

# Expanding Applied Linguistic Investigation Parameters: the cases of Sign Texts in Old and in Modern English.

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## Abstract

Applied linguistics research frequently addresses speculative theoretical questions but traditionally requires hard empirical, often quantitative, data to support validity. Data are then interpreted within relatively narrow parameters of inquiry, often limiting scope of relevance and applicability of the research. In contrast, other disciplines such as archeology and anthropology are less constrained. One cause could be theoretical and practical conceptions of Text. This paper presents interpretations of two written language texts which are similar in genre and purpose but detached in place, time, language function and communicative purpose. Analysis extends beyond normal applied linguistics parameters incorporating historical, archeological and anthropological perspectives and speculation.

It begins by providing an example of issues involved in the context of historical linguistics and proceeds to distinguish the concept of 'Text' from 'texts' as artifacts for investigative analysis. One Old English and one Modern English sign text are analysed in parallel, linguistically, extra-linguistically and anthropologically to realize the scope for potential findings by extending the investigative ground. It is concluded that applied linguistics can and should admit the utility of non-linguistic interpretation of data or risk losing vitality and relevance in present day and future interdisciplinary inquiry.

**Keywords:** Text analysis, Text, Signs genre, Old English, Cameroon English, World Englishes, Investigative approach.

Applied Linguistics investigation can and should do what has occurred in other disciplines and broaden its mind. Reliable conclusions based on analysis of epistemological evidence is good practice, the best we have to go on, but limited to what reliable evidence there is. These two examples illustrate this point.

A recent paleontological documentary on the Discovery Channel (*Tyrannosaurus Sex* 2010) speculated about the mating habits of Tyrannosaurus Rex: the male had to bite the back of the neck to hang on because T-Rex's 'hands' were so small as to be useless. The telling evidence in this case was tooth marks in the upper vertebrae of a T-Rex deemed to have been female. Reliable? No. Valid? From a falsificationist's view, so far yes. Speculative? Certainly. Bite marks as non-language text!

Then, from a *History Today* article about the necessary nexus of history and archeology (Smail 2009) comes this extended quote :

The bodies of evidence now available to students of the human past are growing by leaps and bounds. To the pot shards, texts and phonemes [!] of [early 20<sup>th</sup> century British historian] Collingwood's day we have added genes, isotopes and other traces ... So if you want to find out what was going on in Anglo-Saxon Britain you need to layer any texts at hand on top of the coins and the shards, the ceramics and the glassware, and then add the chemical traces of spices left in pots, the isotopes of carbon and nitrogen left in bones and the modern distribution of genes.

(p 23)

In a sense all the types of evidence mentioned by Smail are Text: it conveys discourse which is significant and meaningful to archeological and other investigators. But Smail's point is to consider the range of evidence available. Should investigation stop there with the evidence? Clearly in paleontology nor archeology they do not. Nor should applied linguists.

Can linguists obtain better quality answers to their questions if they consider a wider range of textual evidence than simply linguistic? Certainly.

This paper considers analyses of English in the light of this question. First, though, the notion of 'Text' as opposed to 'texts' with a usable typology is considered, and applied to analysis of a peculiar memorial text in Old English from 950 years ago. Comparatively, a Modern English sign text in a different situation is examined. In the process, what can happen when investigation transcends the scope of traditional language textual evidence and analysis is presented - how does it stand compared to orthodox linguistic data collection and interpretation? Finally, lessons for how to consider *Englises* in the modern context are taken in.

### **Text, the Social, and the Perspective of the 'Language Event'**

The *language event* concept is useful for understanding notions of Text, especially language Text. The concept is drawn from a comparative concept, the 'Literacy Event', which ostensibly comes from a seminal sociolinguistics work by Shirley Bryce Heath (1983). Basically her work was an anthropological investigation of how people in a relatively remote, predominantly

African-American and Caucasian-American communities in the Carolinas in North America used language, especially spoken discourse, in response to discourses coming at them from written texts from various sources. According to Heath,

literacy events have social interactional rules which regulate the type and amount of talk about what is written, and define ways in which oral language reinforces, denies, extends or sets aside the written material.

(1983 p 386, quoted by Baynham 1995 p 39)

In Heath's research, many subjects had negligible literacy levels, and depended on others to make sense of the texts which bore on their lives. Yet, in their own life-contexts (family, neighbourhood, etc.) these people showed substantially different language behaviour from people outside those contexts. Interestingly this pattern of distinct literacy practices began to dissipate more recently as people from those communities grew up left, went back and also as texts in mass media from outside began to reshape the mass of text with which people in these communities were having contact (see Heath (2012) for a longer-term anthropological view).

In this sense texts within one's environment and the discourse therein influence the lives of people, just as other environmental phenomena do. When people behave by producing language in response to their environment, language events can be observed. In comments on the same point, Gee (1986) observes Heath's anthropological interest in how people in a community gain literacy (language and other communication skills) as part of socialization processes for developing assumptions and values in their communities.

