Discourse and register: Spatio-temporal systems in Chaucer's language

Minako Nakayasu

Hamamatsu University School of Medicine

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a systematic discourse-pragmatic analysis of the spatio-temporal systems in Chaucer's language along the lines of historical pragmatics and discourse analysis (Taavitsainen & Jucker 2015). The text used in the present study is taken from the Riverside edition (Benson 1987), consisting of some tales from *The Canterbury tales* (fiction) and *A treatise on the astrolabe* (handbook) to compare different registers.

Language speakers exploit spatio-temporal systems by which they judge how distant the situations they wish to express are from their domain, that is, proximal (close) or distal (distant) (Nakayasu 2018). Such relationships are embodied by spatio-temporal elements such as pronouns, demonstratives, adverbs, tense forms and modals. These elements may be related to each other to take either a proximal or distal perspective not only in either the spatial or the temporal domain, but also in the integrated spatio-temporal domain. Speakers can then continue to take the same perspective, or alternate different perspectives, in discourse. However, few studies have attempted a systematic analysis of such perspective changes in discourse, particularly in historical data.

On the basis of a statistical analysis of the spatio-temporal elements, the present paper will carry out a qualitative analysis to address the following questions: 1) How does the perspective change as the discourse progresses? 2) What factors are relevant to this change in discourse? and 3) How do these changes and factors vary depending on registers? To provide answers to these questions, this paper will analyse those elements and factors which have an impact on the perspective choice in discourse: 1) elements structuring discourse (e.g. metadiscourse), 2) elements promoting a proximal or a distal perspective (e.g. address terms), 3) elements triggering alternations of these perspectives (e.g. discourse markers), and 4) factors facilitating alternations of elements in either the spatial, the temporal, or the integrated spatio-temporal domain (e.g. contrast between two worlds).

The analysis reveals some noteworthy variances between registers. Both proximal and distal perspectives are equally taken in *The Canterbury tales* (fiction), while proximal perspectives are more likely to be taken in *A treatise on the astrolabe* (handbook). In the former, the narrators employ a wide variety of elements in discourse, and the perspective shifts to and from proximal and distal more dramatically. By contrast, in the latter, its scientific nature tends to maintain the same perspective, and those elements which trigger alternation are less likely to occur.

In conclusion, this research shows how Chaucer deployed his spatio-temporal systems in discourse, and expands our understanding of the unfolding dynamics of communication with further explorations.

References

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