SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF VERNACULAR LANGUAGES IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE: INTRODUCTION[1]

Scope of the thematic issue

The Early Modern period – here defined broadly as c.1400–c.1800 – was witness to major political, social, economic and cultural changes which in turn influenced the development of languages and their literatures. Many vernacular European languages experienced a remarkable functional (and in some cases also geographical) expansion during this period, to which a variety of factors contributed, including cultural change (the Renaissance), social and economic change (demographic and economic growth, the rise of mercantile classes), technological change (for example, the development of printing), religious change (the Reformation, Bible translation, increased use of the vernacular for religious worship) as well as political change (imperial and colonial expansion, codification and promotion of vernacular languages). As part of this functional expansion, vernacular languages came to be used in new text types and literary genres not previously attested in native vernacular prose traditions. At the same time, associated with a progressive increase in literacy and linguistic democratisation, we see a dramatic increase not only in the volume of textual production but also in its sociolinguistic variety.

This thematic issue of *Linguistica* explores the interaction between sociocultural change and the development of vernacular languages in Early Modern Europe. Its scope is deliberately broad in the range of topics, languages as well as in the time span covered from, at one end, the transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period in the 15th century to, at the other end, the transition from the Early Modern to the Late Modern period in the 18th and 19th centuries. The leitmotiv of the issue – the development of vernacular languages – is explored from different perspectives, for different languages and at different periods. The languages covered include not only languages which were official or hegemonic in emerging European nation states – English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch – but also peripheral languages such as Slovene, Irish, Welsh, Scots, Low German, Catalan and Franco-Provençal. Several of the articles in this issue also focus on more than one vernacular language, exploring competition or contact between Latin and vernacular languages or between different vernacular languages and cultures. The approach is necessarily interdisciplinary in that it explores the interaction between social, economic and cultural change, on the one hand, and language development, use and change, on the other. The different aspects of the development of vernacular languages covered include the functional expansion, elaboration and standardization of vernacular languages; the development of new domains of use, text types and literary genres in vernacular languages – through language

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and cultural contact or as a result of sociocultural change – as well as the linguistic changes associated with the use of the vernaculars in new text types and domains; the development of language ideologies and the ways in which language ideology is in turn influenced by the wider political and cultural context; the expansion of vernacular literacy and increased use of writing by more sections of the population, such as women and lower socio-economic classes, as well as their patterns of language use; and finally, the expansion of vocabulary in line with socioeconomic and cultural change and the development of new concepts.

Since the topics covered by different contributions overlap and are interconnected, there is no single logical way of structuring the thematic issue. Broadly, the aim has been to order the articles so that there is, as far as possible, both a coherent chronological and thematic progression.

The development of vernacular languages: functional expansion, elaboration, language contact and sociocultural change

The most obvious and prototypical form of the functional expansion of vernacular languages, especially at the beginning of the Early Modern as well as in the late medieval period, involved *vernacularisation*: the use of the vernacular instead of Latin in domains which had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of Latin (Voigts 1996: 813). This is the subject of the first article of this issue by Anna Havinga, which investigates the increase in use of vernacular languages at the expense of Latin in documentary legal records in two different European cities: Aberdeen (1398–1511) and Lübeck (1430–1451). Havinga identifies when the vernacular first starts to be used in the respective civic records and examines how the use of the vernacular increases over time – more gradually in the case of Scots in Aberdeen and more rapidly in the case of Low German in Lübeck – and also shows how the use of Latin and multilingual practices involving Latin and the vernacular (for example bilingual texts, code switching) persist throughout the period investigated. Setting the Aberdeen and Lübeck documentary legal records in a wider European context, Havinga notes that the increase in use of the vernacular is consistent with a more general trend towards vernacularisation and that in these two cases it seems to reflect bottom-up linguistic practices by the scribes themselves rather than top-down language planning. It is difficult to pinpoint specific reasons for such changes in language practices in the absence of direct testimony, though certain broader sociocultural changes may have contributed to them: for example, a possible decline in Latin literacy in some scribes and increase in vernacular literacy, as with economic growth and the expansion of civic administration more people were affected by and needed access to written texts.

