

The Multilingual Origins of Standard English

Topics in English Linguistics



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Volume 107

The Multilingual Origins of Standard English

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**DE GRUYTER
MOUTON**

ISBN 978-3-11-068751-4

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-068754-5

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-068757-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020941972

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2020 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston

Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

For Ruth Kennedy

Acknowledgements

This volume is produced under the British Arts and Humanities Research Council's Open World Research Initiative umbrella *Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies*, grant no. RG78116AA, strand 'Standard languages, norms and variation: comparative perspectives in multilingual contexts'. It is a companion to Wendy Ayres-Bennett and John Bellamy (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Standardisation*, Cambridge University Press.

I thank Prof Wendy Ayres-Bennett, Principal Investigator, for the care with which she has overseen every stage of this endeavour and enabled it to come to fruition. I thank Prof Susan Fitzmaurice, editor of the Topics in English Linguistics series at Mouton, not only for her incisive criticism but also for her generosity of vision, as the chapters here cover ground from linguistics to medieval studies and several languages. I also thank the forty reviewers whose criticisms have immeasurably improved the chapters.

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Part 1: **The orthodox version**

Laura Wright
Introduction

This collaboration by nineteen historical linguists shows why the current textbook explanations of the origins of Standard English are incorrect (Part One, the Orthodox Version), and suggests an alternative explanation (Part Two, the Revised Version). Textbook authors have been aware of the issues we discuss for quite some time, but, despite many scholars' misgivings over the years, these origin myths have continued to be repeated, especially in textbooks aimed at undergraduates.

But before we consider previous accounts, what do we mean by the origins of Standard English? For mid nineteenth-century scholars it meant vocabulary. For early twentieth-century scholars it meant phonology, as indicated by spellings for vowels in stressed syllables. For mid-twentieth-century scholars it meant orthography (majority spellings, ignoring minority ones). For late twentieth-century scholars it meant morphology – the rise of auxiliary *do*, third-person present-tense *-s*, *you/thou*, the *wh-* pronouns. We work with Trudgill's (1999) definition that Standard English is a dialect, largely distinguishable from other English dialects by means of its grammar and pre-eminently used in writing. In these pages we are concerned with the initial phase, which was propelled by reduction of variants and in particular, loss of geographically-restricted variants. Middle English was characterised by great variety, and it was not until variant reduction began that all the other things that go along with standardisation such as selection, diffusion, elaboration, codification, prescription and implementation could follow. In searching for variant reduction we examine syntax, morphology, wordstock (open-class as well as closed-class), spelling, letter-graphs, and also the the pan-European medieval abbreviation and suspension system, in texts from Edinburgh to Bristol. The mere fact of consistency, even though the feature under consideration may not have been (indeed, was usually not) the one that ended up in modern Standard English, constituted the beginning of the long process of standardisation – which did not appreciably slow down until the nineteenth century.

In the first chapter (Wright: A critical look at previous accounts of the standardisation of English), I track the development of the orthodox origin explanations. These inform readers that the precursor of Standard English was an East Midlands variety (or Central Midlands, depending on the book) that became adopted in London and disseminated therefrom; that manuscripts of the fifteenth century can be divided into four Types, and that the fourth Type,

dating after 1435 and labelled ‘Chancery Standard’, provided the mechanism by which this ‘Standard’ spread. Type 4 was given this label because it was the supposedly relatively cohesive dialect in which letters from the King’s Office of Chancery emanated. Working backwards from scholar to scholar, I identify the nineteenth-century origin of these explanations, which although reasonable according to evidence available in the early 1870s, are in need of updating a century and a half later.

Next, whereabouts should we be looking for the origin of Standard English? The ‘when’ is over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries because specific changes in writing practices are identifiable in those centuries, but the ‘where’ is less apparent, although textbooks assert that it emanated from an original source somewhere in the Midlands, and spread via London. Yet Standard English is characterised by its lack of affiliation to a single region, and defining what constituted fourteenth and fifteenth London English dialect is hard to pin down, partly because variation was still common at this time (meaning that regional features were also present in London writing), and partly because most writing that can be ascribed to London with any certainty during the period was mostly not written in monolingual English and has yet to be analysed. Pre-Standard regional focussing over the fifteenth century (and well into the sixteenth) led to supralocal clusters of morphemes, closed-class words and spelling-sequences fanning out from various provincial centres, as shown, for example, in the lower frequency of regionally-marked spellings in wills from urban York versus those from rural Swaledale (Fernández Cuesta 2014), the urban-hopping of less regionally-marked features in Cheshire and Staffordshire (Thengs 2013), or the more London-like, less Midlands/East Anglia-like, writing of Cambridge (Bergström 2017).¹ Supralocalisation processes are one type of variant reduction, and the fifteenth century was effectively the century of the supralocal spread – which by definition, cannot be geographically pinpointed. As people in cities and towns did business with each other (using the term ‘business’ in its widest application: administration, bureaucracy, estate-management, trade, commerce, industry, law, medicine, accountancy, and any other activity that caused people to write to those whom they did not know in a family or very local capacity), such morphemes, words and spelling-sequences were transferred around the country by means of speaker-contact and writer-contact from places of greater density to those of lower. London as a high-density administrative, bureaucratic and trading centre was highly influential, but it was two-way traffic: the provinces contributed too (present singular *-s*, plural *are*,

¹ See Milroy (1993) for an overview, and Nevalainen (2000) for a discussion of supralocalisation and standardisation.

auxiliary *do*; spellings in <g> in *again*, *guildhall*), and I show (Wright, Chapter 18: Rising living standards, the demise of Anglo-Norman and mixed-language writing, and Standard English) that in particular, the more uniform conventions of written Anglo-Norman provided a model for reduction of variants.

Then, at what should we be looking? The history of English has traditionally been based on studies of monolingual English literary and religious writing, that is, poetry and prose. But language change happens in a dialogue situation, when people communicate back and forth, and the purpose of dialogue – the pragmatics of the situation – is crucial: who spoke or wrote to whom, for what purpose, when, where, and with what result. Most of the writing extant in archives around the British Isles dating from the late fourteenth and fifteenth century was not written in monolingual English but in varying proportions of Medieval Latin, Anglo-Norman and Middle English. Communities of practice such as accountants auditing income and outgoings, merchants keeping track of payments and wares, or lawyers writing letters on behalf of clients, led to the development of specific writing conventions for specific spheres of activity.² More recent scholarship has included the internally dated and located non-literary documents of various administrative, bureaucratic and legal sorts such as those analysed by Stenroos and her colleagues and Cuesta and her colleagues, in which it is less easy to ignore the multilingual component.³ Stenroos and her colleagues' surveys for the *Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* found that during the fifteenth century local administrative writing throughout England was predominantly written in Latin. She reports (Chapter 2: The vernacularisation and standardisation of local administrative writing in late and post-medieval England) that there was no sudden change from Latin to English but decades of switching back and forth, with English emerging in the fifteenth century in functional slots previously held by Anglo-Norman. She distinguishes between formulaic content for internal pragmatic use by other professionals which was usually written in Latin, and the more unpredictable components that needed to be understood by non-professionals which were written in Anglo-Norman until the early fifteenth century and in English thereafter. The switch from French to English in the more oral components was relatively swift, but the Latin components predominated well into the sixteenth century, lasting into the eighteenth. Administrative documents were therefore not the harbinger of Standard

² See Kopaczyk and Jucker (eds.) (2013) for the introduction of communities of practice to historical linguistics as an explanatory framework.

³ Cuesta et al: *Seville Corpus of Northern English*, <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/CoRD/corpora/SCONE/>; Stenroos et al: *A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents*, <http://www.uis.no/meld>.

English, as letters written in English sent from the King's Office of Chancery were proportionately few in terms of ratios of English to Latin; because letters in English were written by petitioners *to* the Office of Chancery not from it; and also because there was no obvious variant reduction in the English components – a pool of variants still persisted at the turn of the sixteenth century.⁴ The meme of 'Chancery Standard' as the fount of Standard English does not bear scrutiny.

With regard to Samuels' other Types, Peikola (2003: 32), examining Type 1 spelling ratios in the orthography of 68 hands who wrote manuscripts of the Later Version of the Wycliffite Bible, concluded: "it is difficult to sustain a 'grand unifying theory' about C(entral) M(idland) S(tandard)"; and "the alleged status of L(ater) V(ersion) as the prototypical 'invariable' Type 1 text has to be questioned when variation is measured at a graphemic level" (Peikola 2003: 32, 40). On analysis of the orthography of texts forming Type 2, Thaisen (Chapter 5: Standardisation, exemplars, and the Auchinleck manuscript) also found no consistent similarities between different scribes' spelling choices and no obvious overlap of selection signalling incipient standardisation. Horobin (2003: 18) examined spelling in texts labelled Type 3 and reported "such variation warns us against viewing these types of London English as discrete . . . we must view Samuels' typology as a linguistic continuum rather than as a series of discrete linguistic varieties". Another part of the origin orthodoxy turns out to hold no explanatory power.

Gordon (Chapter 6: Bristol <th>, <þ> and <y>: the North-South divide revisited, 1400–1700) investigates Benskin's (1982) claim that there was a regional North-South distribution with regard to thorn and yogh spellings in the fifteenth century, with <y> graphs supposedly not used to indicate voiced and voiceless dental fricatives in the South. She surveys various text-types amounting to c.100,000 words emanating from the south-western city of Bristol 1404–1711, and finds that on the contrary, <y> graphs representing word-initial dental fricatives in function words occur in substantial amounts in the letters of affluent Bristol merchants and their families. As well as reopening the topic of regional distribution, Gordon shows that standardisation was far from complete by 1711, that variation still prevailed amongst educated writers although at lower frequencies, and that text-type and register greatly influenced scribal choices. Hernández-Campoy (Chapter 7: <th> versus <þ>: Latin-based influences and social awareness in the

⁴ Auer, Gordon and Oudesluijs's *Emerging Standards: Urbanisation and the Development of Standard English, c.1400–1700* survey of published calendared editions of civic, administrative and legal texts produced in York, Coventry and Bristol also found that the predominant language of written record over the period continued to be Latin.

Paston letters) also considers <þ>/<th> distribution and also finds that the purpose of the text influenced choice. First introduced from Latin in the Old English period and then reinforced by Anglo-Norman usage, the <th> digraph gradually came to replace the monograph <þ> over the Early Modern period. In his study of the Paston family's letters 1425–1503, Hernández-Campoy tracks fluctuation between the two, adducing evidence that during this period <th> was a sociolinguistic variable with indexical meaning: the higher the social rank, the higher the frequencies of the prestige variant <th>. However he also shows how individuals could tweak ratios to give the impression of being more or less humble, according to the purpose of their text. He suggests that Sir John Paston II (1442–1479) used only 33% <th> when writing to the king (even though his father had used 100% <th> when writing to royalty) in order to position himself as an ordinary, put-upon citizen seeking redress. The individual speaker/writer is the crucial ingredient in the diffusion of linguistic practices and innovations.

