

“report”, “phatic” etc.). While surface text types are traditionally based on material conditions and cultural models, the novel notion of socio-pragmatic subtypes is based for the most part on the different functions that language can fulfill (in the sense of Bühler, Jakobson, or Halliday, for example), an extended form of accommodation theory, and speech act theory. This is the topic, from a rather theoretical point of view, of the following section. In a second step, the differentiation into subtypes will be tested in an exploratory study of the late Middle English *Paston Letters* (ed. by Davis 1971). It will be shown that writers in the late Middle English and Early Modern English period were not simply constrained by the basic letter-writing conventions of the time, though these certainly played an important role, but that the function of the letter and the roles of addressee and author, i.e. its underlying, socio-pragmatic text subtype, were also of great importance in shaping its actual form. Therefore, this paper is eventually also concerned with the personal freedom of authors and how they employed the linguistic means available to them for their individual purposes.

2. Text types, genres, registers and related matters

The “terminological maze” (Moessner 2001) of text types, genres, styles, and registers is still a matter of dispute and controversial debates (see, e.g. Moessner 2001; Diller 2001). The present paper is not intended as yet another voice in this sometimes very dissonant chorus; it will not make any claims as to whether the distinctions introduced in the following are a matter of text type, genre, register, or style. Instead, “letters” will be regarded, superficially, as one “text type”, in contrast, for instance, to other text types such as “sermon”, “recipe”, “novel”, or “contract”. Text types differ from each other in both intra- and extra-linguistic features and are generally based on native speakers’ intuitions about these types. For example, a native speaker can always recognise and distinguish a recipe from a novel. That these text types and their individual features must also be understood as prototypes goes without saying. A novel might be very short, for example, or a recipe very long; a novel might contain a recipe, a recipe a brief narrative exposition — but both remain principally recipe and novel. Within the text type “letter” several “subtypes” can be defined. The most common distinction is between “private/personal letters” and “non-private/business/official letters”.¹ The external determinants in this case appear to be the purpose of the letter, publicity, and addressee (i.e. some social relationships and roles simply do not allow for private letters, e.g. John Paston I writing to King Henry IV in 1449 — this clearly has to be business communication, in this case an official petition). The internal, linguistic correlates depend, of course, on the cultural and linguistic background, but generally revolve around formal, literate constructions and forms expressing linguistic and social distance in

non-private documents (e.g. Latinate vocabulary, complex NP structures, sentence initial adverbials; cf. Kohnen 2001) and informal, oral constructions, and forms expressing linguistic and social proximity in private/personal correspondence (e.g. Germanic vocabulary, zero relativisation, short forms, simple NP structures, the use of complex predicates; see Kytö 2000 for an illustrative study of early American letters; see Koch and Oesterreicher 1994 for the "language of distance" versus "language of proximity" distinction). However, apart from this common distinction between private and non-private correspondence, there seem to be further subtypes of letters: "love letters", "requests", "orders" are more or less intuitive categories that spring to mind. The introduction of this distinction rehearses the theme of multiple determination of linguistic variation as outlined by Ferguson: "Every utterance (in speaking and writing) simultaneously exemplifies dialect, register, genre, and conversational variation in the senses used here" (1994:25). The differentiation of various subtypes plays on the themes of genre and conversational variation in Ferguson's terminology. It relates to genres in Fergusonian terms as most "letters", particularly in late Middle English and Early Modern English, have a clear, "identifying internal structure, differentiated from other message types in the repertoire of the community" (Ferguson 1994:21). In other words, they are commonly realised with very fixed formulae and structures (see Davis 1965, 1967; Nevalainen 2001; Sanchez Roura 2002 a,b), and thus leave very little room for personal choices. Letters, in late Middle English, were, after all, an *ars dictaminis* or *ars dictandi* (Schäfer 1995:316; cf. Markus 1988:172). Today, in contrast, we are witnessing a gradual loss of defining structural features for the genre/text type "letter", with no uniform greeting formulae, frequent lack of an exposition, or even without salutations and complimentary closes (cf. Wyss 2002:79, 87 on the loss of *epistolare Schreib-schriftlichkeit* 'epistolary written-ness'). Letters in Middle English were much more conventionalised with regard to their structure. But apart from that, speakers were relatively free in their choices how to fill the empty spaces between the various formulae and obligatory parts, as will be shown in the following sections. Even the obligatory parts themselves still left some choice, albeit very little (see Wood, this vol., for more details on variation in the opening and closing formulae). And this is the place where Ferguson's "conversion factor" plays a role: Language in general can be used for different functions. The Viennese psychologist Karl Bühler distinguished between three different functions: descriptive, expressive, appellative (Bühler 1934:28f). Language is used descriptively (in a symbolic function) when it relates states or events in this world. (Halliday and Lyons referred to this function also as ideational: e.g. "A man with a gun is waiting for you outside".) It is used expressively (in a symptomatic function) when it relates the thoughts or feelings of the speaker (e.g. "Ouch!" or "I'm tired"). The appellative (signalling)