Tino Oudesljis's article "Scribal networks and the language of urban administration: variation and change in sixteenth-century Coventry" also deals with language use in civic administrative records – indentured, that is legal contractual texts written in the English city of Coventry between 1499 and 1600 – though after vernacularisation had been completed. Civic administrative records are an under-researched text type in Early Modern English and Oudeslijs shows how they can shed light on some

significant socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic changes at the time, such as the expansion of local urban administration and record keeping (in turn reflecting economic growth), an increase in lay literacy, the development of English legal discourse, and the spread of supralocalised linguistic forms both geographically and in different text types. Oudeslijs specifically examines the diachronic development of the periphrastic DO construction in affirmative declaratives (e.g. "do go") and shows that there is an increase in the use of periphrastic DO in affirmative declaratives in the Coventry administrative texts in line with the general trend in most other text types in the Helsinki English corpus, which in turn seems to reflect a superlocalised pattern of usage. In the 17th century, however, the usage of the Coventry texts is divergent – even from that of comparable contemporary legal texts – as there is a continued increase in periphrastic DO in contrast to a general decline elsewhere. Oudeslijs suggests that the conservative nature of the scribal networks maintaining the Coventry records may have contributed to their divergent usage, "slow[ing] down the general trend of a more supralocal/standardised variety of English in which periphrastic DO in affirmatives became increasingly restricted to emphasis" (p. 56, this volume), as in Present-Day English.

The functional expansion of European vernacular languages into new domains is closely associated with their (functional) elaboration and also, though not necessarily, their standardisation. In Haugen's model of language standardisation – both the original and revised versions (Haugen 1972 [1966], 1983, 1987) – elaboration is considered to be part of a language standardisation process. Haugen variously presents elaboration as the third of the four stages of standardisation in his original model – "(1) selection of form, (2) codification of form, (3) elaboration of function, and (4) acceptance by the community" (Haugen 1972 [1966]: 252) – and as the fourth of the four stages – (1) selection, (2) codification, (3) implementation and (4) elaboration (functional development) in the 1987 revision of his model (Haugen 1987: 64) – though, as noted by Ayres-Bennett (2021: 30), Haugen stresses that the different stages of standardisation are "not necessarily successive and that they may be simultaneous or even cyclical". Since elaboration is understood, adapting the definition of Swann *et al*. (2004: 92), as the "terminological, grammatical and stylistic development of a language to meet the demands of" new communicative or social functions, the interrelationship between functional expansion and elaboration would seem to be natural and straightforward. Indeed, Swann *et al*'s definition describes elaboration as "two different but interrelated aspects of language standardisation", that is functional expansion and "terminological, grammatical and stylistic development" (Swann *et al.* 2004: 92). However, the interrelationship between the historical functional expansion and elaboration of languages, on the hand, and standardisation, on the other, does not seem to be as straightforward, since functional expansion and elaboration can take place without necessarily being part of a standardisation process or at least a *planned* standardisation process. In Haugen's model, standardisation is understood as a form of language planning, i.e. a deliberate and coordinated process. The expansion of a language into new functional domains and communicative roles and its elaboration for these new domains and roles in a language planning process would, thus, be part of an overall goal to develop a standard

language ("a relatively uniform variety of a language which does not show regional variation, and which is used in a wide range of communicative functions", Swann *et al* 2004: 295). Functional expansion and elaboration, as well as the development of language standards, can, however, also happen as a more organic, unplanned process – what Joseph (1987: 60) terms *circumstantial* as opposed to *engineered* standardisation. Functional expansion and elaboration may, thus, take place as part of a deliberate and systematic process to promote and cultivate a language or may happen spontaneously in a more piecemeal manner. Equally, functional expansion and elaboration may or may not result in the emergence of a language standard.

