

The Question of the 'Standardisation' of Written English in the Fifteenth Century

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The present thesis attempts to reconsider the widely held assumption found in the histories of the English language, namely, that the English Chancery was the source and the cause of the standardisation of the English language which occurred in the fifteenth century.

The thesis considers how the standardisation of the English language is presently described in a number of textbooks. It questions the role of the late medieval English Chancery as an agent of standardisation, and the status of the so-called 'Chancery English' as the early standardised form of English.

The account of the standardisation of the English language is confusing and remains unsatisfactory. The thesis identifies problems associated with current explanations regarding the 'emergence' of Standard English in the fifteenth century, and discusses some reasons why some inconsistencies have been overlooked. Problems arise when researchers try to judge the changes evident in fifteenth-century English by employing modern values and ideas on standardisation which do not apply to late medieval English. This anachronistic practice is hazardous, since there is little consensus over the issue of Standard English even in the present-day context and Standard English is a matter of fierce controversy. The modern concept of standardisation and Standard English are examined and the change in the written English of the fifteenth century is reconsidered in the light of the contemporary understanding of a standard language.

It is further suggested that the changes found in written English of the fifteenth century could be more accurately described by taking into account the effects of dialect contact. Some linguistic features of written texts from Yorkshire and East Anglia are considered from the contact-based approach rather than seeing the changes as manifestations of enforced 'standardisation'.

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Abbreviations

BL The British Library

LALME *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, McIntosh et al.
(1986).

ME Middle English

NRO Norfolk Record Office

OED *The Oxford English Dictionary*

PDSE Present-day Standard English

PRO The Public Record Office

SE Standard English

1 Introduction

1.1 Aims of the Thesis

The present thesis attempts to reconsider the widely held assumption found in current linguistic textbooks, namely that the English Chancery was the source and the cause of the standardisation of the English language and that this occurred in the fifteenth century. The majority of books on the histories of English point out that ‘during the 15th century an official standard began to emerge’ (Fisher, Richardson and Fisher 1984: 27). I shall consider why this view has been very influential in discussions of the history of the English language and highlight problems associated with this kind of description.

There has been a renewed interest in questions of standardisation and Standard English in the past decade. For example, Perera (1994) writes of a ‘debate’ on Standard English, a ‘debate’ which appears to be ‘widening’ (Bex and Watts 1999). The current ‘debate’ on Standard English tends to be a political one (for an overview see Cameron 1995), and is fast becoming a moral one, increasingly personal in tone and with strong language (Honey 1997; Trudgill 1998; Crowley 1999). Although the ‘debate’ concerning present-day Standard English is outside the context of the present thesis, the existing ‘debate’ has demanded a more careful look at the processes of standardisation and the meaning and the use of the term ‘Standard English’. In this respect, the definition and the use of ‘Standard English’ in historical linguistics need to be reconsidered as they

are contributing to the confusion and therefore remain unsatisfactory. It will be emphasised in chapter 2 of the present thesis, that even if the nature of 'debate' on Standard English itself is outside the context of the present thesis, its effects are not. It will be pointed out that modern concepts regarding standardisation, which include linguistic, social and political factors, have shaped how changes in fifteenth-century written English have been perceived. In this respect the thesis is in agreement with J. Milroy, who states:

Yet, there is no doubt that language standardization is a vitally important area to investigate, because, in one way or another, it affects us all (1987: vii).

The present-day 'standard' English 'debate' calls for a more careful consideration of the standardisation process of fifteenth-century written English than has hitherto been given in scholarly discussions.

I shall focus on some of the processes of written linguistic change seen in spelling and morphology in the fifteenth century with selected examples from the Yorkshire and the East Anglia regions and discuss whether changes found could be accurately viewed as 'standardisation'. The language of these two regions is of interest and merit careful study since they are areas which are said to display regionally distinct characteristics in written English of the fifteenth century (Lucas 1973; Beadle 1977; Blake 1979; McIntosh 1983; Lass 1992). The focus of the study is to see if the reduction in the regional forms is due to imitation and adherence to a 'Standard' English model. If the findings from the linguistic study do not reveal conformity to a certain 'standard', then an alternative explanation needs to be sought.

The present thesis considers the processes of linguistic change which undoubtedly took place in the fifteenth century and suggests that many changes are induced by contact.

1.2 ‘Standardisation’ in the Fifteenth Century?

It has been noted that written English of the fourteenth century displays strong dialectal and regional language, but such regionality is much less evident in the written English of the fifteenth century (Davis 1952: 95; Samuels 1981:43; Smith 1992: 56; Blake 1992a: 13; Baugh and Cable 1993: 187). Was this due to ‘standardisation’ in the fifteenth century? Many scholars seem to agree that it was so. This chapter will begin by relating some of the comments found in current textbooks regarding the rise of written ‘Standard’ English. They are listed below:

Official documents continue to be only exceptionally written in English until 1430, when English becomes the norm and documentation becomes abundant. It is written in a kind of Standard, Type IV or Chancery Standard, which thereafter reigns supreme (Strang 1970: 163).

The new standardised variety... was constructed in the fifteenth century and... is now called Chancery Standard or Samuels’ Type IV (Blake 1996: 172).

Standard English emerged ‘naturally’ in the fifteenth century from a variety of regional English dialects, largely because it was the variety used by the Court and the influential merchants of London (Holmes 1992: 83).

The standardisation of the written language which took place during the fifteenth century was in part the product of the organisation of a department of government to write its documents in a relatively consistent form of English to replace the French ‘standard’ to which it had hitherto adhered (Burnley 1989: 37).

Out of this variety of local dialects there emerged toward the end of the fourteenth century a written language that in the course of the fifteenth won general recognition and has since become the recognized standard in both speech and writing (Baugh and Cable 1993: 187).

My point is that Chancery English was created by government officials as the language of government, business, and literature in the fifteenth century (Fisher 1996: 10).

The Chancery (originally *chancelery*) was the Court of the Lord Chancellor, and the written English that developed there in the 15th century was to become a standard, both in its style of handwriting ('Chancery hand') and in its vocabulary and grammar, because the use of English in administrative documents, rather than French, was re-established after about 1430 (Freeborn 1998: 247).

A major reason for the standardization of the Chancery Standard was that William Caxton adopted it, probably in about 1476... (Fennell 2001: 125).

A written standard English began to emerge during the 15th century... (Crystal 1995: 54).

To summarize in broad terms, it is usually said that the end of the Middle English period is indicated by (amongst other things) the advent of printing in the second half of the fifteenth century and by the emergence of that which came to be known as Standard English, which means that our modern perceptions of British English, of crucially, a central Standard and its deviant dialects, can be traced back thus far. The reasoning is that before the materializing of modern British Standard English everything was different, for there was no norm, and no evaluative discrimination of dialects. Before the end of the Middle English period, the story goes, there were only regional dialects of English... This is an appealing story, but it is beset with problems (Penhallurick and Willmott 2000: 14).

As evident from the citations above, many textbooks of the history of the English language in current use point to the fifteenth century as the period during which English language was 'standardised' or even as the time Standard English emerged. The basis of present-day Standard English has been linked to the medieval Chancery. In recent years, this view has gained wide acceptance. This is

clear from the trend in which the authors of the student textbooks on the history of the English language have found it necessary to make emendations and add discussions pointing to the fifteenth-century Chancery as the source of the present-day Standard in their newer editions. Some authors have worded it rather tentatively (see Leith 1996 below), but this trend of discussing the role of the fifteenth-century Chancery in shaping the English language indicates that it has become impossible for scholars to ignore this view. For example, John Fisher, in the introduction to his book entitled *The Emergence of Standard English* (1996) comments on this trend:

Meanwhile, it is gratifying to see the idea of a fifteenth-century institutionalization of English becoming more widely accepted. In the third edition of *A History of the English Language*, Thomas Cable added to Baugh's text that 'a factor more difficult to assess is the influence which the Chancery clerks may have had [upon the establishment of a London standard]. By the middle of the century they had developed a fairly consistent variety of London English in both spelling and accent, and as the language of official use it was likely to have had some influence in similar situations elsewhere' (194). Cable cites the second essay [Fisher 1977] in this collection and goes on to discuss the influence of printing. In the fourth edition, he adds further material about Chancery influence on the development of language: 'This influence emanating from London can be seen in the variety of English used in documents of the national bureaucracy as written by the clerks of Chancery. By the middle of the century a fairly consistent variety of written English in both spelling and grammar had developed, and as the language of official use it was likely to have influence in similar situations elsewhere' (190) (Fisher 1996: 7-8).

Freeborn (1998: 249-50), in his second edition of *From Old English to Standard English*, has added a new section on 'Chancery English'. Leith (1996: 131) takes care not to call 'Chancery English' a standard, but discusses 'Chancery English' as a distinct variety of late Middle English nonetheless. He states:

By Bokenham's time [c1440], English was increasingly becoming the automatic choice for documents emanating from the crown. But it was a particular variety of English, essentially a London variety of the south-east Midlands dialect. A written form of this was developed by scribes working in that part of the royal administration known as Chancery. Chancery English - as the variety of English used for written documents of a very specific kind was called - was to a large extent less subject to the kind of internal variation characteristic of earlier kinds of Middle English... (Leith 1996: 130).

In his 1997 second edition of *A Social History of English*, Leith does not single out 'Chancery English' as the precursor of the modern standard, but nevertheless introduces a fifteenth-century Chancery document in a new chapter with a collection of sample texts. In the new chapter, he identifies 'Chancery English' as 'a variety of formal written English for which scribes made a selection of usage, which were then regularised' (1997: 228-29).

Descriptions of Standard English appearing in the fifteenth century have been founded on anachronistic premises which do not apply to the late medieval period. These presuppositions include the role and nature of printing in the fifteenth century, the notions of prestige, standard ideology, and the distinction between written and spoken English. These issues will be examined and questioned in the context of the fifteenth century situation in chapter 2.

The question of the standardisation of English occurring in the fifteenth century and 'Chancery English' as being that early standard are two related, but separate, issues. They will be considered individually in the chapters which follow. Below is a brief summary of the chapters in the rest of the present thesis.

1.3 Overview of the Rest of the Thesis

Chapter 2: The processes involved in standardisation and the characteristics found in a ‘standard’ language will be discussed. Based on the definitions of ‘Standard English’, the question of whether a ‘standard’ existed in the fifteenth century will be considered. Some problems concerning the use of the term ‘standard’ English will be addressed. Current descriptions of ‘standard’ English in the fifteenth century suffer from strong ideological influences from both past and present.

Chapter 3: ‘Chancery English’ and the claims for ascribing the development of ‘Standard English’ to the fifteenth-century Chancery will be considered. Some problems associated with this view will be pointed out.

Chapter 4: This chapter suggests an alternative approach to understanding and describing the changes in the written English of the fifteenth century, which is based on a contact-induced change. In particular, there will be a focus on the process of dialect levelling. Other features of dialect contact which are considered include accommodation and reallocation.

Chapter 5: Aims and a brief description of the methodology for language studies in chapters 6 and 7 are outlined. A key area to be studied is the way in which variation in morphology and spelling is reduced in fifteenth-century texts. It is emphasised that the changes evident are different from prescriptive standardisation, which is enforced from above and admits no variation.

Chapter 6: A study of variation and change from some selected written materials from late medieval Yorkshire. Texts under consideration include letters from the Plumpton letter collection, wills from Yorkshire, civic records and other documents from York.

Chapter 7: A study of variation and change from selected materials from late medieval East Anglia. Texts considered in this chapter include letters from the Paston letter collection, civic records from Norwich and Lynn, a grammatical treatise and wills from East Anglia.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

2 Standardisation and the English Language in the Fifteenth Century

2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2

The opening chapter has outlined some descriptions found in current textbooks of the history of English language regarding the ‘emergence’ of Standard English and many hold that Standard English appeared in the fifteenth century. The aim of this chapter is to unravel the problems associated with this widely held assumption. It seems that claims to Standard English in the fifteenth century have been made without due consideration of the processes involved in the standardisation of a language. This chapter argues that it is not possible to make claims to a standard language unless it undergoes standardisation and this is a complex and a continuous process (see also Milroy and Milroy 1999: 19, in which they argue that standardisation is a more complicated process than ordinarily understood).

I shall investigate some characteristics of a standard variety, look at how Standard English has been defined and consider some processes involved in the ‘standardisation’ of the English language. The application of the term ‘standardisation’ is also re-examined, as not all the processes of standardisation are relevant to written English in the fifteenth century. A strong ideological influence in the discipline of linguistics has affected how language histories have been perceived, including the standardisation of the English language. It is

suggested in this chapter that describing a ‘Standard English’ language in the fifteenth century is inappropriate and misleading.

The first half of the present chapter involves a theoretical discussion of standardisation and Standard English. The latter half (§2.4 onwards) deals with the question of standardisation in the context of the fifteenth century.

2.2 Standard English

2.2.1 Defining Standard English

It would be useful to have a definition of what ‘Standard English’ is, but it appears that there is little consensus on this matter. The *Oxford Companion to the English Language* makes the following statement concerning ‘Standard English’:

A widely used term that *resists easy definition* but is used as if most educated people nonetheless know precisely what it refers to (McArthur 1992: 982; Italics mine).

Another textbook description refers to it as an unidentifiable linguistic phenomenon:

Standard English remains something of an ideal, an imaginary form of English that is often rhetorically appealed to but never clearly identified. Standardization is thus not simply a linguistic fact but an ongoing process and an ideological struggle (Leith and Graddol 1996: 139).

It is a paradox that, although there is said to be a ‘debate’ on Standard English (Perera 1994) and discussions of Standard English continue, there is little study regarding the nature of standardisation. It seems that knowledge concerning standardisation is taken for granted and discussions of standardisation which is said to have occurred in the fifteenth century are built on widely received assumptions. What J. Milroy has stated in 1987, still holds true:

In modern linguistics, the phenomenon of language standardization has not been a central interest, and it is noticeable that linguistic scholars have often been content with *ad hoc* and incomplete definitions of 'standard language' (p.vii).

Therefore the editors of a book discussing the 'widening debate' on 'Standard English' admit:

It seemed to us that there was a need to clarify and bring into focus the diverse positions held by a number of the contributors to the debate... However, when we approached potential contributors, it soon became apparent that there was no general consensus as to what constituted 'Standard English'... (Bex and Watts 1999: 1).

One reviewer of the above book describes succinctly the present situation in describing 'Standard English':

Other readers might share my sense of institutional frustration at how far sociolinguistics is from being able to present a consistent and persuasive set of principles and perspectives on SE (Coupland 2000: 623).

The complexity of describing 'Standard English' is compounded by the fact that there are several issues at stake, which are dependent on the manner of its definition. Some aspects of standardisation are empirical and some are ideological. The definition of Standard English can have far-reaching effects on the different groups of people in the present-day context. Each group has its own interest in Standard English for various reasons. Some groups and their stance concerning Standard English are briefly listed below.

2.2.1.1 Education in the Schools

Some who are involved in education stress the importance of Standard English as a key to academic and social success. The attitude displayed by Carter below, for

example, is probably closest to the ideal of standardisation which promotes uniformity in order to avoid ambiguity in communication:

There is little doubt that standard written English should be taught in schools and that curriculum documents are right to stress its importance. Standard English consists of a set of forms which are used with only minimal variation in written English and in a range of formal spoken contexts in use around the world... Standard English should, therefore, be taught and, where appropriate and at appropriate developmental stages, taught explicitly, for not to learn to write standard English is to be seriously disadvantaged and disempowered (Carter 1999: 163).

There is a heavy bias toward written English compared to spoken English. As Milroy and Milroy specify (1999: 55), written English has been valued in education, primarily because of its formal usage in keeping records and facilitating communication over long distances and long periods of time. As writing is not a 'natural' activity in the way that speech is, writing skills have to be learned through instruction (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 55). Therefore, mastering of writing skills, which include the adherence to the rules of grammar and spelling, have been linked with academic, and in turn, social success.

2.2.1.2 Class and the Social Questions

During the nineteenth century, 'standard' spoken English became strongly associated with one's social status and class (see Crowley (1989) and Mugglestone (1995) for contemporary comments). This sentiment is still harboured by some today and continues to influence how people view Standard English:

Questions of 'gentlemanliness', 'style', 'taste', 'good-breeding' were at stake in the debate concerning 'standard' spoken English and, more importantly, these questions were entangled

in the web of social signification that clustered around the question of class (Crowley 1989: 149).

Despite the fact that such social judgements were concerned with spoken English, ‘standard’ English and class have become so intertwined that the issue of class and social status has dominated Standard English ‘debate’ in both spoken and written English in the present context. Therefore, Standard English, to some, denotes far more than just uniformity of language and orthography. It is highly symbolic, as explained below:

It is clear... that the ‘standard’ spoken language did not refer to a common or uniform usage but to a particular spoken form belonging to a specific group which was to be taken as a standard to be emulated and as an authoritative exemplar to be consulted in times of doubt. The educated and the civilised are the ‘best speakers’ and their language is a crucial signifier of their social status (Crowley 1989: 149).

2.2.1.3 Prescriptive Views and the Moral Question

Prescriptivism concerning the English language was rife in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and it continues to exist today. Those who voiced their opinions have been called ‘Jeremiahs’ (Pinker 1984: 384-85) and as the ‘self-appointed guardians’ (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 8). Such critics go beyond recommending prescriptive rules of grammar in an educational context. The discussion by the language ‘guardians’ has led to questions regarding general morality, in which the decline in the ‘correct’ use of Standard English has been linked to an increase in criminality (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 41). I cite a comment from the then Head Master of Westminster School:

The overthrow of grammar coincided with the acceptance of the equivalent of creative writing in social behaviour. As nice points of grammar were mockingly dismissed as pedantic and irrelevant, so was punctiliousness in such matters as honesty.

responsibility, gratitude, apology and so on (*Observer*, 7 February 1982, cited in Milroy and Milroy 1999: 41).

Standard English is often assigned a certain level of ‘excellence’ and therefore other moral judgements are easily directed toward the standard and non-standard uses of English. Whether linguists acknowledge this or not, it seems to be the case at present, that Standard English and moral and social values are inseparable. In addition, Cameron stresses that ‘grammar’ has a metaphorical significance to some, so that:

...conservatives use ‘grammar’ as the metaphorical correlate for a cluster of related political and moral terms: *order*, *tradition*, *authority*, *hierarchy* and *rules* (Cameron 1995: 95; Italics in original).

Cameron concludes that ‘verbal hygiene and social or moral hygiene are interconnected; to argue about language is indirectly to argue about extra-linguistic values’ (1995: 114).

2.2.1.4 In Countries Where ‘New Englishes’ are Spoken

Outside the UK and the United States, there seems to be a mixture of opposing sentiments with regard to Standard English. In places where English is taught as a second language or a foreign language, Standard English is useful as a model to teach to students. On the other hand, there is some resistance to the ideology representing Standard English in countries where the so-called ‘new Englishes’ are spoken. This is expressed by Preisler:

In an international context, Standard English is associated, in particular with the standards of Britain and North America. Thus, by implication, it challenges the autonomy of all the other Englishes in the World (1999: 239-40).

Such concerns about the status of Standard English have led to political discussions of language and the question of 'Standard' English has been described as a 'struggle' (Parakrama 1995: 1-6).

2.2.1.5 Linguists' Views

Most linguists maintain that 'Standard English is a dialect... simply one variety of English among many... unlike other dialects, Standard English is a purely social dialect' (Trudgill 1999: 123-24).

It seems that linguists have reacted against the notion of correctness and prescriptivism from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by their comments which attempt to separate linguistic and social aspects of Standard English, for example:

In social terms, linguistic forms which are not part of standard English are by definition non-standard. Because the standard dialect is always the first to be codified, it is difficult to avoid defining other dialects without contrasting them with the standard... But it should be clear that there is nothing linguistically inferior about non-standard forms (Holmes 1992: 145).

A standard dialect has no particular linguistic merits, whether in vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation (Holmes 1992: 84).

At the level of language system, arguments that one language or dialect is linguistically superior to another are generally very difficult to sustain... General linguists, therefore, believe that it is pointless to argue in these terms. Considerations of superiority or inferiority, beauty or ugliness and logicity or illogicality in usage are held to be irrelevant at the level of language system, although they may be relevant at the level of use (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 13).

Linguists have been keen to distance themselves from the prescriptive attitudes to language. As a result, they have tended to disregard such attitudes (for example,

Trudgill 1999) by negating such views, or by condemning them as in the case of Trask (1995: 170).

2.2.2 Standard English: Spoken and Written

The previous section outlined the various points of view which are associated with ‘Standard’ English. In discussing ‘Standard’ English, it is also necessary to delineate the two varieties of the English language, which are the spoken and the written varieties.

The ‘imaginary’ and the ‘ideological’ aspect of Standard English is more akin to the spoken variety of Standard English. It is acknowledged that written English is easily standardised (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 19), and many definitions of Standard English only deal with English in the written mode, as spoken English never achieves standardisation. When discussing Standard English, the spoken and the written varieties cannot be considered together as each variety has different properties, although these two facets of the language are inextricably linked. The characteristic of the written Standard English is said to be as follows:

In the written mode it [Standard English] refers to the fixity of spelling, lexicon and grammar which derives from the work of the prescriptivist writers of the eighteenth century (Smith 1996: 65).

A key feature of Standard English is its uniformity, and strictly speaking, ‘standardisation does not tolerate variability’ (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 19). Therefore, a variety which admits variation should not really be regarded as a ‘standard’ language.

With regard to spoken Standard English (which is often understood to be the Received Pronunciation in the case of Britain¹), it is not a fixed entity, but is said to be a 'focus' (Smith 1996: 66), so that in the words of Smith:

Individual speakers tend to a greater or lesser extent to conform to Received Pronunciation usage, but no one of them can be said to demonstrate every characteristic of the accent (1996: 66).

It is not possible to conform fully in the use of the Received Pronunciation, because 'it is even now not fully described' (Smith 1996: 65). It seems that the spoken 'standard' was never a standard in the strict sense (see § 2.3 concerning the properties of a standard), but this has been overlooked:

Variation in fact appears to dominate the 'standard' since local, diachronic and idiolectal variation all militate against the achievement of the 'perfection' of 'spoken English'. However, empirical variation did not prevent Sweet (as it had not Ellis) from using the term 'standard English' as though there were a uniform, recognisable and standard form of spoken speech (Crowley 1989: 137).

Milroy and Milroy also stress below that 'standardisation' in the absolute sense cannot be achieved with reference to spoken English, in which a standard variety is more of an ideal than reality:

Standardisation is motivated in the first place by various social, political and commercial needs and is promoted in various

¹ L. Milroy (1999a: 178-83) points out that in there exists a different ideology in the case of the United States.

Smith also states:

With reference to the spoken mode, standard language is an extremely complex and notoriously loaded term. A frequent definition of standard spoken English is that it is a prestigious system of grammar and lexis which can be used by any speaker in communities where English is the first language, available for any register of language (as opposed to varieties which are often termed 'restricted' or 'dialectal'). In the British Isles, it can be, but need not be, expressed in Received Pronunciation... (1996: 65).

ways, including the use of the writing system, which is relatively easily standardised; but absolute standardisation of a spoken language is never achieved... Therefore it seems appropriate to speak more abstractly of standardisation as an *ideology*, and a standard language as an idea in the mind rather than a reality - a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 19; Italics in original).

Even though a standard in the form of spoken English is not easy to describe (or impossible, in the view of Milroy and Milroy above), one cannot ignore the fact, or the reality that, in the present-day British context, people perceive standardness in terms of accents (Upton 2000: 71). Therefore, it is argued that a spoken variety has its place in the discussions of present-day Standard English:

We must of course recognize at once that there is a sense in which matters of accent are peripheral to a discussion of a standard, in that, as countless commentators note, it is possible to speak a standard variety in a non-standard accent. Nevertheless, the severance of accent from other linguistic features is never complete, particularly when assessments of 'correctness' are the primary objective (Upton 2000: 75).

Although the present thesis is concerned with written English, some references to spoken Standard English are also included. This is because the written English of the fifteenth century resembles the spoken variety in that its usage was not fixed, but displayed focused use (Smith 1996: 65-66).

The written Standard English and what people perceive as Received Pronunciation in Britain did not develop simultaneously. Standard English is thus described as being 'schizophrenic' in its progress (Fisiak 1994: 146).

Before I discuss how the term 'standard' has been applied in describing the 'standardisation' of the English language, certain features necessarily associated with a 'standard' variety need to be established. The following section will begin with an overview of some of the processes of standardisation.

2.3 Features of Standardisation and Standardness

2.3.1 Processes Involved in Standardisation

It is the contention of the present thesis that standardisation does not occur naturally and inevitably. Weinreich states that:

STANDARDISATION could easily be used to denote a process of more or less conscious, planned, and centralized regulation of language... In the standardisation process, there is a division of functions between regulators and followers, a constitution of more or less clear-cut authorities (academics, ministries of education, *Sprachvereine*, etc.) and of channels of control (schools, special publications, etc.) (1954: 396; Capitalisation in original).

It is noted above (§ 2.2.1) that there is no consensus for the definition of the term ‘Standard English’ at present. Similarly, there are varying opinions as to what constitutes a process of language standardisation. Trudgill remarks:

Standardisation, too, appears to be a relatively uncontroversial term, although the terminology employed in the discussion of this topic is by no means uniform (1999: 117; Italics original).

Four main features of a standard language identified by Einar Haugen over 30 years ago in 1966 still remain important in this discussion and are a useful starting point. He identifies (1966: 933):

- selection of norm
- codification of form
- elaboration of function
- acceptance of community

The above features and other characteristics associated with standardisation are briefly described below.

2.3.1.1 Selection of Norm

A *selection of norm* indicates the process of selecting a variety to serve as an official language. This is usually an ‘entirely political decision’ (Holmes 1992: 113). In many countries, this has involved selecting one variety from the various existing indigenous languages and dialects. In the case of a newly independent nation, the language of the former colonisers would not be conducive as its national language, even if it may serve as a lingua franca (Haugen 1966: 932). Often, a neutral status of a variety is seen as an important factor, so that the selection process is not seen to favour one region or a tribe above another. It sometimes requires an artificial creation of a variety as in the case of modern Norway. In the case of English, the language was never officially selected or proclaimed to serve as the national language for Britain (Cheshire 1991: 14), and perhaps because of this, many regard the standardisation of the English language simply as a ‘natural’ process (cf. §2.4.4). Some also consider the eventual use of English in an official capacity as the deliberate ‘selection’ of English over French and Latin and that this ‘selection’ was politically motivated (see §2.4.3 below).

Selection is but one aspect of the standardisation process. In order to attain standardisation, more is required than an availability of one variety as a national standard, as noted below:

Linguistic standardisation involves more than a conviction that one variety of a language is preferable to all others. It requires *conscious regulation* of spelling, grammar and vocabulary (Bourcier 1978: 179-80; Italics mine).

2.3.1.2 Codification of Form

The *codification of form* involves regularising grammar and spelling. Standardisation demands uniformity of usage and this is an essential process. In some cases, the vocabulary needs to be enlarged and recorded in the form of a dictionary. The role of the dictionary is thus described:

The dictionary is the exemplary result of this labour of codification and normalization. It assembles, by scholarly recording, the totality of the linguistic resources accumulated in the course of time and, in particular, all the possible uses of the same word... (Bourdieu 1991: 48).

The dictionary alone, however, is not sufficient to bring about the uniformity of spelling. This is evident from the dual usage (spelling codified in his dictionary and also his own ‘epistolary’ spelling which did not conform to the dictionary) of the lexicographer, Samuel Johnson himself (Osselton 1984; cf. §2.4.3, footnote 7).

2.3.1.3 Elaboration of Function

The *elaboration of function* requires that the capacity of the newly selected standard language is found in a wide range of domains. This often includes areas such as administration, law, education, the media and literature. For example, in the case of the revival of the Hebrew language as an official language of modern Israel, its function had to be elaborated in order for it to be used as the language of everyday communication. Hebrew had mainly existed as a written language in religious contexts ever since it had been ‘abandoned as a language of everyday communication in about the year 200 of the current era’ (Cooper 1989:12).

Therefore,

The terms for everyday items and activities were missing, requiring an extensive modernization and elaboration of Hebrew vocabulary (Cooper 1989: 14).

Elaboration is sometimes required along with developments within a society. Even when there exists a standard language, new technology and specialised knowledge require linguistic elaboration (Cooper 1989: 150).

2.3.1.4 Acceptance of Community

The *acceptance of community* is said to be fostered by encouraging its users to develop a sense of loyalty and pride in the newly standardised language (Holmes 1992: 112; for possible manifestations of language loyalty, see Garvin 1993: 49). These four points above constitute the key features of standardisation, but more is required in order to successfully standardise and maintain a standard language as pointed out by Cooper (1989: 134):

Prescription of a norm, whether via published grammars and dictionaries or whether via the pronouncements of editors, teachers, critics, writers, or other language guardians, does not constitute standardization. Codification and pronouncements may be ignored or rejected. The norm must be ‘widely accepted’ and ‘felt to be appropriate’. But this attitudinal condition is also not sufficient for ideal standardization inasmuch as feelings must be translated into action.

Garvin identifies ‘motivation’ on the part of the community, which is also required for standardisation. This is linked to the process of the acceptance of the community, but there is more effort involved on the part of the users to maintain the standard. The role of ‘motivation’ is explained below.

Motivation [is] the desire of a community to entertain the development of a standardized variety of its own language. In the absence of such a motivation even the most generous external initiatives will most likely not be sufficient to initiate and maintain a standardization process... The reason for this is

that the attainment of the attributes required for standardization demands of the users of the language a consistent and sustained effort (Garvin 1993: 45; Italics mine).

Standardisation has often been regarded as a ‘natural process’ which may occur if there is a conducive set of circumstances. On the basis of the above features of standardness, however, much effort and planning is required for a language to be standardised. In addition, it takes time to achieve full standardisation. Therefore, it is argued that ‘the standardisation of English has been in progress for many centuries’ (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 25). As Milroy and Milroy conclude, these changes did not happen overnight in the fifteenth century. In the words of J. Milroy, standardisation ‘isn’t something that affects a language at a given time (e.g., in the eighteenth century) and then ceases to operate’ (1993: 19).

The four features outlined by Haugen (1966) above have been applied to describe the ‘standardisation’ of the English language beginning in the fifteenth century, but the problem with this is that such descriptions make standardisation seem a simpler process than it actually is. An example of this is found in Leith:

First, we see the *selection* of the East Midland dialect as the dominant variety; then we discuss the conditions of its *acceptance* by the powerful and educated classes, and the implications this has for speakers of other dialects. Third, we chart the *elaboration* of its functions, as this variety was developed in the domains previously associated with French and Latin. Fourth, we describe the stage of *codification*, the attempts to ‘fix’ a standard variety in dictionaries and grammars, a process most clearly associated with the eighteenth century (1997: 31; Italics in original).

Considered carefully, the situation and events in the fifteenth century do not qualify fully as fulfilling the process of standardisation in the modern sense and this is discussed in the rest of this chapter. The selection of a standard language implies a conscious and a politically motivated choice, but the use of the English

language in the fifteenth century was not so. There is also a problem with the idea of one dialect of Middle English (i.e. East Midlands) being ‘selected’ as the dominant variety, and this will be discussed later (§2.5.2). In the strict sense of the word, ‘standard’ is a fixed variety and as Leith points out, this ‘fixing’ of the English language in terms of grammar and orthography did not take place until the eighteenth century.

Standardisation of a language is not a process which can just happen on its own. Many discussions of standardisation, however, are based on a mistaken assumption that the success of this ‘natural’ process is guaranteed as long as an element of prestige is associated with one variety. The notion of prestige and standardisation is discussed next.

2.3.1.5 The Element of Prestige

In the present-day context, prestige and power are inextricably linked with Standard English. The term ‘prestige²’ described in relation to language usually reflects ‘mainstream, predominantly middle-class and overt societal values’ (Trudgill and Chambers 1998: 85).

It is often found that, however, the forms of language with ‘overt’ prestige are forms from the standard variety (Holmes 1992: 347-48). The relationship between prestige and a standard language is explained by Joseph:

² There is also the term ‘covert prestige’, first used by Trudgill (1972) to describe a notion discussed by Labov (1966) as ‘negative prestige’ (Chambers 1995: 222). ‘Covert prestige’ refers to the preferred use of socially stigmatised linguistic forms and Trudgill and Chambers explain it as:

This, then, is prestige in the sense of being favourably regarded by one’s peers, and of signalling one’s identity as a member of a group (1998: 85).

