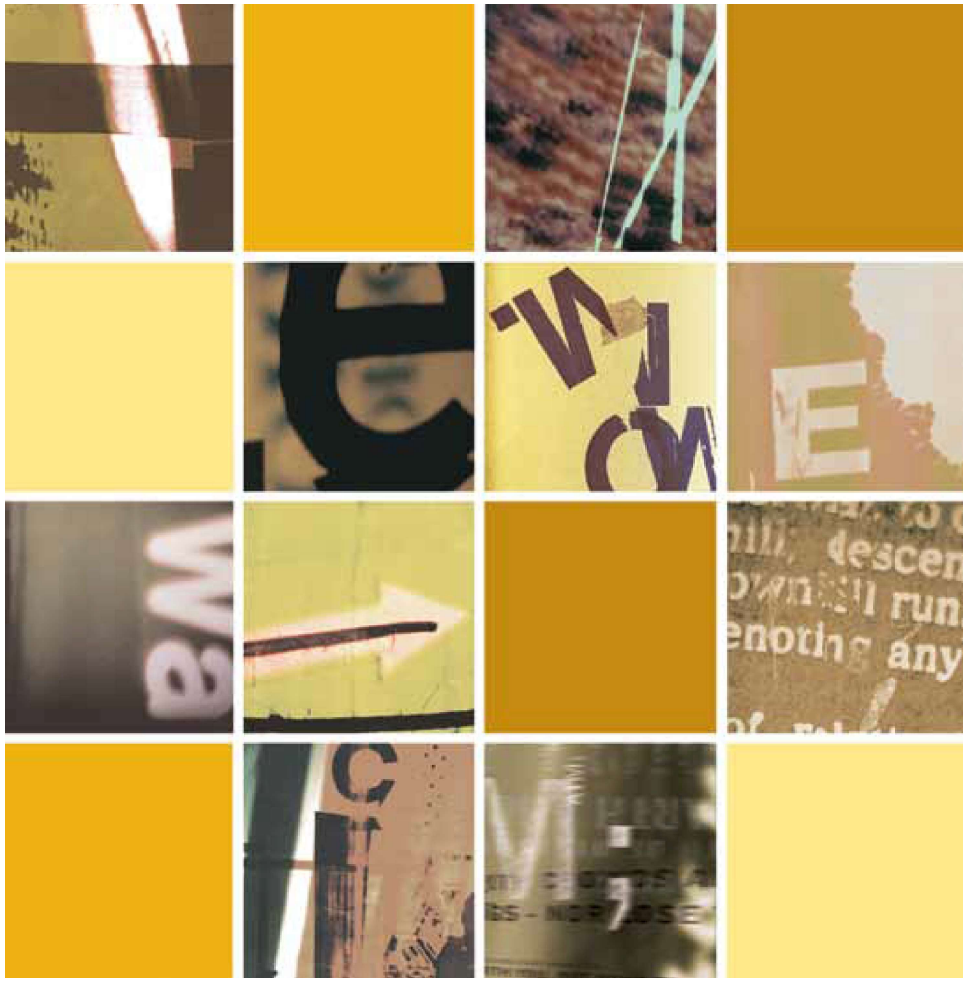

English Historical Pragmatics

Andreas H. Jucker & Irma Taavitsainen

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6 'No one can flatter so prettily as you do': Speech acts

6.1 Speech act theory: From philosophical reflections to corpus searches

Speech act theory begins with the work of two philosophers: J. L. Austin and John Searle. As philosophers they were concerned with the recognition of different types of speech acts and their logical status. They did not work empirically but dissected speech acts with philosophical rigour. Austin drew attention to the three facets of an utterance. First of all, an utterance is an act of uttering certain words, and as such it is a locutionary act, as he called it. Second, an utterance is also an act of doing something; that is, the act of asking a question, of greeting someone, of making a promise or of ordering the addressee to do something. This aspect he called the illocutionary act. And third, an utterance may have an intended or unintended effect on the addressee. The addressee may feel insulted, persuaded, convinced, enlightened and so on. This is called the perlocutionary act. The speaker may intend his or her utterance to have a specific effect on the hearer but the realisation of a specific perlocutionary act depends on whether the addressee is actually persuaded, convinced or enlightened.

In the huge amount of work on theoretical aspects of speech acts and more practical work on specific speech acts, it was always illocutionary acts that received the bulk of scholarly attention. John Searle proposed a particularly influential way of thinking about the illocutionary force of utterances. He worked out what kind of conditions must be met for a certain utterance to count as a promise, a greeting or a question. He called these the felicity conditions of a speech act, and he proposed a taxonomy of illocutionary acts (Searle 1979: Chapter 1). According to this taxonomy, directives are speech acts in which the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something, and commissives are speech acts in which the speaker undertakes to do something himself or herself. In both cases the speaker's words describe a state of affairs that is to come

about in the future through the actions of either the hearer (directives) or the speaker (commissives). The direction of fit – according to Searle – is from word to world. For assertives, on the other hand, the direction of fit is from world to word. The speaker describes a state of affairs. In expressives he or she expresses her feelings, and in declarations, finally, are speech acts which, if performed successfully, bring about the state of affairs that they describe. Searle gives the examples of appointing a chairman or nominating somebody as a candidate.

It did not take long for linguists to see the potential and power of this new way of thinking about utterances, and in addition to the theoretical approaches to speech acts based on the researchers' intuition, they started to develop more empirical methods. In order to find out how realisation patterns of speech acts differed across languages, researchers developed methods to elicit specific speech acts from informants. They gave them questionnaires with short conversations that led up to a specific speech act, such as a request or an apology and asked them to fill in the missing speech act. The responses to these questionnaires could be compared across languages in order to find out about language-specific ways of issuing requests or apologies (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). Another method to obtain empirical results was the use of role-plays. The researcher describes a particular scene to two participants who then have to role-play this situation in which typically one of the participants has to apologise or complain to the other participants about some everyday misdemeanour committed by the speaker or the addressee (see, for example, Trosborg 1995). On the basis of the transcripts of these staged interactions the researcher can then investigate different ways of apologising or complaining, depending, for instance, on the gravity of the misdemeanour or the role relationship between the speaker and the addressee.

It has turned out to be more difficult to use corpus evidence for specific speech acts because there is no straightforward way of searching for a speech act, such as an apology or a complaint, in a corpus, irrespective of whether it is a corpus of written language or a corpus of transcribed spoken language. Apologies, complaints, and almost every other type of speech act, may come in countless different guises. They cannot be recognised on the basis of their syntactic or lexical form alone. Within the last ten years or so, however, some researchers have developed methods to locate specific speech acts in large computerised corpora.

Deutschmann (2003), for instance, in a pioneering study located apologies in the *British National Corpus*. He argues that apologies in English are to a large extent conventionalised. They typically come in a small range of formats and generally include one of a small set of lexical

items, including words such as *sorry*, *pardon* or *excuse*. A search for these items, therefore, will recover most of the apologies that are included in the corpus. He then proceeds to categorise the apologies in the found set on the basis of the nature and the gravity of the offence for which speakers apologised, the demographics of the speakers and the recipients of the apology and their mutual relationship, to mention just a few relevant factors to be taken into account.

6.2 Typical patterns, IFIDs and metacommunicative expressions

In historical pragmatics, the available research tools are more restricted. Experimental approaches, such as discourse completion tasks or role-plays, are not available, and researchers have to rely on the available corpus data. For investigations with a limited data set, it is possible to read the available texts and to search them for instances of specific speech acts. With this method, the researcher can bring his or her philological understanding of the original texts to bear on the analysis in order to locate both the more obvious and more indirect or marginal realisations of a particular speech act. But this method is time consuming, and it sets limitations on the amount of material that can be considered.

For larger scale investigations, electronic retrieval tools have to be used. However, speech acts, as we have pointed out above, are functional entities which cannot be searched for directly. There are, however, search techniques that will retrieve at least some of the relevant instances from a historical corpus. These search techniques can be visualised in three overlapping circles (see Figure 6.1).

The first circle contains searches for patterns that are known to be typical of specific speech acts. Compliments, for instance, often contain positively connotated adjectives. A search for such adjectives is therefore likely to retrieve some compliments, even if it is very unlikely to retrieve all compliments in the corpus. In the words of corpus linguists, the recall is limited. At the same time the search will find a lot of positively connotated adjectives that are not used in the context of a compliment. In the words of the corpus linguists, the precision is also severely limited. The method may, however, be good enough to retrieve some relevant examples from the corpus. In other cases, it might be possible to get higher levels of precision and/or recall. Kohnen in several of his publications (for example, 2008b) has tried to establish an inventory of typical patterns for directives in Old and Middle English in order to provide a (partial) history of directives in English (see section 6.6 below).

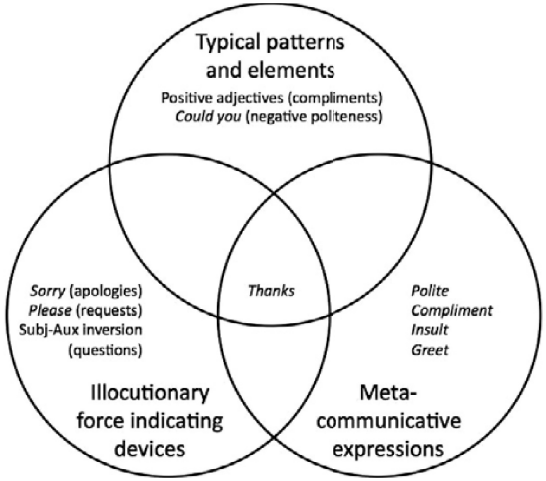


Figure 6.1 Three circles of corpus-based speech act retrieval

The second circle contains those linguistic expressions and syntactic features which are not only typical of a specific speech act but which reliably indicate the illocutionary force of the speech act. These are called illocutionary force indicating devices (often abbreviated as IFIDs). In Present-day English, for instance, *please* is an IFID for a request, *sorry* is one for an apology and the inversion of subject and auxiliary is an IFID for a question. This circle is more focused than the first circle. Positive adjectives, for instance, may be fairly typical for compliments but they are not sufficiently indicative of compliments to count as proper illocutionary force indicating devices. This circle also contains speech act verbs that are used performatively. Expressions such as 'Let me compliment you on . . .' or 'I wish to thank you for . . .' do not only report but actually perform a speech act of complimenting and thanking, respectively. Such formulations may be clear illocutionary force indicating devices but they may also be fairly untypical ways of performing the speech acts that they name.

