

CONVENTION VS. CHOICE IN SECURING
THE GOOD-WILL
OF THE READER: THE CELY LETTERS

ABSTRACT

In the Middle Ages, the popular *ars dictaminis*, or the art of letter-writing, fluctuated between the principles of applied rhetoric and the freedom of personal choice. The most popular trend was the compromise arrived at by the School of Bologna, with its 'approved format' for a letter, which spread throughout mainland Europe from the 11th century onwards. Ciceronian principles were applied to the question of letter-writing, and treatises were written, in which the main concern was not so much theoretical principles, but the presentation of model letters intended to be copied *verbatim* by the future writer. The situation was slightly different in England, where not many treatises were produced at any one time. Yet letter-writing became increasingly popular there. Modern linguistic research has focused on the study of medieval rhetorical treatises in general (Murphy, Camargo) and on the evolution of the genre in England (Denholm-Young, Richardson) as well as on the analysis of surviving letter-collections in particular (Davis, Whigham, Henderson). Most recently, and particularly thanks to the compilation in Helsinki of the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, current research goes a step beyond purely linguistic analysis, to focus on sociolinguistic and pragmatic issues. The present paper is part of a wider personal project aiming at discovering the interface between language and society as revealed by the Cely letters. In this sense, while providing a purely linguistic description for present purposes, my work follows a sociolinguistic/pragmatic line of analysis. Thus, my ultimate aim is to study the expression of the medieval *captatio benevolentiae* as a pragmatic tool within the framework

of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) in the field of historical pragmatics.

INTRODUCTION

The first aim of this paper, which is descriptive rather than theoretical, is to ascertain the level of linguistic flexibility, in terms of both structures and lexicon, present in the expression of the rhetorical element known as *captatio benevolentiae*, or the securing of the good will of the reader. The second aim, which is closely connected with the first, is to gauge to what extent *captatio* is formulaic or unfixd.

Norman Davis defined *captatio*, understood as the opening passage of the letter only, as "a long sequence of conventional phrases and sentences constructed with minor variations upon a regular pattern" (1965: 236). In this paper we shall examine, in the context of the Cely letters, not only that opening passage, which corresponds to the traditional view of *captatio* as one part of the letter, but also other aspects of *captatio* embedded throughout the remaining sections of the letter, which relate to the understanding of *captatio* also as a device, liable to be employed elsewhere. This eclectic combination of both characteristics, along the lines established by Hugh of Bologna in the 11th century, seems to render a more complete definition of what *captatio* really is, and that is the one adopted here. I propose the following taxonomy of topics dealt with under the heading of *captatio benevolentiae*:¹

- (1) address or direct praise of the reader.
- (2) commendation of the writer himself.
- (3) expression of gratitude.
- (4) notification of the health of those near the writer who are very close to the reader; or a desire to hear of the reader's good health.
- (5) acknowledgement of having received a letter from the reader.

¹ This has been dealt with in detail in Sánchez Roura, T (2001).

- (6) notification of the main purpose of the letter, i.e. introduction of the exposition proper.
- (7) offer of service.
- (8) apology for finishing the letter at that point, not offering any more news.
- (9) pious valediction.
- (10) addition of the apologetic 'in haste'.

It must be noted that not all the above topics, or subsections, are present in one single letter –a matter which seems to be socially determined- but the ordering of these is fairly standard. Some topics are particularly associated with the second part of the letter: these are the commendation, gratitude, health, acknowledgement of receipt and the introduction of the body of the text. However, flexibility of location is apparent in the letters.

The corpus of data used here consists of the collection of letters belonging to the Cely family exclusively, covering the period between 1472 and 1488. The number of informants is around 37, all of whom are male, except one. They belong to the family circle as well as collaborators and friends. The corpus was chosen for the following reasons: these letters reflect the daily life of the late medieval English merchant, a position which involved dealings with people belonging to all social classes; the letters deal with a mixture of commercial and domestic affairs, which makes them highly attractive, and finally, the letters are autographed and not the product of the embellishments of a professional scribe. For the purposes of the present study, which aims to focus on the description of linguistic issues only at this preliminary stage, irrespective of social parameters, the letters have not been re-arranged in any way and they have been studied in the same chronological order presented by their last editor.

Following the above consideration of what items qualify as instances of *captatio*, their linguistics description may now be undertaken, in terms of syntactical structure and lexical items. It will then be possible to gauge the extent to which there is flexibility and variation, and this in turn will indicate whether such elements are formulaic in wording or not.