This view is just as salient to the perspective of the investigators analyzing textual evidence as it is to the human subjects whose lives or behaviour are being investigated. First of all the texts or other phenomena need to have become meaningful. The surest, simplest way to comprehend this is acknowledge that people need to encounter these things in their everyday life. This idea is considered later regarding texts and related phenomena almost a millennium ago in the north of England

A similar, more straight forward approach than Heath's is used by Taylor (1983) and by Baynham (1995) among others who present four-dimensional views of individuals in their daily lives interacting with texts and also verbally with people around them as series of literacy events: basically detailing the events, the texts, the contexts, how the events start, and finish. Sometimes the events are small and incidental (eg. buying a train ticket), sometimes extended, complex and having noticeable impacts on the participants' lives (eg. filling out a form and being interviewed at a social welfare office). These researchers' interest lies simply in how and when people interact

with written texts. Similar approaches occur in pragmatics research, such as in speech act and conversation analysis, though pragmatics can move from tangible to more abstract and inferential discourse as its focus and medium. Such research normally is more interested in language and communication behaviour, its causes and outcomes.

### Language Events and Text

This is where the *language event* concept becomes relevant. Here a simple understanding of language event is *any instance in which language is used*. This calls into question just what language is. Language is just one kind of communication mode, and just now the idea of communication as social behaviour is being left out. Rather, the significant feature of language here is that it can become encoded as text. Stringing along understandings of these interdependent concepts, the next question is what is ‘Text’?

#### a. ‘Text’

Text (for convenience-sake this idea of ‘text’ is written with a capital ‘T’) here has no determiner – it is conceptual rather than quantifiable. Text is physical or tangible manifestation of discourse that is meaningful and which can be taken in by people; ‘meaningful’ here means that it signifies something – has semiotic significance. Text then should be, well, manifest – we should be able to sense its existence. Language encoded as written Text means writing that can be read by someone: written language. Can language be produced in any other ways: yes, of course it can – it can be spoken, and gestured (eg. when scuba diving, sign language). The latter notions are contentious, and so limitations need to be admitted:

- time limitations – the life span of the Text is the duration of the message
- recognizability
- comprehensibility

However there are qualifications:

- the extent to which recording or encoding are possible, and if so
- level of difficulty and clarity of recording
- the medium of recording and its quality
- the extent to which a recorded text matches the original text

Regarding written language Text, it actually normally is a form of recording, though not always, especially in literate cultures. There is a presumption that spoken language precedes written language. Without writing or other recording technology this is the norm. Further, people generally learn to speak before they learn to write.

So far *language Text* has been discussed. There is *also non-language Text*. Normal linguistic

investigation leads into semiotics, with the concept of the signifier and the signified. Religion is a relevant field for this, for example powerful symbols such as the Christian cross or Islam crescent; politics such as Nazi Swastika or communist hammer and sickle, and nation-state symbols such as flags or country emblems; gender, age and occupation also have commonly recognized symbols. Here is where the concept of Text moves away from the commonly recognizable. In this paper, *artifacts* are also viewed as Text. Artifacts necessarily require some tangibility because above all they need to be identifiable. Another characteristic of artifacts is that they have *provenance* – they come from somewhere, a context. Artifacts are a common focus in historical and archeological investigation: to the investigators artifacts have significance. Their significance to different investigators is at times also different. This ‘*Artifacts as Text*’ notion has an uncharacteristic semiotic aspect: there is not necessarily any signifier. *Artifacts may have multiple significances*. There are also multitudinous artifacts. It is at this point that discussion can move from Text to *texts*.

#### **b. ‘texts’**

‘texts’ are quantifiable and may stand alone. Grammatically-speaking, they attract a determiner, such as *the* or *a*, and obviously can be plural. Briefly, different pieces of writing become different text items – different texts. eg.:

- a ‘*No Parking*’ sign
- I wrote 25 different email texts last night;
- I have eight textbooks in my bag;
- my old university library had the best collection of *incubalia* texts in Australia;
- my friend has just sent me a text message.

These are examples of *written texts*

Also, there are *spoken-language texts*, just one kind of *spoken texts*. This requires qualification: texts need to be identifiable which is done through the senses: sight and also hearing, touch, taste and smell. The latter two or three require even more qualification, but they are of far less concern in this paper, but comparing the work of wine-tasters or chefs with a teacher marking homework may give some idea of this notion. These may be classified as *transient spoken texts* and *lasting spoken texts*

#### *bi. Transient Spoken texts*

Transient spoken texts include:

- any comprehensible utterance – quite short, even momentary, which may or may not be heard by others in the first instance, eg.:
- a shout off a cliff to capture an echo,

- a phone conversation,
- a lecture,
- a cat meowing at one's feet for begging for food (not human speech, but meaningful to an owner of a cat)
- any comprehensible utterance (or extended spoken discourse) in the immediate present, eg.:
  - me giving a paper as a spoken lecture,
  - a Beatles live concert in 1965,
  - the Japanese Emperor's public announcement of surrender in August 1945

These are finite, transient - they start and they finish never to be seen or heard again.

### *bii. Lasting Spoken texts*

Lasting spoken texts include:

- spoken language transcriptions (the difficult issue is how to transcribe – solution is transcribe the best way to show what you need to show)
- spoken records (eg law court reports, witness testimony)
- reports of spoken language (eg people believing Julius Caesar Roman reputedly saying *E tu Brute* [*You too Brutus*] at his assassination, though contemporary ancient historians, Suetonius reporting him saying something like '*You too child*' in Greek, and Plutarch reporting him staying silent.)

