

Metadiscourse *that is to say*: History, genre and discourse

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The purpose of this paper is to carry out quantitative and qualitative analyses of metadiscourse in the history of English, focussing upon the formula *that is to say*. The corpora employed for this purpose are Penn-Helsinki parsed corpora of Middle English and Early Modern English (Kroch & Taylor (2000); Kroch, Santorini & Delfs (2004)), and Chaucer's texts taken from Benson (1987), consisting of some tales from *The Canterbury tales* and *A treatise on the astrolabe*.

It is known that the metadiscourse formula *that is to say* provides a translation, interpretation or explanation. However, the following example from Chaucer's *Canterbury tales* demonstrates that this formula may be combined with the proximal demonstrative *this*:

- (i) My fourthe housbonde was a revelour –
This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour –

(D.WB 453-454)

Boggel (2009), who carried out a diachronic analysis of *that is to say*, regards *this is to say* as a mere variant of *that is to say*.

The present research first conducts a quantitative analysis of how frequently this metadiscourse formula is employed in the Penn-Helsinki parsed corpora in order to follow its historical development, comparing *that is to say* and *this is to say*. The general tendency is that the cases of this formula are decreasing in the Early Modern period. There is no occurrence of *this is to say* recorded in Early Modern English, and the cases heavily concentrated in the M3 period (1350-1420). Next, an analysis of the genre shows that 'philosophy', 'handbook' and 'religious treatise' employ both variants more frequently than others, while 'travelogue' makes frequent use of *that is to say* but not *this is to say*.

A qualitative analysis of Chaucer's texts, which belong to the M3 period, examines how the use of this metadiscourse formula is influenced by discourse factors. As in (i), typical cases have a function of adding a certain explanation to the referent mentioned just before, where both expressions are possible and *this is to say* seems to be simply a variant of *that is to say* at a glance. When a translation, a definition or an example is provided, *that is to say* is always selected, as far as my corpus is concerned.

Further analysis of discourse, however, uncovers a factor encouraging the employment of *this is to say* rather than *that is to say*: the former assumes a longer preceding context. This use can be considered to derive from the text-structuring function performed by the anaphoric use of the proximal demonstrative *this* (Novelli 1957) to bring the preceding information to the fore. We can therefore say that, while *that is to say* carries only an intertextual function, *this is to say* also assumes an intratextual function (Boggel 2009).

The choice of *that* or *this* in this metadiscourse formula, which is attested in the history of English, is not simply a matter of variation, but is motivated by factors of genre and discourse.

References

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Keywords

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