Turning now to wordstock: Medieval Latin and, to a lesser extent, Anglo-Norman French were the usual languages of written record (with Anglo-Norman occurring in more oral text-types) until the late fourteenth century, when a century of intense written multilingualism ensued – meaning that writings using all three languages are apparent in archives, added to which was the system of mixed-language writing used for accounts and inventories (although as Schendl (Chapter 10: William Worcester's *Itineraria*: mixed-language notes of a medieval traveller) shows, it was also used in personal journals).⁵ We agree with the nineteenth-century scholars identified in Chapter 1 that vocabulary is relevant to the development of Standard English, and we foreground multilingual writing – in particular, mixed-language writing – as the mechanism by which so much late fourteenth-century French and Latin-derived vocabulary became regarded as part of English. Durkin reports (Chapter 11: The relationship of borrowing from French and Latin in the Middle English period with the development of the lexicon of Standard English: some observations and a lot of questions) that

5 For a discussion of mixed-language business writing see Wright (2018) and references therein. A note on labels: the term 'Anglo-Norman' is sometimes objected to on the grounds that the language wasn't half-English, half-Norman but fully French, that the original inputting dialects were more varied, and that lexical and grammatical developments took place over centuries in Britain, with the result that over time, it became unlike the French of the Angevin areas of France. In particular, lexemes belonging to the realm of law were coined in Britain so that 'Law French' was a British phenomenon (see Löfstedt 2014). As the historical dictionary of the wordstock is known as the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, we retain the traditional title in order to preserve continuity with previous scholarship (for a more reasoned justification, see Trotter 2013: 141–2). I do not discuss here Old Norse and Middle Dutch/Low German, but they added to the lexicon too.

present-day high-frequency Standard English vocabulary shows a higher proportion of late Middle English borrowing from French and Latin than the rest of the lexicon, with a “huge spike” in the late fourteenth century. Given that by the late fourteenth century Anglo-Norman was no longer a mother-tongue in Britain, this huge spike would be inexplicable were it not for the equally huge amount of mixed-language accounts and inventories extant from this period, mostly unpublished.⁶ Sylvester (Chapter 13: The role of multilingualism in the emergence of a technical register in the Middle English period) makes the point that within the realm of vocabulary, the process of elimination of variants to the vanishing-point of one single standard form did not apply. Rather, a multiplicity of near-synonyms deriving from several languages enabled nuances of semantics, pragmatics and register to develop. Sylvester demonstrates this by examining the semantic fields of dress/armour and sheepfarming, taken from the *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing in Britain c. 700–1450* and the *Bilingual Thesaurus of Everyday Life in Medieval England*, which include vocabulary from Middle English, Anglo-Norman, Medieval Latin and Older Scots. She deliberately surveys vocabulary to do with sheepfarming in order to demonstrate that Anglo-Norman vocabulary was far from being limited to the higher registers, as is often reported. On the contrary, it was prevalent in land-administration, land-ownership being the backbone of legal day-to-day writing in any century.

Ashdowne (Chapter 14: *-mannus makyth man(n)*?) Latin as an indirect source for English lexical history) considers Latin lexical items in *-mannus* as evidence of English – there are 64 such *-mannus* lexemes recorded in the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, and more than 300 ending in *-man(n)* attested before 1500 in dictionaries of English. Ashdowne makes the point that a study of this highly-productive set that depended on monolingual English evidence alone would miss a significant amount of data. Both monolingual Latin and mixed-language writing provides evidence of English words either not attested in monolingual English, or attested with different meanings, or earlier. “Evidence for English lexical history is available in sources written in a variety of languages by users from a variety of linguistic heritages”, and Latin is key because Anglo-Norman administrators initiated Latin as the main language of written record, admixed with both French and English. Ashdowne’s chapter also makes the point that it was not a one-way street, as English vocabulary crossed over into what

⁶ Mixed-language consisted of Medieval Latin (and to a lesser extent, Anglo-Norman) as a grammatical matrix, with nouns, verb-stems, modifiers and *-ing* forms appearing variably in Middle English. Alcolado Carnicero (2013) has demonstrated that the London Mercers’ Company Wardens’ Accounts, for example, entered into five generations of mixed-language writing after 1380, before committing to monolingual English in the mid fifteenth century.

could fairly be considered monolingual Latin. Both Medieval Latin as written in Britain and Anglo-Norman as written in Britain contained considerable influence from English. Tiddeman (Chapter 13: More sugar and spice: revisiting medieval Italian influence on the mercantile lexis of England) countermands the usual textbook assertion that Italian words predominantly entered English via the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, influencing the poetical vocabulary of Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate, and again during the Renaissance in cultural fields such as music and architecture. She augments the work of previous lexicographers and historians by adding to the list of late medieval trade borrowings from Italian, which greatly outnumbered the later, erudite ones. In many cases these are the names of goods which passed through Italian rather than originated in Italian, and which were then written down in Anglo-Norman and mixed-language in British customs accounts and port books as commodities from the Near, Middle and Far East were ferried over to Britain (notably to Southampton) by Italian merchants. In particular, Tiddeman identifies Anglo-Norman as the buffer language through which Tuscan, Genoese and Venetian trade-terminology was transmitted into Middle English, a role hidden from sight by dictionaries which blanket this route with 'Old French', or simply 'French'.

These discussions of the late medieval wordstock have all depended on evidence taken from mixed-language documents, even though mixed-language is invisible in textbook histories of English. Schendl (Chapter 10: William Worcester's *Itineraria*: mixed-language notes of a medieval traveller) analyses the mixed-language usage of a single scribe, William Worcester, who was secretary to Sir John Fastolf. In the late fifteenth century Worcester made various journeys around Britain noting down what he saw. His *Itineraries* are a hotchpotch of miscellaneous facts and descriptions of all sorts, some written at a slant on the hoof as he travelled. The importance of his diaries cannot be overstated: he used mixed-language not for professional accountancy, mercantile or notarial reasons but for his own personal jottings and note-keeping. Very little other fifteenth-century ephemera has survived, so this is a surprise glimpse as to how mixed-language also pervaded the personal sphere.

Moving now to monolingual English, assumptions have been made about the pre-eminence of London English, with certain scribes assumed to have worked there in the fifteenth century. One such is the Beryn scribe. Carrillo-Linares and Williamson (Chapter 3: The linguistic character of manuscripts attributed to the Beryn Scribe: a comparative study) analyse his spellings using the comparative method of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*. Williamson was instrumental in the creation of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*, so if the Beryn scribe were locatable in London by this method, Carrillo-Linares and Williamson would be able to show us how. However, they conclude that on the contrary, by

means of spelling-comparison the Beryn scribe cannot be localised and could have come from anywhere over a large swathe of the midland and southern half of the country, and that he copied exemplars from various regions. He didn't impose his own dialect in a uniform manner but retained certain features from his exemplars whilst using certain features from his idiolect and others that he'd picked up along the way, as a result of long copying experience. Carrillo-Linares and Williamson come to the view that most fifteenth-century professional scribes would, over the length of a copying career, have written in mixed dialectal styles like this. The culmination of features amassed from the scribe's idiolect, from the supralocal norm, from the exemplar at hand, and those ported over from copying previous texts, would have constituted normal professional fifteenth-century scribal behaviour. As the Beryn scribe was writing within the the period of the supralocal spread, geographical pinpointing is not possible (and in Wright (2012) I make the same point about the non-localisability of the Hammond scribe, who flourished in the late fifteenth century). Carrillo-Linares and Williamson also report that a handful of the scribe's spellings are completely invariant, although none became Standard. The mere fact of consistency signals the onset of the long standardisation process. In Chapter 18 (Rising Living Standards, the Demise of Anglo-Norman and Mixed-Language Writing, and Standard English) I identify another copying phenomenon, that of given versus new information. In any early fifteenth-century mixed-language weekly-payments account from the London Bridge archive, the first half of each week's entry shows invariant spellings and the second half shows variation. The first part (details of the permanent staff) was copied over verbatim from the previous week, then what followed (the individual weekly incomings and outgoings) was new and more varied. I call this the payroll phenomenon: high-intensity copying led towards a more uniform look on the page.

Honkapohja and Liira (Chapter 9: Abbreviations and standardisation in the *Polychronicon*: Latin to English and manuscript to print) also noticed certain consistent spellings across all English manuscripts of their much-copied text, the *Polychronicon*. In different versions of the *Polychronicon* they find that reduction in spelling variation was preceded by reduction in abbreviations, that the rate of abbreviation loss in Latin portions differed from the rate of loss in English portions, and that different abbreviation types disappeared at different rates. Individual scribes varied considerably in their use of abbreviations, but abbreviation densities of scribes were found to be similar across manuscripts. That is to say, individuals had their own preferred patterning of abbreviation usage – the fifteenth-century abbreviation variant pool remained, but individuals selected fairly consistently from that pool. The relative amount of spelling variation also held steady between the various witnesses, with no decrease from the early manuscripts to the mid-fifteenth century.

To take stock so far: the fifteenth century was a century of of multilingual writing, which can be seen in present-day high-frequency vocabulary, and of supralocal spread, rather than standardisation *per se*. Latin continued in use. Incipient standardisation cannot be detected by influence from London, nor by a reduced fifteenth-century feature pool as such, but what can be detected is the behaviour of individual scribes selecting consistently from that pool. Individuals narrowed down their selection but not in a universally-shared manner, so that the feature pool itself continued on. Moreno-Olalla (Chapter 4: Spelling practices in Late Middle English medical prose: a quantitative analysis) considers four herbals written in Middle English during the 1460s–1490s. He finds that, like the Beryn scribe, each scribe had a collection of certain invariant preferences, certain near-invariant preferences, and that each scribe's preferred spellings were not universally shared by the others. Moreno-Olalla finds a discrepancy between the final part of a word (he focusses on distribution of word-final *-e* spellings) and stems: spelling of stems remained varied, whereas the scribes were progressing towards an 'imperfect agreement' about what the end of a word should look like.