A few users of the standard language accede to positions of authority which permit them to direct the future course of standardization. Individuals learn standard languages in order to increase their personal standing. And 'eloquence' in the use of language almost universally functions as a mantle of power (1987: 43).

The power of authority is also associated with dictionaries which play a part in the codification process. According to Cameron, the *OED* is not just a codification tool; it wields its power as the authority on the English language and it is regarded as such by the public. She states further:

...dictionaries enjoy a strange and privileged status as cultural monuments. For example, the publication of a new edition of the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* in September 1993 was a media event: the dictionary was reviewed in every quality newspaper, in several cases by someone ostentatiously distinguished, for all the world as if the *Shorter Oxford* had been a work of literature in its own right; or as though it was the English language itself that the reviewer had been asked to assess (1995: 49).

The emphasis placed on notions of prestige in explaining language change in linguistics is also considerable. For example, according to Coupland (2000: 628):

Asserting specific criteria to define SE both feeds and feeds off the assumption that SE has 'essential' qualities. Two criteria are quite regularly invoked - 'educatedness' and 'prestige'.

The book *Standard English: The Widening Debate* affirms that, 'Few of the authors represented here would deny that the standard is the prestige variety' (Bex and Watts 1999: 7). Prestige and power are often used to explain the choice of a 'standard' as in Trudgill (1999: 124) cited below:

Historically we can say that Standard English was selected (through of course, unlike many other languages, not by any overt or conscious decision) as the variety to become the standard variety precisely because it was the variety associated with the social group with the highest degree of power, wealth and prestige. Subsequent developments have reinforced its social character: the fact that it has been employed as the dialect of an education to which pupils, especially in earlier centuries,

have had differential access depending on their social-class background.

Even the spread of the standard language is explained by the element of prestige:

Once a standard dialect develops or is developed, it generally provides a very useful means of communication across areas of dialect diversity. Its status as a prestige variety guarantees it will spread. (Holmes 1992: 85).

J. Milroy (2000: 23) points out that ‘tradition in English philology assumed an identity between the standard language and the ‘prestige’ language’. He also states that ‘prestige’ was appealed to ‘as a form of explanation for language change’ (J. Milroy 2000: 23). He further observes:

The idea of prestige is still used rather routinely, and there are many instances in the literature where it is assumed that a scale of social status is the same as a scale from non-standard to standard (J. Milroy 2000: 23-24).

It seems that prestige attributed to standard languages including present-day Standard English is ideological and not empirical. It is based on perception rather than reality. This is stressed by Joseph:

Formal functions are always everywhere endowed with great prestige, which is why they are an appropriate domain for the standard language and contribute to the heightening of its status. The standard will be perceived as possessing all of the qualities valued within the culture, such as clarity, variety, breadth, richness, sensitivity, orderliness, and intellectuality, whether or not there is any substantive, measurable basis for any of these attributes (1987: 75).

A similar trend in assigning prestige as the principal property of Standard English and the cause of ‘standardisation’ is seen in the discussions of fifteenth century events. This trend is considered further in §2.6 below.

2.3.1.6 Standard Ideology and Prescription

In addition to the four points by Haugen above, Rubin (1977, cited in Cooper 1989: 144) lists prescription as one of the vital elements of the standardisation process. It is stated that, ‘if the prescription is unnoticed, standardization fails’ (Cooper 1989: 144).

One means of achieving this is what Milroy and Milroy refer to as the ‘standard ideology’, ‘i.e. a public *consciousness* of the standard’ (1999: 25). This ideology is explained further:

People *believe* that there is a ‘right’ way of using English, although they do not necessarily use the ‘correct’ forms in their own speech (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 25; Italics in original).

As quoted in § 2.2.1, Leith and Graddol (1996: 139) describe standardisation as an ‘ideological struggle’. There exists a wide gap between Standard English as is described in linguistic textbooks and how it is perceived by the public. The public perception of Standard English is deeply rooted and it cannot be ignored in the present discussion, as it has proved to be very influential:

There is actually far more residual variation than most discussions of ‘standard English’ allow for... The fact that published printed text is more nearly uniform than any other kind of language underpins the ‘ideology of standardization’ by persuading English speakers, against all evidence to the contrary, that uniformity is the normal condition whereas variation is deviant; and that any residual variation in standard English must therefore be the contingent and deplorable result of some users’ carelessness, idleness or incompetence (Cameron 1995: 39).

Trask also points out that the users of non-standard English are too often unfairly judged as being ‘too lazy, too ignorant or too slovenly to learn to speak correctly’ (1995: 170).

According to Cameron, the pressure for ‘uniformity’ required of present-day Standard English is so intense that it goes beyond the criteria given by Haugen. Cameron calls it ‘hyperstandardisation’:

Uniformity is taken to an extreme that might well be called ‘hyperstandardization’: the mania for imposing a rule on any conceivable point of usage, in a way that goes beyond any ordinary understanding of what is needed to ensure efficient communication (1995: 47).

Various features necessary and believed to be necessary in standardisation of the English language have been considered thus far in this chapter. It is seen that ideological factors play a major part in promoting Standard English in the modern-day context. What has been described as the ‘standardisation’ of written English language will be considered next.

2.4 ‘Standard’ English in the Fifteenth Century

2.4.1 ‘Standard’ Englishes

In diachronic studies, one also finds a similar sense of ‘frustration’ (cf. Coupland 2000 in §2.2.1) in the way the history of English is being recounted. At present, the history of the English language is essentially a history of ‘Standard’ Englishes. A literal example is found in an account by Görlach (1990) in which he traces the history of the Standard English language from the Old English period to the development of ‘extra-territorial’ Englishes in a chapter entitled *The Development of Standard Englishes*. Therefore, a student of the history of the English language may be surprised to find by reading current textbooks that the English language

had been ‘standardised’ many times over the course of its history³. West Saxon in King Alfred’s time is often referred to as Old English ‘standard’ (Kemble 1845: 130, cited in Crowley 1989: 100; Gneuss 1972: 63; Blake 1996: 84). Some see the ‘AB language’ in early Middle English as a ‘standard’ (Tolkien 1929: 108). It has also been stated that English language was ‘standardised’ in the fifteenth century (§1.2 of the present thesis). Some point to the publication of the Bible in the English language in the mid-sixteenth century as ‘a decisive moment in the creation of standard English’ (Leith and Graddol 1996: 138), and it has also been claimed that ‘in the sixteenth century the situation changes and the standard is explicitly recognised’ (Dobson 1955: 27). Others write of ‘standardisation’ in the eighteenth century (Leith and Graddol 1996: 157-61).

The fifteenth century, however, has been particularly noted as the time when the precursor to the present-day Standard English emerged. So, in the words of the *OED* editor Murray,

By the close of the fifteenth century, when England settled down from the Wars of the Roses, and the great collisions of populations and dialects by which they were accompanied, there was thus but one standard language acknowledged (Murray 1872: 45, cited in Crowley 1989: 102).

Therefore, Romaine concludes,

What is generally passed on to students of the history of the language... in the standard handbooks and historical grammars is essentially a history of standardized written records. And... the textbook histories are presented as a list of completed changes attested for the standard written variety with little or no mention of variation, dialect differentiation etc (Romaine 1988: 351).

³ For example, Fisiak (1994: 146) affirms that, ‘the standardizing process occurred twice in the history of English, i.e., in c. 1000 and once again in c. 1430’.

The problem of multiple ‘standards’ found in the description of Standard English is discussed next.

2.4.2 Regional Norms - ‘Standards’?

Confusion exists in current literature since the term ‘standard’ with regard to the English language has been used to denote more than one linguistic state (Black 1999: 161). It was defined that written Standard English entailed fixity of form (Smith 1996: 65), but it is found that the same term is used to describe regional or local norms which are variable in form (e.g. Samuels 1963). Sandved (1981: 31) describes ‘regional and local standards’ as being associated with particular ‘writing centres’ such as the so-called ‘AB language’ which demonstrates regularised usage of spelling, but its sphere of influence is limited only to those in a particular community or area.

The use of the term ‘standard’ to describe different forms of English is a problem, identified as follows:

Certainly at least a part of the complexity in the development stems from a profusion of overlapping definitions for the term ‘standard’, a word that has been applied to a surprising variety of synchronic stages in the OE and ME periods (Rusch 1992: 2).

A clear distinction needs to be made between the use of the term Standard English as a fixed uniform norm, and as a local set of variable norms. They are not one and the same thing, and a single term ‘standard’, cannot be used to describe both without creating confusion.

Current discussions of the history of the English language follow the accepted notion of a development of a standard language, which usually posits a nation with numerous communities with their respective dialects. Out of many groups of people, one community is seen to eventually emerge above others in

terms of economic, political and social standing. It is often described that once such a dialect is assigned prestige, then standardisation ‘naturally’ follows. Joseph calls the intermediary stage between dialect and a standardised language *synecdochic*:

Gradually the dominant dialect may change from first among equals to first among unequals. It may even give its name to the regional dialect as a whole, a process for which I have borrowed the rhetorical term SYNECDOCHE... Once a dialect has achieved this level of dominance, it is a short step for people both within and outside the region to consider it to be the dialect proper, with the dialects of other communities relegated to the status of variants or subdialects (1987: 2; Capitalisation in original).

It is at this stage that the regional norms of language have been referred to as ‘regional standards’. Even when languages are not standardised, it may be possible to find some level of regularisation and homogeneity within a certain speech community. For example, this is seen in how groups of people conduct themselves:

The collective or group consciousness... will strive towards creating homogeneity within the group, a conformity and like-mindedness which will lead to and facilitate corrected common action (Kohn 1944, cited in Newman 1997: 55)⁴.

Yet this phenomenon of local norms must be differentiated from standardisation (cf. discussion of standardness in §2.3 above). Textbook descriptions have used the term ‘standard’ for both regional and national uses of English, for example:

The normal scribe, who followed the tradition he had learned, might use a form of English with more or less restricted currency; but if his form of writing could be described as following a regional standard, it is still different in kind from a national standard because it had roots in a particular place, and because a trained scribe in that place has no choice of forms

⁴ I am grateful to Fumie Tamai for this reference.

available to him. The national Standard, when it arrives, involves preferring a national variety, non-localised in some sense, at the expense of any indigenous tradition (Strang 1970: 215).

In this context using the notion of a regional norm, Samuels has posited 'Four Types' (The types are described in §3.1) of 'incipient standards' in the late medieval period. This has been further explained by Sandved (1981: 39):

It should be emphasised that the categories here distinguished [the Four Types] were called 'types' and not 'standards' just because they do not describe absolute uniformities. Nevertheless, *seen against the perspective of the M.E. dialects overall*, each type comprises closely similar samples from the cline that is the total range of dialectal variation (Italics in original).

Sandved above seems to stress that these 'Four Types' display a certain amount of regularity within each type and therefore these types merit being viewed as forming classes of their own. In other words, the 'standard' status of these types is relative. Sandved addresses this issue further and clarifies his criteria for such 'incipient standards':

A standard type of written language may be said to be 'incipient' in at least two different senses. (a) Used in a purely linguistic sense the term 'incipient standard' may refer to a process through which a type of language is acquiring a sufficient degree of internal consistency for it to be readily identifiable and to become the adopted usage of at least some writers... (b) Used in a socio-linguistic sense, the term 'incipient standard' suggests that the type of language so designated is in the process of becoming recognised as a model language worthy of imitation (1981: 39).

In his 1997 paper, Smith stresses that the Four Types of 'incipient standards' of Samuels (1963) represent local variable norms rather than standards:

First as with Late West Saxon, it is important to bear in mind that these types represent focussed or 'standardised' forms of language, not fixed 'standards' (thus expressions such as 'Central Midlands Standard', 'Chancery Standard', which

commonly appear in the scholarly literature, are potentially confusing if not given careful qualification)... the Types represent standardisation in the written mode in the same way that Received Pronunciation represents standardisation in the spoken mode in Present-Day English: a focus to which particular users tend rather than a set of fixed shibboleths from which any deviation is stigmatised (1997a: 7-8).

With regard to the term ‘standard’, Smith makes a distinction between a ‘standard’ in a medieval context and a modern one. He states:

Yet it is wrong to consider these medieval ‘standards’ as identical to their modern written equivalent. Medieval written standards... are a sort of mean towards which scribes tend. It is therefore perhaps more correct to refer to *standardised* or to *focused* written language; such usages remind us that we are dealing with a process of normative focusing rather than with a fixed set of forms (1996: 67; Italics in original).

Even with this caveat, referring to regional norms as ‘standard’ languages can still create confusion, since more is required of standard languages than being local languages however focused they may be. Therefore J. Milroy’s observation applies here:

Because there can be very marked differences between locally agreed norms and standard norms, sociolinguists will often resort to the concept of ‘localized’ or ‘regional’ *standard* languages. I think that the choice of this term is unfortunate, because standardization has many properties besides its supra-local character, and these properties can hardly be said to apply to these so-called localized standards (1993: 19; Italics in original).

By definition, it should not be possible to describe variable written languages as ‘standards’ in the manner below:

The incipient standard must have been “a trend rather than a fixed system, and as such highly variable and fluid”... (Fisiak 1994: 146).

The conclusion arrived at by Penhallurick and Willmott concerning the discussions of a ‘standard’ in the Old English period below applies with equal force to the late medieval period:

Our conclusion is that there is scant evidence for a standard-like variety in the Old English period and that *we should avoid using the term ‘standard’ in this context* (Pehallurick and Willmott 2000: 17; Italics mine).

The terms ‘standard’ and ‘standardisation’, when discussing past linguistic states, do not equate with modern day notions implied by a standard language and consequently should not be used in the medieval context. Such a usage amounts to a contradiction. For example, in one handbook of the English language, the section under the title *The Origins of Standard English* begins by stating that ‘a written standard English began to emerge during the 15th century...’ (Crystal 1995: 54). After outlining several factors which are said to have contributed to the rise of Standard English, such as the importance of London as a capital, influence of the administrative offices of the Chancery, immigration from East Midlands and the advent of printing, it is concluded that ‘there was never to be total uniformity, but the forerunner of Standard English undoubtedly existed by the end of the 15th century’ (Crystal 1995: 55). This description by Crystal is contradictory, since Standard English cannot emerge as a semi-standardised⁵ language with only some degree of uniformity. Either it is a uniform standardised language or it is not, and in the case of the latter, it is not Standard English. It is preferable to regard the

⁵ For example, a variety which is not a standard, but displays little regional variation, is referred to as a kind of a ‘standard’. A typical use is Wakelin below:

Even the local official documents written in the SW without central redrafting have conformed to *some sort of a standard* closer to that of the rising official dialect and further removed from that of their locality (Wakelin 1986: 11, cited in Fisiak 1994: 155; Italics mine).

type of language which displays less regional variation as a levelled language. This discussion is developed further in chapter 4.

The loose use of the term ‘standard’ only leads to confusion. For in the example given below, the meaning of the term ‘standard’ as used by Burnley is not the same as used by Smith:

Wycliffite writings [Type I] and the products of Chancery [Type IV]... achieved the basic requirements necessary to be regarded as true standards: a high degree of internal consistency in spelling and a wide dissemination outside the centres which produced them (Burnley 1989: 24).

In contrast, adhering to a stricter use of the term ‘standard’, Smith concludes differently from Burnley:

[N]one of the [Samuels’ Four Types (1963)] fulfills all the criteria identified by Hudson⁶... It is therefore *premature to write of a fixed standard written language in the fifteenth century*’ (1992: 57; Italics mine).

This situation of having double or even multiple ‘standards’ is unsatisfactory linguistically. Fennell (2001), in her new textbook, cautions students to this effect, but as she applies the term ‘standard’ somewhat loosely in the book, including her application to both spoken and written varieties, it seems that there is still some potential for confusion. She writes:

Despite the fact that there was an accepted standard form of English, these early versions of ‘standard’ English were not ‘standard’ in the modern sense: during the ME period English is much more restricted in acceptable variations in *pronunciation* than is Early Modern English (Fennell 2001: 125; Italics original).

⁶ Richard Hudson discusses the four criteria outlined by Haugen (1966) highlighted above.

With the loose use of the term ‘standard’, we have the confusing situation in which, depending on the perspective of the scholar, there are said to be two (Shaklee 1980: 48; Burnley 1989: 23-24), or three (Fennell 2001: 123) or four (Samuels 1963 [1989]: 67-71) ‘incipient standards’.

In the past, however, the use of the term ‘standard’ to indicate local norms was common in linguistic literature. This point will be discussed further below in §2.5. In the current climate of Standard English ‘debate’, however, it has become increasingly necessary for linguists to be more rigorous in the use of the term ‘standard’. This should also apply to historical linguists who discuss the history of the English language. This point is reinforced by Smith:

Notions of ‘standard language’ need careful handling. There has perhaps been in the past too much eagerness to detect a standard form of language when, in reality, a more delicate description is necessary (2000: 136).

The loose use of the term ‘standard’ is now outdated and requires qualification. This section has discussed that a regional norm does not qualify as a ‘standard’ and concludes that the term ‘standard’ should not be used in this context.

2.4.3 Evidence of the Diffuse Linguistic Situation in the Fifteenth Century

In order to establish if Standard English could have existed in fifteenth-century England, people’s attitude toward their everyday language needs to be understood. Useful in this regard is the classification by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 187, described in Trudgill 1986: 85-86):

Focused: The language is felt to be clearly distinct from other languages: its boundaries are clearly delineated; and members of the speech community show a high level of agreement as to what does and does not constitute ‘the language’.

Diffuse: Speakers may have no clear idea about what language they are speaking; and what does and does not constitute the language will be perceived as an issue of no great importance.

In the late medieval period, people's concept of 'language', including that of the English language, was not entirely focused. Rather, I would argue that, in the written sphere, the linguistic situation was still *diffuse* in the fifteenth century. This is clear from variation evident in writing.

Variation was seen not just in spelling, but also in the mixing of languages in a macaronic text (Rothwell 2000; Wright 1994, 1997a, 1998, 2000). Such language mixing in which a name of a commodity may be written interchangeably in either Latin or in English in a single document denotes a diffuse situation. This type of contemporary attitude is explained thus:

For medieval Englishmen, however, French was not someone else's language, individual items of which might be "borrowed" for the circumstance, in the way that advertisements in modern fashion magazines deliberately introduce the odd French term here and there into an English context for reasons of market snobbery. For the literate classes, if not for the lower orders, French was one of the languages of England available for use as need dictated (Rothwell 1994: 56).

Voigts similarly finds that the 'texts between the period 1375-1475 reveal language mixing as a widely exploited and effective discourse strategy' (1996: 817). The advantage of variation in the medieval context is discussed by Fletcher:

It has commonly been thought that not until the second half of the fourteenth century, when theological matter in Middle English prose starts appearing in any quantity, did Middle English start to slough the stigma of being a second-class literary language. But the reasons for the preference of Latin to English before this time may be a little more complex: Latin may simply have been found quicker to write, more economical on space on account of its richer repertory of abbreviations, and generally a more familiar written language than English currently was, even to scribes who natively spoke English (1994: 231).

Fletcher above touches on an important issue, which is that the hierarchy of languages in use in the late medieval period cannot be established in a straightforward manner. It has been assumed that Latin and French enjoyed greater prestige compared to the English language, and for English to enjoy wider currency it had to rise in its status. In a diffuse linguistic situation, however, the distinction between languages is not so clear-cut.

In addition, another important factor observed by Fletcher is that in the late medieval period, as well as in the earlier centuries, the scribes had at their disposal an abbreviation and suspension system in writing (Wright 1994), and in the modern context it is easy to overlook the significance of such practice. Historians and historical linguists alike who consult medieval manuscripts are aware that such a system existed, but too often this medieval practice of the use of the abbreviation system has been only recognised as an indication of saving writing space because parchment was expensive before paper came into use, and that it saved the scribes the monotony of repetitive writing, as in the case with a long list of accounts. What a modern reader has disregarded is the sheer practicality and the advantage of the system, linguistically (Rothwell 1994; Wright 1994 and 1996). It is explained thus:

An important feature of its [macaronic document] makeup that has so far been masked by editorial intervention is the amount of abbreviation it contains... When read in their original abbreviated form, the records appear in quite a new light: with most of the syntactical markers (the word endings) reduced to no more than perhaps a single stereotyped abbreviation sign, the semantic core of each element of a communication stands out far more prominently to catch the reader's eye. One does not need to concentrate on the entirety of the Latin word, as in a parsing exercise, but is free to focus attention on its semantic rather than its morphological content (Rothwell 1994: 51-52).

In a society in which a single word could be written using a variety of abbreviation and suspension system, variation in spelling (of the sort which allows the interchangeability of *i* and *y*, or spelling of *ly* and *lie* as adverb morphemes) was commonplace. In this regard, Kuhn (1968) provides interesting evidence of a diffuse linguistic setting in the late medieval period. In a preface to a concordance to the Wycliffite New Testament from the early fifteenth-century (BL, MS Royal 17. B.1), the compiler writes:

Sumtyme þe same word & þe self þat is writen of sum man in oo manere is writen of a noþir manere. As, wher summe writen þese wordis *thing* & *theef* wiþ *t.h.*, opire vsen to writen þoo same wordis wiþ þis figure *þ* (Kuhn 1968: 272).

It has often been stated that variation in writing was *tolerated* (for example, Doyle 1994: 95) in a late medieval society, but this is an understatement, because evidence points that the variation was the *norm*.

In a diffuse linguistic situation, there does not exist a strong identification of one language variety as being the symbol of the nation. Rothwell (1994) mentioned above (earlier in this section) that people were quite happy to use French in their everyday life if the need dictated in the late medieval period. In contrast to the medieval situation, many of today's societies perceive standard language as an essential aspect of a national identity. It seems that some scholars have taken this modern notion quite literally to explain the motivation for having a uniform 'Standard' English in the fifteenth century. For example, Richardson (1980) links the use of English language in official documents and 'standardisation' in the fifteenth century with a deliberate policy on the part of Henry V. Fisher, in his article, *A Language Policy for Lancastrian England* (1992), goes further and sees 'standardisation' in the fifteenth century as a well-

thought out political plan by the Lancastrians with ‘more than a decade of preparation and propaganda’ (1992 [1996]: 23). Fisher stipulates in his article, as cited below:

I do not believe that this sudden burst of production of manuscripts written in English after 1400 was simply a natural evolution. I believe that it was encouraged by Henry IV, and even more by Henry V, as a deliberate policy intended to engage the support of government, business, and the English citizenry for the questionable Lancastrian usurpation of the throne (1992 [1996]: 20).

This is a strong statement, but betrays a lack of understanding of the contemporary linguistic situation and is without firm linguistic evidence. Evidence from the early Chancery documents indicates that much variation was allowed in the written form. Fisiak notes the same point, stating, ‘Chancery Written Standard (1430) was not perfectly homogeneous...’ (1994: 146). This could not be true of a standardised language. Therefore, in attributing a political motive, linguists need to be careful in applying what is a present-day common notion to the medieval world. In this regard, historian R. Davies, explains:

Language appears as but one, and by no means the most important, of the attributes which defined a people; laws and customs, life-styles and origin legends often figure much more prominently. Most important, language is not apparently high on the agenda of issues of conflict between the peoples of the British Isles, between conquerors and conquered. Thus neither in Wales nor in Scotland in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries does language figure at all in the propaganda wars with the English. Rather, is it laws and customs, feudal dependence and liberty which are the issues *par excellence*...

Furthermore in what was overwhelmingly an oral culture, there was far more fluidity of language zones and far greater dialectal differences within a single language than we, so used to universal education and the standardising impact of print-culture and easy travel, often recognise... In such a world the notions of a standard ‘national language’ and of a single linguistic community which could close ranks against outsiders did not easily take root...

There was... another reason why the totemic and uniformist assumptions which tend to cluster around 'national' languages in our world were so slow to develop in medieval society. As in all pre-print societies the language situation was much more complex and fluid than we are used to; diversity and multiplicity of languages were taken as the norm. Language uniformity was taken as an indication of weakness rather than of strength (Davies 1997: 2-5).

Davies cites an interesting argument which took place in 1417⁷. It supports the view that fifteenth century England had a diffuse linguistic situation:

So it was that Etienne de Conti mocked the little kingdom of England which had only one language. But the English were not minded to take such Gallic insults lying down. Thomas Polton, a member of the English delegation to the council of Constance, indeed took the argument directly into the enemy's camp: 'Where the French nation, for the most part, has one vernacular which is wholly or in part understandable in every part of the nation, within the famous English or British nation, however, there are five languages, you might say, one of which does not understand the other'. Thomas Polton was scoring a point and doing so outrageously when it is recalled that his list of the languages of the 'English or British nation' included Gascon (1997: 4).

Polton no doubt exaggerated his pride in the linguistic diversity of Britain in the face of a French insult, but it nevertheless illustrates rather comically the point that in the late medieval society, uniformity was not a virtue, nor diversity a flaw. Even in the mid-eighteenth century⁸, spelling had not been fully fixed. Although

⁷ See also Genet (1984) for MS sources regarding Thomas Polton at the Council of Constance.

⁸ Osselton (1984) describes what he calls a dual 'standard' for spelling or a system of epistolary spelling. He explains:

These are not the letters of semi-literate sea-captains or housekeepers who are spelling as best they know how, and who in their blundering attempts may chance to throw light on odd pronunciations for an H. C. Wyld or an E. J. Dobson. They are the spellings of educated men, great men of letters, who clearly acknowledged that written English could exist (or even should exist) in at least two forms. If Dr. Johnson sometimes spells *dinner* with one *n* that is not carelessness (1984: 125).

there had been dictionaries, they alone did not bring about uniformity. The diffuse situation which continued well after the fifteenth century demonstrates that the various features necessary for standardisation (which include acceptance of community and standard ideology as well as codification, cf. §2.3) had not fully taken place in the late medieval period.

It is impossible to construe a standard ideology in the fifteenth century in such a diffuse situation, and it is likewise not accurate to describe late medieval written English (with variable spelling, abbreviation and suspension system) as a standard.

2.4.4 An Appeal to Naturalness

It was stressed above (§ 2.4.2), that referring to regional norms as ‘standards’ makes standardisation appear a simple and an inevitable natural process⁹, but standardisation is not natural nor simple. This is evident from the above discussion (§2.3.1) pointing to processes of codification, elaboration of function and acceptance of a language which standardisation necessarily entails. Lesley

⁹ Languages other than English are being described in a similar way, in that regional norms have been seen to develop into ‘standards’, as in the example below:

Standard languages developed in a similar way [to the English language] in many other European countries during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Italy, Spain, France and Romania, for example, there were a variety of dialects of the vernacular languages (which all derived from varieties of colloquial Latin) which served the L functions of their communities, alongside classical Latin, the H language. From these dialects there gradually emerged a standard, generally based on the dialect of the political, economic and social centre of the country. Some dialects had extra help - the Italians, for example, established a language academy as early as 1585 to make pronouncements on what counted as standard Italian - but *most were natural births* (Holmes 1992: 84; Italics mine).

Milroy has stated, in her lecture¹⁰ in 2000 at the 5th Conference for the *European Society for the Study of English* (ESSE), that ‘standards don’t just happen - they are created’. Some descriptions in current textbooks, especially those designed for the use of the students, give the impression that a language can develop itself into a standard quite ‘naturally’. This is problematic as such descriptions do not uphold the necessary processes of standardisation described earlier in §2.3. This trend¹¹ of appealing to the ‘naturalness’ of standardisation has also been identified by Rusch, who calls it:

The implicit assumption that the language of a community will *eventually regulate itself* into a form that supersedes variation caused by conflicting dialectal influences; by forces, that is, extrinsic to language (social, political, and economic factors), the speech of a community will be shaped according to some conception of ‘correctness’ or ‘prestige’ (1992: 2; Italics mine).

This type of approach that a language would regulate itself over time to achieve a certain level of uniformity is not new. It is used by Henry Sweet, who has described the spoken ‘standard’ English in the following way:

After London English had become the official and literary language of the whole kingdom, it was natural that some dialect in its spoken form should become the general speech of the educated classes, and that as centralisation increased, it should

¹⁰ The title of Lesley Milroy’s lecture was ‘Two nations divided by the same language: Contrasting language ideologies in Britain and the United States’.

¹¹ Such descriptions of history of a language in terms of past ‘standards’ are seen in histories of other languages as well. Ferguson (1988: 122) notes:

The paradigm case of the second type, that of successive periods of standardization resulting in separate local standardizations, is the example of Latin and the Romance languages, as generally recognized in the standard handbooks and introductions to Romance linguistics... The accounts of such historical instances are helpful as summations of countless individual events over considerable periods of time, and in this respect are like the neogrammarian ‘sound laws’ which summate complex verbal behaviors over time but do not elucidate the interactional mechanism that lead to the regularities.

preponderate more and more over the local dialects (Sweet 1890: v-vi, cited in Crowley 1989: 137).

Some other examples of such assumptions are reproduced below:

Written Chancery standard *anticipated* our modern written and spoken standard with its northern dialect characteristics... along with southern... and midland... (Shaklee 1980: 48; Italics mine).

Henry V gave the necessary impetus to establish English as the official written language in much the same way as Alfred in the ninth century had made the English of Wessex the standard language of his kingdom... Once that step had been undertaken, the political backing of the monarch was less significant because *the standard developed its own momentum* and its promotion and refinement passed into the hands of scribes and scholars (Blake 1996: 175; Italics mine).

As English became the dominant language in government transactions, it was *only natural* that a distinct official variety of English would develop (Heikkonen 1996: 115; Italics mine).

But how does one dialect become so prestigious? Once a dialect gets a head start, it often builds up momentum, the more 'important' it gets, the more it is used; the more it is used, the more important it becomes. Such a dialect may be spoken in the political or cultural center of a country and may spread into other regions. The dominance of France of Parisian dialect, and in England (to a lesser extent) of the London dialect, is attributable to this cause (Fromkin and Rodman 1983: 257, cited in Parakrama 1995: 7).

The scene changed dramatically in the fifteenth century: the 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 (Görlach 1999: 459; Italics mine).

Few standard languages have emerged in the absence of at least a moderately fought *questione della lingua*. Standard English emerged amid relative calm, once the use of Norman French as superposed H dissipated: recent research indicates that the use of a southern Midlands dialect in the royal chancery, for which King Henry V was responsible, led to its establishment as standard without any long debate or machination by rival linguistic factions (Joseph 1987: 60).

Considering the effort required in codifying and maintaining a standard language, it is inaccurate to state that a standard would develop its own momentum. It is always imposed from above (cf. §2.3). Contrary to this aspect of standardisation, some descriptions, such as Blake's above, appeal to the sheer effortlessness of the exercise, and this is a misconception which results from not defining the term 'standard' strictly enough.

2.5 Ideological Influences on 'the History' of the English Language

In order to elucidate this trend of explaining the history of the English language in terms of 'standards', some have suggested that there could have been a psychological process at work. In discussing the problems associated with describing 'Standard' English in the Old English period, Penhallurick and Willmott see rather dramatically the tendency to use the term 'standard' as a 'sub-type of "arrival-case" ', or a ' "transient hallucination of the sane" ' (2000: 16 and 17), so they conclude, that it is a case of 'imagined "standards" ', when standards do not actually exist. Their explanation is as follows:

Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers and Frank Podmore, members of the council of the Society of Psychical Research, in their *Phantasms of the Living* (1886), describe 'transient hallucinations of the sane' (p. xxxi), of which 'arrival-cases' are a category. They say: 'There is definite evidence to show that mere *expectancy* may produce hallucination', as in the instance of the 'delusive impression of seeing or hearing a person whose *arrival* is expected' (p. xxxii; Italics in the original). We say that our example belongs to a sub-type because it is a case of mistaken identity as much as it is a 'transient hallucination' - not quite a 'full' hallucination (Penhallurick and Willmott 2000: 16-17).

I detect that the past trend of attempting to identify ‘standards’ has its origins in the powerful linguistic thought from the late nineteenth century which continued well into the twentieth century. This ideological influence on linguistic discussions past and present will be discussed next.

2.5.1 Traditional Attitudes

For the most part of the twentieth century, identifying ‘standards’ in the history of the English language was the legitimate approach in philology and historical linguistics. J. Milroy points out that this type of approach was ‘inherited’ from the diachronic discussions of the past:

However, this standard-based reasoning has quite frequently been used in diachronic description, and it has affected the conceptualization of language history that we inherit from older generations of scholars (1993: 22).

For example, Jespersen writes in 1925 of seven ‘standards’ which may be at work in varying degrees. They are listed below (cited in Joseph 1987: 115-16):

- The standard of authority
- The geographical standard
- The literary standard
- The aristocratic standard
- The democratic standard
- The logical standard
- The artistic standard

These individual ‘standards’ cannot be discussed here, but Jespersen’s criteria show that, in his day, the multiple and overlapping use of the term ‘standard’ was commonplace.

