

La Sapienza

Revisione esterna tesi dott. REMO APPOLLONI (36 ciclo)

APPOLLONI REMO

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Evaluation form for PhD dissertation

Evaluation form

Title of the thesis

The standardisation of suffixes and definitions in noun taxonomies: a preliminary corpus-based and data-based analysis of the early modern English microlanguage of economics (1572-1664)

Affiliation of the reviewer

Intentionally left blank for anonymity

Report

This is an interesting piece of work, which encompasses a wide range of linguistic issues and makes use of technology in a creative way. The writer has clearly done a lot of linguistic work, which goes a long way in indicating whether a doctoral thesis can be considered worthy of a doctoral degree. However, as it currently stands, the draft is not yet ready for submission to a viva committee. In my opinion, this thesis stands in between a 'require minor revision' and a 'require major revision', in the sense that I am not requesting for the whole thesis to be overturned, rewritten and restructured completely, but I am also aware that many of the changes below require more radical root-and-branch work than a simple list of minor changes. The candidate is definitely capable of delivering a final draft, so the suggestions below are given with the idea of further helping the writer to refine their piece of work. I will try to give some of the most salient remarks below, giving the most important comment first and then adding other smaller notes, largely following the structure available in the thesis.

Main comment:

The need for providing a discussion. I was left wondering, when I finished reading the thesis, how all the work that the student has gone through actually connects with the broader EMode linguistic and non-linguistic discourse. For example, how do the results illuminate our understanding of pamphlets, tracts and treatises more broadly during the period surveyed in the thesis? There is some wonderful work out there on the topic (e.g. Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain, by Raymond, 2003; Early Modern English News Discourse, ed. by Jucker, 2009, to mention only a couple), which is currently ignored. Likewise, how do the results connect

more broadly to research done in EModE suffixes, lexicography, spelling, as well as research conducted on EModE economic thought? What exactly does the thesis contribute to the intellectual pathways above? Surely it is not just a linguistic exercise done for the sake of it? The writer is clearly able to do their linguistic bit, but part of the skill of writing a doctoral thesis is showing how it connects to everything else relevant that the work clearly feeds into. This point will also help the candidate to establish more clearly what the weight of the contribution made by the thesis is -- which is currently quite understated. A fuller statement of originality should be provided both in the introduction and in a section following the results chapter. An overall word count of the thesis is missing, but even if this was a full 80,000 words, I believe that a discussion chapter, which is currently missing, should follow the analytical part of the thesis. The current draft seems slightly out of touch with the more book-related aspect of pamphlets, tracts and treatises, and it uses linguistically based solutions to create a taxonomy of the texts under analysis. The taxonomy would otherwise benefit greatly from the researcher actually viewing some of these manuscripts in real life, in order for their linguistic suggestions to have more credibility. I frequently get the sense, when reading the thesis, that the researcher was only able to access digitised material, and uses those, and those alone, to try to gain a full understanding of the material at hand. Digital material is useful but it cannot replace the full experience of studying EModE printed texts. A useful way in which looking beyond digitised material could help shed light on the issues discussed in the thesis is that some texts would have practically fallen across more than one of the rigid categories in which the thesis currently tries to place each text in. Looking at the corpus in question as a collection of real texts may also help the writer to compare key details such as printer names, which may be the same across some texts and different across others, and interpret the results gained accordingly. Another way in which the manuscript could improve is by signposting key pieces of information more clearly: I would have liked to see the RQs being repeated more explicitly throughout the chapters, to help the reader make better sense of the linguistic results being brought forward and to be more gradually accompanied through the answers to the questions posed. I would have also liked to have a list of abbreviations at the beginning of the thesis, to be able to follow more easily some of the acronyms used across the chapters. An additional way in which a discussion chapter could help further make sense of the results gained is discussing the extent to which the material investigated in this thesis is interconnected. It is assumed, especially in scholarly discourse, that intellectuals (some more than others) were deeply influenced by their predecessors and their peers. Many would have had copies of work from other scholars on their desk when writing their own work. Which of the texts surveyed are more closely connected than others and how does this help us to get a better understanding of the patterns available in the results chapter? Again, a discussion chapter could address some of these issues.