All these have to be read. Spoken texts that cannot be read without re-processing include:

- audio or video recordings (these began ostensibly with Thomas Edison's phonograph, and now there are I-tunes and Youtube. Examples include any analog or digital recording of the transient spoken text examples mentioned before)

These are simply seen and heard, or just heard.

So far notions of Text and texts are limited to the detached researcher's or analyst's perspective. This view is fine for an understanding of the context. Yet, this is limited - attempting to gauge how texts as phenomena in the environment are perceived and acted upon by participants in that environment is also valuable. This latter perspective runs through the rest of the paper.

### **Language Text Juxtaposed with Non-Language Text**

What is Text then? A broad definition is any meaningful tangible articulation or encoding of discourses (if this is done through language, it is language Text). This view draws from systemic functional grammar (Halliday 1985); and also Gee (1996, 2001) which, to paraphrase, sees Discourse as ways of seeing and acting in the world. Language texts such as a newspaper headline, website address, are all just one kind of Text, just as a work of art, a dinosaur's thigh

bone displayed in a museum or shards of a broken terracotta amphora are non-language Text. As such, generic features of Text include:

- texts can be seen, physically analysed, felt, read, **can be significant for some people** (eg our paleontologists, archeologists, anthropologists, historians) though maybe not others
- texts can be recorded or registered like a fingerprint, audio-visually or electronically. For instance, though special equipment is needed (eg. recorder-players, optical fiber cable or wireless computer interface) for the meaning to be conveyed to and taken in by readers (or viewers and listeners), these Text media and their sound or visual images are tangible
- if Text is recorded, for instance spoken language transcribed as written Text, it can maintain just a limited integrity of the original spoken language – limited in this case because the medium has changed, from spoken to written.

The last feature is an important point for considering language Text in historical linguistics.

Thus, as English is just one kind of language, language is just one kind of Text. As Text, language gains tangible form, which is what language users see and create. For linguists, educators and other researchers, textual evidence is regarded as potentially reliable. So it is. Problems begin when one considers how to look at it.

### English as Text

As inferred before, the body of existing knowledge of English language directly or indirectly is based on texts. Of course in a short paper or even a short book, the scope, depth and nature of all texts that have ever existed is impossible. Actually that is not the point.

The point is to consider how these texts are looked at. Attached to this is the notion of what is not seen – gaps, or what retrospectively may logically be expected to be there but is not. Historians, archaeologists, anthropologists investigate along these lines and it is also quite possible for linguists (including students of English) to do so.

In mainstream English historical linguistics, Old English is believed to have evolved from a mix of northern German dialects, and later Scandinavian Norse to a lesser extent, mixing over a few hundred years until about the late ninth century (Culpepper 2005, McCrum et al. 1986, Barber 2000, Baugh & Cable 2002, Crystal 2003a 2003b, Bragg 2004, Lerer 2007, McIntyre 2009, Mugglestone 2006 2012, Smith 2009, Trask 2010). Interestingly all this literature pervades the north Atlantic Anglophone academic axis, relying essentially on lexical and phonological evidence including Old English texts and present day English dialect phonemics. Also, interestingly, an alternative school – mainly in northern and eastern Europe<sup>1</sup> - considers

<sup>1</sup> A series of symposiums at Potsdam University in Germany (Tristram 2006) and the *English & Celtic*

the Brythonic (ie. Celtic) origins of English. Their evidence includes the mainstream school's linguistic evidence, but they also consider comparative grammar analysis with Celtic languages (Tristram 1999, Filppula et al 2009, McWhorter 2008, 2009), especially Welsh, phonological evidence (Filppula 2009, Schrijver 2009) as well as reference analysis of Old English texts (Tristram 1999, Lutz 2009), language culture pragmatics (Vennemann 2009) demographic and even genetic research (Wade 2003, McWhorter 2008). McWhorter, an unorthodox advocate<sup>2</sup> of these alternative approaches provides a critical overview of mainstream views, their evidence and its limitations. For instance he poses the question that, if Welsh and Irish Gaelic were taught in schools as much as French, German and Spanish are, would English linguists have noticed more from syntactic comparisons with Brythonic languages? He noticed similarities which form a substantial basis for his own conclusions.

In the present paper, two texts are analysed, an Old English text (called the *Orm Gamalsun text*) and a contemporary one (the *Sign text*). They are chosen because they have comparative situations being public written texts with particular genre-related functions. However, their communicative functions are different which causes their language forms to be different. An expanded analytical field is used, operating at three levels:

- *linguistic* – focus on the language form, lexis, syntax and morphology
- *extra-linguistic* – more holistic aspect of the text *per se* including theme, genre, script, apparent audience and authorship.
- *anthropological* – perhaps closer to historical, yet primarily concerned with situation and environment of the text

These are intended to correlate with the scope of linguistic, sociolinguistic and also anthropological and archeological approaches described earlier.

### **The Orm Gamalsun Text**

This text is an inscription carved in stone above the south-facing entrance to St Gregory's Minster church door in Kirkdale in northern Yorkshire dating from just before 1066 CE (Current Era). The text was chosen because of anthropological and comparative linguistic observations by McWhorter (2008 pp 110 118 122). I wished to see the extent to which linguistic analysis could complement situational analysis and draw a conclusion. A reproduction of the text is provided below in Figure 1, with a highlighted version in Figure 2.

