

## BOOK REVIEW

McLaughlin, Mairi. *La Presse française historique : Histoire d'un genre et histoire de la langue*. (Histoire et évolution du français, 7). Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2021, 407 pp. 978 2 406 10356 1  
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Mairi McLaughlin's *La Presse française historique : Histoire d'un genre et histoire de la langue* provides the first systematic study of the language of the historical French press, through analysis of a corpus of five French periodicals (1632–1782). This detailed volume will interest scholars and students alike who want to know more about the evolution of the French press, the relationship between the language used in historical and contemporary sources and the role of the press in language innovation and change.

From a methodological point of view alone, McLaughlin's study will be of use to those working in corpus creation and analysis, the comparison of historical and contemporary sources and the use of periodicals to study language variation and change. The creation of a fully digitised corpus, totalling over 500,000 words, is itself an impressive achievement and allows for detailed and robust qualitative and quantitative analyses. The need for both the corpus and the study are clear throughout. McLaughlin, particularly in the first part of the volume, often draws on research on English-language newspapers which is useful for contextualisation and comparisons (e.g. the frequency of reported speech in the French and English press at similar levels, p.124). However, the lack of equivalent corpora or studies of 17th and 18th century French-language periodicals highlights a clear gap that this study begins to address.


The two key aims of the study lend the book its structure. Part one (Chapters 2 and 3) addresses questions concerning journalism as a genre, exploring the origins of the language of the French press, how it developed over time, and the relationship between the historical and the contemporary press. Part two (Chapters 4 and 5) focuses on the history of the language, asking what we can learn about language variation and change through analysis of the historical press, the extent to which French journalism can be considered innovative, and the role of the press in the evolution of French. Each analysis chapter follows a similar internal structure: beginning with a broad examination of the topic, before presenting two detailed case studies.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the origins of the French press and the periodicals included in the corpus. In doing so, McLaughlin provides the first broad-ranging descriptions of the linguistic features of the historical press, a basis from which she is able to explore the origins and evolution of the genre over the 17th and 18th centuries, drawing attention to the linguistic diversity found over time and across publications. Chapter 3 compares the historic and the contemporary French press, for example, testing the claim that the influence of English on French has led

to a rise in the use of the passive voice. In fact, McLaughlin shows that the frequency of the prototypical passive voice has remained remarkably stable; its usage being greatly influenced by the original language in which the dispatch was written. Considered together, the two chapters highlight the linguistic and stylistic changes observable in the French press during the 17th and 18th centuries, the latter being a particularly significant period.

Chapter 4, a diachronic analysis of four linguistic changes, opens the second part of the volume. McLaughlin shows that linguistic changes occur in the same way across different genres, for example, the press, literature, and translations. This has important implications for how historical linguists date linguistic changes, highlighting a need to compare texts from multiple genres, rather than focusing on literary texts alone. The final analysis chapter examines the role of the press in driving language change and the extent to which journalism is an innovative or a standardising linguistic force. Focusing specifically on the standardisation of spelling and language contact, McLaughlin shows that whilst the press contributed to both processes, the effects of language contact were a consistently present characteristic of the press, thus calling into question the idea that the use of borrowings in contemporary French media is a modern feature. This chapter further emphasizes the importance of McLaughlin's volume; she shows that describing the genre's role in linguistic change requires nuance and further research into this area is needed to provide this.

McLaughlin's volume makes clear the importance of periodicals as a data source for tracking linguistic change. Indeed, a key contribution to historical linguistics is her demonstration of the value of diversifying the type of sources used. The possibilities offered by her corpus for understanding the development of the language and the genre are significant, providing, for instance, tangible evidence of the press' influence on the evolution of the French language. A lack of existing comparable studies leads McLaughlin to be tentative in some of her other conclusions, despite her rich analysis. This underlines the very real need for further studies to build on this comprehensive volume which is itself an important contribution to language variation and change, historical linguistics, and our understanding of the genre of journalism.

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