

Introduction to the Special Issue 'Diachronic English for Specific Purposes'

Francisco Alonso-Almeida · Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Sandra Marrero-Morales¹ · Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Historical linguistics has been in constant rebirth and innovation to conform to new advances in the way texts are methodologically addressed. These methods of study have given way to several interdisciplinary focuses, which include the disciplines of historical sociolinguistics (Milroy, 1991; Conde-Silvestre, 2007), historical pragmatics (Jucker, 1995) or diachronic pragmatics (Arnovick, 1999), historical discourse analysis (Brinton, 2001; Berkenkotter, 2009; Navarro, 2008), and historical sociopragmatics (Culpeper, 2009). In this context, we have to mention the groundbreaking work on dialogue analysis by Jucker, Fritz and Lebsanft (1999), and the volume on historical speech acts by Jucker and Taavitsainen (2008). These two books represented an advance in the way both written and spoken discourse should be addressed at from a historical dimension. Historical pragmatics has proven to be the most fruitful discipline of all and, since the foundation of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* by Jucker in 2000 (John Benjamins), it seems to be constantly increasing.

¹ Thanks are due to the Spanish Ministry for Science and Innovation and the European Regional Development Fund (grant FFI2009-10801) for financial support.

In the last decades there has been also a growing interest in the study of English for Specific Purposes, and a similar interest is found in the field of historical linguistics with texts other than literary to study the language of specialisation along with the making of science and other less scientific disciplines, as has already been said. Time and method of inquiry constitute the main differences between ESP and diachronic ESP (diaESP). Because historical technical and scientific texts in manuscript or printed form must necessarily be collected, this implies special methodology to overcome the problems of editing texts in which spelling and brevigraphs, for instance, often pose many difficulties. The question is, however, whether diaESP is a field in its own, or it represents the cinderella version of ESP. We could also argue that diaESP is subsumed by both *historical pragmatics* and *historical discourse analysis*; these two disciplines also labelled as *historical discourse linguistics* by Peikola and Skaffari (2005, p. 1). In this sense, the main difference between them is the restrictive nature of diaESP in that only technical and specialised texts are under attention.

If we define ESP as the field centred on specific language programmes, as well as on language use on specialised contexts as opposing to general English, diaESP should be understood as the study of scientific English from a historical dimension to describe earlier manifestations of scientific and technical English in which a set of particular features pertaining to the fields of science and professions must be identified. This is an important and defining role of diaESP, since its very nature demands the detection of variation and change, as language unavoidably accommodates to express technological and scientific advances. Obviously, this includes the analysis of language use besides the analysis of register, genre, and text-type innovations being detected through time.

The last point raised shows strong connections of diaESP with English historical pragmatics and historical discourse analysis, since the study of variation in language together with the study of new forms of expressions given certain contextual premises are also the objects of these. A possible difference between the two is that, whereas diaESP allows the classification of lexical units and bundles regardless of their immediate context, pragmatics requires both context and cotext for safe interpretation of data. DiaESP may rely on earlier dictionaries and grammars without even questioning the legitimacy of definitions, whereas historical pragmatics must carefully pinpoint the exact contextual meaning and array of possible interpretations words and speech acts

may have. The nature of context is, of course, complex, and includes not only the linguistic environment but also the social, cultural and even biographical features concerning the texts and their writers. Regarding the importance of context in historical-oriented linguistic studies, Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice (2007, p. 22) state the following (emphasis as in the original): “the practice is fundamentally concerned with the making manifest the ways in which language can be understood in its contexts. *Context* here is a very rich concept, collecting historical, ideological, material, as well as textual contexts.”

Without considering context, our first reaction was to think that diaESP seemed a discipline more apt for corpus analysis than historical pragmatics or even historical discourse analysis. If there is no need to examine contextual evidence, researchers have the right to run searches almost automatically, and conclusions are taken as valid on statistical grounds. Nevertheless, this is not necessarily true, since language and hypotheses about language require both quantitative and qualitative analyses and, in this vein, diaESP is no more adequate than historical pragmatics or historical discourse analysis.

