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STRUCTURAL PATTERNS AND COMMUNICATIVE ROLES OF VOCATIVES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH CORRESPONDENCE

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Abstract. The article presents a thorough analysis of epistolary vocatives in Early Modern English correspondence from the perspective of their structural and pragmatic characteristics. The study demonstrates that the examined forms of address functioned to establish tone, levels of formality, and the social dynamics typical of Early Modern English communication. Attention is also given to the variety of vocative patterns and their contextual features, as well as their key role in realizing strategies of politeness, intimacy, or authority, thereby reflecting hierarchical relationships and corresponding social norms. In the analyzed texts, vocatives are essential functional elements, carrying significant semantic distinctions and playing an important communicative role in the relationship between sender and recipient.

The lack of a structural marker for vocatives in English accounts for their syntactic flexibility. Speakers employed various noun phrases and characteristic intonation patterns to express direct address, thereby enhancing the emotional and relational context of the message.

Additionally, the article reveals the pragmatic significance of vocatives as a means of expressing the speaker's intentions and attitude toward the addressee. Each vocative carries a socially conditioned level of respect, and its omission or substitution can alter the speaker's communicative intent. Correspondence between such influential figures as John Manners and Bess, the dowager Countess of Shrewsbury, as well as the letters of Anne Boleyn to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, illustrate the personalization of interaction and the creation of emotional contact through the use of vocatives. The research material highlights the role of epistolary vocatives in setting the appropriate tone and engaging the addressee, offering valuable insights into the cultural and communicative practices of Early Modern English society.

Key words: epistolary vocative, address forms, communicative intent, addresser, addressee, initial and medieval position, correspondence.

СТРУКТУРНІ МОДЕЛІ ТА КОМУНІКАТИВНІ РОЛІ ВОКАТИВІВ У ЛИСТУВАННІ РАННЬОНОВОАНГЛІЙСЬКОГО ПЕРІОДУ

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Анотація. У статті здійснено ґрунтовний аналіз епістолярних вокативів у листуванні ранньонновоанглійського періоду з погляду їх структурних і прагматичних характеристик. У розвідці доведено, що досліджувані форми звертання функціонували для встановлення тону, рівнів формальності й соціальної динаміки, властивих для ранньонновоанглійської комунікації. Увагу також зосереджено на різноманітних зразках і контекстуальних особливостях вокативів, їх ключової ролі в реалізації стратегії ввічливості, близькості чи авторитету, яка унаочнює ієрархічні відносини й відповідні соціальні норми. У досліджуваних текстах звертання є важливими функціональними елементами, виконують важливу смислорозрізняльну роль, важливе функціональне навантаження у відносинах між адресантом та адресатом.

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Відсутність структурного показника для позначення звертання в англійській мові зумовлює їх синтаксичну гнучкість. Мовці використовували різноманітні іменникові словосполучення й характерні інтонаційні моделі для вираження прямого звертання, тим самим посилюючи емоційний і реляційний контекст повідомлення.

Окрім цього, у статті виявлене прагматичне значення навантаження вокативів, засоби втілення намірів мовця та його ставлення до адресата. Кожний вокатив містить відповідний, соціально зумовлений рівень поваги, і його вилучення або заміна може змінювати комунікативний намір адресанта. Листування між такими впливовими особами, як Джон Меннерс і Бесс, вдова, графиня Шрусбері, а також листи Анни Бoleйн до кардинала Томаса Волсі ілюструють персоналізацію взаємодії між учасниками комунікації, створення емоційного контакту між ними засобами вокативів. Матеріал дослідження демонструє роль епістолярних вокативів у встановленні відповідного тону й залученні адресата, уможливорює розуміння ранньомодерної англійської культурних і комунікативних практик.

Ключові слова: епістолярний вокатив, форми звертання, комунікативний намір, адресант, адресат, початкова й середня позиція, листування.

