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Epistolary skill and discourse management: the use of metapragmatic utterances in 18th-century Scottish letters

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Abstract Studies using present-day English data have demonstrated that speakers and writers show reflexive awareness of their own language use by employing metapragmatic comments to monitor and organise their discourse. This study explores to what extent this also applies to historical data and therefore investigates the use of metapragmatic utterances for discourse management purposes in 18th-century Scottish letters. It establishes the different types of metapragmatic utterances attested in the correspondence data and, moreover, assesses the influence of the letter-writers' epistolary skills on the use of such utterances. The study finds that 18th-century writers applied metapragmatic utterances, mostly realised as set strategies, to prevent misunderstandings by clarifying and structuring their own discourse for the addressees and by judging the appropriateness of their own communicative acts. The findings further indicate that writers were aware of the conventional requirement to employ such metapragmatic utterances irrespective of their level of epistolary skill. Nevertheless, generally, a writer's epistolary skill influenced how often they used standardised discourse management strategies as well as how those strategies were integrated in the letter discourse.

Keywords discourse management, epistolary conventions, epistolary skill, metapragmatic utterances, monitoring, 18th-century Scottish correspondence

1. Introduction

When speakers interact with other interlocutors, they do not only communicate on a primary level but also on a meta-level, i.e., they are capable of reflecting on their own communication (Lucy 1993). This is, e.g., evident in the use of comments such as in (1) and (2).

1. *The good news is* that the surplus of a hundred and ninety three thousand six hundred and eighty seven pounds after tax is the largest ever in the Association's history.
(*BNC*, Royal Yachting Association annual general meeting, 17 March 1993)

2. *I shall make two points. The first* concerns something that we can do ourselves.
(*BNC*, Hansard extracts 1991–1992)

In (1), the speaker labels the upcoming utterance as news, thus clarifying its speech act function. The example in (2) serves as a comment that pre-structures the ensuing discourse for the addressee. These two examples show that speakers intervene in their own discourse by means of metacommunicative comments to organise, plan and monitor it (Caffi 2006a: 85–86). Such comments represent what Hübler & Bublitz (2007) have termed 'metapragmatics in use',[1] i.e., "the pragmatics of actually performed meta-utterances that serve as a means of commenting on and interfering with ongoing discourse or text" (Hübler & Bublitz 2007: 6). These meta-utterances make the reflexive awareness of speakers and writers explicit in discourse (see Culpeper & Haugh 2014: 258).

The use of metapragmatic utterances has been studied for various types of synchronous communication including courtroom interaction (Janney 2007) and international communication (Penz 2007, Liu & Liu 2017). Metapragmatic comments are, however, not only common in synchronous interactions but play an important role in asynchronous communication. Tanskanen (2002: 88), for instance, has shown that metapragmatic utterances in asynchronous computer-mediated discussions serve a collaborative purpose so that "communicators adopt the perspective of their fellow communicators and construct their messages in a manner which contributes to a successful communicative exchange". Her study draws, in particular, on Caffi's definition of metapragmatics as management of discourse[2] (Caffi

1 This framework draws on a narrow conceptualisation of metapragmatics. In fact, metapragmatics has been qualified as a 'slippery' term by Hübler (2011: 107), as it has been defined in different ways in the larger context of metalanguage and metacommunication. The reflexive awareness of speakers of their own and their interlocutors' language use is central to it. Thus, for some researchers, metapragmatics encompasses all phenomena testifying to reflexivity in language use (see Lucy 1993, Silverstein 1993, Verschueren 1999: 187–195, 2004).

2 Metapragmatics as discourse management is in fact the third of the three senses that Caffi identifies for the term metapragmatics. Metapragmatics 1 is concerned with metatheoretical reflections on pragmatics as a discipline and metapragmatics 2 with

2006a: 85). Speakers can monitor their discourse by defining it prospectively or retrospectively for the addressees, e.g., by announcing speech acts or controlling discussions (see Hübler 2011: 109–110). These definitions are editable such that they can, e.g., be confirmed, questioned or modified by the interactants. In addition, they can judge whether their discourse choices are appropriate to the communicative situation (Caffi 2006a: 85–86). Building on Caffi's conceptualisation of metapragmatics as discourse management, Tanskanen (2007: 98) classifies the metapragmatic utterances in online discussion forums into three separate but not mutually exclusive functional categories: (a) judgements of appropriateness, (b) control and planning of interaction, and (c) feedback on ongoing interaction. Judgements of appropriateness are mainly self-initiated by the writers and generally refer intratextually to their own contributions by, e.g., apologising for their length (e.g., *Sorry for the length*) or potential incomprehensibility (e.g., *I apologise for the tortured prose*). Comments whose underlying goal is to control and plan the interaction often encourage the other interactants to contribute to the discussion (e.g., *I think I left plenty of room for argument*). Such encouragement may also be achieved by providing feedback on the ongoing discussion (e.g., *Interesting and valuable discussion!*) (Tanskanen 2007: 100–101). However, feedback may also be of a negative kind and discourage interactants from further participating in the discussion. On the whole, Tanskanen's study finds that the majority of metapragmatic utterances in online discussion forums are self-initiated, i.e., they are not prompted by a previous contribution to the thread by another interactant, as well as intratextual and function as judgements of appropriateness of the writers' own contributions. This shows that the writers anticipate the potential reactions of their interactants and try to prevent misunderstandings by adding their comments.

This collaborative and anticipatory purpose of metapragmatic utterances in online discussions may well be shared with other types of asynchronous communication such as historical correspondence. While, at first glance, computer-mediated discussions and historical letters might seem to be entirely different forms of communication and text types, there are, in fact,

the possibility conditions of communication (Caffi 2006a: 83–85). In view of their different orientations, these three senses give rise to different lines of research.

parallels between the two. Both are forms of written interaction involving a time delay, shorter for online discussion forums and longer for letters, thus allowing the writers to organise and plan their online and letter discourse, respectively. In view of these parallels, this study will explore whether historical letter-writers used metapragmatic utterances similarly to present-day writers in online discussions as a salient means of anticipatory discourse management.

The data for this study comprises a set of 90 Scottish letters from the first part of the 18th century included in the *Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence*, 1540–1750 (*ScotsCorr*). The letters in this dataset are varied regarding the epistolary skills evinced by individual writers. While some letters are written in a sophisticated style with standard spelling, others, often but not exclusively authored by women, are less elaborate, manifesting, e.g., non-standard spelling practices and grammatical features (see also Meurman-Solin 2001). In view of this variation, I specifically aim to establish whether the level of epistolary skill and competence influences the use of metapragmatic utterances in the Scottish letter material. The study therefore seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Which metapragmatic utterances did 18th-century letter-writers employ for micro-level discourse management and what are their functions?
2. To what extent does a writer's epistolary skill have an effect on their use of metapragmatic utterances?

Following this introduction, section 2 consists of two parts. It firstly introduces the correspondence data (section 2.1) and secondly the criteria that were used to determine a writer's epistolary skill (section 2.2). Section 3 first of all contrasts present-day online discussions and 18th-century letter-writing (section 3.1) and then applies Tanskanen's scheme to the Scottish correspondence data, discussing how 18th-century letter-writers deployed metapragmatic utterances to monitor their letter discourse (section 3.2). In a third step, section 3.3 addresses the formulaic nature of metapragmatic utterances and discusses the potential influence of 18th-century letter-

writing manuals. Section 4 explores to what extent the use of metapragmatic utterances is influenced by a writer's epistolary skill. Section 5 ties up the findings and provides some concluding remarks.

