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Horace Walpole and his correspondents : social network analysis in a historical context

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Chapter 2. The Yale edition of Horace Walpole's correspondence

2.1. Introduction

In the preface to the first volume of the *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* Lewis states that there were "three good reasons for a new edition of Horace Walpole's correspondence: to give a correct text, to include for the first time the letters to him, and to annotate the whole with the fullness that the most informative record of the time deserves" (HWC 1: ixx). The work done on Walpole by Lewis and his fellow editors is indeed of an almost incomprehensible value for a scholar working on Walpole. Having Walpole's complete correspondence readily available for analysis saves the researcher on Walpole much time and effort: the painstaking task of collecting and editing the correspondence has already been taken care of by the editors of the *Yale Edition* and therefore research on the texts, linguistic or otherwise, can start virtually straight away.

As much as it is a blessing to have all of Walpole's extant letters neatly collected and published with a comprehensive index, ordered according to correspondent and clarified with annotations and introductions written by scholars who are all experts in the field of the eighteenth century and of *Walpoliana* in particular, a published body of correspondence also raises some questions which are of particular importance for use of the text by a linguist. I will discuss these below.

2.2. Using an edited text as a source for corpus analysis

Walpole's letters have hitherto mostly been used in scholarly research as "chronicles" (HWC 1: xxiv) of the eighteenth century. The *Yale Edition* is

therefore very much geared towards usage by historians and the historically interested:

[The] primary intention [of the present edition] is to facilitate the studies of scholars in the eighteenth century. Sooner or later, the eighteenth century scholar, be his subject what it may, must consult Walpole's correspondence ... This edition, through its index, hopes to lead the scholar, whether the subject of his search is Dr Johnson or ballooning, to whatever Walpole's correspondence may have to say about it. (HWC 1: xxi)

By the term "correct text" (HWC 1: ix) which is used in the introduction as one of the aims of the *Yale Edition*, Lewis means both the accuracy of the transcriptions which were used in relatively modern earlier editions when collated with the original letters, and the 'rigorous' editorial practices of some of the earliest editors of Walpole's letters. Examples of the first type of editions are Toynbee (1903–1905) and the later supplement to that edition (1928–1925), and Cunningham (1860–1861), and of the second type Berry (1798). Concerning the early twentieth-century Toynbee edition, Lewis states that "[c]ollation of the printed letters with the originals shows that the texts are frequently inaccurate"; however, the inaccuracies he mentions are mostly of a historical and editorial nature, "involving dates, proper names and omitted passages" (HWC 1: ix). Lewis notes that "[t]hese far exceed the usual casualties of the press and are attributable, in part, to misplaced confidence in certain of the transcripts which were made by friendly owners with more goodwill than knowledge of Walpole's occasionally tricky handwriting" (HWC 1: ix).

Worse is the practice of the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century editors and publishers, such as Mary Berry and William Roberts.¹ Lewis calls it “blameworthy” that “[n]o letter which passed through the hands of Mary Berry, Walpole’s literary executrix and correspondent, remained the same. She inked out paragraphs, suppressed proper names and wrote her notes even where there was no room for them” (HWC 1: ix). Even worse, Hannah More, who “was solely concerned with her responsibility to the public morals, in case the letters to her should ever be published”, fervently edited the original letters in her possession “with her pen, or, in great emergencies, with her scissors” (HWC 1: xx). It is perhaps not surprising that the greatest editorial liberties were taken by the editors who were themselves correspondents of Walpole, which is the case for Mary Berry and Hannah More. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (1991) has shown that this was, unfortunately, common practice in the eighteenth century. Both Fanny Burney (1752–1840) herself (who edited her own letters later in life) and nineteenth-century editors of her letters for publication, such as Charlotte Barrett (1808–1864), “Fanny Burney’s niece, who took it upon herself to publish her aunts journals and letters” (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1991: 146), likewise went to work with scissors and ink.

However alarming the suppression of passages by editors may be, for linguistic research it is not the greatest of problems. Of course, one would prefer to have all the material that was once extant available for research, but it is possible to carry out linguistic analysis on texts from which fragments are missing, which have been slightly misdated or from which personal names have been removed. I would like to note that for the historical linguist, and especially for the sociohistorical linguist, the content and context of the

¹ William Roberts was the brother of Hannah More’s literary executrix. The writer and philanthropist Hannah More (1745–1833) was one of Walpole’s Correspondents.

linguistic data are perhaps almost as important as tools for analysis as are the textual data themselves. The *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* with all its annotations, restored texts (by collating the transcripts from earlier editions with the original letters) and previously unpublished letters is in that sense a very useful resource for sociohistorical linguistic analysis. However, in making use of the material, one always needs to consider the compilers' focus on the correspondence as a historical source when assessing the usefulness of the letters as a source for linguistic analysis.

