Chapter Seven

Towards a speech act annotation scheme for 18th-century Scottish letters

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Abstract

Variational pragmatics studies the impact of macro-social factors such as region or gender on intra-lingual pragmatic variation. Such variation may be manifest, for instance, at the level of individual speech acts but may moreover hold for the interaction of such individual speech acts in larger sequences and their organisation. To date, the methods of variational pragmatics have not been applied systematically to historical data of varieties of English. This paper presents a pilot speech act annotation scheme for 18th-century Scottish letters taken from the *Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence* (*ScotsCorr*) and its possible applications. The pilot scheme represents a testbed for the compilation of a larger, cross-varietal, pragmatically annotated corpus comprising of comparable 18th-century Scottish, Irish and English letters, which will enable researchers to conduct historical variational pragmatic studies.

1 Introduction

Over the past decades, notable advances have been made in English historical speech act research. Particularly directive, commissive and selected expressive speech acts, such as apologies or compliments, have received attention both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective (e.g., Kohnen 2000 and 2017; Williams 2018; Jucker 2019; and the contributions in Jucker and Taavitsainen 2008). This research has been instrumental in delineating the diachronic development of specific speech acts from Old English through to Modern English. Moreover, speech acts have been studied from different perspectives by focussing on particular authors such as Chaucer (e.g., Pakkala-Weckström 2002), spotlighting individual genres or making cross-generic comparisons (e.g., Alonso-Almeida and Cabrera-Abreu 2002; Moessner 2010) and taking sociopragmatic factors into account (e.g., Sönmez 2005). In addition, progress has been made in developing methods for speech act retrieval in historical corpora: for instance, an ethnographic method performing searches for metacommunicative expressions (e.g., Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008) or a micro-analytic bottom-up method, implementing an initial manual search in a small corpus to provide input for a follow-up search in a larger-scale corpus (Kohnen 2007). By approaching speech acts from various perspectives, all these studies have contributed to a fuller picture of their use and development in the history of English.

Yet, despite these advances, the current picture is far from complete. Only few historical speech act studies have been conducted for regional varieties other than Southern Standard English or have even considered the influence of region or gender on speech act realisation (but see Elsweiler 2022). Moreover, due to the difficulties in retrieving speech acts that are not realised by conventional patterns, for instance assertives, through corpus pragmatic methods, the focus has mainly been on typically conventionally realised speech acts such as requests, apologies or greetings and farewells. In

addition, most studies have explored speech acts in a narrow sense, concentrating on individual utterances. However, speech acts are embedded in discourse, so that they do not just have local but also more global interactional functions (Fetzer 2013: 695; House and Kádár 2021: 134; Schneider 2021: 679). This means that individual speech acts do not occur in isolation in discourse, but as part of larger speech act sequences, so-called macro-speech acts (van Dijk 1980: 184).

In this paper, I present a project that seeks to address all these issues by devising a pilot speech act annotation scheme for a corpus of 18th-century Scottish letters taken from the 18th-century sub-section of the *Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence* (*ScotsCorr*). The scheme is conceptualised to capture all speech acts in the letters and reflect their role in the interactional structure of the letter discourse. The annotation will thus not only enable searches for non-conventional speech act realisations but also for larger speech act patterns. The main goal of this contribution is to introduce the pilot annotation scheme, to exemplify its implementation in XML and to illustrate its application. The pilot annotation scheme moreover forms the first step towards a more comprehensive tool for historical variational pragmatic studies consisting of a pragmatically annotated cross-varietal 18th-century correspondence corpus including Scottish, Irish and English letters, which is to be made available to other researchers as well. This cross-varietal letter corpus will be compiled as part of a larger project, as will be briefly sketched in this paper.

In the following sections, I will first expand on the notion of micro- and macro-speech acts in the context of historical correspondence (section 2). Then I will briefly introduce the discipline of variational pragmatics and explain (a) why a pragmatically annotated letter corpus will facilitate historical variational pragmatic studies (section 3) and (b) why 18th-century Scottish letters form suitable material for a cross-varietal correspondence corpus (section 4). Section 5 will present the pilot speech act annotation

scheme as well as its implementation in XML. It will also demonstrate possible applications of this scheme by illustrating different interactional functions of assertive speech acts.

2   From micro- to macro-speech acts

Letters, as an interactive genre involving one or more addressors and one or more addressees, have various communicative functions. Letter-writers may, for instance, want to inform the addressees about events, apologise for an offense or they may want to request favours. Such communicative goals are conveyed through speech acts. These, however, do not occur in isolation in the letter discourse but combine into larger speech act sequences, as is illustrated in the following example from a Scottish letter written by Mary Maule at the beginning of the 18th century:

(1)   (1a) *It is a great Ioy to me that your La: (=Ladyship) keeps your health so well* (1b) *I pray the Lord continve it so* (1c) *and it incourages me to hop ye will not be feard to make another Iournay* (1d) *ye have bein so littil the wors with this*

(Mary Maule to Margaret Hamilton, Countess of Panmure, 1700)

The writer first expresses her joy at Margaret Hamilton's good state of health (1a), which is joined by a wish that this may continue in the future (1b). These two expressive speech acts have a dual function. First, by placing the focus on the pleasure the writer derives from the addressee's well-being, they aim to incline Hamilton positively towards Mary Maule. Secondly, by stressing Hamilton's good health, they disarm possible objections to the ensuing tentative indirect request in (1c), asking the addressee to make a journey, presumably to come and visit the writer. Mary Maule then goes on to justify her request by emphasising Hamilton's good health in the recent past once again (1d). Overall, this speech act sequence can be described as having the communicative function of a request. The requestive force is conveyed by

means of a hedged prediction statement in (1c), which, on its own, could be characterised as a micro-speech act. Importantly, however, this micro-speech act is supported by two preceding micro-speech acts and a succeeding one, which together form a hierarchically organised macro-speech act (see van Dijk 1980: 184).

