CHAPTER 4

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY: PRAGMAPHILOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is meant to present the theoretical and methodological prerequisites for our investigation. As was pointed out in chapter 1, the research for this study involves the use of a unique historical corpus. The major aim of this study is to shed more light on the role and degree of orality, and how this can be elicited from the corpus. I announced to take a pragmatic approach. At this point, some theoretical notions need to be introduced and explained. It should be said at the outset that, due to the unicity of the corpus, the theoretical lines cannot always be applied in their full scope. This is the second reason for the existence of this chapter, viz. to provide a preliminary assessment of the applicability of the theories, and what methods are needed to adapt them to this specific corpus. We shall have to deal with the question how these theoretical notions can be applied and made relevant with respect to the research questions and case studies.

The particulars of this approach will be explained step by step in the course of this chapter. They will be narrowed down consecutively in the following way: A philological approach is employed, more specifically the branch of linguistic philology (§4.2), looked at from a pragmatic perspective (§4.3), which leads us to identify our approach as pragmaphilology (§4.4). Our main focus point within pragmaphilology is orality, which is defined theoretically in §4.5. To maximally generalize the study, a corpus linguistics method is used as much as is feasible for this corpus (§4.6). In order to make the methodological principles somewhat more tangible, their application will be illustrated briefly in §4.7, anticipating one of the case studies.

4.2 Philology

Because we are confronted with historical texts, a philological approach is indispensable; it is the only way of gaining access to old texts. Philology is somewhat elusive to an unequivocal definition, but it can be broadly defined as an instrument for the disclosure of historical texts (cf. Fischer 2004: 132). It

studies the notation, transmission and reception of texts in a variety of dimensions (cf. Gerritsen 2003: 27; cf. Schaeken 2004: 4). There are several subdivisions of philological labour, such as palaeography, linguistic analysis, study of the historical context. The main objective is to obtain a felicitous interpretation of a specific text. A primary characteristic of philology is the central role of the sources (texts) themselves.

Some aspects of philology, such as palaeography, play only a minor role in the present study: this type of research has been conducted quite exhaustively for the birchbark letters. A very suitable edition (DND) is available; therefore, the texts do not need to be deciphered in the most basic sense.

The specific branch of philology that we are concerned with in this study is that of linguistic philology. The linguistic data can only be interpreted in the light of the historical context, and, conversely, the linguistic data can only be extracted properly by a meticulous study of the surface linguistic forms that appear in the texts. In that sense, linguistic analysis is one element of philology, where the latter is an overarching term. Linguistic analysis provides a crucial building block for the disclosure of the birchbark texts. For present purposes, I take a linguistic analysis to denote simply the investigation of linguistic features in a text.

We do not want to just study linguistic features for the sake of reconstructing the grammatical peculiarities of Old Novgorodian. In order to answer the research question, we must be concerned with language *use*. So what we need is linguistics more specifically realized as pragmatics (which is taken as a subfield of linguistics). Thus, we look at linguistic features from a pragmatic perspective. Our linguistic analysis aims at eliciting and analysing pragmatically relevant linguistic elements.

4.3 Pragmatics

Pragmatics, as a subdiscipline of linguistics, is a broad field of study which has gained a widespread application. Taken in its broadest definition, it touches on the interaction between speakers and hearers. On the one hand, there is grammar, and on the other hand, each utterance, which consists of grammatical structures, has a certain function within a certain context. The relationship between the two is studied in pragmatics, which "can be usefully defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations" (Leech 1983: x). Most of the notions that will be appealed to in the case studies will concern traditional (Anglo-American) pragmatic topics, such as deixis, reference, and speech acts. These are sufficiently well-known to go without introduction. Nevertheless, some general issues about pragmatics need to be made explicit before we set out.

Most importantly, we have to do with historical texts. This means that we need to turn to the field of historical pragmatics. Much work has been conducted in this field over the past few years; it is by no means my intention to

go over all these issues in detail. A more general observation I want to make is that the field of historical pragmatics seems to be far less theoretically oriented than earlier studies in synchronic pragmatics. It turns out that studies in historical pragmatics rarely appeal to 'hard-core' theoretical-pragmatic notions, such as presuppositions, entailment, implicatures, etc. Most studies rather concentrate on a slightly *ad hoc* analysis of the more 'surface' elements in a text corpus. This is something to be borne in mind when classifying historical pragmatics as part of the broader field of pragmatics proper.

