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The Individual Variation in the Construction Realization: the Casket Letters Attributed to Mary, Queen of Scots

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This study focuses on the constructional approach to the authenticity of the Casket Letters, the discovery of which helped Mary Stuart's forced abdication. The originals disappeared, so the Letters' authenticity can be judged only by the surviving copies which were repeatedly treated from different points of view: historical, psychological, etc. Analyzing the letters from the position of linguistics using the traditional statistical methods isn't supposed to be justified because of their comparatively small size, but the method of grammatical analysis can be successfully applied to texts of rather a small size.

Keywords: text attribution, constructions, Construction Grammar.

1. Introduction and previous studies

This study focuses on the constructional approach to the authenticity of the Casket Letters, the discovery of which helped Mary Stuart's forced abdication. The texts were written in French, which Mary, Queen of Scots used in her everyday life, and didn't share any heading, but later they were called the Casket Letters (CLs) because the rebelled Scottish lords claimed to have found them in a silver casket supposed to be given by the queen to her third husband James Bothwell, who was generally believed to have murdered King Henry, Lord Darnley. The original CLs disappeared, so their authenticity / forgery can be judged only on the basis of the

surviving copies¹ and contemporary translations into English and Scottish, which were repeatedly treated from different points of view: historical, psychological, etc.

W. Goodall (Goodall 1754) was one of the first researchers to give arguments for the forgery of the CLs. He claimed that the texts were first written in Scots and then translated into French, which he thought to be indicated by the obscure translation of some Scottish idioms and proverbs into French. According to W. Goodall, the CLs could include not only some forged material, but also some doctored letters by Mary Stuart. W. Tytler (Tytler 1767) was also unclined to hold to this opinion. Nevertheless, the 19-th century brought about the discovery of original French

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versions of some letters previously known in the Scots and English translations, and it turned out that some French idioms were also poorly translated into Scots (Hosack 1870). D. Hosack (Hosack 1870) supposed that some French letters could be addressed to Henry, Lord Darnley by the queen.

At the end of the 19-th century the discussion of the CLs was resumed by T. F. Henderson (Henderson 1889), (Henderson 1905) and A. Lang (Lang 1901). It was caused by the publication of some papers which belonged to Darnley's father, the Earl of Lennox. Among them was Crawford's Declaration discovered, which was said to be the record of Darnley's recollection of his conversations with the queen. The matter is that the Declaration uses almost the same language as the so-called 'Long Glasgow Letter' (Letter II) does. T. F. Henderson (Henderson 1905), who held to the authenticity of the CLs, thought that Crawford's Declaration and Letter II could be treated as separate documents.

M.H. Armstrong Davison (Armstrong Davison 1965) brought up the idea that Mary Stuart's genuine letters were doctored and interpolated with letters by another woman to Bothwell. F. i., Letter I could be written by Mary Stuart to Bothwell not from Glasgow, as the rebel lords claimed, but from Stirling. In this case it referred not to Darnley, but to the queen's son James. Letter II consists of two parts: the second one, the earlier, was written by the queen to Bothwell, while the first one was addressed to her half brother the Earl of Moray, who became the regent of Scotland later. M. H. Armstrong Davison attributed letters III, IV, V, and VI, which survived in the original French version, to "the other woman", whom Bothwell could fetch from France in about 1565 and who was mentioned by the English ambassador Randolph. The historian

considered Letter VIII, written by Mary, Queen of Scots, misdated and, therefore, it couldn't refer to Darnley's murder. Letter VII could be addressed by the queen to James Douglas, who helped her escape from Lochleven in 1568. This hypothesis was supported by A. Fraser (Fraser 1969), G. Donaldson (Donaldson 1974), and A. MacRobert (MacRobert 2002). A. Fraser emphasizes the existence of the contemporary French copy at Hatfield, which survived in the Roman hand similar to Mary Stuart's handwriting. The author brings up the idea that it can be one of the forged casket documents.

