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Edward Pearson Esq^r.: The Language of an Eighteenth-century Secretary¹

1. Introduction

On 14 October 1766, one Samuel Kennan, whom I have been unable to identify any further, wrote the following letter to Robert Lowth (1710-1787). Lowth is perhaps best known for his *Short Introduction to the English language* (1762), but he was at that time about to become Bishop of Oxford:

My Lord

I shall omit reciting here, what has been already [...]ed before your Lordship, as thinking it not pertinent to my [pre]sent Purpose, but shall my Lord procede with the greatest [hu]mility, to let your Lordship know, **that I have wrote a Couple [of] Letters to Edward Pearson Esq^r. your Lordship's Secretary,** [w]herein I signify'd my desires, pursuant to your Lordship's [or]ders; but not having receiv'd an Answer to either, occasion'd in a great [pres]sure, thro my previous ption, in acquainting your Lordship [with] what I have signify'd therein, was, that your Lordship would [be p]leas'd to procure for my Demissary letter to the Bishop of Bristol, or any other Bishop who firsts [sic] holds a General Ordination.

(Durham University Library Add. MSS 451, f. 220; emphasis added)

The reason Pearson had not replied to Kennan's letters seems to be that he no longer worked for Lowth. He had been associated with Lowth as his secretary, while the latter was Bishop of St David's, but Lowth's appointment had been very brief indeed. On 2 December 1765 Lowth wrote to the Duke of Newcastle, Lord of the Privy Seal,

1 I am grateful to Susan Fitzmaurice and Marjolein Meindersma for their very helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

to express his gratitude “for a Promotion of the highest rank” (BL Add. MS. 32,972, f. 110), i.e. his nomination as Bishop of St David’s. On 19 July 1766, however, John Thomas, the Bishop of Salisbury, died, upon which the Bishop of Oxford, John Hume, was translated to Salisbury to take his place (Horn 1986, 1996). Lowth became Hume’s successor at Oxford, and he wrote to Newcastle once again, on 31 July, to express his “most sincere Thanks [...] for this last honour in particular now conferred upon me” (BL Add. MS. 32,976, f. 358). Meanwhile, in a letter of 9 August 1766, Pearson had explained to Lowth that he “may do any Act as Bp of St. Davids till you are confirm’d Bp of Oxford” (Durham University Library Add. MSS 451, f. 204); the archbishops’ confirmation came through on 16 October, and Lowth was enthroned in Oxford, by proxy, a week later, on 23 October (Horn 1996). Kennan, who signed his letter to Lowth with “Your Lordship’s most humble and distress’d Servant”, thus simply appears to have been too late, and whether or not he obtained his Dimissary Letter – which he needed to be considered a candidate for ordination – will perhaps never be known.

During the brief time that Pearson acted as Lowth’s secretary, the two men exchanged many letters. Of their correspondence, only Pearson’s letters appear to have survived, though not all of them it seems. For all that, we have fifteen letters by Pearson addressed to Lowth, written between 3 July and 1 September 1766. The letters are kept in Durham University Library (Add. MSS 451, ff. 194-226) – before he became Bishop of St David’s, Lowth was prebendary of Durham and rector at Sedgefield, near Durham – and they are all I have been able to find with respect to Pearson’s identity. The letters may be called business letters, and their primary function was that of “transmitting news, information and authorization for particular acts and agreements” (Fitzmaurice 2002a: 4). What is more, for the participants in the correspondence, i.e. Lowth and Pearson, the letters functioned as a kind of “epistolary conversation” (Fitzmaurice 2002a: 4). As such, however, though perhaps precisely because of this, they lack a beginning and an end, the first letter starting *in medias res*, with “Last night I had y^c Seal from M^r. Lingo & this morning the Archbp sent me the Aption to forward to Your Lordship” (5 July 1766) and the last ending “The Bp of Sarum elect will be here on Wednesday” (1

September 1766). There must have been more letters, such as the one opening the correspondence – unless of course Lowth and Pearson had first become acquainted in person; even then one would have expected a reference to this event in the first letter that has come down to us. And at least one or two more letters must have followed the last one to mark the end of their relationship when Lowth's translation to Oxford became a fact.

The letters are of interest because of their contents, not so much the topics relating to appointments and leases or the payment of postage, but more so because of the events Pearson reported on, particularly relating to Lowth's predecessor at Oxford as well as to his own impending move there. Thus, it seems that Lowth's appointment to Oxford would have been arranged more smoothly than that of John Hume to Salisbury, for Pearson reports on 30 July: "This morning I saw y^e. Bp of Oxford, who was [... at] Court in hopes of kissing Hands for y^e. Bpk of S[arum]". With respect to Lowth's appointment Pearson wrote: "According to Information at y^e. Secretary's office Your Lordship's Business towards a Translation to Oxford may go on without Your coming hither to kiss Hands" (9 August 1766). Several of Pearson's comments suggest that he was engaging in small-talk in corresponding with Lowth. This small-talk occasionally even borders on gossip, as when he writes about a Mr. William Davies, who was trying to obtain a third living, "He grasps at too mu[ch ...] I think, for each of his present Livings i[s in] good maintenance" (15 July 1766). Another example is the following: "This day's Post has brought me a Letter from S^r. W^m. Owen acquainting me y^t he agrees to give a Fine of 175 £ (*which he thinks is large*)" (15 August 1766; emphasis added); eventually, Sir William Owen paid a "Sum of 196 £ being the whole of the two Fines as also 3 £ [fo]r y^e. Postage of y^e. Lease to Durham" (30 August 1766). The tone of the letters therefore suggests a free and easy relationship between Lowth as Bishop of St. David's and Pearson as his secretary.

