INGRID TIEKEN - BOON VAN OSTADE

Eighteenth-century English letters:
In search of the vernacular

Questo studio presenta un modello di ricerca per lo studio degli stili di scrittura vernacolari nell'inglese del diciottesimo secolo. Focalizzando l'attenzione sulle lettere prodotte spontaneamente, è possibile studiare gli stili più informali di un soggetto. Tali lettere, tuttavia, non sono facilmente reperibili: nel Settecento, infatti, scrivere lettere era considerata un'arte, con regole che dettavano esattamente che cosa poteva essere considerato una buona lettera. L'articolo enuncia un gruppo di criteri sulla base dei quali una lettera può essere considerata valida per l'analisi socio-linguistica; l'approccio proposto parte dal concetto che l'autore opera nel contesto di una rete sociale: sulla base di ciò, ci si può concentrare su vari temi importanti in sociolinguistica, da analisi di micro- e macro-livello a studi di sociopragmatica. Viene presentato un repertorio di carteggi del Settecento attualmente disponibile al pubblico attraverso internet, con i criteri proposti per nuove iniziative analoghe; si ritiene infatti che nella pubblicazione di corrispondenza si dovrebbe dare attenzione alle esigenze degli studiosi di sociolinguistica storica, oltre che di un pubblico di lettori più tradizionale.

1. Introduction

A little more than ten years ago, Stella Tillyard published a biography of the four Lennox sisters, Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah. The book, which is called *Aristocrats* (1994), spans a period of nearly a hundred years (1740-1832), and according to the introduction it is based on thousands of letters, written "between sisters, husbands and wives, servants and employers, parents and children" (1994: ix). That so many letters from the Lennox family should have come down to us is not surprising as such, for the eighteenth century was, according to Sherburn / Bond (1967: 1063), "a century devoted to communication", with "letter-writing [being] a natural means of conversing with absent friends". Görlach (2001: 211) even notes that the private letter becomes "a major text type" in the eighteenth century. For all that, many eighteenth-century

letters have not survived. The grammarian Lindley Murray (1745-1826), for example, desired the destruction of all his private letters and documents after his death (Allott 1991: 39), a wish which was indeed carried out, though apparently only with respect to his 'in-letters', the letters he received and would have been easy to dispose of. As for Murray's 'out-letters',[1] letters written by Murray himself, about one hundred have been located so far (see Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996a: 20), and there may well be more. Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) had been of a similar mind as Murray:

> Early in 1755 Richardson wrote Thomas Edwards that he was sorting his correspondence and intended to destroy much of it so that his executor's work would be easier; "if any of my Friends desire their letters to be return'd, they will be readily come at for that purpose. Otherwise they will amuse & divert my Children, & teach them to honour their Fathers Friends, in their Closets, for the Favours done him" (Eaves / Kimpel 1971: 437).

Letters were evidently felt to be the rightful property of the sender. Horace Walpole (1717-1797) specified in his will that all the letters he had received during his lifetime should be returned to the senders if they were still alive after his death (Lewis *et al*. 1955: xxxi), and Jane Arden (1758-1840), according to Percy (1994: 134), offered to return the transcripts she had made of Mary Wollstonecraft's (1759-1797) letters after her friend's death. An important question to any editor of a correspondence is the number of letters that could possibly be traced in relation to the number of letters the author in question might have written. Thus, in preparing his edition of the publisher Robert Dodsley's (1703-1764) letters, Tierney tried to calculate the minimum number of letters he might expect to find by estimating that for every book published by Dodsley at least three letters had been written by "both parties, and frequently more". But Tierney managed to locate no more than 393 letters, about 40% of what he expected to find (1988: 51).

In the chances of eighteenth-century letters to survive a number of

---

[1] The terms 'in-letters' and 'out-letters' appear to have been coined by Baker (1980: 123), whose introduction to Wesley's correspondence serves as an excellent introduction to the eighteenth-century letter.

factors play a role. The first is a sentimental reason on the part of the recipient, as in the case of Jane Arden, already referred to, and of William Clift (1775-1849), who treasured each letter he received as a tangible memento of a far-away relative. Clift, moreover, "was an inveterate hoarder of documents", according to Austin (2000: 45), and he even copied the letters he received from his relatives in coded form, correcting their spelling in the process.[2] The survival of the Clift family correspondence (ed. Austin 1991) was "due solely to [William Clift's] advancement" (Austin 2000: 44). In the case of Boswell (1740-1795) the sentimental reason which led to the preservation of his letters to his friend John Johnston of Grange was not that of the recipient but of the writer: Boswell asked Johnston to preserve his letters so they could later read them over together and relive the events described in them (ed. Walker 1966: 26, 39). A second factor favourable to the preservation of letters is the ability on the part of the recipient to store the letters received, one of the reasons why, according to Healey (1955: vi), so many of Defoe's (1660?-1731) letters to statesmen and other "persons of high station" have survived. Harley, Defoe's patron, kept most of the letters he received because he "had facilities for preserving [them] and reasons for doing so" (Healey 1955: vi). Similarly, we owe to the fourth Duke of Bedford the survival of the letters he received from Henry Fielding (1707-1754) (Battestin / Probyn 1993: xv). In the light of their profession, Robert Dodsley and his brother and successor James (1724-1797) must have had good reason to store their correspondence, too; it is thanks to their care in this respect that a good number of the grammarian Robert Lowth's (1710-1787) letters to his publishers have come down to us.

One letter writer who had no facilities to store the letters he received was the poet John Gay (1685-1732). For most of his life he had no fixed residence, and he was accordingly forced to keep his possessions in a trunk. This, according to Nokes (1995: 268), explains "his apparent carelessness about letters". As for his own letters, Burgess, the editor of Gay's correspondence, notes that there is "no way of knowing how many of [them] have been lost, but presumptive evidence indicates that

---

[2] A comparison with the single original letter that has survived shows that in copying Mary Wollstonecraft's letters, Jane Arden also made a number of alterations (Wardle 1979: 19).

the number is considerable" (1966: xiv); the edition of Gay's letters contains no more than 81 items, and out-letters only. Similarly, of Robert Lowth's correspondence with his wife Mary Jackson only the out-letters, 64 of them, appear to have survived (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2003): Lowth was away in Ireland for most of the year 1755 while his wife stayed at home in Winchester. It seems likely that he did not have the space or the opportunity to preserve the letters he received from her, of which, judging from references to them in his own letters, there must have been at least about sixty. A third factor increasing their chances of survival is the letters' perceived significance from a literary or cultural-historical perspective, either by the writers themselves, as in the case of Pope, who published a collection of his own letters during his lifetime, or by the recipients of the letters, as in the case of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy letters. During her stay in Turkey from 1716 to 1718, Lady Mary wrote a series of letters about her experiences there which were circulated among relatives and friends in England. Eventually, the letters were published, though ostensibly without Lady Mary's permission (Halsband 1956: 287).

The eighteenth century may have been the "great age of the personal letter" (Anderson / Ehrenpreis 1966: 269), but not everyone evidently enjoyed writing letters. While people such as Boswell, Fanny Burney (1752-1840), Walpole and Wesley (1703-1791) must have been compulsive letter-writers,[3] others were not. Gay, according to Burgess (1966: xiii-xiv), "disliked writing letters", besides "scarcely [having] time for extensive correspondence". Battestin / Probyn (1993: xvi) observe that Henry Fielding "quite simply, hated writing letters". As Fielding put it himself,

> For my own Part, I solemnly declare, I can never give Man or Woman
> with whom I have no Business [...] a more certain Token of a violent
> Affection than by writing to them, an Exercise which notwithstanding I

---

[3] During his first stay in London, Boswell must have spent many hours a day writing letters as well as keeping his journal (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996b: 327), and the same applies to Fanny Burney, whose later journals and letters comprise twelve volumes (ed. Hemlow *et al*. 1972-84) and whose early journals and letters are expected to occupy as much space when eventually all are published (ed. Troide *et al*. 1988-, Vol. 1: vii). The edition of Walpole's letters comprises 48 volumes (ed. Lewis *et al*. 1937-1983), while Baker's edition of Wesley's letters publishes 3,500 out-letters (Baker 1980-1982, Vol. 25: 28).

have in my time printed a few Pages, I so much detest, that I believe it is not in the Power of three Persons to expose my epistolary Correspondence (as quoted by Battestin / Probyn 1993: xvi).