The issue of using an edited edition of correspondence for linguistic research is also addressed by Dury (2006), who refers to the "firm principle" laid down by Roger Lass "that language historians and compilers of historical linguistic corpora should work with diplomatic transcripts, and not with edited texts", because "[e]ditors emend, modernize, alter word-divisions, regularize spelling and even 'reconstruct' a lost original by conflating various versions. Through these activities, information is lost and the historical record is falsified and confused" (2006:193). As I am demonstrating in the present study, even though Lass's principle holds in general, it is possible and at times unavoidable for the linguist to use edited material for corpus research. The choice to use this type of material will most often be led by practical motivations, which is in line with the fact that compiling a corpus is at its onset a very practical task: Dury notes that "[i]t is the common experience of corpus-creation (and indeed of all human endeavour) that the methods adopted at the outset of projects must inevitably adapt to solve unforeseen problems" (Dury 2006: 194). The researcher may choose to use an edited edition as a basis for his or her corpus analysis because there simply is not enough material available in its 'original state', or because time constraints demand a choice to be made between spending either more time on compiling a corpus from originals or on the

linguistic research itself. The compilation practices of the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC) and its extension CEECE are a good example of this practice:

In selecting the letters we have aimed at the greatest possible authenticity, choosing autograph letters whenever possible and looking for editions which not only produce original spelling, but also explain their editorial principles as explicitly as possible.... Even though the corpus is based on editions, we have found it a reliable tool for the study of morphology and syntax, as well as pragmatics. (Nurmi 1999: 55)

Sairio (2008) describes her method of collecting and classifying a selected number of letters for the purpose of compiling her Bluestocking corpus. She notes the importance of basing a network analysis on existing material: “My research focus has inevitably been affected by the letters still available by network members: a thorough network analysis without material to test it on is not particularly useful” (Sairio 2008). In other words: one can hypothesise on linguistic influence and the influence of network structure, but this is not very useful if there are no linguistic data to test these insights on. Reference corpora such as CEEC and CEECE and the correspondence sub-corpus of “A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers” (ARCHER)² each are between one and two million words in size and generally provide a better fit of data versus research question than small corpora do. However, the Corpus of Walpole’s Correspondence (CHWC) which I have compiled for the purpose of this study is considerably larger than that, consisting of nearly four million

² According to its website “ARCHER is a multi-genre corpus of British and American English covering the period 1650–1999, first constructed by Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan in the 1990s. It is now in in-house use and managed as an ongoing project by a consortium of participants at fourteen universities in seven countries” (from: <http://www.llc.manchester.ac.uk/research/projects/archer/>).

words. Enough data should thus be available for a generally significant analysis. In Table 2.1. below I provide an overview of CHWC, in which the differences between the available material for the different network clusters also becomes very clear.

Correspondents and correspondence clusters	No. of words in-letters (from HW)	No. of words out-letters (to HW)	Total
Berry	143.847	3.982	147.829
Chatterton	46.923	28.896	75.819
Chute	120.598	42.475	163.073
Coke/More	80.054	16.812	96.866
Cole	87.366	135.265	222.631
Conway	192.897	204.653	397.55
Dalrymple	66.816	10.713	77.529
Gray/West/Ashton	26.49	50.474	76.964
Lady Ossory	307.635	332	639.635
Mann	689.118	720.981	1410.099
Mason	161.281	64.624	225.905
Montagu	150.949	58.247	209.196
Selwyn	58.355	6.916	65.271
Walpole Family	47.058	24.63	71.688
Total	2179.387	1700.668	3880.055

Table 2.1. Overview of the Corpus of Horace Walpole's Correspondence

As can be gauged from the process of compiling the *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, which took over twenty years and considerable financial, personal and technical resources to complete, it would have been an impossible task to compile a corpus of this size from original sources within the limited time and scope of the present study. Therefore, the use of an edited source necessarily opens up a different array of possibilities for scholarly research into the language of this specific group of correspondents. The use of such an edition as a basis for corpus analysis, however, comes with certain constraints and limitations and needs to be done under certain conditions.

