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TEXT AND IMAGE:
REVISITING TRAUBE'S *HALBGRAPHISCHE OBJEKTE*
IN A PALEOGRAPHIC-PRAGMATIC APPROACH
TO SCRIBAL ABBREVIATION¹

ABSTRACT

This article outlines a paleographic-pragmatic approach to scribal abbreviations in Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.2. of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* with a view to demonstrating how expanding the scope of traditional paleographic analyses, focused on the linguistic interpretation of the half-graphic symbols (Traube 1909: 134), to include a pragmatic reading of the interactions between abbreviations and other visual elements on the page allows for a better understanding of medieval reading practices.

KEYWORDS: abbreviations, paleography, visual pragmatics, medieval manuscripts, Gower

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia propozycję paleograficzno-pragmatycznego ujęcia abrewiatur skrybiarskich w analizie rękopisu Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.2., zawierającego tekst *Confessio Amantis* Gowera. Celem artykułu jest wykazanie jak poszerzenie zakresu tradycyjnych badań paleograficznych, których celem jest językoznawcze odczytanie symboli pół-graficznych (Traube 1909: 134), o interpretację pragmatyczną interakcji zachodzących pomiędzy skrótami a innymi elementami wizualnymi na stronie manuskryptu wspomaga pełniejsze zrozumienie średniowiecznych praktyk czytelniczych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: abrewiatury, paleografia, pragmatyka wizualna, średniowieczne manuskrypty, Gower

THE PALEOGRAPHIC-PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO ABBREVIATIONS

The present article revisits one of the most iconic elements of a medieval manuscript page, i.e. scribal abbreviations, in order to argue that technologising the manuscript into computer-readable sets of digital images has not only democratised access to historical texts in their original material contexts, but it has also underscored

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the need for widening the scope of research framework applied to studying manuscript texts. The interpretation of abbreviations is one of two main foci of palaeography (the other one being the study of pre-modern handwriting in general) and crucial for the understanding of historical texts (cf. Traube 1909: 134). Even though paleography does focus on the visual aspect of the manuscript's abbreviating system (i.e. it analyses variant *figurae*, i.e. letter shapes, that 'stand in' for specific, pre-defined sequences of *litterae*²), its goal is, ultimately, a linguistic description of the analysed text. Classical handbooks of paleography (e.g. Capelli 1899 [1982]; Traube 1909; Bischoff 1990), apart from collating lists of abbreviation symbols, provide possible orthographic readings of those symbols which, in turn, feed into phonological or morphological analyses of the abbreviated text. Yet, those very symbols whose understanding is crucial for the *linguistic* interpretation of the text are themselves not linguistic but "half-graphic" objects (Traube 1909: 134), which means that their *visual* interpretation is just as important for making sense of the manuscript page.

The impact of the material aspect of the manuscript text on how readers construe the meaning of the text has been recently recognised as an important criterion in analysing the communicative functions of medieval texts (see, e.g. Jucker and Pahta 2011). One of developing perspectives on manuscript studies is the application of tools and methods of historical pragmatics to the study of historical texts in *both* their linguistic *and* graphic manifestations. This article presents a case for combining tools and methods of traditional paleography, with its focus on the forms of abbreviation symbols, with a pragmatic approach to the study of historical texts, which centres around the functions of abbreviations. Unlike in the strictly paleographic approach, the emphasis here is on the meaning-enhancing functions, performed on the level of the manuscript page. In other words, where traditional paleography views abbreviation symbols as 'standing in' for strings of letters, regardless of other visual elements on the manuscript page, the pragmatic approach considers the half-graphic objects as part of the visual text (Machan 2011), i.e. one whose meaning is dependent upon an interaction of visual elements inscribed on the manuscript page. Within that framework (also known as visual pragmatics or Pragmatics on the Page; see Carroll et al. (2013)), abbreviations, along with such elements as type and size of script, colour of the ink or page layout, help the scribes organise manuscript discourse (textual function); aid the reader's navigation of the page (interactional function); and signal the scribes' evaluative judgements of their texts (metalinguistic function).

