

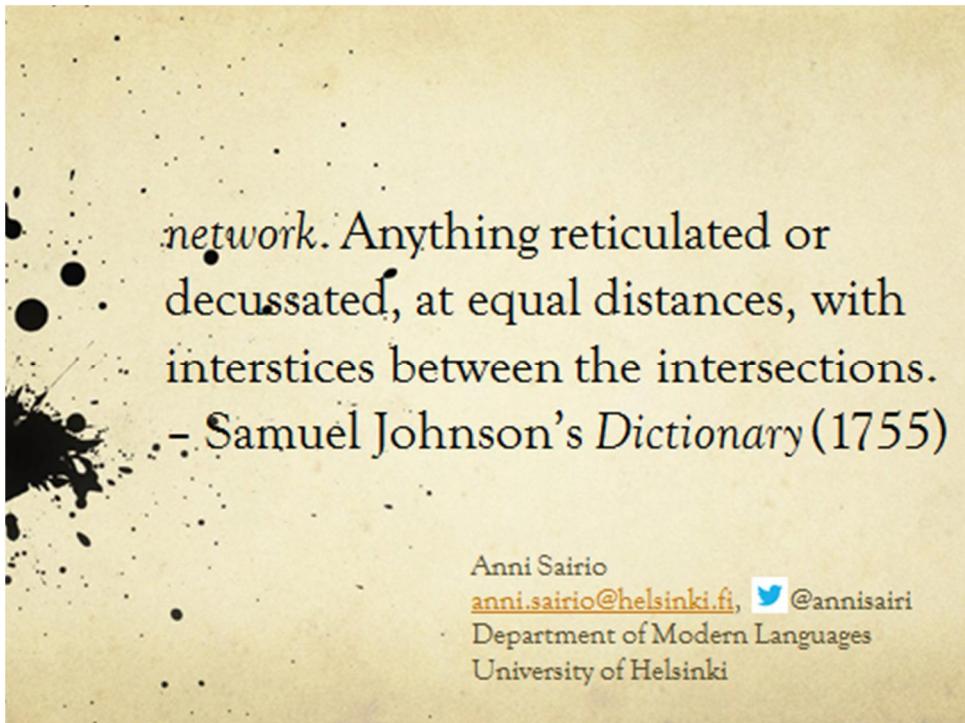
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Social network analysis of Elizabeth Montagu and the Bluestocking circle: methodological issues and linguistic applications

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Samuel Johnson, in his characteristic style, defines network as “anything reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections”. As definitions go, this one is not particularly clear, and Johnson’s understanding of a network differs from present-day definition of a network as an intertwined web of connections between different entities. Today I will talk about social networks in the context of Elizabeth Montagu and the Bluestocking circle on the one hand

and the framework of historical sociolinguistics on the other. I am a historical linguist by training, and most of my research falls into the framework of historical sociolinguistics. This is a field that examines the influence of social categories such as gender, age, social status, and education in language use, and particularly in letter-writing. Social network approach focuses on relationships and connections between groups and individuals, so combined, these approaches build up a rich framework which I have used to analyse Elizabeth Montagu's language use in her private correspondence with Bluestockings and family members.

Historical sociolinguistics & SNA

- Who? What? How? Linguistic implications?
- Letters, subscription lists, other contemporary documents, Bluestocking research (Eger, Myers, Pohl & Schellenberg eds.)
- An electronic corpus of letters 1738-1778, c. 200,000 words

I have explored Montagu's networks and studied language from her youth in the late 1730s to the years of Bluestocking brilliance in the late 1770s, and attempted to find answers to the following questions:

- Who were the individuals Montagu had the most contact with? What was her relationship

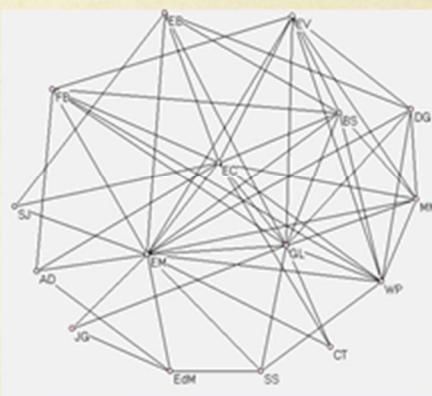
with them, and what were the functional and emotional elements of these network ties? What elements of power and hierarchy emerge from these contacts? And what kind of influence, if any, did these networks have in her private language use?