This macro-sequence reflects an interactional strategy deployed to achieve the writer's communicative goals (Edmondson and House 1981: 45). The concatenation of micro-speech acts into macro-speech acts is thus not random, their underlying patterns are 'socially developed paths of action' (Bührig 2002: 275) that serve a purpose. The two expressive speech acts in example (1) do not accidently precede the indirect request to make a journey, but instead build up to it, pre-emptively disarming possible objections. The socio-conventional nature of larger speech act patterns moreover finds reflection in Bergs' (2004: 213–214) typology of sociopragmatic letter subtypes, such as requests or reports. These are based on factors including speech act types and participant relationship, such that, for instance, requests as a letter subtype have an appellative function and are typically made by inferiors to superiors. Reports, by contrast, primarily have a descriptive function and there is no characteristic relationship between the writer and addressee, i.e., reports can be written by superiors to inferiors, or vice versa, or be sent to recipients of equal social status. A letter may only represent one sociopragmatic subtype, but regularly several such subtypes are combined within one letter. This pertains, if, on a higher level, macro-speech act sequences such as requests and reports combine into global speech acts, resulting in the hierarchical organisation of speech act sequences in an interactive structure (see Longacre 1992: 110–113; Fetzer 2013: 695; Félix-Brasdefer 2014: 342–343).

Since macro-speech acts form socially developed patterns, their organisation may be influenced by different sociopragmatic and macro-social factors such as region, gender or socio-economic status. The impact of such

factors on language use in (inter)action is investigated in variational pragmatics, which, to date, has mainly focussed on present-day pragmatic variation in English. The following section will demonstrate the potential of a corpus of 18th-century letters annotated for speech acts and speech act sequences as a tool for historical variational pragmatic studies.

3 A tool for historical variational pragmatics

Variational pragmatics is a relatively recent sub-discipline of intercultural pragmatics (Barron and Schneider 2009: 425), which combines the methods of variational sociolinguistics and of pragmatics. In fact, it was established to fill a research gap at the intersection of these two linguistic disciplines. Variational sociolinguistics systematically analyses the impact of macro-social factors such as gender, age, region or socio-economic status on structural variation, thus largely disregarding pragmatic variation (Schneider and Barron 2008: 2–3). Pragmatics, by contrast, explores language use in action and interaction, accounting for situational variation due to micro-social factors such as power and social distance, but by treating languages as 'homogeneous wholes' (Barron 2017: 91) neglects intra-lingual pragmatic variation (Barron 2008: 357). Variational pragmatics therefore aims to systematically analyse the impact of macro-social factors on language use by combining the methodological approaches of both variational sociolinguistics and of pragmatics (Schneider and Barron 2008: 16).

In the variational pragmatic paradigm, speech acts can be studied both from a formal, i.e., semasiological perspective, investigating the functions of particular forms such as *(I'm) sorry*, and from an actional, i.e., onomasiological perspective, exploring realisation strategies for a speech act type such as requests or offers. Studies on the formal and actional levels mainly concentrate on micro-speech acts, which have also been the object of historical speech act studies. In addition, variational pragmatic studies may examine the impact of macro-social factors on the organisation of

interactional speech act patterns. So far, this has only been done systematically for present-day dialogic data (e.g., Barron 2005).

Letters, despite not being dialogic, are inherently interactive and, as was demonstrated in section 2, they consist of macro-speech acts, whose realisation is determined by the writers' communicative goals. Although the choice of speech acts and their organisation into such larger patterned sequences may reflect deliberate interactional strategies, these are often conventionalised to a considerable degree and such conventions tend to vary in different social contexts (see Edmondson and House 1981: 45). Historical letters offer the advantage that, generally, their social contexts can be reconstructed at least to a certain extent, since some basic information on the writers and the addressees is often available in the letters themselves or through archival records, even for writers from the lower gentry and the middling sorts. Moreover, at least for the nobility and upper gentry, further information may be retrieved from sources such as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*) or *The New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*. Therefore, letters are a resource that is well suited for historical variational pragmatic studies, not only on the formal and actional levels, but also on the interactional and organisational levels.

Such studies, particularly when investigating the interactional and organisational levels, would be extremely time-consuming if they were to be conducted using unstructured correspondence material. To facilitate historical variational pragmatic studies, I have therefore been developing a pragmatic annotation scheme for 18th-century Scottish letters taken from *ScotsCorr*, which provides systematic annotation of speech acts, reflecting their hierarchical and sequential organisation. This speech act annotation scheme is intended as a testbed for a larger cross-varietal corpus of 18th-century correspondence with speech act annotation, which will include Scottish, Irish and English letters.