J. Guy (Guy 2004) isn't inclined to support the hypothesis concerning the second author whose letters could be mixed with Mary Stuart's ones. He considers all casket documents to be Mary Stuart's genuine letters which were doctored and misdated. The author came to this conclusion after analyzing the comments of the English Secretary of State W. Cecil on the CL copies and translations made by English clerks. J. Guy points out that all the incriminating abstracts are very short and could have been written at page breaks marked with double-line space in Cecil's transcripts of the letters.¹

2. The syntactic approach

Analyzing the letters from the position of linguistics using the traditional statistical methods isn't supposed to be justified because of their comparatively small size. But the method of grammatical analysis can be successfully applied to texts of rather a small size.

This study of the Casket Letters is connected with the problem of language variation treated by J. Leino and J.-O. Östman who linked the aim of CxG to dealing "with all constructs of a language, be they 'core' members or 'peripheral' constructs" (Leino, Östman 2005: 192). The role of the linguistic individual in the formation of linguistic structures was emphasized by A. Bergs

in his work devoted to morphosyntactic variation in the Paston Letters (Bergs 2005).

Two corpuses were taken into consideration in this study of the CLs' authenticity. The first one included four out of eight CLs attributed to 24-year-old Mary Stuart. These 4 letters survived in the original French version. The texts were taken from (MacRobert 2002). The second corpus consisted of 30 authentic Mary Stuart's letters which she wrote at the age of 18-26. The texts were taken from (Labanoff 1844). The letters were analyzed on the basis of 5 parameters:

1. subject-predicate agreement;
2. coinstantiation in the participial complement 'control' structures;
3. theta-criterion;
4. negative constructions;
5. constructions with conjunctions *que/qui*.

The study resulted in revealing the following structures in the Casket Letters which weren't found in Mary Stuart's texts.

2.1. Subject-predicate agreement

Here we have three points to discuss.

2.1.1. The subject is used with the preposition *de* (Letter III, p.180).

(1) <...> **du quel** *vous pouvez tenir seur jusques a la mort ne changera* <...>² (MacRobert 2002: Letter III, p. 180)

Literal translation:

'**of which** you may be sure **won't change** till death'

Contemporary Scots translation:

<...> of quhilk ze may hald zow assurit, yat unto ye deith sall na wayis be changeit <...> (MacRobert 2002: 181)

2.1.2. The subject and the predicate don't agree in number and person (Letter VI, p. 187).

(2) <...> **Je ne vous pourries** *Jamais espouser*. (MacRobert 2002: Letter VI, p. 187)

Literal translation:

'**I** (1 per., sing.) you (2 pers. pl.) **could** (**2 pers. pl.**) never marry'

Contemporary Scots translation:

<...> I culd never marry zow <...> (MacRobert 2002: 188)

Contemporary English translation at Hatfield:

<...> I could vevr marry you <...> (MacRobert 2002: 190)

In this context the predicate agrees in number and person not with the subject *Je* ('I'), but with the direct object *vous* ('you'), which is closer to it.

(3) *Il* <...> *me dist que vous luy mandies qu'il vous escrive ce qu'auries a dire, et ou, et quant me trouveres...* (MacRobert 2002: Letter VI, p. 187)

Literal translation:

'He told me that you wanted him to write to you what (? **I/you**) **had** (**2 pers. pl.**) to say, and where and when you should come to me.'

Contemporary Scots translation:

He <...> tald me ze had willit him to wryte to zow that that I suld say, and quhair and quhen ze suld cum to me <...> (MacRobert 2002: 188)

Contemporary English translation at Hatfield:

He <...> told me that you had willed him to write to you that that I shuld saye, and where and whan you should com to me <...> (MacRobert 2002: 190)

From the grammatical point of view, we can assume that the pronoun *vous* ('you') should be used here, but the sense of the whole context testifies to the contrary.

(4) <...> *et Juges quelle amendement m'a porte ces incertains Nouvelles*. (MacRobert 2002: Letter VI, p. 188)

Literal translation:

'and judge for yourself what **improvement** **has brought** unto me **these uncertain tidings**.'