Problem statement. Epistolary vocatives in Early Modern English offer a unique perspective on the ways writers established tone, formality, and social dynamics through address forms in written correspondence. Spanning from the late 15th to early 17th century, this period marked significant shifts in both language and social customs, as seen in the distinct vocative structures used in letters.

Epistolary vocatives – specific forms of address used to open or punctuate written communication – served not only to introduce the addressee but also to convey respect, intimacy, or authority, depending on the relationship and social norms of the time. **The aim** is to explore the structure and function of address forms, with special focus laid on their patterns, variation, and role in societal and personal relationships. The letter helps us gain a deeper insight into the cultural and communicative practices of Early Modern English society.

The object of our research is Early Modern English address forms (vocatives). **The subject of the research** is the structural and pragmatic characteristics of address forms in Early Modern English correspondence. This includes the analysis of their formal patterns, lexical and syntactic variation, as well as their communicative functions in constructing social identities, expressing interpersonal relationships, and reflecting the hierarchical structure of the Early Modern English society.

Before embarking on the object of investigation, let me first focus on the theoretical background of the required ways of its analysis. In my view, the definition of vocatives has been given by Betsch and Berger (2009, p. 1023), who describe the vocative as a “traditional means of marking nominal forms of address”, where

“nominal” refers to any syntactic structure that acts like a noun. This usually includes noun phrases, commonly used for direct address in English. Quirk et al. (1985, p. 773) and Greenbaum and Quirk (1999, p. 222) hold that vocatives are often noun phrases, especially proper nouns like names or titles, which are used for clear and direct address.

Unlike languages with specific vocative cases, where nouns change form based on function (like in ablative or accusative cases), English lacks a dedicated vocative case. Instead, it relies on flexible noun phrases and intonation to indicate direct address [3, p. 494]. Hornby (2005, p. 1707), for one, explains that the term “vocative” refers to forms used in direct address, marked by position and intonation rather than inflection.

Sentential vocative is treated as a nominal element with a distinct syntactic and pragmatic role. Syntactically, it is an optional element that can appear in various positions within a sentence. These positions may vary, but it is always accompanied by a specific intonation, setting it apart from the main part of the sentence. It is important to note that the vocative does not alter the grammaticality of sentence and does not affect its acceptability from the language norms perspective. However, it should not be solely regarded as a syntactic element, as it holds significant pragmatic meaning.

Pragmatically, the vocative is not simply a nominative form, it is an element that performs functions related to the speaker’s communicative intentions. The vocative employment exemplifies speaker’s attitude towards the addressee, captures his/her attention, or conveys certain emotions or the levels of respect. Due to these pragmatic functions, vocative becomes an essen-

tial element in certain contexts where it is important to convey the intended meaning. It cannot simply be removed or replaced by other grammatical elements without altering the functional use or the pragmatic sense of the sentence [10, p. 25].

The epistolary vocative, or form of address in Early Modern English correspondence, is an important tool for establishing contact between the addresser and the addressee. Commonly, the Early Modern English vocative is placed at the beginning of a letter as an introductory element (initial position), setting the tone and personalizing the communication.

See, an e.g., a letter from John Manners to Bess, the dowager Countess of Shrewsbury, in which he informs her that Edward Dyer is acting as the executor of the will of a certain Master Beresford.

(1) **Good Madam** *I was very glad of the receipt of your Ladyship's lettre... (Bess of Hardwick's Letters. Letter ID: 044).*

Another sample of the initial vocative is one of the Ann Boleyn's to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. That was a thanks message for the gift, he bestowed her on while she was ill.

(2) **My lord**, *In my most humble wise that my poor heart can think, I do thank your grace for... (Letter from Anne Boleyn to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey 1528).*

Like in previous letters, the letter from Katherine Howard to Master Culpeper, in which she expresses concern over not having heard from him, this another example of the clause in the initial position.