4   18th-century Scottish correspondence as a building block for a cross-varietal correspondence corpus

A systematic comparative analysis of speech act use on the formal, actional, interactional and organisational levels in Scottish, Irish and English letters is not possible before the 18th century. Even in the first half of the 18th century, letters by Irish writers are comparatively rare in existing Irish English correspondence corpora (see Elsweiler and Ronan forthcoming).[1] The pilot speech act annotation scheme presented in this paper is therefore being developed based on a selection of letters from the last sub-section of the *Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence, 1540–1750* (*ScotsCorr*), covering the period between 1700 and 1750. Approximately one third of the letters contained in this sub-corpus are written by women, totalling 53 altogether. All of these will eventually be incorporated in the corpus for the pilot scheme and they will be matched by an equivalent selection of male-authored letters. To date, the corpus contains 43 letters by female and male letter-writers, respectively. While both the female-authored and the male-authored portions of the *ScotsCorr* sub-corpus contain letters from different regions within Scotland, the regional spread is more balanced among the

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[1] At the beginning of the 18th century, English had only relatively recently spread in Ireland. While an English settlement had first been established in Ireland in the 12th century, the use of English in Ireland had declined in the later Middle Ages except for the area around Dublin and the South-East of Ireland (Hickey 2005: 83–85). It is only in the early 17th century that planters from Scotland and the North of England settled in Ulster in the North of Ireland. Later in the 17th century, English settlers from further south in England established themselves in southern Ireland. These English speakers mostly formed the upper classes of Irish society. As a consequence of the spread of English from the 17th century, a language shift from Irish to English took place between the 17th and 20th centuries (Hickey 2005: 91–93; Ronan 2020: 332–341).

male-authored correspondence.[2] In the female-authored portion, letters from the North form a substantial part of the sub-corpus. This pragmatically annotated corpus derived from *ScotsCorr* forms a first building block for the planned pragmatically annotated cross-varietal 18th-century correspondence corpus comprising of Scottish, Irish and English letters. The following two paragraphs will briefly sketch the research goal and design principals for this larger project.

So far, studies of 18th-century English linguistic politeness, though highlighting the central role of speech acts, particularly expressive speech acts such as complimenting and thanking (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010), have not considered possible regional variation in politeness cultures. The intended project therefore aims to provide a tool for the investigation of micro- and macro-speech acts as an expression of potentially varying regional politeness cultures.

To allow for comparability of the correspondence data, one of the main principles variational pragmatic studies should adhere to (see Schneider 2010: 252–253), the additional letters from archives will be chosen to meet the same or similar criteria as far as possible. They should represent the same social ranks, mainly the gentry and nobility, and types of letters by including a similar ratio of private to non-private correspondence. Ideally, they should also represent similar letter sub-types (see section 2) and topics, which will have an impact on the micro- and macro-speech acts found in them. While these are the ultimate goals of the project described in this contribution, the remainder of the paper will focus on the design of a speech act annotation scheme reflecting the hierarchical organisation of speech act sequences in letters and its possible applications.

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[2] In *ScotsCorr*, the parameter region reflects the geographical origin of the writers rather than the location where the letters were written (Meurman-Solin 2016: 19).

5   A pilot speech act annotation scheme

As House and Kádár argue, 'speech acts can only be properly systematised if they are approached as phenomena embedded in discourse, that is, if we consider their interactional functions in a broader discursive context' (House and Kádár 2021: 134). Accordingly, it is the goal of the proposed pilot annotation scheme to systematise speech acts in consideration of their interactional functions in the letter discourse. To achieve this, it needs to fulfil the following three criteria:

a)   It should reflect the sequential and hierarchical organisation of larger speech act sequences.

b)   It should be suited to the representation of the interactional structures typical of the letter genre.

c)   It should facilitate comparisons with existing and future studies in historical and variational pragmatics.

The annotation scheme therefore needs to have a component representing the hierarchical structure of speech acts, which, in turn, incorporates an accessible speech act typology. The implementation of these two aspects will be discussed in the following sections.

5.1   Representing a hierarchical interactional structure

A conceptualisation of speech acts as larger, hierarchically ordered sequences is applied in the classification scheme of the *Cross-cultural Speech Act Realisation Project* (*CCSARP*) (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989; see also Edmondson and House 1981), which was developed for requests and apologies. It was therefore chosen as a basis for the pilot speech act annotation scheme. Although the *CCSARP* scheme derives from present-day elicited dialogic data (House and Kádár 2021: 21–22), it has successfully been adapted to historical dialogues and correspondence data (Culpeper and Archer 2008; Elsweiler 2022 and 2023). Moreover, it is still widely applied

in cross-cultural and variational pragmatic studies (e.g., García 2008). The *CCSARP* scheme conceives of speech acts as larger sequences consisting of a core part, so-called head acts, and external modification, so-called supportive moves. Example (1) (reproduced here as example (2)), in which the writer implicitly requests the addressee to venture on a journey, illustrates such a speech act sequence consisting of a head act and supportive moves.

