

LALP Corpus: Diving into Data ‘from Below’

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Written documents created by the lower social orders are of much value for the language history ‘from below’ approach (cf. Elspaß 2005). Within the context of English Historical Sociolinguistics, pauper letters written under the Old Poor Law can be categorized as belonging to these kinds of sources. More precisely, the Old Poor Law aimed at creating a poor relief distribution system in England and Wales. This was centered around the parish as administrative unit and made parish overseers responsible for poor law legislation. During the Late Modern English period, particularly 1795–1834, the poor relief laws legalised the payment and receipt of out-relief from parish funds, i.e. paupers received relief in the form of money that was sent to them or they were removed from their current domicile and brought back to their parish of legal settlement (cf. Auer & Fairman 2013; Auer et al. 2023). The out-relief application letters written by paupers during the period 1795–1834, as well as related correspondence, serve as the basis for the so-called LALP Corpus that has been created as part of the SNSF-funded research project “The Language of the Labouring Poor in Late Modern England” (2020–2025).

In this presentation, we will present the so-called LALP corpus and discuss its value for historical sociolinguistics. More precisely, we discuss corpus creation choices (from transcription to metalinguistic information included) as well as challenges we encountered in the process. We will moreover show that despite the existence of other Late Modern English letter corpora (e.g. *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension*, *Corpus of Late 18c Prose*, *The Bluestocking Corpus*, *The Mary Hamilton Papers*) and much existing expertise in the field, every new text type, and letter type in this case, comes with new challenges and opportunities.

References

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