Tracing the early history of *namely*: From particulariser to marker of expository apposition

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**ABSTRACT:**

The aim of this presentation is to trace the early history of *namely*, from its first occurrences in the twelfth century as a restrictive focusing subjunct (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 604) meaning ‘particularly, especially, above all’ (*OED* s.v. *namely* adv. 1) to the development in Late Middle English of its present-day function as an optional marker of expository apposition (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 1307ff; Meyer 1992: 97) with the meaning ‘that is to say’ (*OED* s.v. *namely* adv. 3).

In its original particularising function, *namely* faced stiff competition from a number of rivals, such as *(e)specially, in special, and principally*, among others. These competitors crept into the system during the Middle English period, coexisted with *namely* for a time, gradually took over its function, and finally ousted it from the inventory of English particularisers in the course of Early Modern English. In a similar fashion, once *namely* developed its derived meaning and function as a marker of expository apposition, it came to compete in usage against a number of forms in its new domain, among them *to wit, scilicet, that is*, etc.

My purpose in this presentation is to explore these two processes of linguistic competition between alternatives in which *namely* has been involved in its lifetime, paying attention to the factors which may have contributed to its failure and its success in these two processes of competition. Evidence will be drawn from a variety of sources, including the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and the *Middle English Dictionary*. 