

How did the relations of space and time evolve in discourse?

Spatio-temporal systems in *Piers Plowman*

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The purpose of this paper is to carry out a discourse-pragmatic analysis of the spatio-temporal systems in an allegorical poem *Piers Plowman* along the lines of historical pragmatics and discourse analysis (Taavitsainen & Jucker 2015). The corpus of this research is taken from the EETS edition of Text B edited by Skeat (1972[1869]), consisting of the Prologus and Passuses I-XII.

Language is equipped with spatio-temporal systems by which the speakers judge how distant the situations they wish to express are from their domain. Such relationships are embodied by spatio-temporal elements such as pronouns, demonstratives, adverbs, tense forms and modals, with a proximal (close) and distal (distant) distinction. These elements can be related to each other to take either a proximal or a distal perspective not only in the spatial and the temporal domains, but also in the integrated spatio-temporal domain. The speakers may maintain the same perspective, or alternate different perspectives, in discourse.

This research integrates both qualitative and quantitative analyses of how the spatio-temporal systems in *Piers Plowman* evolve in discourse. A preliminary analysis of the corpus reveals that *Piers Plowman* has a marginal tendency toward proximal perspective. While the narrator is likely to employ distal elements in his narration, he takes advantage of direct speeches describing his dream visions with proximal perspectives.

This paper then addresses the following questions: 1) How does the perspective change as the discourse progresses? 2) What factors are relevant to this change in discourse? and 3) How diverse are these factors among speakers? To provide answers to these questions, this paper focuses attention on these factors: 1) elements structuring discourse (e.g. metadiscourse), 2) elements promoting a proximal or a distal perspective (e.g. address terms), 3) elements triggering alternations of these perspectives (e.g. discourse markers), and 4) factors facilitating alternations in elements in either the spatial, the temporal or the integrated spatio-temporal domain (e.g. contrast between two worlds). The analysis displays, for example, that elements such as imperatives and address terms typically encourage a proximal perspective, sometimes in cooperation with each other. Alternations between proximal and distal perspectives illustrate contrasts such as those between the speaker's past sin

(distal) and new life (proximal). Such perspective alternations, however, are not so dramatic nor marked as in fictions such as Chaucer's *Canterbury tales*.

Finally, this research demonstrates how the speakers managed the spatio-temporal systems in discourse, advancing our understanding of communication in the past.

References

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