The language of the letters may reflect this relationship; at the same time, due to the difference in status and rank between Lowth and Pearson, the letters would be expected to be polite in tone as well as in language. There may therefore be a certain amount of tension between Pearson's actual language and that which would have been expected of someone in his inferior position regarding his addressee. In other

words, the question in this case is not merely how Pearson as a correspondent would “‘make meanings’ constrained by the ‘formal properties’ of the letter” (Fitzmaurice 2002a: 29), but as constrained by the hierarchical situation he was in. In what follows, I will analyse precisely this, and I will do so by focussing on the politeness strategies Pearson employed in his letters to Lowth, and the extent to which his adoption of these strategies agrees with practice then current in this respect. In doing so, I will draw on prescriptions found in *The Complete Letter Writer* (henceforth CLW), a popular handbook at the time.² In addition, I will discuss aspects of Pearson’s language particularly in relation to the question of the relative formality of the style of his letters to Lowth. I will, moreover, try to determine to what extent the language Pearson used would have been typical of a kind of business English of the time.

2. The letters

Pearson’s handwriting is clear and legible. He appears to have been a trained scribe, for the letters contain features that are not found in, for instance, Lowth’s own letters or that of most of his correspondents.³ Examples are his use of a long stroke to fill out the line, in order to produce an even right-hand margin. This shows concern for a neat page layout. In addition he uses a tilde to indicate the doubling of a nasal consonant, as in “D^{ns}. Coñons”. Susan Fitzmaurice has informed me that she encountered this same feature in various earlier writers, i.e. William Davenant (1606-1668), Matthew Prior (1664-1721) and

2 See Appendix II in Hornbeak (1934). The first edition came out in 1755, and by 1792, eighteen more editions or, as I suspect, reprints had come out. My own copy of the book dates from 1840, which is the only edition available to me. In his excellent introduction to Wesley’s letters, Baker (1980: 59) made use of the 1765 edition. A careful comparison between Baker’s quotations from this edition and the edition from 1840 carried out for me by Karlijn Navest suggests that their contents were largely identical.

3 For a description of Lowth’s correspondence in as far as I have collected it, see Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2003).

George Stepney (1663-1707). Croft (1973: 35), moreover, commented on its use by William Cavendish (1640-1707). But as all these writers had long been dead by the time of the Pearson-Lowth correspondence, and as I have not come across it in Lowth's own letters or in those of his other correspondents, it no longer appears to have been a private spelling feature. Pearson seems to be old-fashioned in his usage here.

Other interesting scribal habits are Pearson's use of a symbol like "∞" above the word in question to indicate the letter <i> in words like *Instituton* and *Delapidacons*. The same symbol is used to mark abbreviated forms, such as *Exors* 'executors'. Pearson also used a long horizontal stroke to mark abbreviations, such as *reced* 'received' and *memdum* 'memorandum'. Like Lowth and most of his correspondents, Pearson used long *s*, as well as *y* as an abbreviation of *th*, though unlike Lowth he primarily used it for the definite article and occasionally for *that* (cf. Tiekens-Boon van Ostade Forthcoming a).

The letters were not copied before being sent off, as appears from words which are occasionally added in between the lines or words that are erased. In addition, there are a number of references in the text that suggest that Pearson would not have had the time to produce fair copies: "The Bellman is going past so y^t. I can say no more but that I am, My Lord, [...]" (ca. 6 July 1766)⁴ and "The postman is going by therefore can say no more but that I am My Lord [...]" (26 August 1766). Frequently, he added some text after his signature, thus violating the principle that "When you write to your superiors, never make a postscript" (*CLW* 1755 [1840]: 38). Filling a page up when something occurred to him after he had concluded the original letter while being still in time for the postman shows Pearson to be practical rather than polite in his ways with Lowth.