Conde-Silvestre (Chapter 15: Communities of practice, proto-standardisation and spelling focusing in the Stonor letters) constructs a community of practice, that of the cofeoffees of Thomas Stonor II (1424–1474). From this network he analyses 21 letters written in English, and compares them to a control group. He finds a prevalence among the cofeoffees of spelling-focussing in words of Romance origin, which reflects the pragmatics of law and administration – which were usually written in Anglo-Norman, Medieval Latin and mixed-language. This is a direct indication that the conventions of Anglo-Norman and Medieval Latin business writing had an effect on written English. In Chapter 16, Romero-Barranco (A comparison of some French and English nominal suffixes in Early English correspondence (1420–1681)) surveys the usage of nine French and English nominal suffixes over a 260-year period, as exemplified by the *Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence*. He finds that the gentry and the professionals were the main users of French suffixes, leading their diffusion at the beginning of the Early Modern English period, in contradistinction to the nobility and the lower commoners. It is notable that the professionals were instrumental here as it is in keeping with the underlying theme of multilingual dissemination by mercantile, legal and other business communities of practice. Nevalainen (Chapter 8: Early mass communication as a standardizing influence? The case of the Book of Common Prayer) assesses whether liturgical language had any influence on Standard English. She compares three versions of the Book of Common Prayer: of 1549, 1552, and revised in 1661. She finds that the versions of 1549 and 1552 were both written in “middle of the road” southern dialect, neither particularly conservative nor particularly modern, but that the 1661 version was somewhat more varied,

modernising some features but retaining others. She concludes that the *Book of Common Prayer* did not exert an identifiable formative standardizing influence on Early Modern English grammar. Like the advent of print, it has often been asserted that the language of the Bible and Liturgy was formative, but it is not easy to marshal evidence supporting either claim.

Kopaczyk (Chapter 17: Textual standardisation of legal Scots *vis a vis* Latin) considers the influence of Latin on Scots, as evidenced by medieval burgh laws. Kopaczyk extracts invariant Latin chunks from selected Scottish burgh laws from seven Latin manuscripts, and compares them with seven extant Scots manuscripts of 1455–1602 in order to see how these standardised Latin chunks were rendered into Scots. The second aim is to establish whether there were any traces of standardisation on the level of text which were not prompted by Latin. She finds the Scots versions show more variation than their Latin counterparts, but within limits. That textual stability seems to have been largely independent of Latin and may be interpreted as incipient standardisation. Scots is an interesting case in that the process of standardisation was set in train but did not go to completion: during the medieval and Early Modern period standardising scenarios were developing in parallel on both sides of the border, with separate standardisation trajectories. As yet we do not know if patterns spread from urban to rural settings, or even where the hubs of standardisation in Scotland were located.⁷ Standard English did eventually arrive in Scotland of course, but only after a series of seventeenth and eighteenth century political and cultural events.

Summary of the revised version

Where: Supralocal centres all over England, not specifically East or Central Midlands, not specifically London. Spreading out from centres of population density to rural areas, driven by language contact (both written and spoken) in a business context resulting in loss of regional features.

When: Second half of the fourteenth century onwards, not completing until the 1800s.

Who: All writers: scribes, clerks, accounts-keepers, copyists of all kinds.

⁷ Kopaczyk, Joanna. 2013. *The legal language of Scottish burghs. Standardisation and lexical bundles (1380–1560)*, Oxford University Press, pp. 43, 258–260. Previous research suggests that Edinburgh was a strong draw.

Which text types: No one single text-type. There is no obvious text-type that should be excluded. Even ephemera provide evidence.

What kind of pragmatics: Stenroos (chapter 2) found that language choice was conditioned by who needed to understand the text (if professional, then Latin, if non-professional, then Anglo-Norman until the mid fifteenth century and English thereafter). Carrillo-Linares and Williamson (chapter 3) found that scribes accrued ‘souvenirs’ along the way; invariant items from individual copying projects that stayed with them and became part of their invariant repertoire. I (chapter 18) found that the pragmatics of high-intensity copying influenced variant reduction, the payroll effect. Latin and French had long been conventionalised on the page and their range of variation was limited, whereas Middle English was not conventionalised and reflected the variation inherent in the ‘linguistics of speech’. When Middle English took over the pragmatic roles of written Anglo-Norman, it took over its tendency towards visual uniformity too.

Which features: All linguistic features are relevant to standardisation, including wordstock, and the under-studied abbreviation and suspension system. The early stage of standardisation can be identified by reduction of grammatical and orthographical variants and loss of geographically-marked variants (however, Sylvester (chapter 12) points out that words did not get eliminated, rather, they increased as foreign words were absorbed into English, allowing technoelects with nuanced meanings to develop). The fifteenth century was still the century of the large variant pool but towards the end of the century individuals began to select fewer choices from that pool. Thus consistency began with individuals curtailing their range, although individuals differed from each other so the feature pool itself still remained large (Moreno-Olalla, chapter 4). This alone speaks against any kind of imposition of a model, whether governmental or bureaucratic, or a single dialect – Midland, London, or anywhere else.

How: Communities of practice; both strong-tie and weak-tie social networks; the repeat back-and-forth encounters inherent in trading activity.

Why: Politics and economics (Wright, chapter 18). In the later fourteenth century living standards rose, exerting a demand for goods, which themselves began to standardise. Trade patterns altered: continental merchants made repeat visits to London, and London became a nexus of trade countrywide, resulting in weak-tie networks both throughout Britain and extending to the continent. As their circumstances improved, the people who belonged to trade and craft guilds began to express themselves on the page in their mother-tongue. Trade and craft guilds correlate with early adoption of monolingual supralocal English.

Why wordstock should be included: The Anglo-Norman administration brought Medieval Latin as a written language and Anglo-Norman as a spoken language to Britain. Over time, British Medieval Latin became more and more informed by Anglo-Norman, which developed lexically and grammatically in ways unlike that of France. Mixed-language, so prevalent in the late fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth centuries, is really written Latin which had absorbed its spoken French reflex (and because Anglo-Norman was used in England, it absorbed vocabulary from English too). When the social circumstances of the trading classes changed and they became more powerful, ratios inverted: instead of a Latin matrix swollen with Anglo-Norman vocabulary, the language of written record became an English matrix swollen with Anglo-Norman vocabulary.⁸

Why multilingual: all of the chapters in this volume answer this question but I single out here Sylvester (chapter 12), who focusses on the development of a technolox (itself a property of standardised languages) via synonyms of English, Latin and French derivation taking on domain-specific nuances of meaning, and Conde-Silvestre (chapter 15), who pinpoints reduction of variation beginning first in Romance-derived vocabulary in the subset of Stonor letters he studies. Schendl (chapter 10) shows how mixed-language writing was used not just for professional, outward-looking purposes such as institutional accounts or wills and testaments (aimed at specific audiences of accountants, auditors, lawyers and legatees) but also inward-looking purposes such as the personal travel journal he discusses. Everything in this volume points towards the conventions of written Anglo-Norman as the key factor catalysing the development of Standard English.

In sum: the ‘Chancery Standard’ meme was successful not only because it is a catchy label, but also because top-down imposition by the Crown fits with modern perceptions of medieval feudalism. Therefore, our revised account needs a nutshell version in order to compete. It is this:

Over the fourteenth century, living standards rose, enabling a new class of people to find their voice. Monolingual English, shaped by its Anglo-Norman antecedent, was the written record of the trading classes.

⁸ I use ‘trading classes’ instead of working or labouring classes because those terms have modern social implications. By ‘trade’ I mean any commercial or professional exchange.

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Laura Wright

1 A critical look at previous accounts of the standardisation of English

Twenty years ago, handbooks discussing the origins of Standard English gave the impression that its beginnings were well understood. Readers were informed that there had been a written variety called Late West Saxon Standard in the Old English period, replaced by a written variety called Chancery Standard in the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century. Readers were told that Chancery Standard was based on Central Midlands writing (or East Midlands, if they were reading an older textbook), and it was explained that the Midlands dialect was more easily understood than other dialects because it was spoken in the middle of the country. How Chancery Standard came to derive from the Midlands dialects was said to be due to migration of Northerners into London (although some authors claimed a migration from the East Midlands, and yet others from the Central Midlands). Handbooks which went into more detail classified Chancery Standard's evolution as stemming from Type 4 of four prototypical Types into which London Middle English writing had been divided, which was writing from the King's Office of Chancery. And there was sometimes a nod to the language of the court, to the varieties of English used by scholars in Oxford and Cambridge, and to the invention of print. The actual mechanism of how Standard English supposedly focussed and diffused both geographically out from the Midlands (whether East or Central) and through different text-types was not detailed. That all that had been originally explicitly stipulated under the label 'Chancery Standard' were spellings for twenty-one common words, the third-person plural pronoun forms *they/their*, and the *-inde/-ende/-ande* morpheme, was not specified. Syntax, morphology, sentence structure, social context and discourse norms, pragmatics, word-choice, register, text-types, reduction of variation, reduction of abbreviations and suspensions, the abandonment of letter-graphs *thorn* and *yogh*, and the multilingual backdrop – the convention of keeping accounts in mixed-language Anglo-Norman/Medieval Latin/Middle English, the continuing custom of alternating passages of monolingual Anglo-Norman and Medieval Latin, and the rise of Neo-Latin as a politico-scholarly medium of international communication – these were barely mentioned.

In various publications (Wright (1994, 1996, 2001a, 2005, 2013, 2017) and Wright, ed. (2000)) I traced how this narrative came to be accepted orthodoxy

when its empirical underpinnings are, as this volume shows, unverifiable. I sorted the competing handbook versions into five groups:¹

1. Standard English evolved from the speech and writing of Middle English speakers from the East Midlands because:
 - a. merchants spoke the East Midland dialect (Leith)
 - b. there was an influx of immigrants from the East Midlands (Strang, Freeborn)
 - c. the East Midlands was culturally, economically and administratively important (Barber)
 - d. the East Midlands was the largest of the major dialect areas (Baugh and Cable)
 - e. the University of Cambridge was influential (Leith, Barber, Baugh and Cable)
2. Standard English evolved from the speech and writing of Middle English speakers from the Central Midlands because:
 - a. the East Midlands dialect was too “peripheral and remote” whereas the Central Midlands dialect had a “more systematic patterning”; therefore the Central Midlands dialect became adopted as a standard instead, despite there being no fresh wave of migration from the Central Midlands (Strang)
 - b. there was later, massive, immigration from the Central Midlands (Crystal)
3. Oxford, Cambridge and London naturally influenced the developing standard because:
 - a. that is where the educated speakers were (Leith, Barber, Crystal)
 - b. but the University of Oxford had no influence (Baugh and Cable)
4. The Midlands dialect was the obvious dialect to standardise because it was more easily understood than the Northern or Southern dialects (Baugh and Cable)
5. Standard English evolved from the usage of the clerks of the office of Chancery (Strang, Crystal)

These five versions are contradictory. The authors did not provide evidence for their assertions about migration, nor why one dialect should have been more

