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Matti Peikola, Jukka Tyrkkö & Mari-Liisa Varila (eds.): *Graphic Practices and Literacies in the History of English.*

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Over the last decade, historical studies have shown increasing interest in the visual aspects of written texts, recognising them as integral to communicative practices throughout different historical periods (e.g. Peikola *et al.* 2017, Peikola and Bös 2020, Włodarczyk, Tyrkkö, Adamczyk 2023, Rogos-Hebda 2025, Esteve-Ramos and Moscowich 2024). In this context, the edited volume positions itself within a recent trend in historical pragmatics that, as Smith (2020: 11) notes, expands its scope to "includ[e] as additional objects of enquiry features that have traditionally been seen as non-linguistic." The volume adopts a multimodal approach to historical English texts, zooming in on graphic features and their communicative and socio-cultural functions in their context of usage.

Building on the foundational 2013 article *Pragmatics on the Page* and extending the work of the 2017 edited collection *Verbal and Visual Communication in Early English Texts*, the book explores the interplay between visual and verbal elements across a variety of genres, text-types, and domains from the late medieval period through the late 18th century. Insofar as contributors examine both handwritten and printed texts, forms and functions of graphic devices (or their absence) are also discussed in relation to the technological constraints and affordances of the different written media. Given the limited research on graphic devices within vernacular literary cultures, the volume convincingly addresses this gap. It does so by leveraging the material affordances of digital humanities and presenting an appreciable array of historical texts examined from a synchronic and diachronic perspective, through qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Originating from the 2021 workshop *Graphic Literacy in the History of English*, held at the 21st International Conference on English Historical Linguistics in Leiden, the volume comprises eleven contributions, along with an introductory chapter and an afterword. The chapters are organised into two thematic sections. Part I focuses on visual practices and conventions related to the graphic articulation of language and text – such as layout, rubrication, and punctuation. Part II features contributions that examine multimodal graphic devices used in the conceptualisation and construction of knowledge, including tables, diagrams, and lists along with forms of metacommunication such as captions for graphic devices and paratexts like title pages and prefaces.

The introductory chapter offers valuable insights into specialised terminology, mapping the relationships between graphic literacies, practices, and events. As the editors explain, identifying historical graphic practices begins with investigating individual graphic events. These events serve as the basis for identifying visual patterns and correlations across texts. Once patterns are detected it is possible to link visual forms to communicative functions and ultimately reconstruct the cultural models, expectations, and competencies (also called "graphic literacy") that characterise specific historical periods. This theoretical framework functions as a unifying thread throughout the chapters, thus reinforcing the volume's internal coherence.

Part I opens with the theoretical chapter by Colette Moore (pp. 25–45). The author draws upon Einar Haugen's 1966 model of linguistic standardisation to develop a theoretical framework for tracing how graphic marks and visual variations on the page become conventionalised in Middle English texts. In Moore's model, the pre-conventional textual state is marked by variation in textual features and a proliferation of functions performed by these features. A feature begins to conventionalise when it is repeatedly used for a specific function (*repetition*) and spreads across various registers and texts (*elaboration*). Over time, the feature may become "functionally specialised," meaning it is used exclusively for that particular function (*specialisation*), and its use may eventually become obligatory in that context (*obligatorification*), thereby completing the conventionalisation process. Moore applies this model in a case study on the development of title pages in printed books.

In the second contribution, Kjetil V. Thengs (pp. 47–64) examines the visual layout of a specialised collection of 27 churchwardens' accounts from the parish church of St. Michael at the North Gate in Oxford, dating from 1424 to 1525. The study identifies a recurrent macro-structural layout characterised by a heading, followed by lists of receipts and payments. However, variation exists as some accounts adopt a prose-style layout that deviates from the conventional list format. Thengs observes that this scribal innovation appears to be limited to certain scriptoria in the latter half of the 15th century and proposes several hypotheses for its emergence. Ultimately, he concludes that the macro-level visual variation does not compromise the overall functionality of the text, as micro-level visual markers continue to perform their intended functions effectively.

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The third chapter, authored by Alpo Honkapohja (pp. 65–103), presents a corpus-based study of graphic features in 31 handwritten copies of the *John of Burgundy Plague Tract* spanning from the 14th century to the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the author focuses on *mise-en-page*, the formatting of recipes, and additional visual highlighting in order to track how content presentation evolves over time. The findings reveal a gradual shift from a medieval rubrication-based system to one in which spatial organisation plays a central role in structuring content. This change is attributed to the increased affordability of paper, which accompanied the advent of print and the growth of the book industry. In contrast, recipes do not receive visual highlighting, although readers consistently engage with them, as evidenced by marginal annotations. After 1550, the introduction of indices facilitates navigation, thus demonstrating the tract's continued relevance across centuries.