Henry's sister Sarah likewise claimed to "have no pen of a ready writer" (ed. Battestin / Probyn 1993: 175). Altogether, no more than 110 of their letters have been located, 77 by Henry and 33 by Sarah. In a letter to Boswell, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) wrote that "if I felt the same reluctance in taking a Pencil in my hand as I do a pen I should be as bad a Painter as I am a correspondent" (ed. Ingamells / Edgecumbe 2000: 112). The young women who were part of Richardson's circle of female friends, such as Miss Mulso, Sarah Wescomb and Susanna Highmore, time and again had to be encouraged to reply to his letters; their reluctance to do so may have been caused by what Zirker (1966: 84) calls Richardson's "neurotic insistence on personal revelation of ludicrously trivial matters", but they may also not have been very keen on letter-writing. To expect too much, therefore, in terms of the amount of eighteenth-century epistolary material that might have come down to us is unrealistic. Despite the general characterisation of the period as an age of correspondence, we have to do with individuals who all had their own specific likes and dislikes with respect to the medium.

2. Sociolinguistics and eighteenth-century letters

With the exception of Charles Lennox (ed. Olson 1961) and Emily Lennox (ed. Fitzgerald 1949-1957), the Lennox correspondence has not been published, nor have the letters which form the basis of Vickery's study of genteel women from Lancashire (Vickery 1998). Yet these studies suggest that the letters represent a storehouse of information about eighteenth-century England and the language of the time which historical sociolinguists would be very eager to use for analysis. If letters such as these were available in good scholarly editions, it would be possible to study the language of individual writers from a number of sociolinguistic perspectives (see e.g. Percy 2001): social stratification (e.g. employers vs. servants), social network analysis (the family and their contacts with outsiders such as friends, prospective husbands,

sources of information on where to find new servants),[4] gender differences (e.g. husbands vs. wives, lovers) and generational change (e.g. parents vs. children). Doing so would shed light on processes such as standardisation, language variation and change, and language maintenance, aspects of language use which must have been as important then as they are now, and which from a sociolinguistic point of view have only recently begun to receive any scholarly attention (see e.g. Tieken-Boon van Ostade / Nevalainen / Caon 2000, Kielkiewicz-Janowiak 2003, and Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg 2003). Traditionally, historical linguistics has primarily been concerned with the analysis of texts written in the more formal, public styles, but Leslie Milroy (1987: 23) argues that "If information is available only on more careful styles, data may […] be seriously incomplete". She moreover quotes Labov (1981: 3) saying that "Each speaker has a vernacular form in at least one language". It seems likely that this must be true for earlier stages of English as well, and that a vernacular may be identified for eighteenth-century speakers of English just as much as for present-day speech communities. In the absence of any real evidence of informal, private speech styles for the eighteenth century, however, the vernacular will have to be looked for elsewhere.

A good place to look for evidence of the eighteenth-century – written – vernacular is in the letters of the period. In these letters there is a lot of material that is suitable for sociolinguistic analysis, the kind of analysis that follows methods developed by Labov, Trudgill, Cheshire, the Milroys and others. Milroy (1987: 12) defines a vernacular as "a speaker's least overtly careful style", a definition which may equally apply to written as to spoken varieties. According to Labov (1981: 3), "the vernacular includes inherent variation, but the rules governing that variation appear to be more regular than those operating in the more formal 'superposed' styles that are acquired later in life" (as quoted by Milroy 1987: 23). Even in the written medium there is evidence that the language of many of the informal letters produced in the eighteenth century is characterised by rules different from and independent of the language of more standard written styles. This has been demonstrated for the area of

---

[4] See for example Vickery's reconstruction of Mrs Shackleton's "Servant Information Network" and of her "Social Encounters at Home" (Vickery 1998: 387-389, 397).

spelling by Osselton (1984), but the same seems to be true for morphology and syntax (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2002a, 2002b and 2002c). If we take care to distinguish formal from informal epistolary styles excluding, for example, heavily edited letters such as Pope's published letters or Swift's *Drapier's Letters* (see Bond 1936: 573), or letters written for publication in the widest sense of the word, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy letters, to which Halsband (1965-1967, Vol. I: xiv) refers to as "pseudo-letters" – we can identify much of the language of informal eighteenth-century letters as a written vernacular. This style is characterised by its own linguistic rules and regularities, as in the case of Boswell's earlier letters to John Johnston of Grange (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996b). Another example is the correspondence of Robert Lowth which I am in the process of collecting, an analysis of which shows a correlation between the occurrence of non-standard epistolary spellings such as *immediatly*, *gott* and *I don't* and relative informality of style (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2003). The same applies to Lowth's use of forms like *wrote* as a past participle (cf. Oldireva Gustafsson 2002), of singular *you was* and of forms of *be* with mutative intransitive verbs as in "Your Letter of the 26th. is just come to my hands" (Lowth to his wife, 31 Oct. 1755; Bodleian, MS Eng. Lett. C572 f.120[r]) (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2002a, 2002b and 2002c). Large-scale sociolinguistic analysis of the eighteenth-century written vernacular will produce interesting results, both from a contemporary synchronic and from a diachronic perspective. I have argued elsewhere (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2003) that results obtained from such an analysis are not essentially different from those obtained within modern contexts.

Prior to such an analysis it is important to have an overview of the material that is available and that is suitable for analysis. To this end, I have compiled a database of eighteenth-century correspondence collections. This database is published in *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics* (→ Contents, → Correspondences),[5] an open-access electronic journal. The database is regularly updated when new editions come out, and readers are invited to supply additions to it. As a point of departure for the database, I took Bond's survey of eighteenth-century correspondence collections published in 1936. Bond's article

---

[5] The URL is <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/hsl_shl/correspondences.htm>.

took stock of then available scholarly editions, including editions at that time in the process of preparation. Following Bond, I will concentrate on epistolary material only, though there is much else that would be equally suitable for analysis, such as journals and travel diaries.

In what follows, I will first outline the present database, and then discuss the extent to which the epistolary material available for the eighteenth century would be suitable for sociolinguistic analysis. In doing so, I will propose several ways in which we can try to identify evidence of the written vernacular in eighteenth-century letters. It will be shown that my findings are in agreement with Nevalainen's (1999: 503) comment that Labov has overstated his case by referring to historical sociolinguistics as "the art of making the best use of bad data" (1994: 11), and that in fact there is a lot of very good data available waiting to be analysed. And finally, on the basis of the present contents of the database, I will suggest topics for sociolinguistic analysis of the material identified. It will become clear in the process that, despite certain limitations due to differences in time and culture in which the informants lived, historical sociolinguistics is not so very different from modern sociolinguistics as might seem to be the case at first sight (see also Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg 2003). It will, however, appear that historical sociolinguistics imposes different requirements on the publication of correspondence collections than those that have been adopted traditionally.

3. *The database of eighteenth-century correspondence collections*

At this moment, the database contains the published correspondence of 73 authors, but it is likely that whenever it is accessed there will be more of them as new editions are published or additional ones have been brought to my notice. In compiling the database I have applied a number of selection criteria. In accordance with Bond, I am excluding any editions published before the 1930s, the reason being that in many older editions the editorial methods employed cannot be considered up to modern standards. An example is Mrs Barrett's edition of Fanny Burney's journals and letters published in the early 1840s, in which the editor freely handled the material to suit her own requirements of decency and chronology (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1991a: 147-149). As Mrs

Barrett also corrected Fanny Burney's spelling and grammar, it goes without saying that this edition and others like it are unsuitable for the kind of linguistic analysis proposed here. Another example is Mrs Barbauld's edition of Richardson's letters published in 1804 (Eaves / Kimpel 1971: 439), in which she standardised Richardson's spelling (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1998: 461) and may well have made other alterations to Richardson's language, too. The only edition included in the database which was published before the mid 1930s is that of the letters of Goldsmith (ed. Balderston 1928).