² For a fuller explication of the concepts of *figura* or *littera* in medieval handwriting, see Laing (1999) and Laing and Lass (2009).

AIMS AND SCOPE

The textual, interactional and metalinguistic functions of pragmatic markers are well-established categories in discourse analysis, which have been recently appropriated to the analysis of historical texts (e.g. Jucker 1995; Jucker and Pahta 2011; Carroll et al. 2013). Just as historical pragmatics applied tools and methods of discourse analysis to the study of contextual conditioning of communicative acts inscribed in historical texts, Pragmatics on the Page, also known as visual pragmatics (Carroll et al. 2013), focuses on the manuscript page as equivalent to the utterance in a traditional pragmatic study, whereas visual cues on that page are bibliographical counterparts of discourse markers, which facilitate the reading of the text. This perspective focuses on “bringing material evidence to bear on pragmatic analyses and employing pragmatic concepts in the study of early English manuscripts” (Carroll et al. 2013: 55). The visual pragmatic approach underscores the materiality of the text, viewing “books as physical objects which provide visual encounters as well as linguistic content” (Carroll et al. 2013: 55). Given the fact that scribal abbreviations signify both onto the visual *and* linguistic planes, superimposing the visual-pragmatic framework onto traditional paleography seems a welcome development in the study of relationships between the text, image and overall meaning of a manuscript page.

The present study centres on Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.2. (available in the digitised format via the James Catalogue of Western Manuscripts of Trinity College, Cambridge), a deluxe copy of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. The document in question is well known in manuscript studies, as it is the focus of a seminal article by Doyle and Parkes (1978) on “The production of copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and *Confessio Amantis* in the early fifteenth century”. That paper drew attention to the relationships between the five scribal hands involved in the production of MS R.3.2 and their copying habits, with broader implications for manuscript production of literary works in late medieval England. Nonetheless, even though the resulting paleographic analyses of individual scribal stints provided the terminological and methodological groundwork for later descriptions of Middle English scribal habits, yet no mention was made of the pragmatic functions of scribes’ *litterae* nor was there any discussion of abbreviations, either paleographic or pragmatic³ (in truth, at that time the discipline of historical pragmatics had not yet been the established framework it is now). Therefore, the ensuing study will attempt to fill in the lacuna left by Doyle and Parkes and outline a paleographic-pragmatic approach to the study of scribal abbreviations, thus highlighting the importance of integrating

³ Curiously, Doyle and Parkes seem to have been aware of pragmatic implications of their analyses when they observed that “[l]ayout and decoration function like punctuation” because “they are part of the presentation of a text which facilitates its use by the reader” (Doyle and Parkes 1978: 186).

insights from the linguistic *and* visual analyses of medieval manuscripts for a better understanding of medieval reading practices.

ABBREVIATING GOWER: SCRIBAL PRACTICES IN CAMBRIDGE,
TRINITY COLLEGE MS R.3.2.

MS R.3.2 is a fifteenth-century vellum copy, written in two columns in a clear Anglicana script. Its bulk is occupied by an incomplete text of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* – one of his most popular English works. The vernacular text is accompanied by a Latin apparatus (“the elegiac verses; the prose commentaries; the speech prefixes and citations of authority; and the colophon and other additions at the end” (Pearsall 1989: 15), integrated visually and structurally with the main body of the work. Doyle and Parkes (1978) identified five scribal hands in this copy of *Confessio*: scribe A authored folios 1-8, 50r-57v, 74r-81v, 84v-89v, 98r-113r (line 15); scribe B (Adam Pinkhurst) – folios 9r-32v; Scribe C – ff. 33r-33v, 34r-49v, 58r-65v, 90r-97v; Scribe D (John Marchaunt) is responsible for ff. 66r-73v, 113 (line 51)-154r; whereas Thomas Hoccleve (Scribe E) wrote ff. 82ra-84ra. The scribes use the colours red and blue for ornamental initials and paraphs (blue and red penwork alternating with red and blue penwork) but otherwise they write only in black and brownish ink. Abbreviation in the English text is quite scarce and limited to those symbols which can be expanded into alphabetic sequences familiar to the Middle English reader, such as *-n/-m*, *-er/-re*, *per-/par-/por-*, *pro-*, *-us*, *-ra*, *-ri* or *-ur* (Clemens and Graham 2007: 92f.). Petti (1977: 23) classifies those symbols into contractions (abbreviating part of the word, such as superscript letters *i*, *a*, *u*, *e*), suspensions (contracting ends of words, like the horizontal line contracting the final *n* in *-oun* sequences), and brevisgraphs or “special signs” (representing “at least two letters or one syllable”, which “might resemble one of the omitted letters or be apparently arbitrary in shape”, like the abbreviation associated with *ser-* <§> in the original Latin system). There are also abbreviations for function words *the*, *that* or *with*.