SYNTACTIC AND LEXICAL ANALYSIS OF *CAPTATIO BENEVOLENTIAE* IN THE CELY LETTERS

(1) ADDRESS

We shall be looking at the address proper which occurs at the very beginning of the letter, and not at the honorifics employed throughout the letter; in any case, the latter are usually simple noun phrases of the type ‘your mastership’ or ‘your good lordship’ functioning as the objects of a verb. Titles of address used as proper vocatives in the opening of the letter offer more interest because the syntactical structure is quite varied, from the simple ‘wellbeloved brother’ to more complicated structures of coordinated NPs, as we shall see now.

Titles of address can be divided into two groups, depending on whether the NP is simple or coordinated. The results of the study are reflected in the following tables:

Table 1. Syntactic structure of titles of address: simple phrases.

Structure	Examples
i. N	Syr, Jorge Cely, bedfellow, brother
ii. Adj	Wellbeloved
iii. Adj + N	Wellbeloved brother, worshipful sir
iv. [Adj+ and + Adj] + N	Honorable and worshipful sir
v. [Adv + Adj] + N	<i>Right wellbeloved brother, right worshipful sir, right trusty friend</i>
vi. (a) [Adv + (Adj +and+ Adj)] + N	<i>(a)Right reverent and worshipful father, right reverent and wellbeloved brother</i>
(b) Adv + [Adj+and+Adj] or [Adv+Adj]+and+ Adj	<i>(b) Right trusty and wellbeloved</i>
vii. [(Adv + Adj) + and + (Adv + Adj)] + N	<i>Right reverent and heartily wellbeloved brother</i>
viii. (a) [(Adv + Adv) + and + Adj] + N	<i>(a)Right interly and wellbeloved brother</i>
(b) [(Adv + Adv) + Adj] + N	<i>(b) Right interly wellbeloved brother</i>
ix. (a) [Adv + Adj] + [N ₁ +and+ N ₂]	<i>(a)Right trusty sir and brother</i>
(b) Adj + [N + N]	<i>(b) Reverent syr and brother</i>

x. (a) [Poss + (Adv + Adj)]+ N	(a) <i>My full trusty friend</i>
(b) [Poss + (Adj + and + Adv + Adj)]+ (N ₁ +and+ N ₂)	(b) <i>My trusty and very trusty friend and lover</i>

Table 2. Syntactic structure of titles of address: coordinated phrases.

Structure	Examples
i. {Adj+N} and {Poss[(Adv+Adj) + N]}	Worshipful sir and my special friend
ii. (a) {[Adv+Adj] + N} and {Poss + [Adj + N]}	(a) <i>Right worshipful sir and my reverent master</i>
(b) {[Adv + Adj] + N} and {Poss + [(Adj + Adj) +N]}	(b) <i>Right worshipful sir and my singular good Lord</i>
iii. {[Adv + Adj] + N} and {Adj + N}	<i>Right worshipfull sir and wellbeloved cousin</i>
iv. {[Adv + Adv] + Adj} and {Poss + [(Adj + Adj) +N]}	<i>Right heartily wellbeloved and my special good brother</i>
v. {[Adv (Adj +and+Adj)] + N} and {Poss + [(Adj +Adj)+N]}	<i>Right worshipful and reverent sir and my special good friend</i>
vi. {Adj + N} and {Poss + [Adj + (N ₁ +N ₂)]}	<i>Reverent sir and my speciall friend and gossip</i>
vii. {[Adj + and + Adj] + N} and {Poss + [Adj+(N ₁ +N ₂)]}	<i>Reverent and worshipfull sir and my special friend and gossip</i>

The next step is to see what lexical items are used to fill the categories of adverb, adjectives and nouns. The adverb most often used is *right*, but *interly*, *heartily*, *very* and *ful* also occur. The last two are selected only after the possessive *my*, and when a second adverb is needed in a compound then the first two are selected. The two adjectives by far the most often used are *worshipful* and *wellbeloved*, which represent the opposite poles of politeness, followed by *reverent*; other adjectives, such as *special*, *good* and *trusty* seem to be context-dependent, since they are only selected if following the possessive; the adjectives *singular* and *honorable* are very rare in our data. The possessive used is always *my*, which is very rare in simple NPs but by contrast it is almost obligatory in the second NP of a compound, as can be seen in Table 2 above. The nouns most often used are *sir*, *master*

and *brother*, which logically reflect the fact that most letters were written between brothers or from inferior to superior; however, brothers could also be addressed as *sir*, and close collaborators could address each other as *brother*. Other nouns used are *father*, *cousin*, *gossip*, *friend*, *lover*, *bedfellow* and proper names. Occasionally the adjective *wellbeloved* is nominalised. The most common collocations are between adjectives and nouns which denote either positive or negative politeness, such as *wellbeloved brother/cousin/friend* and *worshipfull sir/ master*; however, mixed types also occur, where a positively polite noun, such as *father/ cousin /brother* is associated with a negatively polite adjective, such as *worshipfull*; so the collocation *worshipfull father* is fairly frequent at the end of the 15th century. We may conclude that the titles of address offer a flexible syntactic structure, but with a rather limited set of lexical items, which is due to the reduced number of relationships among the senders and recipients of the letters in this corpus.

