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In the eye of the beholder: visual contexts of communication in medieval and early modern texts

The digital turn in the humanities marked a paradigm shift in approaches to studying language change: the virtualisation of our world (Westera 2015) has moved much of linguistic fieldwork in front of computer screens. One consequence is the increasing accessibility of pre-modern texts, i.e. manuscripts and early prints through the digital media, which has brought into focus the multimodal nature of digitally-mediated communication. The same shift has also brought about a renewed interest in the visibility of medieval and early modern texts, including aspects like corrections or marginal notes, which have slowly made their way into mainstream historical linguistics. Since texts are our primary means of accessing linguistic past, it is now possible to analyse and understand how pre-modern participants in communicative exchanges (i.e. authors/ scribes and readers) operationalised the visual means at their disposal, such as type and size of script/ font, colour of the ink, *mise-en-page*, abbreviation symbols, marginalia, corrections etc., and how they used the material context to construe meanings of their inscribed messages. Indeed, it seems clear nowadays that no text should be considered in isolation from its context (Caie 2008).

Following the conference leitmotif “Language and evolution: Issues and perspectives”, we want to explore visual aspects of multimodality of historical texts, especially the ways in which modern technology may offer new perspectives on studying historical texts. We are also interested in how problems and methodologies of historical and modern research on visual rhetoric, textual pragmatics and multimodality can influence one another and how these can inform us about visually embedded language phenomena and their role and functions.

Possible *foci* include:

- Materiality of the text
- Visual pragmatics of pre-modern texts
- Text-image studies
- Paratextual elements in ‘visual texts’
- Pragmatics of the page
- Manuscript studies and digitalised manuscripts
- Modern editions of historical texts

Submissions deadline: March 23rd

Sample bibliography:

Caie, Graham D. and Denis Renevey (eds.). 2008. *Medieval Texts in Context*. London: Routledge.

Carroll, Ruth, Matti Peikola, Hanna Salmi, Mari-Lisa Varila, Janne Skaffari, and Risto Hiltunen. 2013. "Pragmatics on the Page. Visual Text in Late Medieval English Books". *European Journal of English Studies* 17(1): 54-71.

Machan, Tim William. 2011. "The Visual Pragmatics of Code-Switching in Late Middle English Literature". In: Herbert Schendl and Laura Wright (eds.), *Code-Switching in Early English*. Berlin and Boston: Mouton de Gruyter, 303-333.

Sebba, Mark. 2013. "Multilingualism in Written Discourse. An Approach to the Analysis of Multilingual Texts". *International Journal of Bilingualism* 17(1): 97-118.

Westera, Wim. 2015. *The Digital Turn: How the Internet Transforms our Existence*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse.

Wakelin, Daniel. 2014. *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375-1510*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.