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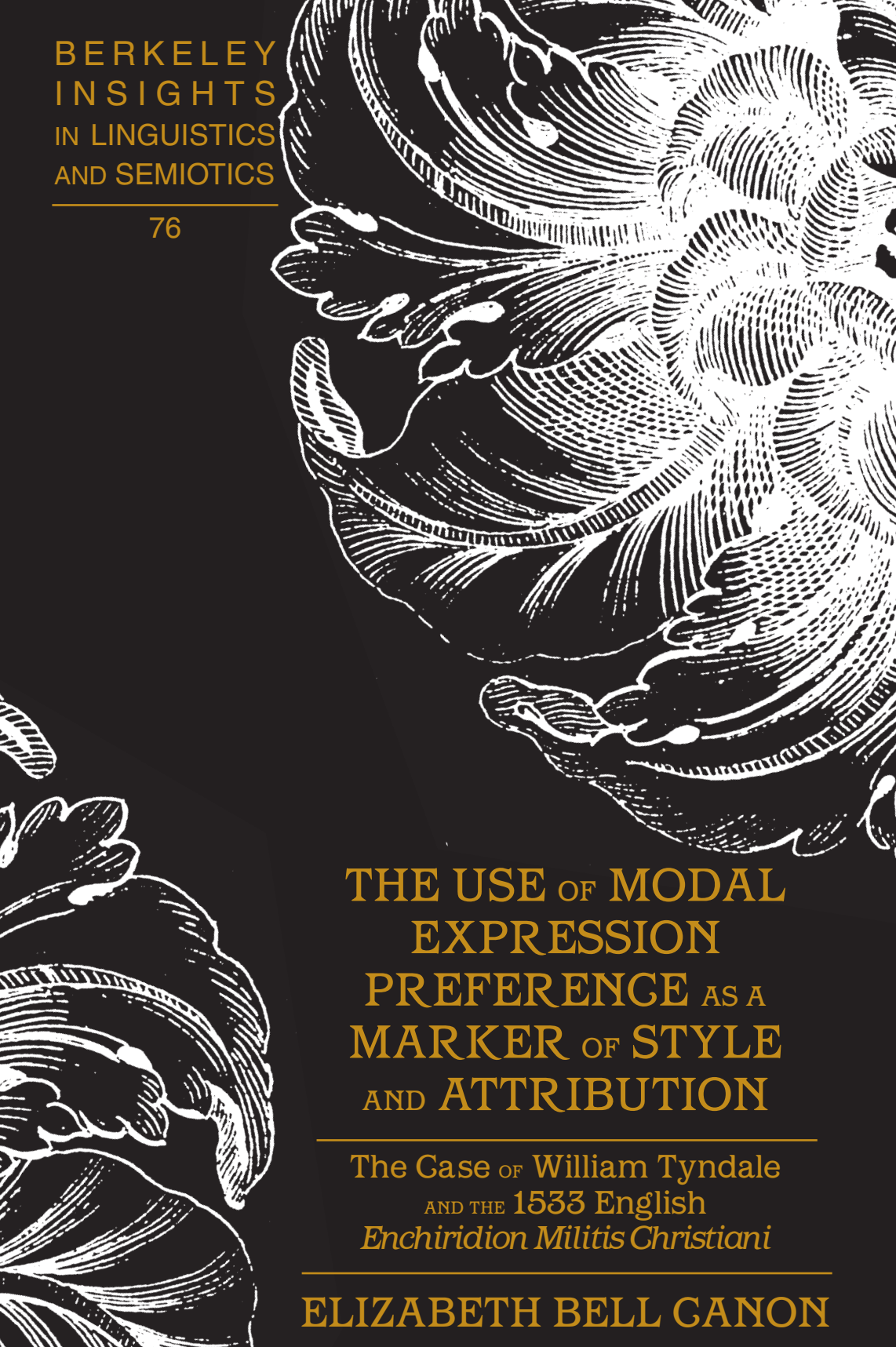

THE USE OF MODAL EXPRESSION PREFERENCE AS A MARKER OF STYLE AND ATTRIBUTION

The Case of William Tyndale and the 1533 English *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*

ELIZABETH BELL CANON

Can an author's preference for expressing modality be quantified and then used as a marker of attribution? This book explores the possibility of using the subjunctive mood as an indicator of style and a marker of authorship in Early Modern English texts. Using three works by the sixteenth-century biblical translator and polemicist, William Tyndale, Elizabeth Bell Canon establishes a predictable preference for certain types of modal expression. The theory of subjunctive use as a marker of attribution was then tested on the anonymous 1533 English translation of Erasmus' *Enchiridion Militis Christiani.* Also included in this book is a modern English spelling version Tyndale's *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon.*

Elizabeth Bell Canon holds a Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Georgia. She is currently Assistant Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse.