Historical pragmatics can be subdivided into two branches, viz. pragmaphilology and diachronic pragmatics (Jacobs & Jucker 1995). Since the diachronic component in our investigations is only minor, the latter branch is not too relevant for our purposes, although some case studies allow for a first impression of a diachronic development throughout the more than four hundred years of birchbark literacy. Pragmaphilology will be discussed in the next subsection.

4.4 Pragmaphilology

As we have seen, we use philology, within philology we narrow down to linguistic philology, within linguistics we focus on pragmatics; now, the combination of these terms leads us to pragmaphilology.

As was mentioned in chapter 2, Gippius's (2004) article can be considered a starting point for a pragmatic approach to the birchbark letters; it served as the basis for a series of subsequent articles by Gippius and Schaeken, and it is also foundational for the present study. In the article itself, Gippius does not really use any theoretical terms to describe his approach. Schaeken (2011a) and Collins (2011) are the first to introduce the term 'pragmaphilology' into the field of berestology; they look back onto the work of Gippius (2004) as a "showcase of pragmaphilology" (Schaeken 2011a: 2), and continue their own investigations in the same vein.

Now, what exactly does this pragmaphilological approach entail? The term 'pragmaphilology' was first introduced by Jacobs & Jucker (1995) as a subbranch of historical pragmatics. The basic definition they provide runs as follows: "Pragmaphilology […] describes the contextual aspects of historical texts, including the addressers and addressees, their social and personal relationship, the physical and social setting of text production and text reception, and the goal(s) of the text" (Jacobs & Jucker 1995: 11). This is the initial definition of pragmaphilology, and it seems a fairly wide-ranging one. The quote is often reproduced, and this is how pragmaphilology is usually introduced. This also seems to be the way Schaeken (2011a) conceived of it when he introduced the term into the field of berestology. The term 'pragmaphilology' can be applied to Gippius (2004), as well as the subsequent research, modelled after Gippius (2004), some of which was discussed in chapter 2. Most, if not all, of

these pragmaphilological studies about birchbark letters concern communicative heterogeneity in some form or other.[1]

Like most approaches, the pragmaphilological approach has inevitably attracted some criticism, too. "It is true that studies that might be labelled pragmaphilology also consider local contexts, but they do so in a more ad hoc way and rarely provide conceptual or theoretical underpinnings (typically drawn from sociology) for local contexts" (Archer & Culpeper 2009: 287-288).

Similar concerns about the reliability of interpretation procedures in historical pragmatics are voiced by Taavitsainen & Fitzmaurice (2007). These can, no doubt, be extended to Gippius (2004) and subsequent research.[2] The present author recognizes that the *ad hoc* kind of pragmaphilology where individual texts are considered on a 'problem-and-solution' basis can indeed result in somewhat subjective interpretations. This situation can be remedied by systematically investigating the birchbark corpus as a whole, focusing on specific linguistic parameters.

So pragmaphilology has attracted some criticism. Furthermore, the term has not been too widely adopted (cf. Kopaczyk 2012). Nevertheless, the earlier successful application of this approach to the birchbark letters (as demonstrated in chapter 2) warrants its further implementation, although in a somewhat broadened form. Pragmaphilology may indeed be somewhat impressionistic, and is usually concerned with individual documents. Though it has proved its worth, it may have to be supplemented by methods of corpus linguistics. We shall see in §4.6 to what extent corpus linguistic methods are applicable to the birchbark corpus.

4.5 Orality

But first we need to concentrate on orality, which forms the heart of the present study. It can be described as a special focus point of pragmaphilology. As we saw in chapter 2, Gippius (2004) refers to an oral component in birchbark communication. But what is orality? The present author is certainly not the first one to ask this question. What has been said about orality (in the Middle Ages or more in general), and what can we do with it? We need a solid definition of orality, and a perspective from which we can view the case studies.

[1] Gippius (2004), Schaeken (2011a, 2011b, 2014), Gippius & Schaeken (2011), Collins (2011).

