

**Birte Bös** and **Lucia Kornexl** (eds.). *Changing genre conventions in historical English news discourse* (Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics 5). Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 2015. 254 pp. ISBN 978-90-272-0084-6 (hardback), 978-90-272-6856-3 (e-book). Reviewed by **Carla Suhr**, University of Helsinki.

The volume, *Changing genre conventions in historical English news discourse*, consists of a selection of papers from the Third International Conference on Historical News Discourse (CHINED III) held in Rostock in 2012. The conference series, which will meet for the sixth time in 2017, has also resulted in a research network ([www.chinednews.com](http://www.chinednews.com)), which demonstrates not only the importance attached to this topic but also the vibrancy of the community of researchers working in the field.

The volume edited by **Birte Bös** and **Lucia Kornexl** is divided into three sections consisting of two, four and three papers respectively. The editors have written a brief introduction outlining the common themes of the various contributions. For one thing, all papers are concerned with genres and “triggers, mechanisms and agents of change that have affected genre conventions in historical English news discourse from the 17th century to the present day” (p. x). Furthermore, all but one of the contributions make use of a variety of corpora (e.g. the *Zurich English Newspapers Corpus*, the *Rostock Newspaper Corpus*, to mention just two) and electronic archives (e.g. *Early English Books Online*, the *Burnley Collection*), highlighting thus the plethora of electronic resources available for researchers of historical news discourse today. The contributions also relate their findings to the social and historical context.

Part I, entitled “The formation of public news discourse and metadiscursive technology”, focuses on domain-specific key terms. **Nicholas Brownlees** investigates editorial metadiscourse in early news periodicals between 1620 and 1695. He assigns the nominal forms he investigates into three different categories: publication types (e.g. ‘book’), modes of presenting news (e.g. ‘account, relation, report’), and concepts of ‘news’. His findings indicate that the use of metatextual comments fluctuates during the century and reflects differences in

news presentation and editorial intervention. Also, Brownlees shows that the new genre of news discourse did not have a stable or fully accepted role in society yet. Birte Bös' contribution continues from where Brownlees leaves off, by focusing on the period 1700–2000. She investigates 25 key terms, some of which are the same as Brownlees looks at, but in addition to analyzing terms related to conceptualizations of news, she also looks at terms related to the gathering and transmission of news, technological means of news transmission, and agents of news processing. Her very thorough analysis of the diachronic developments in the use of these key terms and their contexts reveals a fundamental shift that took place at the end of the 19th century, which was when the Age of New Journalism began with its increasing emphasis on professional journalists and a diversified staff involved in news writing.

Part II is entitled “Changing modes of reference and shifts in audience orientation”, and it contains four papers that deal with the linguistic means for indicating the place and time of news, for appealing personally, and for targeting specific readerships. With the exception of the first paper in this section, the papers focus on specific parts of newspapers (advertisement and death notices) or specialized news discourse (medical news for professional and lay audiences). **Claudia Claridge** looks at the ways in which information about the place and time of news are encoded in early newspapers, but she supplements her analysis of 17th and 18th century newspapers with material from later centuries as well. Her analysis of the frequencies of a variety of deictic items and place and time expressions indicates a less straightforward diachronic development than could have been expected, with changes in preferences for precise or vague deictic or non-deictic elements at different times. These changes can be linked to potential models of news writing (letters, chronicles and official proclamations) as well as more general stylistic shifts into more elaborate writing styles and changes in publication processes and frequencies.

**Minna Palander-Collin** looks at person-mentions in advertisements in two London newspapers between 1785 and 1880. She finds that mentions of persons (advertisers, audiences and other people) decrease over time, and the forms and functions of person-mentions also change. In early advertisements, advertisers attempted to establish a relationship with their audiences, and mentions of other people served to establish the target group or to create respectability of the advertised product. In the latter half of the 19th century, the advertiser-audience dyad decreases in importance, reflecting a less deferential and dialogic style that can be connected to societal developments such as increasing readership, mass production of consumer goods and increased economic activity.

**Sarah Borde's** contribution focuses on death notices in the 19th and 20th centuries. Her analysis of the macrostructure of this highly conventionalized text type reveals thirteen different structural elements, ten of which can be found already at the beginning of the period under investigation. Some of these elements are obligatory (NAME and DATE), others are optional, with fluctuating frequencies. The analysis of the linguistic forms of these elements indicates that some elements shift toward greater precision and fixed expressions, while others show more variety in forms. Though death notices are bound by newspaper-specific conventions regarding layout, typography and principles of ordering, the analysis nonetheless is able to demonstrate that death notices are also influenced by contemporary social norms and conventions regarding, for example, attitudes towards public expressions of grief, or social changes in the status roles of men and women.