My linguistic analysis is based on the Bluestocking Corpus, which I have compiled of manuscript letters in the Henry E. Huntington Library, British Library, and more recently in the Houghton Library, and the letters in Elizabeth Eger's (1999) *Bluestocking Feminism*: the corpus spans from 1738 to 1778, and consists of circa 200 letters and 200,000 words. Network reconstruction, too, is largely based on letters which provide evidence of the quantity and quality of social contacts (for example as metatextual comments of relationships in the use of nicknames and friendship references). In addition to the Bluestocking Corpus, my main sources have been Emily Climenson's and Reginald Blunt's early 20th-century editions of Montagu's correspondence, Matthew Montagu's and John Doran's 19th-century editions of her letters, Mary Delany's letters as edited by Lady Llanover, and the correspondence of Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot and Carter and Montagu, respectively. I have also made use of subscription lists, which provide evidence of patronage and support, and Bluestocking scholarship, of which I especially want to mention the works of Myers, Eger, and Pohl & Schellenberg's (eds.) *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*.

From this data I have been able to track down a considerable number of Montagu's contacts and visits on a nearly month-to-month basis and build a database of this information [hyperlink]. Long visits to, for example, spa towns, the north of England, and country houses of friends are well documented, and gaps between months occur surprisingly seldom. However, strong ties are the easiest to reconstruct, while weak ties are more likely to remain invisible, perhaps lost altogether. The presence of servants, for example, seems to be only sporadically documented. Letters enable the reconstruction of connections that the individuals themselves deemed important and valuable, and when we depend upon editions, we base our research on what the editors have deemed important and valuable.

The Bluestocking circle

- Dense and multiplex
- Strength of ties: frequency of interaction, network density, contents of ties
- Strong network ties: shared identity & group membership, access to resources and support, presence of group norms
- Quantification of ties – a NSS



Social network analysis explores the structure and contents of relationships. Density refers to the extent to which all the possible network ties in a particular group are realized: a high degree of density generally leads to greater communication in the network and the development of and exposure to group norms. Multiplexity refers to the presence of multiple network ties. Over the years the Bluestocking circle developed into a dynamic web of contacts between men and women of scholarly ambitions, most (but not all) of genteel background. Accomplished individuals were invited to join, new members were quickly introduced to old members, and there were links to other social groups. Assemblies, salons, visits, and correspondence provided a relatively informal venue for polite and scholarly interaction. These ties combine elements of affect, collaboration, and patronage. In the 1770s, James Beattie entered the network in the sphere of patronage, but came to form a close relationship with Montagu, eventually the godmother of Beattie's son Montagu; Reginald Blunt (1923: i, 251) suggests that Beattie replaced Lord Lyttelton as Montagu's intimate friend after Lyttelton's death in 1773.