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*in Contact* Project at the Joensuu University in Finland (ECC 2007) present a wealth of relevant Celtic Hypothesis research. However some papers are more convincing than others.

<sup>2</sup> McWhorter (2008) claims in his preface that, despite his Celtic-sounding Scottish name, he does not have a Celtic axe to grind as he is African American.





**Figure 1:** *The Orm Gamalsun Sundial and Inscription* (Source: *Regia Anglorum :Language* (2002), Genealogical website giving a factual annotated bibliography with much relevant historical details surrounding Orm Gamalsun and the church in Kirkdale. <http://www.genealogy.com/users/o/r/m/Charlene-M-Ormsby-FL/FILE/0001text.txt> Viewed 1.11.10. Photograph of the sundial and inscription. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/howick/2807690833/>)



**Figure 2:** *The Orm Gamalsun text highlighted* (Source: *The Kirkdale Sundial Viewed on 1 November 2010 at <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~kroch/scand/kirkdale.html>.*)<sup>3</sup>

#### i. Linguistic

At a micro-level, words are a mix of Germanic and Latin forms. Latin form is used for names of clerical (*GREGORIVS* – [Saint] *Gregorius* or *Gregory*). However, verbs such as *BOHTE*

<sup>3</sup> For an aerial view of the church, see <http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&q=kirkdale,yorkshire,map&ie=UTF8&ll=54.263106,-0.962371&spn=0.0006,0.001599&t=h&z=19>; and for a photo of the text under the portico, see <http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&q=kirkdale,yorkshire,map&ie=UTF8&t=h&ll=54.262839,-0.962724&spn=0,0.001599&z=19&layer=c&cbll=54.262839,-0.962724&panoid=rwdiqGskx0sk7BTxOzOxVw&cbp=12,40.25296899999995,,0,0&photoid=po-32529114>

(bought) and *LET MACAN* (*had it rebuilt – literally let (it be) make*), and past participles *TOBROCAN* and *TOFALAN* (*broken down and ruined – literally broken and fallen*) show Anglo-Saxon morphology. Further, the grammar appears heavily Germanic (eg passive voice form *HIT WES AEL TOBROCAN & TOFALAN – (it) was (all) broken (down and) ruined*). McWhorter (2008 pp 115-16) reports there is evidence of the dative (ie. usually *to/for/in + noun* for an indirect object) case marker suffix ‘-VM’ (-um in *DAGUM: IN EADWARD DAGVM CNG & N TOSTI DAGVM EORL – in the days of King Edward and of Earl Tostig*<sup>4</sup>) being retained from Norse in the Northumberland dialect variety of Old English. Otherwise morphologically and syntactically the text is Germanic, a mix of Norse and Anglo-Saxon. Kroch (1998) and McWhorter (2008) see a softening and regularization of Norse, such as absence of gendered endings for nouns and adjectives as evidence of Scandinavians using an Old English variety as a second language. Yet there is no evidence of Celtic syntax or word order in the text.

One other odd point is inconsistent spelling of *DAEGES* (*day's*) in the middle text and *DAGV*<sup>5</sup>*M* (*in the days*) in the main text. One possibility is the former is a plural form, resembling modern German without an umlaut (*Taege*). Or another explanation is necessary: the spelling may reflect a Germanic phonology used locally at the time.

Summary:

*the text maintains old Germanic and Norse syntax and morphology though with less use of their normal morphology. This suggests simplification or regularisation of grammar. At best it is evidence of shift from Old English variety forms to forms more common in Middle English later.*

## ii. Extra-Linguistic

Mainly, the Orm Gamalsun text is a memorial text, thematised with an individual *ORM GAMAL SVNA* (*Orm Gamal's son*). As a memorial text it has elements of narrative, recounting in the past simple tense how this individual purchased the church –

*BOHTE SCS GREGORIVS MINSTER* (*bought St. Gregory's minster*)

and had it rebuilt

*HE HIT LET MACAN NEWAN FROM GRVNDE* (*he had it built anew from the ground*)

There is a time reference, which is pragmatically normal as temporal exophoric deixis (ie. explicit time reference):

*IN EADWARD DAGVM CNG & N TOSTI DAGVM EORL+* (*in the days of King Edward and of Earl Tostig*)

<sup>4</sup> ‘in Edward’s days as King and Tosti’s day’s as Earl may be a more literal translation.