Pearson's letters were often written in response to letters from Lowth. Occasionally there are overt references to such letters, such as "Last night I had Your Favour" (19 August 1766) and "& now I send, according to Your order, [t]hree Lrs Drin^{ty}" (1 September 1766). Other letters contain indications suggesting that Pearson was replying to a query made by Lowth, as when the direct object is topicalised by

4 According to Baker (1980: 21), bellmen came round "to collect letters, or to announce their arrival at the local post office".

a change of word order, as in “The Abstract of the Rental I have reced” (9 August 1766). Another example is the following passage:

The Bp of Oxford I have seen but twice since he was nominated to Salisbury. He has been this week at Claremont but I shall see him on Monday as I hear he is then to be in Town & on tuesday to set out for Oxford. The Tythes of Cuddesdon make part of the profits of y^e. Bpk, but whether set on Lease or in hand I cannot tell till I see his Lordship (9 August 1766)

At this point, Lowth had just accepted the Bishopric of Oxford, and he appears to have made inquiries about the proceeds from the rectory of Cuddesdon, which was situated nearby. A few weeks later, Pearson announced that he would “stop the Packets directed to Your Lordship at my house but then I must pay the postage of them” (28 August 1766). The payment of postage⁵ was a frequently recurring topic in their correspondence, and Pearson had explained the problem on 5 July:

Last Post brought two Letters directed to Your Lordship at my house, [...] but as the postage [w]as charg’d I desired the postman to send them to Durham These Gents have not heard of the late Regulation of Postage of Letters & y^l. they are not to come free unless directed to any Member of [e]ither House at his usual Place of Residence or at y^e. Place where he shall actually be at y^e. time of Delivery thereof.⁶

Payment of postage could be avoided if letters addressed to Lowth care of Pearson – “as you have no House in Town as yet” (16 August 1766) – were redirected to Lowth unopened:

If I open all Letters directed to Your Lordship at my house it will bring a Charge on You, as the Letters are charged in pursuance of y^e. last Act, w^{ch}. empowers y^e. officers to take a Charge of all Letters directed to Peers or members of any Place where they do not usually reside, therefore I refuse to take them in order y^l. they may be sent to You free from Postage.

(9 August 1766)

5 According to Baker (1980: 22), though “prepayment of postage [...] was compulsory under the London Penny Post [...] charges continued to be collected from the recipients of letters until the nineteenth century”.

6 See also Baker (1980: 24): “Members of Parliament and other officers of state were granted free carriage of letters which contained their signature and the words ‘Free’ or ‘Frank’”.

By the end of the month they had evidently agreed – presumably by letter – that it would be better if Pearson opened the letters despite the fact that Lowth would have to pay postage for them.

With one exception, Pearson's letters are all dated; the only undated letter is supplied with a date in Lowth's hand, i.e. "re^d. July 6. 1766". The epistolary formulas adopted by Pearson are always the same: they always begin with "My Lord", a form of address to which Lowth as a bishop was entitled (*CLW* 1755 [1840]: 40). This form of address was to be repeated in the conclusion (*CLW* 1755 [1840]: 39), and Pearson did so, too, never deviating from the standard formula "I am/ My Lord/ Your Lordship's/ Most Obedient & very much/ Obliged Humble Servant/ Edw^d Pearson". In private letters this formula signals a neutral relationship between writer and addressee (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2003), as being appropriate between acquaintances rather than friends. It was evidently also the suitable formula to use in a business relationship such as that which existed between Pearson and Lowth. Similarly, the language of their correspondence would be expected to be neither too overtly formal, nor too informal, as in the case of Lowth's correspondence with James Dodsley, one of Lowth's publishers (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2003: 251-252).

3. The language of the letters

3.1. *Style*

On the whole it would seem that the style of the letters is quite unpremeditated. To Pearson, the very act of communication was evidently more important than the style or the words he chose for the purpose. As already noted, the letters often start rather abruptly, and he added to a letter even after having concluded it. Apart from using the appropriate epistolary opening and closing formulas, Pearson barely observed the common rules of politeness. Thus, his letter of 19 August 1766 opens with "My Lord/ Last night I had Your Favour, and this morning went to Austin Friars to enquire after M^r. Townshend,

who I find is in Wales". A more polite opening might have read something like "I cannot omit the first opportunity of acknowledging y^e. favour of your very obliging Letter, w^{ch}. is just now come to my hands" (14 October 1756; Lowth to William Warburton; Bodleian Library MS Eng. Lett. C 572, f. 151). Occasionally, the letters read as if Pearson was talking on paper, as is suggested by the kind of information he gives (see above). Another clear indication of this is his use of *nay*, as in the following two instances, which are both from the same letter (emphasis added):

- (1) there is no doubt but Your Lordship may do any Act as Bp of S^t. Davids till you are confirm'd Bp of Oxford, numberless instances of w^{ch}. I have known, **nay** it is common practice nor can any other do the Business till y^e See be void (9 August 1766)
- (2) & [I] shall not be able to get that Instrum^t. compleated under y^e. Great Seal so as to send it to Salisbury till y^e. latter end of next Week, **nay** probably I may carry it thither as I have some Business to transact there for y^e. Society for propagating y^e. Gospel, w^{ch}. probably may happen ab^t. that time
(9 August 1766)

As expected, this has an effect on the language of the letters, as I will demonstrate below (see particularly sections 3.3 and 3.4).