¹ Summarised from Wright (1996: 103): Leith (1983 [1987]: 38–9), Blake (1992: 11), Pyles and Algeo (1964 [1993]: 141), Barber (1964: 160), Baugh and Cable (1951 [1993]: 187–190), Strang (1970 [1986]: 162–3), Freeborn (1992: 95), Burnley (1989: 23), Crystal (1995: 41, 55). Stenroos (this volume) provides equivalent accounts from more recent handbooks. Our lists are not exhaustive: Chancery Standard has been a successful meme over the last fifty years, bearing much repetition.

comprehensible than another. More recent accounts no longer repeat these ‘facts’ verbatim but elements are still occasionally repeated: in particular, the supposed influence of speakers from either the East or Central Midlands, the supposed migration of Northerners to London, and a conflation of London English with Standard English.² One more recent handbook account which does confront these difficulties is Schaefer (2012), who reports that the fifteenth century was when a set of written discourse traditions were taken over from French and Latin models into English, and when written variation started to reduce for supralocal use. However she still devotes subsections to “Types I–III” and “Chancery English”, reporting on them in detail because “Regarding “Chancery English” as the direct ancestor of “modern written English” . . . has very much become the received wisdom”, even though she then goes on to discredit these notions, emphasising instead “that putting “Chancery English” into place means situating it in the multilingual discourse community” (Schaefer 2012: 525).³

Herein lies the paradox: scholars who work on the origins of Standard English no longer accept that “Chancery Standard” was a cohesive entity, and believe that the multilingual context of late Medieval Britain (both written and spoken) had an important influence, but authors of chapters in handbooks aimed at undergraduates still feel compelled to give “Chancery Standard” room due to its pervasive repetition, with the result that students new to the subject learn that a) there was a written variety known as “Chancery Standard” but b) it never actually existed. Let us now see where these versions came from, and why belief in them has been so long-held.

1 East Midlands, Central Midlands

These contradictory versions stem from work by earlier scholars. Eilert Ekwall (1877–1964), a Swedish scholar, summarised changes observed by earlier German linguists Lorenz Morsbach (1850–1945) and Wilhelm Heuser (fl.1886–1930) in English writing of the fourteenth century produced in London. Of Morsbach (1888), Ekwall reported (1956: xiv–xv):

² For a discussion of what different scholars have meant by ‘standard’ and ‘standardisation’ with resultant contradictions, and the classification of Late West Saxon Standard as a set of orthographic norms rather than a standardised dialect, see Kornexl (2012).

³ Schaefer is not the only recent scholar taking this approach of detailing Chancery Standard before pointing out its deficiencies, see also, for example, Beal (2016).

... he examined a number of texts from the 14th and 15th centuries which he supposed to have been written in London proper, such as the Appeal of Thomas Usk (1384–5), some among the *Fifty Earliest English Wills* (1387 ff.) and a number of Gilds (1389). Other groups of texts Morsbach calls Staatsurkunden and Parlamentsurkunden (royal writs, Parliamentary papers and the like). Morsbach found that the language in these texts is on the whole uniform and agrees with the later Standard language. He concludes that the Standard language developed in London and spread from there to the remainder of the country. The language in the late ME London texts is East Midland.

But London is situated in Old Saxon territory, was in fact the capital of the kingdom of Essex. Its language should therefore have been East Saxon. The London language must thus have undergone a change from East Saxon to East Midland. ... The change, in his opinion, is due to the vicinity of the Anglian area (the Midland and the North), which is more than double that of the Saxon-Kentish area. He does not work out his theory in any detail, and the statement that the Anglian area immediately adjoins London is not correct. ... The general results of Morsbach's investigations can on the whole still be accepted. The language found in the texts used by him ... does agree in the main with the later Standard language. But the whole problem is more complicated than it appears in Morsbach's presentment of it, and a convincing explanation of the change from a Saxon to an East Midland dialect is missing.

There are statements here that surprise present-day readers, such as “the language in these texts is on the whole uniform”, that it “agrees with the later Standard language”,⁴ and that despite Ekwall's reservations, “the general results of Morsbach's investigations can on the whole still be accepted”. Ekwall also summarised Heuser's work (1956: xvi):

In 1914 appeared Wilhelm Heuser's important study *Alt-London*, in which the early London language was shown to have been definitely East Saxon. ... The chief criteria of the early London dialect are:

1. *a* from OE *ae*:, as *strate* from OE *strae:t*.
2. *a* from OE *ae* (*e*) from *i*-mutated *a* before a nasal, as *fan* (in *Fancherche* ‘Fenchurch’) from OE *fen* ‘fen’.
3. *e* from OE *y*, *y*:, as *bregge*, *hethe* from OE *brycg* ‘bridge’, *hy:th* ‘landing-place’.
4. *e* from OE *eo* in *melk* ‘milk’, *selver* ‘silver’, as in *Melk*-, *Selver-strate* ‘Milk Street’, ‘Silver Street’.

Ekwall reported that Heuser's work on early (“East Saxon”) London texts contradicted Morsbach's, yet although “Morsbach's starting-point is thus doubtful”, nevertheless “This need not affect his general results” (Ekwall 1956: xvii). Ekwall accepted wholesale both the change from ‘East Saxon’ to ‘East Midland’ dialect and that late fourteenth-century London texts “agree in the main with

⁴ For a discussion of variation in the 1389 guild certificates see Wright (1995). For a discussion of multilingual language in the *Fifty Earliest English Wills* see Wright (2015).

the later Standard language". He explained what he meant by "in the main": distinguishing what he called "genuine London forms" *strate* 'street', *fan* 'fen', *gert* 'girt', *hethe* 'hythe' from forms that occurred "by the side" *strete*, *fen*, *-igurt*, *hithe*. Ekwall's own specification of "obvious Midland features" were three: present plural *-e(n)*, present participle *-ing* replacing what he called "Essex *-ande*", and *they* replacing *hi* (1956: xviii).

In order to provide an explanation for what he thought was a dialect change from East Saxon to East Midland, Ekwall collected together evidence of people who came to London between the Norman Conquest of 1066 and 1360 from somewhere more northerly (a "relatively small" amount), or who had a surname derived from a more northerly place ("extremely numerous", 1956: xxxi). He was well aware of and discussed many of the difficulties with this local-surname approach as a means of proving immigration, and his survey effectively revealed considerable variation not easily reducible to generalisation. He did not pretend otherwise: "The early material points to a good deal of dialectal variation in the early London language".

However from a Neogrammarian perspective such variation was in need of explanation and so Ekwall invoked homophonic clash (*hull* instead of 'expected' *hell* 'hill'), analogy (*whelk* influenced by *melk* 'milk'), "internal sound-substitution" (*bury*), and "Midland" influence (*calf*, *cold* instead of word-initial affricates) (1956: xviii–xxxi). His results were $N = 2,890$, made up of 1,970 from East Midland counties (Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire, Rutland, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire), 380 from West Midlands counties (Warwickshire, Herefordshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Cheshire, Lancashire), 405 from the North and Scotland, and 135 of Midland or Northern origin not included in the above. Note that the East Anglian counties were included under the label "East Midlands" and Lancashire and Derbyshire under the label "West Midlands": classifications that affect the results. He repeated the exercise for the Home Counties (Essex, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey, Buckinghamshire) and found 3,000 immigrants, or the same as the North and the Midlands (in his definition of it!) taken together (1956: lx). For the south (Sussex, Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire – again, note the unusual categorisation) he estimated somewhat over 1,000 persons. In other words, his survey did not support the immigration theory (regardless of the labels, by his surname method, most immigrants were from London's hinterland), and he was well aware of it: "The question may then be raised whether it is probable that linguistic influence due to immigration from the Midlands and the North can have been sufficiently strong to affect the City dialect". Nevertheless he adduced an argument that it could, as he claimed that Midland immigrants included "upper-class

merchants” who affected the speech of the “upper classes” in the City: “the London language as we find it towards the end of the fourteenth century was a class dialect, the language spoken by the upper stratum of the London population”. For reasons he did not give, he discounted trade: “London as a centre of commerce attracted traders from all parts. Some scholars have seen in this fact the chief reason or one of the chief reasons for the dialectal change in the London language, for instance H. C. Wyld, who in *Colloquial English*, p. 8, even suggests that the strong East Midland influence came from the great business centre of Norwich. This cannot of course be accepted”.⁵ However Ekwall also found counterarguments: “I have sometimes wondered whether, and even suggested many years ago in lectures, that the marked East Midland element in the London language may to some extent be bound up with the fact that this part of England was the old Danelaw, where an extensive infusion of Scandinavian blood took place, and where Scandinavian customs left strong traces”.

Was there really a change from “East Saxon” to “East Midland” dialect in London in the fourteenth century? The only features mentioned by Ekwall (1956) were four: certain <a> graphs and <e> graphs in stressed syllables, present plural -e(n), present participle -ing, and pronoun *they* – and no mention of ratios of major to minor variants. Indeed variation posed a problem: “The curious case of the Subsidy of 1307 with its 13 *Meneter* and 13 *Min(e)ter* is an illustration of the variation between old London and Midland forms . . . The material as a whole gives us a glimpse of the flux in the language of early London” (Ekwall 1956: xxx). Ekwall, born a generation after the Neogrammarians, was expecting uniformity. For him, categorical shift from *men-* to *min-* would have indicated categorical shift from Saxon to Anglian. The fact that there were 26 tokens showing both spellings equally was explicable only as change from one to the other. Yet despite his theoretical underpinning causing him to maintain the concept of discrete dialects, his observations of the data were, repeatedly, that there was variation. His data and Neogrammarian theory were at odds, and he had a hard time reconciling the two.

Let us take stock: Morsbach reported that Standard English developed in London and derived from the East Midland dialect. For Ekwall, the label “East Midland” included East Anglia (Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire) and Bedfordshire (also not usually regarded as a Midland county, neighbouring

⁵ Ekwall (1956: lxii). My only suggestion for his outright rejection is that ‘trade’ was thought to be vulgar in the first half of the twentieth century and perhaps Ekwall suffered from this prejudice, coming from an illustrious and prominent family himself. Certainly he assumed that fourteenth-century London Aldermen and Sherriffs were members of the upper class, and that the documents he was analysing – tax lists – reflected upper-class language use.

Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Cambridgeshire and covering part of the Chilterns). Even working with this expanded understanding of the label, Ekwall found that Londoners with locative surnames came predominantly from the surrounding hinterland. Nevertheless he sought to rescue the “East Midland” theory by suggesting that a preponderance of immigrants from this region came from the upper class, assuming that language change was mediated by the upper classes (again, this is not the present-day expectation). However he was not dogmatic about it, also suggesting that features typical of dialects North of London may have entered London speech via “industrial” “freer peasants” from Danelaw areas. A scrupulous scholar, Ekwall discussed motivation, the plusses and the defects of his survey, its preliminary nature, and proffered more than one interpretation.