The next seven articles in this special issue all deal with aspects of the interplay between the functional expansion and the elaboration or standardisation of different Early Modern languages. The first three of the contributions – Christine Elsweiler's article on French pragmalinguistic influence on the development of official letter writing in Early Modern Scots, Carlotta Posth and Sonia García de Alba Lobeira's article on, *inter alia,* French influence on the narrative style of 15-th and 16th-century English prose romances and Santiago del Rey Quesada's article on the influence of Erasmus' Neo-Latin dialogues on discourse traditions in the Early Modern Romance languages – explore the role of language and cultural contact in functional expansion and elaboration. The articles by Alenka Jelovšek on competing language standards in 16-th and 17th-century Slovene manuscript texts and by Mícheál Hoyne on the choice of an appropriate linguistic variety and register for the first printed Irish-language books in the late 16th and early 17th centuries explore the question of the selection of linguistic varieties used in (at least potentially) canonical texts (Bible translations, catechisms and language primers) and the extent to which they became (if at all) linguistic models for later writers and in turn for the emergent language standards. A further key element of the elaboration of Early Modern vernaculars was the development of more complex prose styles, in part because of the increased use of vernaculars for learned texts and in part because of the humanist emulation of the Classical Latin (Ciceronian) periodic sentence. Erich Poppe's article examines syntactic and stylistic complexity in Early Modern Welsh prose, analysing how Welsh 16th-century writer and humanist Gruffydd Robert adopts the Ciceronian Latin periodic sentence in Welsh; Poppe also proposes a tentative empirical framework for measuring syntactic complexity in order to facilitate the comparative analysis of prose style. Lucia Assenzi's article, which focuses on Prince Ludwig von Anhalt-Köthen's (1619) translation from Italian into German of Giovan Battista Gelli's *Capricci del Bottaio* and his adaptation of the Italian language debate (*questione della lingua*) to promote the cultivation of the German language and its use in learned and scientific texts, examines both 17th-century discourses on the promotion and elaboration of German and Prince Ludwig von Anhalt-Köthen's actual linguistic and stylistic practice.

The articles which deal specifically with the functional expansion and/or elaboration of vernaculars mostly seem to describe circumstantial instances of functional expansion or elaboration. Assenzi's article, on the other hand, which examines the promotion of vernaculars in contemporary discourse as well as by language academies

– particularly the German language academy *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, founded in the 17th century on the model of the Italian *Accademia Fiorentina* – describes a notable case of (attempted) planned functional expansion and elaboration. Similarly Antonella Amatuzzi's article on the language situation in the 16-th and 17th-century Duchy of Savoy – where Franco-Provençal dialects co-existed with the official and prestige languages of French and Italian on the western and eastern sides of the Alps respectively – also mentions the founding in 1607 of the *Académie Florimontane* in the Duchy of Savoy on the model of Italian language academies, and also describes the significant role played by certain Savoyard writers in the *Académie Française* and in the French normative tradition.

Latin as well as vernaculars which enjoyed particular prestige – such as French in 15-th and 16th-century Scotland and England, as discussed in Elsweiler's and Posth and García de Alba Lobeira's articles – and which had more developed discourse traditions in particular domains could also provide stylistic models for other vernaculars which expanded into these domains. Elsweiler sets the development of official letter writing in Scots in 16th-century Scotland in the wider context of the functional expansion of Early Modern Scots to an increasing number of text types – administrative, legal, historical, literary as well as epistolary – noting that "[i]n order to be fit for these new communicative functions, the emerging Early Modern Scots standard variety was gradually elaborated, developing in a trilingual setting with well-established discourse traditions primarily for Latin and to a lesser degree French" (p. 63, this volume). Elsweiler further argues that Scots letter writers, some of whom had been educated in France or even, as in the case of the Scots queens Madeleine de Valois and Mary of Lorraine, were themselves French, took "French discourse structures and formulae as a model for their vernacular letters" (p. 64, this volume), adopting in particular request formulae from the French letter-writing tradition. Posth and García de Alba Lobeira's article, like that of Elsweiler, explores *inter alia* the influence of French discourse traditions on 15th-century English in the literary genre of prose romances. Posth and García de Alba Lobeira specifically examine "a number of linguistic devices used to convey narrative coherence in the *chanson de geste* tradition and what happens to these patterns when the matter is transposed from verse into prose and across languages, from French into English" (pp. 119-120, this volume).