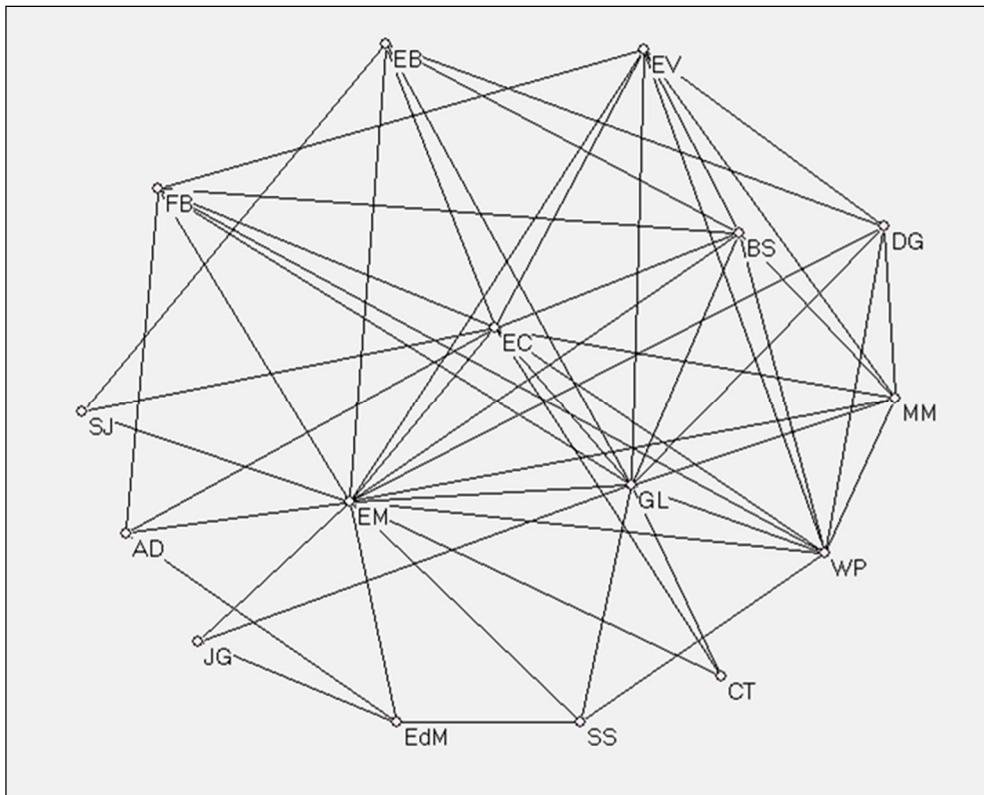


Figure 1. Network ties in the core Bluestocking circle in 1757-1762¹

Strong network ties result from frequent and versatile interaction, and they lead to a sense of shared identity and shared group membership, access to information and support, and group norms (Milroy 1987). Opinion leaders and other influential persons are connected to others with strong ties, and hold a central network position. Those with weak ties to the circle, the ‘friends of friends’, for example, may function as bridges between groups – they may not have all that much power or influence, but they provide potential for new and possibly profitable connections and resources (see Granovetter 1973 on the strength of weak ties). In effect, the core Bluestockings were connected by strong ties. This is apparent from the frequency of interaction, the density of the network (illustrated

¹ EM=Elizabeth Montagu, EC=Elizabeth Carter, EV=Elizabeth Vesey, EB=Edward Burke, FB=Frances Boscawen, GL=George, Lord Lyttelton, BS=Benjamin Stillingfleet, WP=William Pulteney, Lord Bath, DG=David Garrick [his wife should be included], MM=Messenger Monsey, SJ=Samuel Johnson, AD=Anne Donnellan, JG=John Gregory, CT=Catherine Talbot, SS=Sarah Scott, EdM=Edward Montagu

in Figure 1), and the contents of network ties. It is also possible to quantify the strength of ties by devising a network strength scale (NSS).

In a nutshell, a NSS is used to assign points between two individuals to determine the strength of a network tie and the symmetry of that tie in terms of power and reciprocity. Fitzmaurice (2007) suggests that the strength of ties be measured in terms of four parameters that combine subjective and objective criteria: the longevity of relationship, geographical proximity, formal social relationship in terms of comparative rank (social equal / superior / inferior), and the type of relationship (intimates / equals / acquaintance; friendship / competition). Henstra (2008) suggests that the possible asymmetry that results from generational and gender differences should also be taken into account. I have devised a network strength scale on the basis of Fitzmaurice's, Henstra's, and Randy Bax's earlier works: these historical applications ultimately draw from Lesley Milroy's seminal network analysis of a Belfast community in the 1970s.