The final paper in this section is **Irma Taavitsainen's** article about medical news in journals for professionals and lay audiences. The first part of her paper uses keyword analysis to point to the emphasis on observation in the new scientific journal, the *Philosophical Transactions* (1665–), as well as its preference for the narrative text type that detailed the scientific process of experiments. This is further demonstrated in the range of writings on medical topics in the *Transactions* as revealed by the qualitative analysis of the material. In the second part, she moves to investigating differences in the way medical news was distributed in the 18th century to professionals (through the *Philosophical Transactions* and the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*) and educated lay readers of a certain social standing (through the *Gentleman's Magazine*). Here she finds some interesting trends in the lay journal: it seems that the *Gentleman's Magazine*, geared at lay audiences, is more interpersonal in nature, and focuses more on the domestic rather than the public sphere. At the same time, writers often also advocated public health concerns, which shows that the professional and lay domains were still rather close in the 18th century.

The final part of the volume is called "Transgressing boundaries and shifting styles". The first two contributions deal with shifts in style: **Elisabetta Cecconi** investigates changes in the construction of murder reports, while **Alexander Haselow** is concerned with syntactic patterns that show a shift towards more speech-like writing in hard news. The final paper of the volume focuses on Mark Twain's transgressions from news discourse to news satire.

Elisabetta Cecconi analyzes the structure and lexis in murder reports in four news genres (news broadside ballads, occasional news pamphlets, newsbooks and early newspapers, i.e. the *London Gazette*) from the 17th century. She focuses on the presence of authorial commentary, metadiscourse and emphasis

on factuality in the proto-lead and body, as well as comparing aspects of layout in the four genres. The four news genres are closely interrelated as evidenced by the shared stock of evaluative lexis, but some clear differences can be noted; for example, woodcuts on title-pages were found only in ballads and news pamphlets and occasionally in the earliest newsbooks. Authorial commentary is important in news ballads and pamphlets, but it is cropped in newsbooks and the *London Gazette*. The development of murder reports shows the progressive withdrawal of a (godly) authorial voice, which is replaced by objective and precise factuality in the second half of the 18th century.

Alexander Haselow's contribution is the only one in the volume to focus on syntax, though syntactic considerations are touched upon in some of the other contributions (e.g. Palander-Collin). He looks at hard news reports in a quality paper and a popular paper in both 1900 and 2013 to see to what degree they have become more informal and speech-like over time. As he notes, the increasing colloquialization of news discourse has been observed in previous studies, but his comparison of two different kinds of newspapers gives a more differentiated picture of the situation. He analyzes the frequencies of three syntactic structures found in speech but not associated with formal writing: conjunctions as extra-clausal linking devices, i.e. discourse-structuring devices, introducing new sentences and new paragraphs, and clausal and non-clausal syntactic increments following a dash. His results show a clear increase in all three features, demonstrating thus a shift towards more speech-like news writing. Haselow suggests that the reasons for the shift have to do with, on the one hand, facilitating information-processing by reducing syntactic complexity without sacrificing the information density that is typical of formal writing, and on the other hand, with information structuring, as syntactic increments allow for a second focal point in a sentence. The shifts are also related to contemporary practices in communicating news and to journalistic conventions.

The final paper in the volume moves from prototypical news discourse to news satire. **Isabel Ermida** applies her Model of News Satire to ten of Mark Twain's spoof news articles to see whether these texts can be identified as forerunners of the tradition of spoof journalism so prevalent today. The answer to the question is a resounding 'yes', and the careful qualitative analysis of Twain's strategies in the spoof news demonstrates his versatility and originality in subverting news discourse for satirical purposes.

The papers in this volume are of excellent quality, and set a high standard for any future volumes stemming from this conference series. The depth of analysis is exemplary, making use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis combined with considerations of the socio-historical context. What I find

especially heart-warming is the broad range of materials and analytical methods used in the papers, as it demonstrates the vibrancy of the field. While the amount of materials used in these studies is not huge in terms of word counts, the sampling practices and choices and combinations of material show a sensitivity to the wide array of historical news writing. Anyone interested in computer-assisted analysis of not only historical news discourse but historical discourse in general will find this volume of interest.