In a joint effort to continue developing the field of historical pragmatics, the editors of this volume successfully achieve their aim to learn more about how earlier speakers of English used language to communicate and negotiate meaning and to further develop new or already existing methodologies to improve diachronic speech acts analysis. Through innovative case studies and addressing the question Did earlier speakers of English use the same speech acts as we use today?, all the papers in this volume cover a series of different speech acts from Old English to Present-day realizations to offer a diachronic speech act analysis.

The book comprises an introductory chapter and three sections. The Introductory Chapter, by the editors Irma Taavitsainen and Andreas H. Jucker, called Speech Acts Now and Then: Towards a Pragmatic History of English aims at introducing the readers to previous diachronic research studies on the history of speech acts together with a brief, though complete, description of relevant key notions of speech acts and politeness, closely connected with the speech acts studies presented in the book, and research methods relevant in diachronic analysis, namely corpus-based readable methodologies and old manual methods. The section concludes with a brief, yet concise clarifying outline of the contents in each section, so the views of the contributors are anticipated.

The first section, under the heading Directives and Commissives, includes five papers in which Old English and Early Modern English speech acts of requests and directives are analysed in the light of Speech Acts and Politeness theories: the studies are grouped following Searle’s categorization criteria of Speech Acts and address the issue of face work. In particular, the papers deal with indirectness in commissives in relation with politeness and discuss that only at older stages of English did strategies for polite directives develop.

In Beyond Politeness?, Thomas Kohnen inquires into Old English directives using the Helsinki Corpus and the Dictionary of Old English Corpus. He addresses the question of whether politeness and face work play an important role in the choice of directive speech acts in Anglo-Saxon English, analysing four case studies. He explores four different manifestations of speech acts: directive performatives, constructions with explicit performatives-, constructions with ‘you shall’, constructions with ‘Let’s’ and impersonal constructions with ‘It’s necessary’. The author relates Brown and Levinson’s notions of politeness and face work to the study of the development of directives. Today, directives threaten the hearer’s negative face or what Brown and
Levinson define as “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62). For the author, past directives shows straightforward manifestations and were very common while they seem inappropriate today. Kohnen draws as his main conclusion that negative politeness did not play an important role in the past. Also, face-saving strategies in today-English were not present in Old English: direct performatives play a role in commands and requests but not so much in suggestions or advice.

The second paper of this section, Requests and Directives in Early Modern English Trial Proceedings and Play Texts, 1640-1760, written by Jonathan Culpeper and Dawn Archer, focuses on conventional indirect requests and how they evolved in trial proceedings and play texts. In a straightforward style, the readers are first introduced to a brief outline of Searle's ideas of indirectness and requests. However, soon the idea of context gains centre stage for the author, supporting Holdcroft and Bertolet’s idea that speech acts always involve context. Following illustrative contextualised examples of request patterns, the authors conclude that impositive strategies prevailed in Early Modern English, highlighting the use of conventional indirectness by powerful people or intimates of high status. Also, the researchers emphasize a shift in conventional indirectness strategy. Early Modern requests were oriented towards either volition but Present-day’s towards ability. The resulting evidence, for the authors, seems not to support Searle’s felicity conditions, but Blum-Kulka’s categories of directness and Hodcroft’s aspects of social context. All in all, the author’s analysis offers an integrated method to trace back forms, functions, and social context, thus, providing a sociolinguistic picture of prototypical requests in Early Modern English.

In the third paper, Towards an Inventory of Directive Speech Acts in Shakespeare’s King Lear, Ulrich Busse widens his focus towards a larger range of speech acts and, at the same time, narrows his scope of analysis to a specific point in time. The play serves Ulrich Busse’s aims since the changes of the tragic hero in social status, from powerful ruler to destitution, reflect his linguistic choices. To carry out his analysis, Busses first establishes an inventory of linguistic forms from the play to carry out directives –i.e. imperatives and other linguistic forms– and, then, proceeds to determine their discourse function and politeness strategies employed. It is worth mentioning the appropriate choice of discourse by the author since he manages to show the gradual development of Lear’s directive speech acts realizations throughout the play: from directives to inviting, offering and pleading, which depicts the hero's downfall.

Gabriela del Lungo studies the history of requests and commitments from a diachronic perspective in the nineteenth century commerce epistolary discourse in her paper Two Polite Speech Acts from a Diachronic Perspective: Aspects of the Realisation of Requesting and Undertaking Commitments in the 19th-century Commercial Community. Her goal is to assess the applicability of Searle’s notion of indirectness and the idea of
degrees of illocutionary strength – i.e. mitigation/reinforcement in connection with the degree of the strength of illocutionary force of the requests and commitments. Numerous illustrative examples from commercial letters lead the author to suggest that requests and commitments are not performed indirectly in Searle’s words but frequently expressed directly by means of a performative verb and mitigated by politeness strategies. In her conclusion, the author argues in favour of the suitability of the modulation notion when she concludes that 19th-century epistolary commercial writers preferred modulation as a politeness device – i.e. downgrading for directives and upgrading for commissives. The paper ends with the corroboration of the notion that illocutionary force is a matter of degree and as such it is best suited for assessing historical speech acts in terms of their illocutionary strength.

Mari Pakkala-Weckström closes this section with No Botmeles Bihestes: Various Ways of Making Binding Promises in Middle-English, a paper whose main focus shifts towards one kind of commissives, namely promises in Middle-English narratives. The analysis is centred on Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales and starts with a discussion of Searle’s Speech Acts Theory. The author analyses promises in terms of the conditions to be fulfilled to qualify as a promise to then look into the concept of “binding promises” in mediaeval literary contexts. After a close analysis of relevant passages full of binding promises, the researcher does not seem to support the Searlean framework to describe mediaeval promises. In her argumentation, she states that, in mediaeval contexts, the feelings or intentions of promises to fulfil them were not of importance. In fact, as the author puts it “they were of second nature”. A careful analysis reveals that once promises were uttered, they were considered binding even if promises had been insincere. In this way, the idea that if a promise does not intend to undertake the obligation, the utterance does not qualify as a promise (Searle, 1969: 60) does not apply to mediaeval promises.