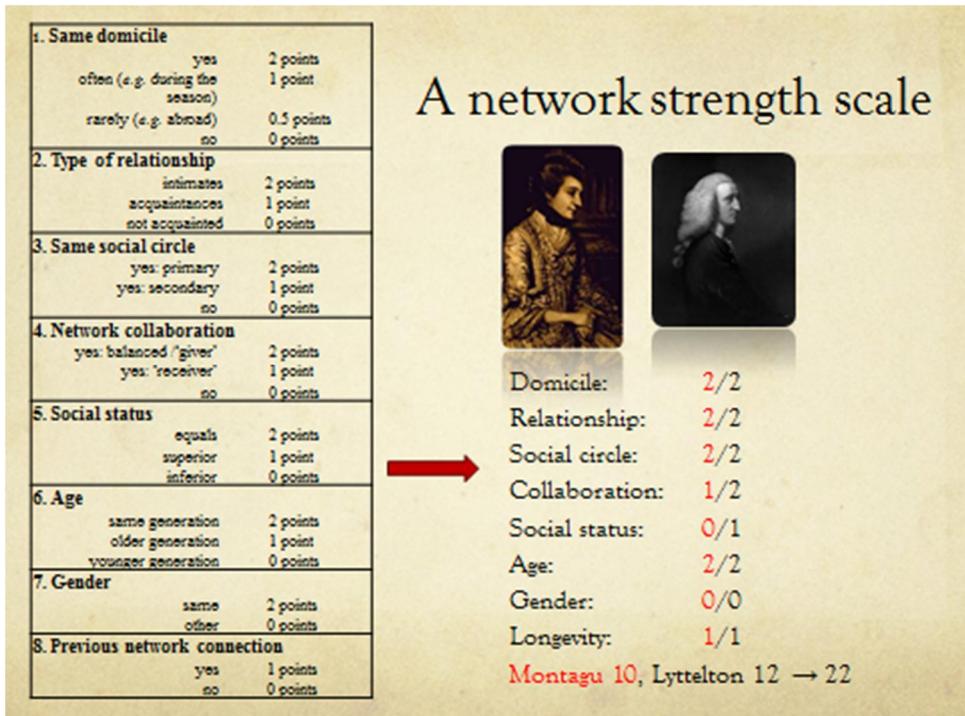
Table 6.1 The NSS parameters

1. Same domicile		
yes	2 points	
often (e.g. during the season)	1 point	
rarely (e.g. abroad)	0.5 points	
no	0 points	
2. Type of relationship		
intimates	2 points	
acquaintances	1 point	
not acquainted	0 points	
3. Same social circle		
yes: primary	2 points	
yes: secondary	1 point	
no	0 points	
4. Network collaboration		
yes: balanced /‘giver’	2 points	
yes: ‘receiver’	1 point	
no	0 points	
5. Social status		
equals	2 points	
superior	1 point	
inferior	0 points	
6. Age		
same generation	2 points	
older generation	1 point	
younger generation	0 points	
7. Gender		
same	2 points	
other	0 points	
8. Previous network connection		
yes	1 points	
no	0 points	

Points are given to two individuals for their geographical proximity, their relationship in terms of intimacy–distance, connectedness, network collaboration, social status, the demographic variables of age and gender, which are assumed to further reflect the aspects of hierarchy and power, and the longevity of the relationship. To go over these parameters as questions: how often did the two individuals meet? What opportunities did they have to meet each other? Were they close friends or more distant acquaintances? Perhaps they did not know each other at all. Did they meet most often in Bluestocking circles, or were they more likely to spend time in family or business contexts?

