



2nd International Workshop on Social Networks and English Sociohistorical Linguistics

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‘For the Benefit of the Publick’ – late 17th-century Londoners seen through advertising discourse

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Early printed advertisements, for the commercial promotion of goods and services, were addressed to a society which, in late 17th-century London, was just recovering from the Plague and the Great Fire. Newspapers and collections of trials, for example, were eagerly read, “seeking news, moral instruction and entertainment.” (Hitchcock and Shoemaker, ‘Publishing history’, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 19th December 2007; also Jucker 2005), and the art of seducing the shopper quickly found its way into their pages, gaining “attention by magnificence of promises” (Dr. Samuel Johnson in *The Idler*, 1759; also, Fries 1997 on the subject of ‘praise’). Whether it was a ‘water to cure the itch’ or a new ‘ladies dictionary’, persuasive rhetoric, sometimes ‘sublime’, sometimes ‘pathetic’ (Dr. Samuel Johnson, *id.*), pervaded the pages of such publications because word of mouth was no longer sufficient for retailers. One such publication was the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, an account of over 100,000 criminal trials held at London's central criminal court, now available as a fully searchable online database, constituting “the largest body of texts detailing the lives of non-elite people ever published” (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 19th December 2007). The *Proceedings*, which began to be published in 1674, were targeted at a popular audience and soon became a commercial success. In order to make the publication even more attractive and to fight competition from other collections of trials, it soon incorporated printed advertisements in the back pages ‘for the benefit of the Publick’. It is precisely this ‘Benefit of the Publick’ that provides the structural backbone to this presentation.

This paper is a two-dimensional study which explores, first, the idea of ‘Publick’, which is subjected to sociolinguistic study in such a way that, by means of the application of Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory to the texts, variables such as social distance and relative power between advertisers and ‘a popular non-elite readership’ can be assessed. A pragmatic approach will further complement this analysis by determining the possible bias of advertisers towards this ‘Publick’, focusing on any possible gender issues reflected in the language used in the body-copy of the advertisements, thus introducing the sociolinguistic variable of sex (Lakoff 1975, Milroy 1992, Romaine 1999) Secondly, the ‘Benefit’, that is, what items or services late 17th-century Londoners were interested in, will also be analysed, thus gaining an insight into the commodities available at the time and the people offering their services, as advertised in the press.

Session 5 (17:00-18:15)

Salón del Conde de Valdeparaíso (2nd floor)