"So moche ye owe me": Speech-Like Representation in Caxton's *Dialogues in French and English*

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Abstract
Historical pragmatics of the last two decades has continued to refine its tools for examining the relationship of speech and writing (e.g. Culpeper and Kytö 2010). As our methodology has improved, it is helpful to return to case studies to see how different models apply to particular materials, and the particular constraints of each text. One depiction of the everyday English of people on the street in late-medieval England can be found in William Caxton's *Dialogues in French and English*, a late fourteenth-century printed edition of a thirteenth-century French/Flemish manual for conversation and vocabulary. Caxton's text provides a two-column format in French and English which contains, among other things, an illustrative marketplace dialogue between a fictional seller and a hypothetical buyer. This interchange, between a female cloth merchant and a male purchaser, exemplifies many of the features that we might expect in colloquial English: a higher number of pragmatic lexical items and interpersonal words, a more highly connected style of second-person pronouns and vocatives, and a greater use of sentence structures like questions and exclamations. And yet, it is fundamentally constructed speech rather than a faithful reporting of an actual conversation, and the very features that serve as markers of its colloquial style (like vocatives) also characterize its nature as written discourse. This analysis examines the textual context of speech-like representation, presenting an account of the pragmatic aspects of genre, style, and discourse that shape the depiction of the mercantile conversation in Caxton's text.

1. Introduction

Searching for traces of spoken language in premodern England often leads us to texts with passages that depict spoken dialogue. There are not a great many of these passages, of course, and none are in texts constructed with the aim of precisely representing spoken idiom for posterity, alas. Rather, these texts are written for some other purpose and to some other end. Usually this end is literary or entertainment (in, for example, playtexts), but it could also be moral instruction (in certain spiritual dialogues), philosophical distinction (in debate poems), or legal evidence (in depositions). Examining the genre and purpose for the construction of dialogues can serve to address how much like common speech they are, and considering particular dialogues as case studies

Moore, Colette. 2017. "'So moche ye owe me': Speech-Like Representation in Caxton's *Dialogues in French and English*." *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 16(1):171-189.

allows us to see the strengths and limitations of speech-like texts as evidence for Middle English colloquial language.

The central studies of early English dialogues have focused on Early Modern texts (Jucker, Fritz, and Lebsanft 1999; Culpeper and Kytö 2010). The medieval period, having fewer surviving dialogues, has been less theorized in this respect (see, however, Taavitsainen 1999; Moore 2016), though many of the conversations about Early Modern dialogues can be extended to late-medieval ones. Culpeper and Kytö's examination of historical dialogue analysis, in particular, provides a framework for how we might approach and contextualize dialogic interchange as a source for insight into spoken language (2010: 1–20). William Caxton's works are right at the cusp between medieval and Early Modern—depending on our models of periodization, we can see them as an ending point for manuscript manifestations of dialogue or a beginning point for printed dialogues. And, of course, they are both.

Caxton's text *Dialogues in French and English* would seem to be a great candidate when we are looking for an illustration of spoken language. The work is a phrase book for basic lexical items; it contains parallel columns of paired phrases in French and English. It has been long read as a kind of a reference work that shows late medieval ideas about daily phrases in French and English; Henry Bradley, the nineteenth-century editor for the Early English Text Society, describes it as "consist[ing] chiefly of a collection of colloquial phrases and dialogues" (1900: v). To the extent that the volume serves as a manual for learning spoken mercantile French, it provides a key to how such a manual would translate allegedly spoken language into idiomatic English. One section, in particular, contains an extended dialogue between a merchant and a buyer as they bargain over prices, and this research will approach this exemplary interchange as a potential source for considering spoken language.

Examining the dialogue section in Caxton's text illuminates different aspects of colloquial language use, and this research provides a discourse analytic examination of three of its linguistic features: interpersonal terms, narrative structure, and politeness. This study first examines the high number of interpersonal markers (address terms and deictic pronouns) in the dialogue and the ways that these mark switches in reported speaker—illustrating claims about strategies of speech representation (Moore 2011). Next, the research examines how the

passage, in being an extended dialogue, supports our models of narrative structure for bargaining as a specialized kind of commercial discourse (see Collingwood 1996, Lebsanft 1999: 279). Finally, the study examines the use of politeness markers in dialogue, contributing to conversations about the historical development of politeness strategies (Watts 2003; Jucker 2008, 2010; Culpeper and Kádár 2010; Nevala 2010). In the coming sections, I will first describe the textual background of the text, then provide the case study of the dialogue section with linguistic analysis, and finally discuss how we might consider the relationship between Caxton's work and spoken medieval English.