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function of language takes precedence when language is meant to invoke some reaction in the hearer (e.g. through directive speech acts: "Give me the salt", "Be careful!"). For Bühler, these three language functions are idealisations which rarely, if ever, occur in isolated, pure forms. Instead, in real life utterances we find a mixture or overlap of all three functions, as in, for example, "I think I have forgotten my invitation". This can express simultaneously the speaker's thoughts and feelings (e.g. embarrassment), a description of the state of the world (e.g. the fact that the invitation is not there), and an indirect, directive speech act intended to provoke a reaction on part of the hearer (e.g. "let me in without the invitation").

How does that relate to the question of text types and letters in particular?

It may be argued that all three language functions are, essentially, also present in written communication. Fictional writing, such as poetry and novels, is prototypically fulfils the expressive function of language (although, of course, we also find programmatic fictional texts which have a strong appellative component or texts that border on the descriptive, ideational part). Newspaper reports, on the other hand, (should) lean towards the descriptive function. Cooking recipes, manuals, and similar texts are exemplars of appellative text types. Letters, however, seem to fall in between all these functions. They do not belong *per se* and prototypically to one single category, at least not in the late Middle English period. The first letters, written more than 5,000 years ago, were essentially business letters, i.e. they fulfilled descriptive and appellative tasks. Only with the advent of private, personal correspondence (but see footnote 1) did the expressive dimension enter the stage. By c. 1500 AD letters certainly fulfilled all three functions to a greater or lesser extent and were not necessarily subject to a strict division between private, personal and non-private, business letters. On the contrary: many Paston Letters, for example, actually show an interesting division within one single letter: while in half of the letter the author strictly talks business, the other half is decidedly more intimate and personal (cf. Kohl 1986:99). Descriptive, expressive, appellative functions clearly coexisted

(pace Lass 1999:150).

How exactly do the different functions embodied in letters influence or shape the linguistic form? It has been mentioned above that letters in Middle English were quite formalised and that letters often employed fixed phrases and formulae. These, obviously, would show only few differences with respect to the various functions. However, it has also been argued that in between the formulae and even within the range of possible formulae there is a certain degree of variability which may be used for functional, communicative purposes. The first and most obvious difference in letter forms and functions lies in the speech act types that can be found. Quite simply, descriptive texts contain more representative speech acts, expressive texts more expressive speech acts, and appellative texts more directives. A second diagnostic may be simple lexical

variation, as has been pointed out in the late Middle English period. The difference between the formal and "I humbly recommend" and "I humbly request" is a difference in politeness, or more precisely, in the degree of deference, negative politeness, and socio-pragmatic functions. On top of other expressions. On top of other expressions. On top of other expressions. On top of other expressions.

Spolsky 1988:108). The matter of accommodation regards letter-writing. Cooking recipes, manuals, and similar texts are exemplars of appellative text types. Letters, however, seem to fall in between all these functions. They do not belong *per se* and prototypically to one single category, at least not in the late Middle English period. The first letters, written more than 5,000 years ago, were essentially business letters, i.e. they fulfilled descriptive and appellative tasks. Only with the advent of private, personal correspondence (but see footnote 1) did the expressive dimension enter the stage. By c. 1500 AD letters certainly fulfilled all three functions to a greater or lesser extent and were not necessarily subject to a strict division between private, personal and non-private, business letters. On the contrary: many Paston Letters, for example, actually show an interesting division within one single letter: while in half of the letter the author strictly talks business, the other half is decidedly more intimate and personal (cf. Kohl 1986:99). Descriptive, expressive, appellative functions clearly coexisted

Like Walpole about the degree of variability which may be used for functional, communicative purposes. The first and most obvious difference in letter forms and functions lies in the speech act types that can be found. Quite simply, descriptive texts contain more representative speech acts, expressive texts more expressive speech acts, and appellative texts more directives. A second diagnostic may be simple lexical variation, as has been pointed out in the late Middle English period. The difference between the formal and "I humbly recommend" and "I humbly request" is a difference in politeness, or more precisely, in the degree of deference, negative politeness, and socio-pragmatic functions. On top of other expressions. On top of other expressions. On top of other expressions. On top of other expressions.