(2) COMMENDATIONS

A prototypical commendation usually opens a letter, with the writer commending himself directly to the reader, as in what we shall label as Type 1:

(1) I recomend me wnto you

Commendations may occur in other contexts (types 2, 3 and 4), which are usually embedded elsewhere in the text. We can define them as follows:

Type 2: the writer commends himself to someone else at the reader's end, as in:

(2) Syr I pray you that ye woll recomaund me vnto my master
youre fadere

Type 3: a third person commends himself to the reader via the writer, as in:

(3) Syr, my Lord of Sente Jonys commende hym to you

Type 4: a third person commends himself via the writer to someone else at the reader's end; this is a very rare circumstance, but occurs in:

- (4) ... say vnto hem that Hary Seyseld recomaunde hem vnto
yowre brodere

A binary distinction may be established according to whether commendations are realized by means of a verb or a noun, as in the prototypical structures:

- (5) I **recomaund** me vnto you
(6) afftyr all dew **recomendassyon** pretendingyng

The basic formula S+V+O+PP as a simple main clause, which is almost invariably transcribed as ‘I recommend me unto you’ as in (5) above, is used to represent type-1 commendations, direct from writer to reader, as well as type 3, from a third person via the writer to the reader, as in (7) below:

- (7) Syr, owr cosyn Cowldayll recomendys hym and hys wyffe to
you

Commendations of the 2nd and 4th types, whereby either the writer or a third person commends himself to a third party at the reader’s end, are embedded as a subordinate clause, typically the object of the verb ‘pray’.¹ Fluctuation in how to build this construction is apparent in our data, as we have the same number of instances for ‘pray + bare infinitive’, ‘pray+ to-infinitive’ and ‘pray+ that-clause’, as in the examples below:

- (8) I **pray** you **recomend** me to my brother Robard
(9) I **praye** you **to recomend** me to owr ostes
(10) Syr I **pray** you **that** ye woll recomaund me vnto my master
youre fadere

It may be said that the syntactic variation seen so far does not obey any pragmatic dictates since syntax is simply adapting itself to the message: the basic formula is needed for a direct message to the reader, whereas the subordinate construction is necessary to ask the reader to do something. However, further variations, involving the addition of optional adverbials in the VP, may be seen as choices made for a particular purpose, that is, choices which are pragmatic in the sense of trying to use the language to best effect. It is not a question of semantics only: the idea of ‘heart’, the element

¹ There is even an example of type-2 commendation expressed in the imperative form: ‘comende me to Twhessylton and aull good fellows’

most often used as we shall see below, in an attempt to demonstrate closeness and friendship, or positive politeness, is translated into different syntactic options, from a mere adverb to a longer PP with a clause embedded in it; thus, however friendly the overall tone tries to be, it will sound more or less deferential depending on the length of the expression. These variations seem to affect only type-1 commendations, since the clauses exemplifying types 2, 3 and 4 always exhibit the basic pattern.¹ From this we may infer that types 2, 3 and 4 are sufficiently sincere by themselves, and that type-1 commendations seem to need extra strengthening elements to make them sound more convincing and less of a formula.

The most popular construction by far, outnumbering even the unmarked one, is the addition of an adverb, either before or after the verb, as in²:

(11a) I recomende me **harttely** wnto yow

(11b) I **louly** recommend me vnto yowre masterschypp

Phrases of comparison are also attached, the most popular being those introduced by ‘as’, in comparisons of the ‘as....as’ type, as in:³

(12) I recommend me vnto you **as hartely as** I can

The prepositions used to introduce optional PPs are ‘in’ and ‘with’; the former introduces the expression ‘in ... wise’ to indicate how the commendation is performed; it is either ‘in the best wise I can or may’ or ‘in as loving/hearty wise as I/heart can (think)’; ‘with’ is invariably used in the expression ‘with all my heart’.

The noun ‘recommendation’ is always the head of the PP as in ‘after due recommendation...’, used to represent type-1 commendations exclusively, most often appended before the basic formula seen above (5), with or without variant extensions, the most common being the inclusion of the

¹ The exceptions are items 94, 194 and 214, in which a third person commends himself to the reader via the writer (type 3) ‘heartily’. Two of those instances are the only commendations from a woman to the writer.

² It must be noted that the collocation of the adverb before the verb is subjected in 99% of cases to the inclusion of the phrase ‘after due recommendations’ before the subject.