<sup>5</sup> In older Roman script, ‘U/u’ was frequently written as ‘V/v’, but pronounced as /u/

However, here the text in the middle stone shows something curious. It still acts as a memorial text, but the discourse switches from third to first person:

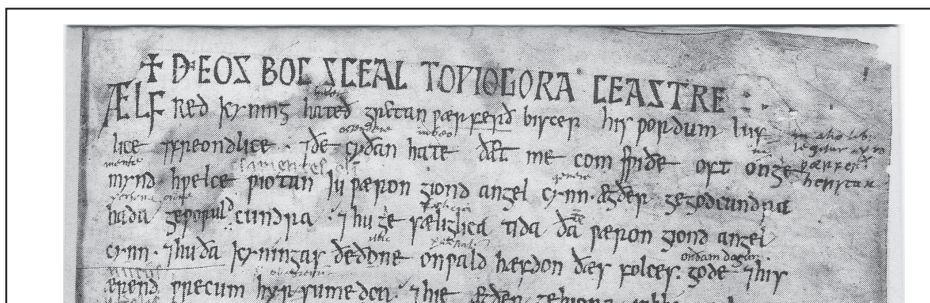
*HAWARTH ME WROHTE & BRAND PRS* (*Hawarth made (literally wrought) me and Brand & priests*)

This gives the text an intertextuality aspect: it mixes the memorial genre with a personalized self-description in a sense. Otherwise, the peculiar personalization of this secondary text is hard to explain. But *ME*, as first person singular pronoun in accusative (ie objective) case (*me*), gives a partial clue: *me* refers to either the whole Orm Gamalsun sundial text, or to the sundial itself:

*THIS IS DAEGES SOLMERCA + AET ILCVM TIDE+* (*This is the day's sun-marker at every time – literally, This is a sundial which marks each hour*)

However it is not clear and is one gap in this language text analysis.

Regarding script and the punctuation, the script is all upper case Roman script. As well, commas are used – these appear as ‘7<sup>6</sup>’ in the carved stone, though they are re-encoded as ‘&’ in different reproductions of the text. The convention of commas comes from ancient Greek text through Latin, even through to Modern English and other languages. However there is no spacing between words, which did occur in ancient Roman and some post-Roman Latin writing. In other written texts spacing and lower-case script was common, such as in this fragment from the *Cura Pastoralis* a scriptural text in Latin dating from the late ninth century from southern England in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3:** An example Latin text (with Anglo-Saxon glossing). Note the spacing between words, and use of what would be called lower-case script today in the main text. (Source: Burnley 2000 p 21. Reproduction of a page from the *Cura Pastoralis* in the Bodleian Library in Oxford)

Summary:

*The text shows narrative characteristics of memorial genre – a significant person as theme and*

<sup>6</sup> Hindu-Arabic numeration – eg 1,2,3,4, - did not enter English writing until hundreds of years later. Instead roman numerals were used, actually exemplified by the numbers surrounding the sundial. Commas however simply looked like a ‘7’.

*past time modality. Further, though ostensibly an English text, it appears unorthodox, being encoded using ancient Latin writing conventions, and showing peculiar shift from third to first person in the secondary text memorializing the maker/s of the texts in stone.*

### iii. Anthropological

This perspective starts with the context of the text. It is placed above the main entrance of a small church facing south half-way up a small hill above a water-course. It is probable that a small farming community of a few families lived around the church which conveniently was close to a water supply. Sticking out from the middle is a sundial which is presently sheltered by a portal-roof.

Text layout is a main memorial text memorializing the instigator of rebuilding the church, on the left and right sides of a secondary text in the middle mentioning who was responsible for making them.

It refers to a man, Orm, the son of Gamal, a Viking or of other Scandinavian descent. Most likely he had wealth and social or political power in the area. In any case he took possession of the church, fixing it up in around 1055 (Kroch 1998), at about the time of King Edward the Confessor, uncle to Harold Goodwinson (King Harold killed in the seminal Battle of Hastings in October 1066) and his brother and rival, the Earl of Northumberland who had a nickname, ‘Tostig’. Mentioning the Earl of Northumberland is significant, because Kirkdale is in the south of the old Northumberland domain, an old Anglo-Saxon region in the north of England. In the seventh and eighth centuries Northumberland had been richer and stronger than other kingdoms until Viking incursions from across the North Sea in the east and across from Ireland in the west subdued the kingdom. Vikings brought their Norse language which – to cut a long story short – mixed with the existing Northumberland variety of Old English. This apparently mixed language variety was used to make the short text about Orm Gamalsun, as mentioned in prior Linguistic analysis.

The text refers to the king at the time and also the local earl. Mentioning them is supposed to place the text in time – in this sense it is an historical event.

One surprising feature of the text is that it actually is in the local (English) vernacular, not in Latin. Surprising, because in England it was most common to record any writing on or relating to churches or religion in Latin, until the sixteenth century. A possible explanation is that as a memorial text it was less spiritual and more secular permitting it to be in English. Or, the writers did not know Latin. Or the people wished to distance themselves culturally and politically from



the Christian institutions. Here only speculation is possible.

Attributing authorship is more problematic. Firstly, literacy was very low, especially in a very rural community such as around Kirkdale. Probably Orm Gamalsun also could not write, nor the stone-mason, Brand. Most likely the priests mentioned in the text could have done the actual writing.

Regarding actual writing, whoever started it drew five straight lines then outlines of the letters traced possibly in ink, but without enough preparation: there is much more text on the right side than on the left, suggesting they ran out of space. After that, Brand, the stone-mason could have carved the text into the stone. Interestingly the text is not engraved (cut into the stone). Rather stone was more laboriously carved away, similarly to how Japanese texts on woodblocks were carved for printing in the later ages. Then the stone blocks would have been raised above the door to be viewed by all who entered.

Who was the text to be read by? If almost everybody was illiterate, once again speculation is necessary. Probably almost all the people going into the church could not read. Conversely, oral tradition would have existed and people could easily have known the message of the texts.