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PETER LANG
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Abbreviations and Symbols

EEOB	Early English Books Online
Infl. Subj.	Inflected Subjunctive
KJV	King James Version
Mod. Aux.	Modal Auxiliary
Mod. Pret.	Modal Preterite
Nondist.	Non-distinct form
pl.	Plural
sg.	Singular
1/2/3	First person, second person, third person

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In this study, I look not only at one grammatical aspect of the original works of William Tyndale, but at the man himself. The first chapter offers a brief biographical sketch. Perhaps best known as a 16th century translator of the English Bible, he wrote many books of his own. Tyndale was sharp-tongued when writing in response to his enemies and often wrote at length about his own beliefs. I believe that an in-depth study of his use of the subjunctive mood will reveal stylistic patterns that were distinctly his. With the use of computer-based corpus analysis tools and techniques, this study answers some questions about Tyndale, and about inflected subjunctive usage as a marker of style and authorship.

The second chapter of this study looks at the history of the subjunctive mood in the Germanic language family, focusing most specifically on its use in Early Modern English. It contains a review of verb forms (both inflected and otherwise) and function words common in the use of the subjunctive. Elizabeth Closs Traugott's *The History of English Syntax* (1972), Manfred Görlach's *Introduction to Early Modern English* (1994), Wayne Harsh's *The Subjunctive in English* (1968), and Dieter Stein's "The Expression of Deontic and Epistemic Modality and the Subjunctive" are key references for the focus on the state of the subjunctive during Tyndale's day. The use of the subjunctive by other authors of that time is briefly examined as background for the study on Tyndale.

The third chapter of the study examines the life of William Tyndale. Beginning with his birth in Gloucestershire, the study discusses the contributions made to his psyche by his family and the community in which he lived. Following him to Oxford and on to the priesthood, the study explores the enlightenment he experienced that started him on the path to martyrdom. Lastly, it places in time the polemical works being studied as well as his monumental contribution to the history of the English Bible. Daniell's *William Tyndale: A Biography* was my primary source, but I also consulted

other biographies including J.F. Mozley's *William Tyndale*, and Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.

Also in the third chapter, biographical works are reviewed and articles on his methods and practices are put into perspective. In particular, David Daniell's *Biography*, which will be followed closely in later portions of the study, is examined as it is considered both the most current and most complete biography available. Of historical significance with regard to the English Reformation and the history of the English Bible are Benson Bobrick's *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution it Inspired*, Brian Moynahan's *God's Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible, A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal*, and Elizabeth Nugent's *The Thought and Culture of the English Renaissance*. Although the focus of some of these works is on Tyndale's career as a biblical translator, there is much information on what was going on 'on the ground' in sixteenth-century England that may illuminate some motivations. Articles that speak to his methods can be found, among other places, in the bound volume *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays* published by the Catholic University of America Press.

The fourth chapter of this study discusses the polemical works themselves, focusing on their message and content. The works under consideration are *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, *The Practice of Prelates*, and *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*. In this chapter, existing literature on each of the books is examined, and each of the three books is compared with the others.

The fifth chapter is the explanation of my research methods. WordSmith Tools 4.0, the concordancer software I employed in my research, is introduced. The corpus analysis was approached in two phases. In Phase I, a search was run on all subjunctive tokens of the verb forms be and were and each resulting token was categorized according to usage. From the data produced by searching both the Tyndale corpus and the comparison texts, I was able to verify the assertion of many other scholars that the conditional clause is consistently governed by a subjunctive verb. The purpose of Phase II was to analyze the method of subjunctive expression within conditional clauses. A search was run for the conditional marker, if, and its Early Modern English spelling variant, yf, on both corpora. The resulting verbs were tabulated and categorized by method of expression: Unmarked form, modal preterite, modal auxiliary, inflected subjunctive.

The data presented in the sixth chapter clearly indicate that Tyndale employed an exceptionally high number of modal preterite inflections in all three texts, and a marked scarcity of modal auxiliary constructions in contrast with the comparison corpus. The comparison corpus behaved in a manner typical of the period as described by Harsh, Traugott, and Görlach in separate studies. Tyndale's 'subjunctive fingerprint' was this modal pattern which was unique to his writing.

The final chapter presents the results of an experiment applying the use of this fingerprint to a text of disputed authorship. The 1533 English edition of Erasmus's *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, an anonymous text whose translator has been presumed by some scholars to be Tyndale, was searched for conditional clauses beginning with if/yf in the exact same way that the previous searches were run. The results indicate that Tyndale is not likely to be the author.

The marriage of corpus linguistics, stylometrics, and the establishment of a subjunctive fingerprint is unique to this study. Although other researchers have employed tests of style including word length, sentence length, and type/token ratios, none have employed a test of style in which an Early Modern English author's preference for modal expression is analyzed. What makes this study work is the fact that it was run on texts written during the Early Modern period; a time in which the difference between indicative verbs and subjunctive verbs was clear (in the second and third persons singular), and the inflected subjunctive was dying out, but not quite gone. It might not have been as successful had it been run on a modern text, or on an earlier text when subjunctive inflections were more common-place.

