

## REVIEW

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**Minna Palander-Collin, Maura Ratia and Irma Taavitsainen** (eds.), *Diachronic developments in English news discourse* (Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics 6). Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017. Pp. vii + 301. ISBN 9789027200853.

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Historical news discourse has been among the trendy topics of English linguistics recently, as attested by the numerous conferences and publications in the area (see the CHINED website at [www.chinednews.com](http://www.chinednews.com)). In the short history of the Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics series launched in 2013, this is already the second volume devoted to the field (after Bös & Kornexl 2015). As the scope of research has expanded and scholarly expertise in the field has grown, specialist readers have developed high expectations. When reaching for the book, the reader anticipates learning about the hows and whys, as well as about the mechanisms behind the production and reception of public discourse that may be unearthed via linguistic analysis.

The book consists of a table of contents, preface, fourteen chapters, including an introduction by the editors, and an index. The chapters fall within three sections: ‘Changing or maintaining conventions?’, which includes six chapters, ‘Widening audiences’, with five chapters, and ‘New practices’, with three chapters. This division indicates the general emphasis of the volume on conventions, especially in relation to the audiences viewed as discourse communities, as well as to the developing literacies (e.g. in connection to multimodality and use of illustrations). As changing conventions and new practices remain very closely related, section titles indicate a homogeneous line of enquiry, which is indispensable to a well-focused and coherent monograph, despite its rather general-sounding title.

In chapter 1, ‘English news discourse from newsbooks to new media’, the editors sketch the background and set the time frames for the upcoming studies, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, mostly sociolinguistic or interdisciplinary in nature. The ‘long diachrony’ of news discourse is presented against the sociohistorical background in reference not only to the issues mentioned above (e.g. readership and literacy), but also to linguistic transactions and markets: political, ideological, commercial, aesthetic and religious. Moreover, the editors list the existing historical news databases and briefly introduce the chapters, mostly from the vantage point of the methodologies and their interfaces.

The first chapter in part I (‘Changing or maintaining conventions?’) is ‘On hopes and plans: Newsmakers’ metadiscourse at the dawn of the newspaper age’, by Birte Bös, who analyses prefatory metadiscourse viewed as presentations of newsmakers

and projections of their audiences in the period when newspapers were cutting their teeth, i.e. the early eighteenth century. In the first issues of London papers drawn from the *Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Burney Collection of Newspapers*, both similarities in rhetorical patterns of newsmakers' metadiscourse and diachronically shifting styles (from concise to more flowery styles and elaboration) are indicated.

Interfaces of religious words and political ideologies in the adversarial royalist *Mercurius Aulicus* and parliamentary *Mercurius Britannicus* at the time of the English Civil War are the focus of Elisabetta Cecconi's chapter, 'Religious lexis and political ideology in English Civil War newsbooks: A corpus-based analysis of *Mercurius Aulicus* and *Mercurius Britannicus*'. The collocational patterns of religious vocabulary reveal strategic choices of editors aiming to legitimise their ideological and political stances and win the support of their readers. The study presents a strong connection between religion, rhetoric and political propaganda in shaping the beliefs of the emerging public opinion in this turbulent period in British history.

A later period, 1700–60, is examined by Nicholas Brownlees, who takes a close look at the commercial dimension of the developing news discourse in his chapter entitled 'Contemporary observations on the attention value and selling power of English print advertisement (1700–1760)'. In this important phase, when periodical print advertising experienced exponential growth, the most prominent public figures such as Addison, Steele, Fielding and Johnson commented profusely on advertisements. In the analysis, such contemporary voices are juxtaposed with the findings based on the actual ads in the *Newcastle Courant*. For instance, the use of Latin in the metropolitan press, the target of Addison's criticism, is not prominent in this provincial paper.

Eighteenth-century consumerism was also the target of criticism and parody in mock-advertisements of, of all things, suicide, as Howard Sklar and Irma Taavitsainen's contribution 'A modest proposal in *The Gentleman's Magazine*: A peculiar eighteenth-century advertisement' shows. The chapter closely examines one such instance, a text dressed up as a medical advertisement, drawn from a specialised periodical targeted at a lay but educated audience, *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Equipped with the toolkit of historical pragmatics, i.e. the sociohistorical context, the authors deconstruct hidden meanings by analysing the rhetoric and style. Drawing on the politics and reception of Swift's 'Modest proposal', the authors contextualise the force and functions of satire in contemporary society. This was not only to educate the readers in the spirit of public interest, but also to entertain, also through morbid content and in an effectively sobering manner. These, as the authors suggest, might have matched 'the rhetorical tastes of the time' (p. 95).

