

SLIN15 report: Dialogic Forms in One Thousand Years of English Texts: from Old English to Late Modern English - 26th-28th May

By Laura Pinnavaia

Our 15th SLIN conference could not have had a more magnificent setting: the city of Cagliari. Set in the heart of the city next to the old-town walls and the castle of San Michele, the University of Cagliari and in particular the Department of Linguistics and Stylistics opened its doors to us on the glorious spring morning of 26th May. To meet up with colleagues from all over Italy and abroad is always a moving moment and it was this year too. Thanks to their warm welcome, the conference organizers – Luisanna Fodde and Gabriella Mazzon – made us feel at home. Kindly ushered into the spacious conference room, proceedings commenced with the generous and hospitable words of Ignazio Putzu (prof. of General Linguistics) and Giuseppe Marci (Dean of the Faculty of Languages).

The very first paper of the conference was the plenary delivered by Irma Taavitsainen. It regarded the development of textbook dialogues across three centuries of English literature, from 1500 to 1800. Here the important and essential theoretical assumptions acting as a backdrop to the papers that were to ensue were finely put forward. Following a short coffee break, two papers focusing on didactic dialogues in the 17th century were given. The first, delivered by myself, regarded the not very well-known teacher and scholar Pietro Paravicino and his use of proverbs in the teaching of Italian to English learners, analysed in a conversation manual dated 1660. The second paper, delivered by Elisabetta Cecconi, centred on the way participants in didactic dialogues relate to one another. This was carried out upon dialogues of the mimetic kind, retrieved from *A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560-1760*, and examined – among other procedures – by means of a statistical analysis of the strategies of politeness and impoliteness utilized.

It was then lunchtime and, being a beautiful sunny day, we were encouraged by the conference organizers to grab a sandwich and take a stroll around the old town. This advice was duly taken up and a group of us took a long walk uphill to the Bastion of Saint Remy in the quarter of Castello. From this *belvedere* we had a marvellous view of the old quarters of the Navy and Villanova, as well as a glimpse of the Campidano plain, Molentargius tin, and in the distance the peaks of the Seven Brothers.

The two afternoon sessions, before and after the coffee break, saw papers devoted to scientific dialogues. The first session opened with Maurizio Gotti's presentation of the expository and argumentative strategies used by Robert Boyle in his 1661 masterpiece *The Sceptical Chemist*. In this presentation, Gotti carefully demonstrated the versatility of Boyle's dialogic style in which normal conversational features are combined with argumentative traits. The need to spread scientific ideas in the 17th century pushed other scientists to simplify their style too. In their presentation entitled "Scientific Discourse in Early Modern English: Reasoning, Rhetoric and the Mimesis of Dialogue", Elisabetta Lonati and Kim Grego unveiled some of the linguistic and rhetorical reforms that writers of scientific discourse enacted to make scientific communication more effective. Their analysis featured a comparison of two English translations of Galileo Galilei's *Mathematical Discourses*, one by Thomas Salusbury in 1665 and the other by Thomas Weston in 1730. They demonstrated how, compared to the 17th century, by the 18th century scientific discourse had started to become somewhat simpler. That eighteenth-century scientists were more inclined to

convey their ideas in as simple a manner as possible was also maintained by Alessandra Vicentini's study of Francesco Algarotti's *Neutonismo per le Dame*. In order to impart in a transparent manner some of Newton's tenets on light and colours, Algarotti devises a dialogue between chevalier and a lady, in which such tenets are presented. It is the English translation of this work that Alessandra Vicentini examined, pinpointing the linguistic and discursive strategies used to popularize science to laymen.

In the last session two more papers focused on scientific discourse. The first of the two was delivered by Elena Olivari and Paola Tornaghi and entitled "Dialogue and scientific writings in the 16th century: Cyprian Lucar's translation of Niccolò Tartaglia". As the title indicates, this paper was centered on the English translation of Niccolò Tartaglia's nine-book *Quesiti e Inventionii Diverse*. It is on the three books translated into English by Lucar that Olivari and Tornaghi carried out their close linguistic analysis on the use of modals conveying intentionality. Highly pragmatic was also the second paper on Molyneux's problem by Geoffrey Gray. In order to explore how Molyneux's problem was constructed, Geoffrey Gray examined a series of implicit and explicit expressions.

The first working day of the conference was over. The rest of the evening was devoted to tasting the culinary specialties of Sardinia in one of the many traditional trattorias, followed by a digestive walk round the harbor of Cagliari. It had been an exciting day!

It was another warm morning, when we arrived at the Department of Linguistics and Stylistics for the second day of papers. Headed by Jonathan Culpeper's plenary, the morning session featured dialogues in plays. Culpeper's paper proved to be a rich and exhaustive historical pragmatic description of dialogues in plays executed by contrasting Early Modern English plays with contemporary ones. This was then aptly followed by two papers on the pragmatic strategies used by Shakespeare in his plays. More specifically, Iolanda Plescia's paper uncovered the semantic and pragmatic values of 'will' and 'shall' in *Macbeth*, while Roberta Mullini's paper highlighted the employment of personal pronouns and politeness strategies used by Anne and Richard in *Richard III*.

After the lunch break, the contexts of situations for the dialogues changed. From being situated in plays, the dialogues under analysis came to be those placed in religious works, first, and, second, in court hearings. To the former group belong the papers delivered by Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti who meticulously analysed the use of pronouns, terms of address, and modality in the hermit William Flete's religious discourse, and by John Denton who exhaustively examined the thou-you switching in a series of early editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*. To the latter group belong the papers of Olga Denti whose attentive study focused on the dialogic dimension in the cross-examination conducted by William Garrow, a well-known eighteenth-century Old Bailey barrister and the prosecution witnesses, and Michela Giordano who examined trial proceedings carried out in the Old Bailey, so as to ascertain the role of indirect speech used by witnesses. The afternoon concluded with a walk-about tour of the fascinating city of Cagliari.

The evening of this second day also turned out to be very interesting, especially from a culinary point of view. It was the night of our social dinner. In the restaurant Sa Domu Sarda, we experienced a series of Sardinian culinary delights. This included a selection of cold meats including *prosciutto crudo* and *pecorino sardo* for the hors d'oeuvres, *culurgionis* and *fregola* among the first course dishes, and the exquisite *porceddu* as the main dish, not to mention the delicious almond-based biscuits and sweets offered to us for dessert. It truly was a most delightful evening!

For the third and final half-day of the conference, we had the honour to be hosted by the Faculty of Economics in the splendid Aula Magna. Here Andreas Jucker delivered his plenary on the politeness strategies used in Early Modern English dialogues. It was an enlightening paper that was divided into two major parts, the first historical and theoretical; the second, practical based on real case studies. This was then followed by Patricia Kennan's intriguing examination of Sidney's use of dialogue in his *Arcadias*, and successively by Daniela Francesca Viridis's interesting illustration of interactive dialogue sequences in the nineteenth-century *The Romance of Lust*. The business meeting closed our successful fifteenth SLIN conference. All our gratitude for its success goes out once again to its organizers Luisanna Fodde and Gabriella Mazzon as well as to their team of helpers. Thank you all again, and see you in 2013 in Genoa!