[2] None of the authors mentioned in chapter 2 (Gippius and Schaeken) use much linguistic theory, or any statistics at all. This may be perceived as confirmation of a point of view which occasionally pops up (cf. e.g. Taavitsainen & Fitzmaurice 2007), viz. that pragmaphilology is impressionistic and provides *ad hoc* solutions that can hardly be generalized. I do acknowledge that this is a pitfall, but it should be remembered what the aims and intentions of Gippius (2004) were. The article was a first exploration of the pragmatics of certain striking birchbark letters, and probably not meant to be generalized at that stage.

Of course, the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about orality is the dichotomy between the spoken and the written medium. This is a very basic and easy to understand distinction: you either speak or write. Now, when studying written materials from the past, like we do, it may not be immediately obvious in what way the spoken medium can be involved there. The only thing we have is a corpus of written texts, which means that we do not have access to spoken Old Russian. So if we want to detect any oral element in birchbark communication, it will necessarily be 'hidden' in the written medium. But how can an oral component end up in a written text?

4.5.1 The oral residue

Before the advent of Christianity in Rus' in the late 10th century, Novgorod was an oral society. Writing did not play a role in society; all transactions were performed orally. As a result of the Christianization, the technology of writing came to be used in Novgorod, first in the church, and afterwards also in broader layers of society. In this way, the new technology spread throughout more and more domains of society: it was used in more and more situations of everyday life (Gippius 2012). Consequently, more and more transactions that used to be conducted orally were now complemented by writing. This means that the sphere of use of writing broadened, at the expense of oral communication.

Such a transition from oral to written communication often has consequences for the way in which written messages are phrased. These messages may contain traces of the old, oral way of communication. This is what Ong (1982/2002) calls an "oral residue" in writing. Ong does not specify in what ways his oral residue can have repercussions on the linguistic content and structure of a text. In fact, he does not investigate any texts at all. He is rather interested in reasoning about issues in literary and psychological theory. Nonetheless, the notion of oral residue presupposes an approach to features of orality that are embedded in the written medium. We shall now see in what way they are embedded, and how the oral features relate to the written medium.

4.5.2 Medium and conception

Building on an initial proposal by Söll (1980), Koch & Oesterreicher (1985) distinguish between the *medium* and *conception*. The spoken and written medium entails a dichotomy: an utterance is realised either in the phonic or in the graphic code. Obviously, the birchbark letters have only come down to us in the written medium. In the medial sense, therefore, it is beyond contention that they belong to the written language. However, the communicative conception is different from the medium. The conception is a continuum with an oral and literate pole. Any text can be positioned anywhere between the poles on this continuum.

Now, what the oral and literate poles represent can be described as follows. The position of an utterance or text on the pole is expressed by communicative conditions (*Kommunikationsbedingungen*) and verbalization strategies (*Versprachlichungsstrategien*). Some of these will be listed in Tables 5 and 6 below. The sum of the characteristics of the oral and literate conception are termed 'language of immediacy' (*Sprache der Nähe*) and 'language of distance' (*Sprache der Distanz*), respectively. It follows that each spoken or written text can have features of immediacy (*Nähe*) or distance (*Distanz*). The most prototypical combinations are spoken + immediacy and written + distance.

Immediacy	*Distance*
dialogue	monologue
familiarity of participants	unfamiliarity of participants
face-to-face interaction	spatiotemporal division
situational involvement	situational detachment

Table 5: Communicative conditions[3]

Immediacy	*Distance*
process	materialization
temporariness	finality
lesser:	*greater:*
informational density	informational density
compactness	compactness
integration	integration
complexity	complexity
elaboration	elaboration
planning	planning

Table 6: Verbalization strategies

The communicative conditions describe the circumstances in which the communicative act takes place. The verbalization strategies describe characteristics of the spoken utterance or written text itself. Not all of these communicative conditions and verbalization strategies are relevant to the birchbark letters that will be encountered in the case studies. Just to illustrate some of the communicative conditions, let us return to one of the birchbark letters that we reviewed already. As an example of how Koch & Oesterreicher's (1985) terms will be applied to some of the data from the case studies, we can take birchbark letter St.R.15:

[3] Koch & Oesterreicher (1985: 23) enumerate some more communicative conditions, but I mention only those that will actually be relevant to the case studies. I have tried to provide appropriate English translations for the Germans terms that are used in their article.

