

SAA 2020 Short Abstracts for “Shakespeare and Linguistic Creativity”
Organizer: Daniel Shore

“Spenser’s Lexicon: Towards a Theory of Surprise”
Anupam Basu

Taking Spenser’s alleged archaism as a test-case this paper will ask to what extent natural language processing techniques applied at the scale of the corpus can allow us to gesture towards how rare, unusual and surprising words, phrases, and perhaps syntactical units function in literary texts. It will build on my previous work which has assessed the (very high) degree to which Spenser’s spelling in print conforms to roiling orthographic norms across his career. I will try to outline what might be distinctive about Spenser’s lexicon – not just the odd words, but the less odd ones that he uses disproportionately – and ask how the deployment of such a vocabulary contributes to his poetical project.

“Misogyny as Metaphor and Metonymy in Shakespeare and Webster’s Critique of Power: A Pragmatic Approach to Macbeth, The Tempest, and The Duchess of Malfi”
Kyle DiRoberto

Drawing on both the monarch’s fascination with witches and James’s reputation for what traditionally had been associated with feminine appetite, Shakespeare and Webster expose a central paradox of power in an emergent libidinal discourse of science and magic (not to mention merchant capitalism, colonialism, and liberal democracy) which seems to justify particular forms of liberty through a hypocritical renunciation of women. Drawing on approaches to literature from literary pragmatics and cognitive linguistics, this essay examines all that is implied in the playwrights’ critique of James I through the early modern theme of witchcraft.

“Tragic Judgment”
Matt Hunter

This paper considers a variety of speech-acts which arise as reliably as a reflex in response to moments of linguistic creativity: speech-acts of judgment, of critical evaluation, of taste, of praise, of blame, and of everything in between. In his recent study of the constitutive resources of language, Charles Taylor argues that what separates language, as a uniquely human semiotic system, from the signs used by animals is the criterion of rightness to which utterances are held. When we are talking about language, we are talking about signs that can succeed or fail based not on facts, but based on their appropriateness to particular occasions. The social scripts that grease the wheels of spoken interaction make it easy to overlook questions of rightness and wrongness, but moments of linguistic creativity force them implacably upon us. If every word is, as Bakhtin has it, oriented to an answer-word, then creativity is oriented towards responses of judgment, speech-acts that aver or deny whether an utterance has “worked.” Like ritual, creativity elicits various forms of retro-performativity as one of its central dialogic effects. The intersections between judgment and

creativity are woven deep into the fabric of early modern tragedy. A genre which, as Thomas Rymer judged it, words are hopelessly out of proportion to action, tragedy flourishes in early modernity as the genre in which language is found to fall short of its object—to be wrong, but only because there is no way for it to be right. By staging what we might think of as the failure of the most creative uses of language, early modern tragedy generates its own peculiar forms of knowledge.

“Linguistic Creativity: Shakespeare’s and Ours”

Alysia Kolentsis

The notion of a specialized sort of linguistic creativity, restricted to or at least mastered in literary writing, is well-established in literary studies. In our field, one need only consider the longstanding, exaggerated claims about Shakespeare’s outsized vocabulary. Yet in many other disciplines (including sociology, linguistics, and cultural studies), the notion of linguistic creativity as the purview of the chosen few – the writers, artists, and poets among us – has long been challenged. Sociolinguists will tell us that we are all linguistic innovators, and the ability to subvert rules and defamiliarize so-called “ordinary” language is our collective inheritance as users of language. Of course, we might respond that there’s a distinction between the linguistic creativity evidenced in poetic and literary language and that in everyday speech. But how might we determine such a distinction? How porous is the boundary between these kinds of language, if indeed it exists at all? My paper draws on recent work in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics to consider the phenomenon of linguistic creativity in all speakers. I want to look past claims about Shakespeare’s singular linguistic creativity to consider the ways that he engages the existing resources of his language. In other words, what can Shakespeare’s linguistic creativity tell us not about his use of language, but about ours?