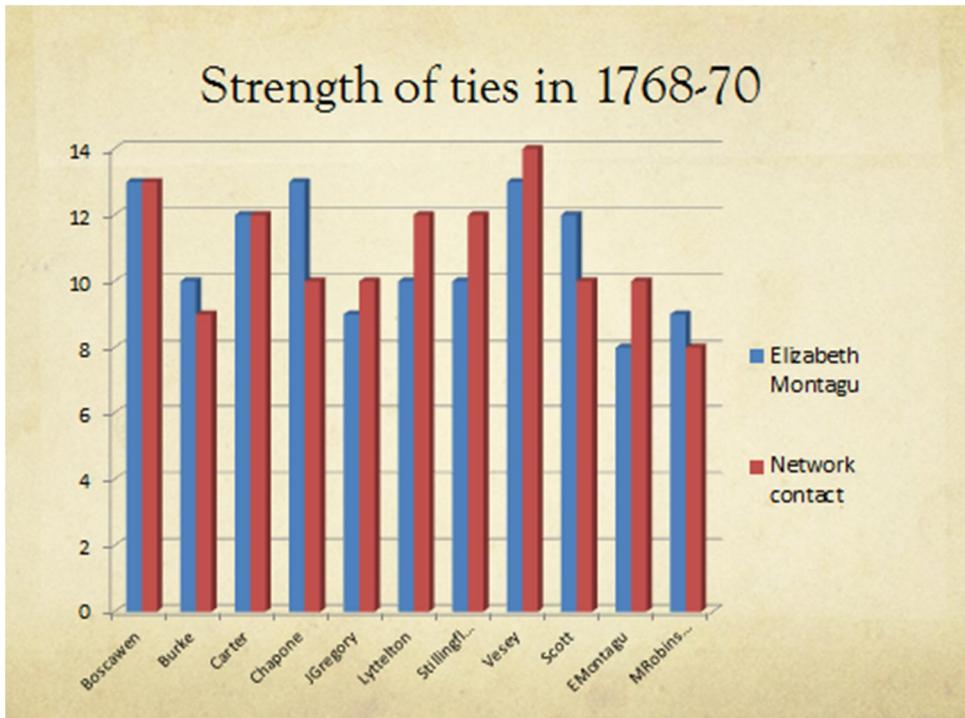
Perhaps their meetings were random and infrequent. Did they engage in scholarly or philanthropic collaboration? If so, was this collaboration equal, or did one person contribute more than the other? What about social hierarchy, determined by rank, wealth, and other types of social influence? Were they social equals or not? Age, too, is taken into consideration, so that people of the same generation are considered as ‘equals’, those of an older generation as ‘superior’ (perhaps the choice of terminology could be more neutral, but here we are), and the younger individuals as ‘inferior’. I have considered an age difference of 15-16 years to be the minimum age gap for a generational difference.

Out of these complex categories, gender invites possibly the most discussion. I did not include it in my first version of the NSS, but as a result I felt I was excluding a significant factor that influenced social interaction in the eighteenth century. Therefore a network tie is considered to be stronger if the individuals are of the same gender (two points for each), and weaker if they are not (zero points). The NSS is specifically devised for the quantification of Bluestocking network ties, to which I think the gender quantification applies. However, this hypothesis of a link between gender and network tie strength may be more problematic when we evaluate a connection between women of considerably different social positions, for example Elizabeth Montagu and Anne Yearsley. Finally I want to consider the significance of time in networks and distinguish between long-standing ties and new connections in a given time period.