- (1) Outward he doth the reu'ence
But al with ynne his conscience
Thurgh fals ymachinaciou^v (f. 1v)
- (2) And bar on hond þ' hī ne roghte
What labour þ' she took on honde (f. 9r)

This variety of types has a fairly restricted token distribution: in the vernacular text it is limited to lexemes conventionally abbreviated in Middle English manuscripts, such as *eu(er)-*, *neu(er)*, *ou(er)*, *þ(er)*, *Em(per)o(ur)*, *(pro)phet* or all manner of *-ou(n)* or *-aunce* endings. This changes whenever the narrative is interrupted by a passage in Latin. Unrestrained by the limitations of English

orthography, the copyists have a chance to utilise a much larger (and more visible) set of abbreviation symbols than those applicable to their English text. Apart from the above-mentioned forms, well-adapted to English orthography, scribes also resort to symbols standing in for Latin *-(or)(um)*, *-q(ue)*, *-q(i)*, *-q(o)*, or *-m(od)o* (Clemens and Graham 2007: 92).

- (3) Prodeg⁹ et pauc⁹ duo sūtextemaq⁹ larg⁹
Est horū medius plebis in ore bonus (f. 85r)
- (4) Dum stimulat⁹ amor qicqid iubet orta voluptas
Andet & aggredit⁹ nulla timenda timens
Omē quod ast queunt herba, siue potestas (f. 92v)

THE PALEOGRAPHY OF *CONFESSIO* ABBREVIATIONS

Notably, although Doyle and Parkes (1978) make much of paleographic differences between specific letter shapes (or, *figurae* in Laing and Lass' (2009) terminology) in stints authored by individual scribes, their observations do not encompass abbreviations. In paleographic terms symbols applied by the scribes of MS R.3.2. do not go beyond the usual repertoire of forms, as illustrated, e.g. in Bischoff (1990) or Derolez (2003). Generally, abbreviations in this manuscript can be characterised with respect to three parameters: their position within the line (supralinear vs. sublinear), their iconicity (superscript *litterae* vs. brevigraphs) and their complexity (the number and direction of strokes necessary to execute a given symbol). For each of the categories the English portion of *Confessio* and its Latin apparatus will have to be considered separately because, even though the latter part of the text occupies disproportionately less space on the manuscript pages, the incidence and variety of abbreviation types in Latin fragments is considerably greater than for the vernacular text.

To begin with the position of abbreviation symbols, both in the English and Latin texts they can be noticed in either of two loci relative to the x-height (i.e. the main body of the letter): above it (either immediately to the right of the preceding *littera*, as in *þt* 'that', or directly above, as in *resoū* for 'reason') or below (either the initial stroke occurs at the x-height and is traced below the base of the letter, as in *herba,* for 'herbarum', or the entire symbol appears at the level of descenders, i.e. letter strokes below the x-height, as in *pchance* for 'perchance'). Notably, since the text is pretty crammed, the scribes do not have too much room for manouver and sometimes abbreviations that normally appear above the preceding letter are actually squeezed into the small interlinear space to the right of the previous *littera*. Insofar as supralinear characters occur with a comparative frequency both in the English and Latin fragments, the sublinear ones are way more frequent and more varied in the Latin stints. Simply, alphabetic sequences like *-(or)(um)*, *-q(ue)*, *-q(i)*,

-q(o), or *-m(od)o*, for which some of those sublinear characters stand, were not found in Middle English lexemes.