variation, as has been reported by Sanchez Roura (2002b) in her study of the late Middle English Cely Letters. She quite rightly points out that there is a big difference between the two commendations "I heartily recommend me to you" and "I humbly recommend me to you". The former clearly expresses warmth, affection, positive politeness (in Brown and Levinson's terms, 1987); the latter deference, negative politeness, "an act of self-humiliation" (2002b: 85). Thus, socio-pragmatic functions may determine lexical choices even in very fixed expressions. On top of these obvious differences, however, the function of a particular letter also makes itself felt in certain linguistic forms through socio-psychological principles such as accommodation and dissociation (Street and Giles 1982), or, more broadly speaking, identification theory (Smith 1996:9). In a nutshell, accommodation theory claims that "we tend to accommodate our speech to the speech of the people we are talking to, in the hope that they will like us more for doing so" (Hudson 1996: 164). Dissociation, on the other hand, is the reverse use of linguistic means to signal differentiation or separation (see Spolsky 1988: 108f; Hickey 2000 for extensive and illuminating discussions). As regards letter-writing, Fitzmaurice (2000: 362) quotes Horace Walpole on the matter of accommodation and dissociation: "a letter is addressed to a single mind of which the prejudices and partialities are known, and must therefore please, if not by favouring them, by forbearing to oppose them". Bax (2002) also discusses accommodation in the written exchanges of Hester Lynch Thrale and Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century. Taking into account the principle of uniformity in linguistic change, there is no reason why a similar line of thought should not have played a role three hundred years earlier, in the fifteenth century. We find some support for this in Margaret Paston's advice to

her son, John II:

(1) What be entent therof was I wot not, but thowge he toke it but lyghly I

wold ye shuld not spare to write to hym ageyn as lowly as ye came,

besecheyng hym to be your good fader, and send hym suche tydynys as

bethe in be contré ther ye bethe in, and that ye be ware of your expence

bettr and ye have be before thys tyme, and be your owne purse-berere. I

trowe ye shall fynd most profytable to you. (1463, Margaret Paston to

her son John II, no. 175, p. 288, ll. 13–18)

Like Walpole about three hundred years later, she suggests that the son should employ a style "as lowly as ye can" when asking his father for support. While this does not necessarily imply linguistic accommodation as such, it still shows clearly style and register awareness as well as the presence of enough individual linguistic freedom to utilise more or less subtle stylistic differences in letter forms. In this context it should also be noted that Walpole, just like most other authors, seems to have assumed basically cooperative speakers/writers who do not wish to offend their interlocutors, or who at least pay some attention to the

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addressees' personae. This is certainly important and true for the subtypes of "report" and "request". With these subtypes, speakers do well if they avoid language use that may be offensive to the addressee. In other words, if speakers need money or other important social and emotional resources, we expect greater accommodation to the language of the addressee, i.e. the grant-giver. If, however, a person in a socially more powerful position writes to a socially inferior person, as in the subtype "order", for example, we expect very little accommodation or perhaps even dissociation. As a somewhat complicating factor it should be added that power and status in relationships need not be static and fixed, but that these may be dynamic, negotiable, and evolving (cf. e.g. Watts 1991 for a comprehensive overview on power and status in family discourse). Fitzmaurice (2002) discusses the correspondence between Lady Mary Pierrepont and Edward Wortley in the eighteenth century. In this study, she describes writers and readers who are not prototypically cooperative, as is commonly assumed, but who are constantly fighting for power in a generally problematic and shifting relationship — not so much because one of them is *per se* more powerful than the other, but because this is part of the battle of wits in the relationship itself. Dynamic relationships of this kind are of course much harder to document and analyse in historical sociolinguistics, even if they are perhaps more realistic and more fascinating. Sociolinguists, at least from a correlational point of view, often have to rely on stable patterns and factors; what they are looking for is a social still life, not a video clip (see Bergs in prep. for a detailed discussion).