It is of the foremost importance to know the textual history of the sources used in order properly interpret the results taken from linguistic research on the language found in this source (cf. Nurmi 1999: 55). An important question for the present study has therefore been in what way the textual history and editorial practice of the editors of the *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, which is primarily geared towards historical research, has influenced the possibilities for its use in linguistic research. In making use of the material I have specifically drawn upon the history of textual transmission of the correspondences in the different volumes and have considered the issues this raises for use of the letters from the edition by linguists (see the point raised by Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2005a: 113–117). Whenever relevant I have taken into account editorial practices which have been identified as problematic for linguistic research (see Dury 2006: 193, see also Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1991) in assessing the extent to which they are a limiting factor for linguistic research on the corpus.

2.3. Editorial practice in the Yale edition

Lewis states that “[t]he first decision in editing this work was to publish the letters by correspondences and not chronologically” (HWC 1: xxxv). This has as a favourable consequence for sociohistorical linguistic research, especially, as in the case of the present study, the kind based on the social network model, that certain network clusters are already identified by the co-occurrence of the relevant correspondents in one volume. A practical benefit of this is that the letters of these clusters are thus found together in one volume, which saves the researcher a lot of time in compiling the corpus for research. Secondly, Lewis mentions a “much more difficult decision ... in which the Advisory Committee [on the publication of the edition] are by no means unanimous”,

namely the question of “what to do about ‘normalization’” (HWC 1: xxxv). The consequences of spelling normalization for linguistic research are quite obvious: one cannot study eighteenth-century linguistic variation and change within the field of spelling on the basis of modernized text. Fortunately, such a high degree of normalization was not employed with the correspondence in the *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*. According to Lewis “[t]he decision was to retain Walpole’s punctuation and spelling of proper names, but to normalize other spellings and capitalization” (HWC 1: xxxv). Lewis argues that the regularization of capitals has led to “a considerable gain in readability and appearance” of the text (HWC 1: xxxv1i), noting that “the extra labour and expense of printing [Walpole’s unclear capitalisation] (incorrectly, no doubt, in many cases), have not seemed to justify the securing of something which, to many, is relatively unimportant” (HWC 1: xxxv-vi).

These statements emphasize the specific manner in which the editors of the edition of Walpole’s correspondence have defined the notion of ‘textual correctness’ which was mentioned as a main objective of the edition in the introduction, namely in a way geared more towards historical and literary research. As a consequence of their decision, spelling irregularities and other spelling-related phenomena such as capitalization and punctuation cannot be studied using this text. Besides the obvious results of the limited normalization practices of the editors, there are also less obvious consequences for what may be called the linguistic relevance of the correspondence in the edition. These result from the history of transmission of the text, and, indirectly also from normalization and pruning practices of editors of earlier editions. The editors of Walpole’s correspondence have, however, been very meticulous in documenting, in the introductory sections to the several different volumes of correspondence, the editorial methods which they employed, as well as the

history of transmission of the texts. This is of great importance for the linguistic researcher.

2.4. Concluding remarks

For the reasons mentioned above and because spelling as such is not dealt with in the present study, the edition, though perhaps not ideal for all purposes of linguistic analysis, is considered suitable for the type of analysis undertaken here. However, I would like to emphasise that Walpole's spelling warrants more research in the future, if only in order to find out more about the differences between his own language use and that of his secretary Kirgate who copied many of his letters for him, especially later in life.

In September 2011 the complete digital edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence (ed. Lewis *et al.* 1937–83) was published online,³ which made my work easier in its final stages and at the same time made the research data more accessible for others. The digitizing of the text done by myself was completed before publication of this digital edition, and was necessary nonetheless to perform full-text corpus research with specialist software such as WordSmith Tools (Scott: 2013). In the digitization process I scanned the published texts into a computer program and used an OCR program to convert the pictures into Unicode text. I manually checked the texts and made sure the letters were dated and separated within the larger files. For all that, the publication of the complete correspondence online has facilitated some last-minute checking of quotations. Fortunately, an increasing number of letters in the digital edition now also contain a link to facsimile images of the original manuscript letters in possession of the Yale Lewis Walpole Library. This is an

³ <http://images.library.yale.edu/HWCorrespondence/>.

incomprehensible treasure trove for linguists, and I expect that other linguists will find this collection of great use for their research.