Royal Voices: Language and Voices in Tudor England

Mel Evans

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The Tudor period and monarchs have long held the fascination of historians, and alongside numerous biographical studies of Tudor kings and queens sits a wealth of research examining these monarchs' writings from literal, historical, and linguistic perspectives. Royal Voices: Language and Power in Tudor England employs a historical pragmatic framework to the analysis of both authentic royal materials (in Part I) and imitations and appropriations of royal discourse (in Part II). Evans' exploration of royal documents and those that emulated royal language serves to reinforce her central argument that the royal voice was an important element in maintaining and managing both royal authority and the complex sociopolitical dynamics of Tudor England.

Chapter two shifts its focus to the language used in the letters to analyse whether the linguistic choices in the correspondence reinforced the messages conveyed by its material properties, as discussed in chapter one. Evans undertakes a thorough keyword analysis of Tudor royal correspondence as a means to understanding its linguistic features and their relationship to the social formulations of monarchy and royal authority. The distinctions between the language used in Tudor royal scribal and holograph correspondence and that of non-royal letters from the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC) are comprehensively demonstrated. Through this analysis, Evans reveals that correspondence keywords relating to "social actions, states and processes," "names and grammatical words," and "linguistic actions, states and processes" are some of the most commonly referred to in royal correspondence (69-72). Evans reveals a high level of linguistic consistency in Tudor royal correspondence, which is ultimately reflected in the successful representation of royal authority through these letters.

In chapter three, Evans considers three intertwined linguistic aspects of Tudor royal correspondence: metacommunication, self-reference, and regulative speech acts. Evans's comparison of the metacommunicative language reveals differences of emphasis in how they promoted royal authority: scribal documents according to their legal legitimacy, and holograph correspondence according to the effort undertaken by the monarch to compose the letter. The examination of first and third person pronouns in scribal and holograph correspondence demonstrates further differences between the two types of documents, as scribal correspondence almost exclusively used the royal "we" in its correspondence, whilst holograph letters were more likely to employ first-person-singular pronouns to suggest a level of intimacy between writer and recipient. Regulative speech acts were shown by Egans to implement change in England and the wider world through interactions between monarch and recipient.

Chapter four moves its focus from royal correspondence intended for an individual to consider royal proclamations designed to convey information or instructions to the public at large. Evans examines some of the visual and textual properties of these proclamations, details evidence of diachronic changes to these proclamations across the Tudor period, and discusses the dual function of Tudor royal proclamations as both a royal

message and a relatively new form of royal document that was facilitated, in part, by the developments in print publications. Linguistically, Evans demonstrates that proclamations were more likely to be written in third person than first and reveals the categories of issues referred to in the documents. Evans argues that the material and linguistic properties of Tudor royal proclamations were characterised by consistency and formulaicity that served to reiterate and reinforce monarchical authority to society as a whole.

Chapter five marks the start of Part II of this volume, which centres on how royal letters and proclamations were comprehended and adapted by non-royal imitators. This chapter considers metacommunication and the ways in which Tudor royal correspondence and proclamations were discussed, described, and evaluated in contemporary non-royal documents. Evans demonstrates that metacommunicative references to royal proclamations in non-royal documents focussed on discussions and evaluations of their content, suggesting the social value of the messages contained therein. Confirmation of receipt of royal correspondence, discussions of future letters, and reasons for a letter writer's present or future actions form the basis of metacommunicative references to personal Tudor correspondence, as Evans demonstrates.

Case studies on three individuals who (legitimately or otherwise) claimed royal power in the Tudor period form the basis of chapter six, which examines how these individuals used royal textual practices in order to reinforce their legitimacy. Through an examination and analysis of various letters and proclamations issued in the names of Perkin Warbeck, the fifteenth-century pretender to the throne who impersonated Richard, Duke of York; Edward Seymour, Lord Protector during the reign of Edward VI; and Lady Jane Grey, the nine-days queen, Evans demonstrates the importance of royal language and the utilisation of vernacular texts to the construction of royal power and authority. The use of royal first-person pronouns signified a relationship between the writer and reader(s) of correspondence and a linguistic analysis of these individuals' correspondence reveals clear use of royal language in an attempt to assert authority and legitimacy.

In chapter seven, Evans investigates the role of language in the construction and maintenance of royal authority in Tudor England by examining reported royal speech in contemporary correspondence. She concludes that there was no formal system that allowed differences between royal and non-royal descriptions of reported royal speech to be distinguished from each other as they shared many common pragmatic features. Through her consideration of sixteenth-century chronicles in chapter eight, Evans demonstrates that whilst chronicles sought to document events, there was also a performative element involved which necessitated elaboration and fabrication and thus their factual accuracy should be understood within that context. Whilst there is some evidence of formulaicity, these chronicles' documentation of royal speech, Evans argues, was less marked than perhaps expected, but that this may be attributable to "the more fluid discourse representation system" employed in this period (234).

In some places throughout the volume, it may have been a useful feature to include images to provide readers with a visual representation of Evans's descriptions, and there are areas in which the linguistical terminology becomes somewhat confusing despite Evans'

obvious endeavours to keep it simple and easy to follow. However, overall, Evans' meticulous material and linguistic analysis of Tudor royal documents and their non-royal imitations and counterparts successfully demonstrates the importance of a royal register of language in royal document and texts to the construction and representation of royal authority.

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