3.2. Spelling and punctuation

Pearson's spelling does not deserve a great deal of comment, as I have only occasionally come across what would now be considered unusual spellings: *parcells*, *Tyths* (though *Tythes* is also found), *do's* 'does' and *proxey*. The latter spelling is not recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. On the whole, Pearson's spelling can therefore not be characterised as 'informal' according to the criteria discussed by Osselton (1984), which would agree with the relative formality of the correspondence. An illustration of this may be found in his use of 'd in past tense and past participle forms of weak verbs. According to Osselton (1984: 133), 'd is found in 40 to 50% of the instances in texts printed between 1740 and 1760. Usage is different in letters, and I discovered that Dr Johnson (1709-1784) no longer used 'd after 1738,

and that Richardson's (1689-1761) usage at the time was 27% only (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1991: 54). Sarah Fielding's (1710-1768) usage was considerably lower than that: 10.4% (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1998: 461).⁷ Lowth's usage confirms that, though Pearson's language may not have been very informal, it was not as formal as it might have been, given their relationship. In Lowth's letters to his wife, all of them written in the year 1755, usage of 'd amounts to 78%,⁸ while his most formal letters (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2003 for a classification of his letters on the basis of relative formality) do not contain a single instance of 'd. The formal letters analysed here date from the 1760s, 70s and 80s, so we must reckon with the possible continuation of the disappearing process of 'd, but that 'd was perceived as an informality marker by Lowth, and thus possibly by other writers as well, is confirmed by the fact that there is one instance in a letter to his wife in which an *e* has been struck out (6 July 1755). Pearson, whose usage of 'd amounted to 20% in his letters to Lowth,⁹ seems to have steered a middle course.

Another interesting spelling feature in eighteenth-century English is the use of extra initial capitals in nouns. According to Osselton (1984: 127), "around the first decades of the eighteenth century printed English prose virtually achieved the situation which exists in present-day German, with all nouns given initial capitals". Pearson's use of extra initial capitals is indeed very high: 79% of all nouns that would not already have had a capital, such as titles, are capitalised.¹⁰ Even adjectives are occasionally capitalised, such as

7 Possibly, this is another example of women being ahead of linguistic change (cf. Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg 2003: 110-132). This topic would be interesting to pursue in greater detail further. See also Sarah Fielding's use of extra initial capitals discussed below.

8 This figure is based on the following data: 104 instances of 'd, 26 of *ed* and three instances of *rec'd/reced*.

9 This figure is based on a total number of instances of 122, of which 80 have *ed* and 24 'd. In addition, six instances have *d* only, as in *informd*, while there was one instance of *cract*, and eleven of *reced*.

10 It should be noted that identifying Pearson's use of capitals is less of a problem than in the case of Lowth's usage: only *a* is occasionally hard to interpret as either a capital or a lower case letter. In Lowth's case, especially *y* presents problems, so that it is often impossible to determine whether *you* is written with a capital or not. In Pearson's case, with only two exceptions, *you*

Expensive. Compared to Lowth, Pearson's usage is very high indeed: in his letters to his wife Lowth capitalised about one-third of the nouns, in his letters to Robert Dodsley, his publisher, with whom he was on friendly terms, about fifty percent and in his most formal letters somewhat less than thirty percent.¹¹ This indicates that to Lowth the use of extra initial capitals does not correlate with relative formality of style, unlike in the case of Sarah Fielding, whose use of capitals increasingly approaches that of printed texts the more formal the style of her letters is (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1998: 460). As in the case of Lowth, Poll (2004) was similarly unable to correlate Robert Dodsley's usage with the relative formality of his letters. Lowth and Dodsley appear to use extra initial capitals to signal emphasis (see Osselton 1985), and an example from Lowth's correspondence is the following: "M^{rs}. Legge bid me tell you, that if you have any business about Silks, Caps, or the like, you may employ her" (6 March 1755). Interestingly, Pearson's usage agrees with one of the "necessary Orthographical Directions for writing correctly, and when to use Capital Letters and when not" presented in *CLW* (1755 [1840]: 42), i.e. number 4: "None but substantives, whether common, proper, or personal, may begin with a capital, except in the beginning or immediately after a full stop". Pearson only occasionally offended against direction number 5: "Qualities [i.e. adjectives], affirmations, or participles, must not begin with a capital, unless such words begin or come immediately after a period; then they never fail to begin with a capital". Occasionally Pearson omits to capitalise the names of the days of the week (*tuesday*, *thursday*); these, however, are not listed by *CLW* (1755 [1840]: 42): "Let proper names of persons, places, ships, rivers, mountains, things personified, &c. begin with a capital; also all appellations, names of profession, etc.". On the whole, Pearson sticks to this direction, with only a few exceptions, like *pembrokeshire*.

and *your* are always written with a capital. This clearly suggests politeness on his part.

11 These figures are based on an analysis of one hundred nouns in Lowth's letters to his wife, to Robert Dodsley, and to the Duke of Newcastle and the Earl of Liverpool. As in the case of Pearson's letters, only the nouns that would not receive a capital by modern standards were counted; thus, place-names, names of the days of the week, titles and the like have been excluded. Cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (1998).

