

**“Oh! you are liars, & God will stop the mouth of liars”:  
impolite and aggressive discourse in Salem witchcraft trial examinations 1692**

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The Salem examination records offer rich material for the study of early dialogues in English. Many problems are, however, involved in the study of spoken discourse reported in writing (see e.g. by Culpeper and Kytö 2010; Kahlas-Tarkka and Rissanen 2011; Kryk-Kastovsky 2002). In most cases claims about the authenticity of the spoken language remain speculative, but arguments for the accuracy of the recording of many examinations in dialogue form can also be presented.

The present paper takes a socio-pragmatic and historical-pragmatic perspective into the dialogue of some of the Salem examinations (Hiltunen 2010; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2010). We hope to show some differences in the attitudes and language use of men and women in different positions in the community, with special reference to impolite expressions and even aggressive attitudes.

The discursal devices discussed in our paper will include the following:

1. Use of figurative language
2. Appeals to God and/or Christ
3. Addressing the examiners/audience
4. Sarcasm
5. Expressions of aggressiveness
6. Laughter

The aim of our paper is to illustrate the complexity of the Salem community, the strategies adopted by the examinees, and how all this complexity, tensions, and social hierarchies are reflected in the examination documents.

## References

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