More recent scholarship is less concerned with macrodialect labels and pays more attention to text-type, as the pragmatics of a text determine the language used. Two recent surveys from the Middle English Local Documents project at the University of Stavanger have shown that parish guild documents were more conservative than other administrative documents from the same date and place (Thengs 2013, Bergstrom 2017; see also Wright 2001b), and one of the findings of the project is that administrative texts show supralocalisation earlier than literary texts. Supralocalisation (meaning the spreading out of variants from centres around the country over time, usually discussed with reference to variants which became near-categorical over a specific region but which were not then adopted in Standard English) is found before standardisation, and it is why Ekwall’s report that “Morsbach found that the language in these texts is on the whole uniform and agrees with the later Standard language” is so startling. A late fourteenth century text can look modern with regard to variant reduction yet look old-fashioned with regard to feature-selection. This is not a paradox: when English became a language of written record, firstly, variants began to be reduced (on the Latin and Anglo-Norman model), and secondly, certain features became selected as majority variants. Which spellings/morphemes were selected as majority variants differed from region to region and text-type to text-type, with some becoming supralocal but not national, and others eventually becoming more widely accepted. This movement from supralocal to national equates to standardisation (although there is more to standardisation than spellings and morphemes). An illustration comes from Bergstrom’s work on administrative texts post 1399 from Cambridge. Cambridge is shown to have been rather advanced when compared with administrative documents from the surrounding areas of East Anglia and further into the Midlands. As well as showing fewer variants, Cambridge texts were considerably more southern in dialect. This is

not due to standardization *per se* – word-final verbal <-th> is present in late medieval Cambridge administrative documents in high ratios, yet it did not last in Standard English.

To return to my discussion of influential scholars: the next was Michael Samuels in *English Studies*, a paper published seven years after Ekwall (1956). Samuels was one of the editors of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* which was to be finished more than two decades later and on which he was working at the time. In this short paper (Samuels 1963 covers thirteen pages but just seven of those pages consist of printed text, the rest being full-size dot maps, diagrams and tables), Samuels classified late medieval London (and other) texts into Types I–IV, introduced the term “Central Midlands dialect”, and the label “Chancery Standard”. He too was not dogmatic, stating, like Ekwall, that his work was preliminary, but he was metaphorical, and it seems that his water metaphor had appeal for generations of literary medievalists: “consultation of any of the large classes of documents at the Public Record Office will show clearly that, until 1430–35, English is the exception rather than the rule in the written business of administration; after that, there is a sudden change, and the proportions are reversed, from a mere trickle of English documents among thousands in Latin and French, to a spate of English documents” (Samuels 1963 [1989]: 70). Inundation aside, this classification of manuscripts into four types has subsequently proved problematical, partly because Samuels did not specify exactly which manuscripts fall into which class, and partly because others do not see the internal cohesiveness he proclaimed. For Type I, he specified “the majority of Wycliffite manuscripts (though by no means limited to them) . . . it becomes apparent that this is a standard literary language based on the dialects of the Central Midland counties”. For Type II he specified just eight manuscripts: Auchinleck MS hands 1 and 3, the Early English Prose Psalter in BL Add. 17376, MS BL Harley 5085, three manuscripts by one scribe: Magdalene College Cambridge Pepys 2498, Bodley Laud Misc. 622 and BL Harley 874, St John’s College Cambridge MS 256, and Glasgow Hunterian MS 250. For Type III he specified a number (but not exactly which) of the documents in Chambers and Daunt (1931) and Furnivall (1882), some Chaucer manuscripts (but not exactly which) “as vouched for by a consensus of the best MSS”, *Piers Plowman* in Trinity College Cambridge B.15.17, and the works of Hoccleve. Type IV “(which I shall call ‘Chancery Standard’)” was specified as “that flood of government documents that starts in the years following 1430. Its differences from the language of Chaucer are well known, and it is this type, not its predecessors in London English, that is the basis of modern written English” (Samuels 1963 [1989]: 67–71). This sounds authoritative, but so far as I can gather from the data presented, it is based on spellings for wordforms

again, -ande/-ende/-inde, any, but, each, gave, given, much, neither, not, old, saw, self, should, stead, such, their, these, they, though, through, while, will, world. Just as Morsbach, Heuser and Ekwall used the term “language” to mean essentially phonology (spellings for vowels in stressed syllables, and consonants, with a considerably smaller amount of space devoted to part-of-speech morphology); so Samuels used it to mean mainly orthography. And methodologically, there are problems: “if we exclude those documents and wills that, on the evidence of their dialectal forms, must have been written by immigrants into London, Type III may still be taken as representative of London English of 1400; but any form of written standard is conspicuous by its absence”. I agree that a written standard is absent from texts written in 1400 but I would like to know Samuels’ principles of exclusion, in order for the result not to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. His wording is extreme: “it was only at the stage represented by Type IV (a stage of London English changed beyond all recognition from that of a century previous) that it was finally adopted by the government offices for regular written use; from then on, it was backed by the full weight of the administrative machine” (Samuels 1963 [1989]: 70–1). The phrases “beyond all recognition” and “the full weight of the administrative machine” are rhetorical overstatements.⁶

Samuels disagreed with Morsbach and Ekwall’s East Midland theory, because his analysis of East Anglian documents for *LALME* showed spellings that differed from those of Types I–IV. Plotting dot maps of major variants (minor variants were ignored) for *they, though, give, gave, their, them*, “notably the so-called northern forms”, he wrote “the nearest point from which they could have spread was in the North Central Midlands”. He then (partially) reported Ekwall (1956): “Professor Ekwall has shown, firstly, that in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, immigration into London was highest from Norfolk, with Essex and Hertfordshire next, and then the remaining Home Counties. . . . But Ekwall has also shown that in the fourteenth century a significant change took place: immigration from Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire increased, that from the Home Counties decreased, while that from Norfolk continued This immigration from the Central Midlands in the fourteenth century amply explains the great difference between our Types II and III . . . as it will explain the further changes from Type III to Type IV (‘Chancery Standard’).” (Samuels 1963 [1989]: 73–4). Again, this sounds authoritative, but Samuels omitted Ekwall’s discussions of the limitations of his survey,

⁶ See Stenroos, this volume, for a refutation of Chancery’s “spate” and “flood” of documents in English.

such as the fact that data was not distributed evenly over the decades between the Norman Conquest and 1360, rendering the deduction that immigration from the Home Counties decreased in the fourteenth century unsafe. Samuels stated that the Central Midlands dialect was “easily understood all over the country”, whereas East Anglian English was “peripheral, and . . . unsuitable as a means of communication with either native Londoners or strangers and immigrants” (Samuels 1963 [1989]: 74). No new evidence was provided for these assertions.

A dense paper packed with ideas, Samuels (1963) was both looking back – disagreeing with Ekwall – and looking forward to *LALME* to come. It is disjointed, and the first footnote explains that it was printed substantially the same as an oral presentation given to a meeting of University Professors in 1962 (explaining oral features such as “flood of documents” and “beyond all recognition”). He gave the caveat that it was interim (“a first attempt”), the project being then ten years into its thirty-four year duration at that point, and I assume the grouping of Types was Samuels’ method of trying to find anchor texts for *LALME*. Anchor texts are those which are irrefutably anchored in time and place to which other texts can be compared, and because the editors discounted the obvious (the explicitly dated and located documents included in the Middle English Local Documents project of 2017, which are usually multilingual), they had to survey all kinds of religious, literary, and other texts and date and locate them on internal and linguistic grounds. There is of course a danger of circularity in this, and Samuels’ assignation of Types and “best” Chaucer texts shows his process of sifting and sorting.

I return to Samuels’ assertion that *they, though, give, gave, their, them* spread from the North Central Midlands. Positing migration as the mechanism by which language change spreads entails identification of a wave of migrants. It is not *prima facie* parsimonious, but there have been points in history when large-scale migrations have occurred. Kerswill (2018) tackles the question of how linguists might identify the point at which a dialect becomes influenced by incomers (that is, when the founder dialect is *swamped*), but rather than conceptualising dialects as discrete entities, he envisages a *dialect landscape*:

a ‘dialect landscape’ consisting of a series of geographically distributed but interlinked communities across which a continuum of language varieties is spoken. . . . Communities are in flux, composed as they are of individuals with overlapping and changing social networks, and boundaries are diffuse. For our limited purposes, namely the actuation and spread of linguistic change, it is useful to see the community as reflecting concentrations of people who are potentially in contact with each other. (Kerswill 2018: 12)

For a dialect to be thus changed, Kerswill states that there needs to be, at a given point in time, a minimum proportion of incomers who have not acquired

the local dialect. He cites studies supporting 50% as this minimum, with additional requirements of a high proportion of children and adolescents, which conditions must persist for at least a dozen years. Trudgill (2011) also cites cases of around 50% of incomers effecting change in natives' speech, with data from Bergen, Norway; Hackney, London; urban Swedish, and native-speaker English in the United States (Trudgill 2011: 57–8, references therein). If we take London's population in 1377 to be about 30,000, then Ekwall's total of 2,890 named immigrants would have been nowhere near enough to make dialect shift plausible.⁷ The conclusion must be that London speech continued, shifting over the years as all language does, and that written Standard English developed as a separate entity.

Back to Morsbach (1888) and Samuels (1963). I have reason to believe that both scholars had the same text open on their desks as they composed their works, despite the 85 year gap between them. This is a text that resonates behind all of the claims discussed so far, and it was published in a source which is no longer a first port of call for linguists. In 1878, the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* printed a long, comprehensive article entitled “English Language”, written by J. A. H. M. I have been unable to consult the Ninth Edition, but by the Eleventh Edition (1910–11), which I have been able to consult, the initials H. M. R. M. had also become appended to this article. These initials belong to no less a figure than James Augustus Henry Murray, together with his daughter Hilda Mary Ruthven Murray.⁸ Morsbach quoted directly from Murray's article of 1878, and Samuels, although not citing it, adheres to its content, for instance passing comment on “the Welshman Pecock”.

7 Unwin (1918: 43): “In 1377 there appear to have been 23,314 lay persons over 14 in London, which suggests a total lay population of about 30,000”. There are 23,314 persons listed in the poll tax of 1377, of which 2,890 equals about 12%. Presumably there were more people in London than appeared on the poll tax list, and more immigrants than those noted by Ekwall, most of whom were located in London between 1250–1350, although weighted towards the later end. ‘The London lay subsidy of 1332: II, Size, wealth and occupations of population’, in *Finance and Trade Under Edward III the London Lay Subsidy of 1332*, ed. George Unwin (Manchester, 1918), pp. 43–50. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/manchester-uni/london-lay-subsidy/1332/pp43-50> [accessed 8 February 2018].