A further explanation relates also to the purpose of the sundial. This chronograph technology would have been one way for people to organize their day, often organized around particular times when prayers or different ceremonies in the church would have occurred. Writing itself was communication technology which could have held some kind of mystical or superior quality requiring respect and subservience from surrounding lower class people. However, the sundial may not have worked well: the sun may only have been high enough in summer (about 56 degrees elevation), compared to just 12 degrees elevation in winter. Despite this, perhaps the text was primarily not intended to be read at all, just to be seen. Local people may not have been able to read, but they could well have known what writing was if they saw it.

Finally, the text is seen together with chronograph technology, the sun dial. As mentioned before, the text is on the south-facing wall, which means that the sundial works now as it would have in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The significance or impact of this technology on local people at the time can now only be speculative. However, it seems most likely that local people would have been reminded of the significance of Orm Gamalsun.

Summary:

*The Orm Gamalsun texts together with the sundial technology appear to be propaganda*

*upholding the image of Orm Gamalsun, a local ex-Viking strongman. Even though the text is in local English rather than Latin, more likely it was intended simply to be seen than read, by people who were probably all illiterate anyway. In any case judging from the text, it seems that writing was an infrequent language event in this context.*

### **Limitations in Analysis of the Orm Gamalsun text**

Interconnections and overlap among the linguistic, extra-linguistic and anthropological text analyses can be seen. Of course there are gaps caused partly by the absence of contemporaneous transient language texts (ie. no examples of spoken language), and also detailed knowledge of the actual local culture and demographic of the time. These analyses also show a decreasing reliability of the text regarding findings from the linguistic, and an increasing dependence on speculation towards the anthropological. The main reason for this is the increasing need to consider other evidence in tandem with the central Orm Gamalsun text.

For ancient texts, frequently this evidence is simply unavailable. Even so, the broader contextual text analysis gives more necessary depth which helps place the text in its proper perspective. For instance, though the text is a lasting written text, it still cannot reliably illustrate what varieties of Old English actually were used – it is a written text from an age when almost everybody could not read or write. Hence the primary function of the text may be less linguistic than simply image-making. As textual evidence it tells more about the social, cultural and political than the linguistic. Still, the social, cultural and political can suggest that linguistic patterns and behaviour – for instance, conventions in Latin, the spiritual, church language – still influenced writing.

This paper now moves to the present age by considering how lessons learned from examining an ancient text can be applied to similar investigation of English in the modern world. In contrast to Old English, there is almost an infinite amount of Modern English Text. In order to draw parallels with and to make sense of comparisons between texts from both types of English, texts from a comparative medium, genre and/or context are more useful. The England of Orm Gamalsun, had barely been named ‘England’ (Beech 2007), and the place was going to be full of competing languages and varieties of English for about another 300 to 400 years. Thus a comparative modern context would be one from a context in which there are competing languages in the present day. Also, the Orm Gamalsun text was (and is) a lasting text publicly viewable and conveying a public message, though most people could not read it. However, in the present age there tends to be majority literacy. It is problematic controlling this potential readership variable.

## The Sign Text

As mentioned, a modern English text from Cameroon, in central west Africa, is chosen for the majority literacy level in the language community there, and also for the language competition in that context. In Cameroon, English and French are the official languages, but depending on region most people opt for French. This is evidenced in the language text in Cameroon note currency, as shown in Figure 4. Also there are about 280 indigenous languages (Ethnologue 2010). As a result, pidgin varieties of English are most common, including a local mix of English, French and local patois called *Camfranglais*. Schneider (2007 p 218) observes it as a growing urban basilect, while on closer analysis Koega (2003 p 25) points out that the basic structure is French with ready adaptation of English and local lexis amounting to code-switching.



**Figure 4:** *Competing languages: a Cameroon bank note, bilingual but French text is more in evidence than English text. No African language text (or pidgin/creole) is present. Yet Cameroon culture appears as non-language text.* (Source: <http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://aes.iupui.edu/rwise/banknotes/cameroon/CameroonP25-1000Francs-1985> Viewed on 1 October 2010)

However, *Camfranglais* is not listed officially as Cameroon language, though Cameroon Pidgin is (Ethnologue 2010). Schneider (2007) discusses Cameroon Pidgin's status as a de facto lingua franca despite strong conservative opposition in schools and government who require more formal, standard English: he sees the situation, at least in Anglophile western Cameroon then as "English for scholastic and formal purposes, Pidgin for informal everyday interactions" (p 214). Arguably this local situation is comparable to the Old English at the time of the Orm Gamalsun text: a mix of Anglo-Saxon and Norse for informal everyday interactions, which probably took up most people's language behaviour every day of their lives.

There are crucial differences however.

- Old English and modern Cameroon are at opposite extremes regarding available texts for linguistic analysis
- it is far easier to check the validity and reliability of findings from analysis of modern English texts than Old English texts, and consequently speculation is probably less necessary as a way to garner and articulate findings.
- there is extensive textual evidence which can be used to give a far more detailed anthropological picture of the context in Cameroon
- in present-day Cameroon spoken language texts can be recorded electronically even in real time as lasting texts (eg. videos of Cameroon pidgin language events on the internet listed at the end of the References list)
- there are multiple contexts for using different languages or types of language in Cameroon, and that seems to be simply part of the language culture
- people generally can switch from one (type of) language to another, even within the same language event.