In discussing the ‘transition’ from Old English to Middle English, J. Milroy (1996) identifies what he calls an ‘antiquarian’ and a ‘traditional attitude’ at work during the twentieth century. It is suggested that scholars in the past had been influenced (consciously or unconsciously) by the ideology which sought to chart the history of Standard English retrospectively continuing from the Old English period. J. Milroy adds:

Thus, it became usual to see the history of English as a relatively unbroken continuum from the seventh century onward, with structural changes described chiefly as internal to the language rather than externally influenced. The effect of this on the legitimization of standard English as a language with an ancient pedigree is considerable (1996: 170).

High value placed on Anglo-Saxon lineage could be gleaned from a comment such as:

For the student of language it is a matter of regret that the old dialects, the historical descendants of Anglo-Saxon, should give way to an artificial standard, which is little more than a century old, its absurd spelling having been fixed by printers, its current pronunciation by pedants (Ernest Weekley 1928, cited in McArthur 1998: 124)

J. Milroy also points out that:

[A]s the main interest was often backward projection from ME to OE, conservative and regular forms of ME such as the West Midland AB Language (*Ancrene Wisse* and certain other texts) tended to be highly valued and mixed or variable texts much less (1996: 180-81).

Variation was not favoured in the ‘traditionalist’ approach¹², for ‘the principles of variation studies can be held to contradict the notion that languages develop in a

¹² This is evident in the treatment of macaronic texts:

For many philologists even today, often nurtured on nineteenth-century descriptions of the evolution of Latin into the Romance languages and their many dialects, this kind of “impure” or

unilinear continuum through time' (J. Milroy 1996: 172). Hence uniformity in a dialect is praised, as in:

First, the best, meaning the most internally consistent, representative of Mercian Old English the *Vespasian Psalter*... (Rusch 1992: 1).

In a similar vein, a variation within a text is regarded negatively, for example:

[Peterborough continuations'] philological value is reduced by a slight admixture... of forms from the standard written language of late OE, which was W[est] S[axon]... and by a disordered system of spelling (Bennett and Smithers 1966: 374, cited in J. Milroy 1996: 181).

J. Milroy (1996) is mainly discussing the influence of traditional linguistic ideology on describing the 'continuation' of the Anglo-Saxon lineage of English into the post-Conquest period, but this has also influenced discussions of the rise of 'Standard' English in the fifteenth century. By 'selecting' a variety of the East Midland dialect of Middle English (although the East Midlands was an area heavily influenced by Scandinavian languages in the past), which came to dominate London English (for example, see Leith 1997) as the type which became the later standard, albeit unconsciously, the effect is that the scholars are continuing the Anglo-Saxon lineage of the English language and establishing a pedigree for the present-day standard. Another line of thought in current textbooks identified in chapter 2 of the present thesis, namely that the 'Chancery English' established and authorised by the English King (in the face of the war against the

"contaminated" writing [i.e. macaronic] is repellent, lying completely outside the scheme of an orderly progression from a "parent" language to a demonstrably coherent "daughter" language (Rothwell 1994: 49).

French) became ‘Standard’ English, can also be seen to be furthering this ideology.

Trying to locate past ‘standards’ betrays a mistaken notion pointed out by Rusch (1992: 2), which is ‘the assumption that a standard language can be extrapolated from a group of texts’. Milroy (1996: 180) states that the above assumptions on the Anglo-Saxon lineage of English that have ‘affected historical description and argument have been language-internal and post-neogrammarian in type’. The discussion of Neogrammarians¹³ are now limited mostly to the study of the history of linguistic ideas. Yet sociolinguists, such as Jahr¹⁴, have raised a concern that the legacy of Neogrammarian ideas has made it difficult to consider contact-based approaches to language change even in the present-day context.

A similar point has been made by Hope (2000) in his discussion of what he calls the ‘single ancestor-dialect’ hypothesis (SAD hypothesis). The basis of

¹³ Neogrammarians (after Robins 1997: 189-221; Lehmann 1993: 5-9): ‘neogrammarian’ or *Junggrammatiker*, was a pejorative name given by the teachers to a group of young scholars in Leipzig in the 1870s. Two of its major proponents were H. Osthoff and K. Brugmann. Prior to the Neogrammarians, A. Schleicher (1821-68) had greatly influenced the thinking of the philologists of the nineteenth century by his *Stammbaumtheorie*, or the genealogical tree model. Schleicher was interested in natural science and his knowledge of botany seems to have influenced this description. In his family tree model, he ‘set out the relations between the parent language and the known Indo-European languages’ (Robins 1997: 201).

¹⁴ Ernst Håkon Jahr likewise expresses his concern over the Neogrammarian legacy prevailing in linguistic research in Scandinavia. Jahr (1998: 119) noticed that although linguists agree that there had been intense language contact between Scandinavian languages and Low German at the height of the Hanseatic period, there has hardly been any discussion of linguistic consequences of language contact. He states:

The Neogrammarian paradigm is based on the ‘family tree’ concept, with all systematic similarities between different languages, in particular, explained by means of ‘sound laws’ which presuppose that language has developed from a common source, a ‘Proto Language’. The changes resulting purely from language contact, therefore, do not fit easily into a Neogrammarian framework (1998: 119; Italics mine).

The consideration of contact-induced change with reference to the English language is discussed in chapter 4.

the SAD hypothesis is the ‘evolutionary, family-tree model of language change’ (Hope 2000: 49). The SAD hypothesis suggests that the history of Standard English is basically ‘the selection of one Middle English dialect, and its evolution into that standard’ (Hope 2000: 49). Hope goes on to suggest why the SAD hypothesis has been favoured in the textbook accounts:

It provides a neat explanation for the emergence of Standard English... and it is an economical account, since by operating at the level of dialect rather than linguistic feature, it automatically explains why any and every linguistic variant was selected to become part of the standard. The alternative would be an ‘every variant has its own history’ account, which would have to treat each variant as a separate entity (2000: 50).

It is precisely this kind of ideological influence which has led to the emphasis on the East Midland element in the descriptions of the ‘incipient standard’. The view that one variety (i.e. East Midland) was ‘selected’ and ‘evolved’ into modern Standard English has been much favoured:

Towards the end of the fourteenth century there emerges, from among the many provincial forms which had hitherto been used for literary purposes, a dialect, chiefly Midland in character, but containing some elements at least of all the other chief dialectal types, which henceforth serves as the exclusive form of speech used in literature, and from which Modern Standard English is descended (Wyld 1906: 251).

The East Midland influence on the language of London is concerned with the fourteenth century and consideration of the ‘East Midland variety’ of Middle English is outside the context of this thesis. The role of the ‘East Midland’ variety on the emerging ‘Standard English’ was reinvigorated by studies by Eilert Ekwall, notably by his 1956 work entitled *Studies on the Population of Medieval London*. In it, Ekwall explains the change in the language of fourteenth-century London from a ‘Saxon’ dialect to that of East Midlands by means of prestige. He shows that London attracted many immigrants from East Midlands. Often the cause of

linguistic change is misunderstood by scholars (see Wright 1996: 104-6), who see the immigration as the only reason for the change in the London dialect. Ekwall, however, bases his theory not on the number of the immigrants, but on the status of the East Midlanders and their potential social influence due to their prestigious positions:

I suggest in Two Early London Subsidy Rolls that the linguistic change of the City dialect may be due to immigration from the Midlands of a considerable number of people belonging to the upper class, the merchant class, and the Midland influence primarily affected the language and the upper classes of the city (Ekwall 1956: lxi).

The discussion of the ‘East Midland’ variety as being the ancestor of present-day Standard English, however, has a long history (Rusch 1992, chapter 1). It seems that due to the tendency to look for a single ancestor dialect as a precursor to the present-day Standard English, scholars are forced to describe the ‘incipient standard’ in the following way:

However, the dialect that developed into the standard is not simply the London dialect, but rather it is essentially *East Midlands with some Northern and Southern influence* (Fennell 2001: 123; Italics mine).

What the present thesis is questioning is not the classification, status, linguistic character¹⁵ or the influence of the East Midland variety, but the validity of

¹⁵ There are still questions to be asked concerning the simple acceptance of the influence of an ‘East Midland’ English on the language of London. There is a problem of the linguistic criteria. Ekwall discusses the East Midlands influence of the spoken language. There is little discussion, however, on other linguistic aspects of ‘East Midlands’ English.

Many current discussions on the influence of East Midlands, however, centre on its effect on the written language of London (and in turn this variety forming the basis of the ‘emerging’ written ‘Standard English’), and therefore, an observation by Laing below is highly significant:

Preliminary work done towards the creation of *A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English (LAEME)*, shows that some of the linguistic features absent from Norfolk in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth

attempting to trace an ancestor to present-day Standard English in a ‘incipient’ or an ‘embryonic’¹⁶ fifteenth-century ‘standard’ which contains the linguistic genetic code as it were, that includes the features of the present-day Standard English.

2.6 Prestige, Power and ‘Standard English’

It was noted in § 2.3.1.5 that prestige was strongly associated and identified with Standard English. The element of prestige has also been emphasised in attempts to identify Standard English in the fifteenth century and in explaining the ‘standardisation’ process. In the discussions of late medieval English, prestige is often linked to authority and power of the monarch (Fisher 1977; Richardson 1980). For example, Blake (1996: 177) states:

As documents from Chancery were sent throughout the kingdom and ... the English used in its documents carried with it the prestige attached to the court and royal usage.

Thus the use of English language in government records and in official domains has been hailed as the result of the English language climbing up the social scale, so to speak, endowed with royal prestige by Henry V. Hence, we read of explanations, such as:

century were in fact current in the language of that county a century or so earlier (1997: 105).

Laing’s observation above points to the fact that some language features which may have been used by the prominent East Midlanders from Norfolk in the period during 1250-1350 (which coincides with Ekwall’s survey of 1956) were levelled out and disappeared by the fifteenth century (Laing’s comment here is agreement with my findings in chapter 7 of the present thesis which provides some examples of dialect levelling in Norfolk).

Therefore, it would be too simplistic a view to assume that the English language of London with the influence of the language of the East Midland immigrants formed the basis of present-day Standard English.

¹⁶ This expression is used by Leith (1997).

The fact that signet English has served as a model for the standard *can perhaps be explained by its close connection with the King and the prestige it derived from that association* (Heikkonen 1996: 115; Italics mine).

With the rise of status of English during the latter years of the Middle Ages, it is not surprising that standardisation of orthography begins to emerge during the late fourteenth century. Given the social developments outlined earlier, the basis of this standardisation had to be the form of the language current in London. The prestige of the capital had a linguistic effect of the kind commonly recorded in modern sociolinguistic surveys (Smith 1992: 55).

Being used by the wealthy merchant classes, it [the Norfolk dialect] probably became a prestige dialect, and became a model that was used in the government offices when French and Latin were replaced by English. Many of the government officials are likely to have belonged to the Norfolk contingent of immigrants (Kristensson 1994: 107).

There is actually little evidence that prestige attached to Chancery papers led to standard written English. Smith suggests the unlikelihood of the prestige theory by stating:

...if 'Chancery Standard' was simply adopted wholesale as a result of its contemporary prestige, then we would expect a simple pattern of replacement of regional by 'Chancery' forms as the fifteenth century progressed. This pattern is not found, however (1996: 73).

This state of affairs in historical linguistics which equates 'prestige' with 'standardness' and/or 'standardisation' is a rather unfortunate one. I am not sure, as is sometimes suggested as in the example below, that people were aware of the full role of a prestige language in the late medieval period since the linguistic situation was diffuse rather than focused:

All this took place against a background in which medieval scholars were aware of the division between dialects and the prestige standard language, and clearly felt the deficiency of English as a literary medium through its lack of such standardisation. Thus the Chancery spelling system became

available to a world which was perfectly capable of appreciating its benefits in terms purely of communicative efficiency (Burnley 1989: 38).

The prestige-based view can becloud our view of the fifteenth-century linguistic situation. Misconceptions regarding the abbreviation and suspension system were touched on earlier (§ 2.4.3). Too often notions of prestige have been invoked to explain linguistic change. For example, the change in the London language of the fourteenth century from a ‘Saxon’ language to an ‘East Midland’ type has been explained by the influence of the merchants from Norfolk who were socially very influential (§2.5.2). The written language of London, which displays many features in common with the Chancery documents, has been explained by virtue of the ‘prestige’ associated with the royal office of Chancery. The danger with explanations based on prestige is that they superficially appear a logical explanation, enough for people to embrace them with little evidence. Smith cautions regarding this trend:

Some current notions of standardisation-processes in the written mode in the late Middle English period are rather crude, notably the notion of simple transference for reasons of prestige from one kind of usage to another. In my opinion, such an account is an over-simplification, which the evidence does not support (1997a).

Despite the fact that the prestige-based explanations lack evidence, because of their wide discussion in students’ textbooks, they have been widely accepted, as is seen in the comment below. Jefferson, who has studied the use of different languages in the records of the Goldsmith’s Company of London, concludes:

The move away from French becomes very evident once one gets to the records from Henry V’s reign. This king’s promotion of the cause of the English language is well documented¹⁷, but

¹⁷ At this point, readers are directed to Fisher (1992).

before English is introduced we find a long series of pages where French and Latin alternate... From the eighth year of Henry V's reign (1420-1), English begins to be used as a language of record, but not exclusively by any manner of means (2000: 181-82).

2.7 Printing and 'Standardisation'

2.7.1 The Printed Page Still Not Uniform

At present, there are some assumptions concerning printing which are taken for granted. Printing in the modern context requires a standardised language. In addition, standardisation can be maintained by the power of the press and the printed page can be used to uphold the standard ideology. Therefore, Cameron points out that the 'printed text would eventually become the most pervasive source of standard English norms, setting a *de facto* standard for all written texts' (1995: 43). Printing and the standard language thus go hand-in-hand. These are correct assumptions and they are deeply ingrained in the modern consciousness.

The fifteenth century is celebrated as the period when printing arrived in Britain. As a result, printing and 'standardisation' have been given almost a synonymous treatment in the textbooks of the history of the English language. The modern conventions of printing, however, do not hold true in the late medieval period, and here lies a problem.

The advent of printing has been described as a 'revolution' and rightly so (Eisenstein 1983). Because of its potential impact, it is often concluded that printing changed the linguistic climate in Britain automatically overnight. Hence we find descriptions such as:

Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries occurs one of the most important events in the 'standardization' of English. William Caxton, living in the latter half of the fifteenth century, brought a printing press to England from the continent... Caxton

may have influenced the direction in which the language grew more than any other single man, for he set himself up as editor of the texts he printed and tried to settle the variant forms both of spelling and of grammar that came across his desk. Succeeding editors followed his policy, and thus a standard in printed language began to be developed (Shaklee 1980: 48).

Caxton's work stimulates, and articulates a concern to have it settled that one usage is generally current, and will meet with acceptance everywhere (Strang 1970: 157).

The new invention gave an unprecedented impetus to the formation of a standard language and the study of its properties. Apart from its role in fostering norms of spelling and punctuation, the availability of printing provided more opportunities for people to write... (Crystal 1995: 56).

A major reason for the standardization of the Chancery Standard was that William Caxton adopted it, probably in about 1476, since he set up his printing press in Westminster and not in London. Caxton probably did more to standardize English in his time than any other individual, since it was expedient for him to edit the works he printed to resolve the dialect variants in order to gain the broadest readership possible for his publications (Fennell 2001: 125).

Contrary to the popular belief, the printing press in Caxton's day did not have an immediate stabilising effect on orthography. What has often been overlooked is the fact that printing on its own cannot bring about uniformity of language. Printing would only act as an agent of standardisation, if all those involved (i.e. the printer and the reading public) come to recognise that there is one 'correct' way to spell words and construct sentences. As has been discussed in this chapter (§ 2.4.3), this had not occurred in the fifteenth century. Rather, it is noted that printing at first had quite the opposite effect:

Where as the spread of this spelling consistency might have been expected to be helped by William Caxton's setting up of the first English press... in 1476, initially printing proved only a hindrance in the move towards orthographic uniformity (Scragg 1974: 64).

This is reinforced by Blake:

Today we are used to all printed books appearing in a uniform spelling, or naturally assume that the printing press was an agent of uniformity from its beginnings. On the contrary, there is much to suggest that at first the printing press led to variety rather than to uniformity (1969: 174).

Fisiak also supports the view that early printing did not unify English orthography:

The role of Caxton in the unification of orthography is often overrated (cf. Shaklee 1980)... (1994: 146).

Brengelman¹⁸ makes an interesting observation in relation to Caxton and ‘standardisation’:

Despite all this, however, if Caxton’s spellings were those we now use, it might be reasonable to give him credit for standardizing English spelling. But the spelling both in his translations and in his original work is quite inconsistent and heavily influenced by French. In his editions of existing works, such as Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, Caxton does not modernize in consistent ways, and indeed his spelling is often more archaic than that of his source. Furthermore, in the words appearing in English for the first time in Caxton’s publications the spellings are almost never the ones that became standard (1980: 337).

Even in 1619, Alexander Gil complained that ‘corruption in writing originated with the printing of our books’ (cited in Crystal 1995: 66). It seems that the scholars describing the English language in early printing were too keen to read into it an existence of Standard English, as if in a case of ‘hallucination’ described in § 2.5.

Some, on the other hand, point to the fact that spelling was not made uniform by Caxton and seem to overstate the case for his linguistic ‘inconsistency’.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Dr Carol Percy for this reference.

When Caxton set up his press in 1476, he was not particularly well equipped to provide a standard form of orthography. As a child, he could hardly have been acquainted with the largely regularised orthography of the Chancery clerks, and his speech would have been that of Kent... It is likely that Caxton's own prologues and translations represented his spelling reasonably closely, but it must be admitted that *it is very inconsistent* (Salmon 1999: 24; Italics mine).

The examples which Salmon cites are indeed inconsistencies today, but were not really viewed as such in Caxton's day. She lists examples from Caxton's *Prologue to the Eneydos*: *thai / theim, boke / booke, dayli / cotype / dyuersitie, axyd / axed / usid, bookys / wordes* among others (Salmon 1999: 24).

The usage seen in Caxton's print reinforces that at the end of the fifteenth century, written English was not standardised in the modern sense of the word. Variability was still very much present and this was the normal professional practice. This is in stark contrast to the requirements of today's copy editors and this is why there is a strong tendency to anachronise. Cameron who interviewed copy editors comes to this conclusion: 'Their cardinal principle, however, was that the text must be consistent' (1995: 37). On the other hand, in the fifteenth century, the modern day notions of 'standardness as a virtue' (Lass 1999: 8) had not yet been developed. Similarly, it is noted that 'consistency is nowadays regarded as a virtue, and that a culture should value switching has been taken as evidence of its inferior moral quality...' (Wright 1997a: 348). Wright is here arguing against the modern prejudiced view toward codeswitching in a multilingual text, but the same principles apply concerning late medieval variability seen in a text or a print. Just as switching between different languages was perfectly acceptable, switching between a person's permitted variables of spelling within one language was also accepted. This practice did not suddenly disappear either when printing began in England in 1476. It is only because the

modern notions regarding consistency and the printing practice differ from that of the fifteenth century, that scholars have found it puzzling to find variability in a printer's English. Caxton has, as a result, too often been judged unfairly as not being 'interested' in spelling but only on the business side of printing, or as being whimsical in his attitude to spelling or criticized that his unfortunate upbringing outside London and his sojourn abroad has made him unable to spell 'properly'.

A similar attitude is taken against the successors of Caxton, de Worde and Pynson. Below they are described as being indifferent to the spelling of English and as a result, this has manifested itself in their irregular orthography:

But contemporaries could hardly be blamed for failing to realise the potential of their clumsy contraption, and in any case neither Caxton nor any of the other successful early printers was fitted by background or outlook for the role of linguistic reformer. Though Caxton was born in England and had received some elementary schooling in the 1430s, he spent the greater part of his life abroad as an English mercer in the Low Countries... It was not to be expected that de Worde, an Alsatian by birth, or Pynson, a Norman, would make any major contribution towards the stabilisation of English spelling... (Scragg 1974: 66 and 67).

When Caxton died in 1492 his press was inherited by Wynkyn de Worde, who continued to print in an *irregular orthography*, though possibly with a greater care for following copy which represents Caxton's own spelling. Two others were associated with Caxton, Robert Pynson and Robert Copland, who both set up their own presses; Pynson specialised in legal documents in French or Latin, and therefore was *little concerned with English orthography* (Salmon 1999: 24; Italics mine).

Caxton did not pay much attention to consistency in spelling. This is also true of other fifteenth century printers, many of whom were either *foreigners* (e.g., Pynson) or were *abroad for a long time* (like Caxton), and hence their familiarity with the rules of the Chancery was somewhat limited, which led to a fair degree of variation in their printed texts (Fisiak 1994: 146-47; Italics mine).

It is certain that the development towards more homogeneous forms of written English would have taken place without the introduction of printing from 1476 on, but the production of

books, almost all from Westminster/London, which supplied relatively cheap reading matter all over England, meant that the printed norms could spread more quickly and evenly. It is important to realise that this process almost automatically devalued the use in writing of all forms that were locally or otherwise deviant (Görlach 1999: 459-60).

Evidence points to the fact that Caxton displayed good business sense in his choice of texts for printing (Matheson 1985) and in his emendations to certain portions of the text. Caxton was sensitive to change in the literary tastes of the fifteenth-century audience. Blake (1992b: 531) discovers that Caxton had printed prose works by Chaucer without change, but he revised Malory's *Morte Darthure* by removing alliteration and changing the lexis. Therefore it is unlikely that Caxton would be deliberately indifferent to a standardised spelling system, had there been one in use.

It has also been suggested that Caxton was able to change his approach to spelling of the text as was required by the type of the exemplar:

Caxton's Malory and Caxton's Gower, therefore, exemplify two kinds of behaviour which Caxton exhibited when he made prints of the two texts of other English authors. They show that he could vary his orthographic attitude depending on the text before him (Smith 1986: 63).

In this regard, Caxton demonstrates himself to be far from uninterested or unskilled; in fact, he must have been highly skilled, with an eye for detail. This type of preservation of the 'traditional' spellings of well-known authors seems to have been the common practice (see also Hellinga (1997) for a similar tradition in the printed texts of Nicholas Love) in the late medieval period in the manuscript book trade as well (cf. Horobin (2000b), who discusses the tradition found in the manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*).

Gómez Soliño (1985: 107-8) who has studied Caxton's language does not see in it a conscious attempt to imitate or change orthography after a 'Chancery English model'. He states:

La conducta lingüística descrita hasta aquí no es la propia de una persona que deliberadamente toma parte activa en la homogeneización del lenguaje de su época. Las variaciones que se observan en sus libros son de suficiente entidad y se repiten con la suficiente persistencia como para concluir que la estandarización de la lengua no es un proceso que Caxton hubiera asumido conscientemente... La relativa falta de uniformidad que exhiben los libros salidos de la imprenta de Caxton se corresponde con la inseguridad expresada por este en el prólogo de *Eneydos*. Sus textos no son una excepción en una época caracterizada, según el propio Caxton, por "dyuersite & chaunge of langage".

[My translation:

The linguistic behaviour described [of William Caxton] so far [in this paper] is not typical of an individual who deliberately takes an active part in unifying the language of his day. The variation which are found in his books are adequately distinct and they are repeated with sufficient persistence so as to conclude that the standardisation of the language is not a process which Caxton would have taken on consciously... The relative lack of uniformity displayed by the books leaving Caxton's press correspond with the uncertainty expressed concerning this in the prologue to the *Eneydos*. His texts are no exception in a period characterised, according to Caxton himself, by "dyuersite & chaunge of langage".]

It is more reasonable to conclude that Caxton's usages (uses of fonts, abbreviation system, spelling and capitals) conform to the manuscript traditions of his day. The first English book printed by Caxton in Bruges c. 1476, shows the influence of the Secretary script in his typeface, because that type of script was being used in the booktrade (Cusack 1971).

Many conclusions have been drawn from the fact that Caxton set up his press in Westminster, and not in the city of London. Many see this as a strong reason that Caxton favoured 'Chancery English' and used this 'standard' in his

printed texts (Fisher 1977: 899; Shaklee 1980: 49; Fennell 2001: 125). I speculate, however, that Caxton probably wanted to set up his printing house outside the city of London where the stationers and the booktrade had established themselves. By 1373, the writers of the court hand (scriveners) and the writers of the text hand and the limners had formed their guild and it seems that their trade was jealously guarded¹⁹, as illustrated in their ordinances, given below:

These ordinances refer to the problems resulting from all sorts of people... 'who are ignorant of London's customs, franchises and usages, and yet all themselves scriveners and also undertake to make wills, charters and all other things' concerning the craft of scrivenerly. Henceforth, none were to keep scrivener's shop... in London or its suburbs unless free of the city and also made free of the scriveners' craft by men of it; applicants for freedom were to be examined for fitness... (Ramsay 1991: 123).

The location in which Caxton set up his printing press is highly relevant and its importance has hitherto been misunderstood. It is not because of the Chancery that Caxton went to Westminster, but the key point is that it was a location near the city of London, and yet out of its jurisdiction. G. Pollard (1937: 20) explains that the authority of the City guilds could only be enforced by the City courts and their jurisdiction did not extend outside the City boundaries. It is also noted, that even within the boundary of the City, there were certain 'liberties' or areas exempt from its jurisdiction, and this included royal manors and royal grants of immunity were given to religious bodies.

Evidence points that a printer like Caxton who had brought his business from abroad needed this protection. Pollard writes of the tensions which mounted

¹⁹ Conflict is said to have existed in fifteenth-century York, between those in the amateur booktrade and those who belonged to the guild (Friedman 1989: 112).

between the alien printers and the City book-trade in the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth century.

[T]hat there existed considerable feeling against alien printers is shown not so much by the assault on Richard Pynson in 1500, as by the statement that his workmen had been terrorized into leaving his service by constant attacks (G. Pollard 1937: 20).

Caxton's press in Westminster probably had little, if anything, to do with an 'official' or 'standard' language. After all, Caxton was not there to print government papers. Caxton's interest was in printing books of popular interest, but he probably would have found it difficult to find professional space in the city where book trade had become more organised and regulated in the fourteenth century (Parkes 1991: 286):

In 1403 the Writers of Text-Letter formed another gild with the Limners (illuminators) and others in the City concerned with the production of books, and from this time onward commercial book production in London was regulated by the wardens of this gild, who had power to enforce their ordinances in the sheriffs' courts (Parkes 1991: 286).

The point that the printers chose to print in London in order to produce books in Standard English is probably a myth. A consideration of the history of the Company of the Stationers in London reveals that the artisans of the London medieval book trade were successful in ousting competition from foreign printers and imported foreign books. They were to gain the monopoly of the printing trade by the mid-sixteenth century (G. Pollard 1937: 26-27). It seems that those in the London book trade even endeavoured to make it illegal to print books outside London. The Company of the Stationers in London probably did play their part in printing books using the English of London, but the reasons for it is different from what is normally assumed, which is standardisation.

Brengelman finds that it is only from the mid-seventeenth century onwards that regularity in spelling is located:

Printed texts from the period demonstrate clearly that, during the middle half of the seventeenth century, English spelling evolved from near anarchy to almost complete predictability (1980: 334).

Even in the seventeenth century, it was not the printers, but ‘orthoepists and lexicographers’ (Brengelman 1980: 343) who were at the forefront in regularising spelling.

2.8 Conclusion to Chapter 2

There is a fundamental problem with using the term ‘standard’ to refer to a type of English language which does not fit the descriptions of Standard English as it is understood today. A standard variety is by its very nature fixed and does not tolerate variability. Applying this principle to the written English language, it is inaccurate to refer to late medieval regional language as having ‘standards’ or being characterised by ‘incipient standards’.

In discussing the ‘standardisation’ process in the history of the English language, scholars have searched for a variety which best fits the identity of the ‘forerunner’ of Standard English, with its spelling, grammar and lexis. For example, Shaklee (1980: 41) reasons, presumably to a student audience:

Let’s look at the dialects of Middle English and ask how a standard English was distilled out of Trevisa’s three major dialects [southern, midland and northern]...

After a brief consideration of some characteristics from the three different dialects in terms of inflection and the choice of pronouns, she suggests:

Now, compare the data for the three dialects and decide which dialect has the most forms that become standard English (Shaklee 1980: 46).

The present thesis suggests that this approach is a mistaken one. The main reason for this conclusion is that the attitudes to the English language in the fifteenth century are different from that of today. It was pointed out that, in the fifteenth century, the linguistic situation was still diffuse rather than focused. In a diffuse situation, the standard ideology does not exist and cannot be put into practice.

The difference has been brought to the fore in recent studies on late medieval and Early Modern materials and it is not possible to discuss their findings in detail here, but some examples will be considered in chapter 4. The following is some of the recent work which has demonstrated the processes involved in language change from late medieval period onwards: Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1996), Black (1997), Nevalainen (2000). What these studies have shown is that the linguistic features which are identified with present-day Standard English do not come from a single variety, but include features from varying dialects and stabilised at different times.

Because of the stricter definition of ‘standard’ required in linguistic discussions today, some scholars have begun to reconsider the status of what have been regarded as ‘standards’ in the history of the English language. An example is seen in the discussion of the so-called ‘AB standard’ by Black (1999). She suggests (p. 164) that the close similarity displayed by the A and B manuscripts of the thirteenth century can be explained by the fact that ‘the usage of both texts go back to that of a single copyist’. She therefore concludes:

If it is supposed that AB is the usage of a single scribe, there is no reason to see its ‘influence’ in other EME texts, just as there is no need to assume that it reflects a direct development from

any earlier, regional standard... To avoid the confusion inherent in terms such as the 'AB Group', the simplest usage might be to avoid 'AB' altogether and, when speaking of the language found in A and B, simply refer to the usage of Corpus 402, or A (Black 1999: 166).

The influence of linguistic ideological notions from the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries on current explanations and descriptions of historical linguistics have probably been hitherto underestimated. Consequently, some myths have crept into linguistic writing. Wright (1996: 109) mentions the 'myth' of 'Chancery English'. Watts (1999: 47) raises the question:

Is it perhaps not a myth to locate the beginnings of Standard English in Chancery English?... What is the nature of the ideology that guides our own teaching, and how is that ideology grounded in the hegemonic practices of academic discourse?

This question will be addressed in the following chapter

At present, the history of English language incorporates to a large extent the history of the discipline itself. Despite much new work on variation studies taking place, those who recount the history tend to follow the tradition and little has changed in the manner with which the history of English has been told in the textbooks.

3 A 'Standard' from the Fifteenth-Century Chancery?

3.1 'Chancery English'

As the quotations in chapter 1 have pointed out, a variety called 'Chancery English' is often identified as the 'Standard' English emerging in the fifteenth century.

The type of English that, in the years after 1430, surfaced as Chancery Standard was a full-fledged language, which bears out the supposition that it had been a standard for a considerable time (Kristensson 1994: 108).

To my knowledge, however, there has not been convincing linguistic evidence for the existence of a distinct variety of 'Chancery English' to date. John Fisher, Malcolm Richardson and Jane Fisher published *An Anthology of Chancery English* in 1984, but essentially it is a collection of documents such as the Signet Letters of Henry V, copies of petitions sent to the court of Chancery and indentures, mostly now kept in the Public Record Office in London. It is a collection of fifteenth-century official and legal documents, but the language of the documents displays much variation and it is not clear from the collection what exactly 'Chancery English' is, linguistically. Davis warns that:

It is not yet fully clear which of the features of it are to be regarded as essential and which may allow deviation without destroying the notion of a standard: nor is it plain how effectively the practices of the Chancery clerks could be impressed upon people who had business with them (Davis 1983: 24).

Fisher et al. (1984: xii) explain their use of the term ‘Chancery English’. stating, ‘We follow M. L. Samuels in calling the official written English of the first half of the 15th century “Chancery English”’. This statement requires some clarification, however. It seems that scholars (e.g. Blake 1997: 4) have followed Fisher et al. in ascribing the use of the term ‘Chancery English’ to Samuels, but as far as I am aware, Samuels has never, in print, described the written English of the fifteenth-century Chancery clerks as ‘Chancery English’. Fisher et al. must be alluding to the seminal article by Samuels in 1963 entitled *Some Applications of Middle English Dialectology*, in which he discussed ‘Four Types’ of ‘incipient standards’ in the late medieval period. The classification of the Four Types are as follows:

TYPE I: WYCLIFFITE MSS. ‘CENTRAL MIDLANDS STANDARD’

Samuels identifies Type I as ‘the language of the majority of Wycliffite manuscripts’ (1963 [1989]: 67). It is also referred to as the Central Midlands standard, which Samuels sees as being ‘based on the spoken dialects of the Central Midlands’ (page 68), but ‘was a well established literary standard’.