While Bond focussed primarily on literary authors, the database contains correspondence collections of any eighteenth-century letter writer, male or female, educated or not, and whether they are of literary or of general historical interest. In actual practice, however, it turns out that most of the collections I have located so far are those of people with some claim to fame, such as the playwright and politician Richard Sheridan, the novelist Fanny Burney and John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church: "even if the letters too seldom show Sheridan at his best, they clearly reveal the nature of the man and are a necessary supplement to his actions, speeches, and plays" (Price 1966: xx); Fanny Burney's "*Early journals and letters* will [...] complete the presentation of [her] invaluable seventy-year chronicle in a modern scholarly format" (Troide 1988, Vol. 1: vii); similarly, Wesley's letters "furnish us [...] with a portrait through seventy years both more revealing in detail and fuller in coverage than any other source" (Baker 1980: ix). Occasionally, collections of letters were published not for the authors' own sake but for other reasons. Thus, Betsy Sheridan's journal letters serve to "give a much more enlightening and complete picture of the background of Sheridan's life in his greatest years than can be gathered from the fragments his biographers have used" (Lefanu 1960: 3). It is for this reason that the book is subtitled "Letters from Sheridan's sister": of great interest though they are in their own right, linguistic and otherwise, Betsy herself apparently did not deserve to have her letters published.[6] The edition of Robert Dodsley's letters (Dodsley was not only a publisher, but also a poet and playwright) was originally intended "to

---

[6] Betsy even has some claim to literary fame herself: in 1804, her novel *The India Voyage* was published. Lefanu, the editor of the journal letters, describes it as "lively" (1960: 18).

provide a minor chapter in eighteenth-century literary history"; however, while engaged on the edition the editor changed his perspective to include "the practical aspect of Dodsley's bookselling business, including his relations with the trade" (Tierney 1988: xv). Though the correspondence of the poet William Cowper is interesting in itself, it produces a valuable side effect, as, according to the editors, "few writers can with such clarity and intimacy reveal not only the writer himself but the personality of the person written to" (King / Ryskamp 1979: v). Such information is essential in, for example, trying to reconstruct eighteenth-century society and its networks in as much detail as possible.

Other selection criteria for the database have been that a collection should contain letters based on autograph manuscripts rather than extracts and summaries of letters, as in the case of Philip Doddridge (Nuttall 1979), or transcripts, as in the case of Lord Macartney, Governor of Madras between 1781 and 1785 (ed. Davies 1949). At the same time, a collection should contain personal letters, unlike in the case of the edition of the Warrender letters (ed. Dickson 1935) and of the Fort William - India House Correspondence (ed. Datta 1958). These collections have therefore been excluded. Moreover, editions should contain at least a Note on the Text, explaining the editorial principles adopted, such as whether or not the spelling of the letters has been modernised. This principle has led me to exclude, for example, *The Private Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood* (ed. Hughes 1957). A final, almost too obvious selection criterion has been that a collection should contain letters written during the eighteenth century. For this reason I have excluded the correspondence of William Turner (ed. Gage 1980) because there is only one extremely brief letter from December 1799, the rest dating from after the turn of the century.

4. Social representativeness of the database

As a representative cross-section of society of the time, however, the present database has many shortcomings. For one thing, there is only a single edition of letters from uneducated writers, i.e. *The Clift Family Correspondence* (ed. Austin 1991). Already in 1936, Wyld discussed the importance of the study of documents produced by relatively unedu-

cated people for the analysis of the history of the English language (Austin 1991: xvii), and the same point was recently made by Fairman (2000), but so far only the correspondence of the Clift Family has been published. Another interesting collection of letters is David Denison's *Corpus of Late Eighteenth-Century Prose*,[7] which contains letters addressed to Richard Orford, steward at Lyme Hall, Cheshire. The letters are written by a variety of people, including what appear to be dialect speakers. The majority of the writers in the database, however, belong to the middle classes, the only ones from the upper regions of society being the Earl of Chesterfield, George III and George IV, Charles Lennox, Lord Fitzwilliam of Milton, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Sir Isaac Newton, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sir Richard Steele and Sir Horace Walpole, though several other letter writers do have aristocratic connections (e.g. Boswell, Henry and Sarah Fielding and Mrs Thrale). Similarly, women, though present, are underrepresented: I have come across published correspondence collections of no more than eleven of them, of which only six are exclusively devoted to the women in question: Abigail Adams (ed. Butterfield *et al.* 1963), Jane Austen (ed. de la Faye 1990), Fanny Burney (eds. Troide *et al.* 1988- and Hemlow *et al.* 1972-1984), Elizabeth and Joanna Clift (ed. Austin 1991), Sarah Fielding (ed. Battestin / Probyn 1993), Mary Anne Lamb (ed. Marrs 1975-1978), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (ed. Halsband 1965-1967), Betsy Sheridan (ed. Lefanu 1960), Mrs Piozzi, formerly Thrale (ed. Bloom / Bloom 1989-2002) and Mary Wollstonecraft (ed. Wardle 1979).

Furthermore, the majority of the authors, including the women, are in some way or other professionally involved with writing, thus forming a highly literate elite. Only a small number of the people in the list can be classified, following the *Dictionary of National Biography*, as having what may be referred to as a non-literary 'profession': Burke (statesman), Constable (landscape-painter), Darwin (physician), Garrick (actor), Newton (natural philosopher), Reynolds (portrait-painter), Smith (political economist), Stannard (textile manufacturer), Mrs Thrale (friend of Dr Johnson [sic])[8] and Wesley (evangelist and leader of

---

[7] See <http: //lings.ln.man.ac.uk/info/staff/dd/late18c.htm>.
[8] In the *Oxford Companion to British Women Writers* (s.v. Piozzi) she is described as a "woman of letters".

methodism). For all that, these people would in the light of their professional activities have been involved with writing, even Mrs Thrale (see Bax 2002). Social stratification on the basis of the published editions of letters alone would therefore produce highly skewed results.

The database therefore may be taken to set an agenda for future editions of eighteenth-century letters, especially when considered from a sociolinguistic perspective: to be able to meet the demands of social representativeness in the study of eighteenth-century society and its language, there should be more uneducated writers, unschooled or partly schooled (cf. Fairman 2000), more members of the higher social classes as well as of the so-called professional classes, and more women. The studies by Tillyard and Vickery referred to above suggest that there is no dearth of such material: it should only be made available for analysis. In addition, there is Richardson's correspondence with his circle of female friends, none of whose letters would have come down to us if he had not corresponded with them. Richardson's biography by Eaves / Kimpel (1971) contains a lot of extracts from such letters. So far, however, only a selection of Richardson's letters has come out (Mullett 1943; Carroll 1964; Slattery 1969); publication of his complete correspondence would make these letters available for sociolinguistic analysis as well. Another important addition to the database would be an edition of the potter Josiah Wedgwood's letters, many of which have come down to us.[9] Oxford University Press is publishing eighteenth-century correspondence collections on CD-Rom, in their series called *Past Masters*.[10] Other excellent initiatives in this respect are David Denison's Late Eighteenth-Century Prose Corpus already referred to and the publication by the State Library of New South Wales of the papers of Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) as digitised images.[11]

Even in the representation of the educated middle classes the present database lays bare obvious gaps: there is as yet no edition of the letters of Ann Fisher, Robert Lowth, or Lindley Murray and no other edition of Joseph Priestley's letters than the one published between 1817 and 1832

---

[9] The website of the Historical Manuscripts Commission of the UK National Register of Archives lists as many as nine collections of his private papers (see www.nra.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/).

[10] See <www.nlx.com/pstm/pstmoup.htm#Letters>.

[11] See <www.sl.nsw.gov.au/banks/index.html>.

and recently reissued (Rutt 2003 [1817-1832]). These are four of the major eighteenth-century grammarians, for each of whom substantial amounts of correspondence has been traced.[12] Other gaps in the database are, for instance, Thomas Paine and Hanna More, though letters by the latter are included in the correspondence of Horace Walpole (ed. Lewis *et al*. 1937-1983, Vol. 31). Walpole's collected correspondence comprises 48 volumes; it is by far the largest I have come across (see also Görlach 2001: 211), which is to some extent due to the fact that the in-letters are included in the edition as well. To judge by the number of people Walpole exchanged letters with, some four hundred altogether, his social network must have been enormous. One result of the editorial decision to include Walpole's in-letters along with the out-letters is that we have access to the letters of people who might not so easily have merited an edition of their own, such as William Mason (Lewis *et al*. 1955: xxvi) and Lady Ossory. Their names are apparently remembered only because they are counted among Walpole's correspondents (Lewis *et al*. 1965: xxxiv).