The functional expansion of vernacular languages was not, however, a straightforward one-way process of the displacement of Latin in the late medieval and the Early Modern periods. Latin remained a language of prestige throughout the Early Modern period not least because of its important role in secular and religious learning: in schools, in universities, in scholarly publishing and as an international learned *lingua franca* (Armstrong 2011: 125; Reisner 2011; Knight 2015; Ogilvie 2015). Indeed, the use of Latin in the Early Modern period did not simply represent a continuation in reduced form of earlier medieval practice (where Latin had been more dominant), but also a renewed (humanist) cultivation of the language (Sidwell 2015). In a sense, just as with the vernacular languages, Latin also underwent a functional expansion both in terms of the output of Neo-Latin texts – especially printed works – and in terms of

stylistic development. The extent to which the development of vernacular languages in the Early Modern period is intertwined with the development of Neo-Latin is explored in Santiago del Rey Quesada's article on "the contribution of Erasmus to the development of Romance languages in the Early Modern period". Del Rey shows how Erasmus (1466-1536) sought – in response to the decline in the use of Latin and its restriction to specific domains such as liturgy, science, learned literature and international diplomacy – to encourage its renewed use as a means of oral communication amongst Europe's cultivated youth and published his *Colloquia familiaria*, a practical conversation manual, to help them master conversational Latin. Del Rey argues that while Erasmus did not succeed in reviving conversational Latin to the extent that he had hoped, his dialogues had a significant influence on the shaping of literary dialogue and discourse traditions in the Early Modern Romance languages, in particular Spanish.

While not focusing on contact between Latin and the vernacular languages, the articles by Erich Poppe, Lucia Assenzi and Aatu Liimatta *et al* also shed interesting light on different aspects of the enduring importance of Latin and its influence on vernacular languages throughout the Early Modern Period. Poppe discusses the Welsh translation of a Neo-Latin text – Diego de Ledesma's *Doctrina Christiana* – and analyses the periodic prose style of a 16th-century Welsh author, which was itself influenced by Classical Latin models. Lucia Assenzi's article, though focusing on the influence of the Italian *questione della lingua* and language academies in 17th-century Germany, also reveals the continuing importance of Latin in the 17th century. Assenzi notes that "[i]n the 17th century, Latin was still the language of culture in the German-speaking world, and it dominated church and state administration, as well as science and literature" and shows that the functional expansion of German into new genres required the active promotion and conscious stylistic elaboration of the language as well as "contend[ing] with the widespread prejudices about the German vernacular being unsophisticated and uncouth" (p. 213, this volume). Aatu Liimaata, Jani Marjanen, Tuuli Tahko, Mikko Tolonen and Tanja Säily's article focuses on a different domain in a different language at the very end of the Early Modern period – on the development of English economic vocabulary in the 18th century – and also shows the continuing cultural and linguistic prestige of Latin, reflected in its influence on English vocabulary.