TYPE II: AUCHINLECK MS, FOURTEENTH-CENTURY LONDON MSS

This type is ‘found in a group of nine fourteenth century manuscripts from the Greater London area’ (Smith 1997a). Samuels states that ‘the main hand in the Auchinleck MS²⁰ may be taken as typical’ (1963 [1989]: 70).

TYPE III: CHAUCER AND HOCCLEVE MSS.

This type includes late fourteenth-century texts copied in London. It is said to be represented by the language of the Chaucer manuscripts such as the Ellesmere MS

²⁰ Edinburgh, Advocates Library, MS 19.2.1

and the Hengwrt MS (Smith 1997a). It also includes the text of *Piers Plowman* in Trinity College Cambridge MS B. 15.17 and the language of Hoccleve (Samuels 1963 [1989]: 70).

TYPE IV: 'CHANCERY STANDARD'

Samuels refers to this type as 'that flood of government documents that starts in the years following 1430' and identifies that 'it is this type, not its predecessors in London English, that is the basis of modern written English' (1963 [1989]: 71).

Samuels' description of Type IV under present discussion, is reproduced below:

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 basis of modern written English. Evidently, between the periods of Types III and IV, the London dialect had undergone further rapid changes; both these changes and those that preceded them are presumably to be explained on the ground that the speech of a capital city is liable to faster changes than those of the country as a whole. But 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, and was certain to oust eventually (though by no means immediately) the other incipient standards (Italics mine).

What Samuels describes above is quite different from what Fisher et al. have developed. Firstly, Samuels calls it 'Chancery Standard' and not 'Chancery English'. Fisher was probably the first to use the term 'Chancery English' in his article in 1977, stating: 'By 1430 Chancery English had assumed its mature form' (page 881). More discussions on 'Chancery English' soon followed (Fisher 1979; Richardson 1980; Hughes 1980).

The fact that, in their discussions, Samuels and Fisher differ as to the origin of this variety has also been overlooked. Samuels hypothesises the origin of ‘Chancery Standard’ as being ‘the dialect of Central Midlands’ (1963: 71) or his Type I, said to be used in Wycliffite material and at Oxford. Samuels notes above that ‘Chancery Standard’ ‘was finally *adopted* by the government offices for regular written use’ whereas Fisher contends that it was ‘*created* by the government’ (1996: 10), as seen from his quote in § 1.2 (Italics mine). These are two quite different processes.

In addition, Fisher (1977: 892) differs from Samuels in explaining the direction of influence, stating, ‘The influence of Chancery reached into Oxford itself’. Fisher is quite explicit in explaining the ‘creation’ of ‘Chancery Standard’. He states (1977: 891):

We must recognise that the magnates and university trained secretaries never made the final drafts of writs and letters that were sent abroad. These were produced by the “typing pool”, the Chancery or Privy Seal or Signet clerks who made fair copies in due form and submitted them for sealing. It was the language of these professional clerks which circulated about the country and established the model for official English between 1420 and 1460 when English was being adopted for government use. Because of the tight hierarchy in Chancery, the idiom and form of the official documents was controlled by a very few people. In theory only the twelve masters in Chancery were empowered to originate new language or to sign important letters.

What Fisher describes above is a rigorously controlled example of language planning and by this description ‘Chancery English’ is an artificially created language rather like that of modern-day Norway (Haugen 1959; Kerswill 1994). Fisher (1977: 885) sees that ‘the new official language was a combination of the two earlier written standards’ and this process resembles the situation when official and national languages are created today. On the other hand, Samuels does

point to what he calls a 'literary standard', the language of the 'Central Midlands' which included Oxford as the possible source of 'Chancery Standard', but the actual process suggested is quite different. What Samuels (1963 [1989]: 74-75) stated was as follows:

The resulting standard language naturally differed from Type I ('the Central Midland Standard'); it evolved later, from a combination of spoken London English and certain Central Midland elements, which themselves would be transmitted via the spoken, not the written language. But the result was a written, not a spoken, standard, which was to spread considerably in use by 1470. Regarding this spread, more could be learnt than hitherto from an intensive study of the Early Chancery Proceedings at the Public Record Office. These include a number of appeals addressed to the Chancellor that were evidently written in more remote counties, yet, apart from stray dialectal forms, they are written in some approximation to Chancery Standard. Nevertheless, its use was by no means universal: ...it was more common for reasonably educated men to write some form of their dialect, gradually purging it of its 'grosser provincialisms', than to make a direct attempt to imitate Chancery Standard.

The difference between what is implied by Samuels' 'Chancery Standard' and the Fisher's 'Chancery English' is delineated and clarified in *LALME* (McIntosh et al. 1986, I: 47):

'Chancery Standard' is reserved for that type of London language so distinguished by Samuels (1963, pp. 88-9: 'Type IV'). The criteria for its recognition are linguistic, and have nothing to do with the institution from which a document originated. It is a form of London English attested regularly from the 1430s onwards; as the fifteenth century progressed, legal and administrative language increasingly converged upon it. It is neither the monopoly of Chancery nor the only London English to be found among its writings.

I am not sure if many scholars are aware of the demarcation as outlined by the producers of *LALME* (for example Burnley 1989; Blake 1996), and what concerns me is that this difference of stance on the identity of 'Chancery Standard' and 'Chancery English' has not been made clear in the textbooks on the history of the

English language. For example, Crespo (2000: 27, see footnote) in a recent paper seems to express a sense of bewilderment that some scholars such as Laura Wright and Michael Benskin disagree on the ‘accepted view’ of ‘Chancery English’ and its dissemination. It is not difficult to see how such confusion could develop. The issue of ‘standardisation’ is a key area in the history of English language and important details such as the use of the term ‘Chancery Standard’ should not be taken for granted by scholars. The discussions of ‘Chancery Standard’ would require explicit linguistic evidence.

Despite some possible areas for confusion and a lack of evidence for a distinct ‘Chancery’ language, one of the reasons for scholars adopting the ‘Chancery’ variety as the basis for the ‘standard’ seems to be the following:

The fact that many Chancery forms are the same as those used in print today has encouraged many scholars to describe this variety as the precursor of standard English (Leith 1996: 130).

What have been hitherto described as features of the ‘Chancery’ variety will be discussed below.

3.2 ‘Chancery Forms’

Samuels (1963) does not give a detailed account of what linguistic features make up the Type IV, ‘Chancery Standard’. He does, however, list ‘a few of the more outstanding differences’ between Type III of the Chaucer MSS and Type IV ‘Chancery Standard’ (1963: 80), which are shown below:

Chaucer	'Chancery Standard'
yaf	gaf
nat	not
bot	but
swich(e)	such(e)
hir(e)	theyre, þeir(e), þair(e), her
thise	thes(e)
thurgh	thorough, þorow(e)
sholde	shulde

More examples are given in Samuels (1983: 29) and spellings identified are *if* for 'if', *yit* and *yet* for 'yet', *before* and *afore* for 'before', *werk(e)* for 'work', and *sawe* for 'saw' (preterite verb).

Fisher's criteria (1977) for a 'Chancery form' are somewhat different from Samuels'. Samuels lists forms which are commonly attested in the government documents from 1430 onward. Fisher, however, claims that clerks had developed their preferred system of spelling which reached a mature form by 1430 (1977: 881). Great emphasis is placed on the 'modernization' which Fisher claims as being evident in the use of English when Chancery clerks were enrolling papers such as petitions to the parliament. Fisher illustrates this by comparing two documents, which are:

- A text of an 'original' petition brought before Parliament (London P.R.O. SC8/25/1238)
- The 'enrolled' copy of the same petition of a Parliament roll for its own record (London P.R.O. C65/90/21)

Comparing the two documents above, Fisher claims (1977: 882):

The differences between the original form and the enrolled form give us a glimpse of the drift towards standardization, for along

with a neater hand in the enrollment goes a tendency towards regularization - modernization, in our terms.

In order to exemplify his point, Fisher gives categories in which a clerk may 'modernise' or 'regress' in his manner of orthography. The categories which Fisher outlines (1977: 822) are listed below:

'MODERNIZATION'

1. dropping *e* where it is not found in Modern English
2. changing *seid* to *saide* in every instance
3. changing *hadd* to *had*
4. changing a plural inflection from *ez* to *es*
5. changing *þ* to *th*
6. changing *monoie* to *monay*

'REGRESSION'

1. adding *e* where it is not found in Modern English
2. changing *i* to *y*
3. doubling *t*
4. dropping *l*
5. using short *o* for *u*

There are several problems concerning the criteria for 'modernization' and 'standardization' as outlined by Fisher. The first is that it would be inaccurate to refer to the above categories as 'modernization' since it was never intended as such in the fifteenth century. This is clear from the fact that the same scribe adds an *e* in some words and omits adding it in other words. Surely, if the clerk had

been intending to ‘modernise’ and ‘regularise’ in a conscious manner, then he would have applied the changes to all the words concerned. What we see here is that the enrolled version of the Chancery petition displays quite an ordinary writing practice of the period which accepts a certain amount of variation as the norm. What is evident from the two texts above is not a case of ‘modernisation’ and ‘regression’, but this kind of variation evident in a single text points to a common late medieval scribal practice in a ‘pre-standardised system’ (Wright 1998: 180). Wright points out that ‘variation is typical of manuscripts produced in London throughout the Middle English period and beyond’ (1998: 180). Questionnaires in *LALME* (1986) also present abundant evidence as to variation in a single text. In this context, it is dangerous to assume that a use of a variable is ‘standardisation’ when the same scribe continues to use other variables in the same text. The above criteria are also questioned by a legal historian Timothy Haskett (1993). Haskett recounts Fisher’s explanation of the ‘emergence of Standard English’ (1977) in his paper, but queries the variables Fisher chooses to demonstrate a ‘standardised’ language in the Chancery:

Given Fisher’s statement that the absence or presence of the final *e* is a matter of personal preference and extreme variance, the initial characteristic in both these lists seems suspect, or at least must be given little weight. Further, the question of whether or not a final *e* is intended where such is not written but where there is simply a final flourish or stroke, is a very difficult one. In the Chancery bills double *l* and double *t* forms, as well as the final *d* often display such indication, but these cannot be taken with any confidence to mean that a final *e* was intended, and thus such an indicator cannot be used to assess even the relative ‘modernity’ of the bills. Similarly, Fisher’s interpretation of the substitution of *y* for *i* as a regressive step seems to contradict his statement that the *i* for *y* change was a matter of great variance and individual preference (Haskett 1993: 16, footnote).

The second problem with Fisher's claim is his suggestion that the enrolling clerk would necessarily display 'standardised' language, because he would be 'working at more leisure and less under the influence of the client's oral statement or the bill drawn up by his notary' and therefore was more 'careful in his language' (1977: 882-83). This statement must be contended in the light of the comment made by the historian Galbraith in his handbook on using the Public Records (1934: 22), which cautions researchers to the contrary:

No other country has any series comparable to the English Chancery enrolments either in its elaborate subdivisions or in the completeness with which they have been preserved. But they have their limitations and they have their defects. They are in the first place *private memoranda* for the use of the Chancery clerks and the administration. The copy on the roll was made from the draft which in some cases was altered before the engrossment was made: there was *no system of examination* and above all there were frequent omissions, erasures, and alterations (Italics mine).

Galbraith stipulates that the enrolments were private copies, and as such, it must be concluded that the language of the enrolled Chancery petitions would have very little influence, if any, on documents outside the Chancery. Myers (1937: 611) points out that people outside of the Chancery simply would not see the enrolled copies made by Chancery clerks, if they were made at all:

[The petitioners] would hardly have access to the parliament roll, for when in 1401 the king did once allow the parliament rolls to be examined it was only as an act of grace.

Thirdly, I contest Fisher on another of his observations. Fisher (1977: 882) concluded that the petitions brought to the court of Chancery were all rewritten by Chancery clerks:

It is in Chancery script, presumably prepared from dictation or based upon a preliminary draft brought in by the petitioner, but it had to be copied over and presented by a sworn clerk as

attorney, since the Chancery clerks had a monopoly on presentations to Parliament and to the Chancellor.

On the question of who produced the Chancery petitions²¹, however, further information is given in *LALME* (1986, I: 49) and is reproduced below:

The class of documents called 'Early Chancery Proceedings' (Public Record Office, London, classification 'C1') needs special note... The documents preserved in this class are mainly formal petitions addressed to the king's chancellor of England, seeking redress for wrongs that the petitioners believed could not be righted by the ordinary processes of the common law... Most petitions follow a common form, and are written in the third person. They show no signs of having been sent into the Chancery: there are no seals, seal straps, or slits for seal straps; they are addressed not in fashion of a letter, on the dorse, but at the head of the text of the petitions, and they show no signs of folding. These considerations led to the view that they were not the original petitions at all, but paraphrases made by Chancery clerks (so Benskin 1977, p.598; repeated in Laing 1978, p. 46). That view, however, is mistaken. The petitions in Early Chancery Proceedings, it now appears, are very largely the work of common lawyers, that is, of the petitioners' own counsel. The reason that they show none of the ordinary signs of being missives is that they were delivered by hand into the Chancery, by the professionals responsible for drafting them.

Many of Fisher's assumptions concerning the organisation of Chancery clerks have since been reconsidered and discounted. For example, Fisher claimed that the masters in the Chancery rigidly controlled the language of the Chancery clerks (1977: 891):

Chancery provided a system of education for both its own clerks and the common lawyers. Each of the twelve major clerks had his own house in which lived minor clerks and candidates for clerkships. These "hospiciae cancellarie" were the origin of the Inns of Chancery, which were the preparatory school for the inns of Court down to the eighteenth century.

²¹ Fisher (1979: 139) reiterates his view that it was the Chancery clerks who produced the petitions from drafts brought in to the Chancery and presents a different view from Myers (1937).

Fisher's description concerning the organisation of Chancery clerks is based on Tout's works (1916 and 1927). In his article entitled *The English Civil Service in the Fourteenth Century*, Tout makes the point that '[Chancery] now had headquarters of its own in London, where the clerks lived a sort of collegiate life in common' (1916: 191). He makes a similar point in his celebrated series, *Chapters in Medieval Administrative History* (1920-33). Tout, however, later revises his earlier views concerning the domestic arrangements of Chancery clerks, stating. 'We have seen that "hospicium cancellarie" means the household of the first-grade clerks only' (1927: 55). In the footnote he adds: 'In *Chapters of Administrative History*, ii, 218, I go too far in asserting that the 'chancery clerks' lived together in a semi-collegiate life'. Richardson (1999: 58) also points out that ' "the household of the Chancery" was probably a myth'. The strict hierarchy and organisation of the 'household of the Chancery' has been integral to the explanation of the 'creation' of 'Chancery English'. A full discussion on the nature of fifteenth-century Chancery cannot be discussed here, but a recent revised insight into the organisation of the medieval Chancery is found in Richardson (1999).

3.3 Chancery Hand

Fisher contends that the 'creators' of 'Chancery English' wrote in what he calls 'Chancery hand', the definition of which I shall discuss below. Fisher et al. (1984: 4-5) state:

It is our contention that the conventions of the official languages (orthography, morphology, syntax, and idiom, in Latin, French, and English) were learned along with the hand by Chancery clerks and by their imitators, and that Chancery usage thus led the way towards standardization of the written language.

Fisher et al. (1984: 4) also conclude that:

The distribution of documents over the decades reveals a gradual increase in the number of documents in Chancery hand which parallels the extension of Chancery usage.

A closer look, however, at the history of the script and the contemporary practice of the scribes dictates that a much more careful approach is required when describing the ‘influence’ of the Chancery hand. It is true that those who wrote and read in the fifteenth century would have recognised the importance and relevance of the script in use for a particular document. This is described by Clanchy (1993: 127):

Contemporaries, as well as modern palaeographers, distinguish between the symmetrical and closely written ‘book hand’, which is the predecessor of the blackletter script of the earliest printed books, and ‘court hand’ or cursive, which is freer and more fluent... The medieval term for book hand was *textus*²², which is more appropriate as *textus* literally means a ‘weave’. Thus an inventory of books in the royal treasury in c.1300 describes one book of transcripts as being written in *grosso texto* (in a large or heavy weave), whereas another is *sub manu curiali* (in court hand)...

Further specialized scripts become apparent in the thirteenth century, particularly among royal clerks, who developed distinctive variations of court hand for pipe rolls, Chancery enrolments, and so on. The good scribe did not therefore aim to write in a unique style distinctive to himself, like a modern writer, but to have command of a variety of scripts appropriate to different functions and occasions.

Originally, what is referred to as ‘Court hand’, and also known as ‘Chancery hand’, is a script which gradually developed, and was not created as such. This is clarified by Clanchy (1993: 128) who cautions:

Some palaeographers have attempted to create a more rigid classification of scripts than the documents warrant. Early

²² Parkes (1969: xiii) refers to it as *textura*.

cursive or court hands have suffered in particular, when they have been described as ‘chancery hands’. The assumption behind this term is that cursive script was taught by writing masters in chancery schools.

As to the origin of the cursive script, T. A. M. Bishop (1961, cited in Clanchy 1993: 129) points to an interesting cause and effect with regard to writing. Bishop argues that:

[The cursive forms] are simply the minuscule forms adapted, by the various habits of individual scribes, for the purpose of writing quickly... The cursive is the result of licence, not discipline; it is evidence not of a common training but of something simpler and historically more interesting: a common pressure of urgent business.

Supporting Bishop’s argument above, Clanchy (1993: 129) highlights that:

The cursive is simply a quicker way of writing and was therefore used wherever speed was important. Hence it became the speciality of those writing offices, like the royal Chancery, which produced the most documents. Cursive was appropriately called ‘court hand’ by contemporaries because most rapid writing was done by courts, not because it was taught in courts or chanceries. It was not so much the distinctive mark of an official, as a practical way of getting through the business.

Clanchy is here discussing the development of ‘court hand’ in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but there are interesting implications for understanding the role of the scripts in the fifteenth century. Traditionally, it shows that the scripts were not taught as such in chancery schools. Another interesting point is that it was the mark of the good scribe that he could produce and distinguish several scripts. Thirdly, cursive hand was originally developed for speed, and hence economy, in producing the manuscript. The book hand, however, continued to be used for fine manuscripts until the sixteenth century.

Clanchy notes above that the various scripts were in use for different Chancery documents. This holds true for the fifteenth century. It must therefore be

concluded that it would be inaccurate to use the term ‘Chancery hand’ as if to represent the script of the whole of medieval Chancery. The term ‘Chancery hand’ has been used by Fisher et al. (1984) to describe the script used by the Signet clerks of Henry V. This has traditionally been known as the Secretary script. In other Chancery documents, such as the Exchequer Memoranda Rolls, Exchequer accounts, Exchequer Issue Rolls, Coram Rege Rolls in the fifteenth century all show different scripts varying between Anglicana and Secretary. Parkes (1969: xiv) explains that ‘A hierarchy also arose in the cursive script itself’. Parkes (1969: xvi) names a variety which developed from mid-thirteenth century to the fourteenth century: ‘Anglicana’, often referred to as ‘Court Hands’. There is a new influence from the end of the fourteenth century, and in the fifteenth century, the new Secretary script is in use. Parkes (1969: xx) states:

One of the outstanding features of the history of English handwriting in the fifteenth century is the gradual infiltration of this new script, which in its English form we now call ‘Secretary’, into all classes of books and documents, until by the sixteenth century it had become the principal script in use in this country... In the collection of Chancery Warrants issued under the Privy Seal or Signet the new script is first used extensively in 1376, but it is hardly ever used in the other offices of the central government.

It is this Secretary script which Fisher et al. (1984) designate as ‘Chancery Hand’. Fisher clarifies his use of the term ‘Chancery hand’ in a later paper (1988). He claims concerning the designations Anglicana and Secretary by M. B. Parkes:

[M. B. Parkes’] analysis does not seem to me to make sufficient allowance for the hands used in the Signet and Chancery offices, which I have called Chancery hand²³.

²³ Fisher (1988: 270) also adds:

The main difficulty with this is that, as pointed out by Parkes (1969: xx), Secretary was not the only script used in the Chancery, nor was it the main one. Variations of Anglicana seem to be dominant in the writings of Chancery documents. This is also highlighted by Matheson (1986: 648), who warns that the use of the term 'Chancery Hand' to denote Secretary 'is a considerable departure from received terminology'. Matheson reports that his own study of selected documents from various files in PRO SC8 (mainly petitions to Parliament) and from files in PRO C1 (petitions submitted to the Court of Chancery and related Chancery proceedings) also shows how it would be inaccurate to call Secretary script 'Chancery Hand' as if it represented all Chancery writing. The evidence points to the fact that there obviously did not exist an official policy of employing Secretary script as the authorised script for the whole of the Chancery. Matheson finds (1986: 649) that, if anything, during the early part of the fifteenth century on which much of Fisher et al.'s (1984) anthology is based, Secretary script was in the minority:

[A] predominance of formally written by mixed hands..., combining in varying proportions anglicana and secretary features, and of anglicana hands, some of very current nature; secretary hands are in a clear minority, though there seem to be more among the Parliamentary petitions than among the Chancery hands. Yet petitions in all the above hands were acceptable, as official endorsements on the documents show.

Intervening between the set anglicana of the fourteenth century and the cursive secretary of the sixteenth was a set hand much like anglicana, although with increasingly freer duct and with the continental letter shapes enumerated above which lent themselves to a more cursive script: single compartment *a*, single compartment *g*, short *r*, and modern *s*. This intermediary hand is what in the *Anthology of Chancery English* I designate Chancery hand.

Therefore Fisher's view (1988: 270) of dissemination and influence of the Secretary hand seems too simplistic:

All of the signet letters of Henry V, written by some thirteen different scribes, use these forms, which were gradually adopted by other government clerks and then by clerks of the guilds and private households and by independent scribes until, by the end of the century, they became the normal forms in Tudor secretary.

A contemporary awareness of what is known as the 'Chancery hand' in the fifteenth century is evident from two letter writers in the Paston collection who state that they are writing in a 'Chancery Hand' (Davis 1983: 24). They are John Clopton (c.1454²⁴) and Lord Moleyns (1448²⁵). It is difficult to understand precisely what is meant by the use of this term by these men, as both letters are nothing like the writing of the Chancery clerks: Anglicana, Secretary or otherwise. In particular, the hand of Lord Moleyns is a typically untrained and untidy hand. Richardson (personal communication) has suggested that it could be a jocular statement regarding their obviously bad handwriting. A closer look at the spelling and morphosyntax also reveal that the usage of these two men did not approximate to the common usage of the Chancery documents. All in all, the letters of Clopton and Lord Moleyns suggest that the contemporary use of the term 'Chancery hand' did not imply the use of the Secretary script and the letters of these two men show that it is not possible to equate the 'Chancery Hand' with 'standardisation' of contemporary writing according to the Chancery practice. Davis, who has considered the writings of the two men, also points out that, 'Neither in fact offers a characteristically Chancery pattern' (1983: 24).

²⁴ BL Add. MS. 34888. f.97.

²⁵ BL Add. MS. 43491. f. 5.

Christianson (1989), who has studied the book trade in medieval London, highlights an interesting point regarding the use of Secretary script in London. He notes that the Chancery scribes were not the only ones to use Secretary. Parkes (1969: xx) points out that Secretary was ‘well established as a book hand in England by 1400’. The use of Secretary by those in the booktrade and those drafting legal documents in London preceded the Signet letters of Henry V written in English. Parkes notes:

The first recorded instance of a stationer in London occurs in 1311, and by the end of the 14th century the term “as not infrequently used of members of the book trade”. With the increasing pressure of work, a distinction gradually arose between the scribes who drafted legal documents and those who copied books. Eventually in 1373 the Writers of Court Hand, or Scriveners, broke away from the others and formed their own gild with its own ordinances (1991: 286).

This shows that the Secretary script was not the monopoly of the Chancery scribes. It is not surprising then, to find, as Christianson observes, that from about 1443 onwards, the clerks producing records of the Old London Bridge began using the Secretary script. I am not sure if this change to Secretary from Anglicana is a ‘deliberate’ one as Christianson concludes it to be (1989: 90). He points out, however, in an earlier paragraph in his paper, that the features used by the clerks working prior to 1443 used written features:

...which were characteristic of mixed Anglicana and Secretary texts at the time, and it would be fair to say that until 1443 Anglicana Script remained the commonly used (and perhaps preferred) office standard within the Bridge House (1989: 90).

Therefore the spread of the Secretary usage seems to be a gradual one. Despite this, Christianson (1989: 101) surmises that the use of Secretary script in the scriveners’ petitions of 1439-40 and 1449-50 was due to the ‘powerful influence of Chancery practices, here beginning to be acknowledged among members of a

small London guild of professional writers'. This observation raises a question. If the stationers had been influenced by the power of the Chancery practice, why did they select only Secretary, when Chancery documents continued to be produced in variations of Anglicana? From the evidence of books produced in the latter half of the fifteenth century in Secretary, there is no doubt that this script was gaining popularity. Yet, at a time before the advent of printing, when written texts for personal collections were growing in demand, the book producers of London must also have had the same economic considerations for their selection of a type of script.

As mentioned above, the Secretary script had been available to London scribes from the beginning of the fifteenth century, and considering that these professional producers of written texts had a flourishing business from the end of the fourteenth century (Christianson 1989: 85), it would not be surprising to find them using the newer Secretary script for book producing purposes. It would be premature, however, to assume that the scribes were following a 'Chancery model' in their selection of the script merely because Secretary was used by the scribes and those in the book trade in the fifteenth century. There is no real evidence to support a statement such as that shown below :

The adoption of English as the language of official documents by chancery scribes about 1430 *gave scribes an authoritative standard*, and as the fifteenth century progressed so *a universal stabilised orthography*, in essence that which has become established in English, was increasingly widely used (Scragg 1974: 64; Italics mine).

What can be noted is that the Secretary hand in the Signet letters of Henry V achieves an unusual degree of consistency and uniformity with regard to the shapes of the graphs, the very small size of the graphs and in the overall quality of

writing including the use of wide margins. This holds true for the different scribes in the Signet Office, evidenced from the fact that their names are signed on the bottom corner of each document. These observations may have led Fisher et al. (1984) to conclude that somehow this script is more authoritative than Anglicana. Their view, although questioned by Matheson (1986), has been accepted in textbooks.

Documents written in this orthography, and written in a characteristic script, were further marked by a distinctive manner of textural coherence proper to legal and administrative language, which has become known as the ‘curial style’ (Burnley 1989: 37).

The Chancery... was the Court of the Lord Chancellor, and the written English that developed there in the 15th century was to become a standard, both in this style of handwriting (‘Chancery Hand’) and in its vocabulary and grammar... (Freeborn 1998: 247).

Even scripts like Anglicana and Secretary, which are classified broadly, are not uniform entities. These scripts were adapted for uses in different text types over time. Doyle (1994: 94) explains:

There is a nomenclature for some different styles of *littera textualis* in the 13th and 14th centuries, but within them and within the class of *cursiva anglicana* there are distinct types, even before the influence of continental cursives multiplied the latter from about 1375 onwards, while within the new secretary style there are recognisably different types, apart from numerous amalgams...

Thus the use of the Secretary script cannot always be ascribed to an influence from the Chancery. An interesting perspective on this issue can be further gleaned from Thomas Hoccleve. It is well known that as well as being a poet who looked up to Chaucer, he was a Privy Seal clerk from the late fourteenth to the early fifteenth century (Compton Reeves 1974; Richardson 1986). His autograph

writings have been identified (for example, some plates can be seen in Schulz 1937) and they are written in a type of Secretary script. It is interesting to note, that when Hoccleve made a collection of letters for the guidance of younger colleagues in his *Formulary*, it was not a collection of Henry V's letters in English, but model letters in French in the curial style:

The style of such letters [in the curial style] was evidently much admired in the first decades of the fifteenth century and well known to English authors, for even as elaborate curial style first emerges into English in the Rolls of Parliament, Thomas Hoccleve thought it worthwhile, although on the verge of retirement, to make a collection of such letters in French for the guidance of younger colleagues in the Privy Seal Office. Hoccleve must have known quite well that the transition from French into English in this sphere was by now irreversible, but this did not deter him from presenting his epistolary models in their original French of fifty or sixty years before (Burnley 1986: 604).

The example cited above of Hoccleve making a collection of French letters for the guidance of younger scribes strongly implies that Hoccleve himself acknowledged the source of epistolary practice, that it was not Henry V's own letters in English which served as the model, but that the practice had been based on the French and that this was the authoritative model (Knapp 1999: 341²⁶).

3.4 The Role of Henry V

Another influential aspect of 'Chancery English' is the claim that its usage was authorised by the King. Richardson (1980: 728) comments:

While English did not become common in the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* and other official Chancery documents until after his death...., Henry's use of English exercised a profound

²⁶ I am grateful to Dr Catherine Batt for this reference.

influence upon the development of Chancery English, both in style and in linguistic content.

The appearance of the English language in Chancery documents has often been perceived as being the result of a government policy implementing a new ‘Standard’ which fits in nicely with the notion of prestige. When English does begin to be used, for example in the *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, however, it did so sporadically and gradually and without any application to a new authorised spelling system, as Rothwell notes:

For example, when French gave way to English in the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* the syntax changed, but a great proportion of the lexis was simply taken over as English, with or even without minor changes in spelling (1985: 45).

Moreover, what Rothwell describes above agrees with the *diffuse* situation found in the writing of the fifteenth century, which is discussed in § 2.4.3.

Richardson concludes that the King’s Signet Office in the fifteenth century was the most important and influential office in the Chancery because of its proximity to the King. He also concludes that this office led the way to ‘standardisation’. He emphasises the role of Henry V’s Signet Office with regard to its language (Richardson 1980: 739):

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the adoption of the “official” London written dialect by the Signet Office constituted a royal recognition that this was the authorized written standard for the central government. Just where this written dialect came from is another question, but what is important is the influence of the Signet Office Standard on Chancery Standard.

Richardson outlines what he sees as evidence of Henry V’s influence and hypothesises on this role. It seems, however, that Richardson’s 1980 article, strengthened by the publication of the *Anthology of Chancery English* in 1984 by

Fisher et al. caught the scholarly imagination regarding the active role of Henry V in promoting 'Standard English' (Blake 1996; Heikkonen 1996; Freeborn 1998; Knapp 1999; Fennell 2001) and thus Richardson's article has been influential in spreading the idea that English language in the late medieval period was 'standardised' by Royal command.

3.5 Implications of this Chapter

The difficulty in accepting Fisher and Richardson's views as they stand is that from their consideration of the Signet letters of Henry V, they seem to be authorising what are to be accepted as Chancery documents and what are not. For example, Richardson points out:

Aside from John's [Duke of Bedford] letter, there are no government documents from the years 1413-1422 that resemble Chancery English as closely as Henry's correspondence does. Fragmentary Privy Council minutes from 1417 are distinctly non-Chancery (1980: 736).

If documents such as Privy Council minutes are not to be accepted as the English of the Chancery, I am not sure what other documents qualify as Chancery papers. It must be remembered, however, that the written language of the Privy Council minutes was perfectly acceptable at the time of writing by the office of Chancery concerned. It was not disregarded by the Chancery office as not qualifying as the 'official' language. In relation to this, the present thesis contends that linguists considering written language of the past centuries cannot ignore data such as that of the Privy Council minutes. It would be wrong for linguists in the twenty-first century to select material which supports a hypothetical view of an 'incipient Standard' language and discard other kinds which do not fit their own criteria.

Wright's argument (1998: 180) for accepting 'the implications of a pre-standardised system' applies to the discussion of 'Chancery English'. There clearly is a problem when linguists 'discount' materials displaying variation as linguistic evidence because 'they are not consistent in spelling or morphology' (Wright 1998: 180).

I suggest, therefore, that the classification of written language conventionally termed 'Chancery English' is not truly representative of the contemporary Chancery and cannot be accepted as such.

A fundamental problem with the account pointing to the Chancery as the source and the cause of standardisation is that it does not explain the mechanisms of change. This problem has been pointed out by Smith (1996: 73):

Some scholars have held that the appearance in prestigious government documents of a standardised written language, like Type IV, was itself the mechanism whereby written Standard English emerged. However, recent scholarship indicates that the process was a little more complex.