Another evident gap are Mrs Thrale's letters dating from before her marriage to Piozzi in 1784, when, according to Sherburn / Bond (1967: 1070), she "wrote hundreds of letters"; with the exception of her correspondence with Johnson (ed. Chapman 1952), these have not so far been published. An edition of her later letters has been published by Bloom / Bloom (1989-2002). The well-known Bluestocking Mrs Montagu (1720-1800) was also a prolific letter writer: Sherburn / Bond (1967: 1072) note that she "wrote letters by the thousand". There must have been many more female letter writers in the eighteenth century: Spender (1986) lists over a hundred eighteenth-century female novelists, who probably wrote letters in addition to their novels, 568 items altogether. Following Tierney's calculations referred to above the publication of these novels might have resulted one way or the other in some 1500 to 2000 additional letters from these women alone, and there must

---

[12] According to María Rodríguez-Gil (p.c.), there are many letters by Ann Fisher (1719- ca. 1801) in Newcastle; I have so far come across nearly 300 letters to and from Lowth; about one hundred letters by Murray have come down to us (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996a: 20); and the Historical Manuscripts Commission of the UK National Register of Archives lists 26 items of correspondence and other papers from the hand of Priestley.

have been many private letters, too.[13] Either these letters have not yet come to light, or they have perished altogether. That Tierney managed to identify only eight letters, three of them untraced, from any of these women to either of the Dodsleys makes one fear for the worst. But of one of them a large number of letters is extant, if not yet published: Mary Hays (1760-1843), from whose hand about one hundred love letters survive, dating from 1779-1780 (Spender 1986: 263).

Nearly all the editions which were in progress when Bond (1936) was published have since come out: Addison, Cowper, Defoe, Garrick, Johnson, Percy, Pope, Shenstone, Steele and Walpole (cf. Bond 1936: 580-584). The only exception is the edition of David Mallet (Bond 1936: 582), which does not appear ever to have been completed. This is unfortunate, because according to Bond, though the poet "Mallet is not, of course, a figure of first rank, [...] his editor has developed the thesis that he exercised a real influence on the greater men of the time, some of his correspondents being Pope, Hume, Garrick, Gibbon, and Walpole" (1936: 582). If this influence was literary, it may also have been linguistic, and the correspondence would be important in studying the changing language of the period. What is more, about a third of Mallet's extant correspondence, according to Bond (1936: 582), consists of letters addressed to Aaron Hill, a close friend of Richardson's. It would be of interest to find out whether Mallet and Richardson belonged to the same social network, and to what extent their linguistic roles within this network and vis-à-vis Hill were at all comparable (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1991b: 54). Like Richardson, Mallet might well qualify for the position of a linguistic innovator, an important role in processes of language change, as it is through linguistic innovators that innovations tend to travel.[14] Another interesting correspondence from the point of view of social network analysis is that of the Dissenting minister Philip Doddridge, already referred to. The 'calendar' of his correspondence (ed. Nuttall 1979) shows that he exchanged letters with as many as 350 correspondents, and that he wrote 300 letters to his wife alone.

[13] Some female novelists, such as Fanny Burney (Troide *et al*. 1994, Vol. 3: ix), made use of an intermediary in their contacts with their publishers.

[14] For a detailed analysis of social networks and linguistic change, see Milroy / Milroy (1985); social network analysis as a research model is dealt with in Milroy (1987).

5. *Evidence of the vernacular in eighteenth-century letters*

In his survey article, Bond distinguishes between three types of eighteenth-century letters (1936: 572):

1. the intimate, informal message designed for one person;
2. the formal, public, "open" letter written for any who will care to read; and
3. the fictitious letter used as a literary device, telling a story or describing people and events.

Bond's categorisation deals only with the so-called familiar letter (cf. Fitzmaurice 2002a). His third category is not relevant from the point of view of the research programme I am advocating here, though a comparison between the language of fictitious letters and that of real letters may produce information about an author's perceptions of how people spoke and wrote (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1991: 52-53). The results of such an analysis might well be interpreted as the historical equivalent to information obtained through subjective reaction tests carried out in modern sociolinguistic research. The second category refers to the kind of letter I have already excluded above, exemplified by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy letters. Pope's edited letters are a somewhat different case, as they were only adapted for public consumption at a later stage in his life. Similar examples are Fanny Burney's journals and letters, which were edited – linguistically and otherwise – by the author herself towards the end of her life to make them suitable for posterity to read (Troide *et al*. 1988, Vol. 1: xxv); Gay's letters were also subjected "to a policy of careful censorship", not by the author himself but by Pope (Nokes 1995: 5), possibly to suppress signs of his friend's homosexuality. In their unedited form all these letters would belong to Bond's first category, and it is fortunate that Troide and his fellow editors managed to retrieve so much of what Fanny Burney tried to erase, thus restoring the original text (Troide *et al*. 1988, Vol. 1: xxix).

It is to the letters in Bond's first category that we must turn to look for evidence of what I have referred to as the eighteenth-century written vernacular. But even here we must be careful in distinguishing the truly

spontaneous letter from what has only been given the appearance of one. For despite the fact that the eighteenth century was "the great age of the personal letter", this suggests a contradiction in terms, for the general focus on the letter as *the* medium of personal communication at the time entailed that great value was attached to the ability to write a "good" letter. In other words, letter writing in the eighteenth century was considered an art, and as Anderson / Ehrenpreis (1966: 273) put it, "the letters that the eighteenth century judged its best are not thoughtless outpourings" but those that had the "appearance of spontaneity", being "the result of considerable, if varied, art". The Lennox sisters were aware of this, too:

> Emily and Caroline saw themselves as self-conscious letter writers with "formed" styles. Like polite conversation, letter writing was an accomplishment with its own complex rules, as Caroline revealed when she told Emily how ashamed she was that [her son] Ste Fox wrote like a child at the age of seventeen. "His letters are quite a schoolboy's. He is well, hopes we are, and compliments to everybody. Adieu. Yours Most Sincerely." Emily's daughter, in contrast, received Caroline's praise for epistolary skill. "I wrote to your daughter Emily [...] She is a delightful correspondent, her style quite formed [...]" (Tillyard 1994: 93).

Such consciously composed letters are therefore unlikely to contain much evidence of vernacular language, as the amount of attention paid to their form would have resulted in a more formal, more standardised language. They illustrate in my view the historical equivalent of a phenomenon known from modern sociolinguistics, the observer's paradox (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000a).

To find evidence of the written vernacular in letters we must look for private letters that were not consciously composed, but that were written spontaneously and at a single run, without being copied before being sent off into the post, the very "thoughtless outpourings" that were considered unacceptable as an expression of the art of the personal letter. Steele's letters to his wife Prue can be classified as such, according to Anderson / Ehrenpreis (1966: 275), as they contain observations that are "of the least possible interest to anyone besides the correspondents and of only transient interest to them". Similar letters are those which Boswell wrote to his friend John Johnston, and which are often so triv-

ial in content that their only aim seems to have been to keep the corre-
spondents' friendship alive (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996b: 327-328),
and Lowth's letters to his wife. Letters such as these are the eighteenth-
century epistolary equivalent of a present-day chat on the phone or, per-
haps even more appropriately because it involves the written medium,
MSN. Because letters received were usually meant to be read by rela-
tives and friends, the Lennox sisters found a way by which they could
write more intimately, and thus presumably more truly spontaneously,
to the person to whom their letters were addressed: "Thoughts that were
exclusive to writer and reader would often be included on a separate
sheet of paper that could be removed before the rest did its round of the
drawing-room" (Tillyard 1994: 94). It is these separate sheets that we
must turn to in order to look for the best evidence of the written vernac-
ular in their case.

Sheridan's letters, according to their editor, Price (1966, Vol. 1: xix),

> are not brilliantly written, and anyone who expects them to be worthy of
> the author of *The School for Scandal* will be disappointed. To achieve
> elegance of that kind, Sheridan had to write and rewrite. He seldom
> gave his letters enough attention: "I shall confess that I write much more
> precipitately and triflingly often than I could wish."