2. Data and methodology

2.1. 18th-century Scottish correspondence data

My study uses correspondence data from the 18th-century sub-section of the *Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence* (*ScotsCorr*), which cover the period between 1700 and 1750. The 18th-century dataset in *ScotsCorr* comprises a total of 117 letters by male writers and 53 letters by female writers from across Scotland. From these I drew 90 letters: 45 letters by female and male letter-writers, respectively, to represent the two genders equally. These letters were originally chosen as part of a speech act annotation project, whose goal it is to provide a pragmatically annotated corpus as a basis for historical variational pragmatic studies.[3] While in the female-authored sub-set, all 19 women writers are represented, the male-authored sub-set contains letters from 41 writers. *ScotsCorr* provides metadata for all letters, detailing who the writers and the addressees were, if known, as well as the date of composition and the regional origin of the writers. In most cases, it is thus possible to place the writers in terms of their social class. The majority of writers in the 90-letter sub-set for this study either belong to the nobility or the landed gentry. Only for a dozen writers are the metadata not sufficient to determine their social status and they are not contained in bibliographical sources such as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*), either. In addition to information on the writers and recipients, the metadata in *ScotsCorr* specify the autograph status of the letters. The corpus is generally based on manuscripts (Meurman-Solin 2016) and the 18th-century sub-section mostly contains autograph letters. Only the corpus data for Margaret

3 Variational pragmatics explores the influence of macro-social factors such as region and gender on language use in action and interaction. To be able to assess the impact of gender on speech act behaviour, in the first stage of the annotation project I aimed to include equal numbers of female- and male-authored letters.

Hamilton, Countess of Panmure, are based on copies of the original letters. In the majority of cases, the letters are therefore likely to represent the letter-writers' own writing practices.

Unfortunately, the metadata do not include any information regarding the educational background of the writers and additional sources such as the *ODNB* or the *New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* do not offer much detail on their education, either. While for male members of the Scottish nobility and gentry, it is reasonably safe to assume that they would have enjoyed schooling beyond a basic level, for women such assumptions cannot safely be made. Well before the 18th century, upper class boys generally attended grammar schools, where they were taught letter-writing as part of a classical education (e.g., Brown 2000: 186–187, Daybell 2012: 55–56). Even parochial and burgh schools would sometimes have offered Latin lessons to boys. By contrast, girls from noble families and the landed gentry rarely attended grammar schools, but may have received private tuition (Glover 2011: 36), generally with a focus on, e.g., singing, dancing but also accounting and housewifery. The focus on practical skills was important in the so-called sewing schools, which in the 18th century were attended by girls from the middle class and even the landed gentry. Whereas daughters of gentry families were often sent to larger towns such as Stirling, Perth or Edinburgh to receive a genteel education, only girls from an aristocratic background were sent to London (Houston 1989: 135–136, Brown 2000: 187, Moore 2006: 115, Glover 2011: 33–34; 37–38, Nenadic 2011: 647). In view of these varied patterns concerning women, in particular, it is difficult to assess a writer's educational background. The social class of a writer is certainly not a reliable indicator of their epistolary skills. Section 2.2 will detail which criteria may usefully be applied to determine a writer's epistolary competence based on the letters they wrote.

2.2. Determining epistolary skill

Letter-writing is a complex skill, which involves competencies at different levels. Accordingly, Whyman's concept of epistolary literacy (2009: 76–77), developed to judge the literacy skills of 18th-century English middle and

lower class letter-writers, does not only capture their actual writing skills, covering spelling and the ability to produce coherent text, but also material aspects, e.g., the ability to handle a quill and fold a letter appropriately, as well as the mastery of epistolary conventions. Depending on how competent writers are on these various levels, they may manifest different degrees of epistolary literacy. For the purposes of this study, I will build on this concept of multifaceted epistolary literacy to be able to rank writers according to their letter-writing skills. To this end, I will briefly review the criteria developed by Whyman and other scholars and discuss to what extent they can be usefully applied to the 18th-century Scottish correspondence data forming the basis of this study.

To rate a writer's level of epistolary literacy, Whyman (2009: 77) evaluates a combination of material and linguistic features, such as a letter's layout, spelling and general language use. In addition, she also takes the scope of a letter's content and, e.g., the presence of literary strategies into consideration. Fairman (e.g., 2000, 2007, 2012) in his studies of late 18th- and early 19th-century lower-order letters, applies more refined linguistic criteria on different levels. A partly-schooled writer typically evinces poor spelling and non-standard punctuation, a preference for simple monosyllabic non-Latinate words, chaining of syntactic elements as well as, potentially, dialectal features. Fully-schooled writers, by contrast, manifest standard punctuation practices and standard orthography, utilise polysyllabic Latinate vocabulary, tend to suspend the completion of sentences by embedding subordinate clauses and do not use dialectal features in their writing. Based on Meurman-Solin (2001: 42–43), the use of connectors to indicate semantic relationships between propositions can be added as a further criterion, which allows the researcher to gauge a writer's stylistic competence.

Whyman and Fairman's criteria were developed to account for lower and middle class letter-writing practices in their own right. In my view, however, the gradient nature of the linguistic criteria, in particular, also makes them suitable tools to assess the letter-writing competency of mostly middle and upper class writers in early 18th-century Scotland. These writers all demonstrate more than basic literacy skills as well as familiarity with epistolary

conventions.[4] It is likely that even writers who did not receive a classical education had ample opportunity to familiarise themselves with general letter-writing conventions. Letters were, e.g., often read out aloud to family members and many parents encouraged their children to practice their letter-writing skills by copying their own letters (see Brant 2006: 65, Whyman 2009: 86–87, 107). Thus, even the least competent writers in my data will likely exhibit a higher degree of epistolary skill than most partly-schooled writers in Fairman's lower class correspondence data. Nevertheless, the Scottish letter-writers also exhibit varying degrees of letter-writing competency. Women, in particular, have been shown to manifest considerable degrees of spelling variation (see Meurman-Solin 2001). Moreover, at the beginning of the 18th century, private correspondence in Scotland, especially by women, had not yet been fully anglicised, but still exhibited some Scots orthographic features (Millar 2020: 100). However, spelling is only one of the features considered in this study to gauge a writer's writing competency. These comprise the following: (a) spelling, (b) use of vocabulary, (c) use of connectors to mark semantic relations, (d) syntactic complexity and (e) use of epistolary formulae. I further noted the presence of general Scots features. Since official Scottish writing had become largely anglicised by 1700 (Millar 2020: 100), the use of Scots in letters may indicate that the writers were not familiar with the norms of the London-based Southern standard. Nevertheless, I proceeded with caution since there is growing evidence that well-educated writers, too, employed Scots lexis and spellings to different ends, e.g., for pragmatic and semantic purposes and as markers of national identity (see Cruickshank 2012, van Eyndhoven 2021). For my categorisation, I took note of the presence or absence of non-standard features in these five categories, also considering whether these occur regularly throughout the letters or only occasionally. However, my categorisation is not based on a calculation of the number of non-standard features, e.g., per 100 words.[5] Since writers may

4 Generally, writing was a "gendered skill" in Scottish society in the middle of the 18th century, as 85 per cent of the women could not sign their name (Moore 2006: 115). This is in stark contrast to 35 per cent of men.

5 In some cases, the writing competency displayed by one writer across different letters seems variable. They may, for instance, only manifest the use of a limited range of connectors, e.g., *and*, *but* and *for* (see Meurman-Solin 2001: 41), in one letter

evince a higher degree of competency with some skills than with others, e.g., syntactic complexity vs. spelling, the epistolary skills of a writer are best rated along a continuum. Based on the linguistic features used to assess a writer's epistolary skills, they were placed into two categories: (a) basic and medium skills and (b) elaborate skills.