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ and judge ze quhat amendment yir new ceremonies brocht unto me. (MacRobert 2002: 189)

Contemporary English translation at Hatfield:

⟨...⟩ and judge you what amendment these new ceremonies have brought unto me. (MacRobert 2002: 190)

Again, the predicate agrees in number and person not with the subject, but with the direct object, which is closer to it.

2.1.3. The absence of a finite verb predicate (Letter IV, p. 182).

(5) *Ce que je ne puis faire ma lettre si nestoit que je ay peur que soyés endormy.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter IV, p. 182)

Literal translation:

‘That that I could not **do my letter (would do)** if I weren’t afraid of waking you.

Contemporary Scots translation:

This letter will do with ane gude hart, that thing quhilk I cannot do myself, gif it be not that I have feir that ze ar in sleiping. (MacRobert 2002: 184)

Contemporary English translation at Hatfield:

That that I could not doo my lre shuld doo it wt a good will, yf it weare not that I feare to wake you. (MacRobert 2002: 185)

Here, the verb *faire* is not used for the second time, as a result, the main verb is omitted in the main clause.

2.2. Coinstantiation

in the participial complement

‘control’ structures

It is generally assumed that “coinstantiation phenomena can be described as syntactic patterns that contain a non-finite verbal complement (infinitival, gerundial, participial) whose subject requirement is satisfied by one of the arguments of the main predicate” (Fried, Östman 2004: 63).

The CLs possess the following peculiarities in the control structures.

2.2.1. The implicit/explicit subject of the participial phrase doesn’t coincide with that of the main clause (Letter III, pp. 179-180; Letter VI, p. 187).

(6) *Je lui ay dist qu’estant venue si avant si vous ne vous en retiries de vous mesmes que persuasion ne la mort mesmes ne me fairoient faillir de a ma promesse.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter VI, p. 187)

Literal translation:

‘I told him that **having gone so far**, if you don’t give up, **neither persuasion nor even death** will make me go back on my word.’

Contemporary Scots translation:

I tald him that seing I was cum sa far, gif ze did not withdraw zour self of zour self, that na perswasion, nor deith itself suld mak me fail of my promeis. (MacRobert 2002: 188)

Contemporary English translation at Hatfield:

I told him that seing I was come so farre, if you did not wdrawe yorselſe of yorselſe that no psuasion nor death it selfe shuld make me fayle of my promesse. (MacRobert 2002: 189)

Definitely, here the subject requirement of the non-finite participial complement is satisfied not by an argument of the main predicate, but by the sense of the whole context.

(7) *⟨...⟩ que vous investant de sa despoille de luy, qui est principal, le rest ne peult que vous estre subject ⟨...⟩* (MacRobert 2002: Letter III, p. 179)

Literal translation:

‘that **you having seized** the shell of it, which is the main, **all the rest** cannot be but yours’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ be ye seising of zow in the possession of the spoile of that quhilk is principall, the remnant cannot be bot subject unto zow ⟨...⟩ (MacRobert 2002: 180-181)

In this context the explicit subject of the participial phrase doesn't coincide with that of the main clause.

2.2.2. The absence of the main clause on which the participial complement depends (Letter III, p. 180).

(8) ⟨...⟩ *or craignant mon coeur de vous ennuyer autant a lire que je me plaise descrire.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter III, p. 180)

Literal translation:

'but **fearing my heart** to bore you by reading as much as I enjoy writing'.

Contemporary Scots translation:

Zit my hart feiring to displeis you as mekle in the reiding heirof, as I delite me in ye writing (MacRobert 2002: 181).

Here, the present participle is used in the function of the predicate, and the whole sentence lacks the main verb on which the non-finite participial phrase could depend.