The very fact that Sheridan did not write and rewrite his letters
makes them of interest for the present purpose.[15] To find more letters
like these, it is important first to look for evidence of the author's own
stylistic consciousness. Some examples are Betsy Sheridan, who ob-
serves in a journal letter to her sister: "But as I scribble a great deal I am
forced to write the first word that occurs, so that of course I must write
pretty nearly as I should speak" (ed. Lefanu 1960: 57), and again later:
"To you my dear Love I write as I talk in all modes and tempers" (1960:
123). Walpole writes similarly: "if you have a mind I should write you
news, don't make me think about it; I shall be so long in turning my pe-
riods, that what I tell you will cease to be news" (ed. Lewis / Brown
1941: 29-30). Other cases of possible interest here are Gray, who ac-
cording to Sherburn / Bond (1967: 1075) "seems more natural and easy

---

[15] Nevertheless, they are only of limited use as the editor decided to normalise Sheridan's
spelling whenever he felt it necessary to do so (Price 1966: xxiv).

in his letter-writing than elsewhere", and Darwin, who is characterised
by King-Hele (1981: vii) as

> one of the liveliest letter-writers: his exuberant personality and bubbling
> ideas overflow into his letters. He wrote as he felt, in a rough and vigor-
> ous style, free from the formality that deadens many eighteenth-century
> letters. The letters show us the real Darwin.

A sure way of identifying a spontaneous letter is to compare the let-
ter to its source to see whether there is any evidence in the form of cor-
rections of the text; I have so far come across only one edition of a cor-
respondence, i.e. that of Reynolds (ed. Ingamells / Edgcumbe 2000),
which attempts to reproduce this graphically:

> Dear Sir
> I have received the enclosed from Miss Monckton I have answered it
> that I am myself engaged <as I really am to Mrs Walsingham> What an-
> swer do you give
> I shall meet you on Thursday at ~~Mrs Thral~~ Lady Lucans or ~~I t~~ if you
> will give me leave to send my coach for you, we will go together
> I have <a> sitter waiting so you must excuse the Blots
> Your
> JR

Reynolds' lack of punctuation in this letter is striking, and would
seem interesting to analyse in the light of eighteenth-century punctua-
tion habits generally. One author who was aware of her shortcomings in
this respect was Sarah Fielding, who wrote in a letter to Richardson: "I
am very apt when I write to be too careless about great and small Let-
ters and Stops" (ed. Battestin / Probyn 1993: 149; see Barchas 1996:
651 and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1998: 458). What could also be stud-
ied as a result of reproducing the text of letters as fully as possible is
that it will enable us to study a letter writer's writing process, and to ob-
tain insights into their linguistic intuitions. I have found two interesting
examples of this. In one letter to a close friend, Lowth corrects the form
lays into *lies*: "I should be very glad to contribute any assistance, that
~~lays~~ lies in my power, to the promoting of so laudable an undertaking"
(30 December 1761; Bodl. Lib. MS. Eng. Lett. C. 573, f. 1). The use of
lay for *lie* is a feature that regularly invites purist comment today;

Lowth's correction shows that it was a sensitive topic in his day, too, and that Lowth realised this as he was writing. The second example shows that Lowth was well aware of the stylistic difference of weak verbs in *'d* or *ed*: "I am heartily rejoice'd to find that you & the little ones are so well" (6 July 1755; Bodl. Lib. MS Eng. Lett. C. 572, f.54). Forms like *rejoic'd* were typical of informal writing styles at the time (Osselton 1984).

When no internal or external indications can be found of the unpremeditated nature of a letter, an alternative approach may be adopted by analysing letters between correspondents who were known to be very close to each other, because in close relationships people are more likely to be at their ease and drop their guard, also linguistically. I have already referred to Steele's letters to his wife and to Boswell's letters to Johnston. Other examples are Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's early letters to Wortley (but not their later ones; see Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1985) or Dr Johnson's letters to Mrs Thrale (see Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1987: 24 and Bax 2002). One way to determine the precise nature of the relationship between the correspondents is to analyse their use of opening and closing formulas (cf. Baker 1980, Vol. 25: 48-51). In the case of Sarah Fielding's letters, I have thus been able to identify her relationship with Mrs Montagu as being least formal of the people she corresponded with and that with James Harris as being most formal, while her relationship with Richardson comes somewhere in between; this difference in formality is reflected in her variation in spelling in the letters (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000b). Likewise, by analysing the opening and closing formulas in Gay's letters I found that his relationship with Swift and Parnell was closer than that with any of his other correspondents (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999).

The degree of formality or informality between correspondents need not remain stable through time (see also Bax 2000), for, as in the case of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and her husband, relationships may change in the course of a lifetime and the style of the letters may be expected to differ accordingly. Even business letters, which are characteristically more formal than personal letters, can develop a certain amount of informality over the years: Lowth's relationship with his publisher Robert Dodsley started out as a business relationship but developed into a close friendship as the adoption by Lowth of the formula "Your most

affectionate humble Servant" from March 1753 onwards shows. A few years later, Dodsley ends a letter to Lowth by passing on his greetings to Lowth's wife – an unexpected act of friendliness in what is otherwise a business correspondence. As noted above, Lowth's greater informality in his letters correlates with an increase in instances from the vernacular, in spelling as well as in morphology and syntax (see Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2003).

In looking for evidence of the written vernacular we must therefore primarily concentrate on those letters that are most likely to have been produced spontaneously. In the absence of any overt evidence of spontaneity, indirect evidence can be found in the form of the epistolary formulas adopted. In addition to a close relationship between the correspondents, the relative importance of the subject is likely to correlate with greater or less formality in the language used. This may apply to trivial subjects, as in the case of Boswell's correspondence with Johnston, or to subjects which are important to either or both of the correspondents, such as Boswell's account of some his sexual encounters in his *London Journal* (e.g. ed. Pottle 1950: 137-140) and the separate sheets in the letters of the Lennox sisters. Linguistically, such exchanges may be comparable to accounts in response to Labov's so-called "danger-of-death" question. At the same time, even the most formal types of letters such as business letters, a category not considered here, may contain informal language. In the letters which Edward Pearson wrote to Lowth during the time he acted as his secretary in 1766, there is a curious mixture between colloquial and more standard language (see (Tieken-Boon van Ostade forthc.).To find evidence of what would entail a style shift within a single letter we must be alert to changes in formulaic expressions such as openings and conclusions or other stylistic markers (cf. Wimsatt 1970).

6. *Towards a sociolinguistic analysis of eighteenth-century English*

The research model proposed here advocates studying the language of individual letter writers in as much sociolinguistic detail as possible given the limitations of the material available. It aims at isolating a writer's full sociolinguistic competence and to describe their linguistic

variation accordingly. In this respect the approach differs from that of Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg (2003), who approach linguistic variation and change from the level of the speech community. The Corpus of Early English Correspondence, which forms the basis of their analysis, has recently been expanded to cover the eighteenth century as well, and already important results are being reported on.[16] Results from macrolevel analyses such as these will serve as important baseline data (see Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg 2003) for microlevel research focusing on the individual (see also Kielkiewicz-Janowiak 2003). But for the purpose of carrying out a systematic microlevel sociolinguistic analysis of eighteenth-century English, more material must be produced. I have already referred to the prospect of studying the language of the Lennox family and of Vickery's genteel families if their letters were made available in published editions. Similarly, the Streatham circle could be studied with the help of the Milroys' social network model if letters of more of its members were to be published. Mrs Thrale's letters, for instance, seem particularly interesting, as she was the circle's leading lady and was in contact with most of its members (Bax 2000), and so are those of her daughter Queeney (Navest 2003). Fanny Burney was first introduced into the Streatham circle in the year 1778, when her first novel *Evelina* appeared; at the present moment, her early journals and letters have so far only been published until around that year (Troide *et al*. 1988-). Of her father's correspondence – Charles Burney was also a member of the Streatham circle – likewise only the first volume has come out yet (Ribeiro 1991-). When both editions are completed, we will have a unique picture of the period in which they lived with many events described from two different angles and in the language of people from different generations. One social network which is currently being analysed along sociolinguistic lines is that of the Bluestockings (e.g. Sairio 2004a, 2004b), of which Mrs Montagu formed the centre (Harcstark Myers 1990). Though Sherburn / Bond (1967: 1072), rightly or wrongly, disclaim her literary influence despite the huge number of letters she wrote, it is precisely because "her real place is rather in social

---

[16] See in particular the forthcoming conference proceedings of the thirteenth International Conference on English Historical Linguistics (Vienna, 2004) and the second Late Modern English Conference (Vigo, 2004).

than in literary history" that an analysis of her language would produce important results. In terms of the social network model, her position within her social network may well have been that of an early adopter, setting the linguistic norm which would be copied by those around her. The very strength of the Bluestocking circle as a social network may have acted as a norm enforcement mechanism, the norm being to a large extent set by those in its centre.