The sign text is reproduced below in Figure 5



**Figure 5:** Institutional preference for more standard English evidenced in this sign outside a university in Cameroon. (Source: <http://www.langaa-rpcig.net+Pidgin-Cameroon-s-Lingua-Franca-or+.html>. Viewed on 1 Oct 2010)

#### i. Linguistic

The text is a sign similar to signs used universally to present rules or warnings. It is written in standard polite modern English. It is highly succinct with redundant grammar removed and no



explicit address. Implicitly it is in simple, declarative mood in the passive voice implying an appropriate verb such as *permit or allow*:

*NO PIDGIN [IS ALLOWED / IS PERMITTED]*

Further, a passive infinitive segment is implied, such as *to be used* or *to be spoken*. However there is no agent, such as *by students* or *by anyone entering (the university) campus*.

Alternatively, the text could imply existential mood -

*[THERE IS] NO PIDGIN*

- with a locative function denoted by the adverbial phrase *ON CAMPUS*. As such it could be interpreted as a simple declarative statement without the coercive nuance of a rule. There is no other information about location of the sign

The text has modulated politeness with *PLEASE*, resisting fuller more complicated and insuccinct formal style (eg. *Students shall not use pidgin / It would be appreciated if pidgin was not used/spoken on campus, or Please refrain from using pidgin on campus*).

Summary:

*The text is a succinct sign text in orthodox standard English. It resembles a polite rule prohibiting use of pidgin on a university campus. There is no explicit reference of location, or agency.*

## ii. Extra-Linguistic

The text is implicitly rule genre, presented succinctly on a sign apparently at the entrance to a university campus in Cameroon. The message's primary semantic focus is explicit: on the idea or condition of *NO PIDGIN*, which is also the theme of the text.

The rest is implicit. As such, addressees (or readers) could include students or visitors. Its authorship is also implicit: the university administration or faculty. Semiotically, the text works on two levels: the direct explicit message prohibiting use of *PIDGIN*; and implicitly in as far as the text is not in pidgin, rather accurate in a standard variety of English suggesting readers use the same variety. Formal politeness is modulated by *PLEASE!*. However the use of an exclamation mark (!) produces a slight emotive, even humanised tone. This modulates the 'rule' integrity of the sign text, making it appear as a warning. This tone is opposite of the tone which would be inferred by use of longer, more complex formal-style grammar forms such as discussed before in Linguistic analysis.

Though there is no explicit agency or stated authorship or institutional authority, interestingly there is no negative polarity, such as *Students cannot/shall not use pidgin ...*. As a result the text

resists what could have been a more coercive tone.

The sign is all in upper-case, white writing on a bright blue background making the sign aesthetically pleasant

Summary:

*Though a 'rule' genre, the text resists being coercive through the language and also its theme - (NO) PIDGIN - rather than the intended readers (students) or authors (the university institution). Further, though the message is explicit and direct, it also works implicitly in as far as the text is standard English rather than pidgin.*

### iii. Anthropological

The sign is on the approach to the high entrance gate of a university campus in Cameroon. The sign appears strict though without being coercive, a quality enhanced by its succinctness and upper-case text. Its image is further softened by the soft pastel blue colour. It compares with two other signs apparently from the same location (in Figure 6), which read even more clearly as warnings for appropriate linguistic behaviour (eg. SHUN IT [pidgin]) and the detrimental effect pidgin can have (ie. *IF YOU SPEAK PIDGIN YOU WILL WRITE PIDGIN*)



**Figure 6:** Similar (ostensibly official) signs warning people about use of pidgin at a Cameroon University – ‘NO PIDGIN ON CAMPUS PLEASE!’; ‘PIDGIN IS TAKING A HEAVY TOLL ON YOUR ENGLISH SHUN IT’; ‘IF YOU SPEAK PIDGIN YOU WILL WRITE PIDGIN’. (Source: Zimmerman 2008)

The sign itself is steel, appearing old and worn as though it has been posted there for a long time. However, in contrast to the larger permanent sign bolted to high posts in the background, this sign appears temporary, in that it has is removable judging by the four brackets on its side posts. This possibly is to present this text and similar signs when the likely intended readers - students - are present and remove them at other times.

Further, the sign has a clear message without any complimentary symbols or messages (in contrast to the Orm Gamalsun text). In this sense obviously the sign text is intended to be read.

The extent to which other discourse or texts with the same anti-pidgin message co-exist with it (eg. from education institutions) is probably high though a matter of speculation.

Yet, the sign text reflects the anti-pidgin attitude of the university institution culture. For them actually to prohibit or discourage pidgin suggests a wide cultural distance between education institutions and popular culture. It also suggests a diglossic situation in as far as students need to use one variety of English in formal institutional situations and an alternative (pidgin) homegrown variety learning elsewhere. How this may change in the future is unclear, though it does compare with Schneider's (2007) assessment of the status quo quoted before.

Curiously, the issue of French is not even implicit in the text, except by its absence. The suggestion then is that the text is more relevant just to the English language community rather than the national language community of Cameroon.