The fourth contribution, by Javier Calle-Martín and Jesús Romero-Barranco (pp. 105–126), examines the punctuation system in early English handwritten medical recipes, focusing on how punctuation signals transitions between rhetorical moves within the texts. The study is based on a corpus of 150 texts drawn from *The Málaga Corpus of Early English Scientific Prose*, covering both Late Middle English (1300–1500) and Early Modern English (1500–1700). Through both synchronic and diachronic analysis, the authors show that Early Modern English is a period marked by variation, during which punctuation practices evolve toward a less heavily punctuated system. This shift is attributed to the increasing specialisation of amateur scribes, who may have reached social consensus over a reduced reliance on punctuation and spacing for marking transitions. However, the study also reveals that the decline in punctuation usage during the 17th century is not uniform across all parts of the recipes: sections dealing with ingredients and preparation tend to retain more punctuation, likely due to their greater structural complexity.

Part I concludes with a chapter by Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (pp. 127–149), who presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of graphic variation in the epistolary correspondence between the 18th-century English grammarian Robert Lowth and his rival, William Warburton. These letters survive in both handwritten and printed forms, allowing for a productive analysis of the "interplay between prescription and practice with respect to

selected graphic features" (p. 148). The printed versions of the letters differ notably from the manuscript versions, particularly in the case of Lowth's letters, which exist only in draft form. Results show that in printed versions short forms were expanded, double hyphens (Wartburg) or colons (Lowth) were replaced with a single hyphen at the end of the line and no ampersand was found with the exception of the version printed by Clarendon House. The comparative analysis also highlights inconsistencies in the application of the three publishers' house styles, as well as distinct graphic practices in Lowth's drafts and Warburton's fair copies. In conclusion, the author underscores the importance of reproducing Late Modern English letters as faithfully as possible to their originals in order to fully understand the relationship between (non-) linguistic variation and its social implications.

Part II, which focuses on practices involving multimodal graphic features such as diagrams and tables, opens with Wendy Scase's contribution (pp. 153–180). Scase examines the visual characteristics and pedagogical function of the English special table in John Trevisa's translation of *Ranulph Higden's Polychronicon*, a mid-fourteenth-century encyclopaedia of world history and geography originally written in Latin. By comparing the English *tabula* with Latin *tabulae speciales* – often paired with *tabulae communes* – Scase argues that the English version follows the tradition of the *tabula specialis*. Indeed, it reproduces the alphabetical structure of its Latin counterpart and facilitates the quick retrieval of information for a relatively unlearned audience. Notably, the English special table favours common nouns over proper nouns and emphasises sensational and curious content, enabling readers with minimal education to locate both wondrous and morally instructive material within the text.

In the next contribution Olga Timofeeva (pp. 181–200) provides a visual and linguistic analysis of the *Pater Noster* table in the *Vernon* manuscript (c. 1390), a collection containing over 350 religious texts principally written in English. In the first part of her analysis, Timofeeva focuses on the visual layout of the table noting its resemblance to both the chessboard and the Exchequer cloth. She argues that medieval readers' familiarity with these conceptual frames may have shaped their interpretation of the table – both in terms of the symbolic conflict between virtues and vices, and in relation to human accountability before God. The second part of the analysis exam-

ines binomials in the *Vernon* table, revealing that not all of them were simply glosses of Latin terms. Some word pairs appear to be innovative, as they are not attested prior to the compilation of the *Vernon* manuscript, while others are established set phrases with varying degrees of lexical freezing.

The third chapter in Part II, authored by Aino Liira, Matti Peikola, and Marjo Kaartinen (pp. 201–225), examines the interplay between visual and textual encoding of time in early modern printed books that address chronology. In the first part of their analysis, the authors identify marginal annotations of dates, lists, tables, and tree diagrams as the most common graphic devices used to represent chronological information, thus highlighting the wide range of graphic choices available to early modern book producers. In the second part of their study, they explore how early modern authors instructed readers in interpreting chronological visualisations. In particular, they analyse the vocabulary and phraseology used in captions to convey the function of tables in "synchronizing or harmonizing chronological data" (p. 224). In some cases, historical visualisations are accompanied by supporting text that identifies unlearned readers as the intended audience for tables representing synchronised chronologies.