Some mechanisms of change evident in fifteenth-century written English will be discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The claims for Chancery being the source and cause of 'standardisation' and the problems associated with such assertions have been considered in this chapter.

4 Role of Dialect Contact in the History of Late Middle English

4.1 Reasons for the Lack of Contact-based Explanations in the Study of Late Middle English

4.1.1 Contact Induced Change: An Alternative Approach

The previous chapters have argued that ‘standardisation’ in the strict sense of the word did not happen, and could not have happened, in the fifteenth century. Chapter 2 in particular has discussed how explanations of linguistic change based on notions of prestige has been popular in student textbooks, but concluded that such descriptions were implausible. Even though ‘standardisation’ of the English language as such did not occur in the fifteenth century, there were notable changes in the written English, for the period prior to the fifteenth century abounds with material written in different dialects of Middle English (Smith 1997b: 129).

Strang points this out:

ME is, *par excellence*, the dialectal phase of English, in the sense that while dialects have been spoken at all periods, it was in ME that divergent local usage was normally indicated in writing (1970: 224).

By the fifteenth century, however, the great dialectal phase was coming to an end and there is said to be a ‘standard’ in London (Strang 1970: 156; Davis 1959: 95). If one variety did not get selected to act as an official ‘standard’ in the fifteenth century, how could the reduction in regional written language be explained? The

process of how this change came to be is missing from the handbooks of the history of the English language, as Lass states:

The term ‘standardization’ is widely used, and everybody I suppose agrees that from around the late fourteenth century on, gathering momentum into the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, whatever ‘standardization’ was had begun to happen to English, and was more or less completed by around 1800 or so. But *the nature of the process is somewhat obscure*, and there are some very interesting indeterminacies that ought to affect our judgement of what is actually happening at any given time (1993: 81; Italics mine).

The present thesis suggests that dialect contact was a major factor in promoting changes which emerged in written late Middle English, hitherto missing from the discussions of the history of English language. It is the contention of this thesis that, unless dialect contact is taken into account, the processes which lead to the regularising of late Middle English cannot properly be explained. Black also suggests in her study of the dialect materials of late medieval Herefordshire that contact between systems (also stressed in Smith (1996: 47-48)) of a language needs to be addressed:

The view held here [i.e. Black (1997)] is that language as an object of study is inseparable from its external context. As it is essentially a social phenomenon, it cannot be properly understood without reference to society; moreover, its immediate context of use, including, on the most basic level, its mode of transmission, should never be lost sight of. ...the study of a variety, medieval or modern, cannot be carried out in isolation, but must take into account both the intra- and extralinguistic context, including factors like synchronic variation and contact between systems; the traditional model of direct descent, modified only by rule-bound intrasystemic change, is thus insufficient (1997: 16).

This chapter will begin by pointing out why dialect contact is not considered in current literature. I will then describe some of the processes involved in a dialect contact situation and point out how they can be applied to the linguistic state in

the fifteenth century. I will also discuss the advantages of a contact induced perspective in describing the history of written English in the fifteenth century.

I suggest that one of the reasons for this lacuna is due to the strong ideological preference in looking for a ‘single ancestor-dialect’ (Hope 2000, see §2.5 in the present thesis). Linked to the Neogrammarian-type idea, there is a tradition of favouring internally motivated changes over externally motivated changes as explanations (J. Milroy 1998: 21). Milroy identifies the probable reason why this has been the case in historical linguistics, stating:

The reason for [setting a high value on internal explanations and a correspondingly low value on external ones] is that in historically attested states, there is often insufficient evidence about the various dialects of a language and the possible contact between these dialects (and/or languages) to offer informed accounts of the processes that were actually involved, which of course lie deep in history.

When contact between different dialect speakers has been discussed in the development of written late Middle English, the effect of contact is usually reduced merely to that of ‘prestige’. For example, Ekwall, who studied changes in London English between 1250-1350, concluded that immigration of wealthy merchants who took up prominent positions in the city of London had influenced the language of upper classes in London to a Midland type dialect due to their status (1956: xiii). While ‘prestige’ is often a salient sociolinguistic variable which affects how people speak and write, it alone cannot explain the developments in the written English of the fifteenth century. Farrar (1996: 70) also argues that ‘prestige’ is ‘a far more complex notion than is often assumed’. Smith (1997a) also notes that current explanations of standardisation processes of written late Middle English which depend on notions of prestige are ‘an oversimplification, which the evidence does not support’. What is not supported by

various studies of written late Middle English is that one type, namely, ‘Chancery Standard’, with its set of linguistic features, replaces the written English in different regions. What is found, however, in recent studies, and in the present study in the chapters to follow, is that various linguistic features which make up present-day Standard English came to be widely adopted at different times (Nevalainen 2000: 357). Recent studies show that no one chose a dialect which contained features which were to become part of Standard English in later centuries. Two such linguistic examples which illustrate this point from a study by Nevalainen (2000) are discussed briefly below.

Nevalainen (2000: 342) points out that present indicative plural *are*, which is originally a Northern form, replaced *be* in the south in the sixteenth century.

Nevalainen (2000: 348) interprets this change as:

A case of ordinary dialect diffusion: as *are* was percolating southwards in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it had a stronger impact on East Anglia than on London. *Its progress seems to have had little to do with the processes of standardisation discussed in section 2.2 [spread of ‘Chancery Standard’]* (Italics mine).

The third person singular present indicative forms *-s* and *-th* again, do not support the view that ‘Chancery Standard’ spread and formed the basis of present-day Standard English. This is further developed in the chapters on Northern English and East Anglian English in the present thesis. The study of these sixteenth-century features by Nevalainen (2000) also supports my findings: she notes that the originally Northern feature *-s* was present in London in the late fifteenth century in the letters written by the merchants, but its use was avoided in the Court including the Chancery documents. Another interesting observation made by Nevalainen (2000: 350) is that, in the second half of the fifteenth century, East

Anglia ‘shows next to no instances of the northern form’. Also the diffusion of *-s* occurs later than that of *are* (Nevalainen 2000: 351). This diffusion pattern in the sixteenth century, although outside the scope of the present thesis, shows that diffusion of Northern forms into London via East Anglia (or East Midlands), as suggested in the textbooks (Baugh and Cable 1994: 189-90, for example) does not hold true. When *-s* was eventually widely adopted in London in the mid-seventeenth century, it was first accepted outside the Court and the Chancery circles (Nevalainen 2000: 352).

These findings above by Nevalainen alone should alert researchers to the fact that the ‘standardisation’ process as described by Fisher (1977) and Richardson (1980) has little empirical basis.

4.1.2 The Dominance of the ‘Creolisation’ Question

Discussions hitherto of contact involving Middle English have been discussions of language contact. The possible effects of languages like Celtic, French, Norwegian or Danish in contact with English, often referred to as the ‘creolization’ hypothesis, have been much debated (Domingue 1977; Bailey and Maroldt 1977; Poussa 1982; Görlach 1986; Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Dalton-Puffer 1995; Allen 1997; Klemola 1997; Danchev 1997, Klemola 2000). Although there is no doubt that such language contacts have had a great impact on the shape of the English language (Samuels 1972: 95; Samuels 1985: 269-80; Mufwene 1999: 2-4; Kroch and Taylor 1997: 298-300), the dominance of the ‘creolization’ question seems to have hindered further application of contact-based approaches in studying the developments of fifteenth-century English. The aim of this chapter, however, is not to contribute to the ‘creolization’ debate, but to discuss the role and effects of *dialect* contact - contact between people from

different dialectal regions of Middle English and the subsequent change in the language - in the development of written English in the late medieval period.

4.1.3 Definition of 'Dialects'

The paucity of dialect contact study in ME is perhaps also due to the way *dialects* have been defined in linguistic textbooks. A typical example is found in Wakelin (1977: 1), who defines dialects as 'variant, but mutually intelligible, forms of one language' and language as 'a form of speech not on the whole intelligible to other languages'. In many cases, the above definitions have sufficed, but they nevertheless are misleading, since they have led people to conclude that, if users of different dialects are able to understand each other (since by definition they are mutually intelligible), dialect contact must have minimal or no effect at all on the language of the users. Recent research into modern-day dialect contact has, however, demonstrated that dialect contact does have notable effect, an important one being the levelling of dialects (Watt and Milroy 1999; Williams and Kerswill 1999) which will be discussed below. The present thesis argues that the study of ME dialects can greatly benefit from the findings of modern-day dialect research. Although much of modern-day dialect research is based on phonology, the principles also apply to morphological and syntactical changes as well. This is also suggested by Cheshire (1982: 122) who comments:

It is reasonable to assume that this process [accommodation due to contact] may extend to morphological and syntactic features as well as to phonological features.

The present study assumes that some of the processes involved in dialect contact will become manifest in the written mode as well as the spoken mode. Late

medieval correspondence is particularly valuable in this regard, as Nevalainen (1999: 506) suggests:

Personal correspondence is the only interactive text type to supply a wide range of authentic communication from the early 15th century to the present day.

4.2 Effects of Dialect Contact

The following section will discuss some mechanisms of dialect contact which are relevant to the present thesis. This will be done by drawing on the results of research on some present-day dialect contact. Applications to the late Middle English contact situations will be made where relevant.

One of the important phenomena which initially occurs as a result of contact is that there is an increase in variation (Trudgill 1994: 20). This could be manifest in an existence of more than one word for a notion, variability of inflection, spelling, grammar and pronunciation. In Middle English there are examples such as *eggys/eyren*, *heo/she*, third person singular present indicative marker *-s/-th* and so on. Variation does not occur simply because a scribe is 'careless, sleepy or degenerate' (Rothwell 2000: 230; Wright 1997: 346-50) or is incompetent and lacking in focus. Variation is also known to be present in some copied or layered texts (Benskin and Laing 1981). This is also a form of contact when a scribe encounters or comes to be in contact with the written language from another area. This chapter will focus on effects of dialect contact which is manifest in an individual's written language, but due to the individual being in contact with a community outside his/her immediate region. A contact based approach accepts and explains the existence of variability in a language. The chapter is concerned especially with the effects of prolonged contact on an

individual's linguistic usage in the written mode and the different effects of contact will be considered next.

4.2.1 Accommodation

One phenomenon which may occur as a result of dialect contact is accommodation. It has been noted by psychologists that people often 'converge' or adapt their speech in some way (for example, reduce pronunciation dissimilarities or change speech rates) in order to gain the approval of the listener and 'to encourage further interaction and decrease the perceived discrepancies between the actors' (Giles and Smith 1979: 46). Trudgill comments that among the studies of the psychologists, there is a 'strong sense that convergence of this type [accent convergence, or a reduction of pronunciation dissimilarities] is a universal characteristic of human behaviour' (1986: 2). Trudgill further suggests that 'accommodation can also take place between accents that differ regionally rather than socially, and that it can occur in the long term as well as in the short term' (1986: 3). He further specifies in the case of long-term contacts that:

We are dealing with contact between speakers of different regional varieties, and with regionally mobile individuals or minority groups who accommodate, in the long term, to a non-mobile majority that they have come to live amongst (1986: 3).

Trudgill bears out an important point from the analysis of his own recordings made for the Norwich study, in which he wished to see if he had accommodated his use of the variables when interviewing informants (1986: 7). He noticed that accommodation did take place, and 'during accommodation between accents that differ at number of points, some features are modified and some are not' (1986: 9). This is also the case with changes in written late Middle English, and is demonstrated in the findings from linguistic study in the chapters to follow. Some

features change and some do not, contrary to the assumptions of the prestige-based theory which predicts that all features from a 'prestigious' variety will be assimilated in a new variety.

4.2.2 Accommodation and Spread

Trudgill (1986) maintains that the spread of a new linguistic feature from one region to another would involve transference at the level of the individual speaker.

He suggests (1986: 39) further, that:

If a speaker accommodates frequently enough to a particular accent or dialect, I would go on to argue, then the accommodation may in time become permanent, particularly if attitudinal factors are favourable.

Before accommodation takes place, there will possibly be a kind of 'habituation process' (Trudgill 1986: 40) in which a person is exposed to a linguistic feature from a different dialect, and after much contact, the original form seems 'unusual and odd'. This aspect demonstrates how accommodation is different from imitation. Trudgill notes that when individual dialect speakers have made a *conscious* decision to acquire a standard, then '*imitation* and *copying* is the mechanism involved, and not accommodation' (1986: 41; Emphasis original). Hitherto, the notion of the imitation of 'Chancery' forms has been explicit in explaining the spread of so-called 'Chancery Standard' because of its supposed 'prestige'. It has been claimed that people like Caxton deliberately imitated 'Chancery Standard' (Fisher 1980; Richardson 1980; see also chapter 2 in the present thesis). It seems, however, that it is accommodation which is essential in the spread of a new linguistic feature, especially in the late medieval period when people's concept of written language was diffuse rather than focused (see §2.4.3 of the present thesis). In a diffuse state, variability in spelling, such as the

interchangeability of graphs *i/y* or *ed/id* (preterite endings) are not considered important and both variants are accepted.

4.2.3 Diffusion

There are different models explaining diffusion, but one which is of special relevance to the present thesis is that of the ‘language missionary’ developed by Steinsholt (1962, cited in Trudgill 1986: 56). ‘Language missionaries’ are those who move from one area into a more urban area and then return to their hometown some years later. Conditions conducive for ‘language missionaries’ to play their part in the fifteenth century are suggested by Ekwall (1956: xli), who notes that ‘there is a good deal of evidence showing that many Londoners kept up intimate connexions with their place of origin’. Also many common lawyers of the fifteenth century, while practising law in London, continued to have strong links with their home region (see examples of Miles Metcalfe in § 6.8; Hugh atte Fenne in § 7.4.1.4).

A present-day example of this phenomenon was observed by Gary Underwood when some children moved from the rural American south to an urban area and returned after several years. It was found that these children were ‘very influential in spreading urban speech forms to their rural friends’, especially since they were considered to be ‘more sophisticated than the stay-at-homes’ (cited in Trudgill 1986: 56). This was because these individuals were still considered to be ‘locals’ and ‘insiders’. If new language forms were used by a genuine outsider, they would most probably have been rejected as being ‘alien’ or ‘foreign’ to the area. The important role which such a ‘language missionary’ could play in diffusing new linguistic forms into an area is summed up by Trudgill (1986: 57):

If the attitudinal factors are right, and particularly if individuals are perceived as being insiders by a certain group of speakers even though they are linguistically distinct, then they can have a considerable linguistic influence through face-to-face contact in spite of being heavily outnumbered.

This observation reveals several important points. Firstly, it clearly demonstrates that *attitudinal* factors - whether one is perceived as an 'insider' of a group or not - play a major role in linguistic accommodation. Secondly, it shows, that, contrary to the popular idea, one does not necessarily need to invoke the notion of mass immigration into an area when there is evidence of some linguistic change.

The role of the attitudinal factor is further stressed by Cheshire, in her study of language of school children in Reading (1982). She analysed the variation of standard and non-standard [local Reading dialect] linguistic forms used by the children. She found that the ways in which some boys 'adapt their speech style when they are at school, ...depend partly on the extent of their involvement with the school culture and partly *on the nature of their relationship with the teacher*' (1982: 122; Italics mine). She points out the fact that some boys [Dave, Pete and Tommy] have a good relationship with their teacher may explain how these boys 'increase the use of standard English present tense forms in their school recording by a significant amount, compared to other boys'. An interesting finding made by Cheshire is that:

[I]t is not so much the attitude of Dave, Pete and Tommy towards the *school* that influences their use of nonstandard forms as their attitude towards the *teacher*' (1982: 122; Italics original).

The implication of this modern day example weakens the argument of fifteenth-century Chancery's institutional prestige in influencing people to imitate 'Chancery Standard'. The attitudinal factor of wishing to gain the favour of the

Chancellor may have played a part in the lack of regional forms in written petitions to the fifteenth-century Chancellor (which make up a large portion of the so-called ‘Chancery’ documents) from persons of all ranks and from various regions, rather than a rigorous imitation of all the ‘Chancery’ forms.

4.2.4 Elimination of Regionally Restricted Forms in Dialect Contact

The contact of two-dialects in modern-day Burträsk, Sweden (Thelander 1979, cited in Trudgill 1986: 91) offers an interesting explanation of how some old non-standard forms survive into a new variety. The contact between the two dialects has led to an existence of a new intermediate variety between dialect and standard. This new variety is spoken over a wider geographical area than that covered by the local Burträsk village dialect, although it is not as widespread as the national standard. A feature of this intermediate dialect is that it contains forms from both the old dialect and the standard variety. The explanation for this phenomenon is that ‘those non-standard dialect forms which survive in the regional standard are precisely those which are *most widespread* in northern Swedish dialects’ and the major mechanism involved in the formation of the new dialect ‘seems to be *the shedding of forms that are marked as being regionally restricted*’ (Trudgill 1986: 94; Italics mine). Therefore, regional forms which may not be perceived as ‘prestigious’ may gain ground in the new variety if they are widely used and this again weakens the arguments of the prestige-based accounts of linguistic change.

4.2.5 Dialect Levelling

Dialect levelling is a key feature of dialect contact which explains change in fifteenth-century written English. A modern day example is considered first to illustrate its effect.

There is a dialect mixture in Høyanger, Norway (Trudgill 1986: 95) which is an industrial town in western Norway developed after 1916. Before its industrial development, in 1916, the town had 120 inhabitants and by 1920 when development was underway, the population grew to 950, and today there are about 3000 inhabitants. This resulted in a mixture of different dialects spoken in the area. In the 1920s, there was already a following mixture of inhabitants in Høyanger:

- 28% from the immediate vicinity of Høyanger
- 32% from the rest of the county of Sogn og Fjordane
- 40% from Hordaland (including Bergen), Telemark, Nordland and Oslo

Trudgill (1986: 96) notes that since there were variety of dialects which speakers could accommodate to, what resulted was that:

Speakers began to reduce differences between their speech, possibly less by acquiring features from other varieties than by *reducing or avoiding features in their own varieties that were in some way unusual* (Italics mine).

Levelling has occurred which can be defined as ‘the reduction or attrition of *marked variants*’ (Trudgill 1986: 98; Italics original). Below are some definitions of dialect levelling:

the *eradication* of socially or locally marked variants which follows social or geographical mobility and resultant dialect contact (Watt and Milroy 1999: 26; italics mine).

the process of *eliminating* prominent stereotypable features of difference between dialects (Dillard 1972: 300, cited in Siegel 1985: 364; italics mine).

In the case of Høyanger, the marked variants were forms that are unusual or in a minority in Norwegian. Thus Trudgill concludes, ‘The forms with the widest

geographical (and social) usage are the ones that are retained' (1986: 98). According to Omdal (1976 and 1977, cited in Trudgill 1986: 95), it was observed that in the 1970s, the older generation who had originally moved into Høyanger spoke in a dialect which reflected to a considerable extent the area of the country where they grew up. The second generation, who were born to the in-migrants spoke in a dialect influenced to a certain extent by their parents' regional dialects, with considerable variation between speakers. 'It is only the third generation', notes Trudgill (1986: 95), 'often the grandchildren of the original in-migrants, who speak a relatively unified and distinctively Høyanger dialect'.

In the light of the findings from Høyanger, it must be concluded that Ekwall's idea about the effect of dialect mixing in London between 1250-1350 is not entirely accurate. Ekwall (1956: xl-xli) assumes that the children of the immigrants into London maintained the regional dialect of their parents intact, stating:

It is to be expected that sons and daughters of original immigrants largely adapted themselves linguistically to their surroundings, so that the second generation generally spoke the London dialect. This was no doubt the case in an earlier period when immigration may be supposed to have been comparatively limited. Things might be different if the influx of provincial people took on considerable proportions. It may then be assumed that people from the same country or district to some extent kept together, even formed social groups. *In such groups the provincial dialect had a chance to assert itself and live on, even be transmitted to children and other members of the household, as servants and apprentices.* A large family of children would probably contribute to *the preservation of the original family dialect.* It is thus not only permissible to include the younger generation; it is right to do so (Italics mine).

In his assumption of the preservation of the regional dialects in London, Ekwall seems to have been overly optimistic. What is observed in present day contact of such nature is that, although the first generation and possibly the second

generation may continue their use of their native dialect, it is not always used, as code-switching occurs depending on the context.

It is the contention of the present thesis that, dialect levelling played a key role in regularising written English in late Middle English as a result of dialect contact. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1993: 203) make this important observation with regard to the kind to process of change evident from the study of late medieval and early modern texts:

In practical terms, standardization can be characterized as the gradual reduction of variant forms in language or the specialization of certain items to specific uses or varieties.

What Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg are describing are essentially dialect levelling and reallocation (§2.4.6). I suggest that what researchers have been observing are clear effects of dialect contact hitherto clouded with the irregular use of the term ‘standardisation’. From a careful reading of Ekwall (1956) and Samuels (1963), it becomes obvious that these scholars have already been pointing to the effect which may be classified as that of dialect levelling:

The widened *contact* between people from various dialect areas would contribute to a greater uniformity of language and to the *elimination of too prominent dialectal peculiarities* (Ekwall 1956: lxiii; Italics mine).

It was more common for reasonably educated men to write some form of their own regional dialect, *gradually purging it of its ‘grosser provincialisms’²⁷, than to make a direct attempt to imitate Chancery Standard* (Samuels 1963: 93; Italics mine).

²⁷ Smith (1997b: 129-30) gives examples of ‘grosser provincialisms’. According to Smith, some spellings for the item ‘through’ in late ME, *drowg3*, *yhurght*, *trghug* and *trouffe* are such examples, compared to the more recognisable *thurgh* and *thorough*. I take this term ‘grosser provincialism’ to refer to marked regional forms.

More recently, Black (1997) has emphasised a similar point, that changes in late Middle English which eventually led to Standard English began not as a conscious imitation of a 'standard' variety:

The process of standardization was preceded from a relatively early date, perhaps the mid-fourteenth century, by the increasing use of 'colourless language', usage that is free from strongly regional forms, while not actively conforming to any definable standard (Black 1997, I: 40).

Laing also comments on the role of the neighbouring dialects, and it is assumed that contact between dialects is taking place in the example of such change as described below:

Forms of language change through time as well as across space, and the rate at which these changes occur also varies between one place and another. Linguistic usages in some parts of the country are recessive and are replaced by innovations from elsewhere or by forms from neighbouring dialects (1997: 105).

The effects of dialect levelling in the written English of Yorkshire and East Anglia in the fifteenth century will be discussed further in chapters 6 and 7 of the present thesis.

Scholars have attempted to describe uses of written English which do not display regional usage. For example, Samuels (1981: 43-4) classifies texts which show few regional characteristics and are difficult to localise, into two types:

(i) those in which the writer replaced his own more obviously local forms directly by those of Chancery Standard, e.g. the dialectally peripheral *har*, *ham* or *hor*, *mykel* or *mekil*, *sulf* were replaced by the corresponding Chancery forms *their*, *them*, *moche*, *self*;

(ii) those in which the writer replaced his own forms, not by those of Chancery Standard, but by other forms in very widespread use, especially if they were phonetically well suited to function as forms intermediate between dialect and standard. e.g. (for the examples given in (i) above *her*, *hem*, *myche*, *sylf*).

Samuels calls the second process a ‘colourless regional standard’ (1981: 43). This seems like the levelled variety as defined by Watt and Milroy (1999) given above. I contend that if a dialect contact-based approach is taken, both processes mentioned above could be simplified into one, namely, a levelled dialect. Dialect contact would explain the existence of two widely used forms at any one time (e.g. *hem* and *their*) without the need for the classification of two types. The two types described by Samuels both involve the elimination of marked regional forms, which is characteristic of dialect levelling. This would also be more accurate a term than a ‘colourless regional standard’, since these regional varieties were not ‘standards’ in a strict sense (The ‘colourless regional standard’ does not fulfil criteria for a standard language listed in § 2.3 above).

L. Milroy (1999b: 1) emphasises ‘the usefulness of dialect contact models in reconstructing the standardisation process’. She, however, highlights the need to

distinguish levelling from standardisation: these two processes are often confused in discussions of the latter. Levelling, associated with koineisation (i.e. the development of mixed dialects), is a linguistic process which arises spontaneously in dialect contact situations. It is part but not all of the standardisation process, which also involves institutional control. Furthermore, cultural models and ideologies, which vary both historically and geographically, are implicated in standardisation, but not in levelling (L. Milroy 1999b: 1).

4.2.6 Reallocation

When a new dialect is formed as a result of dialect contact, ‘focusing takes place by means of a reduction of forms available’ (Trudgill 1986: 107). The reduction could involve levelling out of minority and marked variants or, by means of simplification taking place, it could be a reduction in irregularities. It has been found, however, that there are occasions when regional variants from different

dialects have been retained without being levelled out. This occurs when such variants are retained in the new dialect as *stylistic variants* (Trudgill 1986: 109). This is known as reallocation, when some of the regional variants present in the early dialect mixture have been ‘reallocated to a stylistic function’ (Trudgill 1986: 110).

This is what is found in the London dialect of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I claim that, for example, the third person singular indicative variants *-th / -s* in the sixteenth century and the variants *swich / such* in fifteenth-century London are examples of reallocation before one variant was eventually eliminated. In the case of *swich / such*, *swich* is the older form, found in Chaucer manuscripts, labelled by Samuels as ‘Type III’. *Such* is the newer form in London, belonging to ‘Type IV’, which is claimed to be the basis of the modern standard. It is noted that *swich* was recessive by the 1420s (Benskin 1992: 80). Concerning the decline of *swich* in London, Blake (1997: 22) claims that in some Chaucer manuscripts, ‘The most striking example of standardisation is the change from *swich* to *such*’. Despite this claim, *swich* continued to be used in some circles, and Horobin (2000a) makes the observation that the usage of *swich* is not chronologically distributed [i.e. a straightforward replacement of *swich* by *such*] in the fifteenth century, but rather, genre related²⁸. *Swich* continued to be used in literary manuscripts and printed books, whereas in official writings *such* was the dominant usage. It is even noted that Caxton employs the old form *swich* in his printed literary texts (Horobin 2000a). This can be seen as an example of reallocation: when two different dialectal variants become available, one is given

²⁸ Smith (1997b: 138-39) identifies a similar phenomenon in manuscripts of Nicholas Love and early printed texts of Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (see also Hellinga (1997: 154-59) for the Love tradition in early printed texts).

a stylistic function. Such variable usage, however, is difficult to explain using the traditional prestige-based view. In an attempt to explain the continued use of *swich* along with *such* in London after 1430 (when ‘Chancery English’ is said to have gained supremacy), some have regarded ‘Type IV’ as ‘a separate London dialect co-existing with the ‘Chaucerian’ type’ (cited in Benskin 1992: 77). However, this kind of classification (of co-existing of two ‘standards’) is not really necessary, if one considers the existence of the stylistic variant as the effect of dialect contact.

Another example of plausible reallocation is the third person singular *-th* / *-s* variant. As is well known, the two variants *-s* and *-th* had different regional origins, North and South respectively. According to Nevalainen (2000: 351), *-s* was still a minority variant in the middle of the sixteenth century, and it was never used in court. There was, however, ‘a change in the social evaluation of the two forms’ (Nevalainen 2000: 352) in the second half of the sixteenth century, and the *-s* form began to spread. This spread of *-s* did not oust *-th* completely in the sixteenth century and *-th* continued to be used in literary text types. Thus, Stein (1987: 430) concludes:

The use of *eth* was a marker of the written register of higher, prestigious, literary language. It may also be taken as an indication of the more marked, artificial status of *th*, as removed from the more natural, oral, colloquial connotation of *s* that it was *eth* which was used for metrical purposes in poetry and drama, and not *es*, which would theoretically also have been possible.

This differentiation of uses is, again, a plausible example of reallocation of a dialectal form due to dialect contact. Trudgill makes a valid observation (Trudgill 1986: 125) in this respect, stating:

As far as stylistic variants are concerned, we can say that full (as opposed to pidgin) language varieties appear to need stylistic variation... and dialect mixture provides an ideal source for variation of this type to be acquired.

4.2.7 Dialect Contact and Social Network Theory

J. Milroy (1998: 23) contends that ‘change in language is not brought about by languages, but by speakers, who introduce innovations which may under certain circumstances enter the linguistic system and become linguistic changes’. Milroy and Milroy (1985), and also J. Milroy (1987) explain how linguistic changes might occur at the level of the individual speaker by means of Social Network theory. This theory will be discussed briefly here, for contact between speakers due to mobility is integral to the changes described by Social Network theory.

Milroy and Milroy suggest that if ties between individuals within a small group are weak, this would allow for bridges which link members of that group to another group, and if the ties are strong within a group, it would contribute to local cohesion, but not allow bridges to be formed to another group. It is by means of bridges between groups that ‘information and influence are diffused’ (1985: 364). Therefore, ‘innovations first reach a group via weak ties’ (367). A factor which is relevant to the present discussion of dialect contact is mobility, as Milroy and Milroy (1985: 366) point out:

It is clear in general that social or geographical mobility is conducive to the formation of weak ties... Thus, mobile individuals who are rich in weak ties, but (as a consequence of their mobility) relatively marginal to any given cohesive group are, it is argued, in a particularly strong position to diffuse innovation.

Milroy and Milroy further suggest that it was the breaking up of the strong ties which led to linguistic changes in the late medieval period, and that this was

caused by the 'rise in the importance and population of London'. This created many individuals who were geographically mobile. It is concluded that:

Rapid changes in English [in the late Medieval period] seem to have depended on the existence of individuals and groups who were socially and geographically mobile and whose strong network ties were weakened or broken up by this mobility (1985: 379).

As mobility of an individual is crucial to the formation of a weak tie leading to a link to another group, it is particularly important that the language of these groups are considered in this context, namely, that those individuals who move into a new area for work, etc. are considered not as locals, but as mobile individuals who are potential innovators of linguistic change, still linked to their original group with a weak tie²⁹.

Finally, Social Network theory is important in the present discussion, in that it identifies the changes brought about at the level of the speakers, not systems (or 'incipient standard' types). J. Milroy (1992a: 199) stresses this, stating:

When linguists speak of a close contact situation, they are usually thinking of contact between systems, but what actually occurs is contact between speakers of different languages: the changes that result and that are then observed in the system have been brought about by the speakers, who form weak and uniplex ties when two population first come into contact.

4.2.8 Places of Contact

There are different reasons for individual movements in the late medieval period, but, for long-term accommodation to take place, the obvious destinations are the urban areas which attracted immigrant workers from various regions. Also, the

²⁹ However, Nevalainen (2000) who analyses some linguistic features of certain writers according to their domicile (Court, London, East Anglia, North and Other) from the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* 1417-1681 makes no basic distinction 'between those inhabitants of a locality who had migrated there from elsewhere, and those who were born there' (Nevalainen 2000: 341).

demographic parameter as suggested by Trudgill is relevant (1986: 39) here, namely that ‘the larger the population of a city, the more likely an individual from elsewhere is to come into contact with a speaker from that city’.

I focus particularly on the educational institutions, mainly because there is evidence that reading and writing skills have become highly valued for different social groups during the fifteenth century (Barron 1996: 222-27). If a youngster was sent away from home to be educated, the schools and the universities are the first place of contact, although some children were sent as apprentices directly to a home of a craftsman. As the present study is concerned with the changes in written English, there is good reason to consider the educational institutions where the pupils learned to read and write as well as further professional skills. Looking at Oxford, Cobban (1999: 15) notes that:

Oxford’s main intake seems to have derived from the counties of the southwest, the northern dioceses of Carlisle, Durham and York, and the region of the West Midlands.

As for King’s Hall in Cambridge, Cobban (1999: 16) comments that:

[It] recruited from all parts of England, [but] the main intake was from the eastern counties north of the Thames, with Norfolk seemingly supplying more than any other county and closely followed by Yorkshire. The bias towards the eastern and northern counties at the King’s Hall reflects what appears to be a similar recruitment pattern for Cambridge University as a whole.

There is evidence, therefore, that students from different regions mixed at the universities. It of interest that, as Nevalainen points out (2000: 334), George Puttenham, in advising those would-be poets in his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), warned of language mixing which took place in the universities, stating, that ‘in Vniversities... Schollers vse much peeuish affectation of words out of the primatiue languages’ (Puttenham cited in Burnley 1992: 224).

These educational institutions are of particular interest, because they were not only a training ground for theologians and lawyers, but it seems that many men from the gentry families from all over England went there. Not all attended in order to obtain a degree - spending a few years at a university was an end in itself, as Cobban (1999: 24) explains:

Many students attended a medieval university without having the intention of acquiring a degree. They believed that a period of study at a university, as well as being an education in itself, would bring social and career advancement.

