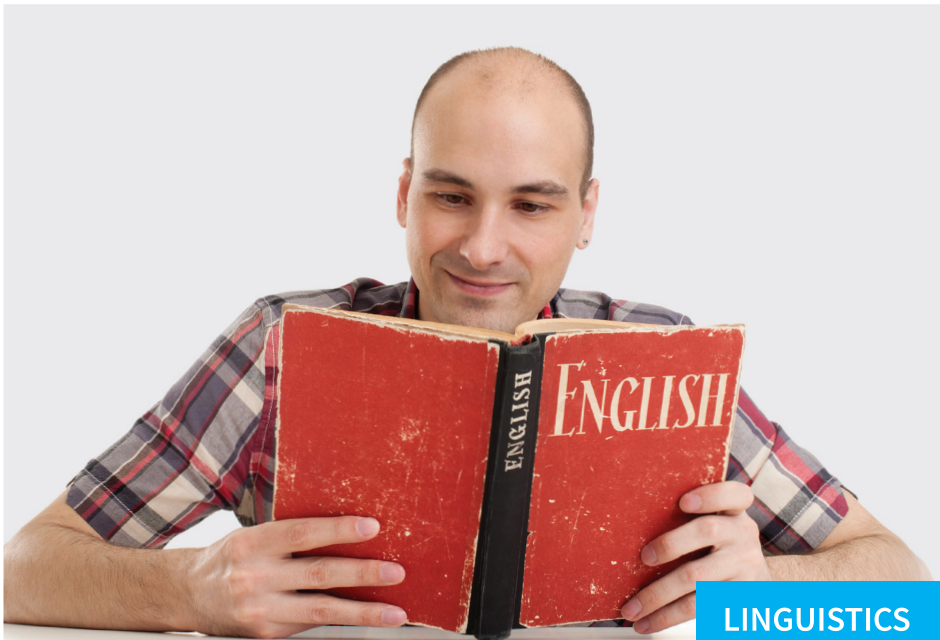


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Variability in English across time and space



LINGUISTICS

PHONETICS, DIALECTOLOGY, HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

Preface

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Variability in language invariably attracts attention of linguists, particularly those for whom the use of language remains the core of linguistic enquiry. Whether viewed from a diachronic or synchronic perspective, the variable use of language provides insights into the formation, evolution and dynamism of the language system. In the case of English, the observed variability seems to be inexhaustible. The language with so many native and non-native varieties, spoken by millions of people as a modern *Lingua Franca* offers endless possibilities for research into its numerous manifestations. The studies collected in the present volume bear witness to the wealth of problems and approaches that can be used in the search for variability patterns in the development and present-day usage of English. Adopting various methodological approaches, the young researchers from the Gavagai Student Society, whose studies have been collected here, take the challenge of describing the variability in the use of English across space and time, from Middle English to present-day English, used by native and non-native speakers.

In the first contribution Adamczyk, presents an in-depth analysis of two competing spelling variants of dental fricatives in the Northern dialect of Late Middle English. The study shows that the so-called Northern system, in which the choice between the two variants was supposed to reflect difference in voicing, can be traced in the analysed data but it was not consistently applied. The study focuses on function words, because this is the area in which spelling variability has been found, and it is based on a large corpus of Middle English legal documents. Thanks to a well-thought-out methodology and scope, the results of the study are an interesting contribution to the study of Middle English dialectology and spelling.

The next study investigates the same period in the history of English, but the variability examined there is syntactic in nature. In his study, Grabski aims to check whether the choice between single and multiple negation patterns in *The Canterbury Tales* is – at least partly – related to sociolinguistic factors. The study shows that Chaucer seems to have used negation as marker of the social status of his characters, with highly-educated speakers preferring single negation and speakers with lower status using negative concord relatively more often. This in itself is an interesting observation since single negation is supposed to have developed in the (Early) Modern English period during the process of language standardisation, and multiple negation became generally stigmatised long after the Middle English period.