2. Textual background

William Caxton's text of the *Dialogues in French and English* is dated at about 1483, and survives in three copies: one at the library of Ripon Cathedral, one in the Rylands Library, and the third at Bamburgh Castle. The work is based on a French/Flemish original, the *Livre des Mestiers*, written probably over a century earlier; it appears to have been written by a Flemish schoolmaster about 1340 (Kibbee 1991: 78). The original volume contained parallel columns of text in French and Flemish; it is thought that Caxton's volume is a translation of the Flemish text (Bradley 1900: vi). The translator for the English addition is unknown. Possibly, Caxton did the translation himself; he would have spent considerable time in Bruges through his business as a silk mercer [he was governor of the English nation in Bruges from 1463–1469 (Harmer 1964: xx)], and he might have become acquainted with the *Livre des Mestiers* there. Some have speculated that he simply added an English column to the French and Flemish in his copy and then printed it later (Lambley 1920: 45). Norman Blake, however, surveys Caxton's biographical details and compares aspects of the English translation of the *Livre* with anglicization practices in Caxton's acknowledged translations and argues that the translator cannot be Caxton himself (1965: 7–15). He thinks it more likely that the English translation was created by a mercer in 1465–1466, that it came into Caxton's hands a bit later (around 1480), and that he printed it soon upon receiving it (15). Blake suggests that perhaps Caxton regarded the work as merely a schoolbook and thus not worthy of a prologue (suggesting that if he had translated it, he might have included a prologue).

Caxton's work has no surviving prologue, or, indeed, even a title page, so its original title is not known. It is referred to by early bibliographers as *Instructions for Travellers,* suggesting that they saw it as a reference for traveling businessmen or tourists (Bradley 1900: v). Bennett, for example, points out that the volume is followed by other books by Wynken de Worde and Richard Pynson, intended for those who "wish to do merchandize in France" (1969: 93). The work, however, is not the most cutting-edge vision of mercantile practice; Lisa Cooper has pointed out that, by the late fifteenth century, the dialogue would already be somewhat nostalgic or retrograde in presenting face-to-face marketplace bargaining rather than communication through mercantile intermediaries (Cooper 2011: 38; for description of the market public space see Masschaele 2002). The original *Livre des Mestiers* is presented as a schoolbook, though, and Norman Blake sees the pedagogical audience for Caxton's volume as well as the commercial one. He comments that "it may have been used by merchants as well as schoolboys" (1969: 65), and modern readers have pursued the implications of this second audience, considering it together with other early pedagogical texts of foreign language (Bennett 1969: 93–94; Howatt 1983; Hüllen 1995: 101).

The work opens as a phrasebook of helpful conversational gambits: "Syre god you kepe," "Ye be Welcome," "Where haue ye ben so longe" (4–5). It then provides different lexical lists, itemizing different semantic fields of daily life. First there are items around the house:

Pottes of coppre kawdrons
Ketellis pannes
Basyns lauours ....
A choppyng knyf
for to choppe wortes
Cuppes of siluer
Cuppes gylte
Couppes of goold.

Cuppes with feet ....
Plente of shetes.
Bordclothes towellis (6–7)
[Pots of copper, cauldrons, kettles, pans, basins, dishpans,.... a chopping knife for to chop food. Cups of silver, gilded cups, cups of gold, cups with feet;... plenty of sheets, tablecloths, towels.]

Other catalogs follow: words for clothes, food, kinds of meat and poultry, other animals and fishes, trees, vegetables, towns, fairs, spices, oils, waxes, measures, weights, metals, ecclesiastical and noble titles. These words inventory the consumer commodities of the late-medieval bourgeois household; indeed, they depict an entire lifestyle, one well-appointed with elegant food, home goods, fine clothes, and refined speech. Lisa Cooper describes the work as a "bourgeois shopping list" and regards the genre of the book as a catalog of lavish products (2011: 42). As such, the catalogue of objects is not merely a list of individual words. The words collectively serve as an aspirational lifestyle aid, in the way that contemporary catalogs for high-end stores do not merely show images of the products that they sell, but also embed the products in a commercial fantasy. If we take the volume's purpose to be language pedagogy, then, the lists of commodities implicitly suggest that learning the words brings the life within reach.