8 Later to become Sir James, Editor in Chief of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Hilda Murray was styled “Lecturer on English Language, Royal Holloway College” in the encyclopaedia but “Lecturer in Germanic Philology” at the college (1899–1915). She was later to become Vice-Mistress of Girton College, University of Cambridge (Thomas 1992: 174). Sir James wrote his 1878 version whilst living at “Sunnyside”, Hammer's Lane, Mill Hill; by 1910 when he and his daughter Hilda revised it, they were living at “Sunnyside”, Banbury Road, Oxford. When Hilda Murray retired from Girton College she and her mother and younger sister moved to “Sunnyside”, Kingsley Green, Haslemere, Surrey.

In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s "English Language" the Murrays give the text of the Proclamation of Henry III "or rather of Simon de Montfort in his name, which . . . has sometimes been spoken of as the first specimen of English". They wrote:

The dialect of this document is more southern than anything else, with a slight midland admixture. It is much more archaic inflectionally than the *Genesis and Exodus* or *Ormulum*; but it closely resembles the old Kentish sermons and *Proverbs of Alfred* in the southern dialect of 1250. It represents no doubt the London speech of the day. London being in a Saxon county, and contiguous to Kent and Surrey, had certainly at first a southern dialect; but its position as the capital, as well as its proximity to the midland district, made its dialect more and more midland. Contemporary London documents show that Chaucer's language, which is distinctly more southern than standard English eventually became, is behind the London dialect of the day in this respect, and is at once more archaic and consequently more southern. . . . During the next hundred years English gained ground steadily. . . . Every reason conspired that this "English" should be the midland dialect. It was the intermediate dialect, intelligible, as Trevisa has told us, to both extremes, even when these failed to be intelligible to each other; in its south-eastern form, it was the language of London, where the supreme law courts were, the centre of political and commercial life; it was the language in which the Wycliffite versions had given the Holy Scriptures to the people; the language in which Chaucer had raised English poetry to a height of excellence admired and imitated by contemporaries and followers. And accordingly after the end of the 14th century, all Englishmen who thought they had anything to say to their countrymen generally said it in the midland speech.

They quoted a passage from the writing of Pecock against the Wycliffites (taken from Skeat): who "has still the southern pronouns *her* and *hem* for the northern *their*, *them*" and "verbal inflections in *-en* in a state of obsolescence". They considered standardisation to be more or less complete by Caxton:

In the productions of Caxton's press . . . the earlier of these have still an occasional verbal plural in *-n*, especially in the word *they ben*; the southern *her* and *hem* of Middle English vary with the northern and Modern English *their*, *them*. . . . By its exclusive patronage of the midland speech, it raised it still higher above the sister dialects, and secured its abiding victory. . . . Modern English thus dates from Caxton."

The Murrays presented a full-page diagram of the history of English, which by means of its layout suggests that Northern English equates to Anglian, Midland English to Saxon, and Southern English to Kentish. Wycliffe, Chaucer and Gower are placed in the "Midland English, Saxon" column with sideways heading "Early Southern and S.W. English", whereas the Proclamation of Henry III of 1258 is in the "Southern English, Kentish" column, with sideways heading "Middle Kentish". The Murrays then surveyed recent work by Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte and A. J. Ellis:

The researches of Prince L. L. Bonaparte and Dr Ellis were directed specially to the classification and mapping of the existing dialects, and the relation of these to the dialects of Old and Middle English. They recognized a *Northern* dialect lying north of a line drawn from Morecambe Bay to the Humber, which, with the kindred Scottish dialects (already investigated and classed [by Murray – *LCW*]), is the direct descendant of early northern English, and a *South-western* dialect occupying Somerset, Wilts, Dorset, Gloucester and western Hampshire, which, with the *Devonian* dialect beyond it, are the descendants of early southern English and the still older West-Saxon of Alfred. This dialect must in the 14th century have been spoken everywhere south of Thames; but the influence of London caused its extinction in Surrey, Sussex and Kent, so that already in Puttenham it had become “far western”. An *East Midland* dialect, extending from south Lincolnshire to London, occupies the cradle-land of the standard English speech, and still shows the least variation from it.”

In this article, Murray laid down all the main concepts: the change from Saxon to Midland, the quoting of the comment from Trevisa’s translation of Higden that midland English was the most comprehensible, the equating of London English with Standard English, adducing as main (only) evidence for the dialect shift personal pronouns in *th-* and verbal plurals in *-n*, and the label “East Midland”, covering ground from south Lincolnshire to London. The Murrays’ article makes for exuberant reading, encompassing the whole of the English language as known at that date. Essentially, it is their adumbration of the standardisation of English that has been repeated so often over the last century.

2 The multilingual background

When the Murrays, Morsbach and Heuser were undertaking their studies a comparative approach was the norm. What is missing from previous discussions of standardisation is the fourteenth and fifteenth-century multilingual background against which English began to be written. Acolado Carnicero (2015) observed that scholars’ datings of “first” writings in English in any given archive vary wildly and can even be contradictory. This is because fourteenth and fifteenth century scribes switched back and forth between languages, so a run of English for several years would then be followed by further decades of Anglo-Norman and Medieval Latin, and oaths and ordinances (for example) would be translated in all three languages. The timespan between first use of English and the switch to monolingual English in a given archive could be more than a hundred years, but in reporting passages of English, systematic notice is rarely taken of surrounding proportions of Medieval Latin and Anglo-Norman. As a rough rule of thumb, from the thirteenth century to the last quarter of the fourteenth, most writing was in Medieval Latin, Anglo-Norman French and mixed-language (by which I mean the system of

codeswitched Medieval Latin/Anglo-Norman/Middle English as used in accounts, inventories, day-books and testimonies). From 1375 to 1440 most writing switched between Medieval Latin, Anglo-Norman, Middle English, and mixed-language. From 1440 to 1500 most writing switched between Medieval Latin, Middle English and mixed-language (that is, Anglo-Norman was used less); and from 1500 onwards most writing was in Neo-Latin and Early Modern English (with a shift away from both the mixed-language system and Medieval Latin and towards monolingualism). From the late fourteenth century to the late fifteenth century, London archives show that use of all four systems was the norm: Medieval Latin, Anglo-Norman, Middle English, and mixed-language. Monolingualism was the exception during this century, with switching occurring within the word, the phrase, the clause, the paragraph; from paragraph to paragraph; from text to text; between text-body, margin, heading, gloss and annotation; and with different text-types following different conventions. The switchover can be characterised as a movement from Medieval Latin, Anglo-Norman and mixed-language, to a transition period of intense switching back and forth, to an eventual outcome of monolingual English and monolingual Neo-Latin. It is not until the sixteenth century that monolingual English settled down as a written norm for numerous purposes, and supralocal varieties still persisted at that date.

The century of intense language switching 1375–1475 co-occurred with a rise in London's involvement in national and international trade, as observed by H. C. Wyld. Wright (2013: 66–71) discusses the locations of debtors owing debts to Londoners in 1329 and 1424.⁹ In 1329, Londoners' debtors lived mainly in the Home Counties, with just a few reaching into Norfolk and Dorset. A hundred years later, Londoners' debtors lived all over England, from Cornwall to the borders. This expansion in trade was due to shifting demand: the Black Death of 1348–9 caused depopulation in England, with a shrunken population exerting less pressure on basic resources and an increased demand for manufactured goods. These goods were supplied by the expanding markets of Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges, with a shift in transport systems causing Antwerp to take over from Bruges as a financial hub. London also became a hub for merchants, national and foreign, buying manufactured woollen cloth. Doing business with people from afar acted as a means of linguistic diffusion, of levelling, of introduction of regional features from elsewhere (present plural *-s*, auxiliary *do*, *-ing*, *are*, were all present in London English but at different stages of their trajectories), and, for foreign

⁹ As identified by the “Metropolitan Market Networks c. 1300–1600” project undertaken at the Centre of Metropolitan History, University of London. Plotted by Keene, Galloway and Murphy, taken from Keene (2000).

merchants, as a catalyst for a learners' target. The rise of Neo-Latin is important because it became a relatively fixed written system at the same time that written Standard English also came to be relatively fixed, as did all the European standards.¹⁰ Trade explains the when, the where, and also why London English is not the same as Standard English. Standardisation does not come about if speakers stay still in one place and remain homogenous, unless it is consciously imposed for political reasons. Trudgill (1986: 107–8) defines a *koiné* as “a historically mixed but synchronically stable dialect which contains elements from the different dialects that went into the mixture, as well as interdialect forms that were present in none”. Standard English can be used as an illustration, with levelling (such as the reduction of adverbial *-liche* to *-ly*, and the loss of regionally-marked *-th*, *-n* and *-s* as plural indicative present-tense markers and the subsequent adoption of zero); elements from different dialects (such as *are*, the *th*-pronouns, third person singular *-s* and auxiliary *do*); and interdialect (such as *-ing* replacing regionally-marked *-and(e)*, *-end(e)*, *-ind(e)*). Koinéisation happens when multidialectal or multilingual speakers need to find common ground, and koinéisation is the underpinning of the standardisation of English – a change from a relatively homogenous usership to a considerably more heterogeneous one.

3 Babies and bathwater

I have been critical of the work of my predecessors yet much from their endeavours is valid. I now pay tribute to their contributions:

James and Hilda Murray: in context, it becomes apparent that their concept of the “East Midlands” was the land stretching from south Lincolnshire in the north to London in the south. Thus they had not envisaged a dramatic dialect shift in London from local south-eastern to the dialect of Northampton or Leicester. Rather, they wrote of a shift in influence from the counties south of London to the counties north of London. There is no need, therefore, to posit migration as an explanation.

