

Speaking to their audiences: a sociohistorical linguistic look at  
interactional language and women's novels,  
France and England, 1670-1770

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## **Table of Contents**

### **Chapter 1—Introduction: Examining Language that ‘Speaks to’ Audiences in a Collection of Women’s Novels.....1**

- 1.1 An Overview of the Present Study
- 1.2 The Present Study: Theoretical Perspectives and Background Information
- 1.3 The Present Study: The ‘Informant’ Novels and Five Categories of Language that ‘Speak to’ Audiences
- 1.4 The Present Study: Conclusions and Other Paths to Map
- 1.5 A Conversational Model in Print: Interactional Language as an Additional Examination Tool

### **Chapter 2—Initial Theoretical Framework: Interactional Sociolinguistics, Sociohistorical Linguistics and Other Organizing Principles.....11**

- 2.1 Interactional Sociolinguistics
- 2.2 Sociolinguistics, Historical Linguistics, Sociohistorical Linguistics
- 2.3 Fundamental Assumptions
- 2.4 Issues of Sources and Samples
- 2.5 Introducing the Matrix of Communicative Context
- 2.6 Some Additional General Assumptions
- 2.7 Interactional Communication in the Novels as Pseudo-Conversation
  - 2.7a Three Audiences
  - 2.7b Traits of Conversation and the Novels
  - 2.7c Genre in the Linguistics Sense
- 2.8 Summarizing the Mini-Theory

### **Chapter 3—Meta-Linguistic Environment: Language in the Period.....33**

- 3.1 Codifying Knowledge: Language Standardization
  - 3.1a The Role of Dictionaries
- 3.2 Conversation and Women: Appropriate for, Appropriated by
- 3.3 Public and Private Spheres as Spheres for Women and their Language
- 3.4 Correspondence and Correspondents
  - 3.4a Properties of Letters

### **Chapter 4—Interim Developments: Growing the Theory and Pointing toward Conclusions.....57**

- 4.1 Characterizing the Private in Interactional Language
- 4.2 Register, Rapport and Relationships, and the Language of the Novels
  - 4.2a Aspects of Common Ground
  - 4.2b Knowledge Types as Common Ground
- 4.3 A Look at Signalling Mechanisms
- 4.4 Directions of Things to Come

## **Chapter 5—Core Components: The Novels and The Language Categories.....77**

- 5.1 Practical Issues Regarding the Texts
- 5.2 The French ‘Informants’: Seven Epistolary French Novels
  - 5.2a *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière*, Marie-Catherine des Jardins de Villedieu
  - 5.2b *Relation du Voyage d’Espagne*, Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy
  - 5.2c *Lettres de deux dames au sujet de l’abbé Bucquoy*, Anne Marguerite du Noyer
  - 5.2d *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*, Françoise de Graffigny
  - 5.2e *Lettres de Madame du Montier à sa fille, la Marquise de \*\*\**, Jeanne-Marie le Prince de Beaumont
  - 5.2f *Lettres de Miss Fanni Butlerd à Milord Charles Alfred*, Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni
  - 5.2g *Lettres du Marquis de Roselle*, Anne-Louise Elie de Beaumont
- 5.3 The English ‘Informants’: Seven Substantially Epistolary English Novels
  - 5.3a *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister*, Aphra Behn
  - 5.3b *Letters written by Mrs Manley*, Delarivier Manley
  - 5.3c *Familiar Letters betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady*, Mary Davys
  - 5.3d *Anti-Pamela, or feign’d innocence detected*, Eliza Haywood
  - 5.3e *Life of Harriot Stuart written by herself*, Charlotte Lennox
  - 5.3f *History of Ophelia*, Sarah Fielding
  - 5.3g *The Delicate Distress, a novel in letters by Frances*, Elizabeth Griffith
- 5.4 A Few Points of Textual Comparison
- 5.5 Data: The Five Language Categories that ‘Speak to’ Audiences
  - 5.5a Category 1: Addressing Audiences with T/V Personal Pronouns
  - 5.5b Category 2: Omission of Openings and Closings in Letters
  - 5.5c Category 3: Activating Common Ground
  - 5.5d Category 4: Signalling Storytelling
  - 5.5e Category 5: Invitations to Engage