CLW (1755 [1840]: 39) contains the following advice:

If your letter consists of several paragraphs, begin every fresh or new one at the same distance from the left hand margin of the paper, as when you begin the subject of your letter; always remembering, as you write on, to make the proper stops, otherwise no person will be able to come at the *sense* or meaning of your letter; which neglect very often causes *mistakes and misunderstandings*; and be careful to put a period or full stop at the end of every paragraph, thus .

Pearson occasionally ends a paragraph in a horizontal stroke rather than a stop, as in his letters of 5 July and 17 July 1766. One sentence in his letter of 5 July finishes with the word *Durham*, the letter *m* ending in a lengthy stroke to reach the end of the line. It seems that to Pearson a stroke functioned as a kind of elongated full stop. Pearson also, and with a high degree of consistency, used a stop to mark an abbreviation, as in “y^c. Archdeacon’s [M]andate to M^r. Davies y^e. Dep. Reg^r. at [B]recon” (a. 6 July 1766).

CLW (1755 [1840]: 38) also advises the reader, “when writing to your superior”, to “be particularly careful”

in not omitting any letter belonging to the words you write, as *I’ve*, *can’t*, *don’t*, *shou’d*, *wou’d* &c. instead of *I have*, *cannot*, *do not*, *should*, *would*, &c. for contractions not only appear disrespectful, and too familiar, but discover (these almost inseparable companions) ignorance and impudence.

In Pearson’s letters I have only come across a single instance of *You’l* and one of *do’s*. His use of abbreviations, however, is extremely lavish, for there are many more of them than in Lowth’s own letters, even his most informal ones, or in those of Lowth’s other correspondents (Tieken-Boon van Ostade Forthcoming a). Examples are *afstion*, *Aption*, *Exors* ‘executors’, *Insuff^{ly}* ‘insufficiency’, *Memdum* ‘memorandum’, *premes* ‘premises’, *Sprual* ‘spiritual’, *Xtian* ‘Christian’. Some of these are more transparent than others; I have been unable to identify the meaning of *afstion* and *Aption*. Contrary to current advice on the use of abbreviations in letters to one’s superior, Pearson’s usage, idiosyncratic though it is, does not seem to have caused offense (see Tieken-Boon van Ostade Forthcoming a). His exceptional use of abbreviations can, I think, be explained by the fact that he was a professional writer: writing fifteen letters in less than ten

weeks time to Lowth alone suggests that the use of abbreviations served an important function for him: it speeded up his writing. For all that, one wonders why he bothered to abbreviate words like *wth*. and *Secret^{ry}*: abbreviating these words into the forms found would hardly have saved time.

3.3. Grammar

Pearson occasionally ends sentences in a preposition, he uses forms of *be* with mutative intransitive verbs as well as past tense forms of strong verbs as past participles. Examples are:

- (3) The M^r. Jo[... whose] Letter overtook You on y^e. Road I guess to be [y^e.] Person y^t. is to transact y^e. Business S^r. Herber[t ...] solicited to be employ'd in, on the Recommen[dation] of M^r Beadon (a. 6 July 1766)
- (4) I am just return'd from Fulham (16 August 1766)
- (5) [& h]e says further y^t. he had spoke in y^e Spring to y^e. [...] Bp.
(1 September 1766)

These features came to be stigmatised in the course of the eighteenth century. Though Lowth used them too, he only did so in his most informal language (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2002a, 2002b, Forthcoming b), which suggests that the constructions were considered acceptable in the more informal registers of writing. That Pearson used them as well confirms the informal nature of the style of his letters.

Following Fitzmaurice (2002b), I decided to analyse Pearson's use of modal auxiliaries. Tentative preterites, as they are termed by Huddleston / Pullum (2002), such as *could* and *would* but also *should* and perhaps *might*, serve an important function in politeness strategies (see e.g. Huddleston / Pullum 2002: 200, 940), and it seems likely that they would have done so in eighteenth-century English as well. Some examples from Lowth's correspondence are the following:

- (6) I **should** be glad to see your first Sheet by way of specimen
(Lowth to Robert Dodsley, September 1757; BL Add. MSS 35,339, f. 18)

- (7) To what I have already offer'd upon this head, I **might** add that the Argument & Substance of the 32^d. & 33^d. Lecture, w^{ch}. seem chiefly to give you disgust, was drawn up to y^e. same effect as they now appear some years before your Julian was publish'd (Lowth to Warburton, 14 October 1756; Bodl. Lib. MS Eng. Lett. C 572, f. 151)

A careful analysis of all instances of *could*, *should* and *would* in Pearson's letters, however, produced no more than three instances in which these auxiliaries signalled politeness, only one of which exhibits politeness on the part of the author himself towards Lowth, i.e. (10):