Lorenz Morsbach: Morsbach gathered together the London English material later published by Chambers and Daunt: the *Appeal of Thomas Usk*, the *Petition of the Folk of Mercery*, the London guild certificates of 1388–9

¹⁰ Although see Demo (2014) and references therein for diversity within Neo-Latin. Medieval Latin and Anglo-Norman were far less variable than English: by the fifteenth century they were no longer languages learnt naturally in infancy via maternal speech, but had become languages learnt consciously by tuition.

that were written in English. He also included the wills written in English in Furnivall's Early English Text Society selection, and the rest of his material was made up of English passages from *Rotuli Parliamentorum*. These were his "Londoner Urkunden": he read through Medieval Latin archives and pulled out the English as it appeared here and there (remember that this is the century of switching between languages, a simplified schema of the progression being from monolingual Latin, to a tip period of switching, to monolingual English). Morsbach also included what he called state witness (*Staatsurkunden*, mostly taken from the Close Rolls and *Rotuli Parliamentorum*) and parliament witness (*Parlamentsurkunden*, also taken from the *Rotuli Parliamentorum*), showing less variation than the *Londoner Urkunden* – as is to be expected if fewer scribes contributed to the rolls of parliament, a single entity, than to the various wills, petitions and guild certificates. Under *Staatsurkunden* he grouped some extracts as stemming from the *Hof* or *Staatskanzlei*, the head or state chancery. The introduction of chancery to the history of Standard English thus enters from German, but Morsbach made no special claim for it. His technique was to group examples of spellings illustrating vowels in stressed syllables, consonants, nouns, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, and verb morphology, meaning that he presented type variation but not tokens thereof. For example, on page 51 of his *Londoner Urkunden* he presents the spellings "chirche-zerd W 21/23; chirsch-zerd W 84/6. 85/4; cherche-zerd W 67/5; chircheyerd W 132/14; chirche-yerd W 104/8; chircheyerde W 98/6. 99/9; Pouleschirche-yerd W 96/5; aber churchyard W 83/13", where W stands for a will in Furnivall (1882), so that the reader can see the variation but not the ratios. Morsbach informed the reader that Medieval Latin and Anglo-Norman were the norm and English the exception (with Latin continuing as an official language until 1733), and he also noted the relevance of London as the "Centrum des englischen Handels und Verkehrs", the centre of commerce and traffic (Morsbach 1888: 5 fn 2, 7). He also presented Higden's opinion (in Trevisa's translation) that "men of myddel Engeland" were understood better than the "syde longages".

Heuser: Heuser's contribution was to add to Morsbach's local London evidence the house, street and placenames found in Sharpe's (1889) edition of the Hustings Rolls, providing earlier London evidence and revealing further variation. He arranged his material in the same way as Morsbach, so that the reader can see type variation but not token numbers. It is interesting to see that Heuser draws attention to variants *-hethe*, *-huthe*, *-hithe*; *bregge*, *brigge*, *brugge*, *hull*, *hill*, *hell*, *-bury*, *-bery*, *-biry*, *Crepelgate*, *Crupelgate*, *Cripelgate*, so that Ekwall's reduction of his findings to <a> and <e> graphs was in fact highly selective.

Ekwall: Ekwall's compiled a list of immigrants' locative bynames, showing that by this method immigration to London from elsewhere in the country was around 12%, far too low for dialect swamping (contrary to his own interpretation),

and also contributing further evidence of late medieval variation. The Murrays' article is not in Ekwall's bibliography, and it is clear that he did not realise what they had meant by the label "East Midland".

Samuels: Samuels, in seeking to show the many exciting purposes to which the then-forthcoming *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* could in future be put, unsettled the "East Midlands" orthodoxy.

4 Centre of the universe: Rutland

James Murray, writing for the 1878 recension of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, had a book open on his desk as he worked, which deduction I make from the fact that he cited it in his bibliography. It was written by Thomas Laurence Kington-Oliphant (1831–1902), and it was called *The Sources of Standard English*.¹¹ Kington-Oliphant's primary application of the term 'Standard English' was not with regard to phonology, like Morsbach, Heuser and Ekwall, nor orthography, like Samuels, but the word-stock. Thus, for Kington-Oliphant, how many obsolete words a medieval author contained determined how Standard it was (he was for "Teutonic" and agin French and Latin: "Alfred's Teutonic has been replaced by the French and Latin that Tyndale was driven to use, owing to the heedlessness of the Thirteenth Century").¹² His book was published in 1873, and was

¹¹ Born at "Charlton House", Wraxall, Somerset of an English father and a Scottish mother, T. L. Kington-Oliphant M.A. (Oxon), barrister, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, Justice of the Peace, Deputy Lieutenant, wrote his *The Sources of Standard English* at "Charlton House", Wimbledon. It may be relevant that his wife's family was from Lincolnshire. (<http://www.thepeerage.com/p12505.htm#i125048>). The Kington family fortune was derived from slaving (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/44502>).

¹² This is footnote 57 of his Chapter 5; some of his more enjoyable footnotes include: "I remember in Somerset a yoke of oxen called *Good Luck* and *Fortune*"; "I wish that the Parker Society had published Tyndale's works in his own spelling."; "*The Art of Rhetorique*, written by Wilson, about 1550. Can he have had a prophetic glimpse of the *Daily Telegraph* of 1873? [a complaint about inhorn terms, and one of two footnotes in Chapter 5 about the *Daily Telegraph* – *LCW*]; "Of course, I use *nicely* neither in the sense of 1303, nor in that of 1873." [he means 'precisely' – *LCW*]; "*Tendimus in Latium* is a bad watchword for England, whether in religion, in architecture, or in philology."; "I grieve to say that he is guilty of 'on the *tapis*,' a vulgarism more suited to a schoolgirl than to a scholar."; "The Secretary of the Society [E.E.T.S. – *LCW*] is G. Joachim, Esq., St. Andrew House, Change Alley, London. I wish they would print more works written before 1400, and fewer works written after that year." For more on the influence of Kington-Oliphant and Murray, see Matthews (1999: xxx–xxxiii). I do not know whether Kington-Oliphant knew Furnivall, but they were much the same age, both lived in London at the same time and shared a lively written style.

based mainly on the literary and religious medieval texts that had been collected in print at that date. The familiar points rehearsed above – East Midlands, Bishop Pecock, Trevisa, Caxton – are all found within (I quote at length as his delightful style is not easy to reduce):

It may often be remarked that one form of a great speech drives another form before it. Thus, in our own day, the High German is always encroaching on its Northern neighbour the Low German; and the Low German, in its turn, is always encroaching upon its Northern neighbour the Scandinavian. Something of the like kind might have been seen in England six hundred years ago; but with us the Dano-Anglian speech of the Midland was working down Southwards towards London and Oxford all through the Thirteenth Century. Its influence may be seen so early as the Essex Homilies of 1180; many years later we find a still clearer token of the change. In some hundred Plural substantives that had been used by Layamon soon after 1200, the Southern ending in *en* was replaced by the Midland ending in *es*, when Layamon's work came to be written out afresh after 1250. East Midland works became popular in the South, as may be seen by the transcript of the Havelok and the Harrowing of Hell. In the Horn, a Southern work, we find the Present Plural *en* of the Midland verb replacing the older Plural in *eth*. In the Alexander (perhaps a Warwickshire work) the Midland *I, she, they, and beon* encroach upon the true Southern *ich, heo, hi, and beoth*. Even in Kent we find marks of change: in the sermons of 1290 the contracted forms *lord* and *made* are seen instead of *louerd* and *maked*. Already *mid* (cum) was making way for the Northern *with*. This was the state of things when the Handlyng Synne was given to England soon after 1303; it was believed, though wrongly, to be the translation of a work of Bishop Robert's, and it seems to have become the great pattern; from it many a friar and parson all over England must have borrowed the weapons wherewith the Seven Deadly Sins (these play a great part in English song) might be assailed. Another work of Robert Manning's is entitled Medytacyuns of the Soper of our Lorde, a translation from Buonaventura, the well-known oracle of Franciscans abroad. The popularity of these works of the Lincolnshire bard must have spread the influence of the East Midland further and further. We know not when it made a thorough conquest of Oxford, the great stronghold of the Franciscans; but its triumph over the London speech was most slow, and was not wholly achieved until a hundred and sixty years after Manning's first work was begun. That poet, as may be seen by the Table at the end of the foregoing chapter, heralded the changes in English, alike by his large proportion of French words and by his small proportion of those Teutonic words that were sooner or later to drop. . . . It may seem strange that England's new Standard speech should have sprung up, not in Edward the First's Court, but in cloisters on the Nen and the Welland. We must bear in mind that the English Muse, as in the tale of the Norfolk bondman, always leaned towards the common folk; it was the French Muse that was the aristocratic lady. (256–8)

Throughout the Fourteenth Century the speech of the shires near Rutland was spreading in all directions; it at length took possession of Oxford and London, and more or less influenced such men as Wickliffe and Chaucer. Gower, when a youth, had written in Latin and French; when old, he wrote in English little differing from that of Manning. This dialect moreover made its way into the North: let any one compare the York Mysteries of 1350 with the version of them made forty years later, and he will see the influence of the Midland tongue. (259)

The Southern dialect, the most unlucky of all our varieties, gave way before her Mercian sister: Dane conquered Saxon. (260)

Mandeville's language is far more influenced by the Midland forms than that of Davie had been fifty years earlier; in the new writer we find *sche, I, thei, theirs, have, are, and ben*, forms strange to the Thames, at least in 1300; the Southern ending of the Third Person Plural of the Present tense is almost wholly dropped, being replaced by the Midland ending in *en*; even this is sometimes clipped, as also is the *en* of the Infinitive, and the Prefix of the Past Participle. A hundred years would have to pass before these hoary old relics could be wholly swept away from Standard English. (264)

Murray, synthesising for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, omitted mention of Rutland, the Nene and the Welland, but kept the gist; Rutland, the Nene and the Welland being the centre of localities that Kington-Oliphant associated with *Havelok the Dane*, the *Harrowing of Hell* and *Handlyng Synne* – especially the latter.¹³ Here is Kington-Oliphant's own synthesis (320–1):

Twelfth Century	Break-up of the Old English grammar; a variety of dialects prevail for two centuries, with no fixed standard.
Thirteenth Century	Loss of thousands of Old English words, which are slowly replaced by French words.
Fourteenth Century	The New English, or Dano-Anglian, which had long been forming, gains possession of London and Oxford, and is spoken at Court.
Fifteenth Century	The Printing-press fixes the language, which had lost nearly all its inflections.
Sixteenth Century	The Reformation brings Standard English home to all men, and imports many Latin words.

Chapter 5, footnote 46 reads “Mr. Earle tells us (*Philology of the English Tongue*, p. 97) that ‘a French family settled in England and edited the English language;’ he means the Plantagenets. I suspect that the Queen’s English owes more to a Lincolnshire monk, on whom I have bestowed some pains, than to all our Kings put together who have reigned since the year 901.” The book he refers to here was written by John Earle (1824–1903),¹⁴ and section 67 of Earle (1871 [1879]) under the subhead ‘The King’s English’, reads:

¹³ Trudgill (1999), describing the present-day dialects of England, shows that the area with fewest distinguishing dialect features equates to central and eastern Northamptonshire bordering on Rutland, northern Bedfordshire, and central and western Cambridgeshire, which could be described as the lands of the Welland and the Nene.