I would recommend for the thesis to also be proofread fully -- the language used is good enough, and mostly readable, but there are several typos, incorrect grammar/vocabulary and many wrong verb tenses scattered throughout the manuscript, and a thesis ready for submission should be above that.

Other suggestions:

- I found it a bit unusual for the author to provide a full description of the tools used for this piece

of research only after the same tools were mentioned extensively in the first chapter. It seems to

me that the description in question should be placed elsewhere.

- Caution is needed when drawing on primary evidence to gauge how to classify each text, since

EModE terminology and labels were frequently subject to change and imprecision. I would have

liked to see a more explicit acknowledgement that the author is aware of this issue, and why caution is needed.

- Is orthographic variability always a sign of stylistic elaboration? Could it be the product of carelessness or a lack of understanding of which category a given text falls into? How do we make

sense of the connection between these two extremes?

- I appreciate the focus on Latin. At the same time, it would be good to show greater awareness of

the fact that Latin was often so embedded in the language of the time that it was essentially considered part of the English language. So to analyse Latin as a separate subject is not always a

theoretically good choice, but may be needed for practical reasons.

- I like what the candidate does with VARD and DICER, though I would have liked to see a more

explicit acknowledgment of the fact that these tools are not perfect, and they have in fact been

bitterly criticised in recent work as quite unreliable for analysing spelling standardisation. Extreme

caution is needed when using them and the very problematic nature of VARD needs to be acknowledged. Luckily, the author's thesis is not primarily on spelling, and the writer mainly draws

on the tools to facilitate other levels of linguistic analysis, so this issue does not endanger the overall linguistic validity of the work proposed.

-p. 116: I'm not sure that the relative frequency results are very meaningful in the table provided

here. Perhaps raw numbers would give a better picture of what we are seeing? I will leave this

specific point up to the candidate and their supervisor, however, as there may be reasons additional to what I see on paper for using relative frequencies. If so, please explain these fully in

the thesis.

- The section in which the candidate provides an overview of the authors included in the corpus

sampled confused me a little, as some of the texts mentioned in this overview were eventually not

included in the actual corpus. A heads-up on the matter would be helpful at the beginning of this

section, perhaps together with visual way of distinguishing corpus material from other non-corpus

material (e.g. maybe leave the material not included in the corpus in square brackets?).

Confidential report (it will not be shown to the candidate)

Evaluation file (optional)

Presentation and clarity

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The reviewer should be able to read the text without difficulty. This implies that the dissertation is clear and 'user friendly', without duplications or repetitions.

Integration and coherence

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The manuscript should present logical and rational links between different parts of the thesis.

Introduction to scientific background

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The text should contain a satisfactory introduction to the scientific background which is relevant to the research, preparing the reader to the exposition of the problem.

Review of relevant literature

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must have a detailed knowledge of original sources, have a thorough knowledge of the field, and understand the main theoretical and methodological issues.

Statement of research problem

None Poor Average Good Excellent

A clear statement of the research problem should be made, together with specific hypotheses, predictions, or questions which the research is designed to address.

Originality

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The research must be the candidate's own work. The degree of independence may vary according to the research topic.

Contribution to knowledge and scientific relevance

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The dissertation should be substantial enough to be able to form the basis of two articles on refereed journal, a book or research monograph.

Mastery of the English language

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must be proficient in written English and show mastery of appropriate scientific/technical language.

The thesis can be considered for a 'cum laude' award

Yes No

A major goal of the review process is to evaluate if the present version of the thesis is:

- 1) adequate as is
- 2) require minor revision
- 3) require major revision

for admission of the candidate to the defense of the work in front of a national evaluation board.

Accept as is Minor revision Major revision

Date: 12/13/2024

Reviewer: Condorelli Marco