The third circle takes a slightly different approach. The search strings in this circle do not search for speech acts directly but for metacommunicative expressions, that is to say expressions that are used to talk about communication. Communicators do not only pay each other compliments, give directives to each other, apologise to each other or insult each other, but they also, from time to time, talk about these activities. They may do this for all sorts of reasons: to evaluate, or just

to report, or indeed to negotiate the intended force of an utterance ('Was this a compliment?', 'Do you wish to insult me?'). Such instances of communication about communication, i.e. metacommunication, may be very helpful for the researcher because it gives him or her a direct insight into the speaker's perception of specific speech acts.

Some search strings may, in fact, appear in the section where all three circles overlap. The following examples taken from the *Helsinki Corpus* illustrate this with the expression *thank*, which is at the same time a speech act verb and an illocutionary force indicating device.

1. and he meniþ ful hertly **þankyng** to God, for þe worþines and þe 3ift of his beyng, (HC M3 1350–1420, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, lines 702–3)
   and he remembers to thank God with a full heart for the worthiness and the gift of his being
2. Deare S^{r} – I **thanke** you for your letter which you sent me from Tuddington (HC, E2 1570–1640, *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley*, lines 22–3)
3. **Thanks**, Harry, saies he; (HC E2 1570–1640, Armin, Robert: *A Nest of Ninnies*, line 385)

In (1) the expression is used to report an instance of thanking God. Here *þankyng* is a metacommunicative expression. In (2), the expression is used performatively. Lady Brilliana Harley uses it and thereby performs the act of thanking her husband for a letter that she had received. And in (3) the speaker ('he') uses the abbreviated form 'thanks' in order to thank Harry. In (2) and (3), therefore, the expression 'thank' is both a typical expression for the speech act of thanking and a device that clearly indicates the illocutionary force of the utterance in which it is contained (see exercise 1 for further examples).

In the following we will present four case studies of specific speech acts or speech act classes in the history of English. However, our focus will be more on the research methodologies that have been employed rather than on a comprehensive history of any of these speech acts. At present such comprehensive histories do not yet seem possible, but these case studies may give an idea to what extent the methodologies might be powerful enough to bring us closer to a comprehensive history of speech acts.

6.3 From 'God be with you' to 'goodbye'

The first case study concerns a specific linguistic form of a speech act and its etymology, namely *goodbye* as a routinised leave-taking formula at the end of an interaction. In Present-day English, it is not only a

typical pattern but also an illocutionary force indicating device for this particular speech act. It may perhaps express good wishes or it may be a mere formula devoid of any propositional content, as suggested by Searle for greetings in general. Only a few people are probably still aware that the origin of *goodbye* was a pious blessing, the phrase 'God be with you' uttered at the beginning, at the end or even during an interaction. In the course of time *good* was substituted for *God* presumably on the analogy of greetings such as 'good morning' or 'good evening'. As a result, it is not possible to use the phrase *goodbye* to express a pious wish in Present-day English. If people indeed want to use a blessing, they have to go back to the expanded form and say 'God be with you'.

Arnovick (1999: Chapter 6) has provided a detailed study of this farewell expression as a case study of pragmatic reanalysis. She shows in detail in what contexts and how this expression lost its religious meaning and became a strictly secular farewell expression. Her study is corpus based. She uses the Chadwyck-Healey database of 2,700 plays by 580 authors, first performed between 1290 and 1949 (Arnovick 1999: 97).

It has to be noted, however, that her approach is more specific than the model introduced above. Her research question does not concern the speech function of a parting salutation in general. In this particular chapter she does not look at expressions such as *farewell* and other ways of taking one's leave or finishing a conversation. Instead she is interested in the changing function of one specific linguistic form, and thus her approach is not a case of function-to-form mapping but rather a case of form-to-function mapping. This is so in spite of the fact that the linguistic expression itself did not remain stable. In the course of time it underwent a process of contraction, but all the spelling variants across time can still be seen as instantiations or rather developments of the same original form.

According to Arnovick (1999: 98), the first attestation of the phrase 'God be with you' can be found in the late fifteenth century. In the late sixteenth century, the phrase was contracted and merged into one word, and it was in the seventeenth century that *good* was substituted for *God*. At the beginning of its development the phrase 'God be with you' functioned both as a blessing and as a parting salutation at the end of a conversation. A blessing was a ritualised speech act that could be performed not only by ordained clergy but by anybody who believed in the power evoked by the blessing. In Arnovick's corpus such blessings are regularly used in closing sections of conversations. The anonymous play *A Warning for Fair Women*, first published in 1599,

contains several extended closing sequences with a combination of 'God be with you' with other parting salutations, as for instance in (4).

4. *Bro.* Now afore God, this bloud was ill espied?
But my excuse I hope wil serve the turne.
Gentlemen, I must to London this forenoone,
About some earnest busines doth concerne me,
Thankes for my ale, and your good companies.
Both. Adieu good maister Browne.
Bro. Farewell unto you both. *Exit.*
M. James. An honest proper Gentleman as lives:
God be with you sir, Ile up into the Presence.
Yeo. Y'are welcome *M. James*, God be with ye sir. *Exeunt.*
(Anon. *A Warning for Fair Women*, ed. by Ch. D. Cannon, Mouton de Gruyter, 1975, p. 141)

Captain Browne, Master James and the Yeoman of the Buttery are here engaged in a lengthy parting sequence with the blessing 'God be with you/ye', with thanks and with other parting salutations, *adieu* and *farewell*. The conversation comes to an end and the characters depart, as indicated by the stage directions *exit* and *exeunt*.

In the early attestations, the phrase 'God be with you' regularly served as a 'parting blessing-greeting that helps to close that conversation' (Arnovick 1999: 103). However, in the course of time, the blessing function receded and through its regular association with closing sequences, the function of the phrase shifted to a mere parting salutation, and at the same time – Arnovick times this to the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century – the spelling *Good-bye* superseded the spelling 'Good be with you', and it is exactly the seemingly random variation of the spelling of *Good* and *God*, sometimes even by the same writer, that provides evidence for the loss of the religious meaning. It is interesting that after the phrase had lost its function as a blessing and had adopted the modern spelling, the original blessing, 'God be with you' re-emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century but this time not as a parting greeting but as an independent blessing. Arnovick (1999: 110) gives the following example to illustrate that *Goodbye* can no longer be used as a blessing:

5. Closing Section:
Explicit Blessing followed by Closing Sequence:
A: Go with God.
B: Thank you.

A: Bye
B: Bye
Arnovick (1999: 110)

The two illocutionary forces of blessing and leave taking cannot be merged into one utterance and therefore two independent speech acts are necessary to carry out both functions.

Arnovick describes this change as a case of an illocutionary split. The blessing function and the leave-taking function became separated and adopted independent spellings. The development of *goodbye* in itself, furthermore, is seen as a case of 'discursisation'. This term is proposed by Arnovick (1999: 117) on the analogy of pragmaticalisation. Where the process of pragmaticalisation enlists lexical material and adopts pragmatic meanings, the process of discursisation recruits illocutionary material, such as the leave-taking function of 'God be with you', and adopts this for a specific discourse function.

6.4 Promises

With a promise a speaker undertakes to do something in the future. According to Searle, a promise is a speech act of the commissive type. The direction of fit is from word to world. The speaker uses words to describe the world that will come about as a result of making the promise come true. Several conditions need to obtain for an utterance to qualify as a prototypical promise.

6. I promise to give you the greatest album of this decade, just for you. (COCA, *Rolling Stone*, 2011)
7. I promise to practice my French before my next visit. (COCA, *American Scholar*, 2010)

In a prototypical promise, the speaker must believe that the hearer actually wants the promise to be carried out. The speakers in (6) and (7) must take it for granted that the addressees want them to bring out a great album and to practise French. This is called the preparatory condition. And in order for these utterances to be sincere promises, the speakers must have the intention of actually doing what they promise. This is called the sincerity condition. The formulation, moreover, must be recognisable as an undertaking of bringing out an album and of practising French. This is called the essential condition (Searle 1969: 60, see also Pakkala-Weckström 2005: 184).

However, it has to be noted that the verb 'promise' is often used to carry out speech acts that are not prototypical cases of promising.

8. It wasn't a dream, Dad. I promise it wasn't. (COCA, *Christmas at Hostage Canyon*, 2011)
9. Don't take another step. Put your hands up, or I promise I'll blow you away! (COCA, *Ray of Hope*, 2011)

In extract (8) the verb 'promise' is used in the sense of 'I assure you'. What is being promised is not an action of the speaker in the future but something that happened in the past and that the speaker claims to have been real rather than a dream. In (9) 'promise' is used to threaten the addressee. There can be no question that the future action described in the 'promise' might be in the addressee's interest. (8) and (9), therefore, are not promises in the intended sense in spite of the fact that the verb 'promise' is used performatively in these utterances.