These inventories, however, are not presented purely in list-form, but embedded in a syntactic structure—part of a back-and-forth that continues in different ways throughout the volume. The second half of the volume consists of a 20-page abecedary of crafts, listing names of townspeople and their roles. From Agnes our maid and Beatrice the launderer to Felice the silkwoman, from Everard the upholster to Zachary the proctor, the text provides an entertaining list of imaginary townspeople with their social functions. Not all are professions either, some are other kinds of identity markers ["Lucie the bastarde"]. The text seems to work out the structure and surroundings of the medieval town, presenting organizational structures for the community as well as the household. It exemplifies in important ways the words of everyday medieval life.

3. The dialogue

The illustrative dialogue between the seller and buyer in the marketplace comprises a middle chunk of the volume (14–18). The interchange is comprised of 39 conversational turns that move directly from one speaker to the other with no framing narrative or *verba dicendi* in between. The length of the exchange depends on where we identify the ending—this is a bit ambiguous since the end of the dialogue merges into the general narrative. Choosing one possible end-point, the section would be 172 lines altogether, and 810 words. The dialogue begins:

Dame what hold ye the elle.
Of this cloth
Or what is worth the cloth hole
In short to speke how moche thelle.
Syre resone.
I shall doo to you resone.
Ye shall haue it good cheep
Ye truly for catell
Dame me must wynne
Take hede what I shall paye
Four shelynges for the elle
Yf it you plese you (14)
["Dame, how do you price this ell of cloth? Or what is the whole cloth worth? In short, how much is it?" "Sir, reasonable. I shall give you a reasonable price; you shall have it cheap." "Yes, truly, for money, Dame, you must win me. Take heed what I shall pay." "Four shillings for the ell, if it please you."]

This exchange goes on for many lines, exemplifying a bargain (that ends satisfactorily for both parties) to show how one might dicker over prices. This section will examine three different linguistic aspects of the dialogue: the use of interpersonal terms to organize the turn-taking, the narrative structure, and the use of politeness strategies.

3.1 Interpersonal terms

One of the most notable aspects of the style and diction of the dialogue is the high frequency of interpersonal and socially-connected speech terms.

Address terms and personal pronouns are important for interpersonal communication and have long been a feature of historical pragmatic analysis (see Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995; Nevala 2004; Jucker 2008, 2010; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 73–91). In this communicative role, these terms also characterize discursive switches in reported speech. In the late medieval period, with no quotation marks or other visual markers of turn-taking to rely upon, early English dialogue must use the words of the text to mark transitions of speaker (Moore 2011), and these kind of interpersonal terms are frequently used in service of this functional end.

Table 1. Interpersonal markers in the dialogue

address term (*Dame*, *Syre*, *Damoyselle*)	19
second person pronouns (*you*, *your*, etc.)	47
first person pronouns (*I*, *me*, etc.)	46
total	112

In Table 1, we see the large number of interpersonal markers; clearly, a large proportion of the verbiage of the passage is dedicated to social connection between the interlocutors. Of 810 total words, we find about 112 to be either address terms or first/second person pronouns—nearly 14% of the total words, then, are taken up with orienting the speaker's utterances between speaker and listener. We also note that of the 39 total utterances, about half of them contain an addressing title like *Dame* or *Syre* which specifies whom the words are addressed to, and, also, by extension, who is saying the words.

One particular site for interpersonal terms or speech-like words in constructed reported speech is at the onset of a new utterance. In this excerpt, for example, the first four dialogic turns are flagged with address terms, and the final turn is marked by a discourse marker:

Dame mete well
Sire I shall neuer shriue me thereof
Of that I shall with holde yow
Dame, that knowe I well
If I had not trusted you
I had called the metar
Sire yf it plese you.