³ Other constructions with ‘as’ are: ‘as heart can think’, ‘as lovingly as heart can device or think’, ‘as heartily as I can device or think’, ‘as heartily as I can or may’, ‘as tenderly as heart can think’ and ‘as lovingly as heart can think’.

adverb ‘lowly’.¹ The effect created by such relatively verbose phrases is that of a more deferential and distant attitude on the part of the writer. The prototypical unmarked version is:

(13) affter dew recommendacyon I lowly recommend me unto
yowre masterschypp

Variation at this level involves modification of the noun ‘recommendation’ by means of a premodifier, invariably ‘all’, and a postmodifier, as in:

(14) afftyr **all** dew recomendassyon pretending / had / preceding

Either modifier may also be omitted, rendering something like “after due recommendation”. Both the basic pattern and the variation are equally popular.

The action of commending is invariably represented by the verb ‘recommend’ or its related noun ‘recommendation’, even though the vocabulary might have allowed other possibilities, such as ‘trust’ or ‘charge’ for example. Semantic variation concerns the optional elements around the basic pattern as seen before, characteristic of type-1 commendations. This, in turn, means that types 2, 3 and 4 do not exhibit much semantic variation.² The elements which are susceptible of variation are the pronouns referring to the reader, the adverbs in the main clause and the lexical items in the PPs. Let us see them in turn: (1) the pronoun of address: the prototypical ‘you’ of ‘I commend myself to you’ may change to an honorific term, such as the usual ‘your mastership’ or ‘your good lordship’, for example. This serves the purpose of enhancing the social distance between correspondents; (2) the adverb used to modify the act of commendation is most commonly ‘heartily’; however, ‘lowly’ is also very much used. This is a particularly interesting dichotomy from a pragmatic standpoint, in that it reveals a different approach on the part of the writer: positive politeness or warmth in the first case, negative politeness or deference, in an act of self-humiliation, in the second; and (3) variation in the PPs revolves around the entity of

¹ There are only a couple of instances in which the ‘after’ phrase comes at the end of the main clause (145, 192).

² There is one instance of the use of the verb ‘beseech’ as a synonym of ‘pray’ in one type-2 commendation.

'heart' and its related adjectives and adverbs. In this sense, the 'as', 'in' and 'with' phrases are semantically parallel in so far as they all include terms connected with 'heart, such as 'hearty, heartily, loving, lovingly, tenderly'.

We may conclude that commendations exhibit little syntactic and lexical variation, but that what little there is seems to be pragmatically determined.

(3) GRATITUDE

Gratitude to the reader is basically understood as being on the part of the writer himself, although there are instances of the gratitude of other people to the reader conveyed by the writer. A third type would represent the reader's gratitude to someone else at the reader's end. We shall label these as types 1, 2 and 3, as in:

(15) hertely thankyng yowe of the greht cheyr and we1fayr þat I
had wyth yowe (Type 1)

(16) and thay thanke yow of your greyt labor in byeng of ther
stowe (Type 2)

(17) and I pray yow thanke them for me (Type 3)

Instances of gratitude of type 1 exhibit two different structures, personal and impersonal, as in:

(18) I comaund me to you, **and I thank you** hertely **of** the good
lodgeng that ye fand vs at Derford

(19) I recomande me vnto you as hertyly as I can, **thankyng you**
of your good will shewed vnto me at all seasons

Both structures are relatively frequent and the previous clause does not seem to preselect one or the other, unless, of course, the clause containing the gratitude message is a completely independent one, in which case the personal construction is selected, as in:

(20) Syr, I thanke you at hyt pleschyd you to leue me Goos

Either structure may include the adverb *heartily*, but it seems to be more popular with the personal construction, which is coherent from a pragmatic point of view, since this personal construction is the more positively polite of the two, as in (18) above.

The verb *thank* may take two complements (very rarely just one), the prepositional one indicating the cause of the gratitude. There is fluctuation concerning the preposition used, which is either *for* or *of*, although *of* is the one more often used by far, as in:

(21) and I thanke you of your grehyte coste and scheyr

(22) and I thanke you for the grete coste that 3e dyd on me at
your departyng

Type-2 instances of gratitude exhibit the personal structure only, as in:

(23) and my godfather recomendys hym to yow, and thankys
yow for yowr rememberans of hys stofe

There is also fluctuation in the preposition which introduces the complement, which again can be either *for* or *of* indistinctly.

Type-3 instances of gratitude, whereby the writer thanks someone else at the reader's end, are always embedded in a subordinate clause which is the object of the verb *pray*, with the verb *thank* in the bare infinitive form, as in:

(24) and I pray yow thanke them for me

There is no lexical variation in the expression of gratitude, which relies solely on the verb *thank*, which in turn may be modified by the adverb *heartily* exclusively. We can conclude that the expression of gratitude does not exhibit much syntactical flexibility and no semantic variation; it does show, however, instability concerning the choice of the preposition.