(2)

Pre-supportive move:	*It is a great Ioy to me that your La: (=Ladyship) keeps your health so well*
Pre-supportive move:	*I pray the Lord continve it so*
Head act:	*and it incourages me to hop ye will not be feard to make another Iournay*
Post-supportive move:	*ye have bein so littil the wors with this*

(Mary Maule to Margaret Hamilton, Countess of Panmure, 1700)

As was explained in section 1, the core part of the request, the head act, which suggests, by means of a tentative prediction statement, that the addressee may be brave enough to travel, could realise the request on its own. However, in this case, the head act is not an isolated micro-speech act but is preceded by two expressive speech acts functioning as pre-supportive moves and is followed by a post-supportive move. The two pre-supportive moves have both a harmonising function, by attempting to incline the addressee positively towards the addressee, and a grounding function, by pre-empting possible objections to the succeeding request. The same grounding function can be attributed to the post-supportive move. The strategic use of pre- and post-supportive moves shows that the addressee, though physically absent, is constantly present for the writer so that speech act sequences are planned to achieve interactional goals, thus forming a macro-speech act.

The pilot speech act annotation scheme developed for 18th-century Scottish letters adopts the distinction between head acts and pre- and post-supportive moves to represent macro-speech acts. The annotation is stored as XML, which is a suitable format for the representation of hierarchical relationships between speech act sequences because it is also hierarchically structured. In XML, the macro-speech act (<macro-SA>) and the components of the macro-speech act, i.e., the preceding or following supportive move(s) (<preSM> and <postSM>), and the head act (<HA>), are marked as elements, which is indicated using angular brackets. Within the elements, the speech act type (e.g., sp-act="request") and realisation strategies (e.g., strategy="prediction statement") are specified as attributes, i.e., additional information.

```
 9 ▽      <macro-SA sp-act="request">
10 ▽          <preSM sp-act="rejoicing" strategy="explicit_rejoicing">
11   it is a great Ioy to me that your La : keeps \ your health so well
12          </preSM>
13 ▽          <preSM sp-act="wishing" strategy="explicit_desire">
14   I pray the Lord continve \ it so
15          </preSM>
16 ▽          <HA sp-act="request" strategy="prediction statement">
17   and it incourages me to hop ye will not \ be feard to make another Iournay
18          </HA>
19 ▽          <postSM sp-act="argument" strategy="reason">
20   ye have bein \ so littill the wors with this
21          </postSM>
22      </macro-SA>
```

Figure 1: Example of macro-speech act of request in XML

XML has the advantage that there are standard technologies with which one can search for elements, attributes or a combination of both (e.g., XQuery). Using these, it will be possible to search the annotated corpus for macro-speech acts but also different speech act types and realisation strategies. It is, moreover, envisaged to encode the letters in compliance with the TEI Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange (https://tei-c.org/guidelines/), which are also customisable. The letters will be provided with a TEI Header, where metadata on the letter, such as its source, information on the writer, the addressee and their relationship, can be stored.

Further guidance particularly on encoding textual features of correspondence in TEI-XML is provided by a special interest group, who have compiled a manual (https://encoding-correspondence.bbaw.de/v1/).

By extending the basic *CCSARP* coding scheme to comprise sequentially and hierarchically organised macro-speech acts, the concept of supportive move needs to be adapted to include not just individual utterances, i.e., micro-speech acts, but complex speech act sequences that may also have a hierarchical structure. This is illustrated in example (3).

(3) Pre-supportive move: Apology	Pre-supportive move: Information	*I thought to have sent the Briewes for the Service by this post*
	Head act: Apology (take responsibility)	*But find some difficultie in getting them and am afraid the Service must still be here*
	Post-supportive move: Apology (explain)	*For as the Superioritie of the Gordonhill lyes in Renfrew Shire and the Service tobe at Grwme The Chancerie Clerke tells Me that they will not take in the Retour if it contain Gordonhill And that tho Your Brothers Service was so and passed by Oversight they will not doe the same again*
Head act: Request		*And therefter write Me what was demanded for the service at Irwine*
Post-supportive move: Argument		*as I have to know what it will cost at Renfrew That so I may know whether a service before the Macers or tuo at Irwine and Paislay will be cheapest*

(Hugh Munro to John Sinclair, 1711)

In this macro-speech act sequence, the request to write to the addressor about what was demanded for the service at Irvine is preceded by an apology which is itself hierarchically structured. It consists of a pre-supportive move, offering background information for the apology, the head act, where the writer takes responsibility for not having been able to get the brieves[3] for the service, and a post-supportive move, providing an explanation why they have not been sent. The internal hierarchical structure of the pre-supportive move can be represented in XML annotation (see Figure 2).

```
17 ▽      <macro-SA sp-act="request">
18 ▽          <preSM sp-act="apology">
19 ▽              <preSM sp-act="information" strategy="background">
20    {left indenture} I thought to have sent the \ Briewes for the Service by this \ post
21              </preSM>
22 ▽              <HA sp-act="apology" strategy="take_responsibility">
23    But find some difficultie \ in getting them and am afraid \ the Service must still be here \
24              </HA>
25 ▽              <postSM sp-act="apology" strategy="explain">
26    For as the Superioritie of the \ Gordonhill lyes in Renfrew Shire \ {f1v} {direction changes>}
27    and the Service to_ _be at Grwme The Chancerie \ Clerke tells Me that they will not take in the
28    Retour \ if it contain Gordonhill And that tho Your Brothers \ Service was so and passed by Oversight
29    they will \ not doe the same again
30              </postSM>
31          </preSM>
32 ▽          <HA sp-act="request" strategy="imperative">
33    And therefter write Me \ what was demanded for the service at Irwine \
34          </HA>
35 ▽          <postSM sp-act="argument" strategy="reason">
36    as I have to know what it will cost at Renfrew - \ That so I may know whether a service before \
37    the Macers or tuo at Irwine and Paislay will \ be cheapest
38          </postSM>
39      </macro-SA>
```

Figure 2: Representation of a complex pre-move in XML

As is exemplified by the macro-request in (3) and in Figure 2, the slots in the hierarchically organised interactional structure represented by head acts and supportive moves are filled by different speech act types. The typology underlying the proposed scheme will be presented in the following section.