He shall be called.
Nay truly dame.
["Dame, measure well." "Sire, I shall never need to make confession that I have withheld anything from you." "Dame, I know that well; If I had not trusted you, I should have called the measurer." "Sire, if it please you, he shall be called." "Nay, truly, Dame...."]

Caxton's dialogue moves back and forth between speakers with no inquit verbs or other narrative flags to the transitions between speakers, so the words of the text have to mark the shifts between the utterances of the buyer and those of the seller (see Moore 2011: 43–69 for further discussion). Table 2 surveys the onset words of these switches of speaker in the new dialogic turns. Here we see that this discursive location does have quite a high number of words that are either interpersonal terms (establishing that someone is speaking), or other speech-like words that perform other conversational functions (answering questions, situating information, etc.)

Table 2. Onset words of reported speech turns in the dialogue

address term (*Dame*, *Syre*, *Damoyselle*)	15
discourse markers (*nay*, *ye*, *in goddes name*)	8
first person or second person pronouns	5
other deictics (*that, it*)	5
interrogative pronouns (*what, how*)	3
other	3
total	39

The onset of a passage of reported speech is a site subject to particular pragmatic pressures in written discourse since the opening words must make clear that a transition in speaker has occurred. Connected speech markers in the dialogue have two purposes, therefore. On the one hand, their higher frequency of usage probably does resemble spoken language, particularly the language of a bargain, since such an oral interchange would surely have depended upon quite a number of pronouns. On the other hand, such markers are also essential to marking turn-taking in written dialogue. Before punctuation developed to mark clearly turn-taking in reported discourse, these interpersonal words worked together with other words of marked orientation (like deictics), and other speech-like words (e.g. *alas*) to flag speech onsets. Thus, interpersonal terms

that build human connection characterize both spoken and written dialogue, but they accomplish slightly different functions in each setting. In a spoken interchange, they serve to connect speaker with hearer and build bridges between them (as well as mark pauses and other functions). In written dialogue, they perform these same functions, but they also serve as markers for discourse organization. Particularly because they do seem speech-like, these interpersonal terms are successful written flags for constructed speech.

3.2 Narrative structure

Certain kinds of dialogue follow a characteristic direction and adhere to an expected structure. Dialogue studies have proposed a typical narrative structure for the conversational form of a bargain, a set of expectations that govern the interchange of seller and buyer. The following thematic elements have been identified in this respect (Collingwood 1996, Lebsanft 1999: 279):

(1) greetings
(2) seller's inquiry into the buyer's need
(3) seller's presentation of the merchandise
(4) price bargaining
(5) buyer's act of paying
(6) seller's delivery of the merchandise
(7) farewells

The dialogue between buyer and seller in Caxton's text follows some of this pattern, but deviates from it in many ways. For example, since greeting forms have already been listed earlier in the text, the constructed dialogue here dispenses with them, skipping straight to the buyer's request to know how much the cloth costs. Given our expectations of the initial greetings and opening pleasantries of the genre, beginning the dialogue with the buyer immediately asking for the price feels rather abrupt.

Characterizing the sections of Caxton's dialogue between buyer and seller suggests these elements:

(1) buyer's inquiry about seller's price
(2) seller's initial statement of price
(3) interchange about grades of cloth and prices
(4) buyer's counteroffer
(5) seller's rejection and counterproposal
(6) interchange about amount of cloth to be purchased and measurements
(7) seller's delivery of the merchandise
(8) seller's naming of final price
(9) buyer's act of payment
(10) interchange about foreign forms of money
(11) exchange of compliments corroborating successful transaction and future possibilities

Oddly, the dialogue does not present a direct agreement on the final price before the seller's presentation of the merchandise. The seller makes a kind of counterproposal which then turns into an interchange about how much cloth will be required for the buyer's intended uses. Then the buyer asks how much, the seller names a total price (which seems rather confusing and not clearly related to the previous conversation about prices), and the buyer pays it. This price would seem to be the linchpin of the dialogue, but yet it seems strangely elided at the critical moment. Still, the dialogue presents a clear delineation of haggling—among the first to appear so clearly in an English text. As such, it is part of a genre of retail transactions, setting out the stages of negotiation and exemplifying for readers the elements of a successful commercial exchange.