A third social network that deserves to be studied is that of Robert Dodsley: as a London bookseller, he was acquainted with most of the major authors of his time, including the main codifiers of the English language, Samuel Johnson and Robert Lowth. Dodsley exchanged letters with 87 different people (Tierney 1988: 53), of thirteen of whom independent correspondence collections were published: Burke, Chesterfield, Garrick, Gray, Hume, Johnson, Percy, Pope, Shenstone, Sterne, Walpole, Warton, and Wesley. His social network was an open one, the type of network that is typically subject to outside influence, and consequently to linguistic change, while it also encompasses closed network clusters (such as the one around Johnson), which are normally conservative in nature, thus resisting linguistic change.

7. Conclusion

The number of editions published so far barely reflects the stratification of eighteenth-century society. In order, therefore, to get a better overview of eighteenth-century society and its language prime consideration in publishing collections of letters should no longer be given to the established fame, literary, scientific or otherwise, of the author in question. Some good examples of the sociohistorical significance of studying the language of relatively unimportant people like the Clift family may be found in Austin (1994) and Denison (2005). More editions of letter writers, male or female, fully or partly schooled, should therefore be published, electronically or otherwise. At the same time published collections should not only contain an author's out-letters, but the in-letters as well, as this would make it possible to study the letters in their full social and linguistic context. Such editions would also make available the letters of authors whose correspondence might not other-

wise be published. Good examples are the editions of Addison's letters, as one of the appendices contains the in-letters of sixteen people, of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who corresponded with at least twenty different people, of Robert Dodsley, and of Walpole, which includes the letters of all his four hundred or so correspondents.

It is, however, unfortunate to say the least that Walpole's spelling has been normalised as part of the editorial process, which makes the correspondence unsuitable for at least one interesting point of study, that of the development of eighteenth-century spelling (cf. Osselton 1984). A similar unfortunate decision was taken by Bloom / Bloom for their edition of Mrs Piozzi's letters: "Her intermittent use of an elision to form a past tense – a usage that she came to see as outmoded – is normalised: e.g., 'defer'd' becomes 'deferred'" (1989: 41). In doing so the editors regrettably missed an opportunity of providing linguists with the material that would enable them to study the kind of variation that eventually led to a change from *-'d* to *-ed* in the spelling of weak verb morphology (see above).

In the present article I have tried to show the potential of eighteenth-century epistolary material for the study of the language of the period from a microlevel sociolinguistic perspective. Results from analyses along these lines should be viewed alongside those based on the eighteenth-century extension of the Corpus of Early English Correspondence. The online database of eighteenth-century collections of letters is to be complemented by one of eighteenth-century diaries, which will be set up in due time. In addition, there should be an overview of studies of the language of individual authors that have been conducted so far. In view of their sheer size, these projects can only succeed if scholars worldwide are prepared to share information and contribute to the bibliographies provided in *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics* (→ Contents, → Authors' language). While the databases are continually expanding, and while new editions are being published, it seems to me that even the material presently available can be used for a sociolinguistic study of the eighteenth century by analysing its language from the following perspectives:

1. the macro-perspective of social stratification, as part of a systematic analysis of possible correlations between language and

- an author's profession, by contrasting the language of e.g. poets (e.g. Addison, Burns, Cowper, Crabbe, Dodsley, Gay, Goldsmith, Gray, Pope, and Shenstone) with that of authors with a predominantly non-literary profession (e.g. Darwin, Garrick, Newton, Reynolds and Wesley);
- gender, by comparing the language of male and female letter writers. In his edition of Gay's letters, Burgess comments on the language of the Duchess of Queensberry, "whose notions of grammar, punctuation, and spelling were, to be gallant, peculiar to herself" (1966: xii). At the same time, it might be interesting to analyse the language of Gay, who appears to have been a homosexual (Nokes 1995), when addressing male correspondents and when addressing female ones. Switching gender roles and its effect upon language in a present-day context recently started to attract scholarly attention; the case of Gay suggests that this might be a topic worth taking up for the eighteenth century as well (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999: 108);
- regional background, contrasting for example the language of Anglo-Irish letter writers such as the Sheridans and Burke and of Scotsmen such as Boswell and Adam Smith with that of authors originating from around London (cf. Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg 2000);
- generational change, contrasting the language of, say, all authors born in the 1720s (e.g. Burke, Charles Burney, Percy, Reynolds, Adam Smith, and Smollett) with that of those born in the 1750s (e.g. Burns, Fanny Burney, Betsy Sheridan, Richard Sheridan and Mary Wollstonecraft) (cf. Raumolin-Brunberg 1996a and see also Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1998); studying the language of members of the same family, such as the Burneys;
- education, comparing the language of authors with a large amount of formal education (e.g. Fielding) with those who received comparatively little education (e.g. Richardson).

2. the micro-perspective of social network analysis, which in the present situation can be carried out only for those circles for which a number of letter collections are available for analysis. Some examples are the Addison circle (for which see Wright 1994 and 1997,

Fitzmaurice 2002b), the Sheridan and the Johnson circles (for which see Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1994), the Bluestockings (Sairio 2004a, 2004b) and the network around Dosdsley.

3. a socio-pragmatic perspective, such as the application of politeness theories to eighteenth-century letters (cf. Görlach 2001: 130);[17] application of analyses discussed by Holmes (1995) for present-day English (e.g. the use of hedges and compliments) to the language of the eighteenth century would seem particularly promising (cf. Raumolin-Brunberg 1996b).

Ideally, the sociolinguistic study of eighteenth-century English would entail a combination of the three perspectives discussed here: Milroy / Milroy (1992) present a case for a synthesis of the macro and the micro approaches in sociolinguistic analysis, and such an approach would seem promising for the study of older forms of English, too. Grouping eighteenth-century letter writers on the basis of their regional origin or profession, for example, might help to explain their position in a social network. Thus, Boswell's position as an outsider in Johnson's circle, and consequently his possible role as a linguistic innovator in this network, in large part stems from his being a Scotsman (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996b), something which he was never made to forget by those around him. Lowth, as a clergyman, was an outsider to Dodsley's more literary network, too. The third perspective outlined above would, in combination with the other two, contribute towards establishing the relationships between correspondents, which is important in identifying their position in a particular social network. At the same time, an analysis of the relative politeness between people would help to define the nature of the differences in language between men and women, different generations and people belonging to different social classes. For the moment, it would seem that attention will be most usefully concentrated on the first and the third perspectives outlined here, though there are a number of social networks that can be studied in some detail already (see e.g. Bax 2002). While more material is being prepared for large-scale analysis of social

---

[17] For a general discussion of the language of politeness in the eighteenth century, see McIntosh (1986).

networks operating on all levels of eighteenth-century society, much pre-liminary work can be done which will obviously have independent rele-vance in its own right, but which will eventually serve to provide future researchers with greater insight into the relationships between eigh-teenth-century letter-writers and into their position within society as a whole, linguistically as well as otherwise.