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[3] In *DOST* (s.v. *Serv(e*, *Serf*, *Sarve*, *Ser*, v.1, IV. 23. a), the service of brieve is defined as follows: 'Of a brieve: To be taken through the procedure known as 'serving' or 'service of brieves' (*Serving* vbl. n. 3 a, *Service* n. 14). This procedure consisted of the summoning of an assise of inquest by the sheriff or other judge to whom the brieve is directed, and the investigation of the claim and delivery of its findings by the assise.'

5.2   Speech act typology

The speech act categorisation at the basis of the pilot annotation scheme takes some inspiration from House and Kádár's (2021: 107–113) interactional speech act typology – a reiteration of Edmondson and House's (1981: 98) classification – but only partially adopts it. The typology was originally designed for conversational data (Edmondson and House 1981: 35–37) and, although it is supposed to be fit to represent single-source, i.e., monologic, texts, too (House and Kádár 2021: 145–148), it contains some categories that are less suitable for non-dialogic interactive data, e.g., the phatic speech act types 'remark' and 'disclose'. Moreover, other speech act types found in the letter data, such as 'complimenting' or 'rejoicing', are not provided for in this typology.

House and Kádár's fundamental distinction between ritual speech acts, i.e. 'those speech act categories which are expected to happen at certain places or phases of an interaction' (House and Kádár 2021: 107), including opening and closing acts, and substantive speech acts, i.e. 'those speech act categories which are not inherently part of the conventional structure of an interaction' (House and Kádár 2021: 107), is, however, a useful one.[4] It also reflects the general make-up of 18th-century letters into standard ritualised parts and more flexible parts to be filled freely by the letter-writers. Therefore, this distinction is adopted into the pilot annotation scheme. The ritualised speech acts are conceptualised as letter-specific speech acts, which typically fill particular slots at the beginning and the end the letter schema, thus

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[4] The category of substantive speech acts in House and Kádár's typology is further sub-divided into attitudinal and informative speech acts. Attitudinal speech acts may relate (a) to future events, thus comprising, for example, requests and invitations, and (b) to non-future events, mostly including speech acts classified as expressive, i.e., expressing a writer's psychological state (Searle 1976: 12), in the Searlean categorisation, for instance, complaints, apologies or thanking. Informative speech acts, by contrast, encompass categories of speech acts conveying information such as telling and expressing an opinion.

reflecting established epistolary norms (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999). They comprise, among others, salutations (4), commendations (5) and leavetaking (6):

(4)   *Affecetionat Cousing*

(Anne Mackenzie to unspecified addressee, 1700)

(5)   *and wee all desire our Compliments to Lady Orchiston*

(James Murray, 2nd Duke of Atholl to unspecified addressee, 1706)

(6)   *Im with the greatest truth & Respect {space}{centred} My Lord Your Lops most Obedt (=obedient) & most humble Servt. Northesk*

(David Carnegie, 5th Earl of Northesk to William Maule, 1st Earl Panmure, 1740)

These are assigned the tags sp-act="salutation", sp-act="commendation" and sp-act="leavetaking" and different realisation strategies such as strategy="soldidary_address" are also specified (see Figure 3).

```
3 ▽     <SA sp-act="salutation" strategy="solidary_address">
4 {centred>} affecetionat Cousing {a wide space vertically} \\
5        </SA>
```

Figure 3: Representation of letter-specific speech act 'salutation' in XML

For the classification of speech acts that are not part of the conventional letter schema, the pilot annotation scheme adopts a basic top-level classification according to the Searlean speech act categories, i.e., Assertives, Commissives, Directives and Expressives (Searle 1979: 12–18),[5] with further specifications within each category. Since many historical pragmatic studies operate with Searle's categories (e.g., Del Lungo Camiciotti 2008; Kohnen

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[5] Since Declarations are not represented in the letter data, this category is not included in the pilot annotation scheme.

2008; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010), this will allow for better comparability with previous analyses. Moreover, it will easily accommodate *CCSARP*-based conceptions of speech acts, such as their schemes for request and apology strategies or the scheme for complaints (Olshtain and Weinbach 1987). As regards the sub-classifications within each of the four categories illustrated in Figure 4, these are the speech act types that are assigned different speech act tags in XML, for instance sp-act="information", sp-act="commitment" or sp-act="apology". These can be realised by different strategies, such as strategy="explain" or strategy="offer_repair" for apologies (see section 5.1, Figure 2).