These peculiarities in the use of the non-finite verbal complement 'control' structures were found in Letters III and VI. It should be mentioned that the participial complement 'control' constructions are comparatively rare in the genuine letters of Mary, Queen of Scots (Labanoff 1844). Besides, they do not normally possess an explicit subject, and the subject requirement of the non-finite participial complement is satisfied by an argument of the main predicate, as in the following example:

(9) *Madame, voiiant que le Roy envoie vers vous messieurs de la Brosse et d'Amiens pour vous soulasger et ayder a donner ordre aus affaires que vous aves, qui est, se me semble, ce qu'il y a long temps que vous demandies, je n'e voulu faillir a faire mon devoir de me ramantevoir par la presenter a votre bonne grace et vous suplire par issele tres humblement ne vous fascher ni ennuiier.* (Labanoff 1844: 70)

'Madame, **seeing** that the King sends to you messieurs de Brosse and d'Amiens to console you

and help you to bring order into your affaires, which is, as it seems to me, what you have demanded for a long time, **I** do not want to forget my duty to write to Your Grace and ask you most humbly not to grieve and feel upset.'

2.3. Theta-criterion

The theta-criterion deals with the disability of a predicate to have two complements with one and the same semantic role, provided they are not homogeneous parts of the sentence.. At the same time, CLs III, V, and VI do possess structures in which the predicate has two complements with one and the same semantic role, which are not coordinated grammatically, as in the following examples:

(10) ⟨...⟩ *la pierre je la compare a mon coeur.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter III, p. 179)

Literal translation:

'**the stone** I compare **it** with my heart'.

Contemporary Scots translation:

The stane I compair to my hart. (MacRobert 2002: 181)

Here, the predicate *compare* ('compare') has two direct objects: *la pierre* (the stone') and *la* ('it'), which are not linked with any coordinative conjunction. In the next context the predicate *responndray* ('will say') has two noun phrases in the function of indirect object with one and the same semantic role of theme, which are not coordinated grammatically: *de leur langue ou fidelite* ('about their indiscretion or loyalty') and *en* ('about it').

(11) ⟨...⟩ *may de leur langue ou fidelite vers vous ie ne vous en responndray.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter V, p. 185)

Literal translation:

'but **about their indiscretion or loyalty** to you I will not tell you **about it**'.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ bot as for thair toungis or faithfulness towards you I will not answer. (MacRobert 2002: 186)

Contemporary English translation at the Public Record Office:

⟨...⟩ but as for their tongues or faythfulnes toward you, I will not answeare. (MacRobert 2002: 187)

2.4. Negative constructions

2.4.1. The absence of the first *ni* in the construction *ni...ni...ne+V* or its substitution with *ou* (Letter III, p. 180; Letter IV, p. 181; Letter V, p. 185).

(12) ⟨...⟩ *car mal ni bien onque ne estrangera.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter III, p. 180)

Literal translation:

‘for evil nor good (I) will never make me abandon it’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ for evill nor gude sall never mak me go from it. (MacRobert 2002: 181)

(13) ⟨...⟩ *car vous ne mavies rien comande vous envoier ni escrire.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter IV, p. 182)

Literal translation:

‘for you have not commanded me nothing to send you nor write’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ becaus ze commandit me nouthr to wryte nor send unto zow. (MacRobert 2002: 183)

Contemporary English translation at Hatfield:

⟨...⟩ for you had not commanded me to send you any thing or to write. (MacRobert 2002: 184)

(14) ⟨...⟩ *car en cela ni aultre chose je ne veux entreprendre de rien fayre.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter V, p. 185)

Literal translation:

‘for in that nor in any other thing I will not take upon me to do anything’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ for nouthr in that nor in any uthr thing will I tak upon me to do ony thing (MacRobert 2002: 186).

Contemporary English translation at the Public Record Office:

For nether in that nor in any other thing, Will I take upon me to doo any thing (MacRobert 2002: 186).