(18) Ot Petra kъ Vasilevi. Vъdai 6 kounъ i grivьnou Vyšjatě. Ali ti ne dastь a pristavi na nь otrokъ.
'From Petr to Vasil'. Give 6 *kunas* and a *grivna* to Vyšata. If he doesn't give [them], then send a court official after him.'
(St.R.15 / 1140-1160 / DND: 328)

Let us go along the line of communicative conditions from Table 5 that can be applied to this letter, bearing in mind the interpretation proposed by Gippius (2004):

- *Dialogue*: Petr addresses two persons consecutively. This is more typical for dialogue than for monologue.
- *Familiarity of participants*: Only those who are involved in the transaction can easily infer the meaning of the text.
- *Face-to-face interaction*: As Gippius (2004) indicates, the communicative act is envisaged as though all three participants were standing together.
- *Situational involvement*: The text can only be understood in the specific situation for which it is intended, i.e. if it is presented and read out aloud by the right person.

These are some communicative conditions that belong to the language of immediacy, which Koch & Oesterreicher consider to be the true parameter of orality (i.e. the conception determines whether a text is more oral or literate, not the question whether it is phrased in the spoken or written medium). Thus, the theory of Koch & Oesterreicher (1985) can be used to provide terminology to describe features of orality in birchbark letters in a more structured manner.

The case studies will show that some of the verbalization strategies in Table 6 are somewhat out of place as far as the birchbark letters are concerned. For instance, compactness is certainly a characteristic of this particular birchbark letter (St.R.15, as well as of the birchbark corpus in general), which Koch & Oesterreicher (1985: 23) consider a feature of the language of distance. But the reason why this letter (St.R.15) is so compact is exactly because of the oral component. The messenger could elaborate on the letter, and the context would make clear what may seem obscure to us. So in this case, compactness (which is a feature of distance) is possible due to the oral component (proximity).

One of the problems is that Koch & Oesterreicher (1985) do not sufficiently specify the verbalization strategies. They just take for granted that the readers will go by the common sense meaning of the terms. It has to be acknowledged, therefore, that this approach is not a fully-fledged theory; it is rather an initial impetus, a description of an approach to be developed. As such, it is innovative and the observations made are most valid and helpful.

However, it remains unclear from the theory in what way these indicators materialize linguistically. In other words, Koch & Oesterreicher's (1985) approach identifies characteristics of immediacy and distance in communication, but these characteristics have not yet been linked to the linguistic surface of texts. The verbalization strategies are too general; they need to be connected to specific linguistic features. Our case studies will be a first attempt at this, i.e. as far as the birchbark letters are concerned.

Ágel & Hennig (2006: 13) also criticize several of Koch & Oesterreicher's verbalization strategies and decry the vague differentiation between communicative conditions and verbalization strategies (Ibid.: 14). In addition, they state that it is hardly possible to position specific texts on the immediacy-distance continuum in a reliable way, due to the absence of tangible criteria (Ibid.). A generalized model can serve as a starting point, but is not sufficient. I would contend that we need to take into account language-specific linguistic features and the way in which they operate in specific texts. Ágel & Hennig's own method for establishing the degree of immediacy/distance cannot serve us here, either; it is more suitable for longer, narrative texts. A token-frequency analysis plays a considerable role in their method, which is not feasible in the case of our limited corpus (see §4.6).

Two important terms remain to be introduced in relation to Koch & Oesterreicher's work, viz. *Verschriftung* and *Verschriftlichung*. These terms are defined and discussed by Oesterreicher (1993), as being related to the distinction between medium and conception. It is hard to find suitable English equivalents; both terms might be described as 'a movement towards writing or literacy', so the German terms will be retained here. *Verschriftung* is used to describe a mere switch from the spoken to the written medium, i.e. without any conceptional consequences (a clear case of *Verschriftung* can be seen in St.R.15, where the oral characteristics of a face-to-face encounter are retained in writing). *Verschriftlichung* has a much wider scope; it involves not only a switch to the written medium, but the switch to the written medium also has consequences for the position of texts on the immediacy-distance continuum (i.e. a language of distance develops).

Looking back on Koch & Oesterreicher's theory, we can certainly use their notion of 'language of immediacy' as the primary indicator of orality, as distinct from the spoken or written medium. But more remains to be said; we can look at orality from yet another angle, which will put Koch & Oesterreicher's classification in a slightly broader perspective.