3.3 Politeness

One pragmatic aspect of the interchange that seems particularly important and telling is the use of politeness terms and strategies. Politeness research is an important part of historical pragmatics in the wake of Brown and Levinson 1987 (see, for example, summary accounts in Watts 2003; Jucker 2008; Culpeper and Kádár 2010; Nevala 2010).

If the dialogue is intended to serve as an illustrative interchange that might teach a foreign mercer how to speak to merchants in a marketplace, one important aspect of this is the meticulous construction of a tone that combines firmness in bargaining with respectful speech.

The dialogue teaches that a potential buyer must drive a good bargain without overstepping into rudeness; the deal will be more successful if the buyer and seller can carefully navigate conversational norms of politeness in the commercial transaction. In so doing, it serves as evidence for the historical development of politeness strategies in English and for the overlap between commercial transactions and deferential and strategic politeness.

In the early part of the interchange, the buyer's tone is more noticeably firm. He uses direct questions and imperatives ("Take hede what I shall paye"). His manner ranges from business-like to indignant ("Hit ne were no Wysedom. / For so moche wold I haue / Good scarlete"). The seller, on the other hand, is more deferential during the initial part of their interchange. She gives him her starting price with a hedge ("Yf it you plese you"), for example. She does, though, use stronger language when rejecting his counteroffer ("That is euyll boden," *That is badly offered.*).

Throughout, though, neither interlocutor makes any critical or negative comments about the other, only about the suggested price. Though the buyer is terse, he always treats the seller with personal respect. In what is clearly a marked distinction, for example, he unfailingly uses the more formal *ye/you* pronoun to address the seller whereas he uses the informal *thou* pronoun twice in a two-line interjection to a nearby boy asking him to carry the cloth for him. Similarly, the seller is respectful, inquiring of the buyer what he thinks the cloth is worth rather than naming another price.

As the negotiation progresses, the buyer's tone grows warmer. He then begins to express trust that she is treating him well ("If I had not trusted you / I had called the metar" *If I had not trusted you, I would have called the measurer*), and to express his satisfaction ("I me holde / Playnly content"). As they conclude the interchange, the praise flows freely on both sides (Her: "Fair sire I am well plesyd with you..." Him: "Hit were right. / For your goodlynes / For the courtosye / That is in you").

Drawing upon Brown and Gilman's model (1960: 255–258), we might say that the dynamic of the interaction shifts from one of defining power to one of building solidarity. A power relationship is nonreciprocal, since both people cannot have power in the same area, whereas solidarity is a more symmetrical phenomenon, building a shared

identity. Rhetorically, the buyer desires to establish a power relationship while the bargain is being negotiated; he sets out this intention with imperative directives like "Take hede what I shall paye." Once the price has been settled, though, it is to the buyer's advantage to build solidarity with the seller: to indicate respect, to solicit good will (for fair measurement), and to lay the ground for future commercial transactions since personal networks played a major role in retailing (Blondé, Stabel, Van Damme, and Stobart 2006: 19).

This shift towards solidarity as the buyer's rhetorical goal is characterized through an increase in both deferential politeness and negative politeness strategies. The two of these have often been taken together as aspects of negative politeness, but Andreas Jucker suggests that they may have different historical trajectories and that they should be differentiated (Jucker 2010: 195–196). He distinguishes between deferential politeness (for example, address terms and pronouns used in situations of formality and deference) and strategic negative politeness (used to preserve the interlocutor's desire not to be impeded or challenged). Since Caxton's dialogue is a translation of a fourteenth-century European original into fifteenth-century English, it is not the best evidence for dating emergent strategies of negative politeness in English. Yet the dialogue does seem to employ strategies of both deferential politeness (through *courtesie* terms) and negative politeness (through negative face-preserving utterances).

Both buyer and seller employ a base measure of deferential politeness throughout the dialogue in the form of the formal *you/ye* pronouns, and the repetition of honorific titles (*Syre, Dame*). In the initial negotiation over price, the seller uses more deferential expressions ("Yf it you plese you"). After the seller is cutting the cloth, though, the buyer makes a point of establishing that he is trusting her and not calling over the marketplace measurer to verify the length. Even as she insists that he should get a second opinion and presses him to measure it himself, he avers that he trusts her: professions of trust that seem clearly to be a mark of respect and a negative face-saving move to acknowledge his good faith in not challenging her integrity. As their interaction draws to a close, he employs adjectives like "goodlynes" and "courtosye" which have been categorized as adjectives of negative politeness by Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg (see 1996: 171 for their politeness continuum). His use of deferential and negative politeness

markers increases as his rhetorical strategies shift over the course of the dialogue.

