

## **Historical corpus pragmatics: Methodological challenges**

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The field of historical corpus pragmatics combines three different research traditions which originally had very different ways of asking questions and analysing data. Historical linguistics, by necessity, relies on written language and for a long time focussed mainly on the core areas of phonology, morphology, lexicon and syntax. Corpus linguistics is interested in patterns across large sets of texts and often focuses on lexicogrammatical problems. And pragmatics is interested in the actual use of language and generally focuses on the minutiae of spontaneous, oral interactions. However, shifts in research interests, different attitudes to data and in particular advances in corpus technology have made it possible for the three fields to interact in increasingly rewarding ways. Historical corpus pragmatics, simply put, uses corpus technologies to trace pragmatic elements in historical varieties of a language and their development through time. Fixed expressions with a pragmatic function, such as discourse markers, are relatively easily traceable with corpus-linguistic tools, while functional units, such as speech acts or the expression of politeness, are more difficult and require more creative search techniques. In this workshop, I will briefly introduce some of the available historical corpora and give an overview of a range of techniques that can be employed to search them for pragmatic units. I will also introduce the recently developed method of semantic corpus trawling, which is a method that uses an entire semantic field, e.g. the field of politeness expressions, to scan a corpus for genres and periods that are particularly rich sources for a discourse on these elements, and, therefore, give us an insight into the historical attitudes towards the pragmatic element (e.g. politeness) denoted by these expressions.