Two examples drawn from the Scottish letter material will serve to illustrate the classification. The first example is Lilias Campbell, who wrote a short letter to Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine in 1705. Her spelling is mostly non-standard, e.g., *ansurs*, *fulay resolfed*, or *apontmentt*. Some of these represent Scots spellings, e.g., *keind* (see *DOST*, s.v. *kind*, *kynd*, adj.) and *kip* (see *DOST*, s.v. *kepe*, *keip(e*, v.). Her sentences moreover exhibit a relatively low degree of syntactic complexity with chaining of clauses that are exclusively cohesively linked by *and*, *but*, *for* and *so*, as in (3).

3. *and* if lachlan be com from Edr (= Edinburgh) he will com if not furn?i?che? {compressed} will com with kinloch, *for* I hop ye will be so keind as not to go {correction} anie way from hom *for* I will do nothing without yowr being present *so* yowr being ther is alvarlay intreted and expected
(#1221,[6] Lilias Campbell to Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine, 1705)

The repetition of *will com* in the conditional clause shows that the writer had planning problems. The connector *for* is used not only to introduce a reason clause (*for I will do nothing without yowr being*) but also a consequence (*for I hop ye will be so keind as not to go)*. Lilias Campbell's vocabulary comprises some Latinate words such as *expect*, *resolve* and *appointment*. The latter, which is used in the sense 'agreement', may well have been part of a more specialised vocabulary she employed when dealing with estate business.

but a wider range in others. My overall assessment is based on the features found across all letters by one writer. For writers who are only represented by one letter, the assessment is necessarily based on this limited evidence.
The assessments for each writer are available here:
https://github.com/Cristeenvic/Epistolary-skill-letter-writers.git.

6 The letter ID in the *ScotsCorr* corpus is indicated by a hashtag followed by the respective number.

The letter also shows that the writer was familiar with basic epistolary conventions as she employs the conventional address form *Sir,* which is set off from the body of the letter by a wide space, as well as the common leavetaking formula *Yowr Most humbell servant Lilias Campbell*, also with the appropriate use of space. Thus, although Lilias Campbell certainly exhibits letter-writing competencies, in view of her stylistic limitations, within the Scottish letter material, I would rate her epistolary skills as basic to medium.

By contrast, Frances Herbert, the Countess Dowager of Seaforth, manifests elaborate epistolary skills in her five letters in the corpus material. Although her spelling practices are not fully standard, this is outweighed by the syntactic complexity of her sentences, e.g., with concessive structures (*tho* … *yet*) and suspension through embedded relative clauses, and her generally sophisticated style, as is illustrated in (4).

4. *Tho* I haue not yet ben soe happy as to recue the anceuer of mine to you, *yet* I cannot but giue you this trouble, to beg not only your aduis *which I find is the best to me of any*, but your assistance to uptaine what I desier, *which is an act of councell in my faour*
(#1234, Frances Herbert, Countess Dowager of Seaforth to unspecified addressee, 1701)

She further employs a relatively wide range of connectors to indicate semantic relationships, including not only *and*, *but* and *for* but also *therefore*, *yet* and *because*. In addition, she is versatile in her use of epistolary formulae. Therefore, I rated Frances Herbert as a highly skilled letter-writer.

To sum up, this section has introduced criteria to gauge a letter-writer's degree of epistolary skill. On the basis of these, the writers represented in the 18th-century Scottish letter material were classified into two categories. This classification will allow me to assess whether the writers' level of epistolary skill had an influence on their use of metapragmatic utterances for discourse management (see section 4). As a prerequisite for this assessment, section 3 will discuss how the 18th-century letter-writers employed metapragmatic utterances to monitor their letter discourse.

3. Metapragmatics of discourse management scheme in 18th-century correspondence data

3.1. Present-day online discussions vs. 18th-century letters

Although there are a number of parallels between asynchronous online discussions and historical letters, as pointed out in section 1, there are also differences, which may affect the way metapragmatic utterances are used in both types of communication. One such difference is that, generally, correspondence collections containing letter exchanges with both in- and out-letters are rare. Nevertheless, letters often contain references to previous letters, thus suggesting that the writers may have been engaged in longer interactions. Another difference concerns the length of the time delay involved in letter communication. In the 18th century, depending on the distance, the delivery of a letter could take several days or even longer and often letters did not reach their destination (see Whyman 2009: 53–56). At the beginning of the century, in Scotland, letters were frequently transported by town letter carriers (https://www.gbps.org.uk/information/rates/inland/scotland-1660-1711.php). Despite the fact that the British postal network, including Scotland, was expanded during the 18th century, postage was quite expensive, and was charged per sheet, so that many letter-writers opted to send letters with family, friends or other messengers (see Whyman 2009: 55–59, 61–65). Due to the costs involved in posting letters and the insecurity regarding their delivery, writers must have felt the need to be explicit about their communicative intentions and to try to pre-empt misunderstandings. This finds reflection in the way writers organised and monitored their letter discourse. Another difference between online communication and historical letters may lie in the nature of the metapragmatic comments used by letter-writers for discourse-organisational and monitoring purposes, since these generally represent recurrent epistolary formulae, for instance, *Yowrs I Received*, or formulaic chunks such as *this is to ask a favour*, for which writers would have found models in letter-writing manuals. After discussing the use of metapragmatic utterances belonging to the three categories 'control and planning of interaction', 'judgements of appropriateness' and 'feedback on ongoing interaction' in the 18th-century letters under analysis in section 3.2, section 3.3 will con-

sider possible models for these in an exemplary epistolary manual that may well have been available to the Scottish writers.

3.2. Metapragmatic utterances in 18th-century Scottish letters

The metapragmatic utterances in the 18th-century Scottish correspondence data were retrieved through close reading of the letters as part of the speech act annotation process (see section 2.1). The instances were then classified according to Tanskanen's three categories, ultimately based on Caffi (2006a: 85–86): (a) control and planning of interaction, (b) judgements of appropriateness and (c) feedback on ongoing interaction.

The types of utterances used for the control and planning of interaction as well as feedback on ongoing interaction, i.e., Tanskanen's second and third categories, differ most from the present-day data of online discussion forums. With respect to judgements of appropriateness, by contrast, the two datasets are much more aligned.

3.2.1. Control and planning of interaction

In Tanskanen's data, comments whose function it is to control and plan the interaction, are often either fairly explicit invitations to continue an ongoing discussion, or in fact, quite the opposite, i.e., attempts to end a discussion, as well as clarifications how a contributor's own previous message should be interpreted. They are thus mostly typical examples of comments which cause a break in the primary communication (see Hübler & Bublitz 2007: 7–8, Hübler & Busse 2012: 2). In the 18th-century correspondence data, these breaks are generally not as salient as they are in the online discussion forums. Since the interactions in the letter material are characterised by a conspicuous lack of immediacy, with long time gaps between dispatch and delivery, the metapragmatic utterances employed by the writers mainly plan, organise and clarify the discourse for the addressee rather than, for instance, inviting them to continue a discussion opened up in a letter. This is regularly achieved through utterances by means of performative verbs or expressions, which perform a speech act but at the same time also describe it. This is, for example, the case with hedged performatives, since they, as Schneider states,

"are more congruent with descriptions and much less with the speech act indication" (2010: 275, see also Schneider 2017: 230–232), as in (5) and (6).

5. *I most beg* you may Let my Sister come. hear the begining of the nixt week to me
(#1220, Margaret Campbell to unspecified addressee, 1700)

6. *I think my self Oblidg'd to acqwaint* your La (= Ladyship) that my Lord Arbuthnott is to goe out of toun to morrow
(#1224, Jean Sutherland, wife of James Lord Maitland to Katherine Morison, Lady Strathnaver, 1711)

Both examples (5), where a performative request is hedged by the modal auxiliary *most* 'must', and (6) show that the writers reflect on their own communicative acts such that they highlight the obligation they are under to perform the respective speech acts, thus partly minimising their own responsibility (see Caffi 2006b: 174).[7] At the same time, they clarify their communicative intentions for the addressees and structure the upcoming discourse for them. In certain cases, these hedged performatives introduce and flag expressive speech acts such as complaints or laments (see Hübler & Bublitz 2007: 17–18), for instance, in (7).