¹⁴ Priest and Professor of Old English at the University of Oxford (1849–1851 (the chair was tenable only for five years at that time), and then again 1876–1903, his death) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32954>. Earle lived at no. 84, Banbury Road, Oxford; Sir James Murray lived at no. 78.

We have a phenomenon to account for. In the midst of this Babel of dialects there suddenly appeared a standard English language. It appeared at once in full vigour . . . Piers Plowman is in a dialect; even Wiclif's Bible Version may be said to be in a dialect; but Chaucer and Gower write in a speech which is thenceforward recognised as THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, and which before their time is hardly found. This seems to admit of but one explanation. It must have been simply the language that had formed itself in the court about the person of the monarch. . . . If we want to describe the transition from the Saxon State-language of the eleventh century to the Court-English of the fourteenth, and to reduce the description to its simplest terms, it comes in fact to just this: That a French family settled in England, and edited the English language.

So the idea of a change from Saxon to something else had already been introduced in 1871, but this change was simply the addition of Anglo-Norman French lexemes due to the Norman Conquest, not a wholesale shift in dialect. For Earle, the sublimity of Chaucer's English was largely due to its admission of so much French vocabulary, which fact he explained by Chaucer's being a courtier (he called the Proclamation of Henry III of 1258 "overcharged rudeness and broadness", "crude and laboured", and "an artificial conglomerate of confused provincialisms"; he regarded regional dialects to be relatively free from French). Kington-Oliphant offered up Rutland as an alternative, and it is the Rutland hypothesis – passed down to posterity as East Midland – that has reigned ever since.

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Merja Stenroos

2 The ‘vernacularisation’ and ‘standardisation’ of local administrative writing in late and post-medieval England

1 Introduction

1.1 Aims of the chapter

This chapter addresses linguistic usage in local administrative writing in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England, with reference to the processes of ‘vernacularisation’ and ‘standardisation’ often assumed to take place in this period. Most textbooks of the history of English suggest that the fifteenth century saw both the standardisation of written English and its adoption as the language of administration and government; however, recent scholarly work has shown that the evidence of government documents does not, on the whole, agree with these accounts (see e.g. Benskin 2004; Dodd 2011a, 2011b, 2012).

The present study is based on documentary evidence from local administration, that is, from sources outside the central government offices: the records of cities, churches, manors, local courts and private transactions, as sampled in *A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (MELD). It is sometimes assumed that the ‘standardisation’ of English proceeded through this type of texts, a point made most explicitly by Benskin (1992: 75). This chapter considers the question to what extent the MELD materials show developments that might corroborate the ideas of a major fifteenth-century process of anglicisation and standardisation.

The overall finding concerning the first question – that local administrative writing continued to be predominantly Latin – comes as no surprise to those who work on documentary texts. The patterns of use of English and Latin in this period are, it is held here, crucial for understanding what goes on in the development of written English. No attempt is made to trace the usage of individual texts or groups (even though such studies are important): instead, the focus is on the general variability. The study considers

both formulaic phrases and spelling, tracing in detail the spelling variation in five highly frequent lexical items.

Given the scope of the material and the complexity of the questions involved, this study can only present preliminary findings, and much more work is needed. It should also be pointed out that the concepts discussed – vernacularisation and standardisation – are relative and variously defined, and there can thus be no absolute answers: rather, the aim is to discuss some of the claims made in light of the patterns found in the material. The discussion is restricted to administrative materials throughout: no attempt is made to deal with these processes in other kinds of materials, such as literary or scientific texts.

1.2 The textbook ideas of ‘vernacularisation’ and ‘standardisation’

In most introductory textbooks and histories of English, the late Middle English period is marked by two more or less cataclysmic events: the rise of English as a major written language (sometimes referred to as the ‘triumph’ or ‘restoration’ of English, or the ‘vernacularisation’ of text production) and the standardisation of written English. For example, Millward and Hayes (1990: 148) note that, at the end of the Middle English period, ‘[t]he revival of English as the national language of England was assured, and a national standard English based on London speech was being disseminated throughout the country’. The classic history by Strang gives more detail:

Official documents continue to be only exceptionally written in English until 1430, when English becomes the norm and documentation is abundant. It is written in a kind of Standard, Type IV or Chancery Standard, which thereafter reigns supreme.

(Strang 1970 [2015: 63])

In a more recent textbook of the History of English, van Gelderen (2014: 17) states that ‘(a)t the end of the Middle English period (in 1420 to be precise), scribes working at the Chancery began writing in English rather than in Latin’ and notes that ‘Chancery English may be the beginning of a written standard’ (van Gelderen 2014: 18).

These accounts all go back to a single source, the 1963 article by Samuels titled ‘Some applications of Middle English dialectology’. This article, which arguably presents the single most influential narrative of the standardisation of written English, expressly connects this process with the appearance of English in official writing:

Type IV (which I shall call 'Chancery Standard') consists of that flood of government documents that starts in the years following 1430. Its differences from the language of Chaucer are well known, and it is this type, not its predecessors in London English, that is the predecessor of modern written English. . . it was . . . adopted by the government offices for regular written use; from then on, it was backed by the full weight of the administrative machine. (Samuels 1963 [1989: 71])

While Samuels does not claim that English immediately replaced all other languages in government documents, his formulation ('adopted by the government offices for regular written use') does suggest a major, irreversible change. Samuels further claims that the English adopted by the government offices represented a specific, definable variety, the predecessor of 'modern written English'.

Samuels' ideas have had an enormous influence on scholarly views of the standardisation of English, and they are repeated in virtually all later textbooks (see Wright 1996 and Chapter 1.). A highly influential account based on Samuels' theory was developed by Fisher (1977, 1979, 1992, 1996), who added the idea that the 'Chancery Standard' was enforced through deliberate control, as part of government policy. Through Fisher's work, a whole generation of scholars were taught that the 'Chancery Standard' was imposed by Chancery as a national standard of English writing. As adopted in textbooks, this idea sometimes seems to owe more to modern assumptions of standardisation than to actual historical evidence:

[T]he emergence of a new standard language began to re-institute a linguistic norm for written supraregional English. This development was a natural consequence of the acceptance of English in public domains, and was speeded up by the change-over to English as the Chancery language in 1430. It is important to realise that this process almost automatically devalued the use in writing of all forms that were locally or otherwise deviant. . . Obviously, cases of deliberate neglect of the pressure towards conforming were rare. (Görlach 1999: 459–60)

It may be noted that Görlach's narrative has travelled far from Samuels' original, far more guarded, account: the adoption of English from the late 1430s has become a change-over in 1430, and the beginning standardisation has become a 'linguistic norm'.

Later work has adjusted many of Samuels' premises. It is now clear that the adoption of English in government documents was neither general nor sustained (Dodd 2011a, 2011b, 2012), and that the English produced by the government departments, including Chancery, shows highly variable usages (Benskin 2004: 31–33). Accordingly, the idea of a regulated and enforced 'Chancery Standard' is no longer generally accepted, and most scholars see the process of standardisation as a considerably more complex and gradual one.

While Samuels saw standardisation as a direct consequence of the adoption of English in government documents, he did not elaborate on the spread of the standard forms. Benskin, in another classic paper, points out that we cannot talk about standardisation until such a usage has spread to different parts of the country:

It is... in its adoption as a second-learned competence that the language of the capital qualifies as a national standard at all: the displacement of local conventions is not an epiphenomenon, but standardisation itself. Without attention to provincial usage, 'the rise of standard English' simply cannot be understood, and it is above all in administrative and legal writings that the early standard appears. (Benskin 1992: 75)

Benskin sees the usage of the local administrative documents throughout the country as the decisive *locus* of standardisation. Other scholars have called in question the entire idea of a single origin of Standard English, whether as government usage or another specific model variety (e.g. Wright 2000a: 6; Hope 2000: *passim*; see also 4.1 below). However, the idea that English administrative documents functioned as a major medium of standardisation has not been seriously called into question.

A *Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (MELD) has now made available a large sample of local administrative texts from the period 1399–1525. This material makes it possible to start addressing the questions of 'vernacularization' and 'standardisation' beyond the scope of a single archive or text type: to what extent, and when, did English supplant French and Latin as the language of administration outside central government, and how far does the evidence support a fifteenth-century process of standardisation in the written English of local administration?

2 The material: Middle English local documents

The texts concerned here are the kind of texts that were referred to as 'documentary texts' in the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (McIntosh, Samuels and Benskin 1986; henceforth LALME), often in contrast with 'literary texts'. Documentary texts were described in LALME (I: 40) as 'legal instruments, administrative writings, and personal letters: the type of material that is calendared by historians, likely to be of known date and local origins'. Because of their connection to specific localities, this type of texts were used as 'anchor texts' in LALME, providing the initial framework for localisation. More recently, historical sociolinguists in particular have developed an interest in these practically oriented texts

as linguistic evidence in themselves, precisely because they represent the linguistic output of language users in a specific historical context.

A *Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (MELD) defines documentary texts as follows:¹

- a) they relate to a specific situation at a specific point of time, involving specific people, whether or not all of these are explicitly stated (for example, we may not know the precise year when a letter was written, but we know that it relates to that precise moment of time and no other)
- b) they have a pragmatic function – transferring values, recording a decision, communicating information or whatever – not an aesthetic or scholarly or didactic function.

This definition includes a wide range of administrative and private texts, including wills, sales, accounts, inventories, receipts, letters and all kinds of memoranda. It excludes such practically oriented texts as recipes or law texts, which are meant to have a general applicability: however, local ordinances, such as guild rules, are included in MELD as long as they are dated and refer to a specific, geographically and institutionally defined group. Most documentary texts are connected to a specific geographical location or area. Such connections can be of three main kinds: an explicit localizing clause ('given at x'), the people or places referred to, or the physical context of a text, such as a town cartulary. As used here, the term 'local document' refers to texts that show any of these kinds of local affiliation. This excludes documents produced by the central government offices, but includes the local documents that were produced in London: conveyances and letters by Londoners, church accounts, municipal declarations and memoranda.

By far most documentary texts from this period may be defined as administrative: personal letters are the main exception, but even they are most often written for a specific, practical purpose, such as requesting an action or conveying information. The texts represent a range of domains and institutions, including manorial, monastic, ecclesiastical, commercial, academic, legal and municipal administration as well as private papers. Most of this type of texts are held in county record offices and municipal archives; others are found in university and cathedral libraries and some remain in private collections.

For the compilation of MELD, the team visited 82 archives and identified more than five thousand documentary texts from the period 1399–1525, written in or containing English. The so far compiled corpus covers the whole of England, with a few texts from bordering areas of Wales; altogether it includes 2,017 texts from 766

¹ For a fuller description of the corpus and of local documentary texts in general, see the MELD Introduction (<http://www.uis.no/meld>).