- (8) however his other Uncle w^d. resign wth. Your Leave his Cursal Prebend in his behalf (*ante* 6 July 1766)
- (9) [Som]e time ago I wrote to a person at Carmarthen to [inquire] if he w^d. be concern'd in taking an Estimate of [D]ilapidacons (303 July 1766)
- (10) [If] You sh^d. think fit to continue him as Collector of [the] rents in Carmarthenshire (30 July 1766)

Example (8) is an instance of a reported request directed at Lowth by a third party which might have been phrased like "I should like to obtain your Leave to resign my Cursal Prebend". In (9), which may originally have read something like "I should like to inquire if you would be concern'd in taking an Estimate of Dilapidacons", Pearson reports a request he made to "a person at Carmarthen". These examples confirm the point made above, that Pearson's language to Lowth was not as overtly polite as might have been expected in the light of their hierarchical relationship. At the same time, this discussion suggests that the use of modals in eighteenth-century letters is more complex than would appear from the analysis presented in Fitzmaurice (2002b): providing merely the overall figures for the occurrence of the three modals in question, i.e. *could* (4), *would* (7) and *should* (14),¹² would have shed no light on Pearson's use of modal auxiliaries in relation to the politeness strategies he might or might not have adopted in his letters.

12 The letters contain no instances of *might*.

There is one interesting difference in Pearson's language compared to that of Lowth, i.e. his use of *thereof*. The occurrence of *thereof* is discussed by Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg (2003: 62-63) in relation to the rise of *its*: alongside *of it*, *thereof* is one of the variants that is ousted by the rise of the new form. In Lowth's correspondence, however, the in-letters included with the out-letters, *thereof* is used by none except Pearson (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2005). It occurs as often as ten times in the letters, as in

- (11) at his usual Place of Residence or at y^e. Place where he shall actually be at y^e. time of Delivery **thereof*** (5 July 1766),

and even as often as three times in a single very brief letter:

- (12) Time will only permit me to say [t]hat M^r Hesse has perused & makes no Objection [to] y^e. inclosed Artes & if You approve **thereof** they [s]hall be prepared & sign'd by him. These will be [b]inding without a Lease. Lest Kathedin sh^d. remain [so]me time vacant & this being y^e. time Tythes ~~are~~ sh^d. be taken [the]re of I have taken y^e. Liberty to prepare & send a [...].nestracon **thereof** yⁱ. if Your Lordship approves [**the**]reof it may be sign'd. I am, My Lord./ Your Lordship's/ Most Obedient and very much/ Obliged Humble Servant/ Edw^d Pearson/ Duke Street/ July 12. 66.

The new form *its*, which had risen very fast according to Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg (2003) since its first occurrence early in the seventeenth century, is, however, found only three times in Pearson's letters, alongside three instances of *of it*. In one sentence, the two are found side by side:

- (13) I shall write to him by this Post to know y^e. Name **of it**, & **its** annual Value,
(19 August 1766)

When viewed against the development described by Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg (2003: 63) on the basis of their analysis of the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC), as well as in comparison with Lowth's own letters, Pearson's usage of *its* seems decidedly archaic (see Figure 1).

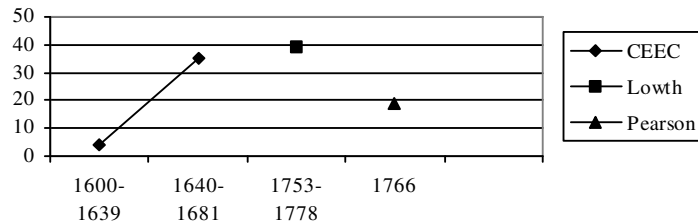


Figure 1. Rise of ITS (%) at the expense of OF IT and THEREOF (based on Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg 2003: 63 and Tiekens-Boon van Ostade 2005).

Pearson's frequent use of *thereof* is consequently archaic as well.¹³ In addition, Pearson uses *therein* (3) *thereto* (2), as in:

- (14) & sh^d. think what Leases have been received since y^e. Alteration of the Style the Rents **therein** are made payable according to new Style (9 August 1766)
- (15) because [the person] who rents the College House & Lands **thereto** belonging [is] by his Lease obliged to leave it in good Repair (5 July 1766).

Neither *therein* nor *thereto* occur in Lowth's letters. Even at that time usage of these forms would appear to be primarily restricted to the legal register, and an illustration may be provided by Lowth's own will:

- (16) I hereby give and bequeath unto the Executors and Administrators of the said Henry Bilson Legge and Thomas Cheyney the Sum of three thousands pounds in trust for the uses and purposes of the said Marriage Articles or Indenture of the twenty third of December one thousand seven hundred and ffifty two according to the Conditions and Limitations fully expressed **therein** concerning the Sum of three thousand pounds above
(National Archives, PROB 11.1160).

The context of Pearson's usage of these postnominal paraphrases, as Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg (2003) term them, suggests that, as fossilised forms, Pearson might have considered them suitable to the

13 Interestingly, the *OED* does not provide any quotations of *thereof* for the eighteenth century.

kind of business register he adopted in reporting on diocesan affairs to Lowth.