This qualitative study is followed by an inductive inquiry into the functions of four-word lexical bundles by Ying Wang in *The Times* of London over a period of 200 years (1784–1983), under the title 'Lexical bundles in news discourse 1784–1983'. The diachronic rise and fall in the frequencies of four-grams is related to the shifts in readership (elite to commoner) and formality, while the peak between 1864 and 1903 indicates a phase of experimentation with newly gained freedom of expression (p. 109). The author concludes that great stability characterises the analysed bundles and news discourse overall.

Part II ('Widening audiences') opens with the chapter by Martin Conboy, who also provides a diachronic overview of 'British popular newspaper traditions: From the nineteenth century to the first tabloid', which was the *Daily Mirror* in the 1930s. The chapter provides a narrative on Victorian Sunday papers, including their generic patterns and melodramatic tone, and describes the initial failure of the *Daily Mirror* and its rejuvenation in 1934. Conboy presents the popular press through the lens of dialogues between readers and producers based on letters to the editor and ascribes the staggering commercial success of tabloids to the innovative appeal of audience–journalist exchange.

With the next contribution by Claudia Claridge on 'The *Poor Man's Guardian*: The linguistic construction of social groups and their relations', we remain in the environment of the unstamped papers, in particular the radical and illegal ones. These provide a window into the construction of social groups and their relations against the background of class-consciousness and the conflict between the capitalists and the working classes. The chapter demonstrates the strategy of delegitimisation of the oppressive social strata achieved rhetorically by pathos, with a clearly didactic aim and a patronising attitude.

In chapter 9 'Diffusing political knowledge in illustrated magazines: A comparison between the Portuguese *O Panorama* and the British *The Penny Magazine* in 1837–1844', Jorge Pedro Sousa, Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas and Sandra Gonçalves Tuna look into the ways in which political knowledge was diffused in illustrated magazines, comparing Portuguese and British sociocultural backgrounds and data. The Portuguese *Panorama*, initially an imitation of the *Penny Magazine*, reflected the growing awareness of the need to satisfy not only the demand for information, but also the readers' aesthetic tastes, that is, it involved a step towards reading for pleasure. However, the topics were still serious political issues and technological inventions narrated in an encyclopaedic tone. The authors present the Portuguese illustrated magazine as a romantic, liberal and patriotic publication.

In the next chapter, 'From adverts to letters to the editor: External voicing in early sports match announcements', Jan Chovanec focuses on sports news while analysing external voicing in early sports match announcements. Viewing such announcements as a functional rather than a textual category, he shows that both advertisements and letters to the editor were sites for the publication of future newsworthy events. The study underlines the importance of community in assigning meanings to texts and the potential of ephemeral texts as a vehicle for author–editor relationship negotiation (p. 193), and shows that indirectness, agency shifts and responsibility shedding may, surprisingly, be strategies for announcing sports events (p. 187).

In exploring the public identity of Jack the Ripper against the backdrop of the process of popularisation of the press, Minna Nevala presents an overview of rich terminology referring to crime and criminals in the late modern period (chapter 11 'The public identity of Jack the Ripper in late nineteenth-century British newspapers'). For the purpose of analysis, an evaluation model based on the notions of intensity, solidarity and objectivity is employed. The author shows how the press manipulated the public concept of the murderer through the 'labels of primary potency' (p. 201) that created and maintained the negative response.

Part III ('New practices') opens with the chapter by Maija Stenvall, 'Narrative vs "objective" style: Notes on the style of news (agency) reports on violence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century'. News on violence is thus also the topic of this contribution, which employs the appraisal framework based on affect, judgment and appreciation to evaluate the contemporary 'ideal of information' (p. 221). The data come from the accounts of the Siedlce pogrom (news from the Associated Press and Reuters agencies), an attack by the Russian regime on the Jewish minority in an eastern town in partitioned Poland under the Tsar's rule (1906). The author shows how fact-mindedness as a sign of objectivity of the press also involves the hiding of the reporter's own voice and, paradoxically, may be a vehicle for falsehoods and distortion of facts. Despite the emergence of objective journalism, in the accounts of the Siedlce pogrom American newspapers presented a picture that was in fact in line with the official Russian version.

