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The (socio)linguistic value of sources of Late Modern English 'from below'

Historical approaches to the study of the English language have traditionally focussed on printed texts and documents written by the elite to the exclusion of other social groups. However, the past decades have seen a rise in studies focussing on language histories 'from below', or alternative language histories (see e.g. Elspaß et al. 2007). This new approach to the study of language history focusses on the written language of the ordinary population, including not only the elite social classes and professional writers, but also texts produced by other social groups that are traditionally underrepresented or not represented at all, such as artisans and the labouring poor or women. As such, it includes the analysis of registers that were previously ignored in historiography, and new corpora are being built to facilitate these kinds of studies 'from below', such as a *CORpus of Irish English CORrespondence* (CORIECOR; McCafferty & Amador-Moreno under construction) which consist predominantly of emigrant letters, *Letters of Artisans and the Labouring Poor* (LALP; Auer et al. under construction) including mainly poor relief applications, the *Old Bailey Corpus* (OBC; Huber et al. 2012) and the *Threatening Notices Corpus* (TNC; van Hattum under construction) encompassing threatening notices.

Montgomery (1995) first explored the value of using such sources for the study of Irish English in his paper on Ulster emigrant letters, and the current paper intends to build on that evaluation by exploring and contrasting the (socio)linguistic value of dialect literature, emigrant letters, poor relief applications, threatening notices, and trial proceedings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It will discuss the relationship between a speech event and its written record for each of the registers based on the categorisation put forward by Schneider (2012) (i.e. recorded, recalled, imagined, observed, and invented) and explores the representativeness, validity, levels of language organization, and the determination of extralinguistic contextual parameters. In addition, some of the criteria for classifying and evaluating earlier texts as put forward by Hickey (2010) (e.g. assessment of the degree of vernacularity and whether the language is intrinsic or extrinsic to the author). According to Hickey (2010: 8), "[t]he heterogeneous and incomplete nature of texts attesting the historical development of non-standard varieties makes it necessary to classify these and discuss their relative value for linguistic analysis in advance of any examination of

actual texts". The present paper contributes to this by classifying and discussing some registers that have not been evaluated before (poor relief petitions and threatening notices) and contrasting these registers with others previously used for the study of Late Modern English to assess their relative value.

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