## **Chapter 6—Samples and Findings, Part 1: Addressing Audiences with T/V Personal Pronouns.....93**

- 6.1 Some Contextualization of T/V Pronouns in the Mini-Theory
- 6.2 Samples: Tu/Vous (T/V) Pronoun Use in the French Novels
- 6.3 Samples: English T/V Pronoun Use in the Novels
- 6.4 Findings: The Novels in Terms of T/V Pronouns
  - 6.4a Characteristics: ‘T’ Pronouns and Solidarity
  - 6.4b Trends: Connotations of Increasing French Usage and the Evolving Sensibility of English Style
- 6.5 Effects of Choosing ‘T’ or ‘V’: Relationships and Audience Positioning

<b>Chapter 7—Samples and Findings, Part 2: Omission of Openings and Closings in the Letters.....</b>	<b>119</b>
7.1    Samples: Highlighting What Isn't There	
7.1a    Samples: Recognizing Developed Openings and Closings	
7.2    Samples and Findings: The Perspective Offered by Inclusion Rates	
7.2a    Samples and Findings: Openings—Rates, Trends and Comparisons	
7.2b    Samples and Findings: Closings—Rates, Trends and Comparisons	
7.3    Effects of Absent Generic Sections: Relationships Promoted and the Emerging Issue of Fiction	
 <b>Chapter 8—Samples and Findings, Part 3: Activating Common Ground.....</b>	<b>145</b>
8.1    Negotiating Common Ground in Written Interactional Language	
8.2    Samples and Findings: Overtly Tagging Relationships	
8.3    Samples and Findings: The Dialogue Effect	
8.4    Written Common Ground: A Matter of Information Management	
 <b>Chapter 9— Samples, Part 4: Signalling Storytelling.....</b>	<b>167</b>
9.1    Samples: Retaining the Floor	
9.2    Samples: Relinquishing the Floor	
9.3    Samples: Cues of Co-Construction	
9.4    Storytelling Signals and Positioning the Audiences	
 <b>Chapter 10—Samples, Part 5: Invitations to Engage.....</b>	<b>187</b>
10.1    Samples: Questions as Invitations to Engage	
10.2    Samples: Commands as Invitations to Engage	
10.3    Samples: Assurances as Invitations to Engage	
10.4    Samples: Presuppositions of Engagement	
10.5    Samples: Longer Passages Inviting Engagement	
10.5a    The Special Case of Anti-Pamela: Preaching to the Audience	
10.6    Characterizing the Impact of Invitations to Engage	
 <b>Chapter 11—Conclusions: the Novels, ‘Speaking to’ Language, Women and Other ‘Big Picture’ Considerations.....</b>	<b>229</b>
11.1    Summarizing and Characterizing the ‘Speaking to’ Language of the Novels	
11.2    Language that ‘Speaks to’ Audiences and Bakhtin’s Theories	
11.3    Private and Public Space, Language, Women and their Novels	
11.4    Additional Terrain to Map	
11.5    Final Points	
 <b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>241</b>
Primary Sources	
Secondary Sources	



## Abstract

Using principles mainly from Interactional Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics, this study has examined fourteen epistolary novels by French and English women, from 1670 to 1770, for language that 'speaks to' audiences in an interactional way. A primary objective was to investigate whether women's novels specifically foster relationships via language use. Five categories of such interactional language emerged: Addressing Audiences with T/V Personal Pronouns, Omission of Openings and Closings in the Letters, Activating Common Ground, Signalling Storytelling, and Invitations to Engage. While the first two categories suggest distinctions between usage in the French and English works, the last three shift the focus to the question of audience position. This shift highlights that the 'participants' in these 'conversations' are engaged not only in the narrator-to-audience and character-to-character relationships identified by Halliday as occurring in fiction, but also in a blended audience position that may allow the external reading audience to 'adopt the mantle' of letter recipient or to otherwise share the letter recipient's 'relationship' with the stories. Not all of the novels offer this third relationship. Some of the novels firmly position the external reading audience as 'outsider', not only to the stories but also to the relationships depicted in them. This finding reflects an apparent development in the genre of epistolary novel, one that codifies distinctions between this genre and that of simply writing letters that are not entirely 'real'. In turn, these findings led not only to links with Bakhtin's theory of the multi-languaged novel but also Habermas' theory regarding the private and public spheres in the period. In fact, this approach to the interactional language of novels may allow pathways to operationalize further research in those directions, and to consider whether there are differences between the relationships fostered via language in novels by women and men.





### Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled, 'Speaking to their audiences: a sociohistorical linguistic look at interactional language and women's novels, France and England 1670-1770', has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Laura Gale Ruch (40792390)

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Date



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