An investigation of a particular speech act, therefore, must distinguish carefully between the different shades of meaning that a speech act verb such as 'promise' can have and the functional profile of an illocutionary act. In a historical investigation the problem may be exacerbated by the fact that functional profiles of specific illocutionary acts may change. In the section above, we have seen that in earlier times a farewell greeting often included a pious blessing. In this section, we shall take a look at how prototypical promises changed their functional profile from Middle English to Present-day English. Two types of Middle English promises have been particularly well researched: the promise of restored health at the end of a medical recipe, and the literary promise in the world of courtly love. Both of them differ significantly from the prototypical promise in Present-day English exemplified in (6) and (7) above.

Middle English medical recipes often finished with an efficacy statement which promised the success of the prescribed measures (Alonso-Almeida and Cabrera-Abreu 2002). They often had the general form of 'he shal be hol' ('he will be healthy'). Extract (10), for instance, is the end of a medical recipe for headaches. It describes how a plaster can be made consisting of breast milk, ale and various spices, such as camomile and cumin, and it finishes as follows:

10. let yt þer as þe hed ys sorest & vse þis medycyne iij dayes & euery tyme newe & he schal be hool bi godes grace.
'put it where the head is sore. Use this medicine three days, a new one each time, and he will be healthy by the grace of God.' (Alonso-Almeida and Cabrera-Abreu 2002: 147)

Such promises obviously differ from Searle's prototype of a promise. Here it is not the writer of this promise who undertakes to do something in the future, but he assures the reader that, if the instructions of

the recipe are faithfully carried out, the desired effect will be obtained, that is to say the patient will recover from the ailment. Alonso-Almeida and Cabrera-Abreu (2002: 148) also discuss the significance of the final phrase 'bi godes grace' ('by the grace of God'), and whether this actually diminishes the strength of the promise. Thus, more than just a faithful observance of the recipe is necessary; God's help is also required. Moreover, should it turn out that the patient does not recover in spite of the medicine, the lack of success can still be blamed on the lack of God's grace.

In *The Franklin's Tale*, one of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, promises play a particularly significant role. This tale is about Arveragus and Dorigen, who are happily married, and Aurelius, who courts Dorigen against her will. In order to get rid of the unwanted suitor, she promises her love if he can remove all the rocks on the coast of Brittany, rocks which threaten the safe return of her husband. To her this means that she will never love him because the task is impossible. However, Aurelius manages to secure the help of a magician by promising him the princely sum of £1,000. The magician removes the rocks and, thus, puts Dorigen in the dilemma of keeping her promise to Aurelius and at the same time her loyalty that she promised her husband Arveragus. Promises, as Pakkala-Weckström (2005: 186) has pointed out, were considered binding even if they were only made orally and even if they were made in jest: 'Among the consequences of breaking a promise were public and private shame.' Confronted with the dilemma Dorigen and Arveragus agonise over a solution, but Arveragus decides that Dorigen must be true to her promise and therefore commit adultery. In the end, Aurelius is so impressed by the true love between Arveragus and Dorigen that he releases Dorigen from her promise to love him, and the magician is so much moved by Aurelius' story that he releases him from his promise to pay the enormous sum. Dorigen's 'promise', on closer analysis, turns out not to be a promise at all. By combining it with what she considers to be an impossible condition, she makes clear that she has no intention of doing what she promises. The promise does not fulfil the felicity conditions. But it is so strong and binding that even her husband forces her to be true to it. Pakkala-Weckström (2005: 194) concludes:

> The tale's roots lie in the tradition of folktales, romance and courtly love, and the generic rules that govern these also affect the behaviour of the characters. Furthermore, the nature of promises has undergone fundamental changes over the centuries that have passed between the compilation of the *Franklin's Tale* and its sources, and the appearance of speech act theory. It is not enough that Dorigen herself has no intention of loving Aurelius, and that she can easily set conditions if she believes they will never be met. In the fictional society where the tale is set, Dorigen's truest intentions become irrelevant when measured against her husband's honour and the value of *trouthe*.

Thus, Searle's profile of a prototypical promise helps us both to identify promises in historical contexts and it allows us to pinpoint the fundamental changes in the nature of promises over the centuries. In the two studies of promises in medical recipes and in Chaucer's tale, the researchers identified the promises by reading the source texts and by their philological understanding of texts of the period in question and their sociocultural or literary context. With this method it is difficult to trace long diachronies, and, therefore, methods have been developed that allow the researcher to find specific speech acts with more or less automatic corpus searches. Such approaches will be introduced in the following section with the example of directives.

6.5 Directives

Directives are used to get the addressee to do something in the future. They comprise a large group of speech acts that range from unmitigated commands and polite requests to simple suggestions, vague hints and instructions in cookery recipes. There are countless different ways in which directives can be formulated. Depending on the specific type of directive, on the relationship between the speaker and the addressee, and on the general situation, some of these forms may be very direct and unmitigated while others may be elusive and vague. As yet it is not possible to provide a comprehensive repertoire of all possible directives at any given time and even less to tell the precise history of how this repertoire changes over the centuries in the history of the English language.

However, some considerable advances have recently been made in this direction; for example, by Thomas Kohnen. In a methodological paper he has set out the necessary steps for an investigation of directives in the history of English (Kohnen 2008b). He points out that the crucial first step must consist in establishing the inventory of directives in a narrowly defined text genre. As an example he uses sermons, because of their primary function of religious instruction, which he presumes to consist at least to some extent of directives and which persists throughout the entire history of the English language. Thus sermons provide a stable context for a diachronic analysis. The researcher can investigate how people were told how they should act morally at different stages in the history of English. Within this genre, Kohnen then proceeds to

establish the inventory of all directives. This has to be done manually by subjecting the texts to a careful philological analysis and by highlighting relevant instances. Such an analysis must necessarily be based on a limited amount of data because of its labour-intensive nature. But once an inventory has been established for a particular period, the analysis can proceed with corpus-based technologies, at least for the recurring patterns. This means that the method will provide the most reliable results for those patterns that are most frequent and most conventionalised, and it is far less reliable for rare and creative patterns. The method also depends on the availability of a sufficient amount of relevant data throughout the period under investigation.

With this method, Kohnen (2008b: 298) established that there are basically four manifestations to be accounted for. The first type are performative directives, which typically contain a directive speech-act verb in the first-person singular or plural indicative active as in extract (11), which contains the performatives *pray* and *beseech*. By using these verbs in this context, the author performs the act of praying and beseeching.

11. Wherefore **we pray and besech thy maiesty**, that at no tyme thou suffer vs to be vnthankefull vnto these exceding great benefites, not yet vnworthy of thy greate merytes, . . . (Cuthbert Tunstall, *Certaine godly and deuout prayers*, Kohnen 2008b: 298, Kohnen's emphasis)

The second type of directives are the imperatives, which comprise various types of first, second- and third-person imperatives, including forms such as *let us* or *let's* and Old English *uton we* with a similar meaning:

12. . . . **let vs never gruge** therat but take in good worth and hartely thanke hym as well for aduersytie as for prosperytie. (Thomas More, Letter to his Wife, Kohnen 2008b: 299, Kohnen's emphasis)
13. And **utan** ðurh æghwæt Godes willan wyrcan swa we geornost magan. (Helsinki Corpus, Wulfstan, *Homilies*, 184)
    'And let us in every way perform God's commands as carefully as we may be.' (Kohnen 2008a: 36)

Extracts (12) and (13) illustrate the so-called first-person imperatives with the form *let us*, and *uton*. Kohnen (2008b: 37) points out that the *uton* construction was regularly used for exhortations to love and adore God, to pray, keep the peace and so on. Standard second-person imperatives also belong to this group.

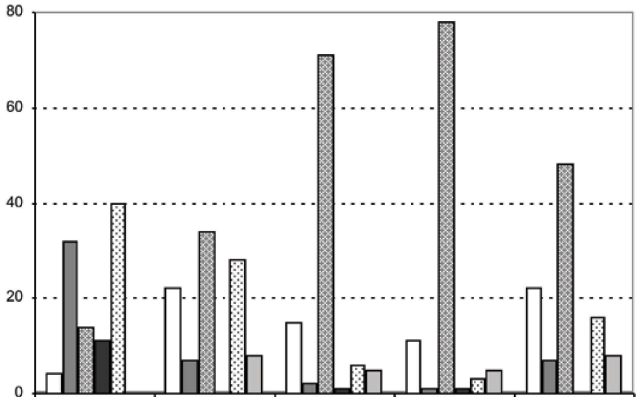
The third group of directives, the modal directives, are formed by modal expressions denoting obligation, permission or possibility.

They can again occur in the format of expressing an obligation for the addressee or as first-person directives as in extract (14):

14. **We must** take heed how we scoff at Religion. (Tillotson, *Sermons*, Kohnen 2008b: 299, Kohnen's emphasis)

The last group, the indirect directives are the most diverse group and contain, for instance, hearer-based interrogatives ('could you . . .'), hearer-based conditionals ('if you would like to . . .'), speaker-based declaratives expressing volition ('I'd like . . .'), and so on. Kohnen (2008b: 300) ventures that 'the four basic classes seem to cover most, if not all, the manifestations of directives in the history of English'. He also hypothesises that these four forms probably cover most of the directives in other genres, too. If he is right that his search strings cover most manifestations of directives, it should be possible to locate a high percentage of all directives in his data. He then proceeds to provide statistics on the frequency of directives at the various periods covered in his data (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 indicates that performatives and second-person imperatives have increased considerably, while first-person imperatives and to some extent modals have decreased over the centuries. Kohnen (2008b:



	10th/11th c.	15th c.	16th c.	17th c.	late 20th c.
performatives	4	22	15	11	22
1st pers imp	32	7	2	1	7
2nd pers imp	14	34	71	78	48
3rd pers imp	11	0	1	1	0
modals	40	28	6	3	16
indirect	0	8	5	5	8

Figure 6.2 Distribution of manifestations of directives in the data (in percentages) (Kohnen 2008b: 301)

309) concedes that the class of indirect directives is most problematic because it is least predictable. It is difficult to draw the line between speech acts that can still be taken to be directives and other speech acts. In addition, there may be examples of directives in his corpus that were not retrieved by his search strings. This means that we cannot establish with certainty the entire inventory of directives and their precise number at a given time, and as a result we have to be very cautious about the changing importance of specific directives because we cannot compare the frequency of these types with the overall frequency of all directives.