As regards the question of style and sociolinguistic variation, it seems reasonable to assume that in the case of "dissociation" the actual style of the letter much more reflects the writer's own usage (is closer to the "vernacular") than in the case of "accommodation", where the writer tries to emulate the addressee's language as far as possible, for instance in order to flatter the recipient or create positive face. What also needs to be taken into account is Bell's Style Axiom, which says, in a nutshell, that intraspeaker variation only follows interspeaker variation, i.e. register and style variation generally should not exceed socially motivated variation. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg have tested this hypothesis on the basis of five changes documented in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC; see Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1996) and have found the very same implicational scale to be operative in their data: "social variation (regional variation > gender variation) > register variation according to addressee" (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003:200). Thus, studies on linguistic variability in early data should also consider both intra- and interspeaker factors. In the present case, the Pastons provide data from roughly one geographical location (mostly Norfolk, Cambridge, and London) and very few female informants (four out of fifteen with approximately one third of the total data, of which in turn more

than 90% was produced in this vol., for a detailed stylistic differences do appear to be negligible, extent with certain exceptions on the basis of evidence from between 1300 and 1400. In the following, the text type category are Middle English Letters and Papers by differentiation into Inventory, Testaments of Complaint, state Petition quality as interactive/bidirectional Verses, Recipes etc. they are not necessarily the text type "letter" classification has been observations in the "Reports" basically descriptive function may be written from meant to be on the influence is to be expected to socially superior/hearer/addressee superior to inferior and appellative not give orders do — though these are neutral. They still give advice. "Phatic" expressive language, although they, too. Although it may

than 90% was produced by one single speaker, Margaret Paston — see Wood, this vol., for a detailed discussion of Margaret's language), so that these factors appear to be negligible. In sum, one basic hypothesis is that, apart from subtle stylistic differences, different subtypes of letters should correlate at least to some extent with certain salient linguistic variables. In the following, we will test this hypothesis on the basis of the Paston Letters, i.e. a corpus of family correspondence from between 1421 and 1503, with c. 245,000 words (ed. by Davis 1971).

3. The linguistic consequences of socio-pragmatic text types

In the following, the linguistic consequences of a socio-pragmatic division of the text type category "letter" will be described and discussed on the basis of the late Middle English Paston Letters. The authoritative edition of the *Paston Letters and Papers* by Davis (1971)² already contains some intuitive and basic differentiation into different text types: Letter, Indenture, Memorandum, Inventory, Testament/Draft Will, Declaration, Schedule, Verses, Account, Bill of Complaint, Statement, Recipe, Draft Deed, and Petition. Only Letter and Petition qualify as belonging to the text type "letter", since they are the only interactive/bidirectional texts, i.e. written for a particular recipient. Schedules, Verses, Recipes etc. are not necessarily written with any addressee in mind, i.e. they are not necessarily interactive/bidirectional and thus cannot be included in the text type "letter". In terms of socio-pragmatic subtypes, the following classification has been used in this study: reports, requests, orders, counsel letters, phatic letters.³ This division is based in part on phenomenological observations in the texts, but also on the language functions discussed above: "Reports" basically report, i.e. describe some facts or state of affairs (the descriptive function) from a socio-psychologically neutral point of view. They may be written from superior to inferior and vice versa, but since their focus is meant to be on description rather than on social relationships, only little influence is to be expected. "Requests" are generally made from socially inferior to socially superior; their function is essentially appellative, focusing on the hearer/addressee. "Orders" are also appellative in nature, but made from superior to inferior. "Counsel" letters are borderline cases between the descriptive and appellative function. They are rather characterised *ex negativo*: they do not give orders, do not express requests, and they do not focus on descriptions — though these may also be present. Socio-psychologically, they are also rather neutral. They simply give counsel without forcing the addressee to follow the advice. "Phatic" letters are a mixture of phatic communion, descriptive, and expressive language functions. They show no socio-psychological asymmetries, although they, too, can be directed from superior to inferior and vice versa. Although it may be suggested that this list, certainly non-comprehensive,

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represents parts of a universal text type inventory, as it reflects universal language functions (cf. Bühler 1934:26ff), it also seems clear that individual linguistic communities at different times, in different regions, and in different cultures may employ these subtypes differently. Some types may simply be absent; others may be added through more finely grained distinctions. The development of (at least European) letters in general, from official business letters to a general means of written communication, is a case in point in this respect.