7. *I must own* I have mett with afflictions enough to breake any thing of a generous spirit
(#1828, Alexander Robertson, 17th of Strowan, Brigadier to Marion Baillie, 1708)

Metapragmatic utterances where writers explicitly clarify the function of a speech act referred to by the deictic demonstrative *this* also testify to the writers' reflexive awareness. Such utterances are often prospective, as in

7 Such hedging is a form of mitigation, whose use, according to Caffi (2006b: 174), reveals the metapragmatic awareness of an interlocutor in shaping the 'self' they want to present to the addressee in a given interaction.

(8) and (9), so that they pre-structure the letter discourse by announcing the following speech act.

8. *this is to aske a favor* of your lop: (= lordship).
(#660, John Murray, 2nd Marquis of Atholl, 1st Duke of Atholl to David Melville, later Leslie, 3rd Earl of Leven, 1706)

9. *I tacke ocasion by this to salloute* you and your Lady
(#1269, Janet Brodie to unspecified addressee, 1714)

Alternatively, they may be applied retrospectively, as in (10), which refers back to a complex apology for a land dispute, including an offer of repair and an attempt at minimizing the writer's own responsibility for the damage.

10. *this I thought fitt to inform* yow of
(#1791, John Campbell of Mamore to Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine, 1701)

Utterances with deictic *this* are not only employed to clarify speech act functions but also the intended perlocutionary effect on the addressee, as in (11).

11. *I writ this to make yow lach*. tho I be not in a laching mood myself
(#1253, Isabel Mackenzie to unspecified addressee, 1709)

Examples (5) through (11) all illustrate intratextual metapragmatic utterances that have a clarifying function regarding the writers' own communicative acts. Prospective utterances, in particular, pre-structure the ensuing letter discourse, e.g., (7) and (8). They thus have a clear collaborative purpose in that they pre-empt misunderstandings by making the communicative intentions of the writers explicit.

Metapragmatic utterances in the category 'control and planning of interaction' are, however, also applied intertextually to interpret the addressee's messages and communicative acts in previously received letters,

e.g., in (12). The writer qualifies the nature of the letter the addressee had sent him with the messenger Doctor Blair as *a challeng*.

12. The honour I had last day of *a challeng* from your lap (= ladyship), by doctor Blair wes equally peirceing and pleasant, and as the wound of a freind
(#1772, John Gray, 9th Lord Gray to unspecified addressee, 1723)

In sum, metapragmatic utterances that aim at controlling and planning the interaction typically clarify the writers' own communicative intentions in a letter and also have a structuring function. By applying them, the writers may have attempted to prevent misunderstandings by making their communicative intentions as clear as possible.

3.2.2. Judgements of appropriateness

In Tanskanen's present-day data, metapragmatic utterances most typically act as judgements of appropriateness. They thus comment on the appropriateness of the writers' own or their interlocutors' messages in the given communicative context. Such comments may, e.g., be on the length of a contribution or on its formulation. These types of utterances are also common in 18th-century letters and they exclusively comment on the appropriateness of their own communication. As with deictic *this* and the hedged performatives discussed in section 3.2.1, the metapragmatic comments at the same time function as speech acts. Writers apologise, for instance, for the length of a letter, see (13), its style, as in (14), or indeed the letter itself, e.g., in (15).

13. I hop ye will excuse *this long letter*.
(#1252, Isabel Mackenzie to unspecified addressee, 1705)

14. madam I belive you will not get *this confus'd ill writ letter* read
(#1224, Jean Sutherland, wife of James Lord Maitland to Katherine Morison, Lady Strathnaver, 1711)

15. *So shall trouble your Lop: (= Lordship) no further* at present
(#1833, John Ker, 1st Duke of Roxburghe to unspecified addressee, 1720)

Examples (13) to (15) all illustrate retrospective judgements of appropriateness. Writers do, however, also pass such judgements of appropriateness prospectively, thus preventing any potential trouble in the communication, see (16).

16. *yet I cannot but giue you this trouble*, to beg not only your aduis which I find is the best to me of any, but your assistance to uptaine what I desier
(#1234, Frances Herbert, Countess Dowager of Seaforth to unspecified addressee, 1701)

They therefore serve as hedges, for example, for upcoming requests and may be interpreted as instances of negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) since they aim at minimizing the degree of imposition on the addressee.

3.2.3. Feedback on ongoing interaction

While the judgements of appropriateness in the 18th-century Scottish correspondence data are very similar to the ones found in Tanskanen's online discussion data in terms of their content,[8] metapragmatic comments giving feedback on ongoing interaction are of a very different nature to the examples in Tanskanen's material. They do not encourage writers to keep engaging in a certain line of argumentation, but occasionally aim at discouraging interactants from pursuing abusive communicative behaviour as in (17).

8 The judgements of appropriateness in Tanskanen's online discussion forum data, for instance, also include comments on the length of a message (*Sorry for the length, but the issue is complex*) and its style (*I apologise for the tortured prose*) (Tanskanen 2007: 98).

17. I returne yow the Earls Letter inclosed & the Ladys *y^t^ she may be – ashamed of her Insinuationes*
(#1855, Dougall Campbell to Patrick Campbell, 1708)

Example (17) is clearly "communication about ongoing communication by means of letters" (Hübler & Busse 2012: 4). This is also the case with the more usual feedback comments acknowledging the receipt of a letter by the addressee, a typical component of early letters (Tanskanen 2004: 259–260), as is illustrated in (18).

18. *I was honour'd with your Lops: (= Lordship's) of the 29 of March* on Sunday last
(#1834, John Ker, 1st Duke of Roxburghe to John Gordon, 16th Earl of Strathnaver, 1722)

By letting the addressee know that he has received his letter dated 29 March, the writer John Ker confirms to the recipient that his letter had indeed arrived, which was important at a time when the safe delivery of letters could not yet be taken for granted (see section 3.1.). Moreover, this utterance creates common ground between the correspondents regarding the knowledge basis for the present letter.

As in present-day asynchronous online discussions, the three functions of metapragmatic utterances are not mutually exclusive. An utterance can have a clarifying and structuring function, thus contributing to the control and planning of interaction, and at the same time judge its appropriateness, as in (19), where the writer Anne Mackenzie pre-emptively qualifies her request as *trouble*.

19. I am informed that the Leard (= Laird) of apellcros is to – mett (= meet) uith you *uhich hes occisoned me to give you this trouble to beg* you may do me the - fauer. To spek to him anent that busnes of assons. uher in I am concrned (= concerned).
(#1247, Anne Mackenzie to unspecified addressee, 1707)

To account for the multifunctionality of metapragmatic utterances such as example (19), these were assigned to more than one function in the classification.

As the use of the apologetic *trouble* formula in examples (16) and (19) shows, 18th-century Scottish letter-writers largely relied on recurrent formulae as well as formulaic chunks for the realisation of metapragmatic utterances. The following section will explore to what extent these may have been modelled on formulae found in letters contained in 18th-century letter-writing manuals.