So far, we have studied pattern and variation from a mere linguistic point of view, regardless of any sociological variable. But if we simply stop to analyse **who** says what in what way, it is probable that what looked like repetitive formulaic patterns may be the hallmark of one individual writer as opposed to the hallmark of the genre of correspondence. Let us analyse the following topics in this light.

(4) HEALTH MATTERS

The mention of health matters is an aspect of *captatio* which seems to be socially constrained in a very marked way, since it is only incorporated in

the letters of those correspondents who are very close, and it is generally avoided by writers addressing the socially superior addressee. This can be stated since the basic social network of social relations among the principal correspondents is known, and by analogy the social standing of other writers of whom we know very little can be inferred. In this way, if a writer does not mention health at all, it is clearly the case that he is not close to the reader and vice versa, inclusion of health matters indicates less distance between correspondents. Having said this, another difference between letters of family members and more sporadic writers must be mentioned, concerning how to address the health issue. Close relatives and friends tend to inform each other about the health of those near them, who are close to the reader – whereas sporadic writers more deferentially inquire about the reader's health.

If we analyse the structures employed, patterns seem to emerge, although these are not uniform across letters, which would denote a general formulaic usage, but rather characteristic of certain writers. This suggests a personal style that repeats itself from letter to letter. In this way:

a. Richard Cely seems to use the following:

(25) (furthermore) informing you or please hyt you to wet /
understand...at the making of this our father and mother were
(an we all were) in good health, thanked be God.

Variations include basically the addition of a coordinated clause, as in

....

(26) ...and send you their blessings

(27)... and desire greatly to hear of yours.

(28) ... and so we trust that you be.

b. William Cely never touches on this topic, except on three occasions: to acknowledge George's illness, to inform of someone's death and to let George know of his own sickness. The syntactic structures are all different:

(29) be the whych I vnderstond ye be well mendyd off yowre
grett sycknesse, wheroff I am ryghyt gladel, and I thanke God
off yowre goode rekewer,

(30) Furdermore, plese hett yowre masterschypp to be enfformyd
that Margere ys dowghter ys past to Godd. Hytt was berydd

thys same daye, on whoys sowle Jhesu hawe marsy. Syr, I vnderstond hytt hadd a grett pang: what sycknesse hytt was I cannott saye,

(31) I hawe byn a lykuill dyssesynd, but I thancke Godd I am amendyd and walkynge, and Joysse hathe ben syke allso, butt nowe he ys well mendyd, thanckyd be Godd,

c. The two other members of the family, the father, Richard, and the more distant brother, Robert, use the same basic structure as George:

(32) At the making of this letter we were in good health...

Differences appear when thanking God, which the father states baldly, whereas the brother passivizes:

(33) I thank God

(34) Blessed be God

Note however that Richard the elder is not monotonous in his structures but exhibits variation:

(35) Desiring to hear of your recovering

(36) Youre moder and I desire for to hear of your recovering

d. William Maryon, Thomas Keston and the rest of the sporadic authors seem to opt for:

(37) Desiring to hear of your welfare

which in the more deferential letters is followed by a relative clause which is a prayer to God to preserve health. Thus,

(38) Desiring to hear of your welfare, the which I beseech almighty Jesus to preserve and keep unto his pleasure and yours.

The nouns used to refer to different aspects of people's well-being are the following: *health* and *welfare* by far, together with *sickness*, *amendment*, *amending*, *recovering*, *prosperity*. The adjective most often used to modify health is *good*, in collocation with the word *health*; others, used to modify the person himself are: *hooll*, *merry*, *comforted*, *amendyd*, *sick*, *well mendid*, *sore sick* and *strong*. Other expressions, used to refer to a medical condition, are *fare well*, *died*, *had a great pang*, *past to God*, *deceased*. Pattern and variation are also observable in the pious vocabulary embedded in the

relative clause appended to the word *health*: the deity is usually *God, the good Lord, Jesus, almighty God* and *almighty Jesus*, who are *thanked* or *blessed*; the deity is asked to *keep, preserve, maintain, increase* or *continue* the reader's health, usually *to his pleasure* and onto the reader's *heart's desire*, which admits some variation, as in *to your heart's ease and will, to your most profit both of body and soul* or *to your pleasure*. From the above it may be concluded that both pattern and variation are present throughout the letters as a whole, but it is my tentative suspicion that whereas pattern characterises the letters of an individual, variation is apparent between individuals.