(3) **Master Culpeper**, *I heartily recommend me unto you, praying you to send me word how that you do (Queen Catherine Howard to Thomas Culpeper Letter Analysis).*

Said material helps to conclude that in the early modern English period, initial vocatives were frequently employed in both private correspondence and official documents. For instance, in Katherine Howard's letter to Thomas Culpeper, the front position vocative serves to express emotional involvement and intimacy. Same story holds true in Sir John Manners' letter to Bess of Hardwick, in which it adds a tone of politeness and respect on top of a formal address. These instances manifest that initial placement of vocative was not only a common norm of epistolary style at the time but also fulfilled important pragmatic functions, i.e., high-

lighting social relationships, addressee's status, and author's emotional stance. Therefore, it can be concluded that initial-position vocatives were a characteristic feature of letter-writing in the Early Modern English period.

However, a vocative function is not limited to the beginning of the text. The vocative can appear in various parts of the letter, including the medial or even final position. In such cases, it becomes part of the closing etiquette formula or serves to emphasize emotional or significant moments in the text, thereby enhancing its importance for the addressee.

In Anne Boleyn's final address to King Henry VIII from the Tower before her execution, she expresses astonishment at his anger and her own imprisonment. She confidently denies any guilt or betrayal and pleads for a fair and public trial, also begging that the innocent men who suffered alongside her not be punished. She reminds the King of her loyalty and love, while acknowledging the fickleness of royal favor. This letter presents a particular interest from the perspective of vocatives, as Anne Boleyn uses them both in the initial, as well as in the middle position throughout the letter to enhance its emotional intensity.

(4) **Sir**, *Your Grace's displeasure and my imprisonm[en]t are thinges soe strange unto mee, as what to write or what to excuse ...*

The letter begins with a vocative in the initial position, which was characteristic of Early Modern English letters. But throughout the letter, Anne repeatedly uses forms of address in the middle position:

(5) *Yow have chosen mee from a lowe estate to be your queene and companion farr beyond my desert or desire. If then yow found mee worthy of such an honour, **good your grace**, lett not any light fancye, or badd counsell of mine Enemies, withdrawe your princely favour from mee.*

(6) *Trye mee **good Kinge**, but lett me have a lawfull tryall and lett not my sworne enemyes sitt as my accusers and Judges... (Letter from Anne Boleyn to King Henry VIII, During her Imprisonment in the Tower, 6 May 1536).*

These vocatives indicate the superior rank of the addressee and emphasize the hierarchical relationship between the addresser and the addressee. At the same time, these forms of address serve an emotional purpose. They express not only humility but also loyalty and a desire to preserve dignity even in the face of death.

Conclusion. The analysis of epistolary vocatives in Early Modern English correspondence reveals their crucial role as both structural and pragmatic devices that shaped the tone, emotional intensity, and social dynamics of written interaction. The findings demonstrate that vocatives were not simply ornamental or conventional openings but served as powerful tools for expressing respect, affection, subordination, or authority, reinforcing the hierarchical and relational fabric of the period's communicative norms. The dominant placement of vocatives in the initial position of letters, whether in personal, political, or formal exchanges, suggests a codified rhetorical strategy designed to immediately establish the social standing and intent of the writer.

Moreover, the presence of medial and final vocatives in emotionally charged or rhetorically significant passages, such as Anne Boleyn's final

letter, illustrates the vocative's capacity to intensify affective engagement and draw attention to critical appeals or pleas. These instances show how vocatives could underscore shifting power relations, reflect emotional vulnerability, or assert personal agency within constrained social frameworks.

The lack of a grammatical vocative case in English, the flexibility of syntactic placement, along with reliance on noun phrase variation and intonation, points to the unique adaptability of English vocatives and their embeddedness in socio-pragmatic meaning. Ultimately, this study affirms that epistolary vocatives in Early Modern English were integral not only to linguistic structure but to the very construction of interpersonal and social identity in written discourse. Further research could expand this analysis to a larger corpus or investigate diachronic changes in vocative usage beyond the Early Modern period.

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