- (5) No^o qd Greci oēm te
ram fertilem debella
bant . s3 tūc Archad
am p̄ eo qd paup̄ &
sterilis fuit pacifice dimiserunt (f. 18r)

Another issue to be considered while investigating the paleography of Latin abbreviations in MS R.3.2 is their iconicity, or, the relationship between the shape of the symbol (i.e. its *figura*) and that of its orthographic expansion. For example, contractions (like superscript letters) may bear a formal semblance to part of the sequence they abbreviate, e.g. *pⁿincipal* for ‘principal’, or *p^t* for ‘that’, but not so in the word *m^ccy* ‘mercy’, or *p^opos*, where the superscript symbols replaces *-er* and *-ur* respectively. The most direct form-to-function analogy in MS R.3.2. obtains for superscript letters abbreviating sequences *-ri*, *th(a)t*, *w(i)t(h)*:

- (6) Buth þey þat writen þe sc̄pture (f. 36Br)
(7) Whan þ^t he saugh the tyme best (f. 26Ar)

No iconicity, in turn, can be claimed for *-us*, *-ur*, *-er*, *-ra*, *p(er)-l p(ar)-*, *pro-*, or *-n/ -m*, or for <q3>, <v>, <b3>, with the latter three occurring solely in the Latin apparatus:

- (8) Quē p̄bat armo, p̄bitas veu^o ap̄batet quē (f. 29Bv)
(9) His wil was nought for vein hono^o (f. 116Bv)
(10) Thou saugh neu^e thilke place (f. 20Ar)
(11) Toward his poeple and g^aciuous (f. 116Av)
(12) For thogh me tonge is slough to c^uue (f. 21Ar)
(13) And if it falle hym so p̄chance (f. 19Bv)
(14) Whan he that thyng may not amēde (f. 25Bv)

Finally, abbreviations in MS R.3.2. differ also in terms of their complexity, measured with the number and direction of strokes the scribe needs to execute in order to write a specific abbreviation symbol. From this perspective, the least complex mark would be the so-called common symbol of abbreviation (Cappelli 1982: 1), also known as the macron, i.e. a single horizontal stroke directly above the letter preceding the abbreviated *n* or *m*. Similarly, the superscript *i*, requiring a single vertical minim stroke was not a laborious symbol to execute. On the other hand, those abbreviations which required operating the pen in a counter-clockwise manner and/ or employing additional strokes, such as in the words *hono^o* ‘honour’, *g^aciuous* ‘gracious’, or *p̄bat* ‘probat’ were more complicated and time consuming and so perhaps there is little wonder that, save for the Latin fragments, they do not appear with particular frequency.

Descriptions like these provide insight into the technicalities of scribal work on the manuscript and preferences of individual scribes working on specific stints of the text, but they do not really explain much beyond the usual form-to-orthographic function mapping. Purely paleographic descriptions do not clarify what abbreviations *do* to the manuscript page, apart from 'standing in' for specific sequences of letters (which can be a controversial interpretation anyway). The fact that the scribes of MS R.3.2., like so many medieval scribes before and after them, by no means abbreviate all lexemes containing orthographic strings liable for abbreviation; nor do they abbreviate all instantiations of that same word in a single text (or on a single page, for that matter); or the fact that considerations of space and time frequently do not seem to matter in light of cases where clearly the scribe could have avoided overrunning the line or pushing his text into the page gutter suggests that symbols of abbreviation must needs have still different roles to play than the ones assigned to them by paleographic handbooks. The interpretation of those roles is the task of visual pragmatics.

THE VISUAL (MANUSCRIPT) TEXT

Recent surge in the number of manuscript digitisation projects has offered an unprecedented possibility of consulting scribal copies, otherwise often unavailable, from one's computer screen. The steadily improving quality of images, expanding descriptive apparatuses and interactive features have not only democratised access to scribal output but they have also brought about an important methodological shift in manuscript and philological studies: the focus on the visual text. This gradually progressing reorientation of scholarly perspectives on historical texts is informed on the one hand by the visual culture we are part of but, on the other, it may be referred to as merely a new way of formalising something that has been known for a very long time, namely, that all texts are, essentially, visual. Any text, be it in a handwritten, printed or electronic format, prior to being read is first perceived: the reader internalises the shapes and sizes of letters, the colour of the ink, the spaces between words, the width of the margins, the presence (or lack) of illustrations, etc. Only once the visual aspect has been processed can linguistic meaning be superimposed on that string of characters on the manuscript/ paper page or computer screen.