Analysing the present contents of the database of eighteenth-century collections of letters has brought to light a number of shortcomings in the material if it were to be used as input for large-scale sociolinguistic analysis. I have therefore made a number of recommendations for future publications of editions of letters to make them of interest for a wider reading public, i.e. one consisting of sociolinguists as well. To sum-marise them: editions of letters should no longer be published solely as testimonies of the author's name and fame but also because of the evi-dence they present of the development of the English language in all layers of eighteenth-century society. Secondly, an edition of a corre-spondence should contain all available letters, including the in-letters received by the subject. Apart from having material available from let-ter writers which we might otherwise never see in published form, such editions would enable us to study socio-pragmatic aspects of language like turn-taking in a conversation, of which for the eighteenth century much correspondence is the written equivalent (see Fitzmaurice 2002a).[18] As for editorial decisions to be made in preparing new edi-tions, in the first place the language of the letters should not be mod-ernised or normalised. Eighteenth-century English is not so far removed from that of the present day as to make the letters hard to read if the original spelling is retained, even for a more general reading public. If an uninformed reader would at first sight identify the use of *-or* spellings in eighteenth-century letters in words such as *favor* or *honor* as being typical of American spelling, this would only serve as a re-minder of the fact that present-day American spelling, like present-day British spelling, has its origin in earlier British spelling variation. Fur-thermore, keeping the original eighteenth-century spelling has other ad-

---

[18] From this perspective it is unfortunate that Burgess (1966: xii) decided to exclude the in-letters from Gay's correspondence on the grounds that most of them may be found in existing edi-tions already.

vantages besides linguistic ones: it preserves the general historical character of letters from that period.[19] The opening and closing formulas, moreover, should be reproduced as part of the reprinted letter, no matter how standard a form they may appear to take. The formulas provide essential information for the identification of a letter writer's stylistic repertoire. Lefanu's decision to omit "many of the formal openings and most of the endings with conventional greetings to relations and friends" (1960: xii) makes it all the more difficult to reconstruct the precise nature of the social network to which Betsy Sheridan belonged. His decision to do so is all the more peculiar because this was, after all, the main objective of the edition to begin with.

References

Allott, Stephen, 1991, *Lindley Murray 1745-1826, Quaker Grammarian of New York and Old York*, York, Sessions Book Trust.

Anderson, Howard / Daghlian, Philip B. / Ehrenpreis, Irvin (eds), 1966, *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century*, Lawrence, University of Kansas Press.

Anderson, Howard / Ehrenpreis, Irvin, 1966, "The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century: Some Generalizations". In: Anderson, Howard / Daghlian, Philip B. / Ehrenpreis, Irvin (eds): 269-282.

Austin, Frances (ed.), 1991, *The Clift Family Correspondence 1792-1846*, Sheffield, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language.

Austin, Frances, 1994, "The Effect of Exposure to Standard English: The Language of William Clift". In: Stein, Dieter / Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid (eds): 285-313.

Austin, Frances, 2000, "Letter Writing in a Cornish Community in the 1790s". In: Barton, David / Hall, Nigel (eds): 43-61.

Baker, Frank (ed.), 1980-1982, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vols. 25 and 26, Letters I (1721-1739) and II (1740-1755), Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Balderston, Katherine C. (ed.), 1928, *The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Barchas, Janine, 1996, "Sarah Fielding's Dashing Style and Eighteenth-century Print Culture". *ELH* 63: 633-656.

---

[19] This point was brought to my attention by Paul Hoftijzer (p.c.).

Barton, David / Hall, Nigel (eds), *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, Amsterdam, Benjamins.

Battestin, Martin C. / Probyn, Clive T. (eds), 1993, *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Bax, Randy, 2000, "A Network Strength Scale for the Study of Eighteenth-century English". In: Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid / Nevalainen, Terttu / Caon, Luisella (eds): 277-289.

Bax, Randy 2002, "Linguistic Accommodation. The Correspondence between Samuel Johnson and Hester Lynch Thrale". In: Fanego, Teresa / Méndez-Naya, Belén / Seoane, Elena (eds), *Sounds, Words, Texts and Change*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 9-23.

Bloom, Edward A. / Bloom, Lillian D. (eds), 1989-2002, *The Piozzi Letters. Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784-1821 (formerly Mrs. Thrale)*, 6 vols., Newark, University of Delaware Press.

Bond, Richmond P., 1936, "Eighteenth-century Correspondence: A Survey". *Studies in Philology* 33: 572-586.

Burgess, C.F. (ed.), 1966, *The Letters of John Gay,* Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Butterfield, L.H. / Garrett Wendell, D. / Sprague, Marjorie E. (eds), 1963-1993, *The Adams Family Correspondence,* 6 Vols., Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press (Harvard University Press).

Carroll, John (ed.), 1964, *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson,* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Chapman, R.W. (ed.), 1952, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson, with Mrs. Thrale's Genuine Letters to him,* 3 Vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Curtis, Lewis Perry (ed.), 1935, *Letters of Laurence Sterne*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Datta, K.K. (ed.), 1958, *Fort William - India House Correspondence*, Delhi: Government of India.

Davies, C. Collin (ed.), 1949, *The Private Correspondence of Lord Macartney, Governor of Madras (1781-85)*, London: The Royal Historical Society.

Denison, David, 2005, "Syntactic Surprises in some English Letters: The Underlying Progress of the Language". Paper presented at History from Below: Linguistic Variation in the Germanic Languages from 1700 to 2000, Bristol, April 2005.

Dickson, William Kirk (ed.), 1935, *Warrender Letters. Correspondence of Sir George Warrender Bt. Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and Member of Parliament for the City, with relative papers. 1715*, Edinburgh, Constable.

Eaves, T.C. Duncan / Kimpel, Ben D., 1971, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Faye, Deirdre le (ed.), 1995, *Jane Austen's Letters* [3rd ed.], Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Fairman, Tony, 2000, "English Pauper Letters 1800-34, and the English Language". In: Barton, David / Hall, Nigel (eds): 63-82.

Fitzgerald, Brian (ed.), 1949-1957, *The Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 1731-1814*. 3 vols., Dublin: Irish Manuscript Commission.

Fitzmaurice, Susan, 2002a, *The Familiar Letter in Early Modern English: A Pragmatic Approach,* Amsterdam, Benjamins.

Fitzmaurice, Susan, 2002b, "Servant or Patron? Jacob Tonson and the Language of Deference and Respect". *Language Sciences* 24: 247-260.

Gage, John, 1980, *Collected Correspondence of J.M.W. Turner: With an Early Diary and a Memoir by George Jones*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Görlach, Manfred, 2001, *Eighteenth-Century English*, Heidelberg, Winter.

Halsband, Robert, 1956, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* [repr. 1957], Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Halsband, Robert (ed.), 1965-67, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 3 Vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Harcstark Myers, Sylvia, 1990, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Healey, George Harris (ed.), 1955, *The Letters of Daniel Defoe*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Hemlow, Joyce *et al*. (eds), 1972-84, *The Journals and letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay)*, 12 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Holmes, Janet, 1995, *Women, Men and Politeness*, London, Longman.

Hughes, Edward (ed.), 1957, *The Private Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, London: The Navy Records Society.

Ingamells, John / Edgcombe, John (eds), 2000, *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Johnson, R.B. (ed.), 1928, *The Letters of Robert Burns*, London, John Lane / The Bodley Head.

Kastovsky, Dieter / Mettinger, Arthur (eds), 2000, *The History of English in a Social Context,* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Kielkiewicz-Janowiak, Agnieszka, 2003, "*Women's Language"? A Sociohistorical View*. *Private Writings in Early New England*, Poznan, Motivex.

King, James / Ryskamp, Charles (eds), 1979, *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, 5 Vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press.

King-Hele, Desmond (ed.), 1981, *The Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Labov, William, 1981, "Field Methods used by the Project on Linguistic Change and Variation". *Sociolinguistic Working Paper* 81. Austin, Texas, South Western Educational Development Laboratory.

Labov, William, 1994, *Principles of Linguistic Change: Internal Factors*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Lefanu, William (ed.), 1960, *Betsy Sheridan's Journal*. *Letters from Sheridan's Sister* [repr. 1986], Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Lewis, W.S. *et al*. (eds), 1937-1983, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*. 48 Vols., New Haven: Yale University Press.

Marrs, Edwin W. (ed.), 1975-1978, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb,* Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

McIntosh, Carey, 1986, *Common and Courtly Language*. *The Stylistics of Social Class in 18th-Century English Literature*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Milroy, James / Milroy, Lesley, 1985, "Linguistic Change, Social Network and Speaker Innovation". *Journal of Linguistics* 21: 339-384.

Milroy, Lesley, 1987, *Language and Social Networks*. 2nd ed. (repr. 1989), Oxford, Blackwell.

Milroy, James / Milroy, Lesley, 1992, "Social Network Analysis and Social Class: Towards an Integrated Research Model". *Language in Society* 21: 1-26.

Mullett, Charles F. (ed.), 1943, *The Letters of George Cheyne to Samuel Richardson (1733-1743)*, Columbia, Miss., University of Missouri.

Navest, Karlijn, 2003, "Epistolary Formulas in Queeney Thrale's Letters". MA thesis presented at the English Department, University of Leiden.

Nevalainen, Terttu, 1999, "Making the Best Use of 'Bad' Data. Evidence for Sociolinguistic Variation in Early Modern English". *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 100: 499-533.