In contrast to the first section, the second section of this collective volume labelled Expressives and Assertives, comprises three papers which focus on the speech acts of greetings, compliments and apologies. The common feature of the papers is that they deal with a group of speech acts that involve the expression of attitudes, namely of well-wishing, approval and regret.

In the first paper, Hal, Hail, Hello, Hi: Greetings in English Language History, Joachim Grzega offers a chronological overview of greeting phrases in mediaeval Anglo-Saxon and Early-Modern English times. The author’s main goal is to shed light on the functions of greetings; whether they are used to greet or to carry out other communicative functions. After an elaborate discussion and relevant instances of greetings, Grzega proves his initial assumption; greetings cannot always be thought in terms of expressives but also in terms of wishes, questions and conversational markers. In his brief but straightforward conclusion, the scholar states that greeting phrases in the history of English moved in between two opposite extremes; assertive
or expressive, an explicit wish or mere conversational markers, flattery so as to please the addressee or brief to avoid being excessively long.

The second contribution to the volume, done by Irma Taavitsainen and Andreas H. Jucker, offers a concise overview of a speech act history of compliments and gender in *Methinks You Seem More Beautiful Than Ever: Compliments and Gender in the History of English*. Based on literary corpus material from Early Modern English to the twentieth century, their analysis focuses on the English culture to depict how compliments used to have a much wider application in the past —i.e. past compliments were an important part of ceremonies, condolence, greetings, farewells and even requests. The study combines a historical perspective and an analytical grid of gender to show that this kind of speech act was both gender-specific and culture-specific. Also, the authors argue in favour of the possibilities of retrieving data by means of a computer-aided ethnographic survey. The paper concludes that compliments consist of social moves full of cultural values triggered by multiple motivations, which reveal the polite behaviour of the period.

The last paper of this section, *Apologies in the History of English: Routinized and Lexicalized Expressions of Responsibility and Regret*, by Andreas H. Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen looks into apologies in the Renaissance period and draws a contrastive diachronic analysis between Renaissance and Present-day apology behaviour. The starting point of their study is the idea that Present-day realizations of apologies are highly routinized and based on a small range of expressions. The results show that apologies were less routinized and more direct than today’s, which, according to the authors, confirm a developmental change towards increasing negative politeness behaviour in Present-day apologies. In other words, apologies developed from addressee to speaker centerness whereas Present-day speakers seem to avoid this imposition.

The third and last section of this volume differs considerably from the two others. *Methods of Speech Act Retrieval*, as the name suggests, contains three papers of a technical nature. They, indeed, focus on the search techniques to retrieve speech acts from computer corpora. The readers are presented to the problems and limitations of historical corpora faced by the authors of this volume themselves and its contributors.

In the first paper, *Showing a Little Promise: Identifying and Retrieving Explicit Illocutionary Acts from a Corpus of Written Prose*, Valkonen describes two methods to look into promises speech act patterns, the Archer and the Chadwick-Healey Eighteenth Century fiction database. Valkonen centres his analysis on the problem of retrieving speech acts which lack a fixed linguistic form. Valkonen develops a computer-based method to extract explicit performative speech acts from machine corpora of prose. The study concludes with the corroboration of Valkonen’s initial assumption concerning the possibility to retrieve explicit performatives from morphosintactically corpora.
The last proposal by Andreas H. Jucker, Gerold Schneider, Irma Taavitsainen and Barb Breustedt, *Fishing for Compliments: Precision and Recall in Corpus-linguistic Compliment Research* deals with compliments which are performed through a performative verb on rare occasions. Their search patterns are based on Manes and Wolfson (1981), transformed into search strings and then entered into the British National Corpus. The authors’ main goals are to explore the patterns established by Manes and Wolfson and to corroborate their claims that American compliments are mainly formulaic, lacking originality. The second one is more technical and has to do with learning about the nature of compliments so as to develop corpus-based methods into more efficient search tools. For these authors, the two major problems are precision -i.e. search patterns that could not be classified as compliments as in ironical structures- and recall -i.e. search failures in extracting all compliments-. Despite these flaws in the corpus-based searches, the researches provide accurate approximations of the numbers of compliments aided by a complementary manual classification of patterns.

In his last contribution to the volume, *Tracing Directives Through Text and Time: Towards a Methodology of a Corpus-based Diachronic Speech-Act Analysis*, Thomas Kohnen concludes this section with an innovative report on directive speech acts retrieval from computer readable corpus. The author puts forth a different methodology to study the development of directive speech acts from Old English to Present-times, and discusses some of the problems in corpus-based searches when assessing the development of these speech acts. Therefore, he suggests a genre-based micro-analytic bottom-up method, which focuses on genres such as sermons, private letters and prayers. Last but not least, the scholar highlights the usefulness of the genre model since genre-specific patterns are highly predictable and retrievable.

All in all, this volume constitutes the corner stone towards diachronic speech acts analysis based on automatically readable corpora. Though not exhaustive, it sheds light on the nature of major groups of speech acts in the history of English and seems to have laid the foundations for further research to develop more sophisticated tools. As for the style, its straightforward discourse enriched with convenient illustrative instances provides an overall picture of the development of speech acts, and brief but concise theoretical issues that allows the reader an easy grasp of the book.

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