Similarly, the medieval reader was faced with a highly visual experience and it was upon the correct interpretation of the elements comprising that experience that an appropriate reading of the manuscript was dependent. Script type and size, *mise en page*, colours of the ink, initials, paraphs, running heads – all these visual cues helped the reader make sense of the text encoded in the linguistic form by providing the non-linguistic context of the communicative exchange between the

reader and its author(s). Visual pragmatics perceives those graphic aspects of the manuscript page as reading aids of sorts, i.e. “anything on the page that adds meaning to the linguistic message” (Carroll et al. 2013: 56). Abbreviations are a peculiar case of a bridge between the visual and the textual: in and of themselves they belong to the purely graphic category (cf. Traube 1909), but they are expandable into linguistic elements.

Pragmatics (including historical pragmatics) studies the influence of context on the meaning of the utterance. For historically oriented *visual* pragmatics, the ‘utterance’ is the manuscript page, whereas the communicative context is comprised by both the material properties of the manuscript (the matter of codicology) and the visual appearance of the page itself. Just like discourse markers add to the meaning of a spoken communicative exchange, analogically, visual cues provided by scribes and illuminators contextualize the manuscript discourse for the reader. Apart from paratextual elements (Genette 1987), such as titles, running heads, borders, or catchwords, framing the text proper, also those components of the text which break its linearity (enlarged initials, paraph signs, braces) thus ‘vying for the readers attention’, provide contextual clues to the interpretation of the text. In discourse analysis such contextual clues which help organise discourse and monitor the communicative exchange between the speaker and addressee (like *well, you know*, etc.) are called pragmatic markers⁴. In what follows the author proposes a visual pragmatic approach to abbreviations, in which those *halbgraphische Objekte* function not unlike pragmatic markers, monitoring manuscript discourse, supporting the interaction between the reader and the text, and commenting on the implied status of the text (Erman 2001).

A (VISUAL) PRAGMATIC READING OF ABBREVIATIONS IN MS R.3.2.

In her discussion of functions of pragmatic markers in spoken English Erman (2001: 1339–1340) distinguishes three planes of meaning for those elements of discourse: textual, social and metalinguistic. On the textual level, the task of pragmatic markers is to monitor the organisation of discourse by ensuring coherence. In essence, their job is to move the discourse forward and ensure that the addressee knows what is being communicated to them. In their social, or interactional function, pragmatic markers “negotiate the meaning and management of discourse” (Erman 2001: 1339) by engaging the addressee in the communicative exchange. Finally, the metalinguistic function concerns the speaker’s attitude towards the propositional value of the utterance and may involve distancing oneself from the truth value of the proposition (Erman

⁴ There is much terminological inconsistency across the field of pragmatics but for the sake of clarity Erman’s (2001) approach has been adapted for the purposes of this study.

2001: 1341). These pragmatic categories have been adapted by Carroll et al. (2013) to a pragmaphilological study of historical texts, which allowed for operationalising the nonlinear relations between abbreviation symbols and other visual elements on the manuscript page and teasing out the correlation between abbreviations and subtextual meanings of that page. To this end, in what follows scribal abbreviations previously described in paleographic terms will be considered from a visual pragmatic perspective, i.e. as pragmatic markers of sorts, functioning on Erman's three planes of meaning: textual, interactional and metalinguistic.