In the fourth chapter Mari-Liisa Varila, Carla Suhr, and Jukka Tyrkkö (pp. 227–257) investigate the use of graphic devices in a selection of early modern medical books drawn from the *Early Modern English Medical Texts* corpus (1500–1700). By adopting both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the authors focus on various categories of medical writing – ranging from general texts to specialised surgical and anatomical treatises. These texts were published for a wide range of readerships, from learned physicians to laypeople. The overall diachronic trend suggests that graphic devices were a common feature in early modern medical writing. The quantitative findings indicate that more theoretical texts tend to include fewer graphic features than practice-oriented texts, in which visual aids assist readers in identifying anatomical structures or surgical instruments. The authors observe variation in both the types of devices used and their distribution across sub-genres. Tables appear in relatively few books, whereas 'braces' – classified as diagrams – are frequently found in recipe collections. Images remain scarce across the sub-genres analysed, and when they do appear, they are not integrated with the text but are instead placed at the beginning or end of sections. The authors suggest

that this practice may reflect the limited recognition of the didactic potential of images in early modern English medical texts, at least in codex form.

Hanna Salmi's contribution (pp. 259–279) examines John Playford's dance manual *The English Dancing Master* (1651) and its subsequent 17th-century editions. She focuses on the visual and verbal elements used in the manual's tabular format to describe dance movements and figures, and how these relate to the accompanying musical tunes. In the original format, each dance figure is separated by a horizontal line, making it easier for readers to follow the sequence of movements in relation to the music. While this visual model was innovative, it lacked consistency in later editions. Salmi's diachronic analysis shows that, over time, the tables were gradually eliminated due to the increasing length of musical notation and a concurrent reduction in the number of cells used for dance descriptions. She attributes this shift to several factors: the labour-intensive nature of producing the tables, a growing demand for new tunes, and the simplification of dance movements, which became easier for the average reader to understand without the aid of graphic organisation.

Part II concludes with a contribution by Janne Skaffari and Jukka Tyrkkö (pp. 281–307), who present a detailed qualitative study of graphic devices in two 17th-century grammar books: one by Jeremy Wharton (1654) and another by Joseph Aickin (1693). These grammars were selected due to their notable use of graphic elements such as tables, diagrams, and other visual features. To contextualise the graphic choices made by Wharton and Aickin, the authors also examined four additional grammars by their contemporaries and predecessors. The findings indicate that both the case study grammars and the comparative texts employed a wide range of graphic devices to organise and present grammatical content. Presumably due to their grammatical complexity, verbs and pronouns were the word classes most frequently accompanied by tables and diagrams. The contribution lays the groundwork for further quantitative research on graphic devices in grammar books to identify broader patterns of usage.

There follows an insightful afterword by Jeremy Smith (pp. 307–309), who acknowledges the volume's innovative and comprehensive contribution to the field of historical pragmatics. In particular, he highlights the original and wide-ranging value of the collected chapters, which testify to the scholarly

impact of the "Pragmatics on the Page" research group at the University of Turku. Smith observes how the book's multimodal approach to historical texts encourages the expansion of historical pragmatics into adjacent domains, "breaking down boundaries between disciplines" and fostering dialogue among them (p. 309). He regards the volume as an exciting model for interdisciplinary research, spanning different – and often overlooked – genres and historical periods.

Overall, the collected volume offers an innovative and illuminating multimodal study of historical English texts. Thoroughly grounded in the principles of visual pragmatics, the contributions convincingly explore the relationship between graphic forms and communicative functions, in a commendable and methodologically sound effort to reconstruct communities of practice in the medieval and early modern periods.

One of the volume's most significant merits lies in its emphasis on the semiotic relevance of graphic elements, and on the ways in which these interact with verbal language within the socio-cultural context of their time. Language remains a crucial lens *through* which our multiple communicative affordances can be recovered and studied across different points in time (Włodarczyk, Tyrkkö, Adamczyk 2023: 3). The contributors' reflections on the intended readership completes the picture providing a valuable insight into cultural practices related to the usage and interpretation of different semiotic modes. This focus is particularly important, as reconstructing audience reception of written texts from remote historical periods remains one of the most complex challenges in historical pragmatics (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 13).

To conclude, the bibliography provided constitutes an exhaustive compendium of the state of the art in recent historical pragmatics, reflecting the field's growing interest in visual features and its productive intersections with related disciplines. The volume successfully fulfils its aim of shedding new light on the role of graphic devices in the conceptualisation and construction of knowledge. As such, it will undoubtedly appeal to researchers interested in historical pragmatics, book history, and the multimodal dimensions of medieval and early modern English genres. N

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