3.4. Colloquial language

Pearson's letters contain a number of features that suggest colloquial language. One example is his use of the word *Gents* in the following quotation:

- (16) These **Gents** have not heard of the late Regulation of Postage of Letters
(5 July 1766)

The word is evidently used derogatively here, though not in the sense found in the *OED*, i.e. “now only *vulgar*, exc. as applied derisively to men of the vulgar and pretentious class who are supposed to use the word” (s.v. *gent* n.). Instead, it expresses Pearson's irritation at the fact that the people who wrote to Lowth were not aware of current changes in the postal system. Another example of colloquial language is his use of *is* combined with a past participle, as in

- (17) M^f. In^o. Morgan [w]as Bp Ellis's Chaplain & on Enquiry find he is now at Braintry in Essex – **He is wrote** to desire on what Grounds he gave Bp Ellis y^e. Information of Lloydarth's For[est ...] (30 July 1766)

It seems to me that there are two possible interpretations of *He is wrote* in this passage, i.e. as ‘he has written’, with *is* being the result of incorrect expansion of the contraction *he's*, or as ‘he has been written’. The passive interpretation is perhaps the more likely of the two, and it looks as if we have to do with an example of what might be called indirect reported writing here, from a letter written by Pearson on Lowth's behalf, which might have contained a phrase like “The Bishop of St David's desires to know on what grounds [...]”. As a passive this construction is, as far as I know, not very common in eighteenth-century letters; it is the only case I have come across in Pearson's letters or Lowth's correspondence.

I have also found an example in Pearson's letters of a relative clause introduced by \emptyset , i.e.

- (18) [The]re was another Ø applied, M^r. Tho^s. Lewis at Yniswen [not] far from Carmarthen, for Rees Price's Collection (30 July 1766)

Zero relatives, according to Rissanen (1999: 298), who is quoting Rydén (1966), are typically found with existential clauses in sixteenth-century English, and this continued to be the case in the Late Modern English period (Denison 1998: 281). Eventually, the use of Ø relatives as in (19) came to be considered ungrammatical, and Görlach notes that they “drastically decreased in the 18th century” (2001: 127). According to Phillipps (1970) they indicate non-standard usage in Jane Austen's novels (Denison 1998: 281).

The following passage is of interest for two reasons:

- (19) in two Covers I have sent by this post S^r. W^m. Owen's two Leases, they are prepared in the Welsh Style, especially y^c. Lease for Lives, w^{ch}. runs to y^c. Exors &c. instead of y^c. English Way Heirs & Ass^s. **in w^{ch}. is a blank left** for y^c. Attorneys (only one in y^c. last but I have left a blank for two in the new Lease) (16 August 1766)

The highlighted clause is an example of a sentence with the subject following the finite, in which one would expect the use of the dummy subject *there*, also known as existential *there* (e.g. Breivik 1977),¹⁴ though I have not found any similar examples in the letters (nor are there any instances in Lowth's letters). Dummy *there* does occur in Pearson's letters, but in different constructions. According to Breivik (1977: 343), existential *there* could occasionally be omitted in Old English in sentences in which in present-day English it would be obligatory. Further analysis on a much wider scale is needed to find out if this might still have been the case in eighteenth-century colloquial language.

There is also another sentence, this time with *there*, which deserves to be discussed here, i.e.

- (20) He also says y^t. this [Lease is] for 21 y^{rs}. but I sh^d. think **there is added**, if D^r Squi[...sh^d.] long continue Bp there, for I apprehend this was [...] let at Rack Rent (5 July 1766)

14 I am grateful to Wim van der Wurff for bringing this article to my attention.

The phrase *there is added* seems to have the function of a passive, and may be paraphrased as ‘something has been added’. In other words, *there* in example (21) is not empty, as it would have been if it had been purely existential. In Lowth’s letters I found a similar instance, also in a passive sentence, i.e.

- (21) There is a new Scheme started
(Lowth to his wife, 1755; Bodl. Lib., MS Eng Lett C 572 f.19)

In this instance, however, *there* does seem empty of meaning. Though Breivik (1977: 345) notes that existential *there* frequently occurs in passive sentences in present-day English, this was not yet the case, according to Baekken (2003: 147), in the seventeenth century. My examples show that passive *there* does occur a century later (see also Denison 1998: 215), though the example from Pearson in (21) perhaps suggests that the construction was in the process of change during the eighteenth century. All this seems to deserve further analysis.

The second reason the passage in (20) is of interest is Pearson’s use of parataxis in the first line. Parataxis, in the form of linking clauses without the use of either a coordinator or a subordinator, is a common characteristic of the spoken language (cf. Coates 1986: 26). There are many paratactically linked sentences in Pearson’s letters, e.g.:

- (22) perhaps [M^r. H]am[m]ond may have them, **he is now out of Town.**
(17 July 1766)
- (23) Your Lord[ship has?] a Rental with an Acc^t. when y^e. Rents become due, **if [you] think proper M^r. Robson will take a Copy thereof** (30 July 1766)
- (24) I’ll take care to give the Business what Dispatch I can, **there will be time to finish it** as there is no doubt but Your Lordship may do any Act as Bp of S^t. Davids till you are confirm’d Bp of Oxford (9 August 1766).