The interchange seems like good evidence for the finer social niceties of successful bargaining, since practices of commercial discourse were being developed and refined in the medieval period. The dialogue is partly instructive, casting the reader as the visiting foreign mercer who must make a bargain with the local marketplace merchant. It is possible that making the seller a woman heightens the invitation to identify with the male buyer—though there were certainly many women working in the medieval marketplace (Hutton 2011: 119). Typical gender dynamics in conversation might also underscore the recommendation to the buyer to take a firm tone with the seller, at least at first. The buyer's changes in tone as the bargain progresses fruitfully, from business-like to more pleasant, is held up as a model to follow. His speech, marked by absence of hedges and initially infrequent deferential remarks (in contradistinction to the seller's utterances) is put forward as a paradigm for how one might pursue a mercantile transaction, and permits us to see how dynamics of power and solidarity overlap with usage of negative politeness.

4. Evaluating the dialogue's relationship to spoken English

The constructed spoken interchange in the dialogue leaves us wondering about the representativeness of Caxton's text for spoken English. Several obvious impediments emerge to taking the whole work as a representative source for speech. First is the fact that the work is a translation, so it was neither composed nor translated with the immediate intention of resembling spoken English at all. The *Livre des Mestiers* is a French/Flemish parallel text, and the English column in Caxton's work is a translation. As has been remarked by readers and editors, the English is often too slavish in imitating both the syntax and vocabulary of the Flemish (or French). L.C. Harmer gives examples like *se vous aves de quoy* (6), rendered as "Yf ye haue wherof" (1964: xvii), and Alison Hanham gives as an example, *il se lieve touts les nuyts* paired with "he ariseth alle the nyghtes" (2005: 715). A translation of conversation risks depending overmuch on the syntax and vocabulary of the base text rather than on the idiom of spoken English, and this seems to be the case for Caxton's volume. Nevertheless, the English certainly depicts examples

of simple plain style, so even if every turn of phrase may not conform to a similar phrasing in a fifteenth-century London market, the correspondence to common language is surely fairly good or Caxton would never have printed it. It is, in this sense, more a mimetic dialogue than a scholastic one (Taavitsainen 1999: 251, Culpeper and Kytö 2010: 43–44).

Second, the words of the text cannot be taken purely as an attempt to render daily language; they play different structural roles in the organization of the text. This is true within the dialogue section, as we saw in the use of socially-connected interpersonal language: certain words function, in part, to organize the written discourse. And it is also true when taking the volume as a whole: while the words do serve as evidence of the vocabulary of everyday life, they have other functions, too. Werner Hüllen enumerates and describes five kinds of discourse in the work: 1) framing utterances for the whole text, 2) boundary utterances of smaller sub-sections, 3) pedagogical remarks on foreign language, 4) lists of lexical items in syntactic embeddings, and sometimes as addresses to imaginary people, and 5) illustrative dialogues demonstrating language in use (1995: 106). The words at any given point, therefore, cannot be taken as data for ordinary language; they are always embedded in a generic and stylistic context with differing functional goals.

Third, Caxton's work is subject to other pragmatic pressures besides fidelity in reporting colloquial speech. In the dialogue, the text attempts to present a sample bargain: the degree to which this constructed interchange might be said to promote a fantasy of easy international commerce is an open question. Another purpose is pedagogical: to illustrate basic words in their contexts. And still other purposes become clear in different sections. The very first entry in the table of contents, for example, is "Fyrst, the callyng of the trinite;" (1) and the beginning and end of the work are a religious invocation. These opening and closing prayers cannot be said to advance the purpose of describing everyday vocabulary, but they serve as an important part of a text (since the whole endeavor is through the grace of God) and particularly a pedagogical text (since learning is always a religious process). The invocation of God first in the contents also models the proper order of the world, a function echoed in the long lists of titles ("the grete lordes I shall name") that begins with the Pope, the emperor, a list of kings, abbots, bishops,

clerics, dukes, and so forth (20–22). This list goes on for pages, and it seems unlikely that it is motivated by the belief that familiarity with the "erle of flaundres" or the "Vycounte of beaumond" is critical to knowledge of ordinary vocabulary. It appears to be more an attempt to delineate the order of the human world (similar, perhaps, to the way that a dictionary might contain not only lists of words but an appendix with famous names and places). In this sense, Caxton's *Dialogues* is a description of the human world, with all of the objects, foods, places, people, and talk it contains, and, as such, provides a kind of evidence for the lexicon of ordinary life.