(5) ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT

It must be noted that only frequent correspondents acknowledge receipt of a letter, which they tend to claim to understand, usually repeating its contents. Once again, pattern and variation seem to occur: the former, across letters by the same author, and the latter, across authors. This way, one individual's mode of expression may be singled out. So, for instance:

a. Richard the younger fluctuates between:

(39) Sir, I haue ressauyd a letter from yow wrytt at

and

(40) ... informyng you that I haue ressauyd a letter from you wryttyn at

The way he finishes this sentence is quite variable, fluctuating between nothing at all and one of the following versions:

(41) ... the qweche I do whell wndyrstonde / the qweche I wnyrstond riught whell

(42) ... wherby I wndyrstonde ...

(43) ... wherein I fynd

That is, if regurgitation of the previously received letter is included, one of the structures above is selected.

He is not consistent either, in the amount of information he adds regarding the date and place of the letter received.

b. William Cely's letters always conform to the same pattern. His acknowledgment of receipt is another example of this. He invariably introduces it in the following way:

(44) Furdermore plese hit yowre masterschypp to vnderstonde
that I haue receyued an letter ffrom yow the whych I haue
redd and well vnderstond...

If recapitulation of the letter is included, this is introduced by one of the following:

(45)... be the tenour wherof I vnderstond...

(46) ... be the whych I vnderstond...

(47) ... howe that...

Slight variations include:

(48) Fyrddyrmore, lyke hytt yowre mastyrscypp to haue yn
knowlege that thys day I haue receyued yowre lettyr

(49) Fyrdyrmore, lyke hyt yowre mastyrscypp to wytt that I
haue receyued yowre lettyr

He sometimes includes the name of the bearer and details concerning when and where the letter was sent from.

c. Richard the elder is another author who seems to follow the same pattern from letter to letter. He introduces the acknowledgment of receipt abruptly, immediately following the opening greeting, linking it to this by means of 'and', as in:

(50) ...and I haue resayuyd a letter from the wrete (...)the weche
letter I haue wyll understande euery ponte.

He does not offer a recapitulation of a previously received letter, therefore his acknowledgements of receipt end in 'understand'. Only once does he topicalize the date of receipt, as in:

(51) The laste day of Octobor I haue resayuyd a letter from you,
wrete at Bregys the xxijj day of Octobor, the weche letter I
haue wyll understand,

d. William Maryon introduces yet another structure which he selects quite often in his letters; this is:

(52) Ferdermor, and yt plesse yow, ye schall vnderstonde that I haue ressayved a letter from you wreten at Calles the xxviiij day of Marche, the wyche letter I haue well vnderstonde that...

He also uses to:

(53) Ferdermor, plessed you to wete that / Plessed you to vnderstond that

e. George Cely also makes use of one and the same structure from letter to letter, along the lines of the one used by William above:

(54) Fordyrmor plesyth yt yow to vndyrstonde I resseywyd an lettyr ffrom yow wrytt at London the fforst day of May, the wheche lettyr I haue rede and do whell vndyrstonde

f. Other isolated authors show a variety of structures:

(55) ... Letyng you wnderstond / wit þat I resauyd a letter from you, be the whiche writtyng I ondirstond

(56) Certefyng you that I receyved a lettre from you (...). The tenour of which lettre I vnderstode ryght wele and therupon

(57) ... I haue receiued your kynde and louyng lettre and wel vnderstonde alle þingys þerynne contened

as well as the already familiar:

(58) Fordyrmor plesythe ytt yower Lordshyp to vndyrstond that Y haue ressaywyd an lettyr ffrom yowr Lordshyp beryng datte at Napullus the last day of Novembyr derectyd to my broder Rychard and me.

Lexical variation in the acknowledgement of receipt of a letter occurs with the 'informing' verb that opens the clause and at the end, to introduce the recapitulation, if any. In this way the verb most commonly used to acknowledge receipt is *understand* in expressions of the type seen above, followed by *inform*, *let wit/understand*, *certify*, *have (in) knowledge* and *to be informed*. Recapitulation is also introduced by the verb *understand* in a majority of cases, in a variety of constructions as seen earlier. On the basis of the above it may be concluded that the syntactic structures exhibited show a constant patterning across letters by the same author, which varies across

authors. As mentioned before, the patterning may well define an author's style but not the genre as a whole. There is not much lexical variation regarding the items selected to fulfil the different categories and functions in these clauses.