6.6 Insults and compliments

What insults and compliments have in common is that they are speech acts that express – in a very general sense – the speaker's evaluation of the addressee. In the case of an insult it is a negative evaluation, and in the case of a compliment it is a positive evaluation. In Searle's classification, they are expressives. They also have in common that their status as a positive or negative evaluation is not always clear or that they can be misunderstood. On occasion, one may even be mistaken for the other. An ironic compliment may be intended as an insult, and a compliment that comes across as inappropriate may be perceived as an insult even if it is not intended as one. To some extent at least, insults and compliments depend on how they are understood by the addressee. If somebody does not feel insulted it may well be argued that the utterance was not really an insult, and if the recipient is not pleased about a compliment, the utterance is not really a proper compliment. Finally, what the two speech acts also have in common is that the conventionalisation of their realisation is very limited. While greetings, apologies and thanks have a range of conventionalised linguistic forms that are regularly used for their realisations, this does not seem to be the case for insults or compliments.[1]

At different periods, insults and other forms of verbal aggression can be found in different types of texts. In order to account for the diversity of forms of verbal aggression, the framework of the pragmatic space of insults with a multi-dimensional grid can be used (see Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). This grid distinguishes, for instance, between ritual- or rule-governed forms of insults and creative forms. In the Old English heroic tradition, for instance, Anglo-Saxon warriors followed strict rules in what is called 'flyting'. It consisted of sequences of Claim, Defence, and Counterclaim. The Claim and the Counterclaim often consisted of boasts and insults. The contestants boasted of their

own deeds and belittled those of their opponents (Clover 1980: 452). These contests either ended in violence or in silence, but they were ritual in terms of their structure and content. In this they resemble the twentieth-century practice of 'sounding', the ritual insults of urban African-American adolescents also known as 'playing the dozens', 'screaming', 'joining' or 'signifying' (see Arnovick 1995: 604).

This grid also distinguishes between ludic and serious forms of insults, and according to this dimension, the sounding of African-American adolescents can be described as mostly ludic. The purpose is to better one's opponent with caustic and humorous insults but it is part of the game that they have to be patently unrealistic and untrue. However, many forms of verbal aggression are not ludic but very serious indeed. In seventeenth-century courtrooms, for instance, insults seem to have been used as a systematic means of intimidation in the interrogation of defendants and witnesses, as in the following extract taken from the proceedings of the trial of Lady Alice Lisle in 1685. Dunne, a baker and a messenger for Alice Lisle was interrogated by the Lord Chief Justice, who grows increasingly impatient at what he sees as Dunne's evasive, confusing and contradictory answers:

15. *L.C.J.* Why, thou vile Wretch didst not thou tell me just now that thou pluck'd up the Latch? Dost thou take the God of Heaven not to be a God of Truth, and that he is not a Witness of all thou say'st? Dost thou think because thou prevaricatest with the Court here, thou can'st do so with God above, who knows thy Thoughts, and it is infinite Mercy, that for those Falshoods of thine, he does not immediately strike thee into Hell? Jesus God! there is no sort of Conversation nor human Society to be kept with such People as these are, who have no other Religion but only Pretence, and no way to uphold themselves but by countenancing Lying and Villany: Did not you tell me that you opened the Latch your self, and that you saw no body else but a Girl? How durst you offer to tell such horrid Lyes in the presence of God and of a Court of Justice? Answer me one Question more: Did he pull down the Hay or you?
Dunne: I did not pull down any Hay at all. (p. 114) (HC E3 XX TRI LISLE; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 87–8)

Dunne has no way of defending himself against this onslaught of insults hurled at him in the official context of a courtroom and gives a very brief answer. He is certainly not in a position to insult the Lord Chief Justice in return. A return of insults, however, is regularly appropriate both in the case of Old English flyting and the sounding of African-American adolescents.

Such a grid allows the analyst to focus on similarities and differences

of related speech acts across different centuries and different cultures. Speech acts are seen as dynamic. They may change their communicative profiles as well as their linguistic realisations, but they can be described with the help of appropriate dimensions in a multi-dimensional pragmatic space. So far it is only possible to trace very partial histories of specific speech acts, such as insults, but ultimately larger scale studies of forms of insults may lead to a better understanding of the inventory of speech acts in the pragmatic space of verbal aggression and its development over time.

Taavitsainen and Jucker (2008: 207) report on an attempt to locate compliments in historical corpora by searching for adjectives that regularly express positive evaluations, such as *beautiful, nice, great, lovely*, and lexical strings, such as *really nice, really great, well done, like/love your, what a, you look/'re looking* and so on. While these searches did indeed provide relevant hits, they also returned a lot of passages that did not contain any compliments (very low precision).

In the absence of typical words and expressions and in the absence of relevant illocutionary force indicating devices, the analysis has to turn to a metacommunicative expression analysis (Figure 6.1 above), that is to say to the search for terms that describe insults and compliments. A search for the term 'compliment' (including spelling variants and related forms such as *complimentary*) retrieves passages in which the term is used performatively as well as passages in which it is used discursively:

16. 'Will you do me the honor of exchanging cards with me?' he said to Elizabeth. 'You have shown yourself so competent here this afternoon, and your work has been so skilfully done that I want to **compliment** you upon it, and to say that I am sure you have before you a promising future.' (COHA, 1911, Florence Finch Kelly, *Emerson's Wife and Other Western Stories*)
17. Tis believed the Pope will order him to **compliment** the Duke of Mantoua upon his late Marriage with the Princess of Guastala. (ZEN, 1671, 1671lgz00518)
18. *De R.* Lady Clanarlington, permit me to congratulate you on your excellent looks this morning. But I must not forget to ask after your fair daughters – though daughters, indeed, appear impossible, when such a mother blooms before us.
    Lady C. Really, Monsieur, you are too **complimentary**; no one can flatter so prettily as you do. (Stuart-Wortley, Emmeline, Lady, *Moonshine* (1843), pp. 35–6; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 215)

In extract (16), the speaker uses the verb *compliment* performatively to pay Elizabeth a compliment. In extracts (17) and (18) the term

compliment is not used performatively but is used either descriptively or discursively. Extract (17) is taken from a seventeenth-century newspaper which reports the audience of an abbot with the Pope. The abbot received several favours and was ordered to pay compliments to the Duke of Mantua on his recent marriage. The reader of this newspaper is not told with which words the abbot complimented the Duke of Mantua. But the report reveals the circumstances of the compliment, who is to make it and who will receive it. The compliment, in this case, differs from those we are familiar with in Present-day English. It is a ceremonious act of diplomacy. Such compliments were common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and newspapers regularly reported them. Dignitaries received compliments not only on their marriages but also on the births of their children, on their accession to power and even on occasions of bereavement. In Emmeline Stuart-Wortley's comedy *Moonshine*, Monsieur de R. pays a rather elaborate compliment to Lady Clanarlington. He compliments her on her looks and after an enquiry about her daughters hints that Lady Clanarlington looks so young and beautiful that it seems impossible for her to have daughters. The receiver of the compliment responds gracefully with an ambiguous countercompliment. She praises the complimenter but also calls it flattery. In this case it is the term *complimentary* which retrieves the extract in a corpus search. The term is used discursively in that the speaker uses it to assign a discourse value to the preceding utterance, and it reveals that the speech acts of complimenting and flattering could be seen as being very close together.

A metacommunicative expression analysis reveals passages which may tell the researcher a great deal about the nature of a specific speech act at a given time. Who used this particular speech act, to whom and on what occasions? How was it evaluated by the speakers and the recipients? In addition the search will often reveal the wordings of the speech act itself in close vicinity to the search term as in extract (18) above.

6.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have looked at a range of speech acts and how they have changed over the centuries. The case studies reviewed above have also revealed rather different approaches in the attempt to trace speech acts in historical contexts. Illocutionary acts are defined in functional terms. A greeting, a promise or a directive are instances of their category, not because of their linguistic form, but because of their functional profile, because of their purpose in an interaction. Such functional profiles can be found in historical contexts by a careful and philologically trained reader,

but this method has its limitations if we want to gain an understanding of the larger picture of developments across centuries and across a broad range of different genres. In the case of the farewell greeting *goodbye*, the starting point of the investigation was the linguistic form. In spite of the changes in the spelling, the early form 'God be with you' and its spelling variants can easily be identified as the precursor of *goodbye*, and the analysis focuses on the functional change which turned a pious wish that often occurred at the end of an interaction into an entirely secular marker that finishes a conversation. The promises that occur as efficacy statements at the end of medical recipes and the literary promises in *The Franklin's Tale*, on the other hand, had to be located manually on the basis of their functional profile (but see Valkonen 2008 for an attempt to use corpus searches to identify promises in historical contexts). In the case of directives we have focused on work that tried to locate a large number of relevant speech acts via an inventory of relevant linguistic manifestations. For insults and compliments, finally, we reviewed approaches that used speech act verbs in order to locate discursive passages in these speech acts.

Note

1. Manes and Wolfson (1981: 120) have argued that American English compliments are very formulaic. They claim that three syntactic patterns account for 85 per cent of all the compliments in their data ('NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ', 'I (really) {like/love} NP' and 'PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP', where '(really)' is an optional intensifier and ADJ a positive adjective). However, it seems very likely that their data collection method (diary reports collected by their students) is at least partly responsible for the stereotypical nature of their compliments.

