

## Compiling a corpus of English historiography

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English-language historiography has been in existence since the Old English period and is nowadays an established academic field and register. Nevertheless, historiographical texts have hardly received any linguistic attention from the genre perspective, unlike medical scientific and religious genres, for example. The project to be reported on here aims at compiling a corpus of English historiography spanning the years 900-1900, in order to make a long-term generic investigation possible. As historical writing turns out at closer view to be a rather fuzzy object and constantly changing over time, this raises certain problems for compilation.

The corpus contents thus need to be broad enough to capture a potentially wide range of texts regarded as historiographical writing at one point or another. The corpus architecture then needs to define sensible sub-groupings of history writing. Kohnen solved this problem for the Corpus of English Religious Prose by genre hierarchies (first-, second- and third-order) and genre sets (core, minor, associated). Neither approach can be copied fully here, as the constellation of discourse participants does not lend itself to it (e.g. there are no clear professionals before the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and as the domain of historiography has less internal structure than religion or medical science.

This contribution will present a possible solution for the corpus structure by discussing the following criteria:

- Focus / thematic scope: Is the focus on one event, one person or on a larger group, a nation, a longer period – in other words, is the approach more individualising or generalising? This distinguishes, for example, narrative histories of England or the history of the reformation from (auto)biographies and from narratives focusing on historical actor, e.g. Charles V. This may correlate with certain preferred generic functions.
- Primary purpose / function: Coffin's classification into recording, explaining and arguing genres may be helpful here. Whereas (early) chronicles and annals primarily record (or document), running narratives may explain, and research articles may argue. Additionally, some historical works entertain, e.g. romances, and some may instruct, e.g. saints' lives.
- Form: Is the work in prose or verse? Verse is not necessarily a marker of fictionality in the past, but may also indicate a more popular target audience.
- Publication format: (Shorter) texts of a historical nature may be published in formats not primarily historiographical, e.g. pamphlets, newspapers. This is similar to Kohnen's associated genres.
- Fact-fiction relationship: While an epic is clearly a work of literature/fiction from the modern perspective, this was not necessarily the contemporary view. Also, fact and fiction can mingle in interesting ways in individual works, cf. the use of invented speech, for example.

Thus, the following types of works should be accommodated: annals, (verse) chronicles, narrative 'monographs', research monographs, research articles, saints' lives, (auto)biography, 'historical' pamphlets, newsletters, (newspaper reports), epic, romance, historical novel. A clear segmentation into corpus lines will not be possible, as most texts will be classifiable in various ways. Thus a multidimensional coding will be used.

### **References**

- Coffin, Caroline. 2006. *Historical Discourse. The Language of Time, Cause and Evaluation*. London: Continuum.
- Kohnen, Thomas. 2010. "Religious Discourse". *Historical Pragmatics*, ed. by Andreas H. Jucker & Irma Taavitsainen. Berlin: Mouton, 523–547.