“Affective Pacing and Literary Style in the Early Modern Sermon”

Sarah Kunjummen

Studies of early modern sermons have often focused either on their political impact, or on the rhetorical strategies they employ to produce conviction in their hearers. This focus on rhetoric is further fostered by canonical status of John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes, two strikingly virtuosic prose stylists. T. S. Eliot’s seminal appraisal of Andrewes emphasizes his ability to wring significance out of individual words, “squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning, which we should never have supposed any word to possess.” This critical impetus has been taken up in work on Donne and Andrewes’ style by Sophie Read, Peter McCullough, Robert Whalen and Noam Reisner, and in Jennifer Clement’s work on affect in the early modern sermon. My paper, uses the tools of computational analysis, specifically sentiment analysis, to examine the affective rises and falls of the early modern sermon at a broader scale. Using a corpus of late Tudor and early Stuart sermons, I suggest that affective pacing—how long a sermon lingers in a monitory mode, perhaps, or a consolatory one—emerges as a distinctive element of authorial style in the early modern sermon, and suggest its potential usefulness for other literary genres.

“Shakespeare and Grammatical Creativity”

Lynne Magnusson

Many ideas about Shakespeare's linguistic creativity focus on lexical words: what if we try to conceptualize syntactic or grammatical creativity? This conjectural paper will explore some of the ways writers and thinkers have imagined "grammatical creativity," with attention (for example) to Erasmus's chapters on grammatical variation in *De Copia*, to Wittgenstein on grammar and forms of life, to Dolores Burton and Madeleine Doran on Shakespeare's grammatical art, to Jonathan Hope and Sylvia Adamson on grammatical variation and change, and to recent linguistic work on grammaticalization and construction grammar (including Dan Shore's reflections on Shakespearean constructions). The paper will draw upon tactics both of close and of distant reading to illustrate forms of grammatical creativity in Shakespeare's plays.

"How Shakespeare Verbs: A Construction Grammar Approach to Denominal and Deadjectival Verb Formations"

Laura A. Michaelis

I will illustrate the application of Sign-based Construction Grammar (SBCG; Sag 2012, Kay & Michaelis 2019), to verbs derived from nouns and adjectives, both innovative and conventional, in the First Folio. The Shakespeare derived verbs are those described by Thierry et al. 2008. Since Clark and Clark (1970), we have understood that source nouns convey participant roles in the events and relations expressed by derived verbs. For example, in (1) the source noun conveys the goal of the transfer event expressed by the verb *bag*, while in (2) the source noun conveys the agent of the activity expressed by the derived verb *mother*:

1. Starr **bagged** the personal effects for evidence.
2. She **mothered** her sister Codie, 12, and brother Zach, 10.

Following Michaelis & Ruppenhofer (2001), I assume that such derived verbs do not 'denote' thematic roles but rather that they render such thematic roles sufficiently predictable to warrant null realization; note, for example, that (3) is redundant but (4) is not:

3. She **buttered** her bread with butter.
4. She **buttered** her bread with apple butter.

The SBCG approach to derived verbs assumes derivational constructions in which frame-semantic elements from the 'input' non-verbal lexeme and the 'output' (verbal) lexeme are coindexed. But derived verbs in Shakespeare present some problematic cases for this model, including (5):

5. Antony/Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see/Some squeaking Cleopatra **boy** my greatness/I' the posture of a whore.

What is the event structure of the event described (a parody performance with a boy actor) and how precisely is the source-noun meaning integrated into that event, to create a complex construal, in which the imagined performance diminishes Cleopatra's stature/authority? I will argue that a formal approach like SBCG, with a frame-semantic foundation, allows us to represent participant roles and event entailments of both verbal and non-verbal lexemes, and thereby elucidates the manner in which frames are blended to create the rich event envisionments that Shakespeare achieves through verbing.

“Embodied Linguistics in Much Ado About Nothing”

Sophie Shorland

On first meeting Much Ado About Nothing’s clown-constable Dogberry, his frequent malapropisms suggest that language is entirely outside of his control, in contrast to the hyper-controlled intentional slippages of the play’s aristocratic characters. However, accompanying Dogberry is his assistant, Verges. ‘Verges’ refers both to the constable’s rod of office, and is also probably a sexual innuendo, playing on ideas of virility typically associated with the early modern clown, and Will Kemp (who played Dogberry) in particular. This paper will consider the relationship between embodied linguistics, suggested by Verges’ presence, and the abstracted forms of speech used by characters like Beatrice and Benedict, capable of verbal slippage.