Chapter 13, by John M. Ryan, 'Astride two worlds: Emergence of Italian-American identity in the Massachusetts immigrant press' aims to contribute to research on immigrant press, assimilation and cultural preservation. The author shows a gradual shift over the period between 1903 and 1949, from the higher participation of Italian language in newspapers to overwhelmingly English discourse, including a shift from native terms of address. The variables chosen for analysis in samples from 528 issues of *La Gazette del Massachusetts* are the format, content and language. The chapter conducts a 'careful analysis of the change of language' (p. 261) revealing the move from the avoidance of English to its purposeful use.

The final contribution, 'Newspaper funnies at the dawn of modernity: Multimodal humour in early American comic strips', by Isabel Ermida, also focuses on an American Sunday paper, *The Yellow Kid*, and explores newspaper humour at the turn of the twentieth century. Five illustrated comic strips are presented and analysed in a semiotic framework covering structural, sociological and semantic elements, i.e. the modes, functions and mechanisms respectively. The study underlines the corrective and persuasive functions of newspaper humour and contextualises these closely in the ideological, political and cultural ambience of contemporary America.

The most notable achievement of the volume is a notable extension of perspective, as well as evidence of bridge building in English historical linguistics. Besides the sociolinguistic orientation of the book, many contributions enter into dialogue with neighbouring subfields, in particular, discourse studies and pragmatics. For instance, some canonical topics of discourse studies, such as the *we/they* opposition, are approached in a new way by Claridge, who conceptualises the communicative framework as a 'triangular deictic constellation' (p. 142). Chovanec reaches for Goffman's concept of *participation framework* (1981) in sketching the multi-ended and multi-directional reader-producer setting. Rhetoric, including persuasion, is of interest to a number of contributors (Conboy, Claridge), and so are satire and irony as vehicles of grave political and ideological content (Sklar & Taavitsainen, Ermida). Evaluation models and the appraisal framework, bordering on Critical Discourse Analysis, are employed by Nevala and Stenvall. Finally, multimodality of the mass media is also

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touched upon, providing an interface with semiotics (Ermida, Sousa *et al.*). These eclectic approaches are very effective in addressing the recurring sociolinguistic topics: the construction of identities and stances through language and the reflections and functions of orality in written language.

One criticism that could be aired pertains to the fact that some chapters are less effective in answering their research questions, which, in comparison to a number of very strong contributions, renders the volume a bit uneven. In addition, when it comes to individual chapters, the reader comes across some rather unfortunate generalisations or statements that call for further explanation (for example, ‘full literacy had taken place by 1914’, p. 109; ‘[c]ode switching of English words’, p. 263). Some studies appear overly descriptive (e.g. Sousa *et al.* and Ryan) and do not seem to deliver what they promise (for instance, Ryan sets out to analyse code-switching, but fails to do so), while others do not quite find agreement between the discussion and conclusion (for example, Wang’s chapter is devoted to diachronic variation, but underlines stability in conclusion, based on a single diagnostic). These critical remarks do not diminish the generally high standards of the volume. The editorial side of the volume is impeccable (only two typos were found, an extra space on p. 119 and omission of the diacritic in Kopówka, p. 293).

Overall, the volume is a solid, coherent contribution and indeed delivers considerable advances in the field of English historical sociolinguistics. The datasets are carefully selected, the applied methods are versatile, in some cases novel (in particular Claridge, Brownlees, Sklar & Taavitsainen and Ermida), with original and intriguing research questions. Academic and specialist readers are very likely to be satisfied both with the new content and the broad scope of themes and perspectives. The contributions show clearly that English historical news discourse analysis has come of age, not only because their findings enrich our knowledge of language use and variation in contemporary societies, but also as we learn about the societies via the window of news discourse (Sklar & Taavitsainen).

As for the less experienced, but keen student of linguistics, *Diachronic developments in English news discourse* poses an ambitious, yet feasible challenge, since the studies are entertaining and readable. In terms of a broader appeal, the audience interested in learning more about communication and public discourse will also be gratified. After all, the omnipresence of the media today stirs popular attention to their history, so the book definitely has a general appeal. Indeed, there are a number of facts that curious lay readers will be happy to learn: for instance, the Sunday press encouraged non-observance (Conboy); the first English newspaper (*London Gazette*), launched in 1665, only started publishing advertisements in 1671, when the Queen’s little spaniel was lost and happily found as the result of an appeal in the advertisement section (Brownlees). If you are intrigued by questions such as which English newspaper was the first to be fully financed by advertising (Bös), what the profession of the suspect in the Jack Ripper case was (Nevala), what the evergreen of newsworthiness is (Stenvall), what ‘speech lines’ are and why comics would be the target of crusades (Ermida), your curiosity will be more than satisfied.

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