The young scholars at Cambridge in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* illustrate how northerners' speech was recognised to be different for its vocabulary and sounds, but, at the same time, Chaucer's story demonstrates the situation of language contact which existed for students in the fifteenth century. Historian John Taylor points out that there was such a connection in the late medieval period. Rather than the northern scholars from Chaucer's tale being a mere fictitious stylistic device, there evidently was a historic basis for such an example. He states:

... there is another aspect to the life of the Church in this period [later Middle Ages] which is worth considering, namely the connexion between the diocese of York and the medieval universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries the diocese constituted an important recruiting area for the two universities. In this period also clerks from the York diocese played a significant role in the activities of both Oxford and Cambridge, while the appointment of an increasing number of university-trained clergy to benefices in the North added a new dimension to the religious life of the area (Taylor 1989: 39).

Other than the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, London was another important high contact area. The importance of London is obvious; not only was it the commercial capital, home of the royal court, a place with many religious houses, but it contained what Baker (1990) called the 'Third university of

England', the Inns of Court. Baker states that 'anybody who was anybody attended [the Inns of Court] in the fifteenth century... the alumni of the inns of court and chancery far outnumbered the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge' (1990: 17-8).

Another interesting perspective on the lives of fifteenth-century Londoners is highlighted by Keene (2000: 110):

Within London the population was *highly mobile*. The pattern of occupancy in a sample of about twenty houses in a relatively stable and prosperous central district in the fifteenth century shows that on average rent-payers moved house every two to three years, and perhaps 70 per cent of them occupied their homes for two years or less (*Italics mine*).

The mobility of Londoners has strong implications for the Social Network theory - it would not only indicate that immigrants into London had weak ties and were likely to be innovators of change, but it seems that many Londoners themselves might have had weak rather than strong ties, which would create a situation conducive to linguistic change. Thus J. Milroy concludes that urban situations are a 'sub-type of contact situations' and makes the generalization that 'contact situations (including urban ones) result in an increase in the number and frequency of weak ties existing within populations' (J. Milroy 1992a: 199).

Another geographically mobile group in the late medieval period were the merchants, particularly those involved in the wool trade. The Celys were such an example. Some of their activities are described by Postan:

In order to get large quantities of wool, it was now necessary to collect it all over the country, and there appear the men who were to become familiar figures in the English countryside from the late fourteenth century to the eighteenth century, the builders of so many beautiful houses, the founders and embellishers of so many churches, i.e. the wool brokers, as they were called at that time, the wool merchants of the smaller country towns and the more substantial villages. These brokers

travelled in the wool growing areas, in Yorkshire, in Northamptonshire, in parts of Wiltshire, in parts of Dorset, in the Cotswolds and in Gloucestershire (1973: 348).

The Celys are described as ‘wool exporters, merchants of London with a country place in Essex’ (Postan 1973: 348) and they had links with the capital and the countryside. It is not possible to include the writings of the merchants of the late medieval period in the present study, but this is an area which merits further study.

4.3 Dialect Contact as an Explanation

Dialect contact sheds light on processes which took place in shaping the written English language of the fifteenth century. Confusion in linguistic theory as a result of the loose use of the term ‘standard’ was discussed in Chapter 2. In this chapter, I suggest that what have been referred to as ‘incipient standards’ (Samuels 1963) and ‘regional standards’ can be better understood as levelled varieties. Samuels’ ‘Type I’ is a case in point, and below I discuss how dialect contact can explain what Samuels has described regarding his ‘Type I’.

4.3.1 ‘Type I’ as a Levelled Dialect

Samuels’ ‘Type I’ is described as ‘the language of the majority of Wycliffite manuscripts... [I]t becomes apparent that this is a standard literary language based on the dialects of the Central Midland counties...’. Samuels suggests that the Lollards were ‘a powerful influence in spreading it’ and gives as evidence the language of the Welshman Pecoock who used similar language fifty or sixty years later so showing that the language of the Central Midlands was a ‘well-established literary standard’ (1963: 85). The so-called ‘Central Midland standard’, however, can be more accurately referred to as a levelled dialect. The evidence lies in the

centre of learning, Oxford, which attracted many students from different regions.

Black (1999: 162) contends regarding the ‘Central Midland standard’ as follows:

The so-called Central Midland Standard, found in a large number of late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century manuscripts, mainly of Wycliffite writings and medica, and *perhaps to be identified with the written usage current at Oxford university*, did not attain even such a degree of standardisation, and there is little clear evidence that it was ever used outside its geographical and/or scholarly focal areas (Italics mine).

Additionally, concerning Samuels’ claim that Pecock’s language provides evidence of its ‘standard’ status, Black points out:

Pecock was an Oxford theologian, whose college career falls within the early part of the fifteenth century; if the present suggestions are correct, his use of the Central Midland Standard would have been quite unremarkable (1999: 169).

Another possible evidence for a levelled variety centred on Oxford is based on the findings by Taavitsainen, who stresses the link between scientific writings and ‘Central Midlands’. She points to the translation of *De proprietatibus rerum*³⁰ dated c.1410, which ‘shows Central Midland characteristics’ (2000: 144-45) despite the fact that Trevisa worked in Gloucestershire, and concludes that ‘it could well be that the Midland type of language was a conscious choice to gain a larger readership’. She suggests (2000: 145) that Trevisa, who was convinced of the usefulness of the Central Midlands dialect (cf. his comments in the translation of Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*) in reaching a wide audience compared to the extreme language of the north and the south, had influenced the Wycliffites in using the Central Midlands dialect. She notes:

³⁰ British Library MS Add. 27944; included in the *Corpus of English Medical Writing*, University of Helsinki.

Trevisa spent about twenty years of his life in Oxford, and some of this period coincided with Wycliffe's stay there. Recent scholarship has found more evidence to suggest that Trevisa worked with John Wycliffe, Nicholas Hereford, and probably others on a translation of the Bible. This collaboration explains the connection and the use of the Central Midland spelling system in Lollard writings (Taavitsainen 2000: 145).

I suggest, however, that it was the linguistic contact at Oxford which is the common factor here for Trevisa and Wycliffe and in turn influenced their written language. Trevisa, although coming from Gloucestershire, had spent time at Oxford and came to use a levelled dialect and continued to use that dialect in his writings. Similarly, Wycliffe, who was a Yorkshireman, must have learned to write in a levelled variety after spending many years at Oxford. The same would hold true for the Welshman Pecock. Therefore, one does not have to look for a 'regional standard' and its prestigious influence in explaining the loss of regional forms, if the role played by dialect contact is fully taken into account.

L. Milroy (1999b: 3) likewise suggests that 'The so-called 'Chancery standard' seems to have been effectively a levelled variety developed and used by lawyers'.

4.3.2 Example of Language Contact in Early Modern Scots

Another example of how a contact-based approach can explain the variation and change in a language, which will be considered briefly here, is the anglicisation of the Scots language in 1520-1659, based on the study by Amy Devitt (1989). Devitt considers the diffusion of five linguistic variables of Anglo-English forms into Scots, which are:

- the relative clause marker
- the preterite inflection

- the indefinite article
- the negative particle
- the present participle

She finds that ‘each of the five variables changes differently’ (1989: 17), and makes an interesting observation which undermines the prestige-based accounts of change:

Because the prestige and influence of England over Scotland was growing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we might like to prove a social motivation for the linguistic anglicization occurring at the same time. In fact, however, it is probably *impossible to prove that any single feature changes in response to England’s prestige* (Devitt 1989: 17; Italics mine).

Devitt does not at this point suggest contact as an explanation of change, stating, that ‘internal explanations are always possible’. I would like to suggest, however, from her other observations given below, that language contact must have been one of the major reasons for changes observed in the Scots language. Devitt notes (1989: 11):

Economically and socially, as well as politically, *the Scottish elite found it necessary to spend time in London*. Aitken’s description of the Scot’s contacts with London sounds much like descriptions of an English country squire’s contacts with London in earlier centuries, when the London standardized dialect was spreading within England: ‘every Scotsman of the nobility was likely to *spend part of his time in southern England*, at court or residing in the Home Counties, and nearly all other eminent Scots... visited *London for shorter and longer periods*’ (Aitken 1979: 91-2; Italics mine).

Devitt, in the concluding chapter of her book, comes to a tentative conclusion and hints that contact might have played a part in the changes observed in Scots. She points to an important fact, that change towards uniformity occurs after increased variation in a language. She states (1989: 73-4):

The general direction of change was toward uniformity, some of which was fully achieved during this time [1520-1659] (in the present participle and religious treatises, for example). But uniformity was achieved only through increased variation... Yet we do not know the source of that initial variation. One wonders if much variation, if it could be traced back to its origins, might not occur as *the result of contact* between speech communities (Italics mine).

In my opinion, Devitt is absolutely correct in pointing to contact as the source of initial variation. Her tentative conclusion would also hold true for late Middle English. Contact must also be the cause of anglicisation. As mobility increased, it led to an increase in variation due to contact, which eventually led to levelling of the dialects. The same phenomenon was observed in Høyanger in Norway (see §4.2.5).

4.3.3 Invisible Hand Theory

An advantage of considering the changes in language in the fifteenth century from a contact-based perspective is that it does not see the linguistic change in individual's writings as always being a 'conscious' and an 'intentional' decision with a view to imitating a 'Standard'. This implies that change in written English is not to be explained with a motive on the part of the people and is so not clear-cut as described below:

There came a point in the fifteenth century at which every educated speaker (and particularly writer) of English had to make a decision as to what kind of English he considered more respectable or correct for formal use than another (possibly his vernacular) form and show this attitude by conforming (to a greater or lesser degree) with what can loosely be called 'formal, written London English'. This implied distancing himself from regional uses, which would become increasingly marked as 'spoken, informal, less prestigious, uneducated, lower-class' (Görlach 1999: 463).

In this respect, Keller (1994) describes language change as something which is a result of human actions, but not always as an intentional one. This is an important concept for the present discussion and Keller's idea will be considered briefly here.

Keller identifies three possible situations, and concludes that things such as language change are 'results of human action, but not the goal of their intentions' fall under the 'phenomena of the third kind' (1994: 56-7). The three possibilities are:

1. There are things that are not the goal of human intentions and that are (therefore also) not the results of human actions (upright walk, the language of the bees, the weather, the Alps)
2. There are things which are the results of human actions and the goal of their intentions (Westminster Abbey, a cake, Esperanto).
3. There are things which are the result of human actions but not the goal of their intentions (inflation, the makeshift path across the lawn, our language).

Keller (1994) discusses the above against a background with varying views regarding the nature of language in the nineteenth century between the noted philologists. Some, like August Schleicher and Max Müller, saw it as a natural phenomenon. At the same time, others like William Whitney saw it as a man-made artefact, claiming:

If the voluntary action of man has anything to do with making and changing language, then language is so far not a natural organism, but a human product (Whitney 1873: 301, cited in Keller 1994: 52).

So, according to Keller (1994: 55), an object can be man-made either because it is:

A: the result of human actions,

B: or it came into existence as a result of human intentions.

Keller stipulates that ‘B implies A, but A does not imply B. This means that both criteria often apply simultaneously, but not necessarily’ (1994: 55-6).

This distinction helps to explain the fifteenth century situation rather well. Obviously, change evident in written English (chapters 6 and 7 of the present thesis) is a result of human actions, but it will be argued in the following chapters that linguistic change found in fifteenth century texts is not ‘intentional’ in the sense that it did not have Standard English as its goal.

Keller calls the explanation of the above ‘phenomena of the third kind’, an ‘invisible hand theory’. The reasoning behind it is that it ‘attempts to explain structures and reveal processes, namely those structures which are produced by human beings who do not intend or even notice them, as if they were ‘led by an invisible hand’ (Keller 1994: 68). He took the expression from Robert Nozick (1974: 18) who defines it as:

[The explanations] show how some overall pattern or design, which one would have thought had to be produced by an individual’s or group’s successful attempt to realize the pattern, instead was produced and maintained by a process that in no way had the overall pattern or design ‘in mind’. After Adam Smith, we shall call such explanations *invisible-hand explanations* (cited in Keller 1994: 69; Italics original).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that effects of dialect contact must be taken into account when considering the developments of written late Middle English. Explanations

based on the influence of 'prestige' in inducing change do not fully explain the differences involved in variation and change associated with individual linguistic features. Therefore, rather than describing different groups of standard languages, the aim in this study is to focus on the process as J. Milroy aptly puts it, 'Standardization is not about varieties of language, but about processes' (J. Milroy 1993: 27).

The contact-based approach explains the existence of variation as well as its subsequent reduction, and is able to identify the processes which lead to the gradual regularising of written English more accurately.

5 Methodology

5.1 Aims of the Study

An important reason for a study of different variables in late Middle English is that the changes in written English did not occur simultaneously. Students of the history of the English language can easily see the changes in the English language at a glance by the useful paradigms of the inflections of Old English and Middle English supplied in the textbooks (for example, Lass 1992: 137-38). Unless a student considers the history of English very carefully, the paradigms may present the change in English language as a part of a neat and regular change similar to that described by Neogrammarians (cf. §2.5).

Likewise, Fisher's methodology (1977) is built upon the premise that if one senior Chancery clerk 'modernised' a word, then all other Chancery clerks would copy this model and, in time, the writers from the rest of the country would follow suit. It has been noted, however, that language change occurs rather differently. Aitchison (1991: 87) describes below a general pattern of change concerning sound changes but the principle can also be applied to morphological and syntactical changes in late Middle English:

Any change tends to start in a small way, affecting a few common words. At first, there is fluctuation between the new forms and the old, within the same speaker, and sometimes within the same style of speech. Gradually the new forms oust the old. When the innovation has spread to a certain number of words, the change appears to take off, and spreads rapidly in a relatively short time-span. After a period of momentum, it is

likely to slacken off, and the residue is cleared slowly, if at all. The slow beginning, rapid acceleration, then slow final stages can be diagrammed as an S-curve, which represents the profile of a typical change.

What will be seen in chapters 6 and 7 is that some changes are not always in the form of a S-curve, but in some cases the change follows a slightly more complex pattern.

The aim of this chapter is to outline the basis for the following two chapters which consider some features of Yorkshire and East Anglian writings respectively. The present chapter briefly discusses the reasons for examining the variation and the reduction of variation in written English during the fifteenth century in selected variables of morphology and spelling. This is based on a premise that, over time, changes will be observed which display effects of dialect contact, especially the levelling of marked regional forms.

5.2 Examples of Morphological Study in the Past

Morphology has been considered in the handbooks of Middle English along with phonology and syntax (Wright and Wright 1923; Wyld 1936; Mossé 1952; Mustanoja 1960). Hitherto, popular have been the studies on Middle English morphology in considering the origin of the morphemes, whether they came from Old English, Norman French or Old Norse and analysing of sound changes of English as the major cause of morphological change.

Some important studies have been carried out by considering variation found in written late Middle English. Davis (1969) has made interesting observations concerning the language of the letter writers of the fifteenth century by considering morphology as well as the spellings of certain lexical items and the

conventions of letter-writing. As regards morphology and syntax, Davis has considered areas such as (i) the use of *do*, (ii) infinitives with or without prefix *to*, (iii) positions of adjectives, (iv) uses of verbal nouns, (v) genitive markers, and (vi) adverbs. By selecting a number of features, he was able to use them against other letter writers and analyse their usage in view of their occupation, status, age and gender.

5.3 Value of Studying Fifteenth-Century Variation

Studies of variation of this type in recent years have yielded interesting results. To illustrate this point, I shall briefly outline the result found in Raumolin-Brunberg's study (1996) comparing the uses of *which* and *the which* in late medieval and early modern correspondence. As she explains, *the which* was originally a northern form, but is found in the south in late ME (1996: 100). Its origin is debated³¹. It is also noted that in fifteenth-century prose, *the which* was more

³¹ The discussion regarding its origin is outside the context of the present thesis, but it will suffice to mention here that *the which* is said to have originated from French *liquels* (Burnley 1983: 26). Fischer (1992: 303), on the other hand, argues that this could not have been the case since the 'earliest instances are found in the North, where French influence was slight'. She suggests that *the* derives from an Old English demonstrative, explaining:

This may account for the fact that *the which* occurs in Middle English in places where there was need for a relative capable of recalling the antecedent more strongly, i.e. in non-restrictive clauses, particularly in clauses separated from their antecedents (Fischer 1992: 303).

It cannot be stated with certainty, but French influence in the Northern region cannot be ruled out altogether when Northern history is considered. For example, it is known that between 1298 and 1338 the central government was removed from Westminster to York on no less than five occasions. Ormrod (1997: 16) notes:

This experience was quite unique among provincial cities and gave York an altogether exceptional contact with the practices of royal government and the realities of high politics.

It has also been recognised (Childs and Taylor 1991: 3-4) that the French version of the *Anonimale Chronicle* (Leeds, Brotherton Library, MS 29) was produced at St Mary's

common than *which* (Mustanoja 1960: 198-99). In her study, Raumolin-Brunberg finds that:

What we see here is a very rapid change. While the older generation of Cely family only used the compound form, the simple *which* was practically the only alternative for the informants who wrote their letters in the 1540s and 1550s (1996: 100).

This finding has implications for ‘Chancery English’ as the variety which became ‘Standard English’. Raumolin-Brunberg comments:

[*the which*] appears to have been a minority usage in Late Medieval English in general. Fisher et al. (1984: 44-45) show that in Chancery English the share of *the which* was relatively high, exceeding 50% in some texts, but in the last subsection of the Helsinki Corpus (1420-1500), the proportion of *the which* is 28%..., spread over different types of writing, from law and documents to handbooks and religious treatises to chronicles and romances. In the preceding subsection (1350-1420), the proportion of *the which* was 22% (1996: 101).

Concerning the above observation, Wright (1997b: 220)³² points out:

The Corpus of Early English Correspondence project provides direct evidence that the language of Chancery documents are not the direct precursor of Standard English, with regard to this feature [i.e. *the which*].

Abbey in York by one of the Chancery clerks while his stay in the North. Among the official circles in York during the King and his household’s stay there, written French would not have been unusual. Concerning the use of French language in York during the fourteenth century, Rothwell quotes Galbraith and states that St. Mary’s Abbey at York regularly housed the whole Chancery for long periods and therefore this particular abbey enjoyed a special connection with the Crown. He further explains:

The presence in York of considerable numbers of high government officials from London who lived and worked in the abbey for perhaps month at a time must have made it something of an island of French in a sea of English... It would seem reasonable to conclude, then that the French text of the Anonimale Chronicle need not be seen as a refutation of the view that French in medieval England was confined in very large measure to the southern part of the country (Rothwell 1983: 261).

See also chapter 6 below, regarding the late medieval history of Yorkshire region.

³² I am grateful to Dr Laura Wright for this reference.

This has led to questions such as:

It is not quite easy to say why exactly these forms were the ones chosen for the incipient standard and not the rivalling forms. If London was the place where the best English was spoken, why did some London variants survive and some others disappear? We can refer to high-status official documents here, but as regards for instance *which* and *the which*, both forms occurred in such documents (Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 108).

Raumolin-Brunberg's observation emphasises the point that the prestige factor does not account for all the changes. Wright also notes:

...that appeals to prestige can't explain why some London variants survive and others don't. This kind of study is particularly valuable precisely because it shows that the development towards present-day Standard English was not uniformly linear; there is much yet to be uncovered and understood (1997b: 220).

What is interesting here is that it was not a straightforward incorporation of 'Chancery forms' into Standard English or 'Chancery English' stabilising as Standard English. The variant *the which* was the preferred usage in the Chancery documents of the fifteenth century, and yet it did not become a part of the later Standard. It also shows quite clearly that the ratio of these variables continued to change well into the sixteenth century. Therefore, it demonstrates that one cannot expect to find an 'incipient standard' in a single variety in the fifteenth century. In addition, the study shows that the 'selection' of one variable cannot be explained by the notion of prestige. Considering the above material from a contact-based approach to language change, however, one does not need to appeal to 'prestige' for an explanation. The survival of *which* over *the which* could be simply due to the fact that *the which* had been a minority form in general, as was pointed out above.

Therefore in order to understand the process of how a standard feature comes to be stabilised, variation, regulation and the eventual elimination of varieties over time need to be studied. Lass (1993: 83) comments concerning this type of research for the period 1500 onwards stating:

Obviously complete regulation was never achieved on any linguistic level in English. But the period 1500-1700, in which the standard really begins to emerge, shows some very clear developments of the regulating type - as well as others. One is the elimination of coexisting variants; or, to be more accurate, a tendency in linguistic behavior for certain variants to be eliminated, and a parallel (but not identical) concern in metalinguistic discourse with variation as an issue.

It is also true that the study of the variants and the process of some of its elimination is important for the fifteenth century. These individual processes lead to a more regular written English.

For the purposes of my analysis, the main interest lies in a certain aspect of each feature selected, namely two or more variables which coexisted. A use of one form rather than its counterpart should reveal its development in view of the recognised trends of change in written English. 'Standard English' as we know it today did not exist in the fifteenth century, nor was standardisation complete by 1500 as is implied in many textbooks, but it is true that many new linguistic features evident in the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries stabilised to become an element of present-day Standard English. For many language features, the fifteenth century only marked a beginning of such change which continued well into the sixteenth century and beyond. This for a time resulted in the coexistence of older forms with newer forms. At the same time, there were uses evident in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries which were becoming less frequent which did not survive to become a part of present-day Standard English

usage. With the growth of cities, the fifteenth century saw contact of the users of the regional varieties of written English which gave impetus to more than one way of writing the same thing in a given locality. The premise of the present study is that by identifying such features and seeing how much a writer incorporated either new or old trends in their written language, we may discern some of the processes of change. Factors such as the writer's age and social status will be taken into account whenever possible. Particular focus will be made on Northern and Norfolk writings in the following two chapters.

5.4 Types of Texts

The following types of texts will be considered in the next two chapters. They are:

5.4.1 Letters

Letters are a useful resource for language study since something about the sender is usually known and the purpose of writing is known. For the following two chapters I have selected some individuals from the two regions who have sent a number of letters over the years. It is, therefore, of interest to consider the changes seen in the writing habits over time. Most of these men selected in my study studied at universities and had some legal training at the Inns of Court in London.

5.4.2 Chancery Papers

Haskett, who has looked at late medieval Chancery bills, suggests the bills were probably the product of 'country lawyers' (1993). Haskett states that the 'variety in phrasing, orthography and morphology, and in style generally, which characterises the Chancery bills, is typical of country products of this time' (1993: 14). He goes on to suggest that the Chancery bills, although not produced by

Chancery clerks themselves, demonstrate a strong familiarity with the accepted legal forms together with some local language and ‘support the general consensus that writing for legal and business purposes was being carried on in the country at an increasing pace over the course of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries’ (p18).

5.4.3 Civic Documents

Concerning the role of keeping civic records in the late medieval period, Rees Jones explains:

The keeping of civic records, (court records, registers of charters, correspondence and legislation, financial records and so on), had really begun in earnest in the latter half of the thirteenth century, largely in response to the demands of the royal courts and administration which increasingly relied upon written evidence in their proceedings (1997: 109-10).

One important aspect of the civic records is that, from the selective material contained in the registers, it is possible to discern the interests of those who wrote the records. Those who wrote the civic registers were usually the common clerks and they:

...presided over an office of junior clerks or administrators. The clerks bore the main burden of the daily administration of the city and it was common for the same clerk to remain in the employment of the city for many years (Rees Jones 1997: 111).

She also points out that:

The registers and chronicles which the city clerks compiled were, no doubt, intended to be prestigious objects, as well as working records, which would represent the city’s business in the best possible light (p112).

The civic authorities had the services of fully trained lawyers in the fifteenth century. It was not just the wealthy landowners who required the assistance of a

man of law, but the corporations also needed their expertise. The situation is well described by Ives (1983: 131):

Bridgwater, for example, retained one regular learned counsellor in the first part of the fifteenth century, until in 1468 a new charter provided for a recorder³³; the much larger city of Norwich had correspondingly more advisers - a recorder, a serjeant-at-law and an apprentice. York, which appears to have had a recorder and four other counsel by 1454, even tried to stem the tide in 1490 by discharging all lawyers of fee. Ecclesiastics were equally active. In Henry VII's reign the bishop of Worcester fed a serjeant, three apprentices and an attorney in common pleas and exchequer. Peterborough Abbey in 1504-5 had at least seven lawyers on its pay-roll, and an attorney as well.

Jewell comments that 'sometimes it is possible to discern that an administrator was actually a trained lawyer. William Eland, for example, member of parliament for Hull in 1450, 1459, 1461, 1467, 1469, and 1470 was a lawyer, and was a justice of the peace, and Archbishop Neville's seneschal of Beverley' (1982: 133).

5.4.4 Wills

It can be said that the wills share certain characteristics with medieval letters and are therefore of equal interest. Such features have been noted below:

First, [the will] is a formal legal instrument, like a deed or a charter. Its form, formulae, and vocabulary are of importance, for it must function - indeed, can only function - in the permanent absence of the person who composed it... Second, a will is a personal record, like a letter (Haskett 1996: 149-50).

In the fifteenth century, many wills were still being drawn up in Latin. It is suggested that the wills were drawn up by 'professionals, that is, clerks, notaries.

³³ Sellers (1915: viii) states that 'the recorder was the official civic lawyer; originally he was chosen each year, when the sheriffs were elected'. The Memorandum book A/Y (Sellers 1915: ix) describes the recorder as 'the legal adviser of the mayor and aldermen especially when they acted in their magisterial capacity'.

and most especially lawyers who were fully cognizant of both the language and the form proper and necessary to the will' (Haskett 1996: 172). Some are produced by testators themselves as noted in the will. The number of English wills increases steadily as the century progresses. It is true that not everyone left a will, and those who left wills only represent a certain section of society, but it does represent the part which was likely to have been more literate. For most of the wills, we do not know just who wrote them, and it is for this reason they are not usually considered suitable for linguistic studies. Often, a friend, a local clergyman or a school master was relied on to fulfil this role (Cusack 1998: 319). There are many reasons why a will was written by someone other than the testator. It could be that the testator, although literate, may have been too ill to write his own will. Even if the testator was able to read and write, he may have wished to call on the services of a skilled person since the will had to be produced in a language which would avoid ambiguity and allow no arguments about its interpretation (Cusack 1998: 318-19). Even if the written language was not of the testator's own, I believe that the wills have their value in their own right. They are rare documents which provide the name, occupation or rank of the testator, the date of the will, the place of residence and some information regarding their family. Most of all, the written document was seen fit to represent, on paper, the wishes of the particular individual involved at that time. This may seem an obvious point to make, but in the medieval context wills were important not just in terms of dividing one's worldly goods and to make certain that the land (if there were any) stayed within the family Medieval wills also had a huge religious significance (Heath 1984). To ensure that everything was fine for the testator after his or her death, the wills provided the last opportunity to display piety: arrange

for prayers to be said on one's behalf, give to the poor and to the Church and repay all existing debts (this sometimes involved revealing a secret unfair trading practice from one's past). Burgess (1990: 16) notes:

Repentance and confession were essential for salvation; penitential acts and good works, moreover, might substantially lessen the purgatorial reckoning.

The contents of the wills reveal that for many, making a will must have been a solemn occasion: a time for reflection and honesty. Such consideration point to a strong probability that if one was not able to write his or her own will, then this task must have been delegated to a person who could be trusted by the testator. It could reveal one's social network. A poor widow would consult her parish priest, and a more affluent merchant could hire a professional scribe. Whether the will was produced by a trained scribe or lesser trained local person, the wills should reveal the amount of regional language present in this text type. By studying the reduction of regional usage over time, a trend of change could be considered in a particular text type. It is peculiar to this text type that often a formal document is produced using the first person forms and this is especially valuable in studying the northern usage.

As legal documents (Sheehan 1988: 4), these wills were also accepted and used by the authorities concerned regardless of the writer's background (either professionally trained or not). It is of interest to consider the extent of legal documents written using the regional language, as the claim by many modern scholars is that Chancery documents, which were largely legal documents, carried prestige and were an impetus for change in regions outside London.

5.5 Linguistic Features

In the following two chapters, regionally marked forms and a levelled variety (from the point of view of the region) are considered and selected for analysis. Salient regional forms will obviously differ from region to region. For example, what is a marked regional variant in Yorkshire (e.g. the use of the first person present in the 'northern subject rule') will not necessarily apply to East Anglia. Also, features selected for consideration will differ according to the text types under study. The wills will often contain the use of the first person whereas the civic documents will most probably not contain such uses.

6 Change in the Written English of Yorkshire

6.1 Introduction to Chapter 6

This chapter is based on a study of some writings from Yorkshire of the text types outlined in §5.4 and the focus is directed towards the gradual reduction of marked Northern features in the fifteenth century. Some regionally marked linguistic forms of Yorkshire material will be discussed and the loss of these features from the written documents are studied from the dialect contact perspective rather than accepting it as a result of standardisation. Some extra-linguistic information concerning the region is useful in considering the texts from the area, and the history of late medieval York will be considered briefly below.

6.2 Late Medieval York

York was second to London in terms of importance as a medieval city. Historians have commented on the political role of the city of York in the fourteenth century, for example Harvey (1971: 202-3):

There is some evidence suggesting that Richard II, seeking for a means to defeat the economic stranglehold of the citizens of London, did consider the transference of the capital to York... If there were to be any question of a transfer of the capital in the fourteenth century, York was the only conceivable choice.

Even before the reign of Richard II, during the rule of the first three Edwards, York was chosen instead of Westminster as the seat of government on many occasions. Ormrod (1997: 16) explains:

That sense of the city's regional and national role was given new relevance under the first three Edwards as a result of the periodic removal of the offices of central government to York. On no fewer than five occasions between 1298 and 1338 the exchequer was moved from its original base at Westminster and relocated at York. Since convention dictated that the court of common pleas should sit in the same place as the exchequer, the entire staff of this court was also transferred to York on these occasions... Finally, in an age when the chancery still had close links with the king's household, most royal transfers into the north country also meant the removal to York of the office of the great seal.

This had apparently brought benefits to the citizens of York:

It has been amply demonstrated, for example, that just as the Londoners suffered during the removals of the royal household and the courts to the north, so too did the property holders and traders of York profit directly from the sudden appearance of enormous numbers of courtiers and clerks, lawyers and litigants, who followed in the train of the king's government (Ormrod 1997: 22).

The migration of the Royal household to the North resulted in some northerners moving to the south as members of the household and other offices when the King returned to Westminster:

...the gradual infiltration of the royal administration by clerks with Yorkshire connections. At the end of the first (and longest) of the government's sojourns in the north, in 1304, Edward I's chancellor, William Greenfield, became archbishop of York. Under his influence, a significant number of men with local connections were sent off to Westminster to take up key posts in the chancery, exchequer and households of Edward I and Edward II. The perpetuation of this particular recruitment system may be accounted for in two ways: firstly, because several of Greenfield's successors as archbishops - particularly William Melton and John Thorlesby - also had close professional and personal contacts with the crown; and secondly, because the Yorkshiremen already in royal service

were particularly adept at securing government jobs for their own relatives (Ormrod 1997: 23).

Moreover, medieval York enjoyed a special privilege from the crown which no other city did, except London.

What is certain is that, from his assumption of real power in the spring of 1389 onwards, Richard went out of his way to do signal honour to the city of York. It is probably of considerable significance that the new keeper of the privy seal... was Edmund Stafford who had been dean of York since 1385... How far did this association with York churchmen imply and special regard for the city?... [I]t is recorded that Richard had visited York in 1387 for the express purpose of settling differences that had arisen between Archbishop Alexander Neville, the dean and chapter, and the mayor and citizens, and that his decision was favourable to the citizens (Harvey 1971: 204-5).

The second charter of 1396 awarded to York had significance, not just to the city itself, but also to the region as a whole.

With the second charter of 1396, ...the city was in future to have, instead of three bailiffs, two sheriffs as did London, and they were to have complete freedom of jurisdiction within the city. York and its suburbs were to form a county, with the mayor as escheator... (Harvey 1971: 206).

One important implication of the 1396 charter is seen in the legal sphere in the city of York, as described below:

Indeed one of the most significant effects of the charter was that it added several new courts to a city which was already honeycombed with civic judicial sessions of one sort or another. In practice the single most important regular city court was probably the one which came to be called 'the court of the common pleas' held by the mayor and sheriffs jointly... But this court was only part of an extraordinary judicial network within the city (Dobson 1997: 45).

It is known that the city regularly employed up to eight common lawyers (Dobson 1997: 45). It seems that this figure is rather high, compared to other medieval cities (see §5.4.3, especially the comment by Ives).