In many respects, we insist, diaESP, historical pragmatics and historical discourse analysis are so related disciplines that the boundaries among them are fuzzy enough to claim that the last two subsume the former. Because of the restrictions imposed by Field in the Hallidayan tradition, we conclude that diaESP is a subfield of historical pragmatics and historical discourse analysis, and of these two diaESP adopts an important methodological aspect, and this is the accurate identification of contexts to correctly interpret the text, but also to account for textual and communicative strategies (Salager and Defives 1998). However, it shares with ESP a same object of study, i.e. scientific and technical language.

At this point, we should make clear in what ways these disciplines relate to each other. Jacob and Jucker (1995) and Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice (2007) describe the two branches in which historical pragmatics divides, namely pragmaphilology and diachronic pragmatics. Pragmaphilology is concerned with the interpretation of historical texts in context, whereas diachronic pragmatics “compares two or more stages of a same language” (Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007, p. 14). The latter is further subdivided into form-to-function mapping and function-to-form mapping. The first deals with “the changes in the communicative functions of linguistic features” (p. 14), whereas the second

focuses on detecting “the changing linguistic realisations of pragmatic phenomena over time” (p. 14).

Brinton (2001, pp. 139-140) offers a three-fold division of historical discourse analysis: (a) historical discourse analysis proper (synchronic perspective; corresponds to *pragmaphilology*), (b) diachronic(ally oriented) discourse analysis (covering changes between periods of a language; corresponds to diachronic pragmatics), and (c) discourse-oriented historical linguistics (this includes motivations for changes in discourse practices within specific discourse communities). Carroll et al. (2003, p. 1) describe their analyses as historical discourse linguistics as the study of “language in use” from a historical dimension. Reformulating this to our needs, we would say that diaESP is the study of language in use in professional and scientific settings from a historical perspective. This study may involve pragmaphilological practices, but also methods pertaining to diachronic pragmatics and diachronic discourse analysis. It is especially interesting the relationship of *discourse-oriented historical linguistics* with diaESP. Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice (2007, p. 30, n. 6) include the University of Helsinki project *Scientific-thought styles* as an example of discourse-oriented historical linguistics, and this is exactly the kind of studies we refer to as DiaESP.

Several other projects and works might be considered under the umbrella of diaESP, even if unintentionally by their authors. The discipline has some tradition, if not launched with the label of DiaESP, and the absence of specialised publishing fora to gather similar contributions in scope has made authors submit their work to specific periodic publications in the field of applied linguistics, such as the leading journals *English for Specific Purposes* and *Applied Linguistics*, for instance. Good examples of this tradition are the diachronic studies by Salager-Meyer (1998) on referential behaviour in scientific writing, by Li and Ge (2009) on the evolution of English medical research articles, both published in *English for Specific Purposes*; and the study on the evolution of research medical writing by Atkinson (1992) in *Applied Linguistics*. These are only three instances of the rich field diaESP is. Still, one of the most important publishing venues for DiaESP articles is, and will be, the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* (John Benjamins), where we find the papers by Becker (2002) on early modern English language teaching textbooks, and by Archer (2006) on the language of English courtrooms in the early modern period.

The Special Issue we introduce here deals precisely with examples of language in use in specific professional and academic settings. The organisation of the volume is diachronic from Old English to late Modern English. The Old English period is here represented by a study on Ælfric's *Cosmology* and *Colloquy* in which Ruiz-Moneva identifies elements pertaining to the scientific register. In the case of the Middle English period, Díaz-Vera presents an analysis of the metaphorical expressions showing emotional distress in medical texts of the period contained in the *Middle English Medical Texts*, MEMT, a database compiled by Taavitsainen et al. (2005). Precisely, Taavitsainen's article in this volume uses this compilation, also complemented by the new *Early Modern Medical Texts* (2010), EMEMT, to study medical case reports. She identifies and describes stylistic changes in the genre in a diachronic perspective from 1375 to 1700. This paper is part of the *Scientific-thought styles* project at the University of Helsinki (<http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/domains/scientific%20thought.html>).