Table 1. Socio-pragmatic differentiation of text types

Text type(s)	Subtype(s)
Letter	Report (= descriptive, neutral) Request (= appellative, socially inferior to superior) Orders (= appellative, socially superior to inferior) Counsel (= descriptive-appellative) Phatic (= phatic-descriptive-expressive)
Petition	Request (= appellative, socially inferior to socially superior)

Some examples: Letter no. 346 (1471), from John Paston III to his mother Margaret, belongs, of course, to the general text type "letter". Pragmatically, however, it should be classified as a "request". It begins with the traditional formulaic introduction:

(2) Afyr humbyll and most dew recommendacyon, in as humbyll wyse as I can I besече you of your blyssynge, preyng God to reward you wyth as myche plesyer and hertys ease as I have latward causyd you to haue trowbyll and thowght". (1471, John Paston III to his mother Margaret, no. 346, p. 565, ll. 1-4)

This introduction and greeting, though formulated along traditional lines, is extremely humble in comparison to other similar letters (cf. e.g. Sanchez-Kouras comments on lexical variation between "heartily" and "humbly" mentioned above). In the rest of the letter John asks for money and help; in doing so he frequently employs phrases such as "ye may spare eny money" (l. 8), "do your almesse" and "in as hasty wyse as is possybyll" (both l. 9). These seem to underline his very unfortunate position. The letter culminates in John's exclamation that he has "neyther met, drink, clothyng, lechecraft, nor money but vp-on borowynge" (ll 12f). He asks for money, clothing, information on certain important issues, help, and many other substantial things and ends by ascertaining that all his renderings are "trew for very serteyn" (l. 40). In brief, this is an almost prototypical example of the subtype "request".

Letter no. 339 (from John Paston III to his brother John Paston II in 1470)

was also classified as a "request" (see Bergs 2002b:81-84, Nevada). The chance to vary the expressive function indicate the expressive function John goes on in a list of functions that have been discussed in the literature. Estem er it be redy to be as for Doctor Pysen [...] (p. 554, ll 5ff, 7ff) that there are a few things that ye wyl make aquyete I prey you send me change the essential forms and construct a humble request. A similar kind of address and author absens þat greet stand more-ouer, that will [...] that comfort in wheder ye be disposed to understanded vnderstanded Be your modor (c. 1472, Margaret Paston III to her mother Margaret Paston III) In this letter, Margaret Paston III uses formulae and formulae validation (see Bergs 2002b:81-84, Nevada).

was also classified primarily as "letter". Pragmatically, however, this turns out to be more like a "report". It also begins with a formulaic opening; this, however, is much shorter and much less humble in comparison to his brother's: "Ryght worchepful syr, I recomand me to you aftry þe old maner, sertyfying you þat I have comoynd wyth my modyr for your comyng hom [...]" (ll 1f). Interesting here is his mentioning of "þe old maner" of introducing a letter and of recommending the author. This interesting metalinguistic comment hints at some kind of awareness with regard to the traditional, old-fashioned, high prestige form of beginning letters (Davis 1965, 1967; see also Sanchez Roura 2002b: 81–84, Nevalainen 2001), and, what is more, it shows that authors had the chance to vary these forms at their discretion. In this particular case, it may indicate the expressively low-key tone, orality, and informality of the letter. John goes on in a list-like fashion, telling his brother about various things that have been discussed before: "Item, as for your clok at Harcortys, it wyll be nye Estern er it be redy [...]" (ll 13f), "Item, the caryer forgat your byll behynd hym [...]" (ll 13f), "Item, that there are a few lines in which John asks for minor things ("Item, I pray you that ye wyll make aqwetance on-to the person of Mawtby [...]" (ll 13f), "Item, I prey you send me swyr tydy[n]gys of the world in hast" (l. 41)) does not change the essential character of this letter, which is that of a report. Many forms and constructions that we find here would be stylistically awkward in a humble request. A request involves asking the person for vital, important things, and a strong dependence on the fulfillment of this request. An order has a similar kind of function, but here we find a reversal of power between addressee and author:

(3) I grete you wele, letyng you wete that þer was told me a thing in your

absens þat goth right right nere myn hert [...].] Where-fore, in eschwynng of þe greet slaundre and inconveniens þat may grow þer-of, I requyre you and more-ouer charge you vp-on my blissyng, and as ye wull have my good will [...].] that ye restreyn it. [...].] And how so euer wull counceill you the cont[ra]ry, do as I advyse you in this behalffe or ell trost neuer to have comfort in of me. [...].] There-fore send me word þe berere here-of wheder ye haue assent to any such thing or nought, and how that ye be disposid to do there-in; for I shal not be quite in myn hert till I vnderstonde you of þe cont[ra]ry disposition.

Be your moder
(c. 1472, Margaret Paston to her son John II, no. 214, p. 361ff)

In this letter, Margaret comes straight to the point and simply leaves out most formulae and formal features, such as the common commendation and pious valediction (see Sanchez Roura 2002b, Nevalainen 2001). She addresses her son

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