3.3. Metapragmatic formulae in letter-writing manuals

Letter-writing manuals in English, which were adaptations of Latin or French originals, had been available since the 16th century. Beside theoretical instructions, these manuals contained model letters on various topics, exemplifying different writer-recipient dyads. Two early manuals, William Fulwood's *Enemie of Idleness* and Angel Day's *The English Secretary*, proved to be particularly popular and were in fact reprinted several times, with ten editions between 1553 and 1585 and nine editions between 1586 and 1635, respectively (Mack 2002: 76–82). The target audience of these manuals seems to have been the upper ranks of British society, which is also true of the increasing number of English epistolary manuals published from the 17th century onwards (Mack 2002: 101–102, Nevala 2004: 274). Some of these were more specifically targeted at women and manuals from the second half of the 18th century were aimed at a wider readership, including the lower ranks of society (Bannet 2009: 21–22).

Most 18th-century manuals were actually printed in London but these were in fact also popular in more remote areas of Britain such as Scotland (Bannet 2009: 22).[9] It is thus likely that the letter-writers considered for this study, who mostly belonged to the nobility and gentry, had access to letter-writing manuals. To see whether the model letters contained in manuals

9 In the later 18th century, adaptations of London manuals were moreover published in Scotland, for instance, Dilworth's *Complete Letter-Writer, or Young Secretary's Instructor* (1783), which was printed in Glasgow (Bannet 2009: 22).

manifest the use of metapragmatic utterances to help the writers monitor and organise their discourse, the letters in *The Compleat English Secretary, and Newest Academy of Complements* by Henry Scougal, printed in London in 1714, were checked.

The model letters across different topics and writer-recipient dyads indeed regularly offer examples for metapragmatic utterances employed to plan, organise and clarify the discourse for the recipients. These include, for example, numerous instances of comments using deictic *this* to announce a following speech act, as in (20), (21) and (22).

20. Most Honoured Father, *by this I let you know*
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, A Letter from a Son to his Father, p. 7)

21. *this is to let you know* how affairs proceed in your absence
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, A Letter from an Apprentice to his Master in the Country, p. 10)

22. *By this letter I humbly crave leave to acquaint you*
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, A Letter from a Tenant to his Landlord, p. 30)

Moreover, performatives hedged by the modal auxiliary *must* are also in evidence, see (23).

23. *I must confess*, my Company here is very pleasing
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, Answer to a Letter from a School fellow to another, p. 17)

Another popular reflexive formula is employed in some variations to close the model letters, see (24) and (25).

24. *I take Leave to subscribe my self*
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, A Letter from one Gentlewoman to another, p. 18)

25. *I crave leave to subscribe my self*
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, A Letter of Consolation to a Widow, upon the Death of her Husband, p. 29)

Variants of this closing formula are also found in the Scottish letters, exclusively in the correspondence of more highly skilled writers. However, it is not used as often as the most typical closing formula *This is all…* and variations of it, which is more representative of the correspondence of less skilled writers (see section 4.1). The model letters thus contain several examples of discourse structuring comments which are not identical with the ones found in the Scottish letter material, but, nevertheless, offer a template for such comments, which could then be used creatively by writers.

In addition to discourse organisational comments, the model letters comprise examples giving feedback on ongoing interaction by confirming receipt of previous letters, as in (26) and (27), which are represented in similar form in the Scottish correspondence data.

26. Benjamin, *I received your Letter of the 19th past*
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, Answer to a Letter from an Apprentice to his Master in the Country, p. 10)

27. *I received yours of the 24th past*
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, Answer to a Letter from one Sister to another, p. 15)

While there is ample evidence for metapragmatic utterances organising the letter discourse and offering feedback on the ongoing interaction with the addressee, comments judging the appropriateness of a speech act or, e.g., the length or style of their letter are conspicuously rare. In fact, only two such comments were found in a model letter by a gentlewoman addressed to another and the answer to it, see (28) and (29).

28. *I am constrained thus to trouble you*, I hope you will take it in good part
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, A Letter from a Gentlewoman to another, p. 19)

29. I might mention many Particulars, but knowing you are ignorant of them, *I shall not at this time be tedious to you*
(*The Compleat English Secretary*, Answer to a Letter from a Gentlewoman to another, p. 20)

Thus, whereas judgements of appropriateness are commonly found in the 18th-century Scottish letters under investigation, these might indeed have spread by convention within the local letter-writing community rather than through established models in letter-writing manuals.

4. The influence of epistolary skill on the use of metapragmatic utterances in 18th-century Scottish letters

This section explores to what extent a writer's epistolary skills influence their choice of metapragmatic utterances to monitor their letter discourse. Section 4.1 discusses the degree to which writing competencies affect how often writers make use of metapragmatic utterances and in which parts of their letters. Section 4.2 takes a closer look at the distribution of different types of metapragmatic comments across the skill groups.

4.1 The influence of epistolary skill on frequency of use of metapragmatic utterances

To determine to what extent epistolary skills had an influence on the use of metapragmatic utterances, the writers represented in the 18th-century Scottish dataset were categorised according to the level of epistolary competence they demonstrate in their letters (see section 2.2). They were assigned to one of the following two categories: basic/medium or elaborate epistolary skills. Table 1 details the number of writers and letters in each category by gender. While just under two thirds of the female letter-writers are classified as having basic to medium epistolary skills, the ratio is reversed

for the male writers, where over two thirds are categorised as having elaborate epistolary skills.

Table 1. Distribution of correspondence data across epistolary skills and genders.

Epistolary skills	Female	Letters	Male	Letters
Basic / medium epistolary skills	Janet Brodie	1	Lawrence Calder	1
	Christian Cameron, relict of John Cameron of Glendessary	1	Thomas Calder	1
	+Jean Campbell	2	Dougall Campbell	1
	Lilias Campbell	1	John Campbell of Mamore	2
	Margaret Campbell, Countess of Balcarres	1	Neil Campbell	1
	Susanna Campbell	1	Thomas Douie	1
	Anne Hay	3	William Gordon	1
	+Anne Mackenzie	13	*William Lann	1
	Isabel Mackenzie, Countess of Seaforth	4	John Murray of Broughton	1
	Mary Maule	1	James Sinclair of Mey	2
	C. Montrose	1	John Sinclair	1
	Jean Sutherland, wife of James Lord Maitland	1	Robert Rollo, 4th Lord Rollo	1
Elaborate epistolary skills	Elizabeth Cunningham, Lady Kilmaurs	1	John Arbuthnott, 5th Viscount of Arbuthnott	1
	Elizabeth Gordon	1	*John Campbell of Glenorchy, 2nd Earl of Breadalbane	1
	Margaret Hamilton, Countess of the 4th Earl of Panmure	3	David Carnegie, 4th Earl of Northesk	1
	Frances Herbert, Countess Dowager of Seaforth	5	*David Carnegie, 5th Earl of Northesk	1
	E. Ruglen	1	W. P. Colyear	1
	Anna Scott, Duchess of Buccleuch and Monmouth	3	Laurence Craigie	1
	*Frances Stirling, Lady Montgomery of Skelmorlie	1	*Hew Crawford	2

		James Douglas, 2nd Duke of Queensberry	1
		James Erskine	1
		Simon Fraser, 11th Lord Lovat	1
		George Gordon, 1st Duke of Gordon	1
		John Gordon, 16th Earl of Sutherland, Lord Strathnaver	1
		James Graham, 4th Marquis of Montrose	1
		John Gray, 9th Lord Gray	1
		John Hamilton-Leslie, 9th Earl of Rothes	1
		James Keith	1
		*William Keith, 9th Earl of Marischal	1
		John Ker, 1st Duke of Roxburghe	2
		Kenneth Mackenzie, 4th Earl of Seaforth	1
		James Maule	1
		Patrick McDowall of Freugh	1
		George Melville, 4th Lord Melville, 1st Earl of Melville	1
		Hugh Monro	1
		James Murray, 2nd Duke of Atholl	1
		John Murray, 2nd Marquis of Atholl, 1st Duke of Atholl	1
		Alexander Robertson	1
		Alexander Ross, Solicitor	1
		George Ross	1
		Lachlan Shaw of Inverness	1

Overall, the vast majority of writers across the two groups of epistolary skill make use of metapragmatic utterances. One of the 12 male writers in the basic/medium epistolary skill group does not manifest any metapragmatic comments in his letters (marked by * in Table 1). In the group of male

writers with elaborate epistolary skills, four out of 29 writers do not make use of metapragmatic utterances at all. Among the female writers, who are mostly represented by more letters, there are fewer writers without any metapragmatic utterances in their letters. In the basic/medium skill group there are only four letters without any metapragmatic utterances. Three were written by Anne Mackenzie, who otherwise makes use of them in her other ten letters, and one by Jean Campbell, who also uses a metapragmatic utterance in her other letter (marked by + in Table 1).[10] Moreover, one of the seven female writers with elaborate skills, Frances Stirling, does not employ any metapragmatic comments in her letter.