The work as a whole does not make a good source for undifferentiated data analysis, therefore: we cannot merely feed the text into a syntactic analysis program and use it to talk about spoken syntax. Different sections have different purposes, and not all of it is even intended to resemble speech. As we saw in the dialogue, too, even the sections that more clearly resemble speech pose problems.

Yet it can also be said that—given certain caveats—the volume and particularly the dialogue do serve as evidence for common language: what we might call the style of colloquial language. Caxton's works fundamentally position themselves as the language of the common people (though, as Caxton clarifies, people who are not *too* common). Caxton in his prologues expresses a philosophy of translation that values not conforming to an elevated prose style or a too-localized one, but to a middle way: "englysshe not ouer rude nor curyous" (Prologue to *Eneydos* [1928]: 109). He often apologizes for his English in ways that are typically read as formulaic humility, but sometimes seem to be closer to class-conscious anxiety. While he is deliberately not printing his texts for a purely aristocratic audience, his prologues sometimes feel the need to apologize to worthy patrons for his language. He says: "I ... was born & lerned myn englissh in kente in the weeld where I doubte not is spoken as brode and rude englissh as is in ony place of englond" (Prologue to *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* [1928]: 4). We see a number of these apologies for "rude" English in the prologues:

(a) ...to haue me excused for the rude & symple makyng and reducyn in to our englisshe (Prologue to *The Game and Playe of the Chesse* [1928]*:* 13).

(b) And now at this tyme rudely translated out of fresshe in to Englissh by me symple persone Wyllm Caxton (Prologue to *The Mirrour of the World* [1928]: 53).
(c) and by me willm Caxton translated in to this rude & symple elglyssh (Epilogue to Reynart the Foxe [1928]: 62)
(d) ...reduce this said book out of frenssh in to our vulgar englissh (Prologue to *The Book of the Knyght of the Towre* [1928]: 86)
(e) ...and to pardoune me of the rude and comyn englyshe. where as shall be found faulte For I confesse me not lerned ne knowynge the arte of rethoryk / ne of such gaye termes as now be sayd in these dayes and vsed: B[u]t I hope that it shall be vnderstonden of the redars and herers: And that shall suffyse. (Prologue to *Blanchardyn and Eglantine* [1928]: 105)

Caxton acknowledges his audience in these prologues and spells out his purposeful attempt to position his English at the middle. When we consider the relationship between Caxton's works and everyday English, therefore, it is helpful to notice Caxton's purposeful positioning of his English away from overly elevated and literary language.

5. Conclusion

Caxton's *Dialogues in French and English* is a landmark for early studies of dialogue, therefore: the first English text that aims at foreign language pedagogy, and one of the early representations of marketplace bargaining. The text has many limitations, however, if we approach it as a source for spoken English. The whole text is not representative enough of spoken English idiom to simply be searchable syntactically, and even the lexical choices raise some question. It is, though, good as a source for marked features of a colloquial style, and good in its copiousness. It is particularly good as a source for certain kinds of pragmatic functions; we get important information about politeness strategies, about the discursive organization of conversation, about everyday lexical items, and about strategies of written discourse organization. Caxton's text is evidence for the dynamics of commerce: a rare window into the speech of the marketplace, the quotidian interactions over everyday goods, and a conversational interaction (between a man and a woman, between a merchant and a tradesman).

Analyzing the dialogue sheds light on developing models of politeness in historical English linguistics: confirming that negative politeness did (at least to some degree) characterize later medieval usage. It also exemplifies the way that interpersonal terms can help to organize reported discourse in early written English. And it illustrates the narrative structure of a retail conversation: the bargaining and bantering that that entails. This kind of case study helps to fill out our understanding of dialogic writing in early English.

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