Historical Corpus Pragmatics: Epistemic and Evidential Stance in Early Modern English

Summary / Zusammenfassung
In this project, I investigate epistemic and evidential stance in Early Modern English from the perspective of historical corpus pragmatics. Epistemic stance expresses the degree of certainty or reliability of information, while evidential stance expresses the source of information. Examples of typical expressions are, for instance, I think, I am sure, it is my believe that, and certainly. However, stance can also be expressed in less formalised and more context-dependent ways. These latter expressions have so far received less attention. In addition, the various ways in which the larger social, cultural and situational context influences whether and how stance is expressed has not yet been sufficiently explored. Historical corpus pragmatics is the field of research that develops methods for identifying and analysing context-dependent meanings in historical corpora. This is a challenging endeavour, and the existing methods are not sufficient for a comprehensive investigation of stance in Early Modern English.

The aims of this project fall into three main groups. On the descriptive level, I will establish an inventory of stance markers of Early Modern English, focussing in particular on markers which are specific to the early modern period and which have received little attention so far. By taking into account four different ways in which context affects stance, I will contribute to a better understanding not only of how stance was expressed in the early modern period, but also of the more general dynamics of stance and the interplay between words, grammar and context. This leads to the second aim of this project, which is of a theoretical nature and consists in developing a comprehensive model of epistemic and evidential stance. This model is not restricted to morphology and lexico-grammar, but it also integrates the pragmatic dimension, understood in a broad sense and, thus, including the socio-historical context. The final aim of this project is methodological. By developing methods for the identification and analysis of context-dependent meanings in large historical corpora I contribute to the still young but fast evolving field of historical corpus pragmatics.

Keywords / Suchbegriffe
historical pragmatics, corpus linguistics, Early Modern English, stance, epistemicity, evidentiality

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