While it is thus evident that the majority of letter-writers indeed show some metapragmatic competence in their writing, such competence may well have been a matter of degree. In fact, some writers apply metapragmatic utterances sparingly and typically only use one such utterance in their correspondence, as, for instance, in the letter in (30) about a stolen cow, which the writer Jean Campbell closes by the discourse structuring comment *This is all*.

30. L. C.
Your man John Roy was here this day anent that Cow that was stollen from M^{c} No???kaird {an unclear correction or cancellation} which {torn} m^{c} Coall was alleadged {torn} with the m^{c}Lauchlans and I sent Archibald m^{c}Cal??\?? John to m^{c}Coall and he actually denyes it tho his Maister promised to pay for him Therefore Cussane doe me the favour as to delay it till such time as my husband Comes home which I hope will? Be shortly for I expect him every night and it shall not be long in Debet And what?? {blurred} is resting by the m^{c}Lauchlans it shall be payed when you plea?s {blurred} *This is all* with my service to yourself And family I Rest Your humble servant Jean Campbell?
(#1270, Jean Campbell to Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine, Lieutenant, 1707)

10 The two writers who only have one metapragmatic utterance in some of their letters but more in others are marked by + in Table 1.

Conversely, others demonstrate fuller metapragmatic competence and generally use more than one metapragmatic utterance in their letters, which typically also represent different categories. This is, for instance, the case for David Carnegie, the 4th Earl of Northesk, as is illustrated in (31).

31. Ethie 29 Agust

My Dear Lord

my health not being such as I dare undertake so long a journey yet (31a) *Im oblidged to make my excuse* for not attending My Lord Balgonys funeralls, which I reccon your Lo; will belive scarse any thing else wold have hindered me from doeing, how soon it pleases god I become a litle better, I dissign to come wait on you; I think you have resolved perfectly right, in makeing ther buriall as soon and private as possible, in my opinion all such occasions are best so, and I dare say wold {no HAVE auxiliary} been your sons own desire hade he spoke on that subject. (31b) *I must say* I think my daughter has just cause of sorrow, for a kind husbands loss, but I wish she moderate it, as her duty to god, and the care she should have in wiew of his Children requires, tho this is more easie to enjoyn then practice, besides her I think wee have all lossed a good frind, and have too good reason to regrait it; my wife gives your Lo; her humble service I know you will at present bee much taken up with many different things, (31c) *so shall add now no more*, but that I very sincery am

My Dear Lord

your most obedient
and humble servant
Northesk

(#1767, David Carnegie, 4th Earl of Northesk to David Melville, later Leslie, 3rd Earl of Leven, 1721)

Northesk opens his letter with an apology for not being able to attend his son-in-law's funeral, which is introduced by the clarifying discourse structuring comment *Im oblidged to make my excuse* (31a). Further down in the letter, he uses another discourse structuring device, *I must say* (31b), which flags his upcoming statement on his general compassion for his daughter's sorrow. He closes his letter by a further discourse organisational comment, *so shall add now no more* (31c), which at the same time serves as a judgement of appropriateness, since he clarifies beforehand that he does not want to take up any more of the recipient's time.

To see whether such fuller metapragmatic competence as manifested by the Earl of Northesk is more widespread among writers evincing elaborate writing skills, Table 2 lists a) the writers who only employ one metapragmatic utterance per letter and b) the writers who utilise more than one metapragmatic utterance per letter.[11]

Table 2. Distribution of writers by the number of metapragmatic utterances per letter.

Epistolary skill	Writers with one metapragmatic utterance per letter	Writers with more than one metapragmatic utterance per letter
Basic/medium	12 (52 %)	11 (48 %)
Elaborate	13 (42 %)	18 (58 %)

A slight majority of writers evincing basic and medium writing skills (52 per cent) employ only one metapragmatic utterance per letter. The majority of these metapragmatic comments are either placed at the beginning of the letter, confirming receipt of a previous letter (N=3) or at the end of the letter, closing it by variations of the *this is all* formula (N=6) (see example (28) above) and an apologetic *trouble* formula (N=1). By contrast, eleven writers (48 per cent) apply metapragmatic comments more often. These writers also quite regularly acknowledge receipt of a previous letter or lack thereof (N=6) and

11 Some female writers only use one metapragmatic utterance in one of their letters but more in other letters. These are classified in the group "Writers with more than one metapragmatic utterance per letter" in Table 2.

even more often judge the appropriateness of their letters, generally through variations of the *trouble* formula, mostly in the closing part of their letters and/or in postscripts (N=17). In addition, however, eight of them also utilise metapragmatic comments in the main body of their letters, as is illustrated by the examples from Christian Cameron's relatively short letter (257 words), see (32).

32.a *I receiwed yowr the 19 of this month* (opening)

32.b *I will be so freae with you* I cold not hinder the man to speake to me yeat that was not tyl wpone? Me {cancellation} (main body)

32.c *which is all* from D: b: (= Dear brother) your Loving sister Christian Camerone (closing)

32.d *I know you will hardlie make good sence* (postscript)
(#1268, Christian Cameron, relict of John Cameron of Glendessary to Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine, 1722)

Among the writers with elaborate writing competencies, 42 per cent only utilise one metapragmatic utterance per letter. These are generally more varied in type, form and position in the letter than the single utterances in the basic/medium skill group. Letters are, e.g., opened by (33), combining the acknowledgement of receipt of a letter by the recipient with an apologetic and deferential thank you for it, and closed by (34).

33. your La : (= Lady ship) has great reason to think me one of the rudest creatures in the world *for not returning y^{r} La: my humble thanks for the favour of y^{r} oblidging letter sooner*;
(#1257, E Ruglen to unspecified addressee, 1701)

34. in the meane time *alow me to beg*, yr la^{p} (= ladyship) will euer looke upon me as Your la^{ps}. most faithfull humble Seruant
(#1223, Elizabeth Gordon to unspecified addressee, 1702)

The analysis moreover shows that the majority of the more highly skilled writers (58 per cent) employ metapragmatic utterances more extensively.[12] They generally use them for more than one function, for instance, to organise their letter discourse and to make judgements of appropriateness in a more elaborate style (see example (31) above).

The overall distribution in Table 2 disguises an interesting gender pattern, though. Eight of the 12 writers in the basic/medium epistolary skill group using only one metapragmatic utterance per letter are men. These are either of a gentry background or their social status is unknown. By contrast, eight of the eleven writers who apply metapragmatic comments more extensively in their letters are women. Most of them belong to the nobility. In the elaborate epistolary skill group, eleven out of the 15 male writers (73 per cent) who employ metapragmatic utterances more comprehensively in their letters as well as all three female writers[13] in this category are of a noble background. Thus, metapragmatic awareness seems to be linked to social status, since writers of a noble background more typically use more than one metapragmatic utterance in their letters. With male writers, this mostly seems to coincide with a high level of epistolary skill. Conversely, noble women may overall be categorised in the basic/medium skill group but nevertheless manifest a comprehensive use of metapragmatic utterances in their letters. In this context, it is interesting to see whether, in addition to a writer's general frequency of use of metapragmatic utterances, their level of epistolary skill has an influence on the types of metapragmatic comments they apply. This will be discussed in the following section.