Papers focusing on the Modern English period constitute the largest part of this monograph. Rodríguez-Puente presents report on the structure and compilation procedures of the *Corpus of Historical English Law Report* (CHELAR). This project is still underway at the University of Santiago de Compostela by members of the VLCG research group (*Variation, linguistic change, and grammaticalization*, <http://www.usc-vlcg.es/PRP.htm>). Gotti analyses the methods used by the specialised discourse community to disseminate advances and discoveries among their members. These methods include correspondence, early scientific journals, and minutes, among others. Gotti leads and has coordinated several projects dealing with various aspects of the History of English and specialised discourse in the *Centre di ricerca sui linguaggi specialisti*, CERLIS (<http://dinamico.unibg.it/cerlis/page.aspx?p=55>), where he is the Director. Mele-Marrero describes self-promotion in nine seventeenth century obstetric manuals. This paper also touches upon the contemporary confrontation between (male) surgeons and midwives, and how this is reflected in language. This work is included within the framework of a project on evidentiality and modality in scientific and technical texts carried out by the TeLL research group (<http://www.gi.ulpgc.es/tell/page2/evycorpe/evycorpe.html>).

The following group of four papers deal with various aspects of scientific language in the *Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing* at the University of La

Coruña, CC, (Spain) by the MuStE research group (<http://www.udc.es/grupos/muste/corunacorpus/index.html>). Moskwich's paper deals with the presentation of a new subcorpus to be included in the CC, i.e. *Corpus of English Philosophical Texts*. Crespo-García identifies and analyses persuasion markers in this CC subcorpus, but the author also seeks to explore the presence of ideological trends concerning social values, religious values, etc. in these philosophical texts. Lareo examines the use of *make*-complex predicates in the subcorpus of Astronomy. Her study considers variables pertaining to the sociological background of the authors in her analysis of findings. Cantos and Vazquez also working on the subcorpus of Astronomy examine the lexicon found in these texts from 1710 to 1920 to describe the evolution of the astronomy specific lexicon.

Faya-Cerqueiro's article deals with letter-writing manuals in the eighteenth century. Her objective is to study variation and change in the use of requests markers, especially *pray* and *please* in this century from a diachronic perspective. This work is part of a larger study she carries out as a member of the VLCG research group (<http://www.usc-vlcg.es/FF.htm>). Dossena explores linguistic strategies in labour discourse documents of the nineteenth century. Interest is placed on how language is used to express working conditions in that century, and how certain topics are thus purposely enhanced and evaluated. Dossena's contribution is placed within a tradition of research on languages for special purposes from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective at CERLIS (<http://dinamico.unibg.it/cerlis/page.aspx?p=103>). Finally, Wright's paper offers a description of the semantic evolution of the colour-terms *maroon* and *magenta* in British Standard English. She focuses on different data from where she documents for her analysis, and these include artists' handbooks, paint catalogues, Charles Dickens' novels and letters, among others.

All in all, we hope the great quality of the papers herein included, and which are the result of a strict peer-review selection, will serve the purpose of formally introducing the field of Diachronic English for Specific Purposes. We would also like that they become useful for those already working on historical issues of the English language for specific purposes, but also inspirational for young researchers in the field.