CHAPTER 2

Computational Analysis of Texts

My study of three polemical texts attributed to the 16th-century author, William Tyndale, is a corpus-based inquiry. Many researchers have used corpora to gain an understanding of various linguistic aspects of any given body of work. These studies may produce a better understanding of:

- grammatical features based on naturally-occurring examples
- semantics, or meaning of a given word, phrase, etc.
- stylometrics
- attribution

Some of the most trusted names in linguistics have employed corpora in their work. Jespersen, and Quirk, for example, assembled a corpus and reviewed it looking for examples of particular grammatical types (See Meyer 11). Harsh used a corpus of samples taken from texts which he intended to analyze. What makes my study different from theirs is the use of the computer to make the counts more reliable and to produce related statistical data which can further illuminate the result of the initial search.

2.1 The Nuts and Bolts of a Computer-Assisted Corpus Analysis

There are certain ingredients present in all computer-assisted analyses of corpora. The first is the text itself. At the risk of stating the obvious, the text and its format are of crucial importance to the integrity of the study. It must not be an image document, but an electronic one. Hockey writes, "the term 'electronic text' is used specifically to mean a transcription of a text, rather than an electronic or digital image of it" (1). It must be searchable, and that requires a text format and not an image or the computer will not be able to pull very specific information out of it. It must be stripped of all formatting, so any electronic text must be converted to plain text form.

In addition to the text itself, software must be employed that will address the task at hand. For the purpose of my study, I chose WordSmith Tools 4.0, a concordancer software program that searches for specific words and terms in texts and corpora of varying lengths. There are others available (See Hockey, Meyer, and Stubbs).

2.2 The Pertinence of a Corpus Study to an Historical Research Project

In his book, *English Corpus Linguistics: An Introduction*, Meyer says the following with regard to the intersection of historical linguistics and corpus linguistics:

> Much current work in historical linguistics is now based on corpora containing texts taken from earlier periods of English, corpora that permit a more systematic study of the evolution of English and that enable historical linguists to investigate issues that have currency in modern linguistics. (11)

Harsh's 1968 study of the subjunctive in the history of English was done on small samples to keep the project from becoming unwieldy. This would not have been an issue had concordancer software been available to him. In the same way, pre-computer grammar books and dictionaries could have been produced faster and with greater accuracy had their compilers had access to modern computers. A grammarian can look at large bodies of naturally-occurring language samples and determine exactly what any given population deems "grammatically correct." Likewise, the advantages for lexicographers are obvious. With enormous corpora available, and the ability to rapidly pinpoint a specific word within the corpora, determinations can be made as to the semantic content of any word. These are studies that can be done not only on Present-Day English, but also on any period of English with a representative text in electronic form. Tests could be done on the history of a specific English word or construction by employing a large enough corpus.

In addition to the above-mentioned applications, corpus analysis can be used by historical linguists in what Meyer calls, "contrastive analysis and translation theory" (23). In other words, a corpus study of the works of one author could shed light on the constructions used by another author translating the former's work. For the purpose of my own study, a later application of corpus analysis might be to study the use of the subjunctive mood in Mar-

tin Luther's *On the Liberty of a Christian Man* from 1520. Much has been written about the possibility that Tyndale borrowed from this and other documents by Luther, but I am not aware of any analysis addressing what Meyer calls "translationese."

Related to "contrastive analysis" is what Susan Hockey calls "stylometrics and attribution" (104). In the study of historical texts, it is possible to identify features which seem to recur in the works of any given author. These features, once identified, can be used comparatively with other texts of unknown or disputed authorship. She writes that "various projects have shown that it is possible to characterize an author or a set of texts by linguistic fingerprints" (Hockey 104). This is where computer-based corpus linguistics has the most to offer my study of the polemical works of William Tyndale.

2.3 How the Subjunctive Mood and Stylometrics are Complementary

The question is a simple one: If a subjunctive "fingerprint" can be established for an author, might it be used, in conjunction with other accepted tests of style, to determine authorship of other texts? The answer to that question will depend on the following factors:

- What is the scope of the study? In other words, is the researcher looking for one or two specific forms, or all instances of subjunctive verbs?
- Is the researcher taking into account methods of expressing mood exclusive of inflected forms? Modal auxiliaries indicate mood, but do not fall into the category of inflectional form–are they to be included? What about modal adverbs?
- How is semantic content determined? Is there a litmus test for categorizing meaning?
- How can a difference of interpretation be accounted for when differences in degrees of meaning are very small?

Based on research that will be presented in subsequent chapters, I am looking at all forms of modal expression within a specific category of modal usage: The conditional clause. Assuming that all authors of the 16th century used modal forms in conditional clauses, I am looking at what choices the authors made as to type of modal expression: Unmarked, modal preterite,