Exercises

1. Look at the following examples from the *Helsinki Corpus*. In which cases is the expression 'thank' used as a performative speech act verb? Do the thanks offered to God pose any problem in the analysis? In which cases is 'thank' a metacommunicative expression?

    1. And Iesus lift vp his eyes, and said, Father, I thanke thee, that thou hast heard me. (HC E2 1611, *The New Testament* (Authorised Version), lines 1821–3)
    2. But oh! she disarms me with that modesty and weeping, so tender and so moving, that I retire, and thank my stars she overcame me. (HC E3 1640–1710, Behn, Aphra: *Oroonoko*, lines 368–70)

    3. I do heartily thanke God for it, and will endevor myselfe to put it in practise continually. (HC E2 1570–1640, Brinsley, John: *Ludus Literarius*, lines 414–16)
    4. In charitee, ythanked be oure Lord! (HC M3 1350–1420, Chaucer, Geoffrey: *The Summoner's Tale*, line 83)
    5. and thereupon I drinke to you, and I thanke you for my good cheere with all my heart. (HC E2 1570–1640, Deloney, Thomas: *Jack of Newbury*, lines 147–9)
    6. My Lord of Cant: gave me greate thanks for the advertisement I sent his Grace in October (HC E3, 1640–1710, *Diary of John Evelyn* lines 469–70)

2. The following passages contain several strategies commonly used in performing apologies. Extract (1) is one of Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989: 290) illustrative examples. Extract (2) has been retrieved from the *British National Corpus*.

    1. I'm sorry, I missed the bus, and there was a terrible traffic jam. Let's make another appointment. I'll make sure that I'm here on time.
    2. I shall have to apologize to the council, cos I mean I did do the, the survey of the erm residents and of course I had flu last month, I do apologize, I didn't actually manage to get that done. But if you still want me to do it I will do it. (BNC H49 910–11)

    Which words belong to the IFID, which provide the explanation, express responsibility, and promise forbearance and repair?

3. The following extract is taken from the autobiography of John B. Gough (1817–86), an American temperance orator. In this extract he gives a humorous account of an overly polite landlord he met on one of his visits to London. Provide a speech act analysis of the utterances attributed to the landlord.

    > The proprietor of the lodging-house where we were entertained on our first visit to London, was so excessively polite, that it was embarrassing at times. He would insinuate himself into the room at breakfast time, and, bowing very gracefully, would say: "I beg your pardon—excuse me—I'm much obliged to you—thank you—but, hem!—what would you like for dinner?" These expressions he used on all occasions. The committee had presented him with tickets to the lecture at Drury Lane Theater, and on my return he met me at the door and said: "I beg your pardon, sir," etc., "but, hem! —I've been to your lecture, and—I beg your pardon—thank you—but, hem!—I've been very much disappointed, sir."
    > "Ah! Mr. ———, I'm sorry for that."
    > "Oh, my!—thank you—I beg your pardon—but, hem!—to look at you,

> nobody would think you could speak on a stage—hem!—I beg your pardon—thank you, sir—but, hem!—when Lord Shaftesbury introduced you—you know, sir—hem!—that he is a very noble-looking gentleman, so tall, you know, and so—hem—I beg your pardon, but really—thank you, sir—when you stood up, you looked so-hem!—so very—I beg your pardon, but really I pitied you—I did indeed, now—to look at you nobody would think you could speak on the stage—hem!—I beg your pardon." (John Bartholomew Gough: *Autobiography and Personal Recollections* by John B. Gough, San Francisco: Francis Dewing, 1870, p. 238–9, Google Books)

Further study

1. Use the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA) to search for the term 'compliment'. Look at the first ten or fifteen hits for the decades headed 1810, 1900 and 2000.
   a. Try to categorise the hits according to whether the term *compliment* is used performatively (to carry out a compliment), descriptively (to describe a compliment), or discursively (to negotiate the status of a preceding utterance).
   b. Are the compliments positive evaluations of the addressee or can you find any ceremonious compliments (compliments of diplomacy)?
   c. Can you find out what the addressee is complimented on (appearance, performance, possession, personality)?
   d. Can you find a development from 1810 to the most recent compliments?

Further reading

The classic text in speech act theory is still Austin's (1962) posthumously published book of his lecture series in which he develops some of the foundations of speech act theory. Searle's (1969) work is the second foundation stone of speech act theory. Soon after the work of these language philosophers, linguistic work on speech acts began to proliferate. In the text above some pioneering research efforts were highlighted that introduced empirical methods into the study of speech acts: Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Trosborg (1995) and Deutschmann (2003). None of these titles, however, considers speech acts from a historical perspective. In fact, historical speech act analyses are still somewhat scarce, but Arnovick (1999) is an early example. She studied the illocutionary histories of a range of speech acts in English, not only the

history of *goodbye* referred to above but also the illocutionary histories of the agonistic insult, promises, curses and the sneeze blessing. In 2008 a volume of articles was published on speech acts in the history of the English language (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2008).

The most relevant references for the speech acts of the case studies above have already been mentioned in the text. For promises, we have relied mainly on Alonso-Almeida and Cabrera-Abreu (2002) and Pakkala-Weckström (2005: Chapter 7). Kohnen has studied directives from a diachronic perspective in many of his publications. The best overview of the problems of locating directives in historical corpora is provided by Kohnen (2008b). Compliments have been investigated from a historical perspective by Taavitsainen and Jucker (2008), Jucker and Taavitsainen (forthcoming), and insults by Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000) and Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007).

7 'For your curteisie': Forms of politeness and impoliteness

7.1 Introduction

In Present-day English the following utterances are typical ways of asking somebody to do something.

1. Er, could you tell me where you were born? (BNC FXV 2)
2. Would you mind shutting up for a minute? (BNC HV1 389)
3. I wonder if you could provide me with the following information? (BNC AP1 697)

The speakers of these utterances use the format of a direct or indirect question to inquire about the addressee's ability or willingness to perform a certain action, but in the context these utterances are not understood as genuine inquiries. It is clear that these are requests for the addressee to comply and to answer a particular question in (1), to be quiet in (2) and to provide some relevant information in (3). It appears to be more polite to give the addressee an option, even if the option is only pretence. The speaker projects the illusion of not imposing on the addressee. As a result, such forms may also appear to be insincere or even hypocritical, but they are certainly widely used in Present-day English. However, they are a fairly recent phenomenon. Earlier stages of the English language relied much less or not at all on such formulations for making requests.

Does that mean that during these earlier stages speakers of English were less polite? The answer to such a question can only be, no, they were not less polite but they had different ways of interacting with each other in a socially acceptable manner. For the historical pragmaticists it is interesting to trace the changing manifestations of politeness. How did people interact courteously? How did they make polite requests and how did they compliment each other? It is equally interesting – or perhaps even more fascinating – to see how people used language to

be impolite at different points in the history of English. How did they insult and offend each other? How did they criticise and hurt other people using linguistic means?

In all these questions, it is clear that politeness and impoliteness describe a secondary language function. They are superimposed on primary functions, such as conveying information, asking a question, getting another person to do something, and so on. As such, elements of politeness and impoliteness are more elusive and, therefore, more difficult to pin down. In the following sections, we want to give a brief overview of the research that has so far been carried out in the development of politeness and impoliteness in the history of the English language. This picture is still patchy with many gaps, especially in the case of impoliteness, but in recent years some notable insights have emerged. However, in order to tackle these questions, it is necessary to first establish more clearly what the term 'politeness' and its opposite 'impoliteness' refer to.

7.2 Approaches to the study of politeness and impoliteness

The words 'politeness' and 'impoliteness' are both part of our everyday language but like many words they have no clear-cut delimitation as to what exactly they refer to. What appears to be polite for one speaker may appear as insincere and therefore not particularly polite or even downright rude to another. At the same time, these words are also used as technical terms, and this often leads to confusion. The technical terms are sometimes taken to be as fuzzy as the everyday notions. For this reason, it has become customary to refer to the everyday notion of politeness as first-order politeness or politeness$_1$ and to the technical term as second-order politeness or politeness$_2$.

Politeness$_1$ and impoliteness$_1$ are susceptible to change in the course of time. What people believed to be polite or impolite a few centuries ago may be evaluated differently today as we will see later in this chapter. Nevertheless, politeness$_1$ offers unique opportunities for diachronic research. It is extremely revealing to investigate not just the words 'politeness' and 'polite' and their antonyms 'impoliteness' and 'impolite' but a whole range of terms in the semantic field of courteous and discourteous interaction. This will tell us a great deal about how people at a particular time evaluated particular forms of social interaction.

Politeness$_2$ and impoliteness$_2$, on the other hand, are analytical tools. They are as precise and stable as we manage to make them by formulating precise definitions. Once we have established one or several

definitions of politeness$_2$ or impoliteness$_2$, it is an empirical question to find out whether the forms of behaviour described in the definitions exist in a particular society at a given time or not.

The best-known classification of different types of politeness (politeness$_2$) was introduced more than 30 years ago by Brown and Levinson (first edition 1978, second edition 1987). They distinguished between positive politeness and negative politeness, which were directly related to their notion of positive and negative face. Face as a technical term was based on the everyday notion of face in such phrases as 'save someone's face', 'lose face' or 'maintain face'. Positive face consists of a person's wish to be appreciated by others. We generally prefer to get praise for what we do and for who we are, rather than criticism. Negative face consists of a person's wish to be unimpeded in their actions. We generally prefer not to be bossed around – we would rather do things our own way.