References

- Archer, D.** (2006). (Re)Initiating strategies: Judges and defendants in Early Modern English courtrooms. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 7.2, Special Issue on Historical Courtroom Discourse, edited by Barbara Kryk-Kastovsky, 181-211.
- Arnovick, L.** (1999). *Diachronic Pragmatics. Seven case studies in English illocutionary development*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Atkinson, D.** (1992). The evolution of medical research writing from 1735 to 1985: The case of the Edinburgh Medical Journal. *Applied Linguistics* 13.4, 337-374.
- Becker, M.** (2002). “Yf ye wyll bergayne wullen cloth or othir marchandise...: Bargaining in Early Modern Language Teaching textbooks. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 3.2, 273-297.
- Berkenkotter, C.** (2009). A case for historical “wide-angle” genre analysis: A personal retrospective. *Ibérica* 18, 9-22.
- Brinton, L. J.** (2001). “Historical discourse analysis”. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 138-160). Malden, Massachusetts/Oxford: Blackwell.
- Carroll, R., R. Hiltunen, M. Peikola, J. Skaffari, S. Tanskanen, E. Valle & B. Wårvik.** (2003). Introduction. In R. Carroll et al. (Eds.), *Discourse perspectives on English: Medieval to modern* (pp. 1–12). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Conde Silvestre, J. C.** (2007). *Sociolingüística histórica*. Madrid: Gredos.
- Culpeper, J.** (2009) Historical sociopragmatics. An introduction. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 10.2, 179-186.
- EMEMT: Early Modern English Medical Texts.** (2010). CD-ROM with EMEMT Presenter software. I. Taavitsainen, P. Pahta, T. Hiltunen, M. Mäkinen, V. Marttila, M. Ratia, C. Suhr & J. Tyrkkö (compilers). Published together with I. Taavitsainen & P. Pahta (Eds.), *Early Modern English medical texts: Corpus description and studies*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Jacobs, A., & A. H. Jucker.** (1995). The historical perspective in pragmatics. In Andreas H. Jucker (Ed.), *Historical pragmatics. Pragmatic developments in the History*

- of English*. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 35). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 3-33.
- Jucker, A. H., & I. Taavitsainen** (Eds.). (2008). *Speech acts in the History of English*. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 176). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Jucker, A. H., Gerd Fritz, & Franz Lebsanft** (Eds.). (1999). *Historical dialogue analysis*. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 66). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Jucker, Andreas H.** (ed.). (1995). *Historical pragmatics. Pragmatic developments in the History of English*. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 35). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Li, J. & G. Ge** (2009). Genre analysis: Structural and linguistic evolution of the English-medium medical research article (1985-2004). *English for Specific Purposes* 28.2, 93-104.
- MEMT: Middle English Medical Texts.** (2005). CD-ROM with MEMT Presenter software. I. Taavitsainen, P. Pahta & M. Mäkinen (compilers). Amsterdam & Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Milroy, J.** (1991). *Linguistic variation and change: on the historical sociolinguistics of English*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Navarro, F.** (2008). Análisis histórico del discurso. Hacia un enfoque histórico-discursivo en el estudio diacrónico de la lengua. In Moreno-Sandoval, A. (ed.), *Actas del VIII Congreso de Lingüística General*. <http://www.llf.uam.es/clg8/actas-paperCLG85.pdf>. Retrieved online 15 may, 2011.
- Peikola, M., & J. Skaffari.** (2005). A frame for windows. On studying texts and discourses of the past. In J. Skaffari, M. Peikola, R. Carroll, R. Hiltunen and Brita Warvik (Eds.), *Opening windows on texts and discourses of the past*. Pragmatic and beyond new series (pp. 1-4). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Salager-Meyer, F.** (1998). Referential behaviour in scientific writing: A diachronic study. *English for Specific Purposes* 18.3, 279-305.
- Salager-Meyer, F. & G. Defives** (1998). From the gentleman's courtesy to the scientist's caution: a diachronic study of hedges in academic writing (1810-1995). In I. Fortanet y S. Posteguillo (Eds.), *Genre studies in English for*

Academic Purposes (pp. 133-171). Castellón: Publicaciones de la Universitat Jaume I.

Taavitsainen, I., & S. Fitzmaurice (2007). Historical pragmatics: What it is and how to do it. In Susan M. Fitzmaurice and Irma Taavitsainen (Eds.), *Methodological issues in historical pragmatics* (pp. 11-36). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