Generally, a data-driven approach is adopted, so that, rather than rigidly implementing pre-determined types based on present-day classifications, the speech act categories reflect the speech acts found in the historical data. Consequently, the pilot scheme is designed to remain flexible to include new categories which may arise as the underlying letter corpus is expanded.

Speech act classification

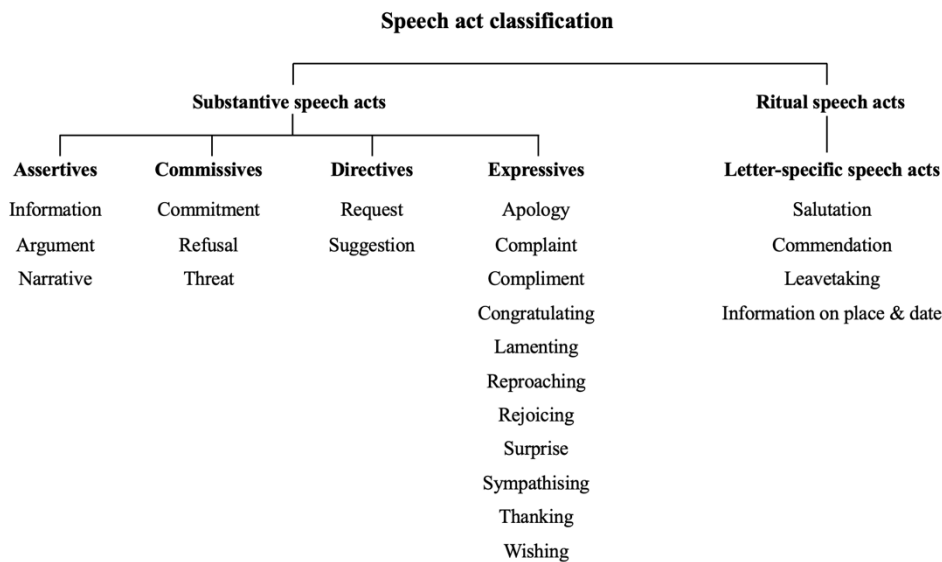| Substantive speech acts				Ritual speech acts
Assertives	**Commissives**	**Directives**	**Expressives**	**Letter-specific speech acts**
Information	Commitment	Request	Apology	Salutation
Argument	Refusal	Suggestion	Complaint	Commendation
Narrative	Threat		Compliment	Leavetaking
			Congratulating	Information on place & date
			Lamenting	
			Reproaching	
			Rejoicing	
			Surprise	
			Sympathising	
			Thanking	
			Wishing	

Figure 4: Speech act classification for the pilot corpus of 18th-century Scottish letters

The annotation for selected letters of the pilot corpus has already been tested by Master students at LMU Munich, who were provided with guidelines on the speech act classification, and has been adapted according to their feedback. The scheme is thus to be improved based on feedback from iterative interrater reliability tests, especially during the compilation of the cross-varietal correspondence corpus. Once the annotated cross-varietal corpus is made available, guidelines on the speech act annotation will be provided to assist other researchers who intend to use the corpus data for their own research. These include a description of the speech acts and strategies, typical linguistics features as well as examples for the corpus. Since the annotation scheme is designed to be flexible, suggestions for improvements and additions to the scheme by these researchers will also be welcome.

5.3   The interactional roles of assertive speech acts

Among the speech act categories represented in the classification in Figure 4, assertive speech acts are the most frequently found type. However, they have not received a lot of attention in English historical pragmatics because they generally do not follow conventional patterns. Yet, in the context of the letter discourse, assertive speech acts frequently act as 'scaffolding' in larger speech act sequences. The following sections will spotlight their various interactional roles.

5.3.1 Informative, argumentative and narrative acts

Assertive speech acts form a varied class. They are 'regularly creative without any predictable or formulaic elements' (Jucker 2017: 40), so that their identification mainly relies on contextual and functional criteria. In the 18th-century letter data, writers primarily employed them (a) to inform their addressees about events or states of affairs, thus having the conventional effect of equipping them with knowledge (see Sbisà 2020: 171), and (b) to

argue a case to persuade their addressees, e.g., of their integrity, their commitment or the utility of a requested action. In view of these perlocutionary intentions, a basic distinction between informative and argumentative acts is applied in the pilot scheme (Leech 1983: 224; see also Vergaro 2015: 14).[6] It is, however, not always possible to neatly distinguish between these two categories (see also House and Kádár 2021: 111–112), since, for instance, information may be given as part of a larger sequence aimed at convincing an addressee. Therefore, the two speech act types may be realised with partly overlapping realisation strategies. This applies, for example, to the strategy 'stating a consequence' (see (7) and (8)).

(7)   *She her self at length made all publick,* ***& so removed the only thing wch restrain'd me from taking measures I would have sooner done had it not been to prevent Noise & preserve the Credit of my own familly***.

(James Erskine to Margaret Hamilton, Countess of Panmure, 1730)

(8)   *but as it is* (8a) ***I must rely upon your goodnesse to me, in being soe kind as to solicit this businesse for me with the counseleres, and most particularly the Aduocat*** *which I haue referd to your giuing him a full account of how I am staieted heare, which realy I thinke is a sheame to heare,* (8b) ***and I know your representing my case to the Aduocat, will haue greater pouer then any other***

(Francis Herbert, Countess of Seaforth to unspecified addressee, 1701)

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[6] House and Kádár's category of informative speech acts comprises both so-called 'tells' and 'opines' (House and Kádár 2021: 107). In my view, the main perlocutionary intention of opines is to persuade the addressee of an opinion. Their classification as an informative act does not take this into account. Therefore, I propose the basic distinction between informative and argumentative acts delineated in this section instead.