Lowth does not make use of parataxis, not even in his most informal letters, i.e. those to his wife. This suggests that Pearson makes use of more informal features in his letters to Lowth than might be expected of him. At times, he even omits a subject, which is common in the style of diaries or private journals, but not so much in letters, let alone

business letters. Two examples occur in the second letter of the collection:

- (25) W^{ms}, whose Xtian name I think [is] John, **but shall be Certain** before it's returnd, (a. 6 July 1766)
- (26) I have not as yet reced any of [y^c.] Papers relating to the Bpk, **not met with M[r. ...]** tho' I have calld at his House (a. 6 July 1766)

The colloquial features discussed in this section appear to signal involvedness on the part of Pearson in his relationship with Lowth. On the one hand, such behaviour might be interpreted as evidence of a kind of personal commitment which Pearson felt towards Lowth. On the other hand, given the fact that Lowth and Pearson had a working relationship which only appears to have lasted for about two months, the type of language adopted by Pearson in his letters to Lowth might simply have been characteristic of his working relationship with his superiors generally. At the same time, we also find features in his language that signal a more formal style, such as his use of the subjunctive, some examples of which are the following:

- (27) [so] far as if only a Stone in the pavem^t. **be** cract a ne[w one] is to be put in its place (5 July 1766)
- (28) & he will wait till y^c. Comm[ission [...]] **be** return'd.— (15 July 1766)
- (29) If M^r. Morgan's Acc^t. **be** true y^c. Fore[st has been] improved since 1650
(22 July 1766)

According to Görlach (2001: 122), the subjunctive was “largely confined to formal registers” in the eighteenth century. This agrees with my findings from Lowth's correspondence, in which only fossilized phrases such as “God bless and preserve you” occur in his most informal letters. Another possibility might be that Pearson was an elderly man, older in any case than Lowth. There are features in his language that seem to suggest this, such as his use of old-fashioned scribal features and of forms like *thereof*, *therein* and *thereto*. As an older man who was experienced in ecclesiastic affairs he may have felt in a slightly superior position towards a relative newcomer like Lowth.

4. Conclusion

My analysis of Pearson's correspondence with Lowth has shown that his language reflects a curious mixture of formal and informal elements. His use of epistolary formulas is formal, though, it seems, only perfunctorily so. Pearson does not make any effort of being more polite in addressing Lowth than necessary. In fact, their relationship must have been quite informal, as appears from the kind of information – small-talk bordering on gossip alongside details relating to diocesan matters – he provides in his letters. His spelling almost entirely conforms to that found in the printed books of the period, thus differing significantly from that found in private correspondences, even of men like Lowth and Dr Johnson (Osselton 1984; Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1998). Pearson's use of abbreviations, however, is higher than I have seen anywhere, higher even than that of Lowth's draft letters. This feature in his language seems most closely related to the nature of his profession: writing letters must have been a task that occupied a lot of his time, and to speed up the process by resorting to the use of abbreviations would have served him a considerable advantage. But it is interesting that his use of abbreviations does not appear to have affected his relationship with his addressee, despite warnings from the handbooks of the time to this effect: the many abbreviations were not intended to show disrespect or too much familiarity, nor do they seem to have been taken as such, for they continue to occur in large numbers throughout the letters. Pearson, moreover, used grammatical constructions that normally occurred either in formal or in highly informal contexts in letters of the period: his use of the subjunctive alongside highly colloquial language illustrates this most clearly.

The most striking feature I encountered in Pearson's language was his use of *thereof*, which continues in his letters despite the fact that according to Nevalainen / Raumolin-Brunberg (2003) it had rapidly been replaced by *its* since the beginning of the previous century. The new form *its* is, consequently, rare in Pearson's language. That the use of *thereof*, which does not occur in Lowth's letters nor in those of his correspondents (Tieken-Boon van Ostade

2005), already seems to have been restricted to legal language at the time, suggests perhaps that Pearson had received a certain amount of legal training. His discussion of problems concerning leases and fines confirms this. In addition, he must have been trained as a professional scribe, as his clear handwriting and his use of certain scribal features demonstrate. As part of his training he must also have learnt to use a handbook such as *CLW*. There are many aspects in his letters that indicate this, viz. his correct use of epistolary formulas, his use of capitals, and his avoidance of contracted verb forms. For all that, he felt free enough with Lowth to add postscripts to his letters, though they were never headed as such. It seems to me that Pearson's style in writing to Lowth can be characterised as befitting a relationship which was familiar without being too personal, a relationship, in other words, that would today be typical of that between any personal secretary and their employer. Whether or not Pearson was unusual in this is, as I hope to have shown here, a question that deserves to be investigated further.

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