(6) INTRODUCTION OF THE EXPOSITION

The body of the text is usually introduced in a way similar to the one used when dealing with health matters and the acknowledgement of receipt, namely one of the *please it you to understand* variations. Now, if an author has already selected this expression earlier in the letter, he might resort to a different one to start the body of the letter proper, usually by means of a shorter form, such as *furthermore*, *also* or simply the honorific *sir* immediately followed by the main point of the letter. Alternatively, he may repeat the same phrase again. The same happens whenever a new item of news is introduced later in the text: the author may either repeat the *please it you to know* phrase, he may simply use the honorific for each new point or he may simply start a new sentence with no connectors. Concerning this topic, it seems that a pattern across authors pervades the letters, in favour of what may be called a formula; however, there is also a good deal of variation at the syntactical and lexical levels, although in the case of the "*please it you to understand*" formula it might be a case of unsettled syntax as opposed to true variation. Before we proceed to the analysis of the various forms, it must be said that, once again, a pattern across the letters of one individual author does seem to be at work too, thus characterising his style. In this sense, the letters of Richard the younger introduce the body of the text by means of the honorific *sir*, because he has already used the other formula to introduce health matters and acknowledgement of receipt. This contrasts sharply with the style of William Cely, who as we know, hardly ever mentions either topic; thus, he feels free to use the "*please it your mastership to understand*" formula to introduce the body of the text. A formula which, together with the honorific *sir* and the connectors *and*, *also* and *as for*, he repeats throughout the text.

The style of Richard the elder boasts a direct and concise coordinator *and*, which he uses to link the main body of the text abruptly to the initial salutation. Another form he uses is the open *ye shall understand that...*

The other authors use a variety of resources, in many cases depending on how they have begun the letter.

A variety of connectors are employed to link the main body of the text to the second part of the letter; such connectors are also used throughout the rest of the text whenever a new item of news is mentioned. They can be divided into four groups:

a. very short ones: adverbs, conjunctions and nouns:

also	and	sir
further	as for	item
furthermore	as touching (the matter)	item sir

b. finite clauses:

I understand by (that)
Ye shall understand (that)
I lete you wit (that)
The cause of my writing is this

c. non-finite clauses (gerund):

ascertaining you (that)
certifying you (that)
doing you to wit (that)
informing you (that)
informing you as for
letting you understand / wit/ have in knowledge (that)

d. others (with *please* and *like*)

like it you to wit / to be enformed (that)
like it your mastership to understand as for

without *it*:

pleased you to wit (that)

pleaseth you to understand / wit (that)

with *it*:

please it you

please(th) it you to wit / understand / to be informed (that)

different word-order:

it please you

it please you to wit / understand (that)

if it please you to wit / understand (that)

Variation at the syntactical and lexical level is certainly available; patterning seems to be, once again, a question of stylistic characteristics of the individual writers, who opt for one way of expression and use it throughout their letters.

(7) OFFER OF SERVICES

This aspect of *captatio*, as in the case of gratitude, is certainly free in sentiment and only included when it is really meant. There are very few instances of this in the Cely letters. The wording varies from letter to letter, but two patterns seem to emerge, with and without an explicit conditioning undertone in the subordinate clause, as in:

a. with explicit condition:

(59) And ther be any thytige that 1 can do for yow in
Ingelonde...

(60) Ande if ther be any theng that 1 can do ar may ffor yow...

(61) And yf het ly in my power...

b. without explicit condition:

(62) and anything pat I cane do vnto pleser...

(63) and any servis that 1 can or may do for you here...

(64) and sir, eny seruice that I can or may do for your
maystership here...

The main clause exhibits one of the following variations:

- (65) I wyll do yt wyth all my hartte
(66) I am ande schal be at yowre comandement,
(67) I schall do as moch that: schal be vnto your plesure,
(68) ye shal fynde it redy
(69) ye shall fynde me as redy to do it and as glad as any man on
lyve
(70) hyt schall be redde to my powhere
(71) shall be r(e)dy atte your desyre,

Offers of service tend to end with a pious good wish, which becomes the usual valediction at the end of the letter. This is usually attached by means of a relative clause, as in the following instances:

- (72) ... the weche conowthe God, ho haue yow in ys kepynge,
amen.
(73) ... that knowleth Jhesu, who kepe you.
(74) ... as knoweth owre Lord, qwou send you good fortune
wyth þe accomplishment off your goodly desyrys.
(75)... by Godys grace, who euer preserue you.
(76) at knowith the blessid Trynyte, whom I beseche to preserve
you into good helthe, amen.
(77)... be the grase of God, how haue you in ys kepe.
(78)... and that God knows, how preserue.
(79)... as oure Lord God knowith, who Y beseche to preserue
you and youres in felicite long duryng.

All instances of this pious valediction are slightly different, showing a wide range of syntactical structures and lexical items, from which it may be argued that this aspect of *captatio* does not seem to be formulaic.