In (7), the past consequence is contained in an informative act as part of which the writer informs the addressee that his wife publicly proclaimed their separation. In (8), by contrast, the writer states the positive future consequence of the addressee's support for her, namely their greater weight with the advocate, see (8b), which is meant to persuade the addressee to perform the action requested in (8a). Therefore, it is categorised as an argumentative act. During the annotation process, the attribution of the strategy has to be done on a case-by-case basis.

In addition to informative and argumentative acts, a third assertive category was identified, *viz*. narrative acts, which do not fit neatly into either of the other two categories. The main characteristic of narrative acts is the presentation of past events in a temporal sequence. This sequence is often preceded by an orientation, which establishes the setting for the ensuing narrative. At the end of the sequence, the writer may evaluate the narrated event, thus pointing out why it is a story deemed worthy to be told (see Labov and Waletzky 1967; Georgakopoulou 2007: 12–13). The narrative sequence in (9) illustrates this. Anne Hay tells the addressee about progressive gout attacks affecting an unidentified Lady she is caring for. The plotline is introduced by an orientation stating that the Lady's health had been good all winter. This background information makes the gout attacks, related in five temporal sequences, seem even more surprising. In the evaluation, her own fear caused by the Lady's violent discharge of phlegm comes to light, which explains why she considers this episode so noteworthy.

(9)

Orientation	*I blis god all this winter she hes been prity free of the gout and been caried twice to the chwrch every sabath sinc agust that we had the comwnion in this place,*

Temporal sequence 1	*but this day 8 days she complean'd a little of a pain in her right hand which nixt day was easely prerseved to be the gout*
Temporal sequence 2	*it swelld exciding big and and she had excesive pain in it till setterday morning*
Temporal sequence 3	*that she had swm ('some') eas*
Temporal sequence 4	*and and then took it in her right elbow and her right foot*
Consequence	*so that her right side is very leam,*
Temporal sequence 5	*Her Gr (= 'Greatness') was setterday night and sabath night very mwch trwbled with a violent speat of Deflwction*
Evaluation	*so that I was affraid she should have chocked*

(Anne Hay to Margaret Hamilton, Countess of the 4th Earl of Panmure, Lady Nairn, 1716)

As this narrative sequence shows, while one of the writer's communicative goals is to inform the addressee about this gout attack, her story conveys a strong emotional element.

This section has provided a first glimpse of the functional versatility of assertive speech acts. The following section will expand on this by placing the focus on the functions informative and argumentative speech acts assume in the interactional structure of the letter discourse.

5.3.2 The interactional functions of informative and argumentative acts

In 18th-century letters, informative and argumentative speech acts enter into a variety of interactional structures, ranging from head act sequences to supporting roles in different types of macro-speech acts. Their functions depend on the overarching communicative goals of the macro-sequences they are employed in. This section will present a selective overview of some typical interactional functions of informative and argumentative acts to show for which purposes these were employed by writers in longer macro-sequences.

Informative speech acts as head acts

In letters or parts of letters where the main communicative goal is to inform the addressee about events, informative speech acts may function as head acts concatenated into a macro-speech act sequence of information, as is illustrated in (10).

(10)

Head act: information	*The rest of this family are all very well,*
Head act: information	*Duke Hamilton is going wp to London with my Lord Selkirk,*
Head act: information	*I swpos they will go from this - in 8 or i0 days, in order to settle him at Aiton scooll for his Edwcation,*

(Anne Hay to Margaret Hamilton, Countess of the 4th Earl of Panmure, Lady Nairn, 1716)

Each new piece of information in (10) represents a head act. As the last head act in the sequence demonstrates, the writers may show varying degrees of confidence in the information they convey. Unlike informative acts,

argumentative speech acts typically do not function as head acts of macro-sequences in the 18th-century letter data.

Informative and argumentative speech acts as supportive moves

Writers may, however, also employ informative speech acts in support of other speech acts, most frequently of requests. In this function, they often offer the necessary background information for the request as pre-supportive moves, thus establishing common ground between the writer and the addressee (see Green 2013: 402), as in (11).

(11)

Pre-supportive move: Background information	*You mind that my deceast sister att Dremavwk left {ins} me {ins} att her Death one Chist with some cloaths which is very weel known to your brother and son*
Pre-supportive move: Information	*I severall times askit the same in Civility which was denyed me by both*
Head act: Request	*I once more Desyre the Same Chist and Cloa??? {torn} of you And them*

(Jean Campbell to Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine, 1708)

Argumentative speech acts, on the other hand, are often employed as post-supportive moves, where they provide justification for the preceding request, e.g., in (12).