The study by Matysiak analyses variability in English from a modern perspective, focusing on Polish users of English. The most interesting aspect of the study is that the informants are Polish immigrants living in London, surrounded by people using English natively and communicating in English on a daily basis. Recently, this group has become very numerous and its linguistic behaviours are an extremely interesting area of study. The aim of this investigation is to check to what extent the level of proficiency in English on arrival in the UK and the quality of English input afterwards influence the use of English by Polish speakers. The linguistic variable selected for the purpose of the study is aspiration of voiceless plosives. The study shows that previous language experience is of crucial importance and determines success in the acquisition of L2 pronunciation in the investigated group.

In the next study, Rajtar examines the degree of formulaicity of native and non-native English used by Polish learners. The aim of the investigation is to determine the most frequent two- and three-word sequences from both samples and compare the occurrence of silent pauses within them. The study is based on the British National Corpus and PLEC corpus (PELCRA Learner English Corpus) created at the University of Łódź. The study shows that native and non-native speakers use almost completely different sets of formulaic phrases (the only exception is *I don't know*) while the distribution of silent pauses is very similar in both samples, which proves that formulaic expressions demonstrate similar behaviour regardless of language (variety).

With the study by Rybińska, the volume moves back to the Middle English period. This contribution focuses on lexical variation and it aims to establish regional differences in the distribution of Late Middle English lexicon. The study is limited to verbs and the material selected for the purpose of the analysis are two distinct versions of *Mandeville's Travels*: one manuscript was produced in the Northern dialect while the other comes from the south of England. The regional differences

established on the basis of this text are verified by the author on the basis of a larger sample of Northern and Southern Middle English texts. The study shows that the differences in ME dialects are not only phonological or syntactic but also lexical, which is often disregarded in historical studies of this period.

The investigation carried out by Szczytko is also historical, but based on a collection of letters coming from the Late Middle and Early Modern English period. The investigated variables are forms of address, with special attention paid to the choice between two competing second person pronouns *thou* and *you* in private correspondence. The aim of the author is to establish which sociolinguistic factors are decisive in the selection of forms of address. Quite surprisingly, no instances of *thou* have been identified in the analysed sample, which shows that letters are clearly different from drama from the same period, where variability in second person pronouns does exist. The author suggests that this result may be related to the epistolary conventions of the period. The investigation proves that the choice of nominal forms of address was determined by two main factors: social position and family relations.

The last contribution in this volume is a study of phonetic imitation by Zajac who analyses the linguistic behaviour of Polish learners of English. The study aims to show to what degree the informants imitate the native or non-native model. The linguistic variable analysed in the study is the duration and quality of vowels. The analysis suggests that phonetic imitation does have an impact on L2 pronunciation because the informants showed a tendency for convergence towards the native English speaker and divergence from the Polish speaker. This result seems important from the point of view of phonetic training and shows that attitude towards native and foreign-accented speech have an impact on L2 pronunciation.

The studies presented in this volume reflect but a fraction of variability present in historical and contemporary English. However, the very fact that they are so varied shows how stimulating the wide range of possible venues to be taken within this area of research can be. This collection of papers bears witness to the effect of cooperation and discussion within a student society environment. We hope that it will be both interesting and stimulating for other young scholars interested in English linguistics. Finally, we hope that our contributors will never stop being curious about language and out of this curiosity they will keep asking questions and will continue to explore various aspects of variability in English and other languages.

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Synchronic variability in the area of phonetics, phonology, vocabulary, morphology and syntax is a natural feature of any language, including English. The existence of competing variants is in itself a fascinating phenomenon, but it is also a prerequisite for diachronic changes. This volume is a collection of studies which investigate variability from a contemporary and historical perspective, in both native and non-native varieties of English. The topics include Middle English spelling variation, lexical differences between Middle English dialects, Late Middle and Early Modern English forms of address, Middle English negation patterns, the English used by Polish immigrants living in London, lexical fixedness in native and non-native English used by Polish learners, and the phenomenon of phonetic imitation in Polish learners of English. The book should be of interest to anyone interested in English linguistics, especially English phonetics and phonology as well as history of English, historical dialectology and pragmatics.

The book is also available
as an e-book



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