TEXTUAL FUNCTION

The most prototypical function of pragmatic markers is organising discourse and ensuring communicative coherence. The prototypical function of abbreviations, in turn, is to ensure cost-effectiveness of the manuscript copy, but also to organise the manuscript page visually. The latter is especially true of later Middle English literary texts, which typically appear in a two-column format and abbreviations can serve as an aid with justifying visually the columns of the text. This function would most easily be fulfilled by the common mark of abbreviation, i.e. the macron, as it was applicable on a much broader scale than other types of truncation symbols and could be introduced quite late in the process of copying the line of the text, when the scribe realised that without abbreviating he would run his text into the gutter of the page or onto column B of the text. This discourse organisational role is most visible in Latin fragments, especially those which appear in the margins. Despite reducing the size of script to fit their Latin apparatus to the limited marginal space, scribes of MS R.3.2. often additionally had to resort to abbreviating ends of words:

- (15) No^a adhuc sup
 eodē de quodam
 astrologo qui
 quoddam op^o
 ingeniosū qua
 si ad cōpleme
 ntū ducens vni^o
 momēti tardaci
 one oēm sui op
 is diligenciam
 septennio ppeni
 tus frustraait (f. 17v)

Moreover, the scribes of MS R.3.2. deploy macron abbreviations to provide visual coherence of rhyming couplets: in such contexts abbreviations function not unlike braces in Middle English poetic texts.

- (16) Wher of in thi confessiō
 The name and thi condicioū (f. 66Ar)
- (17) The laste of this diuisiō^v
 Stant vnto ward Septemtriou^v (f. 106Br)

Visual coherence is also noticeable in the stark contrast between the frequency of occurrence of abbreviated forms in Latin vs. vernacular fragments: even without reading the relevant portions of the text, the reader is capable of assigning them to either linguistic code just by considering the sheer volume of symbols in the interlinear space. Also, sudden increase in the type and token frequency on a page always signals code switching from English to Latin (sometimes aided by other visual pragmatic markers, like change in the size of script or a decorative initial):

- (18) Dum stimulat^o amor q'c'q'd iubet orta voluptas
 Andet & aggredit^o nulla timenda timens
 Ome quod ast^a queunt herba, siue potestas

Such shifts from scarce to heavy abbreviation also mark out fragments of discourse that lend authority to the vernacular text (see, e.g. Pearsall 1989). Finally, textual pragmatic markers also encode and edit the text (Erman 2001: 1340), signalling the scribes' efforts to select the (visually *and* linguistically) appropriate form for their text. This pragmatic function is manifested in resorting to a limited and easily decodable set of contractions in the vernacular text, as opposed to dense abbreviation in the Latin fragments; a practice which almost defies decoding the message but which visually links those fragments to scholarly or religious prose (viz. examples (15) and (18) above).

INTERACTIONAL FUNCTION

In their interactional function discourse markers “elicit audience involvement” (Erman 2001: 1341) by engaging them in interaction with the utterance; here – the manuscript page. One of the ways to secure the readers' involvement with the text is to provide visual aids for navigating that text. This comprehension-securing function is operationalised, for instance, in using the same *figura* of the macron abbreviation in rhyming couplets, thus emphasising both the visual and textual unity of the abbreviated stint (see examples (16) and (17) above). Abbreviations in the Latin apparatus do not necessarily help the readers follow the meaning of the text but they underscore shifts from one linguistic unit to another (English to Latin and vice versa) and from one literary form to another (poetry to narrative).

Regarding textual shifts, the incidence of abbreviations is also a diagnostic for codicological analyses: in MS R.3.2. the type-to-token distribution of abbreviation

symbols correlates with breaks in codicological units. Apart from subtle changes in handwriting, the reader can appreciate changes in abbreviating practices when each new scribal hand takes over the copying of the manuscript. For example, whilst scribe B typically abbreviates function words *þʳ* or *wʳ*, scribe C, who takes over at f. 33r, spells them *þat* and *with* most of the time, but abbreviates 'their' as *þʳ*. Scribe A, in turn, hardly uses abbreviation at all and when he does it is usually to abbreviate word final *n* in *-oun* sequences by means of a complex macron sign (upward stroke with a right-turning horizontal stroke).

- (19) Til thei took in possessiou^v
 The lordes of þuissiou^v (f. 51Br)

Another supralinear character which occurs with some regularity in this stint of text is the so-called hook, i.e. the symbol <'>, abbreviating *-re/ -er*, but in general, scribe A tends to apply those abbreviations which take up little space between the crammed lines, e.g. <p> or <þ>.