(12)

Pre-supportive move: Background information	*yow may remember Lact Time yow were here yow promised to be master of y^t Inibiccion and to Lett me Know by a Line q^n yow Gatt ye same,*

Head act: Request	*I desire yow may be pleased {ins} to appoint {ins} any day of ye Latter end of ye Nixt Week and {ins} have {ins} ye Inibition rady*
Post-supportive move: Justification (purpose)	*y^t I may see it*
Head act: Request	*and I shall wait of yow att Ballmagh*
Post-supportive move: Justification	*for I am Going to ye shire ye Nixt week after in order to Informe my self anet {sic} The seal of martour*

(John Murray of Broughton to unspecified addressee, 1705)

The first explicit request in (12) to get the letter of inhibition ready, realised by a performative, is justified by a post-supportive move stating the purpose of the request (*y^t I may see it*). This is, in turn, followed by another implicit request, where the information that the writer intends to wait for the addressee at Ballmagh can be interpreted as a hint that he expects him to go and meet him there. He justifies this in the ensuing post-supportive move by providing details on his travel plans.

The requestive speech act sequence in (13) illustrates, moreover, that informative and argumentative acts may be employed alternately as pre-supportive moves.

(13)

Pre-supportive move: Report	*I am informed by Duncan Campbell merchant in this place that there was a horss stoln from him Out of the Kings park of the marks &, colours specifyd in the inclosed memorandum qch he gave me*
Pre-supportive move: Evaluation	*In whereby yow may see how pointed he is in his information y^t Robert M^c nab maltman had that horss*

| Pre-supportive move: Report | *and he adds further that Rob: m^c nab sold the said horss at the fair of Dunblain or to a man that Lives near Dunblain* |
| Head act: Request | *wherefore I desyre yow may immediately call for Rob: m^c nab and enquyre unto the truth of this story and send me ane account* |

(John Campbell of Glenorchy, 2nd Earl of Breadalbane to unspecified addressee, 1719)

The writer supplies an evidential report on the incidence of the stolen horse in the first pre-supportive move, which necessitates his request to make inquiries about this, thus creating common ground with the addressee. Before the writer goes on to add a further piece of information reported to him, the first report is substantiated by an argumentative act, in which he evaluates the information for the addressee and thereby engages him.

While informative and argumentative acts most frequently support requests, they are also found in support of, for instance, expressive speech acts, such as complaints (14).

(14)

| Head act: complaint | *I doe admire ('marvel') hou your Lo should beleve that I refused the Tynds of neitherlorne if I could get it sufficient* |
| Post-supportive move: Justification | *but just I could not take, by reasone that your Lo would allou sufficient meal to be given to me, but I could not get of the Tynds of neitherlorne ane boll of meal qch I could allou to my children,* |

(Susanna Campbell to her half-brother John Campbell of Glenorchy, 1st Earl of Breadalbane, 1708)

In (14), Susanna Campbell complains to her half-brother about being blamed for refusing the tithe of Netherlorne. She justifies her complaint by arguing that the tithe does not yield enough oatmeal to give to her children.

Another hierarchically organised expressive speech act frequently incorporating argumentative acts as supportive moves are apologies, as is illustrated in (15).

(15)

Pre-supportive move: Explanation	*I not understanding. any thing of busnss.*
Head act: request for forgiveness	*forgive – this troubll.*

(Anne Mackenzie to unspecified addressee, 1700)

The writer apologises for causing the addressee inconvenience with her letter by asking for forgiveness for it. This is substantiated by the preceding explanation that her lack of understanding of business matters is the reason for doing so. Such explanations, which are argumentative speech acts, are regularly part of apology sequences (see, e.g., Leech 2014: 117).

The general socio-conventional patterns presented above are attested in combination with different micro-speech acts. Assertive speech acts therefore interact with other micro-speech acts in various ways and are thus employed strategically by letter-writers to achieve different communicative goals. Since assertives are typically not realised in a conventional way, it would be difficult to explore possible patterns within macro-speech act sequences in an unstructured correspondence corpus. The speech act annotation scheme presented in this paper therefore makes it possible to investigate interactional and organisational patterns involving speech acts that are not realised through conventional patterns, such as assertives.

6   Outlook

This contribution has presented the basic outline of a pilot speech act annotation scheme which is being developed for 18th-century Scottish letters drawn from *ScotsCorr*. The annotation scheme is designed to represent the hierarchical structure of longer speech act sequences, so-called macro-speech acts. It is implemented in XML, which is searchable using tools such as XQuery. It will therefore be possible to search the pilot corpus for particular macro- and micro-speech acts as well as the strategies employed to realise them. Accordingly, the annotated letter corpus can be used to explore speech acts on an actional, interactional and organisational level (see section 3).

The pilot annotation scheme thus presents a testbed for the compilation of a pragmatically annotated cross-varietal corpus consisting of 18th-century Scottish, Irish and English letters. Using this resource, which is to be compiled as part of a larger project, researchers will be able to address hitherto unexplored research questions regarding the influence of the macro-social factor region on the interaction of micro-speech acts on a sequential level and their organisation into hierarchical macro-sequences. These may include, for instance, the following:

1. Does the macro-social factor region impact the choice of supportive moves for speech acts such as requests, complaints or apologies?
2. Does the macro-social factor region influence the complexity of macro-speech act sequences?
3. How are particular sequential patterns realised formally by writers from Scotland, Ireland and England?

This new tool is therefore intended to facilitate studies in historical variational pragmatics, a hitherto under-researched sub-discipline of English historical pragmatics.

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