(15) *Car Je ne ose me fier a vostre frere de ces lettres ni de la diligence.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter VI, p. 188)

Literal translation:

‘for I dare not trust your brother with these letters nor with diligence’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ for I dar not traist zour brother with thir lettris, nor with the diligence. (MacRobert 2002: 189)

Contemporary English translation at Hatfield:

⟨...⟩ for I dare not trust yor brothr wt these lres nor wt the diligence. (MacRobert 2002: 189)

2.4.2. $V_1...ni+V_2$, where it is V_1 that has the negative meaning (Letter V, p. 185).

(16) ⟨...⟩ *pour scavoit comment ni gouvernerois.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter V, p. 185).

Literal translation:

‘knowing how not to behave’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ I knew not how to governe myself (MacRobert 2002: 186).

Contemporary English translation at the Public Record Office:

⟨...⟩ I knew not how to gouverne my self (MacRobert 2002: 186).

2.4.3. Construction *ou+V...ni+V* in the positive meaning ‘or...or’ (Letter III, c. 180).

(17) ⟨...⟩ *comme merque de tout ce que jay ou espere ni desire* (MacRobert 2002: Letter III, p. 180).

Literal translation:

‘as sign of all I hope for nor desire’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ as signe of all that I outhere hope or desyris (MacRobert 2002: 181).

2.5. *Constructions with conjunctions que/qui.*

2.5.1. ...*tell...qui* +*S+Pred*, where *qui* is used as a complement and refers to an inanimate object (Letter III, p. 179).

(18) ⟨...⟩ *telles qui je desir moymesme.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter III, p. 179)

Literal translation:

‘**such who I desire** myself’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

⟨...⟩ sic as I desyre myself (MacRobert 2002: 181).

2.5.2. *Que* is repeatedly used after the participial phrase (Letter III, p. 180; Letter VI, p. 187).

This case can be testified by the contexts (6) and (8), which are presented here as examples (19) and (20) correspondingly.

(19) *Je lui ay dist qu'estant venue si avant si vous ne vous en retiries de vous mesmes que persuasion ne la mort mesmes ne me fairoient faillir de a ma promesse* (MacRobert 2002: Letter VI, p. 187).

Literal translation:

‘I told him that **having gone so far**, if you don't give up, **neither persuasion nor even death** will make me go back on my word.’

Contemporary Scots translation:

I tald him that seing I was cum sa far, gif ze did not withdraw zour self of zour self, that na perswasion, nor deith itself suld mak me fail of my promeis. (MacRobert 2002: 188)

Contemporary English translation at Hatfield:

I told him that seing I was come so farre, if you did not wtdrawe yorselpe of yorselpe that no psuasion nor death it selfe shuld make me fayle of my promesse. (MacRobert 2002: 189)

This context exemplifies the rather typical for the CLs use of the conjunction *que* (‘that’) after the participial phrase. *Que* forms the comparative construction with the adverb *si* (‘as’) in the prepositional phrase, thus making the participial phrase function as the main clause for the subordinate clause introduced by this conjunction.

(20) ⟨...⟩ or *craignant mon coeur de vous ennuyer autant a lire que je me plaise descrire.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter III, p. 180)

Literal translation:

‘but **fearing my heart** to bore you by reading as much as I enjoy writing’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

Zit my hart feiring to displeis you as mekle in the reiding heirof, as I delite me in ye writing (MacRobert 2002: 181).

This sentence is another example of using the conjunction *que* (‘that’) after the participial phrase. Here this conjunction forms the comparative construction with the preceding adverb *autant* (‘as much’) in the prepositional phrase. Taking into account the above mentioned absence of the main verb on which the non-finite participial phrase could depend, we have to regard the subordinate clause rather than the participial phrase as the typical grammatical form for this kind of context.

2.5.3. Despite the general frequency of the constructions with conjunctions in the CLs, some complex sentences lack conjunctions and, consequently, semantic correspondence between its parts, as in the following context (Letter VI, p. 187-188):

(22) *Et cependant je suis malade je differaray quant au propose cest trop tard.* (MacRobert 2002: Letter VI, p. 187)

Literal translation:

‘And in the meantime I am ill, I will look into the matter, it is too late’.