4.5.3 Types of orality

There are several ways in which a text can be related to the notion of orality. According to Culpeper & Kytö (2010: 17), there are three ways in which a text can be connected to speech. A text can be *speech-like*, *speech-based* or *speech-purposed*. Speech-like can be explained in terms of Koch & Oesterreicher's

(1985) notion of immediacy, as discussed above: a text contains features of 'conceptional' (as opposed to 'medial') orality. Speech-based means that the text is based on an oral speech event (such as trial proceedings). Speech-purposed means that a text is "designed to be articulated orally" (Culpeper & Kytö 2010: 17), in other words, that it is meant to be read out aloud (like plays).

Culpeper & Kytö (2010) envisage the terms as representing three categories of genres. As we shall see when discussing the results from the case studies (chapter 9), all three elements can be present simultaneously in birchbark letters, and they are often interdependent. More specifically, speech-like properties can often be explained by the speech-based and speech-purposed nature of a text. In other words, speech-like features of immediacy are often the result of dictation (speech-based) and the fact that a letter is meant to be read out aloud in front of the addressee (speech-purposed). This line of reasoning will be followed further in the discussion of the results (chapter 9). Of course it should be realised that this usage stretches the categories farther than Culpeper & Kytö (2010) have intended them. So I employ Culpeper & Kytö's terms, although I use them in a slightly different way.

Culpeper & Kytö (2010: 17) do acknowledge that their categories can overlap, but, curiously, they exclude this possibility for personal letters: "Personal correspondence is an example of a genre that does not overlap with the other categories: it is neither based on nor designed to be like speech." This shows that the character of a genre such as personal correspondence is heavily dependent on the communicative practices of writing of the culture in which it is embedded. After all, personal correspondence on birchbark is often closely linked to dictation and reading out aloud, and, therefore, speech-based and speech-purposed, even if the latter may be wholly unconscious (in other words, even if the author of a letter did not make conscious efforts to adapt the contents of the letter to its spoken performance in front of the addressee, the letter can nevertheless contain elements that are speech-purposed).

4.5.4 Trust in writing

An important notion that is connected to orality is 'trust in writing', or rather, in more theoretical terms, the extent to which a written text can have a context-independent function, without the necessity for a messenger to lend credibility to a written message. As was mentioned already in chapter 2, there are two diametrically opposite points of view regarding trust in writing in the Middle Ages. Gippius (2004) bases his interpretations on the theory put forward by Bulanin (1997), who views the authority of the birchbark letters as a remnant of the origin of the written word in religious writing (as far as medieval Russia is concerned, of course). For him, the symbolic nature of the birchbark letters is primary, whereas the contents merely play a secondary role. The symbolic authority of the written word lends credibility to the spoken message

by which the messenger enlarges on the letter. Thus, because of its religious connotations, writing acquired a kind of 'magical' status which was subsequently exploited for affairs in everyday life.

Some researchers of Western European medieval literacy (most notably Clanchy 1979/2012, but also Köhn 1998 and others) start from the opposite end; they view the written word as a secondary by-product of the spoken message, which remains primary. There has to be a person who testifies orally to the truth of the written message, or else the document is not trustworthy and cannot fulfil any function by itself, i.e. independently from an oral component.

Can these contradictory viewpoints, as expressed by Bulanin (1997) one the one hand, and Clanchy (1979/2012) be reconciled, and what can the birchbark letters tell us about these apparently diverging views? Bulanin's theory is quite extreme and far-fetched, but Gippius (2004) also speaks about a letter as a mandate. In fact, all authors who raise the matter in connection with the birchbark documents seem to take the same stance: they assume a certain amount of trust in writing which lends authority to the documents.

What should be concluded on the basis of all this? Was writing culture in medieval Novgorod so very different from that in Western Europe? Alternatively, Clanchy, Köhn and others may have been totally wrong. But obviously, although they write about roughly the same period as the birchbark era, their field of study concerns Western Europe, not Russia. In addition, the text types with which they are concerned are generally more of a chancery-type literacy, whereas our birchbark letters are generally more casual and ephemeral. But that is strange: we would rather expect the opposite conclusions to be drawn, i.e. more trust in the official, 'chancery-type' parchment documents, and less trust in the short-lived and casual birchbark letters.

In any case, it has become clear that if we investigate matters of orality in the birchbark corpus, we cannot leave out the problematic notion of trust in writing. We must view the case studies also against the background of this issue. A further evaluation will follow in our final discussion of the case studies (chapter 9).