In the domain of religion, a major factor in the functional expansion of vernacular languages at the expense of Latin was the Protestant Reformation, a key tenet of which was to give people access to the word of God in their own language. The articles by Mícheál Hoyne, Alenka Jelovšek and Erich Poppe all focus on religious texts. Mícheál Hoyne's article investigates the earliest printed, Protestant Irish-language texts in 16th and early 17th-century Ireland and Gaelic-speaking Scotland – John Carswell's 1567 translation of Knox's *Forme of Prayer and Ministrations of the Sacraments*, Seaán Ó Cearnaigh's 1571 primer of the Irish language and catechism translation and the 1602 Irish translation of the New Testament – focusing on the selection and elaboration of an appropriate form and register of the Irish language for these first three printed books in Irish. Alenka Jelovšek's article investigates the question of language standardisation in Slovene-language manuscript texts from the second half of the 16th and early 17th cen-

tury, examining to what extent Catholic manuscript texts adopted the existing "Protestant language standard" based on Primož Trubar's and Jurij Dalmatin's late 16th-century Bible translations and other works from the period. Erich Poppe investigates the prose style of the Welsh Catholic recusant writer Gruffydd Robert in his introductory paratext to fellow Welsh Catholic recusant writer Morys Clynnog's 1568 Welsh-language manuscript *Athravaeth Gristnogavl* ('Christian Doctrine'), an adaptation of Diego de Ledesma's Latin *Doctrina Christiana,* examining how Gruffydd Robert recreates the complex Ciceronian Latin periodic sentence in Welsh – which was in fashion in much contemporary Neo-Latin and vernacular humanist prose (Adolph 1968). Paradoxically, Hoyne and Jelovšek's articles investigate the linguistic impact and importance of vernacular Protestant texts, in particular Bible translations, in two cultures – Irish and Slovene respectively – which were predominantly Catholic, while Poppe's article investigates a Catholic recusant text in a predominately Protestant culture, that of Wales. All three articles, however, show explicitly or implicitly the enduring linguistic impact of the Protestant Reformation. Not only did the Protestant Reformation encourage the use of the vernacular in the religious domain in Protestant cultures, but it also spurred the production of vernacular religious texts more generally, including counter-Reformation Catholic learned and polemical works as well as practical religious texts such as catechisms.

The production of canonical vernacular texts such as Bible translations and catechisms could, moreover, contribute to the development of language standards based on these texts, because of their exceptional authority and wide diffusion, and could also in turn contribute to the spreading of such standards, as they often provided a means, before schooling became more widely accessible, for the wider population to acquire literacy (Burke 2004: 103; Currie 2022; Nevalainen 2014: 124; 2020). This was indeed the case in Wales, where the 1620 revised Bible translation provided the basis for an emerging Early Modern Welsh literary standard (Currie 2022). However, the outcome in Ireland, as demonstrated by Hoyne's article, was somewhat different. Hoyne shows that, as a result of the decline of the Irish language under the English conquest of Ireland as well as the failure of the Protestant Reformation to take hold amongst the native Irish-speaking population, "[t]he vernacular register developed for the Irish New Testament by 1602 had been outpaced by far-reaching sociolinguistic changes before it had a chance to attain anything like canonical status or exert long-term influence on the development of the Irish language" (p. 192, this volume).

Language and cultural contact – like the functional expansion and elaboration of vernacular languages – is a golden thread which runs through this thematic issue, as it was a key factor influencing the development of vernacular languages in the Early Modern period, and is a primary or secondary focus of many of the articles. In those already discussed above, language and cultural contact was itself a factor in functional expansion and elaboration of vernaculars: in the competition between Latin and vernaculars (Havinga), as a source for the introduction of new text types or discourse traditions (Posth and García de Alba Lobeira, Del Rey Quesada), as a source for models for functional elaboration (Elsweiler) as well as a source of inspiration for the vernacular

language debate (Assenzi, Amatuzzi). In the articles by Antonella Amatuzzi, Vicente Lledó-Guillem and Brenda Assendelft and Gijsbert Rutten, however, language and cultural contact is discussed more in a context of language(-ideological) conflict.

