The language use of the upper ranks in a corpus of Early Modern English drama

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This paper discusses the language use of characters forming part of the nobility and gentry in a corpus of Early Modern English comedies. In particular, it sets out to explore which linguistic forms are ‘key’ in their turns, as opposed to the lower ranks, and to thereby show which forms are characteristic of their constructed language use.

The analysis is based on the sociopragmatically annotated Drama Corpus which builds on the drama sections of A Corpus of English Dialogues, 1560-1760, the Sociopragmatic Corpus and the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English. This corpus is annotated for the sociopragmatic variable of social rank and includes drama comedy samples by a range of different authors from the period 1500 to 1760.

The data will be approached from a primarily quantitative perspective in that I will determine which words are ‘key’ in the speech of the nobility and the gentry. This analysis will then also be extended to include collocations and clusters in which these words appear. Due to the nature of the data, which are fictional, the results will primarily reflect a particular perception or dramatic representation of the language of those in positions of social and linguistic influence.

References

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