4.6 Use of the corpus

So within a pragmaphilological approach we focus on matters of orality. How is this done practically in the case of the birchbark corpus? The general direction that can be noticed in the field of historical pragmatics over the past ten years is a movement towards a greater emphasis on statistics, larger-scale corpora, and a concern to verify and objectify findings. As I said before, there has been some severe criticism of the pragmaphilological method in this respect. Taavitsainen & Fitzmaurice (2007) propose a robust, data-driven (corpus-based) quantitative approach to historical pragmatics, with the intention to warrant a methodologically sound interpretation of individual documents. It

sounds like a good idea to try and generalize the findings using a statistically robust method. However, such a heavy quantitative emphasis is hardly feasible when studying the birchbark letters, due to the restricted size of the corpus (cf. §1.2). The usual theories and methods of corpus linguistic cannot be of much avail to us. The closest we can come to corpus linguistics is by investigating linguistic features throughout the corpus, without too many statistic pretentions. This is the road that has been taken in the present investigation.

The specific nature of the corpus has to be taken into account. What is so specific about it is, first of all, the brevity of the texts, and, connected to that, the vastly important role of context. This excludes a purely quantitative analysis. Each text has to be studied meticulously in its own right. Nevertheless, the quantitative component is not totally absent from our investigation, especially in the case study about speech reporting. In any case, the drawback that the lesser use of the quantitative method may seem to imply should not be overstated. Corpus linguistics is often thought to be more 'objective' and 'exact' than the qualitative study of texts (cf. Jucker & Taavitsainen 2013: 42), but in the case of certain subfields of historical pragmatics, "there is always a subjective element in the interpretations" (Ibid.). The remedy is to use a combination of a qualitative analysis with as great a quantitative component as is possible for this corpus. The problem of small numbers does, therefore, not have to be insurmountable.

The relationship between this kind of mainly qualitative research and the rather quantitative-oriented approaches of the day is envisaged by the present author as follows. As was just mentioned, the nature of the corpus makes it impossible to conduct extensive quantitative research. That is the simplest reason for the minor role it plays in this study. On a more fundamental level, the quantitative approach can only select certain formal characteristics, such as perfect tense forms. Such a selection according to a formal criterion alone does not shed much light on any issue, however. The data need a qualitative interpretation, and it is only then that a meaningful selection can be made, i.e. certain functions are assigned to *a part of* the formal category (not all perfect tense forms are connected to orality in the same way, for instance; see §4.7). It is impossible to connect specific linguistic features to the language of immediacy or distance without analysing how these features are used. It is here that the importance of a qualitative pragmatic approach shows itself.

In short, I do not want to ignore prevalent quantitative research strategies, but their dominance is simply not viable in this case. We would need a much larger corpus, and even then we would have to investigate each extracted token qualitatively.

Finally, a few words about the practical use of the corpus. The corpus that has been used is an electronic database of birchbark letters, compiled by several Russian scholars in 2006. This means that the findings of the subsequent seasons have not yet been incorporated into the database. Hence, the birch-

bark letters from N960 onwards had to be investigated manually from the preliminary editions published in the journal *Voprosy jazykoznanija* (which have recently been superseded by NGB XII, i.e. a new volume in the series of printed editions).[4] In the meantime, an updated version (up to N1015) has seen the light as part of the Russian National Corpus, which is publicly available online.[5] The database includes the option to search for parts of speech and linguistic features, such as verbal tense, verbal aspect, person, gender, number, as well as specific lexical items.

As was mentioned in chapter 1, the birchbark corpus as part of the Russian National Corpus contains 19,461 words (lexemes). This includes only those pieces of birchbark (885) which are of a reasonable length and in a reasonable state of preservation, as opposed to those fragments which have just a few characters or too many gaps to be of any use at all.

4.7 Illustration of the pragmaphilological approach: One case study

The previous sections were all, admittedly, fairly abstract from a methodological point of view. We shall now discuss three methodological components of our approach by looking ahead to one of the case studies, viz. the one about assertive declarations (chapter 8). Without entering into too many details, I shall give a step-by-step methodological overview of the procedure of research in this particular case study. These steps can by and large be generalized to the rest of the case studies, too. Three things need to be made clear in order to make a meaningful selection of relevant data and draw the proper conclusions from them. Data need to be (a) elicited, (b) selected and (c) analysed/interpreted. Not all these individual steps are necessarily clearly visible on the surface of the case studies. After all, the case studies are a report of the research process, rather than a step-by-step rendition of that process itself. This is why I call attention to the process at this point, before proceeding with the case studies.