One more means of engaging the reader with the text is related to the fact that introducing abbreviation breaks the linearity of the text and requires from the reader a different kind of processing than reading an unabbreviated passage, with orthographic symbols distributed evenly on the line. Also, the reader faced with a symbol of abbreviation needs to select a viable interpretation from the more or less restricted set of orthographic choices – a decision, which is not always uncontroversial (especially characters accompanying word-final *litterae* are potentially confusing because they can either represent abbreviation for *n* or *e*, or they may be otiose strokes which are merely the scribe's mannerism, devoid of any linguistic function). By virtue of engaging the reader in negotiation of meaning abbreviations facilitate the interaction between the reader and the manuscript text. Pragmatic markers operating on the interactional (or social) plain are also a safeguard for reader comprehension: abbreviated and unabbreviated instances of the same lexeme, appearing in the same text, might be interpreted as the scribes' way of making sure their 'orthographic intentions' were properly understood. To this role Erman (2001: 1340) refers to as functioning outside the text proper:

- (20) Was take vpon this Empour
 And set here Empo^o (l. 19 and l. 23, f. 54Br)

Abbreviations in MS R.3.2. are also applied to negotiate the available space on the page. For instance, depending on the amount of room between the lines (e.g. the text of scribe B is very crammed, with little interlinear space, whereas scribe C writes a small, more angular script, leaving generous space between the lines), abbreviations appear in different positions relative to the x-height: they can be extended horizontally or elongated way above the x-height. They can also be

shifted to the left or right with regard to their putative position due to limitations of space:

- (21) Omībz̄ in causis sapiēs doct̄na salutē
 Consequit̄ nec hēt quis nisi doct̄^o opem
 Naturam supat doct̄na . viro quod et ort̄^o (f. 99r)

Carroll et al. (2013: 64) also note that on the interactive level (or, in the reader-oriented function), pragmatic markers in a manuscript visually signal the reader's status. This has to do with the overall appearance of the page but abbreviations are particularly important for texts asserting their immersion in the literary Latinitas of the Middle Ages and, clearly, *Confessio* is a text of this kind, especially its deluxe copies like MS R.3.2. In other words, the more abbreviations (accompanied by other visual cues) in a medieval vernacular manuscript, the more prestige (material or intellectual) that manuscript potentially carries.

METALINGUISTIC FUNCTION

Carroll et al. (2013), following Erman (2001), introduce a third dimension to a visual-pragmatic perspective on the medieval manuscript page: the metalinguistic, or stance, function of pragmatic markers. In that role visual cues in the manuscript are “directed towards the [author’s] subjective appreciation of the illocutionary force of the utterance as a whole” (Erman 2001: 1341), i.e. they function as emphasisers. For one thing, abbreviations visually emphasise Latin sources of the literary tradition of *Confessio Amantis*, providing an interpretative framework both for form-to-function mappings and in terms of the broader structure of the poem. On the other hand, an extensive use of abbreviations in Latin fragments underscores the *auctoritas* of the text as a whole, signalling the author’s attitude towards his own text (what Carroll et al. refer to as “visual marking of stance” (Carroll et al. 2013: 64)).

Also, modal pragmatic markers highlight the author’s non-committal attitude towards the truth-value of the proposition, hence they operate as hedges or approximators. For example, the very decision to apply an abbreviation symbol rather than spell out a given lexeme in full is indicative of the scribes’ lack of commitment to any specific spelling of that word (an interpretation borne out by the fact that not infrequently abbreviated forms appear alongside multiple expanded spellings). In other words, abbreviation marks operate as approximators by giving the readers “a rough but sufficiently exact idea about a certain state of affairs for the general purpose” (cf. Erman 1995: 144) of the communicative exchange between the text (or, its author) and the reader.

THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL ABBREVIATION

As can be seen from the preceding sections, an overriding feature of pragmatic markers is their multifunctionality: one type of visual cue can operate on both the textual and interactional or both interactional and metalinguistic, or sometimes even on all three levels at the same time, without either domain being primary to the other one (cf. Lutzky 2009: 38). Fludernik (2000: 235) notes that “no single discourse marker necessarily fulfils any one or exclusively one function”, whereas Lutzky (2009: 38) underscores the interdependence of structural and interactional functions of pragmatic markers. Even though distinct lines have been drawn in this paper to indicate the tripartite interpretation of abbreviations in a Middle English manuscript, the possible visual pragmatic roles outlined above of abbreviations in MS R.3.2. have demonstrated a significant overlap of forms and functions.

It is equally important to stress the interdependence of paleographic and pragmatic features of abbreviation symbols as well as their interactive nature: specific shapes of abbreviation symbols (or, their *figurae*) are not merely idiosyncracies of individual scribal practices but context-dependent markers of visual discourse. Even though symbols of abbreviation do not belong with the linear text, the direction of penstrokes used for committing them to the page mirrors the sloping of ascenders *in* the line; their size and position relative to the preceding letter reflects the distribution of text *between* the lines, whereas their overall shape is indicative of the ductus of the main text, i.e. the specific appearance of the scribe's handwriting (in both vernacular and Latin guises). Most importantly, though, understanding scribal abbreviating practices requires a complementary paleographic *and* pragmatic perspective: just like correctly interpreting linguistic forms in spoken discourse requires the acknowledgement of pragmatic contexts of the communicative exchange, so does an integrated approach, involving an assesment of handwritten forms, their orthographic interpretations and structural-interactional functions necessitate considering a cross-disciplinary framework.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has outlined a paleographic-pragmatic perspective on the study of abbreviations in late Middle English literary manuscripts. It has been argued here that their half-graphic nature, signposted by Ludwig Traube (1909), necessitates an integrated approach; one which takes into account both orthographic mappings and discourse-organisational functions. The study focused on the abbreviating practices of scribes involved in the production of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* in Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.2. This late-fifteenth century English manuscript has been

one of the central sources for Middle English literary, linguistic and paleographic studies (Doyle and Parkes 1978), but despite the scholars' focus on the visual make-up of the manuscript in question (in terms of its script or *mise en page*), the pragmatic aspect of that visuality of has not really been studied systematically.

The fact that visual pragmatics has recently been applied to the study of historical texts is on the one hand reflective of the recognised need for the interdisciplinarity of approaches (historical pragmatics and the history of the book; or pragmatics and materialist philology – see Carroll et al. (2013: 54–55)) and on the other, it is a response to the simple fact that reading – also medieval reading – is essentially a collaborative and interactive process, as is book production. Even though independent paleographic, codicological, materialist or pragmatic studies of a medieval manuscript can and have been undertaken and returned relevant findings, a cross-disciplinary approach of visual pragmatics takes those findings one step further and links the physical properties of the manuscript, its script or *mise en page* with orthographic, linguistic and pragmatic meanings, all of which are intertwined on the page of a medieval scribal text.

Abbreviations are the “grey area” components of the medieval manuscript: as half-graphic objects, or ideograms (Benskin 1977: 506) they belong with other visual components of the page, like type and size of script, ink colour, illustrations or rubrics. In symbolic terms, though, they also represent the linguistic component, i.e. they are the “Litteral Substitution Sets” (Laing 1999) for specific phonological sequences and morphological categories, implicitly expressed in specific (and variable) ideographic forms. As shown in this paper, particular abbreviation forms map not only onto potential orthographic expansions, but just as importantly they operate on textual, interactional and metalinguistic levels, as discourse organisers, comprehension-securing markers, and approximators-emphasisers respectively. It is only through a combination of paleographic and pragmatic approaches to the study of medieval manuscripts that one can fully appreciate the visual text and unpack the multimodality of meanings, hidden on the manuscript page. What has been outlined here are only preliminaries of a research perspective that capitalises on cross-fertilisation of ideas from disciplines which have been interested in the historical texts but saw them as collection of features rather than as interdependent, multi-functional vehicles of meaning. The logical next step would be to analyse the relationship between the physical form of a specific abbreviation symbol and its potential orthographic and pragmatic functions with a view to contextualising scribal practices with respect to such parameters as, e.g. text type, hierarchy of script, or the linguistic matrix of the manuscript.

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