Summary:

*Though less coercive than it could be the sign text reflects wide cultural distance between institutional attitudes to homegrown pidgin English and the commonplace quality of that language variety outside institutional contexts. Though seemingly intended primarily for students, the text reflects part of the situation in an Anglophile community rather than in other, Francophile communities or in Cameroon as a whole.*

## Discussion

A purpose of the text analyses in this paper is to consider parallel circumstances and avenues of investigation between Old Englishes and modern world Englishes. Both analyses are of publicly posted (sign) texts. Though of different genres – a memorial text and a rule text, the former intended (it seems) just to be seen and the latter meant to be read - both are publicly visible. As such, both texts need to be considered in context in order to make sense of them as parts of their environments.

Both texts are selected as representations of English. However, arguably each English text would be almost incomprehensible to audiences (not necessarily limited to readers) in the other's context. Linguistic analysis alone can prove this. However this point depends on the assumption that each language community in its historical time and place is, basically, different. This extends to the types of common language events, including the ones which involve these texts.

Language events are where the texts also deviate. The Orm Gamalsun text firstly had very complex authorship, and then was probably very unlikely to have actually been read in its

immediate historical context. Ironically, even now, it is probably more looked at (by tourists, etc., who would likely prefer to read Modern English translations of the Old English) than read. The Cameroon sign text probably is read far more often (though how much students would pay attention to it is debatable).

In short, the linguistic, extra-linguistic and anthropological analyses have turned up different aspects of the two texts examined in this paper. However they have in common that they do expand the awareness of context of situation surrounding each text. This in turn shows up features of the language which can seem appropriate, inappropriate or simply odd. In both of these texts, the semantic and other extra-linguistic aspects of the Text does this: a written text for people who could not read it; and a rule requiring one type of English for people who quite normally and commonly speak another type of English!

### **Limitations of Lessons from Old English Investigations for Modern Englishes Investigations.**

Having considered two texts from broad analytical perspectives, it becomes clear that understanding context garners greater depth of understanding of the language texts, both as evidence of linguistic phenomena and also of language behaviour of people in the language cultures in which the texts were produced. The same aspect of context also produces limitations. To understand this point, returning to the historiography field introduced at the start sheds light.

A recent article (Mortimer 2010) about the fragile accuracy of historical narrative based on imperfect textual evidence concludes like this:

... in adopting an information-based approach we can finally be confident that we are at last not simply studying evidence at a superficial level ...; but rather studying the formative process that lies within and beneath that evidence. That formative process – *the prehistory of the information before it found its resting place in a piece of evidence* –... it is precisely that process on which the authority of almost all history depends

(p 16. Italics mine)

In other words, needing to understand context and origins of a text in order to draw a reliable understanding of it. As was clear in the anthropological analyses of the two texts above this is not always so clear nor reliable, frequently merely speculative.

Further, with ancient texts, often there is just not enough information to understand the prehistory of a text. For instance, the Orm Gamalsun text shows certain features of the English of that time and place, but it is written Text from a time and place where almost everybody could speak but not write. Consequently, we remain uncertain as to exactly what the form of their language was.

Here lies tension between Smail's (2009) earlier-cited calls to consider coins, shards of ceramics and glassware, chemical traces of spices, the isotopes of carbon and nitrogen and modern distribution of genes on top of the texts, and Mortimer's (2010) warning that 'the prehistory' of a text must be found to give that evidence authority. Frequently we are left only with speculation.

These days it is easier: for instance if we believe that people speak a standard English in Cameroon as insisted by the sign text, all we need to do is to just go there and check it out. As well, is simple speculation good enough? These days, probably not. Still sometimes that is all that we have got.

### **Conclusion: lessons**

In this paper two texts from different ages were analysed in an attempt to demonstrate how reading a text from the past can provide lessons to linguistic investigators in for how to read texts in the present. Drawing from historical analytical approaches, it was realised that in both instances the texts probably did not represent the reality of the language form normally used in each context. In this sense linguists would need to be wary about assuming that both texts were representative of language used in the communities they came from.

A simpler lesson is that texts offer more than just language. Every text has a pre-history, a context of situation. As such, even through just speculation, the texts can evidence other things besides language forms. They can teach us more. The only qualification is the warning not to confuse speculation with reality.

Also speculations are likely to meander and diverge. Linguists should not be afraid of that. It is just speculation, and it can lead to alternative perspectives and views, such as the Celtic Hypothesis explained earlier. If that is not good enough for linguists, they may risk falling behind other disciplines in relevance and popular interest. So a call is made to them to broaden to their minds and not to ignore what else is there.

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For further reference:

Some links to video examples of spoken Camfranglais and Cameroon Pidgin English:

- Contri people <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKwIwDVTm1M&feature=related> (Retrieved 5 November 2014)
- PIDGIN NEWS DU (Douala), Cameroon. Broadcasts regularly posted on YouTube for about 2 years but then removed. For 7 November 2013, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDyslkQcv2s&index=5&list=PLu57gYev0Vw9HT-dcycDRoBTKSRo0TVTM> (Retrieved 5 November 2014)
- Dead Cow Joke in Cameroon Pidgin English [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feGZC\\_pdYXg&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feGZC_pdYXg&feature=related) (Retrieved 5 November 2014)