12 The number of metapragmatic utterances in a letter is not primarily determined by its length. There are several short letters containing more than one metapragmatic comment, for instance, #1221: 111 words, #1244: 72 words, #1800: 144 words and #1760: 172 words. Conversely, there are longer letters which only contain one metapragmatic utterance, for example, #1230: 334 words, #1263: 402 words, #1802: 456 words and #1811: 402 words.

13 One of the three female letter-writers utilising metapragmatic utterances extensively in her letters is Margaret Hamilton, Countess of the 4th Earl of Panmure, whose letters in *ScotsCorr* are copies and therefore non-autograph.

4.2 The influence of epistolary skill on the distribution of metapragmatic utterances

The distribution of metapragmatic utterances by letter-writing competency illustrated in Figure 1 shows that writers in the two skills groups predominately apply them to either control and plan their letter discourse or to judge the appropriateness of their own communicative acts. The least frequent of the three discourse management types are comments providing feedback on the ongoing interaction. These are mostly restricted to acknowledgements of receipt of letters by the addressee (see section 3.2.3).

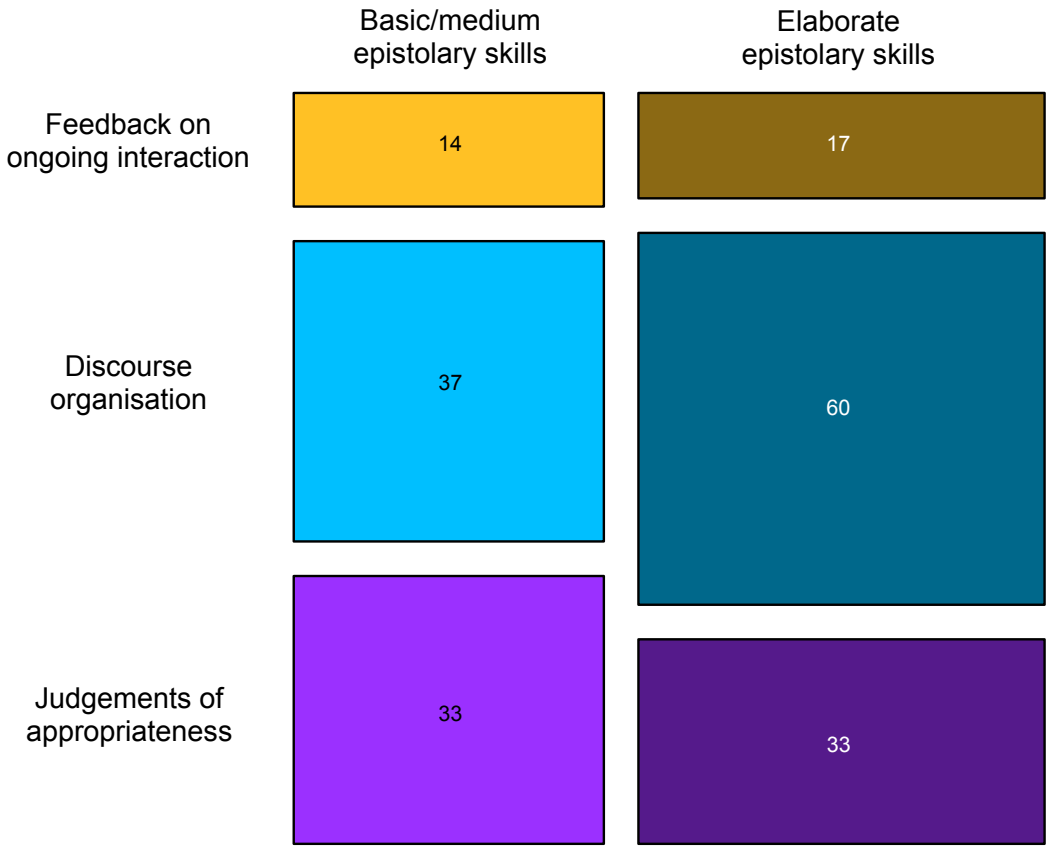

Figure 1. Distribution of discourse management types by epistolary skill, based on raw frequencies. In the mosaic plot, the width of the bars indicates the frequency of attestation in the three skill groups and the height of the bars their respective percentage share. Since several utterances were assigned to more than one type (see section 3), the number of types exceeds the total number of utterances (N=158).

Despite the common dominance of metapragmatic utterances employed to plan the letter interaction and to make judgements of appropriateness, the distribution of these two categories across the two skills groups also reveals

differences. 55 per cent of the instances utilised by writers with elaborate epistolary skills serve controlling and planning purposes. Conversely, for writers with basic or medium epistolary skills, these account for 44 per cent. As was shown above, in particular, less skilled writers who only make use of one metapragmatic utterance per letter tend to employ these rather mechanically to close their letters, mainly in the shape of the *this is all* formula. By contrast, the writers in the basic/medium skill group who utilise metapragmatic comments more extensively, for instance, also apply them to clarify their intentions in the body of a letter, as in (35) and (36).

35. *I most disser* (=desire) your La would send her hear with your oune horces
(#1220, Margaret Campbell, Countess of Balcarres to unspecified addressee, 1700)

36. *I think my self Oblidg'd to acqwaint* your La that my Lord Arbuthnott is to goe out of toun to morrow
(#1224, Jean Sutherland, wife of James Lord Maitland to Katherine Morison, Lady Strathnaver, 1711)

The writers in the elaborate epistolary skill group, who overall utilise metapragmatic utterances more often to structure and organise their discourse than the writers in the basic/medium skill group, mostly apply these in the body of their letters (57 per cent). This may indicate that they show an increased reflexive awareness of the need to structure their letter discourse for the addressees and to clarify their communicative intentions so that there is no scope for misunderstandings. This is nicely illustrated in a letter by Frances Herbert, the Countess Dowager of Seaforth, in example (37).

37.
(…) but finding things goe extraordinary ill with me, & noe licklewood {sic} of amendment, but by my doeing things with a seuer hand, which was what you know I neuer was for, yet I feare I must come to it befor I can be setled; (37a) *I thought fiet to aquant you with it*, (37b) *and at the same time desier your aduise*, (37c) *which*

you know is allwayes what I desine to doe in thinges of this notuer if it be not to much trouble to you
(#1233, Frances Herbert, Countess Dowager of Seaforth to unspecified addressee, 1701)

In the passage in (37), Frances Herbert closes a short account of her current unfortunate circumstances with the retrospective clarifying and structuring comment *I thought fiet to aquant you with it* (37a), to then immediately transition to her upcoming request by means of the prospective utterance *and at the same time desier your aduise* (37b). This is directly followed by a justificatory comment, which combines a clarification with a judgement of appropriateness and thus aims to reduce the imposition of the preceding request: *which you know is allwayes what I desine to doe in thinges of this notuer if it be not to much trouble to you* (37c).

The less skilled writers seem to be slightly more concerned about the appropriateness of their own writing than highly skilled writers since judgements of appropriateness represent around 39 per cent of all metapragmatic utterances compared to 30 per cent in the group with elaborate skills. Most prominent among these are variations of the apologetic *trouble* formula, e.g., (38) and (39).