Vicente Lledó-Guillem's article examines language ideological discourse in the Catalan work *Los col·loquis de la insigne ciutat de Tortosa* ("Dialogues. A Catalan Renaissance Colloquy Set in the City of Tortosa"), originally written in 1557 by Cristòfol Despuig, and analyses it in the historical and sociolinguistic context of the contemporary Spanish Empire. Prior to being subsumed in the Spanish Empire, the Catalan-speaking area – including both Catalonia and Valencia – had been part of the Catalan-Aragonese Empire, in which Catalonia had had a dominant role, particularly in relation to its Valencian neighbour. Lledó-Guillem argues that in Despuig's Colloquy the Catalan language is instrumentalised for political purposes to defend "the memory of the historical importance of the Catalan-Aragonese Empire" (p. 234, this volume). Despuig, thus, asserts Catalonia's superiority over Valencia by arguing that the variety of Catalan spoken in Catalonia is superior to that spoken in Valencia – for instance, on the grounds of its origin and on the grounds that, unlike Valencian, it had not been contaminated by Castilian. Despuig also erases the literary achievements of Valencia in the Catalan language, expressing "a clear association between language and political power in which literature does not play an important role in the value of a language". Lledó-Guillem's study of Despuig's Colloquy provides an insight into the conception of the relationship between the perceived value of languages and power in contemporary discourse.

The functional expansion and elaboration of vernacular languages is perhaps the most salient aspect of the development of vernacular languages discussed by the articles in this thematic issue and is most typically associated with the transition from the medieval to the Early Modern period in the 16th century and with the increasing use of vernacular languages instead of Latin in different domains as well as with the emergence of vernacular language debates. Functional expansion and elaboration are, however, characteristic of the whole of the Early Modern period. Different processes contributed to functional expansion and elaboration; it is not only a question of language choice, a decision to use the vernacular instead of Latin, or indeed one vernacular instead of another, in an already existing domain such as administration and religion, but it also involved the development of new domains and text types as a result of sociocultural, scientific or economic change. Further, an increase in literacy led to an increased use of the vernacular in written texts by a wider cross-section of society as well as to new writing practices. Eleonora Serra's and Anne-Christine Gardner's articles both explore the effects of increasing literacy at opposite ends of the Early Modern period and at almost opposite ends of Europe: Serra examines the private family letters of a patrician woman writer in 16th-century Florence, and Gardner analyses pauper letters in 18-th and 19th-century England.

Like Elsweiler's study in this thematic issue of the development of Early Modern Scots correspondence, Eleonora Serra's article also investigates the use of epistolary formulae in 16th-century letter writing, though in Italy and in private communication as opposed to official correspondence, focusing on the previously unstudied letters

in the Florentine State Archive of a Florentine patrician woman, Lucrezia di Matteo Albizzi Ricasoli. Serra sets the writing practices of Lucrezia di Matteo Albizzi Ricasoli in her letters to her sons in the broader context of the increased practice of letter writing by women in 16th-century Italy, in turn reflecting an increase in literacy. Noting that Lucrezia started writing quite late in her life and probably had a limited level of writing experience, Serra investigates Lucrezia's use of epistolary formulae over her life span and seeks to understand what this use may reveal about how she learned to write, about her changing level of writing experience and about the functions the formulae might have had in her writing process. Serra argues that epistolary formulae can act as prefabricated units which make it easier for inexperienced writers to compose letters. Her analysis of Lucrezia's language shows a frequent, often stereotyped use of such formulae as well as a relative fixity in their use over time, suggesting that for her, as an inexperienced writer, formulae could have provided an important support for her letter writing.

