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LModE-7: Myths and Late Modern English in Ragusa Ibla, Italy

After a two-year delay caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the 7th International Late Modern English Conference (LModE-7) finally took place last 5-7 May, 2022. On the premise of reflecting on the topic “Myth-making and Myth-busting in and about Late Modern English”, around forty scholars gathered in Ragusa Ibla to discuss and learn about Late Modern English and to share their latest research on the many areas of this fruitful field.

Among the most celebrated interventions were those by the renowned professors in charge of the plenary talks: Dr Raymond Hickey, from the University of Duisburg and Essen, Dr Jeremy Smith, from the University of Glasgow, and Dr Linda C. Mitchell, from San Jose State University. With the title “Late Modern English as a World Language: Broadening the Base”, Prof. Hickey delivered a most useful and interesting talk in which he provided an overview of the extant research on Late Modern English which paved the way for a discussion on the gaps and emergent research branches within the field, including the necessary expansion of the traditional focus on British and American English in favour of those *other Englishes* spoken around the world. In “Myth-Making through Letters: The Pragmatics of Punctuation in the Correspondence of Robert Burns”, Prof. Smith provided new insight into the correspondence of Robert Burns by exploring its materiality and use of punctuation through the lens of historical pragmatics. Prof. Mitchell, for her part, elaborated on “The Fallacy That Proper Language Equals Proper Person” by examining the role of grammarians and lexicographers in 18th-century English sociolinguistic setting, which led to an interesting discussion on her own and the audience’s linguistic experiences in connection to prescriptivist attitudes.

These talks, together with the rest of the fascinating presentations delivered by well-known scholars such as Joan Beal, Marina Dossena, Carol Percy, Massimo Sturiale, or Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, among many others, gave ground to most enriching debates about language and research. Such discussions greatly enhanced my learning experience, in the same way as the useful questions and feedback I received after my presentation, which was warmly received by the audience. In “Written Identities: The Enregisterment of Dialect in 19th and 20th-century Derbyshire”, I reviewed the literary tradition of the county of Derbyshire by focusing on the works representing its dialect from the 17th century until the present day. After that, I undertook a qualitative and quantitative linguistic analysis of a selection of 19th- and 20th-century texts and looked at the data obtained from the lens of enregisterment in order to establish the role that these textual artefacts played in such process. Finally, I compared the outcomes with both contemporary and modern non-literary accounts of the dialect, which revealed the correlation between the information they provide and the image of the dialect portrayed in literature. This demonstrated not only the validity of literary representations of dialect as sources of information about historical varieties and the values attached to them, but also the enregisterment of 19th- and 20th-century Derbyshire dialect and the continuity of some of its features in the present day.

All in all, the 7th International Late Modern English Conference was a wonderful experience and a unique opportunity to exchange ideas, and, above all, learn about cutting-edge research on the various aspects of Late Modern English. The 8th International Late Modern English Conference will be celebrated in Salamanca, Spain, in September 2024; it will undoubtedly be as successful and productive as its predecessor.