Positive politeness and negative politeness are forms of (linguistic) behaviour that pay respect to the addressee's positive or negative face wants, in particular in situations where one or the other of these are in some way threatened. If parents ask their child to eat up his or her dinner or if teachers ask students to move chairs and tables, the negative face of the addressee is threatened because the request interferes with the addressee's wish to be free from imposition. In (4) the speaker chooses a token of positive politeness, the term of endearment *honey*, to mitigate the face threat and in (5) the speaker uses negative politeness (interrogative form, the modal *would* and *please*).

4. You will eat your coleslaw honey won't you? (BNC KCH 6235)
5. Would you please bring your chairs and that table over here? (BNC FMC 8)

It is important to stress that such forms are culture specific. Features of positive and negative politeness may be abundant in Present-day English, but – as we will show – they are relatively recent in the history of the English language.

Negative politeness can take two different forms. The form illustrated in (5) above is called 'non-imposition politeness' and it subsumes all the linguistic elements that give the addressee an option, or at least pretend to give the addressee an option. These elements are directly addressed to the addressee's wish not to be imposed upon. A second type of politeness that Brown and Levinson (1987) also subsumed under negative politeness is called 'deference politeness' and includes elements that express the speaker's humble submission and respect

towards the addressee. Prototypical examples are titles and honorifics, such as *Professor* or *Mr President.*

From these examples, we can see that Brown and Levinson's concept of positive and negative politeness covers only part of what we might wish to call polite behaviour. It is basically designed to account for situations in which the speaker's or the addressee's face is in some way threatened. Thus, it accounts for what we might want to call strategic politeness; that is to say, politeness that is used to soothe potentially tricky situations in interactions, to minimise the severity of impositions, or to minimise the risk of losing the addressee's appreciation.

Thus we need a term to describe behaviour that is polite without being strategic in the above sense. Two useful terms that have been suggested are 'discernment politeness' or 'politic behaviour'. This describes a type of behaviour that comes across as polite because it is appropriate in a given social and situational context. It is a base line which contrasts, on the one hand, with impolite behaviour and, on the other, with strategically polite behaviour.

Terms of address are an obvious example. Whether a person is addressed as *Mary*, *sweetheart* or *Dr Smith* depends largely on the speaker and their relationship with this particular individual. It is, of course, easy to imagine situations in which these choices are also used strategically. Parents have often been noted to change their terms of address to their children in the process of telling them off for some misdemeanour; for example, by switching from a term of endearment to the full first name and perhaps even to full first and last name. But in general, terms of address are chosen on the basis of the social and situational context without strategic implications. Many languages have an elaborate system of choices, where speakers must use the appropriate verb endings, for instance, or use particular lexical items depending on the social status of the interlocutor.

7.3 Old English: Mutual obligation, kinship loyalty, *caritas* and *humilitas*

Old English does not use such politeness-related terms as *courtesy*, *civility* or *politeness* itself. These only became part of the English vocabulary as a result of French influence in the Middle English period. But under the heading of 'courtesy' *The Historical Thesaurus of English* gives a number of Old English words that give a first impression of politeness or courtesy in Anglo-Saxon England. These include *manþwærnes* 'gentleness, courtesy, weakness', *wynsumnes* 'loveliness, pleasantness, rejoicing' or *swetnes* 'pleasantness; kindliness, goodness', *þeawfæstnes* 'adherence

to the rules of right conduct or method, discipline, obedience to rule' and *þeawfæst* 'decorous, moral, virtuous, honourable, of good manners, of well-ordered life; gentle'. They all refer to gentle, kind and obedient behaviour that does not seem to be concerned with face-threat mitigation or face enhancement but rather with face maintenance and with behaviour that conforms to social and contextual expectations; that is, with discernment politeness. It is noteworthy that in the Old English sections of the *Helsinki Corpus*, these words and their various case forms are only used in religious contexts.

Anglo-Saxon England was a warlike and violent society that was organised on strictly hierarchical principles within tribal networks. It was characterised by frequent feuds between these tribal networks. As a result, individuals had their fixed places in society. In fact this place in society could even be given a monetary value, the so-called *wergild*, i.e. the money that had to be paid as ransom if somebody was captured by another tribe or as settlement in the case of manslaughter. In this sense, it was a 'brutally commercial society' (Campbell 1991: 59). In such a context, the personal wishes of a warrior, such as his wish to be appreciated and liked by others, and his wish to remain unimpeded and free from imposition, were not of primary importance. What counted was his kin loyalty within his own tribe and his obedience to his sovereign.

> In the tribal world of Germanic warriors, where mutual obligation and kin loyalty were prevalent, it was certainly most important to maintain friendly relationships within one's tribal network and to emphasise affectionate family relationships, but also to respect the fixed hierarchical distinctions as manifested in the difference between lord and man. (Kohnen 2008c: 154)

Superimposed on these values of the Germanic warriors, Kohnen discerns the distinct values of Christianity.

> Within a Christian setting, the friendly or even affectionate relationship to one's fellow Christians is part of the basic Christian ideals of *humilitas* and *caritas*, which forbid you to place yourself on a higher level than your fellow Christian and order you to care for your neighbour. Complying with these guidelines can hardly be called face work. (Kohnen 2008c: 155)

This particular Anglo-Saxon blend of Germanic and Christian values can also be discerned in the use of Old English terms of address, in particular *leof* 'dear one', *broþor* 'brother' and *hlaford* 'lord' (see Kohnen 2008c). Such terms reflect the fixed positions of interlocutors in Anglo-Saxon society and do not enhance the addressee's positive face

(endearment) or negative face (deference). Kohnen (2008c: 155), with reference to Watts (2003), argues that this 'could not be called politeness in the sense of face work but only in the sense of discernment or politic behaviour'.

Requests and other directives constitute, in Present-day terms, an imposition on the addressee who is asked to do something that he or she might not have done anyway. In Old English, typical constructions to perform requests were directive performatives, such as 'I ask you to . . .'; constructions involving a second-person pronoun plus *scealt*/*sculon* 'you shall'; constructions with *uton* 'let's' plus infinitive; and impersonal constructions with (*neod*)*þearf* 'it is necessary for x' (Kohnen 2008a). The authoritarian *þu scealt* construction was particularly common in secular or Germanic contexts. It does not show any concern for considerations of face (Kohnen 2008a: 40). For speakers in an authoritative position, the mitigation of face impositions does not seem to have been important. The *uton* and the (*neod*)*þearf* constructions, on the other hand, were more common in religious contexts. In this sphere, the speaker includes himself or herself in the required action or formulates it in an impersonal way.

> In the monastic world of humility and obedience there are (or there should be) only limited face wants since Christians are not allowed to assume a rank above their fellow Christians, and everybody is bound to follow the requirements of a Christian life. (Kohnen 2008a: 40)

The Old English constructions *ic wille* 'I want to' and *ic wolde* 'I would like to' appear to be early examples of expressing requests with negative politeness as personal wishes rather than as directives. However, Kohnen (2011) convincingly shows that a careful assessment of the extant examples reveals a rather more complex picture. Most of the instances of *ic wolde* are based on translations from Latin texts and therefore reflect Latin usages rather than genuinely Old English patterns of politeness. Constructions with *wille*, on the other hand, appeared mostly in vernacular genres (laws and charters) and reflect the authority of a king or lord, who 'simply specified his wishes and that was that. In all likelihood, no association with "impoliteness" or "inappropriateness" applied' (Kohnen 2011: 251).

The evidence that we have does not allow any far-reaching conclusions about politeness in the Anglo-Saxon period, but it provides some interesting hints about a particular type of politeness; that is, discernment politeness. In the areas of nominal terms of address and directives, there is no evidence of face-threat mitigation or face-enhancing politeness.

7.4 Middle English: *Curteisie*

In 1066, William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, defeated the British at the Battle of Hastings and became King of England, and within a generation the entire nobility including all the higher levels in the Church hierarchy was replaced by Normans. The effects on the English language are well known. In certain contexts, English was completely replaced by French; for example, as the language of the court, for official business and as a legal language. In the context of the church, Latin kept its strong position as a language of religion and learning. English underwent far-reaching changes over the next few centuries. In particular the vocabulary of English was massively affected by contact with French. The changes did not happen overnight but took several decades to have a real impact, and this is why the beginning of the Middle English period is usually set at around 1150, several generations after William the Conqueror. Middle English has always been seen as a kind of bridge between Old English and Early Modern English because it links Old English and Early Modern English on all levels, not just the level of vocabulary, but also on the level of phonology, morphology and syntax.

However, the linking function of Middle English on the level of pragmatics has so far not received the same degree of scholarly attention as the other levels. The evidence of the *Historical Thesaurus* affords a first overview. Under the headings of 'courtesy' and 'courteous' it lists a large range of terms with the dates of their first attestation in the English language. It turns out that it was in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries that we find the earliest appearance of some lexical items in the semantic field of courteous behaviour and courtesy. In fact, a search for these words with all their spelling variants in the *Helsinki Corpus* reveals that these terms make their first appearance in the second subperiod of Middle English that is dated from 1150 to 1250. The words *courtesy* and *courteous* themselves are first attested in texts from the thirteenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definitions for the words *courtesy* and *courteous*:

> Courteous behaviour; courtly elegance and politeness of manners; graceful politeness or considerateness in intercourse with others. (OED, courtesy, *n.* 1.a.)
>
> Having such manners as befit the court of a prince; having the bearing of a courtly gentleman in intercourse with others; graciously polite and respectful of the position and feelings of others; kind and complaisant in conduct to others. (OED, courteous, *adj.* 1.a.)

The connection with behaviour that was expected at court is very obvious. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that the word is borrowed from Old French. In the earliest quotations, this quality is ascribed to knights and their character. It is only in later quotations that the quality is also used to describe behaviour and even later still to describe ways of speaking.