Anne-Christine Gardner's article examines at the very end of the Early Modern and beginning of the Late Modern period (1730–1834) the emergence and development of a new text type – English pauper letters, petitions for financial support written by the labouring poor to their local parish – which emerged in the specific legal and socio-economic context of 18-th and 19th-century England. Gardner explains in detail the social context of pauper letters and provides an analysis of their recurring key structural and communicative features, which facilitates both a categorisation of the letters as a new text type and an analysis of linguistic and stylistic variation between different writers. To an even greater extent than the women writers in 16th-century Florence who are the subject of Serra's article, the English paupers had limited literacy and writing experience and, moreover, were of a low social status, yet the letters could be an important means for them to obtain much needed financial support. Gardner's analysis shows that "there is significant stylistic variation and that the writers employ strategies, in particular self-reference, to index their social roles of applicant and parishioner or to highlight the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves" (p. 335, this volume). Gardner analyses paupers' use of formulae and conventional expressions and shows that it is possible on the basis of such an analysis to shed light on how they might have acquired their (limited) literacy skills.

The final two articles in the thematic issue by Brenda Assendelft and Gijsbert Rutten on Dutch and by Liimatta *et al.* on English both explore how socio-cultural and socio-economic change influenced the development of vocabulary. Assendelft and Rutten's article on "the rise and fall of French borrowings in postmedieval Dutch" explores the history of French loanwords in Dutch from 1500 to 1899 in the broader context of the development of anti-French and pro-Dutch discourse, in particular from the 18th-century on, when standard language ideology emerged. Despite the fact that French and Dutch, as contiguous languages, have been in contact for centuries and despite the prominence of anti-French and pro-Dutch discourses, Assendelft and Rutten note that the history of contact between French and Dutch is still poorly understood because of a lack of empirical linguistic research. Assendelft and Rutten investigate empirically the supposed "French-ification" of Dutch and show that "both words and suffixes borrowed from French show a

gradual increase from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, and a remarkable decrease from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century" (pp. 350–351, this volume). Assendelft and Rutten's findings reveal the significant and protracted influence of French on Dutch during the Early Modern period and at the same time "an unanticipated 'Dutchification' in more recent times", which they relate to "the national language planning efforts emerging in the eighteenth century, following the rise of the standard language ideology from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards" (p. 351, this volume).

Aatu Liimatta, Jani Marjanen, Tuuli Tahko, Mikko Tolonen and Tanja Säily's article on the development of English economic vocabulary in the 18th century sheds light on how broader economic, political and sociocultural change not only gave rise to new text types and discourses but also to new concepts, which is in turn reflected in the expanding vernacular vocabulary and terminology. Using Oxford English Dictionary metadata, the study analyses the source language of new words (lemmas) in the English lexicon in the category of "trade and finance" and provides an insight into how the influence of two prestige languages – Latin and French – on English economic vocabulary changed over time. They show that in the 14th and 15th centuries "French was the most prolific foreign source of new words in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries", which reflects its political and cultural prestige both in Britain and in Europe at the time. In the seventeenth century, though, Latin was "the most common non-English source language […] at a time when [it] was still a popular publishing language, but vernacular publishing had already surpassed it in Britain and was starting to grow substantially" (p. 362, this volume). Liimaata *et al*'s analysis of the English economic vocabulary of the 18th century, which is the focus of the article, further shows the continuing importance of Latin in this domain, "f[inding] that the incoming economic vocabulary is largely Latin or French in origin, whereas the stable and outgoing economic vocabulary tends to be either of native English Germanic origin or older loans from e.g. French or Dutch, with dominant non-economic meanings" (p. 370, this volume). Liimaata *et al* also identify a broad semantic change in English economic vocabulary during the course of the 18th century, observing that more abstract terms tended to be added to the English vocabulary at the end of the century in contrast to more concrete terms at the beginning of the century, suggesting "a specialization of economic discourse that is related to the emergence of political economy as a field for intellectual theorizing" (p. 373, this volume).

While vernacular languages in the Early Modern period have been relatively intensively researched in historical sociolinguistics, this thematic issue seeks to make an original contribution to the field in its broad and interdisciplinary approach, embracing linguistic, philological, literary, and cultural perspectives, and focusing not only on major and more widely studied languages (such as English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch), but also peripheral and less-researched languages (such as Catalan, Slovene, Low German, Scots, Irish, Welsh and Franco-Provençal).

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