Contemporary Scots translation:

And in the meane tyme I am seik; I will differ
as tuiching the matter it is so lait. (MacRobert
2002: 188).

Contemporary English translation at
Hatfield:

And in the mean tyme I am sicke. I will differ
as touching the matter it is to late. (MacRobert
2002: 189).

4. Conclusion

Thus, though we can't faultlessly judge the Casket Letters' authenticity/forgery in the absence of the originals, there is no doubt that the Casket Letters possess some constructs passing on from one letter to another and having rather high frequency for texts of such a small size, but not occurring in Mary Stuart's authentic texts which outnumber the Casket Letters greatly.

¹ Only four out of eight CLs (III, IV, V, VI) survived in the original French version, the others (I, II, VII, VIII) are known only in the contemporary English and / or Scots translations used as evidence in Mary Stuart's First Trial of 1568.

² As Scottish lords claimed, the silver casket also contained twelve sonnets that are supposed to be one long poem by some historians (Armstrong Davison 1965), (Fraser 1969). Cecil refused to consider the sonnets as evidence, and they used to be less often investigated in historical studies. M. H. Armstrong Davison and A. Fraser claim that the sonnets under discussion could be produced by the "other woman", whose letters are supposed to be interpolated to Mary Stuart's texts. This hypothesis is brought about by the fact that all the lines pointing to Mary Stuart's authorship are rather clumsy and have faults in rhythm. According to P. Herman (Herman 2002), philological researches have neglected Mary Stuart's verses partly because the attribution of some of them, the Casket Sonnets in particular, is problematic, and partly because they "transect a number of national literatures without precisely belonging to any" (Herman 2002: 54). R. Bell (Bell 1992) points out that the wordgames and puns observed in the casket sonnets were typical for Mary Stuart's verses (if not considered characteristic of the French 16-th century poetry in general). P. Herman (Herman 2002) emphasises that the casket sonnets can be treated as Petrarchan sequences from a woman's perspective: the conventional object of desire becomes a desiring subject who is constantly speaking of her submission at the same time. This lack of balance in the casket sonnets was also examined in (Hopkins 2002) and (Burke 2000). The same departure from the Petrarchan convention can be observed in Louise Labe's verses. And if it was Louise Labe's low social position that gave her the freedom to reverse gender roles, it could be Mary Stuart's status as a monarch that allowed her to depart from the conventional feminine role (Herman 2002). In general, P. Herman proceeds from the assumption that the casket sonnets were composed by Mary, Queen of Scots, but he doesn't leave out the possibility of another authorship and emphasises the importance of their philological investigation as outright forgery testifies to the contemporary recognition of a distinctly feminine lyric voice. It is interesting to mention that some genuine Mary Stuart's verses may also be treated as the departure from the literary convention: the form typical for love poetry is used for a kind of diplomatic correspondence (Fleming 2004).

³ The surviving copies of the CLs do not contain diacritical marks, besides their orthography and punctuation possess some peculiarities, which can be treated either as mistakes made by the clerks or as the distinctive features of the author's style.

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**Индивидуальная вариативность
в реализации конструкций:
«письма из ларца», приписываемые
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Данная статья является продолжением когнитивных корпусных исследований по общезыковой и индивидуальной вариативности в употреблении конструкций. Она посвящена оценке с позиции конструкционного анализа подлинности так называемых «писем из ларца», приписываемых шотландской королеве Марии Стюарт (1542–1587). Оригиналы писем исчезли, поэтому об их подлинности или поддельности можно судить только по сохранившимся копиям. В современной лингвистике существует множество работ, посвященных проблеме определения авторства методами лингвистической статистики. Однако практически все предлагаемые методы разработаны для анализа художественных прозаических текстов большого объема. В данной статье предлагается конструкционный подход к проблеме определения авторства текстов малого объема.

Ключевые слова: атрибуция текста, конструкции, грамматика конструкций.