The importance of York is also indicated in another way. In what is known as the Gough Map³⁴ of the fourteenth century, it is noted that, ‘Only two cities, however, were particularly distinguished by having their names written out in gold leaf: these were London and York’ (Ormrod 1997: 15). It seems that the people of York were very conscious of their position:

As early as the 1390s, the mayor and council described themselves, however unofficially, as ‘le secound Citee du Roialme’; and by the late 1430s Roger Burton, York’s most distinguished common clerk, casually mentioned (for who could doubt it?) that his city was ‘the chief place of all the north’ (Dobson 1997: 46).

Culturally, York played an important role in the North. Recognising this is essential in studying the language of the Yorkshire documents, Friedman outlines below:

York was by population England’s second largest city during the Middle Ages and the obvious place to look for evidence of book production in the province. Not only was there a large lay and clerical reading public... but there was a market for books for students at the cathedral school of the city as well as at several schools throughout the province, such as Beverly, Guisborough, Hedon, Pontefract, Wakefield, Helmsley, Hovingham and Malton... By 1425, the scribes, flourishers, and illuminators of the city had formed themselves into a guild. That there was a substantial amateur trade as well, which often came into conflict with the guild... (Friedman 1989: 112).

As discussed above (in §4.2.8), the diocese of York constituted an important ‘recruiting area’ (Taylor 1989: 39) for the universities of Oxford and Cambridge between 1300-1520.

³⁴ MS. in Bodleian Library, Oxford, cited in Ormrod (1997: 15).

Pollard (1997: 135) stresses that although the north underwent a ‘severe and lasting economic recession in the fifteenth century’ the region was not backward economically. He states:

The lowland north suffered a secular economic decline in the fifteenth century. But the prosperity of York and its hinterland at the end of the fourteenth century indicates that the late-medieval north was not structurally an economically backward region (p 135).

What about the lives of gentry families in Yorkshire? Some evidence from the letter collections of the Plumptons, a fifteenth-century family in Yorkshire (see §6.6 below for a study of the Plumpton letters) shows increasing need for written documents, and in turn the services of lawyers and clerks:

Although less numerous, vibrant and politically informative than those of the Pastons and their circle, the listening ear may yet hear in the Plumpton letters the voice of Henry VI on the eve of Towton; the voices of the great of the land: Percy Neville, Howard, and Talbot; the voices of lawyers, men of affairs, friends, enemies, creditors, beleaguered wives, and unhappy daughters, speaking mainly to the two chief characters, Sir William Plumpton (1404-80) and his son, Sir Robert (1453-1525)... From c.1402 until Sir William’s death in 1480, therefore, the Plumptons were numbered among the élite of county society (J.W. Kirby 1990: 106).

6.3 Attitudes Towards the North in the Fifteenth-Century

In the present-day context, there is said to be a strong ‘negative bias against the North’ (Wales 2000: 4), mainly promoted by the media. The regional and social stereotypes are regularly echoed in the form of linguistic distinctiveness and their non-standard language is often a subject of ridicule. In print, the non-standard speech is reproduced using non-standard orthography³⁵, which stands out in a

³⁵ For example, concerning the use of the non-standard orthography, Jaffe points out that,

society that only tolerates standardised written language (for examples, see Wales 2000). Since there evidently was an awareness of dialectal differences in the late Middle English period (cf. Clark 1981) and its examples are often mentioned in the handbooks of the history of the English language, it is easy to view past references in the light of such modern day trends.

It is noted that the conception of the ‘north-south divide’ goes back to the twelfth century. Penhallurick and Willmott (2000: 26-27) rightly point out that the well-known remarks ascribed to Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon* (translated by Trevisa in the late fourteenth century) regarding the north, are replications of William of Malmesbury’s comments in *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum* (*Deeds of the English Pontiffs*, c.1125). Malmesbury’s comments (translated in Penhallurick and Willmott 2000: 27) do not suggest the superiority of the southern English, but they do indicate that his discussion concerning language is centred in the south. When he writes of the ‘whole language of the Northumbrians, and most particularly at York, is so uncouth [or ‘unnatural/disordered’...]’ and that the southerners can understand none of it, Malmesbury is referring to the early twelfth century situation with its strong Scandinavian influence, and not the fourteenth century, as is often thought to be the case. This view was probably shared by Higden and Trevisa, for they saw fit to reproduce Malmesbury’s comment in their editions. The above comment suggests a sense of foreignness and an alien quality of the language of the north, rather than the northern language as ‘non-standard’.

...the use of non-standard orthography is a powerful expressive resource. Unlike standard orthographies, which render invisible many features of casual and ‘non-standard’ speech, non-standard orthography can graphically capture some of the immediacy, the ‘authenticity’ and ‘flavor’ of the spoken word in all its diversity (2000: 498).

William of Malmesbury explains the reason for the southerners' inability to understand northerners:

This comes about because of their proximity to barbarous [or 'foreign'; *barbararum*] peoples, and because of their remoteness from the kings, who were once English but are now Norman, whom we know to be more inclined to the south than to the north (Penhallurick and Willmott 2000: 27).

Here, remoteness is given as a reason for a divide, rather than the perception of social differences that divide north and south today. Penhallurick and Willmott further explain the existence of the 'north-south divide' in the twelfth century, which is quite different from the modern day notion based on 'provinciality':

The passage evinces primarily a north/south divide. That the Norman conquerors prefer the south is significant. It centres the south. That York was the centre of the old Danish kingdom of the north is also significant. In addition, the sees of York and Canterbury were engaged in a power struggle for pride of place in the christian hierarchy of the country. Both factors help to explain why York is singled out above other areas of the old Danelaw. The apparent focus of the passage - condemnation of northern speech in comparison with southern - is therefore a symbol of deep-seated anxieties and rivalries (2000: 28).

Often Chaucer's use of the Northerners in his *Reeve's Tale* is seen as an example to laugh at the provinciality of the north (e.g. Wakelin 1977: 34-35). Such conclusions deserve more thought, since there is a tendency to construe fifteenth-century attitudes on what is actually a modern-day notion (see §2.4 for my discussion of the application of 'standardisation' to the fifteenth-century context found in textbooks). In a diachronic language study, it is also easy to infer that contemporary linguistic changes were motivated by ideas which did not exist in the late medieval period. For example, a loss of a regional form may not necessarily indicate that the user had abandoned it in favour of a southern usage because of wishing to avoid association with the 'backward' north, but it is easy

to conclude so. Taking the well-known *Reeve's Tale* as an example, Blake illustrates this point:

Although... uncomplimentary remarks were made by Trevisa and others about northern speech, to regard its use here as satiric may be *a modern way of interpreting the occurrence of dialect speech*. Of the characters in the tale the undergraduates are the ones highest up the social and educational ladder, whereas one might expect dialect to be put into the mouths of those who were ignorant and rustic. The miller is perhaps more provincial and certainly more boorish than the undergraduates... When the miller does poke fun at them, he does so in their role as undergraduates and not as northerners... Furthermore the story ends with the clerks victorious over the grasping miller, so that if their speech was meant to be satiric it is difficult to place that satire within the meaning of the tale as a whole (1981: 28; Italics mine).

Jewell (1994: 189-93) stresses that southerners saw the fifteenth-century north as being 'alien', and Pollard (1997: 139) points out that in the fifteenth century, southerners conceptualised northernness as being 'unstable, barbaric and threatening, backward and violent', but there is very little reference of this type of view relating to language.

It is of interest that Thomas Polton (described in § 2.4.3), who defended the diversity of dialects in fifteenth-century Britain at the Council of Constance in 1417, was himself a canon of York Minster. At Constance Polton also argued the case for the superiority of Britain in comparison to France by pointing to a mythical figure which strengthened the British position as the founding of the Christian faith, stating, 'Could any Christian nation in Europe produce a foundation figure to rival the achievements of York's own St Helen or Helena³⁶?'.

³⁶ Dobson (1997: 47) explains this mythical figure:

St Helena had the attraction of fitting every conceivable, York, and indeed British, patriotic need. The alleged daughter of 'old King Coel' of Colchester, she was also the alleged descendant of King

(Dobson 1997: 47). This particular comment by Polton is interesting for the present discussion, since it betrays not only a certain sense of national pride, but also his pride in the medieval city of York. Polton seems an eccentric figure, but contemporary citizens of York must have enjoyed these legends, as such tradition was very much a part of an identity of a medieval community³⁷.

There are some contemporary citations of people's reaction to written language of the north. Hudson points out an interesting reference to a Bible written in northern English in a copy of a text originally written around 1400:

Also a man of Lonndon, his name was Wyring, hadde a Bible in Engliche of norþen speche, wiche was seen of many men and it semed too hundred 3eer olde (1975: 4).

While this comment illustrates the difference in the written language of the north, it does not say anything about the superiority of the southern English. A translation from one dialect into another is usually explained as a means to facilitate understanding. For example, the scribe of the Cambridge University Library MS li. Iv. 9 noted that the *Informacion of Richard the ermyte* had been 'translate oute of Northarn tunge into Sutherne that it schulde the bettir be vnderstondyn of men that be of the Selve Contre' (cited in McIntosh et al. 1986, I: 5). A northern perspective of the 'gulf' between the two varieties around 1300 is described by the author of the northern poem *Cursor Mundi*. He states that he had

Ebraucus; after her alleged marriage to a Roman Emperor in Eboracum, she allegedly gave birth to Constantine the Great, whom she allegedly helped to make Christianity the established religion of the *imperium Romanum*, before she herself finally went on to discover (allegedly again of course) that most compelling of all Christian relics, the True Cross itself.

³⁷ Jewell (1994: 188) also notes that, 'Distinguishing history and legend was not a key concern of many medieval writers'.

to translate the story of the *Assumption of our Lady* originally written in Southern English into Northern, so that the northerners can understand it:

In sotherin english was it draun,
 And turned it haue I till our aun
 Langage o notherin lede
 þat can nan oiþer english rede

(II. 20, 61-64, cited in Baugh and Cable 1994: 184).

When one considers, however, the evidence that many northerners were recruited as government clerks during the fourteenth century, it points to the fact that there could not have been a strong bias against the northerners based on their language, either in the spoken or the written mode. In the fourteenth century, government records were kept in either French or in Latin, and the regional writing in the vernacular would be very rare among such clerks, but the presence of the northern clerks does emphasise the fact that northerners were welcomed into the official ranks of the government and not rejected out of prejudice. Ormrod (2000: 89) describes it this way: ‘York provided a kind of spiritual home for a significant number of clerical staff in the central government of the Plantagenet kings...’.

Ormrod sees the northerners working as royal clerks as:

more product than a cause of the original relocation of the central administration to York in the 1290s; but once established, it proved remarkably enduring and was still ensuring a steady flow of northerners into the king’s service in the reign of Richard II (2000: 89).

Grassi also provides some evidence of the presence of northern clerks in the fourteenth-century Chancery:

The keeperships of the rolls and of the hanaper were the second and third offices of the chancery and the control over them by the York clerks was even more remarkable than their hold on the chancellorship. The office of the keepership of the rolls was in their hands for a period of fifty years from 1295 to 1345... Of the keepership of the hanaper they had a complete monopoly for

a whole century, holding it without break from 1298 to 1399 (1970: 20 and 21).

The present study argues that there is evidence of dialect levelling in some written English from Yorkshire in the fifteenth century. It seems to me that this levelling has been unfortunately confused as 'standardisation' taking place using the forms prescribed by the Chancery.

6.4 Some Features of Written Northern English

Some examples of the strongly regionally marked variants, which were later eradicated, can be shown from a Yorkshire petition which contains northern vocabulary and morphology. It is dated from around 1424-26, which is relatively early for a petition to be drawn up in the English language. It is the petition of Willyam Mydylton of Holderness, Yorkshire (London, PRO C1/1/27³⁸):

Compleines Willyam Mydylton of Waughen in holdernesse in als **mykill** als Iohn of Cotyngham gentyلمان of Waughen forsayde...

...& ye forsayde Iohan of Cotyng ham Iohn Thomas Robert & Iohn with yair force en armed & wapened **lygand** still in ane awayte in ye kyngis way & aboute ye same **kyrke** to haf slayne me if I had comyn oute of ye **kyrk** & no man durst him arest to ye pece & yat same Iohn of Cotyngham proferd openly to ye **qwhyk** of yam forsayde yat myght haf kyllid me...

Some of its northern language features include:

- third person singular present indicative *-s* instead of *-th*
- present participle *-and* instead of *-ing*
- *mykill* for 'much'

³⁸ Also printed in Fisher et al. (1984: 212-13).

- *qwhylk* for ‘which’
- *kirk(e)* for ‘church’

Notable northern written English linguistic variants in the fifteenth century are listed below:

6.4.1 Third Person Singular Present Indicative Suffix

Lass (1992: 136) refers to third person singular present indicative as one of the ‘best regional indicators’ and *-s* is its northern variant. The southern variant *-th* is also found in the north from around the middle of the fifteenth century. Laing (1977: 241) therefore notes:

During the course of the fifteenth century, while in the spoken language *-s* endings were spreading south from the north, in the written language some writers of northern English were beginning to adopt in their documentary usage *-th*...

6.4.2 First Person Present Indicative Suffix

This is a northern linguistic feature also known as the ‘northern subject rule’. If the verb was adjacent to the pronoun, it had zero suffix, and if the verb was not adjacent to the pronoun, *-s* was added to the verb (McIntosh 1983: 237-38; Ihalainen 1994: 221-22). Some examples are given below.

...I Alex Nevile, knyght, in hole mynde and hele of bode, **settis** and **ordandis** my testamentt in ye maner that folous... (Raine 1855: 207).

...I Robert Yarwith of Semer **makes** my testament in this maner... (Raine 1855: 248).

6.4.3 Present Participle *-and(e)*

It is thought that Middle English past participles are generally geographically distributed as follows (Lass 1992: 146)

North	Midlands	South
<i>-and</i>	<i>-ende</i>	<i>-inde</i>

J. Milroy (1992: 176) also affirms that *-and(e)* was a typical northern (and north midlands) present participle suffix. Lass (p 146) suggests that:

The northern form probably reflects Scand. *-andi*; the southern midland ones continue OE *-ende*.

It seems that northern *-and* was already recessive by the first half of the fifteenth century and *-ing* endings are found in northern texts.

6.4.4 ‘Much’

Mykill (or *mickell*) is the northern variant for ‘much’ (cf. *LALME* maps 16 (1)-(6) for ‘much’ in McIntosh et al. 1986, II: 75-80). *Mykill* becomes recessive during the fifteenth century and is replaced gradually by *much*

6.4.5 ‘Such’

Swilk is the form found in northern texts for ‘such’ (cf. *LALME* map 10 ‘such’ (3), McIntosh et al. 1986, II: 41). Tolkien (1934: 64-65) and Blake (1979: 5) comment on Chaucer’s use of *slyk* for ‘such’ as a more distinctive northern variant than *swilk*.

6.4.6 ‘Each’

Ilk type variants of ‘each’ are found in the north, East Midlands and East Anglia as seen in *LALME* dot map no. 84 (McIntosh et al. 1986, I: 325). Early fifteenth century texts in Yorkshire use *ilk*. During the fifteenth century, however, *ilk* becomes recessive and *ych* is used more frequently.

6.4.7 'Shall'

Early northern fragment composed around 1272 (cited in J. Milroy 1992b: 179) uses *sall* for 'shall' and is the marked northern form (J. Milroy 1992b: 181). *Sall* is also found in early fifteenth century northern texts and is replaced by *shall*. It is also well known that Chaucer employs *sall* in the Reeve's Tale (Blake 1979: 4).

6.4.8 'Which'

The marked northern variant for 'wh-' (OE *hw*) is the *q*- variant as in *quilke* for 'which'. Also the OE final consonant group *-lc* written *ch* in the south (e.g. Chaucer) is represented by *lk* as in *whilk* for 'which' (Blake 1979: 4). The use of *q*- disappeared early in the fifteenth century and when it is used, it denotes strongly marked northern usage.

6.4.9 'Church'

The northern form for 'church' is *kirk*. J. Milroy (1992b: 175) states that:

Northern dialects favour <g>, <k> where southern and midland sources have spellings that are thought to indicate affricate pronunciations, e.g. *ch*.

It is Scandinavian in origin (Fisiak 1994: 147-48). J. Milroy (1992b: 187) also notes:

The [*LALME*] maps confirm and refine traditionally recognised boundaries, especially (it seems) when Scandinavian invasions have affected the east and north. For example, initial <k-> spellings for *church*... coincide roughly with the boundaries of the Danelaw.

It is the marked northern usage such as *whilk*, *mickell* and the third person singular present indicative *-s* which steadily disappears in the writings from Yorkshire during the fifteenth century, but this levelling is most clearly seen in the writings of the lawyers who have been trained in London and may have studied in

the university and had continued business or connections with the courts in the capital. They were, on the whole, a geographically mobile group. So the language I shall focus on in this study is a selection of variables which existed for fifteenth-century Yorkshire. It has been noted that ‘when a change is in progress, the alternative forms will co-exist in the language’ (Hope 1994: 5). It is expected that the change will begin with fewer instances of London forms, and then a sudden marked increase in the use of the new form before settling down with very little use of the old form (Hope 1994: 7). The premise of the linguistic study is that if levelling is taking place, reduction of regional language will be seen, together with increased use of London forms.

6.5 Letters

6.5.1 The Plumpton Letters

The Plumptons were ‘in many respects a typical West Riding gentry family’ (Taylor 1975: 72) of the later Middle Ages. Although not as famous as the Paston letter collection, the Plumpton letters nevertheless provide a valuable source of written late medieval English which concerns a northern gentry family. The Plumpton letters contain a cross-section of late medieval society, from ‘kings, magnates, senior churchmen, abbots and judges to lawyers, men of affairs, friends, relations and servants, enemies and creditors’ (Kirby 1996: 21). The period covered by the letters is 1460-1552. I shall focus on Plumpton letters of the period between 1460-1500.

The original copies of Plumpton letters are not known to have survived; what we have today are several books of transcripts of the Plumpton letters and papers. The letters were transcribed into *Sir Edward Plumpton's Book of*

*Letters*³⁹ in the early part of the seventeenth century. As the originals cannot be consulted, there is no way of knowing the amount of scribal errors and changes contained in the seventeenth-century copy. Most of the letters which were used for this study had been copied during 1612-13. What can be said concerning the transcriptions is that in the early seventeenth century, the spelling had not yet become fixed, and it is unlikely that the scribe would consciously modernise spellings and words in the manner people would today. People yet did not have the notion that there is only one 'correct' way of spelling words. The scribe probably had his own system and his own preferences in writing, but from what I have seen, it is thought that this interference is minimal in the present analysis.

One basis for this view is that there is a letter by Edward Plumpton written in 1483⁴⁰, extant in the Stonor Letter collection (Carpenter 1996: 159). A comparison of Edward Plumpton's letter in the Plumpton collection of similar date has shown that the differences are of the kind that, for example, the Stonor collection has the word spelled *maistership* and the Plumpton collection has *mastership*. Such differences would certainly be unsuitable for an analysis described by John Fisher (1977: 882; discussed further in § 3.2 of the present thesis), but I am not using his criteria for variation, such as the use of *y* instead of *i*, or doubling of a vowel or a consonant. Even if the above difference between Edward's letter in the Stonor collection and the Plumpton collection was due to scribal interference, it should not affect my analysis. If there were changes made by the seventeenth-century scribe, what we should see is an increase in the use of

³⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds Sheepscar Library, Chambers MSS. Acc. 1731/2.

⁴⁰ London, PRO, SC1/44/73.

the third person singular present indicative *-s*, for the suffix *-s* replaced the southern use of *-th* during the course of the sixteenth century. (Nevalainen 1999: 515). This is not seen, as will be discussed below.

In describing the late medieval world in which the Plumptons lived, Joan Kirby (1990: 108-9) points out that;

...kinship, good lordship, and in spite of its imperfections, the law were better guarantees of security than violence. Hence the Plumptons and their neighbours provided themselves with marriage contracts hedged with provisions for every contingency, with legally binding leases, feoffments, grants of annuities and contracts of service, and wherever possible, with unassailable titles.

The written legal documents constituted, therefore, a vital element of the lives of the gentry. This would require letters being written between the lawyers, the members of the gentry family and the local churchmen. Hence, for the Plumptons from Yorkshire, the society in which they lived necessitated contact with London and the services of lawyers who frequented London on their business. It is to these lawyers that I turn, for evidence of dialect levelling in their writings. A glimpse into the Plumpton correspondence reveals the numerous common lawyers at work (Kirby 1996: 301-43).

6.5.2 Four Individuals from the Letter Collection

I consider men who correspond with Sir Robert Plumpton and William Plumpton to deal with their legal affairs. The four men are John Pullein, Godfrey Greene, Brian Roccliffe and Edward Plumpton (Kirby 1996):

6.5.2.1 Brian Rocliffe

Brian Rocliffe was a barrister of the Middle Temple, and a son of the lawyer Guy Rocliffe of Cowthorpe, near Wetherby in Yorkshire. He was a puisne baron of the Exchequer and as such put on the commission of the peace in 1454 in Yorkshire and continued to be re-appointed thereafter to the West Riding bench until Reademption of 1470. There are 5 letters by Rocliffe, covering the period 1461 - 1464.

6.5.2.2 Edward Plumpton

Edward Plumpton was possibly a son of Sir William Plumpton's younger brother Godfrey. Sir Robert sent Edward to Furnivall's Inn for legal training and employed him thereafter as his man of affairs. He was also employed by George, Lord Strange and by Sir John Weston, Master of St John Clerkenwell and was also known to the Cely brothers. There are 22 letters by Edward Plumpton, covering the years 1483 - 1497/8.

6.5.2.3 John Pullein

John Pullein of Killinghall was Sir Robert's attorney and was an outer barrister of Lincoln's Inn. He was active in local government and became escheator for Yorkshire 1516-17. He was also Recorder of York, counsel to the Abbot of the Fountains and Justice of the Peace for the West Riding. There are 6 letters from him, during the years 1498/9 - 1502.

6.5.2.4 Godfrey Greene

Godfrey Greene is thought to be a member of the landed family at Newby, near Boroughbridge, but very little else is known about him. His letters reveal that he

was acting as a lawyer to the Plumptons. There are 7 letters by Godfrey Greene dated between 1463/4 - 1477.

6.5.3 The Study of the Variants

The following four sets of variants in the letters are considered:

- the relative pronoun *which* / *whilk*
- *such* / *swilk*
- *much* / *mickell*
- the third person singular indicative marker: *-th* / *-s*.

The number of occurrences of each feature in the letters of the four individuals are given below in table 1. The shaded area denotes northern usage.

Table 1: Some linguistic features of the Plumpton Letters

	<i>which</i>	<i>whilk</i>	<i>-th</i>	<i>-s</i>	<i>such</i>	<i>swilk</i>	<i>much</i>	<i>mickell</i>
Rocliffe (1461–64)	7	0	6	5	2	0	0	0
Greene (1463/4–77)	4	0	0	8	3	0	3	0
Plumpton (1483–97/8)	18	0	53	1	16	0	14	0
Pullein (1498/9–1502)	5	0	15	1	7	0	0	0

6.5.4 Observations

Which/whilk: The letters from all four men use *which* instead of *whilk*.

Such/swilk: The letters of all four men also use *such* rather than *swilk*.

Much/mickell: Greene and Plumpton who use this variant, only employ *much*.

Third person singular -s/-th: There are some differences with regard to this feature. The letters of Plumpton and Pullein, which are written about twenty years later than those of Greene and Rocliffe, contain the southern form *-th*, except for one instance each. Green and Rocliffe's letters, produced around the middle of the century, reveal that the northern *-s* was still in use in that period. Greene's letters only contain the northern form *-s*, whereas Rocliffe's letters contain almost equal instances of *-s* and *-th*. In contrast, Plumpton and Pullein's letters confirm that the use of *-s* has diminished completely.

6.5.5 Observation from Other Letters in the Plumpton Collection

In the Plumpton correspondence, the letters which consistently contain the southern forms (*-th, which, much, such, each*) other than these lawyers are by those of the royalty, nobility, gentry and senior churchmen, and do not include the merchants, craftsman, and labourers. It could be hypothesised that those of the nobility and senior churchmen had the services of well qualified lawyers and clerks who were likely to have been educated at Oxford or Cambridge and in one of the Inns of Court in London. Often the gentry filled this need for a trained lawyer by ensuring that one or more of the family members received such an education. An example may be seen in the will of Sir Thomas Markenfield, knight, made in 1497, which left to his son and heir a yearly sum of 15 pounds 'to his exhibicion and fynding ij yeres at Oxford, and iij yeres at London in oon in of Courte...' (Raine 1869: 124). It seems that the written language of the letters from the nobility and senior churchmen which show no marked regional features represent a levelled variety.

The only letters which contain *mickell* are those of Sir Robert Plumpton and Richard Plumpton. Persons whose letters contain *whilk* are John Johnston of York,

Sir Robert Plumpton and William Jodoopken, priest. There are 11 other letter writers in the Plumpton collection whose letters contain the use of southern form *which*, but with the continued use of the northern third person singular present indicative marker *-s*. Out of the 44 people's letters considered from the Plumpton correspondence, 18 people's letters used *-s*. Out of the 18, 6 letters had both *-s* and *-th*. The usage of these letter writers shows that some people were quite happy to use both forms of the variants available to them and it indicates that these writers were not consciously trying to replace the northern form with the southern (or the 'Chancery' form). The consideration of the Plumpton letters demonstrates that the southern variant *-th* (which is the form found in Chancery documents) did not immediately replace the northern *-s*.

Another interesting point can be observed here. As *-th* was eventually ousted during the course of the sixteenth century, the finding here refutes the theory that 'Chancery' forms were the authorised standardised variety to be used for Standard English. If 'Chancery English' was a standardised variety, its features would have remained fixed. Although *-s* is the form which eventually became Standard English, this study demonstrates that this did not happen because of a straightforward spread of this northern feature. In the fifteenth-century North, *-s* was almost completely eradicated.

6.6 Wills

6.6.1 Linguistic Features Considered in the Wills

I focus on the evidence of dialect levelling during the fifteenth century in some Yorkshire wills. I consider the wills in the Probate Registers of York⁴¹ in the Borthwick Institute, York. The reduction of marked northern features will be considered as in the study of the Plumpton correspondence above. An additional northern use of language considered here is the use of the first person present indicative.

Table 2 below shows the number of individuals whose will contains either one of the selected southern or northern forms, or both.

Table 2: Overview of linguistic features in Yorks. wills

	1440-1466	1485-1494
<i>-s</i> (1 p s p ⁴²)	10	4
<i>-th</i> (1 p s p)	0	1
<i>-s</i> (3 p s p)	12	11
<i>-th</i> (3 p s p)	1	26
<i>which</i>	6	27
<i>whilk</i>	5	2
<i>such</i>	0	13
<i>swilk</i>	2	0
<i>much</i>	4	4
<i>mickell</i>	1	2
<i>church</i>	4	25
<i>kirk</i>	12	15
<i>each</i>	3	7
<i>ilk</i>	5	7

⁴¹ There are printed editions of the Yorkshire wills by Raine (1855; 1869).

⁴² p s p denotes 'person singular present'.

What is seen above is that overall, the marked northern features decrease in these Yorkshire wills as the century progresses. It is interesting that the northern features dominate in the period between 1440-1466, but this is reversed for the later period. Notable points for the later period (1485-94) are listed below:

- Although *-s* is still used, there is a great increase in the adoption of *-th*.
- *whilk* has decreased and *which* has overtaken the use of this relative pronoun.
- *Such* is used instead of *swilk*.
- *Church* is more widely used in writing instead of *kirk*.

The decrease of the first person *-s* in verbs not adjacent to the personal pronoun toward the end of the fifteenth century. The use of *-th* in such verbs in what is actually a northern usage denotes a hypercorrection influenced from the third person singular present inflexion and gives evidence to the general switch to the use of *-th*.

I shall now consider the wills in more detail. I have divided them in twenty-year intervals. Some information regarding the testator is given in the next section.

6.6.2 Yorkshire Wills: 1431-1450

Ten wills are considered for this period. Some details concerning the testator's home, occupation, connections, and status are known. These points of information are given below:

1. 1431 Nicholas Blackburn, senior, citizen of York. Raine (1855: 17) describes him as 'one of the wealthiest, and certainly the most munificent, of the merchants of that great commercial city'. He was Lord Mayor of York in 1413 and 1429. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, ff. 605r-605v. Will also printed in Raine (1855: 17-21).

Table 4: The use of 1st person singular, 3rd person singular and present participle

	1p. -s	1p. -th	1p. -∅	3 p. -s	3p. -th	-and	-ing
1. 1431	1	0	0	4	0	0	1
2. 1432	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
3. 1433	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
4. 1436	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
5. 1436	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
6. 1443	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
7. 1444	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
8. 1444	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. 1447	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
10. 1449	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Table 5: The spelling of 'shall' and 'church'

	<i>sall</i>	<i>shall</i>	<i>schall</i>	<i>kirk</i>	<i>chirch</i>
1. 1431	0	0	0	0	0
2. 1432	0	0	0	0	0
3. 1433	0	0	0	1	1
4. 1436	1	0	0	0	0
5. 1436	1	0	0	5	0
6. 1443	1	0	0	0	0
7. 1444	2	0	0	2	0
8. 1444	1	0	0	2	0
9. 1447	0	0	0	0	0
10. 1449	1	1	0	0	1

6.6.2.1 Observations for wills (1431-1450)

The ten wills during this earlier period in the fifteenth century display northern linguistic features overall. The exception seems to be the use of the present participle suffix *-ande/-ing* in which both variants are used.

‘Which’: The northern variant *whilk* is the dominant form. Out of the 6 wills that use this form, 5 contain *whilk*. Only 1 will during this period contains *which*.

‘Much’: There is no occurrence of ‘much’.

‘Such’: There is only one instance of this feature and *swilk* was the form used.

‘Each’: 6 wills all use *ilk* for this variant. The northern feature is again dominant here.

First person singular suffix: Out of the 7 instances of this feature, 6 wills use the northern form with the suffix *-s*.

Third person singular suffix: The 7 wills which use this feature all employ the northern suffix *-s*.

Present participle suffix: 6 wills contain the present participle. There is no clear preference for the northern marker for this feature. 2/6 wills employ *-and* whereas 5/6 wills have *-ing*.

‘Shall’: 6 wills use this feature. 6/6 use the northern *sall*, 1 will uses both *sall* and *shall*.

‘Church’: 5 wills contain this feature. 4/5 use *kirk*, 2/5 use *chirch* (1 will uses both *kirk* and *chirch*). *Kirk* is the dominant variant during this period.

With the exception of the past participles, all the features display marked northern usage. There are a few instances of the southern form (e.g. one will uses *which*, another used *chirch* and no suffix on the first person singular indicative). the southern forms are in the minority. It is interesting that during the first half of the fifteenth century, northern wills considered here do not use *-th* at all.

6.6.3 Yorkshire Wills: 1451-1470

11. 1453 John Thorn⁴³ of Kingston upon Hull, merchant. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, f. 292v.
12. 1453 Roger Ward of Givendale, near Ripon, knight. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, f. 275v. Also printed in Raine (1855: 165).
13. 1454 William Clederhowe of Kingston upon Hull, merchant. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, ff. 295r-295v. Also printed in Raine (1855: 171-72).
14. 1454 Elizabeth De la Ryver, widow of Thomas De la River of Brandesby, Esq. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, f. 301r. Also printed in Raine (1855: 173-74).
15. 1454 Robert Constable of Bossall, squire. Grandson of Sir Marmaduke Constable of Flamborough. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, ff. 303r-304r. Also printed in Raine (1855: 174-77).
16. 1454 Sir John, Lord Scrope of Masham and Upsal. Member of the Privy Council and Treasurer of England (1432-4). York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, ff. 321v-324r. Also printed in Raine (1855: 184-93).
17. 1454 Thomas Arden of Marton, near Bridlington, squire. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, f. 326r. Also printed in Raine (1855: 195-96).
18. 1454 Sir Alexander Neville of Thornton Bridge, knight. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, ff. 351r-352r. Also printed in Raine (1855: 207-9).
19. 1455 Richard Barton⁴⁴ of Whenby, squire. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, ff. 373r-374r. Also printed in Raine (1855: 215-16).
20. 1456 Thomas Fulthorp, knight, also Justice of the Common Bench. York City Archives, York Memorandum Book B/Y, f. 157v. Also printed in (Percy 1973: 203-4).
20. 1460 Robert Yarwith⁴⁵ of Semer. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, f. 449v. Also printed in Raine (1855: 248).
21. 1461 John Hedlam of Nunthorpe, Cleveland, knight. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, f. 451r. Also printed in Raine (1855: 247-48).