(8) END OF NEWS

The announcement that the letter has reached its end is characterised by its abruptness and conciseness in all cases. The basic formula is:

- (80) No mor to you

This admits very little variation, either syntactic or lexical. Syntactically, this phrase may appear either independently, as in (81) above, or as the direct object of a clause, as in:

(81) I wryte no mor to you

In either case, the PP *at this tyme* may be also added, as in:

(82) No mor to you at this time

(83) I write no mor to you at this time

Occasionally, William Cely adds the honorific *sir* before the phrase and also occasionally the complement *to you* is omitted, as in:

(84) No more at this tym

(85) I wryte no more

The bare expression '*no more*' is rarely found. At the lexical level, the only variation present involves the substitution of the pronoun *you* for the honorific NP *your mastership*. We may conclude that this part of the letter is certainly formulaic in wording, both syntactically and lexically.

(9) PIOUS VALEDICTION

All writers include a pious valediction of some sort at the end of their letters. 'Of some sort' refers to the actual length of the farewell. Thus, correspondents within and outside the family who are on close terms and write to each other frequently will opt for a short form, whereas writers addressing a socially superior reader, or who write to each other sporadically, will opt for a longer, more deferential form, both of which we can see below:

(86) But Jhesu kepe you

(87) But almighty Jesus hath you in his blessed keping

Another characteristic of pious valedictions is their level of syntactic independence in the text. Short farewells are usually independent clauses, linked to the rest of the text by a mere 'but' (in the sense 'no more news except ...'). By contrast, longer sequences usually come at the end of a clause, to which they are semantically related, by means of a relative, as in:

(88) By the grace of God, who have you...

The prototypical valediction, among very frequent correspondents, is:

(89) But Jhesu kepe you

Variations of this are as follows:

(90) But Jhesu / our Lord kepe (you) and all yours (amen)

(91) But the Trinity / almighty Jesus have you (and (all) yours)
in his (blessed) keping

(92) Jesu have you in keping

(93) Almighty God have us all in his blessed keping

(94) But almighty Jesu save you and kepe you

(95) But almighty Jesu preserve (you) and kepe you

Further variations include:

(96) But the Holy Ghost be with you

(97) But the Holy Trinity have you in his keping

(98) But almighty Jhesu preserve and kepe you and all yours long
in good health and pro

(99) Jhesu kepe you and send you good health

(100) But I pray to the Trinity send you health and bring you
well hither

(101) But our Lord send you long life and good to his pleasure
and yours

(102) But I pray Jhesu that all things may be well conveyed

(103) Be the grasse of God, who have you and all yours in his
keeping, amen / the which have you in his keping

Lexical variation occurs in both the names and adjectives used to refer to the deity (*Jhesu, our Lord, the Trinity, almighty God, Holy Ghost, Holy Trinity*) and also the actions asked for (*kepe, have in keping, send, save, preserve*). The pious valediction of the shortest type is a pattern of individual writers but also across writers, which would point towards its being formulaic; longer versions are based on the prototypical one with extensions that do not imply variation in the core structure of the expression. Lexical items provide a limited degree of variation.

(10) 'IN HASTE'

The 'in haste' phrase seems to be formulaic in the case of Richard Cely the elder, who always includes it in his letters, with the variation 'in great haste'. There are a few other authors who include it very sporadically, from which we may infer that its use was not stereotyped but of necessity. The 'in haste' phrase always comes at the end of the letter, between the attestation and the signature, and on three occasions it is used on the dorse of the letter, as a kind of urge to the bearer. Concerning the reasons for the inclusion of the 'in haste' phrase, the writer may be referring to his writing in a hurried, careless manner due to something or other that needs his attention more urgently and will not let him devote more time to the letter; or he may be referring to the urgency to finish the letter because the bearer is waiting on the stirrup ready to depart.

CONCLUSIONS

Pattern and variation, or conventional formulae versus free choice, are terms which are closely interrelated rather than being mere opposites. In my view, an overall pattern, both at the syntactic and lexical levels, becomes clear when reading the Cely letters. However, far from being the epitome of conventionalism, this pattern emerges precisely because of the choice each individual writer makes from among the possible variables the language offers. These he uses exhaustively throughout all his letters, producing what we could call his own personal formulae. In other words, due to the fact that the number of authors and writing contexts in the Celys is somewhat limited, we become accustomed to certain expressions which we read repeatedly throughout the letters. These are not necessarily conventions of the genre, but rather the personal hallmark of each author, who has acquired a writing style which he exhibits in one letter after another, although depending to a certain extent on whom the addressee is.

When such sociolinguistic variables as author and addressee have been taken into account, it has been shown that those writing styles do vary across

authors, thus denoting the existence of variation and consequently free choice. A study of the pragmatic use and effect of these expressions (forthcoming) sheds light on this issue, in the sense that it seems to be the case that choices are made by the writer both before deciding whether to include a certain topic or not (e.g. health matters), and at the moment of giving it linguistic shape (i.e. deferential or warm). It is my claim that this also seems to support the hypothesis that such passages, i.e. most instances of *captatio benevolentiae*, are present for a purpose and not as a customary technique.

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