38. *I well ad, no furder troubll*
(#1243, Anne Mackenzie to unspecified addressee, 1700)

39. *pray excuse all this trubll* from your reall affectionat frind Isobell seafort
(#1254, Isabel Mackenzie to unspecified addressee, 1711)

While these are also attested in the letters of highly skilled writers, in the letters of writers with basic and medium epistolary skills, these instances of negative politeness aimed at minimising the degree of imposition account for 73 per cent of the judgements of appropriateness. These numbers are, however, somewhat skewed by the fact that Anne Mackenzie, who is represented in the basic/medium skill group with 13 letters, uses these *trouble* formulae extensively. Nevertheless, the pattern displayed in her letters is also

found in the letters of other less skilled writers and, when discounting Anne Mackenzie's instances, female and male letter-writers employ these trouble formulae with a similar frequency. In nearly two thirds of the instances, these *trouble* formulae act retrospectively and they are mostly – rather mechanically – placed at the end of the letter. Their ubiquity testifies to their conventional character. However, as was shown in section 3.3, they are hardly to be found in model letters contained in letter-writing manuals. The fact that the less skilled writers relied considerably on this formula could be an indicator that they were acutely aware of the fact that it was considered appropriate to justify and apologise for the trouble their writing represented for the addressee. This could even lead to an excessive use of *trouble* formulae, as in a letter by Thomas Douie (40).

40.

Madam

I have sent you hir Inclosed M^{r} Burroughs to your Ladyshipe also M^{r} Demsters to uhom I have told uhat my comishon is (23a) but *I ame not uoling to be trubellsom to your Ladyshipe* but I hope you uoll send in that 180 {an unclear correction} bolls of uheatt that is uanting of y^{e} 300 bols that you agried to give to M^{r} Burroughs & allthough my orders be peremtor to seass all your victuall until he be sattesfayed but {ins} Hoping {corrected} I ueat your Ansuer uith y^{e} berer uhat your Leadeship Desirs for I most have your ansuer that I may knou uhat to ureat to my Master on heast (23b) for *I ame soray that I should be trubelsom* to you but I most obay (23c) *hoping you uoll axcous y^{e} truble*
I ame uith all Respek

your servant
Thomas Douie
(#1800, Thomas Douie to Margaret Hamilton, Countess of Panmure, 1716)

Example (40) is a letter of request to send 180 bolls[14] of wheat. The writer Thomas Douie frames his request by the *trouble* formulae, thus apologising for it beforehand (see 40a) and again at the end of the letter, where he even doubles them up in his final apology, *for I am soray that I should be trubelsom to you* (40b) and *hoping you uoll axcous y^e^ truble* (40c).

Despite their conspicuous absence from epistolary manuals, these *trouble* formulae must have been very salient and less skilled writers may well have picked them up from the correspondence of more highly skilled writers (see section 2.2), who often incorporated them in a more sophisticated style, e.g., (41) and (42).

41. *I could not – Refuse At the Desire of some of his frends to give yow? {or you} this trouble* which I hope you'l have the goodnesse to Pardon
(#1773, John Hamilton-Leslie, 9th Earl of Rothes to John Gordon, 16th Earl of Sutherland, 1716)

42. having had the {ins} good {ins} fortune of seing you in this place *and the honour My Lord has of being related to you makes me – hope I may take the freedom of giving this trouble* which is to beg that you'l deliver the inclos'd and also joyn with y^r^ good offices in the parliament and any other way you have influence and particullarlie to intercede with your Cusin M^r^ Sacretarrie Stanhope in My Lords favours
(#1227, Margaret Hamilton, Countess of Panmure to unspecified addressee, 1716)

On the whole, although less skilled writers seem to apply judgements of appropriateness more often than highly skilled writers, considering the extensive use of the *trouble* formulae by just one writer, Anne Mackenzie, the differences between writers of different epistolary competence are indeed relatively small. Nevertheless, since these judgements of appropriateness, in particular by means of the *trouble* formulae, are so widespread, they

14 A *boll* is a Scottish and Northern English measure of capacity or weight for grains and other commodities (see *DOST*, s.v. *boll, bow*, n.[1]).

show that both writers with basic and medium epistolary skills and those manifesting elaborate skills were aware of the conventional requirement to apply these metapragmatic comments, even if they sometimes did this in a rather mechanical manner.

5. Conclusion

Asynchronous communication poses challenges. Interactants are aware of these and employ metapragmatic comments for collaborative purposes to pre-empt misunderstandings, as Tanskanen (2007) showed for present-day online discussion forums. Among the metapragmatic utterances in her data, self-initiated comments judging the appropriateness of their own contributions within the same post are most common. Contributors, however, also used comments to control and plan their discussions and to provide feedback on ongoing interactions. The goal of this paper was to find out whether Tanskanen's findings apply more generally to other types of asynchronous communication in different contexts as well. It was therefore explored whether interactants engaging in asynchronous interactions in the past felt a similar need to monitor their communication. For this purpose, 90 18th-century letters by Scottish letter-writers, mostly members of the nobility or gentry, were examined. These pose maybe even greater challenges than present-day online discussions, one of them being the often considerable time delay between the dispatch and the delivery of the letters, which possibly prompted writers to be explicit about their communicative intentions to try and prevent misunderstandings. Nevertheless, such metapragmatic competence may have been influenced by the varying levels of epistolary skills 18th-century letter-writers evinced. While some writers wrote elaborate prose in Standard English, others produced coherent text, which, however, consisted of relatively simple sentences written in mostly non-standard spelling. Thus, this study further aimed to establish to what extent a writer's letter-writing skills impacted their use of metapragmatic utterances for discourse management purposes.

The findings of the analysis confirm that 18th-century writers, too, managed their letter discourse by means of metapragmatic utterances. These mostly served control and planning purposes allowing the writers to clarify

and structure their discourse for the addressees, for instance by announcing speech acts, e.g., *this is to aske a favor of your lop:*. Comments to judge the appropriateness of the writers' own communicative acts or even the whole letter, though less frequent than metapragmatic utterances in the category 'control and planning of interaction', are also a typical feature of 18th-century correspondence. In fact, in most instances, the metapragmatic utterances on all three levels of discourse management are of a conventional formulaic nature. Interestingly, however, while writers may have drawn on formulae in model letters in letter-writing manuals to organise and structure their discourse and to acknowledge receipt of previous letters, their judgements of appropriateness are hardly attested in these.

As regards the influence of epistolary competence, the analysis moreover showed that both less skilled and highly skilled writers used metapragmatic utterances to monitor their own discourse. Writers of different levels of skill were thus mostly aware of the conventional requirement to employ such metapragmatic utterances but did not all manifest the same degree of metapragmatic competence. Highly skilled writers typically made use of more metapragmatic utterances in their letters than less skilled writers. They generally deployed different types of metapragmatic comments across different parts of their letters and utilised discourse structuring utterances in the body of their letters to clarify their intentions for the addressee. These may have been inspired by variations found in model letters in epistolary manuals. Less skilled writers, by contrast, used metapragmatic utterances more sparingly and often rather mechanically in the opening or closing of a letter. This finding applies, in particular, to men, though. Women in the basic/medium skill group employed metapragmatic utterances more comprehensively across the different parts of their letters both to structure their letter discourse and to judge the appropriateness of their communicative acts.

In addition, less skilled and highly skilled writers also manifest differences in the way they integrate metapragmatic comments in their letters. This is, for instance, evident in the ubiquitous *trouble* formulae, which highly competent writers skilfully incorporated in their letter discourse, whereas less skilled writers often just added them at the end of a letter, so as not to forget them. Most writers were thus aware of the need to employ such set strategies, which proves that there is a socio-cultural basis for such standardised metaprag-

matic utterances (see Hübler & Bublitz 2007: 20). The difference with respect to epistolary skill therefore does not primarily lie in the letter-writers' knowledge of conventional metapragmatic utterances but in their level of sophistication and the way standardised discourse management strategies were deployed and integrated in the letter discourse.

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