Nevalainen, Terttu / Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena (eds), 1996, *Sociolinguistics and Language History*. *Studies based on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, Amsterdam, Rodopi.

Nevalainen, Terttu / Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena, 2000, "The Changing Role of London on the Linguistic Map of Tudor and Stuart England". In: Kastovsky, Dieter / Mettinger, Arthur (eds), 278-337.

Nevalainen, Terttu / Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena, 2003, *Historical Sociolinguistics*, London, Longman.

Nokes, David, 1995, *John Gay. A Profession of Friendship. A Critical Biography.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nuttall, Geoffrey F., 1979, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge DD (1702-1751)*, London, Northamptonshire Record Society.

Oldireva Gustafsson, Larisa, 2002, "Variation in Usage and Grammars: The Past Participle Forms of *Write* in English 1680-1790". *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics* 2, www.let.leidenuniv.nl/hsl_shl/ (go to: Contents, Articles).

Olson, Alison Gilbert (ed.), 1961, *The Radical Duke. Career and Correspondence of Charles Lennox, Third Duke of Richmond*, London etc., Oxford University Press.

Osselton, N.E., 1984, "Informal Spelling Systems in Early Modern English: 1500-1800". In: Blake, N.F. / Jones, Charles (eds), *English Historical Linguistics: Studies in Development*. Sheffield, CECTAL, 123-137.

Percy, Carol, 1994, "Paradigms for their Sex? Women's Grammars in Late Eighteenth-century England", *Histoire Epistémologie Langage* 16: 121-141.

Percy, Carol, 2001, review of Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998. *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics*, www.let.leidenuniv.nl/hsl_shl/ (go to: Contents, Articles).

Pottle, Frederick A. (ed.), 1950, *Boswell's London Journal. 1762-1763,* London, Heinemann.

Price, Cecil (ed.), 1966, *The Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, 3 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena, 1996a, "Apparent Time". In: Nevalainen, Terttu / Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena (eds), 93-109.

Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena, 1996b, "Forms of Address in Early English Correspondence". In: Nevalainen, Terttu / Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena (eds), 167-181.

Ribeiro, Alvara, S.J. (ed.), 1991-, *The Letters of Dr Charles Burney*, Vol. 1., Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rutt, J.T., 2003 [1817-1832], *Life, Memoirs and Correspondence of Joseph Priestley*, London, Thoemmess Press.

Sairio, Anni, 2004a, "Progressives in the Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu and her Circle in 1738-1778: A Social Network Approach to Language Change", paper presented at the second Conference on Late Modern English, November 2004.

Sairio, Anni, 2004b, "Social Networks of Bluestockings in 18th-century England:

Elizabeth Montagu's Use of the Progressive", paper presented at ICEHL-13, Vienna, August 2004.

Sherburn, George / Bond, Donald F., 1967, *The Restoration and Eighteenth Century (1660-1789)*, Vol. III of Baugh, Albert C. (ed.), *A Literary History of England*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Slattery, William C. (ed.), 1969, *The Richardson-Stinstra Correspondence, and Stinstra's "Prefaces" to Clarissa*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press.

Smith, David Nichol (ed.), 1935, *The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Spender, Dale, 1986, *Mothers of the Novel*, London, Pandora.

Stein, Dieter / Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid (eds), 1994, *Towards a Standard English 1600-1800*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1985, "*Do*-Support in the Writings of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: A Change in Progress". *Folia Linguistica Historica* VI: 127-151.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1987, *The Auxiliary Do in Eighteenth-century English*. *A Sociohistorical-linguistic Approach*, Dordrecht, Foris.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1991a, "Stripping the Layers: Language and Content in Fanny Burney's Early Journals". *English Studies* 72: 146-159.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1991b, "Samuel Richardson's Role as Linguistic Innovator: A Sociolinguistic Analysis". In: Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid / Frankis, John (eds), *Language: Usage and Description*, Amsterdam, Rodopi: 47-57.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1994, "Eighteenth-century Letters and Journals as Evidence: Studying Society through the Individual". In: Sell, Roger D. / Verdonk, Peter (eds), *Literature and the New Interdisciplinarity. Poetics, Linguistics, History*, Amsterdam, Rodopi: 179-191.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1996a, "Two Hundred Years of Lindley Murray: An *Introduction*". In Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid (ed.), *Two Hundred Years of Lindley Murray*, Münster, Nodus Publikationen: 9-25.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1996b, "Social Network Theory and Eighteenth-century English: The Case of Boswell". In: Britton, Derek (ed.), *English Historical Linguistics 1994*, Amsterdam, Benjamins: 327-337.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1998, "Standardization of English Spelling: The Eighteenth-century Printers' Contribution". In: Fisiak, Jacek / Krygier, Marcin (eds), *Advances in English Historical Linguistics*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter: 457-470.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 1999, "Of Formulas and Friends: Expressions of Politeness in John Gay's Letters". In: Tops, Guy A.J. / Devriendt, Betty / Geukens, Steven (eds), *Thinking English Grammar*. *To Honour Xavier Dekeyser, Professor Emeritus*, Leuven/Paris, Peeters: 99-112.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 2000a, "Sociohistorical Linguistics and the Observer's Paradox". In: Kastovsky, Dieter / Mettinger, Arthur (eds): 441-461.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 2000b, "Social Network Analysis and the Language of Sarah Fielding". In Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid / Nevalainen, Terttu / Caon, Luisella (eds): 291-301.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 2001b, "Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar* reprinted". *Publishing History* 49: 5-17.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 2002a, "Robert Lowth and the Strong Verb System". *Language Sciences* 24: 459-469.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 2002b, "*You was* and Eighteenth-century Normative Grammar". In: Lenz Katja / Möhlig, Ruth (eds), *Of Dyuersite & Chaunge of Langage: Essays Presented to Manfred Görlach on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, Heidelberg, Winter: 88-102.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 2002c, "Robert Lowth and the Corpus of Early English Correspondence". In: Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena / Nevala, Minna / Nurmi, Arja / Rissanen Matti (eds), *Variation Past and Present*. *VARIENG Studies on English for Terttu Nevalainen*, Helsinki, Société Néophilologique: 161-172.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid, 2003, "Lowth's Language". In Dossena Marina / Jones, Charles (eds), *Insights into Late Modern English*, Bern, Peter Lang: 241-264.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid (forthc.), "Edward Pearson Esqr.: The Language of an Eighteenth-century Secretary". In: Dossena, Marina / Fitzmaurice, Susan (eds), *Business and Official Correspondence: Historical Investigations*, Bern, Peter Lang.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid / Nevalainen, Terttu / Caon, Luisella (eds), 2000, *Social Network Analysis and the History of English*, Special issue of EJES 4.3.

Tierney, James E. (ed.), 1988, *The Correspondence of Robert Dodsley 1733-1764*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Tillyard, Stella, 1994, *Aristocrats*. *Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox 1740-1832,* London, Chatto & Windus.

Toynbee, Paget / Whibley, Leonard (eds), 1935, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Troide, Lars E. *et al*. (eds), 1988-, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Vickery, Amanda, 1998, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. *Women's Lives in Georgian England*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Walker, Ralph S. (ed.), 1966, *The Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnston of Grange*, London, Heinemann.

Wardle, Ralph M. (ed.), 1979, *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Wimsatt, W.K., 1970, "The Consistency of Johnson's Style". In: Watson, George (ed.), *Literary English since Shakespeare*, London etc., Oxford University Press: 289-307.

Wright, Susan, 1994, "The Critic and the Grammarian: Joseph Addison and the Prescriptivists". In Stein, Dieter / Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid (eds): 243-284.

Wright, Susan, 1997, "Speaker Innovation, Textual Revision and the Case of Joseph Addison". In: Nevalainen, Terttu / Kahlas-Tarkka, Leena (eds), *To Explain the Present*. *Studies in the Changing English Language in Honour of Matti Rissanen*, Helsinki, Société Néophilologique: 483-503.

Wyld, H.C., 1936, *A History of Modern Colloquial English*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Zirker Jr., Malvin R., 1966, "Richardson's Correspondence: The Personal Letter as Private Experience". In: Anderson, Howard / Daghlian, Philip B. / Ehrenpreis, Irvin (eds): 71-91.