Chaucer uses the term frequently to describe the characters in his *Canterbury Tales*. For the Knight, as a representative of the aristocracy, the designation seems particularly appropriate. In the General Prologue the narrator describes him in the following way:

> 6. A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
> That fro the tyme that he first bigan
> To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
> Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie. (GP I 43–6)[1]
>
> 'There was a Knight, a worthy man who loved chivalry, truth and honour, freedom and courtesy ever since he first began to ride out.'

Courtesy is here mentioned in a list of high courtly qualities that befit a member of the aristocracy. His son, the Squire, is also described with this term. However, Chaucer also uses it regularly for characters that belong to the clergy, and in these cases the term is often used with a touch of irony. The Prioress, for instance, is described in all the splendour of a courtly lady. She is carefully dressed, she has good table manners, she feels so compassionate about her lap dogs that she feeds them with the finest bread only and her greatest pleasure is in good manners ('In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest', GP I 132). The narrator thus creates a picture of subtle irony in which these qualities contrast with what would be more appropriate praise for a nun; that is, her religious devotion or her compassion for her fellow human beings.

In the case of characters from lower classes, the term is again used in a slightly different way. It is often used in the speech of such characters when they address other characters using the phrase 'of (for) (your) curteisye', which Benson (1987: 1234) glosses as 'if you please'. As such, it could be taken as a mere formula without much meaning, but it appears that it is typically used in situations when the decorum of the situation is somehow threatened. In *The Miller's Tale*, for instance, Alison cries out 'Do wey youre handes, for youre curteisye!' (MilT I 3287) in her (very brief) mock resistance to the indecent advances of her lodger, Nicholas. And in the frame narrative the Summoner uses the following words to protest against what he sees as a slanderous tale told by the Friar:

7. 'Lordynges,' quod he, 'but o thyng I desire;
I yow biseke that, of youre curteisye,
Syn ye han herd this false Frere lye,
As suffreth me I may my tale telle.' (SumP III 1668–71)
'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I desire only one thing: I beseech you, for your courtesy and since you have heard this false Friar tell lies, allow me to tell my tale.'

Thus both Alison and the Summoner use the phrase 'for your curteisye' in a situation where they perceive that the usual decorum of decent behaviour is seriously challenged in order to remind their addressees of the proper behaviour. The term 'curteisye', therefore, is used by Chaucer to describe a high moral quality that aristocratic characters possess or strive to possess. It is a quality that Chaucer also ascribes to some members of the clergy, usually with a clear touch of irony. It is in addition a quality that lower ranking individuals try to invoke in cases where there is an immediate danger that the decorum of appropriate behaviour is in danger or has already been violated.

It is also in the Middle English period that the use of the personal pronouns changed. Starting in the thirteenth century under the influence of French, English writers started in certain situations to use the second-person plural pronoun *ye* rather than the second person singular pronoun *thou* to address a single addressee. It was used, for instance, to address higher-ranking individuals in order to indicate a higher level of respect. This development must be seen in connection with the more general increase in awareness of social distinctions, and of the social decorum of appropriate behaviour towards people of different social classes, and thus it is part of the development of politeness in English. Such developments were described in more detail in Chapter 5.

7.5 Early Modern English: Positive and negative politeness

Politeness in the Early Modern English period has been analysed mainly from two perspectives. The earliest approaches were those by Brown and Gilman (1989) and Kopytko (1995). They used Brown and Levinson's model of positive and negative politeness and tried to apply it to some of Shakespeare's plays. Ulrich Busse (2002) and Beatrix Busse (2006) also used Shakespeare's work for their investigations, but they looked at terms of address. This work has already been referred to in Chapter 5 on terms of address. Here we will focus on the politeness models proposed by Brown and Gilman and by Kopytko and the more recent impoliteness model proposed by Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011).

In their analysis of four plays by Shakespeare (the tragedies *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*), Brown and Gilman (1989) proposed a taxonomy of positive and negative politeness strategies derived from the taxonomy initially outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987). Positive politeness strategies are those that enhance the positive face of the addressee, that is to say they make the addressee feel appreciated. Negative politeness strategies enhance the addressee's negative face, either by giving deference to the addressee or by suggesting that a face threat is non-imposing. Brown and Gilman maintain that these strategies cannot really be quantified in their data. They just give relevant examples of all the strategies in a qualitative analysis.

Kopytko (1995) extends Brown and Gilman's analysis. He adds four comedies (*The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*) to the corpus used by Brown and Gilman and proposes a slightly modified taxonomy of sixteen different positive and ten negative politeness strategies. He also provides frequency figures for all the strategies in all eight plays of the corpus. In the following we illustrate these strategies with examples from *Romeo and Juliet*. The first example illustrates positive politeness strategies:

8. Benvolio: I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire:
The day is hot, the Capels are abroad,
And if we meet we shall not scape a brawl,
For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring. (R&J 3. 1. 1–4)[2]

In this example Benvolio urges Mercutio to avoid an encounter with members of the Capulet family and he emphasises his request with several positive politeness strategies. He prefaces Mercutio's name with the epithet *good*, which counts as an instance of the positive politeness strategy 'notice admirable qualities, possessions, etc.' The formulation 'let's retire' can be seen as the strategy 'include both S and H in the activity'. The next three lines outline the reasons for his request and thus are an example of the strategy 'give reasons' (Kopytko 1995: 517–24).

9. Nurse: Gentlemen, can any of you tell me where I may find the young Romeo? (R&J 2. 4. 97–8)

In example (9) the Nurse approaches Romeo, whom she does not recognise, and two of his friends, Benvolio and Mercutio. She wants to know where she can find Romeo in order to deliver a message from her mistress, Juliet. In her request, two negative politeness strategies can be discerned. The address term 'Gentlemen' is an instance of the negative

politeness strategy 'give deference'. The formulation 'can you tell me' can be seen as an instance of the negative politeness strategy 'be conventionally indirect', in the same way that 'can you pass the salt' is conventionally indirect. However, in the case of the salt, the speaker knows that the addressee is able to pass the salt. The interrogative format, therefore, is merely a pretence of giving the addressee the option of non-compliance. The utterance is seen as non-impositive and, therefore, as strategically preserving the addressee's negative face. The Nurse's question, however, may well be a real question. The gentlemen whom she accosts may not be able to give her the desired information. It is interesting that Romeo in his jocular response (extract 10) first answers the surface question about his ability to give her the information and only subsequently answers her implied request by revealing his identity:

10. Romeo: I can tell you, but young Romeo will be older when you have found him than he was when you sought him: I am the youngest of that name, for fault of a worse. (R&J 2. 4. 99–101)

Brown and Levinson listed the strategy 'Be conventionally indirect' as their first and most prominent strategy – but without any explicit claims that it is the most frequent one. In Shakespeare's plays, however, it is attested only very rarely. This stands in contrast to the conventionally indirect ways of issuing a request in Present-day English with formulations involving 'could you' or 'would it be possible' mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. In Shakespeare's plays, requests are very often issued as straight imperatives. The face threat involved in this action is reduced by other strategies and very often by positive politeness strategies.

On the basis of his frequency analysis of positive and negative politeness strategies, Kopytko (1995: 530–1) finds that the positive strategies clearly outnumber the negative strategies both in Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies and he concludes:

> I tentatively assume that the high rate of occurrence of positive politeness strategies in Shakespeare's plays characterises the interactional style or 'ethos' of Elizabethan society. It should be stressed, however, that this assumption is valid for in-group politeness only. There is no reason to believe that Shakespeare created an 'artificial' society in his plays rather than reflected the one he belonged to. This is surprising, especially in view of popular claims about the interactional styles of modern British society which is associated instead with high *social distance* (D), i.e. negative politeness culture. (Kopytko 1995: 531–2)

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the characters are not always polite to each other: quite the contrary. One of the driving forces of the play is the enmity

between the two houses of Montague (Romeo's family) and Capulet (Juliet's family). Culpeper (1996) has provided an early analytical framework to capture impoliteness strategies, a framework very closely modelled on Brown and Levinson's work. Impoliteness strategies are basically seen as mirror images of politeness strategies. Where politeness strategies are seen to enhance the addressee's face in order to minimise the risk of face loss, impoliteness strategies are used to intentionally attack the addressee's face.

In the crucial encounter between Tybalt and Romeo and their respective friends in the third act, the interaction is particularly hostile, except that Romeo, who is already secretly married to Tybalt's cousin, Juliet, wants to avoid any open confrontation.

11. Tybalt: Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford
No better term than this: thou art a villain.
Romeo: Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee
Doth much to excuse the appertaining rage
To such a greeting. Villain am I none;
Therefore farewell, I see thou knowest me not.
Tybalt: Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries
That thou hast done me, therefore turn and draw.
Romeo: I do protest I never injuried thee,
But love thee better than thou canst devise,
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love;
And so, good Capulet, which name I tender
As dearly as mine own, be satisfied.
Mercutio: O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!
'Alla stoccata' carries it away [*Draws.*]
Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk? (R&J 3. 1. 53–68)

This passage starts with some blatant impoliteness by Tybalt. He greets Romeo with the words 'thou art a villain'. The term *villain* is 'a very serious insult demanding reprisal, carrying not only the sense of "depraved scoundrel" but undertones of "low-born fellow" (= villein)' (Evans 2003: 137). This falls under Culpeper's (1996: 358) positive impoliteness strategy 'call the other names'. In addition, Tybalt uses the personal pronoun *thou*, which can be used either to signal intimacy or to insult (see Chapter 5). Tybalt uses it to insult (strategy: 'use inappropriate identity markers'). Romeo is at pains to defuse the situation and therefore ignores the insult, but takes the greeting as a mere description which does not apply to him. He is not a villain. The greeting, therefore, reveals that Tybalt does not know him. As a result, Tybalt steps up his insult. Whereas in the first utterance he called him 'Romeo' and now

calls him 'boy', which is a term of contempt, appropriate for a servant but not for a member of a noble household. He sticks to the insulting pronoun *thou* and challenges Romeo to a duel, but Romeo still desists and tells Tybalt that he loves him even if he cannot tell him the reason for that love (i.e. his marriage to Juliet). Romeo also uses the pronoun *thou* for Tybalt, but in this case we may take it as a pronoun of intimacy for Tybalt, who – through Romeo's marriage with Juliet – is now his kinsman. Mercutio is outraged by what he sees as Romeo's submission to Tybalt's insults. He calls Tybalt 'Alla stoccata', which is an Italian fencing term that literally means 'at the thrust'. Mercutio despises this technique and therefore uses the term as an insult ('call the other names') for Tybalt (Evans 2003: 138). He also uses the term 'rat-catcher' for him, a metaphor that he continues later in this hostile conversation when he calls him 'Good King of Cats'. It is noteworthy that Mercutio in spite of his insults still uses the more polite (and more appropriate) personal pronoun *you* for Tybalt.