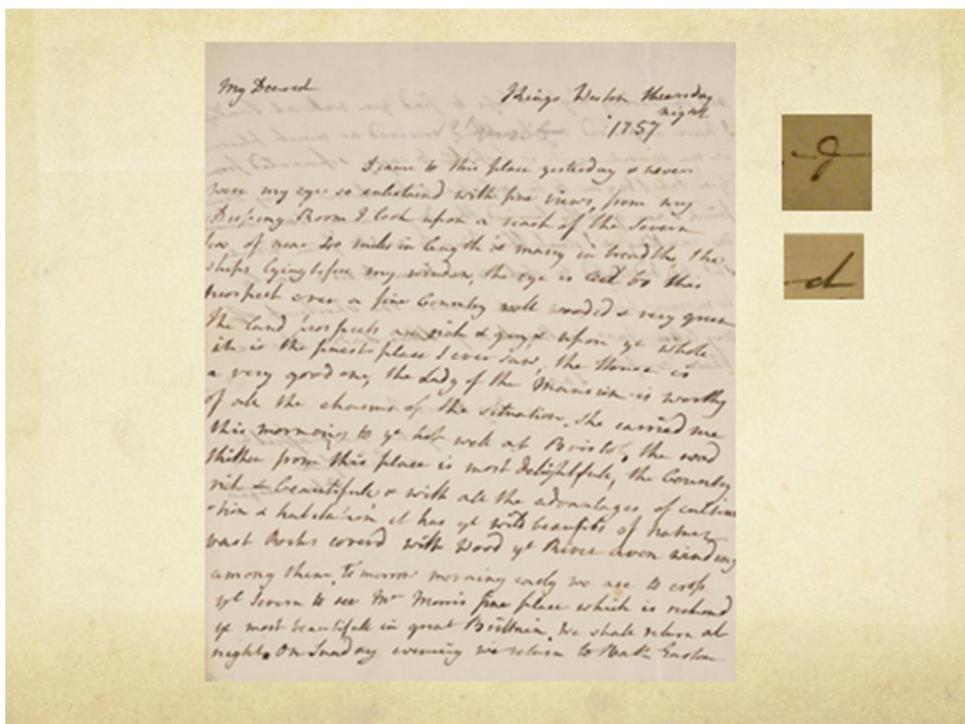


Here is an example of the quantification of Elizabeth Montagu's and Lord Lyttelton's network tie for the years 1768-70. Due to the difference in social rank and their asymmetrical or unreciprocal literary collaboration, Lyttelton's network score is two points higher. I can also calculate their combined network tie strength (it is 22) and compare it with Montagu's other contacts.

Before I move on to the linguistic part of this paper, I want to show you this column of Montagu's network ties in 1768-70. As you can see, the Bluestockings score relatively high – the women higher than the men, but the scores are relatively similar. These are strong network ties.



And now I want to talk about how this can be applied to linguistic analysis.



Between the years 1738 and 1778, Montagu's language changed in various significant ways. Some of this change happened as she moved from the Portland circle of her youth (centred around the

Duchess of Portland) to the Bluestocking circle, in which her network position was more central and more powerful, and in which she began to carry out her scholarly ambitions. For one thing, these changes reflect Montagu's reactions to the standardisation process of the English language that took off in the eighteenth century. Strong network ties correlate to some extent with her use of informal, fairly oral-like language use, but the increasing stigma of preposition stranding was strong enough that Montagu almost stopped using it over the years, regardless the recipient. But I want to zoom in to the visual elements of her language use, to the level of spelling and its social dimensions.

Spelling variation in 18th-century private writing is partly linked to what was going on in printed texts at the time, increasing linguistic prescriptivism – highly visible in bestselling grammar writing that took off in the 1760s –, pronunciation, and also to the relationship between the letter writer and the recipient and to their social attributes [cf. e.g. Beal 2004, Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Noel Osselton]. I want to single out Montagu's use of two spelling variants of regular past tense verbs and past participles: the apostrophised -'d and the simple contracted -d. These minuscule, perhaps easily dismissed characters are remarkably connected to the social and cultural realities of 18th-century genteel society, and at times they manage to convey information about gender, intimacy, power and social hierarchy, and changing printers' practices.

The apostrophised -'d, in the early part of the century a prominent feature in printed texts and a marker of sophistication that began to lose that prestige towards the end of the century (cf. Oldireva-Gustafsson 2002), is significantly more frequent in Montagu's letters to men. The simple -d contraction, not particularly commented on by grammarians and evidently a feature of private, informal language use (Oldireva Gustafsson 2002), is significantly more frequent in her letters to women. This is not an isolated incident: this gender distinction in formal, full spellings and more informal, perhaps speech-like, occasionally criticized contractions appears also in modals and

auxiliaries (Sairio 2009). Gender is a key factor when Elizabeth Montagu chooses between spelling variants. It is partly linked to social rank, so what I'm presenting you here is slightly more complex than appears.



I also want to return to the issue of quantification and point out that when we study spelling features with statistical methods, in hundreds if not thousands of occurrences, the noise caused by lack of space on the paper or the researcher's incorrect transcriptions tends to fade away.

Overall, language change and variation may be influenced in different degrees by the relationship between the writer and the recipient, their social attributes and the social meaning of, for example, gender, and also by the social meaning of the language feature itself (see Penelope Eckert) – is it prestigious? Does it reflect formality? Is it unmarked, neutral? Is there a stigma? Contextualization is an important aspect of historical sociolinguistics, and I am grateful to historical and literary scholars for their critical scholarship and high-quality editions which are so essential to the work of historical linguists. Perhaps here is a network tie that could be made more prominent, more transparent to us all.