The hypothesis that led to the case study about assertive declarations (i.e. one type of performative expressions, according to the theory of Searle; see chapter 8 for more details) is that in the birchbark corpus, certain past tense forms can be used in instances of a performative nature, for example:

(19) Ot Sьmьjuna. Sь vozjalo esmь u Xrarja zadnicju Šibьnьsьvu. A bolь nь nadobě nikomu.
'From Semjun. Hereby I have taken from Xrar' the inheritance of Šibenec. And for the rest nobody has any claims over it.'
(N198 / 1260-1280 / DND: 492)

[4] Any alterations and additions compared to the preliminary edition have been taken into account by the present author in the final revision of the present study.
[5] http://ruscorpora.ru/search-birchbark.html

The hypothesis is that a formal criterion (in this case, certain past tense forms) can in some way or other provide an insight into the degree of orality of the birchbark corpus.

The first step to verify the hypothesis is to find out all tokens of the formal criterion, in this case all past tense forms.[6] This is the purely corpus linguistics part, corresponding to step (a) above. However, the selection of relevant past tense forms is not merely a quantitative enterprise. After all, by far not every past tense form can be interpreted as a performative. The formal criterion of the past tense shows up in many different contexts and has several shades of meaning and a wide scope of usage. Therefore, the criteria cannot be described in a purely formal way. The specific context of each letter plays a role. It is here that the qualitative aspect of this study is more important than the purely quantitative aspect.

So how do I select those instances of the past tense that are performative? It is not my intention to provide a justification for each individual choice. Rather, the general reasoning process should be transparent, which should provide ample opportunity for anyone to verify my decisions. A description of the corpus has been given already in chapter 1 and in §4.6; it is to be understood as the whole of the available birchbark corpus, which is generally accessible. The formal search criteria (linguistic features, such as 2nd person pronouns (chapter 5) and past tense forms (chapters 7 and 8)) have been laid out in chapter 3.

What remains to be explained is the selection criteria, corresponding to step (b) above. These are tightly interwoven with step (c), viz. pragmatic analysis and interpretation. In cases like this, philological transparency is attained not by providing exhaustive enumerations of individual instances, but by justifying the general interpretative principles and reviewing a few representative cases. This is done in each case study, but let me give one example at this point already, from the same case study as above:

[6] In practice, this means perfect and aorist forms, as will become clear in the case study itself.

(20) Jazo tobe, bratou svojemu, prikazale pro sebe tako: Jazo tobe, bratou svojemu, prikazale pro sebe tako: ourjadilo li sja so toboju ci li ne ourjadilosja, ti ty so Drociloju po somolove pravi. A jazo sja klaneju.
'From Petr to Kuz'ma. I have instructed [i.e. hereby instruct] you, my brother, concerning ourselves as follows: whether he has made an arrangement with you or has not made an arrangement, you execute [it] with Dročila according to the agreement. And I bow down.'
(N344 / 1300-1320 / DND: 526)

The perfect tense form *prikazale* 'I have instructed' is most likely to be interpreted as 'I hereby instruct', judging from the following instruction. This would give the utterance a performative function. It thus makes it eligible for the selection in step (b). All selected tokens are presented in a table, and thence they form the starting point for their further interpretation in the light of the main research question.

Thus, step (c) requires the selected data to be analysed and explained in terms of orality. This requires that not just a single example, but the whole of the selected examples be taken into account. For this particular case study, it is argued that the use of the past tense is not to be taken as a mere recording of a past event, but (in the light of orality) rather as looking back on a past oral transaction (for instance, a prior oral agreement that is now fixed in writing, or a previous act of dictation, the result of which is the letter). See chapter 8 for a more extensive discussion of the particular birchbark letter just mentioned (20) and the further analysis of all elicited examples.

What remains, then, is to describe the types of orality encountered in each case study. In this case, it is mainly speech-based orality that is concerned (i.e. the use of the past tense reflects the primacy of a previous spoken utterance). A general appraisal of the types of orality encountered in the case studies will be given in chapter 9. Further details will be explained over there.

It is now time to turn to the case studies themselves.