7.6 Present-day English

We have started this chapter with the observation that in Present-day English speakers often use indirect and non-imposing formulations for making requests. In fact, these formulations seem to be so prototypical that commentators often focus more or less exclusively on them when they describe aspects of politeness. The sociologist Kate Fox (2004: 97), for instance, claims that

> English rules of politeness are undeniably rather complex, and, in their tortuous attempts to deny or disguise the realities of status differences, clearly hypocritical. But then, surely all politeness is a form of hypocrisy.

However, our survey of a few aspects of politeness in the history of English reveals that rules of politeness have always been complex. Language is multi-functional and it is used to communicate on several levels. Speakers do not only exchange information, they also signal their awareness of the complex social relationships they have with their addressees and their awareness of the face-wants of all the participants in a communicative situation. The way in which this awareness manifests itself in language is both language specific and time specific. Each speech community develops its own forms of communicating in accordance with the social complexities of its society.

In Present-day English, there is a considerable amount of evidence that indirect and non-imposing forms of communication are often appropriate. Wierzbicka (2006: 45–8) lists a range of non-imposition

politeness forms and claims that these forms are characteristic for Present-day English. Typical forms are 'whimperatives' such as *could you (do x)*, *will you (do x)*, *would you* (do x) or suggestory formulae such as *you might like to*, *you might consider*, *I would suggest*, *perhaps you could*, *I wonder if you could*. Examples (12) to (15) taken from the *British National Corpus* are relevant examples.

12. Perhaps you might like to investigate epilepsy in dogs and do an article on the subject. (BNC C8U 341)
13. I would suggest that you refer to the December 1990 edition of RUNNING Magazine in which the causes of groin pain are discussed. (BNC AR7 692)
14. Perhaps you could open the door, could you? (BNC APM 385)
15. I know you're very busy [. . .] but I wonder if you could help me? (BNC HYA 1987)

According to Wierzbicka these forms are typical for speakers of English. She stresses the fact that such strategies are not universal but very culture specific:

> Clearly, speakers of English are quite happy to identify some of their utterances as (mere) *suggestions* but are reluctant to identify any as attempts to *put pressure* on the addressee. For speakers of many other languages, for example, Russian or Italian, on the other hand, the opposite is true. (Wierzbicka 2006: 39)

Leech et al. (2009: 88–9) add a further piece of evidence in the form of a dramatic decline of the use of *must* in explicit requests in favour of *should* and *need to* in the second half of the twentieth century.

However, our knowledge of politeness phenomena in the history of English is still very limited. The research has only just begun and what we have are no more than snippets of relevant insights. They cannot even begin to compare with the level of knowledge that decades of research have revealed on the development of the phonology, morphology and syntax of the English language.

There are three limitations that weigh particularly heavily on our current knowledge of politeness in the history of English. They are theoretical, methodological and practical. On the theoretical level, politeness research has made some significant advances in recent years. Researchers have come to develop increasingly sophisticated analytical tools. They distinguish different types of politeness and impoliteness. They have increasingly moved away from the Brown and Levinson type of analysis, which concentrates on individual utterances and their impact on the addressee, in favour of models that adopt a more

comprehensive point of view by analysing the way in which conversationalists discursively negotiate politeness and impoliteness in their interactions. However, such models have not yet been applied to historical data.

On the methodological level, historical politeness research suffers perhaps even more from the limitations of historical pragmatic research than other areas. As a secondary language function, features of politeness and impoliteness often cannot be searched for directly and more sophisticated search techniques have to be developed; for example, through lexical analysis.

Finally, the practical level refers to the fact that research in the history of politeness in English has only just started, and therefore a lot of work still needs to be done. The task of getting a comprehensive overview is daunting both because of the sheer amount of data that has survived from the Old English period to the present day and also because of the huge gaps in the material that has survived. Our necessary reliance on written material means that for the large illiterate sections of earlier societies we do not have any direct evidence at all. Finally, we cannot expect a linear and direct development from the earliest periods to the present day. The vast linguistic diversity of dialectal differences and differences of genres and text types means that even in the foreseeable future we are unlikely to be able to provide more than snapshots of selected periods and selected contexts.

Notes

1. Extracts from Chaucer are quoted from *The Riverside Chaucer*, Benson (1987). Benson (1987: 24) glosses *curteisie* here as 'refinement of manners'.
2. Quotations of Shakespeare's work follow the *New Cambridge Shakespeare* edition (Evans 2003).

Exercises

1. The following extract is part of a standard message that is used to invite expert scholars to read and assess an article that has been submitted for possible publication to an international journal. Such a request poses a considerable imposition on that scholar's time and therefore constitutes a face threat to the negative face of the scholar, i.e. his or her wish to remain free from imposition. What kinds of elements of positive and negative politeness has the author put into this standard message to mitigate this face threat?

> As co-editor of the *Journal XY* I would like to ask you whether you could help us with a review. We have received a paper entitled xxxxxxx, for possible publication in our journal, and I wondered whether you would be willing to give us your expert opinion on its suitability and publishability. I would need to know whether the ms is in your opinion publishable as is, whether it requires revisions or whether it is not publishable or perhaps better suited for another journal. If you think that revisions are necessary it would be helpful to have specific suggestions. I would need your comments within about three weeks.

2. The following is a short extract from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in which the characters talk explicitly about 'courtesy'. Mercutio and Benvolio have been waiting for Romeo, who had not returned home after falling in love with Juliet at the ball given by her father. Identify forms of politeness that you may find in this passage and discuss the characters' use of the term 'courtesy'.

> Mercutio: (…) Signior Romeo, 'bon jour'! there's a French salutation to your French slop. You gave us the counterfeit fairly last night.
> Romeo: Good morrow to you both. What counterfeit did I give you?
> Mercutio: The slip, sir, the slip, can you not conceive?
> Romeo: Pardon, good Mercutio, my business was great, and in such a case as mine a man may strain courtesy.
> Mercutio: That's as much as to say, such a case as yours constrains a man to bow in the hams.
> Romeo: Meaning to cur'sy.
> Mercutio: Thou hast most kindly hit it.
> Romeo: A most courteous exposition.
> Mercutio: Nay, I am the very pink of courtesy.
> Romeo: Pink for flower.
> Mercutio: Right.
> Romeo: Why then is my pump well flowered. (R&J 2. 4. 38–52)

Notes: *French slop*: Romeo is still in his masking costume of the previous evening. *Gave us the counterfeit*: deceived us. *Slip*: counterfeit coin. *Conceive*: understand (the pun). *Strain courtesy*: transgress good manners, but interpreted by Mercutio as *cur'sy*, i.e. make a bow because of the effects of a venereal disease. *Very pink*: flower, i.e. acme. *Pump*: light shoe.

3. Kate Fox (2004: 97) described politeness in English as follows:

> Our politenesses are all sham, pretence, dissimulation – an artificial veneer of harmony and parity masking quite different social realities.

With this she refers in particular to the indirect ways of making requests. Applying a historical perspective on politeness, do you agree or disagree with Kate Fox's assessment?

Further study

1. Use the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (www.oed.com) to find all the attested words in the semantic field of 'courtesy' and 'courteous' and note the first attested date of each of them. On the basis of this list, find out in which century the politeness vocabulary of the English language grew most.

Further reading

There is a wide and growing research interest in linguistic politeness and impoliteness with annual conferences and even a journal (*Journal of Politeness Research*). There are a number of textbooks that give a good introduction to politeness or impoliteness research. The classic in the field is still Brown and Levinson (1987, first published in 1978). In spite of continuing criticism, this book is still regularly referred to in the relevant literature. Eelen (2001) and Watts (2003) endeavour to present alternative frameworks. Bousfield (2008) and Culpeper (2011) are book-length studies of impoliteness research. However, there is still relatively little research on politeness and impoliteness in the history of English, or indeed of other languages, especially in the sense of attempts to cover the entire history and more than just one specific form of politeness. The only exceptions seem to be the two articles to which this chapter is most heavily indebted (Jucker 2008b and in particular Jucker 2012b). A classic study in the field is Brown and Gilman (1989), who applied Brown and Levinson's (1987) approach to four plays by Shakespeare. Kopytko (1995) extended this work in a more comprehensive and more systematic way. More specialised studies deal with speech acts that are particularly relevant for considerations of politeness; for example, directives (see Kohnen 2008a) or compliments (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008) or expressives in general (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010). Watts (1999) focuses on the ideology of politeness in eighteenth-century Britain and thus adopts a broader view of politeness, but only for a relatively narrow time period. Several scholars deal with issues of politeness in the context of terms of address; references to this work can be found in Chapter 5.