⁴³ As far as I am aware, this will has not been printed by Raine.

⁴⁴ This will has: *whike and dede* for the 'quick and the dead', and *white clamed* for 'quitclaimed'.

⁴⁵ This will has: *both whike and deed*.

22. 1462 Oliver Mirfield of Mirfield, squire. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register II, ff. 468r-468v. Also printed in Raine (1855: 256-57).
23. 1466 Maud Eure, widow, wife of late Sir Willam Eure, knight. Daughter of Henry Lord Fitzhugh of Ravenswath Castle. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register IV, ff. 48r-48v. Also printed in Raine (1855: 284-86).
24. 1467 John Langton of Farneley, near Leeds, squire. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register IV, ff. 244r-244v. Also printed in Raine (1855: 277-79).

Table 6: Wills (1453-1467) ‘which’, ‘much’, ‘such’, ‘each’

	<i>whilk</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>mykill</i>	<i>much</i>	<i>swilk</i>	<i>such</i>	<i>ilk</i>	<i>ych</i>
11. 1453	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. 1453	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13. 1454	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
14. 1454	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15. 1454	0	4	1	1 ⁴⁶	0	1 ⁴⁷	0	0
16. 1454	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
17. 1454	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
18. 1454	0	0	0	0	1 ⁴⁸	0	8	0
19. 1455	6	1 ⁴⁹	0	0	0	0	0	0
20. 1456	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
21. 1460	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
22. 1461	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1
23. 1462	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
24. 1466	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25. 1467	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0

⁴⁶ *mych*

⁴⁷ *sich*

⁴⁸ *silke*

⁴⁹ *wiche*

Table 7: Wills (1453-67) 1st person singular, 3rd person singular, present participle

	1p.- <i>s</i>	1p. - <i>th</i>	1p. - \emptyset	3 p. - <i>s</i>	3p.- <i>ez</i>	3p. - <i>th</i>	- <i>and</i>	- <i>ing</i>
11. 1453	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
12. 1453	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
13. 1454	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
14. 1454	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
15. 1454	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
16. 1454	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	6
17. 1454	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
18. 1454	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	1
19. 1455	2, <i>lez</i>	0	0	2	2	0	0	0
20. 1456	2	0	0	3	0	2 ⁵⁰	0	1
21. 1460	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
22. 1461	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
23. 1462	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
24. 1466	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
25. 1467	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

⁵⁰ Both instances are *hath*.

Table 8 Wills (1453-67) 'shall', 'church'

	<i>sall</i>	<i>shall</i>	<i>schall</i>	<i>kirk</i>	<i>chirch</i>
11. 1453	0	2	0	0	0
12. 1453	0	0	0	0	0
13. 1454	0	0	0	5	0
14. 1454	0	0	0	0	0
15. 1454	0	0	0	5	0
16. 1454	0	1	0	0	2
17. 1454	0	0	0	2	0
18. 1454	0	0	0	13	0
19. 1455	0	0	0	3	0
20. 1456	0	2	0	0	0
21. 1460	0	0	0	1	0
22. 1461	0	0	0	2	0
23. 1462	0	0	0	2	0
24. 1466	0	0	0	2	0
25. 1467	1	0	0	1	4

6.6.3.1 Observations for wills 1453-67

During this middle period of the fifteenth century the variables used differ from feature to feature.

'Which': More wills use *which* (5/6) compared to only 2 wills with *whilk*.

'Much': There are only a few instances of this feature. Only 1 will uses *mykill* and 2 wills *much*.

'Such': There is only one will which use *swilk* and there are 2 wills which use *such*.

'Each': There are 4 wills which have *ilk*, and one with *ych*.

First person singular indicative suffix: This feature displays marked northern usage at this period. 9/11 wills use *-s* and follow the northern subject rule whereas only 2 wills have zero suffix.

Third person present singular: This feature also shows marked northern usage during this period. Out of the 11 wills which use the third person present singular, 10 wills have the northern *-s* and only three wills use *-th*.

Present participle: There are only instances of the *-ing* form.

‘Shall’: There are only 4 instances of this feature. There is only 1 will with the northern *sall*, but this occurs in 1467. There are 3/4 wills which use *shall*.

‘Church’: *kirk* is still the dominant variant. Out of the 15 wills, 10 contain *kirk*, and only 2 contain *chirch*.

The past participle *-ing* has now totally replaced *-and*. With regard to ‘much’ and ‘such’, there are too few cases for a comment, but there are uses of both variants (*much* and *mykill*, *such* and *swilk*). The choice for ‘each’ is largely the northern *ilk*. It seems that during this middle period of the fifteenth century, *which* replaces *whilk*. As for the morphological affixes (the first person present singular suffix and the third person present singular suffix), they remain markedly northern. It may be a tendency for morphological affixes to show a slower rate of change than spellings.

6.6.4 Yorkshire Wills: 1494-1500

26. 1494 Agnes Maners of York, widow. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register III, ff. 312r-312v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 97-98).
27. 1494 John Bone of Doncaster, merchant. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 477v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 98-99).
28. 1494 Sir Martin of the Sea of Barmston, knight. Last of an old Holderness family. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, ff. 453r-453v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 100-1).
29. 1495 John Bradford, the elder of Warmfield. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, ff. 474r-476r. Also printed in Raine (1869: 108-9).

30. 149? Dame Margery Salvin of York. Widow of Sir John Salvin of North Duffield, knight. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 480r. Also printed in Raine (1869: 116-17).
31. 1496/7 Robert Johnson, Alderman of York, Grocer. Chamberlain of York in 1484, sheriff in 1487-8 and Lord Mayor in 1496. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 510v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 120-21).
32. 1496/7 Sir James Danby of Thorp and Farneley near Leeds, knight. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 499v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 122-23).
33. 1497 Sir Thomas Markenfield of Markenfield near Ripon. Raine (1869: 124) refers to his family as the 'one of the oldest of the great Yorkshire families'. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 489r. Also printed in Raine (1869: 124-26).
34. 1497 Thomas Dalton of Kingston upon Hull, merchant. Sheriff of Hull in 1484, and Mayor in 1489 and 1499. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register VI, f. 51r. Also printed in Raine (1869: 126-28).
35. 1497 Nicholas Conyers of Stokesley. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 509v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 128-29).
36. 1497 John Lepton. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 512r. Also printed in Raine (1869: 129-30).
37. 1497/8 Alexander Leysten of Tickhill. York Borthwick Institute, Register of Archbishop Rotherham, f. 364v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 132).
38. 1498 Richard York, merchant, knight and alderman of York. He was Chamberlain in 1460, sheriff in 1465-6, Lord Mayor in 1469 and 1482 and was elected M.P. in 1473, 1482, 1483, 1483-4, 1486, 1488 and 1490. Mayor of Staple of Calais in 1466-7. Printed in Raine (1869: 136-37).
39. 1498 Richard Bank of Leeds⁵¹. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register III, ff. 341r-341v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 148-49).
40. 1498 Anne, Lady Scrope of Harling, widow of John, Lord Scrope of Bolton. Printed in Raine (1869: 149-54).
41. 1498/9 Katherine Mountford of Doncaster. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register III, f. 334v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 154-55).
42. 1498/9 William Worsley, Dean of St. Paul's and Canon of York. He was from Lancashire. Also printed in Raine (1869: 155-57).

⁵¹ 'Wheat' is spelled *qwhet* in his will.

43. 1489? Robert Calverley⁵² of Calverley, squire. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 518v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 157-59).
44. 1498/9 Dan Burton, vicar of Wighill. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register V, f. 519r-520r. Also printed in Raine (1869: 160).
45. 1498/9 Robert Hirste of Leeds. York Borthwick Institute. Probate Register III, f. 336r. Also printed in Raine (1869: 161-62).
46. 1499 Sir Henry Vavasour of Haslewood, knight. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register III, ff. 316r-318r. Also printed in Raine (1869: 164-67).
47. 1499 Matilda Malham of Skipton in Craven. York Borthwick Institute, Probate Register VI, f. 56v. Also printed in Raine (1869: 167-68).

⁵² In his will, 'white' is spelled *qwhit* twice, and 'whether' is spelled *qwheder*.

Table 9: Yorks. wills 1494-1500 ('which', 'much', 'such', 'each')

	<i>whilk</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>mykill</i>	<i>much</i>	<i>swilk</i>	<i>such</i>	<i>ilk</i>	<i>ych</i>
26. 1494	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
27. 1494	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
28. 1494	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
29. 1495	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
30. 149?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
31. 1496/7	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
32. 1496/7	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
33. 1497	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
34. 1497	0	4	0	1 ⁵³	0	1 ⁵⁴	0	1
35. 1497	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
36. 1497	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
37. 1497/8	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	10
38. 1498	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
39. 1498	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
40. 1498	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	5
41. 1498/9	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
42. 1498/9	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	0
43. 1489?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
44. 1498/9	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
45. 1498/9	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
46. 1499	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0
47. 1499	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

⁵³ *mich*, written in the addition to his will, dated 15 June 1501, four years subsequent to the will.

⁵⁴ *sich*, written in the addition to his will, dated 15 June 1501, four years subsequent to the will.

Table 10: Yorks. wills 1494-1500 (1st pers., 3rd pers. sing., past part.)

	1 p. -s	1 p-th	1p -ø	3p -s	3p -th	-and	-ing
26. 1494	0	0	0	0	5	0	2
27. 1494	0	0	0	0	3	0	5
28. 1494	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
29. 1495	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
30. 149?	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
31. 1496/7	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
32. 1496/7	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
33. 1497	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
34. 1497	0	0	0	1	1	0	5 ⁵⁵
35. 1497	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
36. 1497	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
37. 1497/8	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
38. 1498	0	0	0	0	4	0	3
39. 1498	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
40. 1498	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
41. 1498/9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
42. 1498/9	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
43. 1489?	0	1	0	0	5	0	0
44. 1498/9	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
45. 1498/9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
46. 1499	0	0	0	0	5	0	1
47. 1499	1	0	0	1	1	0	0

⁵⁵ 2 uses of this feature appears in the addition to his will.

Table 11: Yorks. wills 1494-1500 ('shall', 'church')

	<i>sall</i>	<i>shall</i>	<i>schall</i>	<i>kirk</i>	<i>chirch</i>
26. 1494	0	0	0	0	1
27. 1494	0	0	0	0	3
28. 1494	0	0	0	0	8
29. 1495	0	1	0	0	2
30. 149?	0	0	0	0	1
31. 1496/7	0	1	0	0	1
32. 1496/7	0	0	0	0	2
33. 1497	0	1	0	0	3
34. 1497	0	0	1	4	1 ⁵⁶
35. 1497	0	0	0	5	0
36. 1497	0	0	0	0	1
37. 1497/8	0	1	0	0	4
38. 1498	0	1	0	0	2
39. 1498	0	0	0	0	1
40. 1498	0	1	0	0	16
41. 1498/9	0	4	0	0	2
42. 1498/9	0	0	0	0	6
43. 1489?	0	0	0	0	2
44. 1498/9	0	0	0	0	1
45. 1498/9	0	0	0	0	7
46. 1499	0	2	0	0	0
47. 1499	0	0	0	1	0

6.6.4.1 Observations for wills (1494-1499)

‘**Which**’: During this period, all the wills represented here employ *which*.

‘**Much**’: There are only three occurrences of this feature and it is not possible to comment with only these examples. Both *mykill* and *much* are used. There is an instance of *mykill* as late as in 1498/9.

⁵⁶ Written in the addition to his will, dated 15 June 1501, four years subsequent to the will.

‘Such’: There are 10 wills using this feature, and all use *such*. It seems that the use of the northern *swilk* has been levelled out by the end of the fifteenth century.

‘Each’: It is interesting that there is one occurrence of *ilk* in 1499, but 5 other instances of this feature employ *ych*.

First person singular present indicative: There are 4 instances of the northern use of the first person suffix out of the 15 wills in this period. The 2 wills use *-th* as the suffix for the northern subject rule. Only 2 wills use *-s*. The use of the southern suffix *-th* in what is a typically northern usage demonstrates that the northerners have adopted the use of *-th*.

Third person present singular indicative: There are only 3 instances of the northern suffix *-s*, but there are 11 wills use *-th*. The southern suffix has become the dominant usage in the north for this feature by the end of the fifteenth century.

Past participle: The northern *-and* had been replaced by *-ing* from an early period in the fifteenth century. *-and* suffix has been levelled out and there are only examples of *-ing* at the end of the fifteenth century.

‘Shall’: The northern *sall* has been eliminated by this period and there are only uses of *shall*, except once use of *schall*.

‘Church’: There are still 3 instances of *kirk*, but 19 other wills (one will has both uses) employ *chirch*.

It is not possible to comment on the use of *mykill* in this period from these wills as there were too few instances of this feature, but as for the rest of the features considered here, they all demonstrate a marked reduction in the use of the

northern variants. There are sporadic uses of the northern variants even at the end of the century (e.g. *ilk*, first person singular suffix, third person singular suffix).

Whoever it was that wrote these wills, the fact remains that the lawyers represented in the figures above have used a levelled language and those who used local provincial words were decreasing and those who replaced them with southern forms were on the increase.

Many persons who appear in the Plumpton correspondence also appear in the York wills. The York wills actually represent a slightly wider group of people as it also contains the wills of widows of merchants and craftsmen who are not represented in the letter collection. Such widows probably had the will written by someone else, but it is still of interest, as just who could be called to write one's will again depended on one's rank and position. Those widows of the upper clergy no doubt could count on the services of the well-trained clergy, those of the nobility and the gentry probably had a lawyer or a clerk at their disposal, and those without such an amanuensis likely went to a local clergyman or a school teacher, to someone they knew from their community.

6.7 Civic Documents

The materials used for this study are the York Memorandum Books, York City Archives MS E20⁵⁷ (also known as A/Y) and York City Archives MS E20A (also known as B/Y). The contents of the York Memorandum Books include

⁵⁷ YCA MS E20 (A/Y) is to undergo extensive repairs and conservation work. What was one volume will be separated into five volumes. At the time of writing this thesis, the covers had been removed from the MS and the folios were loose. I am most grateful to the archivist Mrs Rita Freedman for giving me access to the MS in this condition. There is a printed edition of MS E20 (A/Y) by Maud Sellers (1912; 1915). The MS E20A (B/Y) has been edited by Percy (1973).

...ordinances of the city's craft guilds, descriptions of the boundaries of the city, amounts collected from the parishes towards the Fifteenth and Tenth, deeds, leases of city property and many other items relating to civic administration and the trade and life of York from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries (Percy 1973: viii).

It is thought that the entries in the Memorandum books were compiled by the town clerks; Percy mentions one contributor, Roger Burton. He is referred to as

[T]he meticulous Common (Town) Clerk, 1415-1436, ...the most prolific contributor, as is evident from his signed entries (Percy 1973: viii).

Not all the entries are dated, however, and I have selected those in English with deducible dates, where the name of the Mayor in office is given regarding a document.

The civic documents of York reveal the involvement of lawyers in the affairs of a medieval city. Matters such as obtaining a charter required the work of the lawyers. The York memorandum book gives information regarding the work of lawyers commissioned by the city of York. One entry states (Percy 1973: 130):

Firstly, in various expenses incurred this year by Thomas Redley and William Girlyngton, Aldermen of this city, at the king's parliament held in London, in the writing, conception and making of various bills and supplications presented to the king for confirmation and augmentation of the charter of the city's liberties...

The list of expenses includes money for two journeys to London, payments made to lawyers for advice, favour and work. The role of such a lawyer necessitated work in London, as can be seen from an example of a Yorkshire lawyer. Miles Metcalfe. He studied at Gray's Inn, and was called to the bar in 1445. In 1445, he

Percy notes that the contents of the York Memorandum Book E 20A are 'very similar to the contemporary York Memorandum Book A/Y...' (1973: viii).

is described as a 'gentilman, of London' (Parkhouse 1989: 176). Evidently, such titles were often used to describe a lawyer at that time. He then 'appears in the York city chamberlain's accounts for 1468-9 as being retained for his legal services at a fee of 20s...' (Parkhouse 1989: 177), but Parkhouse notes, that 'He was, however, still very much practising law in London' (1989: 178). Miles Metcalfe is known to have worked for some of the most powerful men in the North, and he attains the position of a recorder of the city of York (Parkhouse 1989: 178-79). He also appears in the Plumpton letters as an arbitrator of the dispute concerning the Plumpton inheritance.

6.7.1 York Memorandum Book A/Y

The documents from the York Memorandum Book A/Y included in this study are listed below.

1. early 15th (f 31r) Ordinances of the Cardmakers. Also printed in Sellers (1912: 80-81).
2. ?1417/8 (ff128v-29v) Ordinances of the Fishmongers. Also printed in Sellers (1912: 221-23).
3. 1417/8 (ff 196v) Certificate of Searchers of Masons and Wrights. Also printed in Raine (1888: 13).
4. 1420 (f 207r) Certificate of Serchers of Masons and Wrights. Also printed in Raine (1888: 15-16).
5. 1423? (f 25r) Adhuc de Coureours. Also printed in Sellers (1912: 65-66).
6. 1428 (f 287v) Marshalls and Smiths. Also printed in Sellers (1915: 179-80).
7. 1431 (f 24r) Concerning the Craft of the Skynners. Also printed in Sellers (1912: 64).
8. 1476 (ff 281v-82r) Tanners. Also printed in Sellers (1915: 166-67).
9. 1482/3 (ff 363r-64v) Ordinacio Vinteriorum. Also printed in Sellers (1915: 275-77).

Table 12: York Memorandum Book A/Y ('which', 'much', 'such')

	<i>qwhilk</i>	<i>whilk</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>mykill</i>	<i>much</i>	<i>swilk</i>	<i>such</i>
1. Early 15c	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
2. 1417/8?	2 ⁵⁸	2	0	5	0	0	0
3. 1417/8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
4. 1420	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
5. 1423?	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
6. 1428	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
7. 1431	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
8. 1476	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. 1482/3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Table 13: York Memorandum Book A/Y ('each', 'shall', 'should')

	<i>ilk</i>	<i>yeh</i>	<i>sall</i>	<i>shall</i>	<i>suld</i>	<i>should</i>
1. Early 15c	2	0	4	0	0	0
2. 1417/8?	1	0	8	6	0	0
3. 1417/8	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. 1420	0	0	6	0	0	0
5. 1423?	0	0	5	6	0	0
6. 1428	0	0	0	0	3	0
7. 1431	1	0	0	0	3	0
8. 1476	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. 1482/3	0	0	0	6	0	0

⁵⁸ *quylke* and *quylk*

Table 14: York Memorandum Book A/Y (past part, 3 pers. sing. Pres.)

	<i>-and</i>	<i>-ing</i>	3p <i>-s</i>	3p <i>-ez</i>	3p <i>-th</i>
1. Early 15c	0	0	5	0	0
2. 1417/8?	0	0	7	0	0
3. 1417/8	0	0	3	0	0
4. 1420	0	0	3? ⁵⁹	0	0
5. 1423?	2	0	8	0	0
6. 1428	0	1 ⁶⁰	0	0	0
7. 1431	0	0	2	0	0
8. 1476	0	0	0	0	0
9. 1482/3	0	7	3	0	4

6.7.1.1 Observations for York Memorandum Book A/Y

‘Which’: In the first quarter of the fifteenth century, *whilk* is used and one will uses the northern *q-* graph. There is only one will that uses *which*, but this is found in 1482/3.

‘Much’: *Mykill* dominates in the early part of the century up to 1431. Unfortunately the 2 later documents (1476 and 1482/3) do not use this feature, so it is not possible to comment on its use at the end of the century.

‘Such’: It is not clear from the finding above as there is only one use of this feature in 1483, but it is the levelled variety as expected.

‘Each’: Only the early documents (up to 1431) use this feature, and all the examples are the northern *ilk*.

⁵⁹ 1 *hafes*

⁶⁰ *pertenant*

‘Shall’: There are more instances of the northern *sall* in the early period (up to 1431), but there are also uses of *shall* from the document c1417 and c1423. Only *shall* is found in the last document from 1482/3.

‘Should’: This feature occurs only in the early period and in both documents (1428 and 1431) the northern variant *suld* is used exclusively.

Past participle: 4 documents use this feature (c1417, c1423, 1428 and c1483). The two earlier documents use *-and* whereas the latter two use *-ing*.

Third person singular: The northern *-s* is dominant except for the last document which has both *-s* and *-th*.

There is a clear distinction between the earlier texts (up to 1431) and the last two later texts (late fifteenth century) and there is evidence of dialect levelling. The earlier texts show marked regional usage almost throughout across the different features. The exceptions are past participle *-ing* and *shall* which show levelling at an earlier time than other features considered here. The civic documents also display a marked preference for the northern *-s* in the use of the third person present singular indicative suffix.

6.7.2 Memorandum Book B/Y

Below is a table of a list of English entries from the Memorandum Book E20A showing which language features are represented in the text.

1. 1431 (f. 74v) Deed to lead the uses of a fine. This is calendared in Percy (1973: 106-7).
2. 1433 (f. 119v) Petition of the Vintners. Printed in Percy (1973: 157).
3. 1433 (f. 120r) Petition of the Spicers. Printed in Percy (1973: 158).

4. 1442 (f. 91r) Arbitration between John of Bolton and the Abbot of Kirkstall. Text printed in Percy (1973: 126-27).
5. n.d. (1445?) (f. 121r) Ordinances of the Armourers. Text printed in Percy (1973: 159-60).
6. 1475 (ff. 139r-139v) A view of the boundaries of a piece of ground behind coppergate. Text printed in Percy (1973: 175-76).
7. 1475 (ff. 139v-140r) The Constitution of the Armourers. Text printed in Percy (1973: 176-79).
8. 1475 (f. 140v-141r) Ordinances of the Glovers. Text printed in Percy (1973: 179-80).⁶¹
9. 1475 (f. 141v) Ordinances of the Millers. Text printed in Percy (1973: 181-83).
10. 1475 (f. 142r-142v) Ordinances of the Plasterers and Tilers. Text printed in Percy (1973: 183-84).
11. 1476 (f. 146v) Ordinances of the Fletchers. Text printed in Percy (1973: 190-91).
12. 1476 (ff. 147v-148r) Ordinances of the Porters. Text printed in Percy (1973: 191-92).
13. 1476 or 1486 (148v) Ordinances of the Bookbinders. Text printed in Percy (1973: 93).
14. 1483 (f. 141r) Ordinances of the Glovers. Text printed in Percy (1973: 181).
15. 1487 (f. 149) Thordinance of Textwriters, Lominers, Notors, Tournours and Florishhers of the Citie of York. Text printed in Percy (1973: 194-96).
16. 1487 (f. 150r) Arbitration in a dispute between the Sciveners and textwriters and Sir William Inceclyff, Priest. Text printed in Percy (1973: 196-97).
17. 1492 (f. 161r) Thordinance of the Science of the Tixtwriters, Lominers, Noters, Turners and Florisschers within the Citie of York. Text printed in Percy (1973: 206-9).
18. 1496 (f. 168r) The obit of William Spencer and others in the church of St Martin in conyngstrete in the City of York. Text printed in Percy (1973: 214-15).
19. 1498 (ff. 169r-170r) Ordinances of the Butchers. Text printed in Percy (1973: 216-18).

⁶¹ One section of the text which is written in a different hand from the main text in the MSS (part of f. 140v) and refers to the ordinance of a later date (1487) is omitted in the study.

20. 1500 (ff. 170r-170v) Ordinance of Glovers and Perchmyners. Text printed in Percy (1973: 218-19).

21. 1500 (f. 171r) Ordinance of the Skynners. Text printed in Percy (1973: 222-23).

Table 15 : Memorandum Book B/Y ('which', 'much', 'such')

	<i>qwhilk</i>	<i>whilk</i>	<i>qwhich</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>mykill</i>	<i>much</i>	<i>swilk</i>	<i>such</i>
1. 1431	0	1	0	2 ⁶²	0	0	0	0
2. 1433	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0
3. 1433	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
4. 1442	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
5. 1445?	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
6. 1475	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. 1475	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8. 1475	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. 1475	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. 1475	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11. 1476	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. 1476	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
13. 1476/84?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
14. 1483	0	0	0	2 ⁶³	0	3	0	0
15. 1487	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	3
16. 1487	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
17. 1492	0	0	0	5	0	1	0	5
18. 1496	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
19. 1498	0	0	0	1	0	1 ⁶⁴	0	2
20. 1500	0	0	0	1	0	1 ⁶⁵	0	1
21. 1500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

⁶² *woche*

⁶³ *wich* and *wych*

⁶⁴ *myche*

⁶⁵ *myche*

Table 16: Memorandum Book B/Y ('each', 'shall', 'should')

	<i>ilk</i>	<i>ych</i>	<i>sall</i>	<i>shall</i>	<i>schall</i>	<i>suld</i>	<i>should</i>
1. 1431	0	0	7	0	0	0	0
2. 1433	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
3. 1433	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. 1442	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 ⁶⁶
5. 1445?	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
6. 1475	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
7. 1475	0	0	0	15	0	0	0
8. 1475	1	0	0	7	0	0	0
9. 1475	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
10. 1475	1	0	0	7	0	0	0
11. 1476	0	0	1	7	0	0	0
12. 1476	0	0	0	8	0	0	0
13. 1476/86?	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
14. 1483	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
15. 1487	0	0	0	16	0	0	0
16. 1487	0	0	0	5	0	0	0
17. 1492	0	0	0	17	0	1	0
18. 1496	0	1	0	7	0	0	0
19. 1498	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
20. 1500	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
21. 1500	0	0	0	0	5	0	0

⁶⁶ *shuld* used twice

Table 17: Memorandum Book B/Y (past part., 3 pers. present singular)

	<i>-and</i>	<i>-ing</i>	3p <i>-s</i>	3p <i>-ez</i>	3p <i>-th</i>
1. 1431	0	1	2	0	0
2. 1433	1	0	1	0	0
3. 1433	1	0	1	0	0
4. 1442	0	0	1	0	0
5. 1445?	0	0	1	0	0
6. 1475	0	2	0	0	1
7. 1475	0	5	4	2	6
8. 1475	0	2	4	2	0
9. 1475	0	2	1	0	2
10. 1475	0	2	2	0	3
11. 1476	0	2	1	0	2
12. 1476	0	2	2	0	0
13. 1476/86	0	1	0	0	1
14. 1483	0	3	2	0	1
15. 1487	0	4	1	1	9
16. 1487	0	1	0	0	4
17. 1492	0	6	2	0	8
18. 1496	0	10	0	0	3
19. 1498	0	4	0	0	2
20. 1500	0	0	1	0	0
21. 1500	0	0	0	0	0

6.7.2.1 Observation for York Memorandum Book B/Y

‘Which’: *Whilk* is found only in the earliest four documents up to 1442. *Which* is also found in two documents from the first half of the fifteenth century (1431 and c1445). Levelling of the regional feature is evident and in the last twenty years of the period under analysis, only *which* is used.

‘Much’: The marked regional form *mykill* is found only up to middle of the fifteenth century and again, during the last twenty years of the period under study, only *much* is used.

‘Such’: There is only one document which uses this feature in the first half of the fifteenth century and it uses the regionally marked *swilk*. Dialect levelling is again seen, for in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, only *such* is used.

‘Each’: There are only three documents which use this feature and it is not clear if there is dialect levelling in progress. The earlier two documents do use *ilk* and the later document (1496) uses the levelled *ych* as expected, but the occurrences of *ilk* are both in 1475 and seem rather late for this variant.

‘Shall’: *Sall* is the minority feature and it is only found in two documents (1431 and 1476). *Shall* is found continuously from about 1445.

‘Should’: There are only three documents which employ this feature and it is not clear if there is levelling taking place. There is an unusually late use of the regionally marked *suld* in 1492.

Past participle suffix: The only two documents containing the northern *-and* are both from 1433 and are early uses of this form. Levelling is observed and *-ing* is the dominant variant from 1475 onwards.

Third person singular present indicative: There are uses of both the northern *-s* and the levelled variant *-th* throughout the period. There is, however, levelling in progress. The early documents up to c1445 only use *-s*, and even when there are both uses of this feature in a single document, the levelled variant is more numerous after 1475 (e.g. in a 1487 document, there are 9 uses of *-th* as opposed to a single use of *-s*).

Dialect levelling is evident from the above documents in the York Memorandum Book B/Y. The earlier texts up to 1445 show a marked preference for the regional variants and the later texts from 1475-1500 display preference for the levelled forms.

6.8 Other Documents

1. 1428 Indenture made at Middleham (London, PRO, W327/586).
2. 1436 Letter from the Abbot of the St Mary's Abbey, York (London, PRO, E28/56/42).
3. 1437? Petition of the Inhabitants of the East and West Marches toward Scotland (London, PRO, SC8/128/6373).
4. 1437/8 Petition of Henry Austynmore of York, Merchant (London, PRO, C1/9/168).
5. 1440/41 Petition of John of Bempton of York (London, PRO, C1/9/221).
6. 1451 Marriage Settlement, Dalton, par Rotherham, West Riding (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Grantley MSS, DD53/III/2620).
7. 1453 Petition from the Parishioners of St Nicholas Micklegate, York, for setting up a steeple (York Borthwick Institute, MS R. I. 20 Register of Archbishop Booth, f. 385r)
8. 1454 Award concerning lands in Rastrick (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, DD12/II/3/9/16 (ii), also printed in *Yorkshire Deeds*, IV, no. 429).
9. n.d. (c.1454?) Award concerning lands in Rastrick (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, DD12/II/3/9/16 (i), also printed in *Yorkshire Deeds*, IV, no. 428).
10. before 1459 Marriage settlement on the marriage of John Thornhill and Elizabeth Mirfield (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, DD12/II/3/9/21, also printed in *Yorkshire Deeds*, III, no.126).
11. n.d. (? Between 1422-1461) Petition of John Slingsby (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Leeds, DD 56/A1/6).
12. 1466 Certificate concerning the Dishforth Estate (West Yorkshire Archive Services Leeds, Sheepscar Library, Newby Hall MSS NH 317)
13. 1477 Matters relating to Corpus Christi pageants in York (York City Archives CB1a, f. 114v).
14. 1483 Affidavit of Richard Wilkinson, formerly parish priest of Eland (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, DD12/II/3/1/7, also printed in *Yorkshire Deeds*, III, no. 129).
15. 1490 Indenture, given at Fountains (West Yorkshire Archive Services Leeds, Sheepscar Library, Newby Hall MSS NH 321).

Table 18: Other Yorks. Documents ('which', 'much', 'such', 'each')

	<i>whilk</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>mykill</i>	<i>much</i>	<i>swilk</i>	<i>such</i>	<i>ilk</i>	<i>ych</i>
1. 1428	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. 1436	0	6	0	0	0	4	0	0
3. 1437?	3	2	2	1 ⁶⁷	1	2 ⁶⁸	0	0
4. 1437/8	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
5. 1440/1	0	1	0	1 ⁶⁹	0	0	0	0
6. 1451	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. 1453	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
8. 1454	0	1, 2 ⁷⁰	0	1	0	0	0	0
9. c.1454	4 ⁷¹	1 ⁷²	0	0	1	0	0	0
10. Pre 1459	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11. n.d	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. 1466	0	1	0	1 ⁷³	0	0	0	0
13. 1477	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
14. 1483	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
15. 1490	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

⁶⁷ *moch*⁶⁸ *swych*⁶⁹ *myche*⁷⁰ *qwylche*⁷¹ *qwylke*⁷² *qwycche*⁷³ *myche*

Table 19: Other Yorks. Documents (3 pers. sing. pres., 'shall', pres. part.)

	3p s -s	3ps-th	3p -ez	sall	shall	schall	-and	-ing
1. 1428	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
2. 1436	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	2
3. 1437?	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	2
4. 1437/8	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
5. 1440/1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. 1451	2	3	0	0	5	0	0	0
7. 1453	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
8. 1454	4	0	0	0	0	4	2	0
9. c.1454	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
10. Pre 1459	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11. n.d	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
12. 1466	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
13. 1477	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	1
14. 1483	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
15. 1490	1 ⁷⁴	5	0	0	1	0	0	2

⁷⁴ abbreviation for -es

Table 20: Other Yorks. Documents ('should', 'church')

	<i>suld</i>	<i>shuld</i>	<i>schuld</i>	<i>kirk</i>	<i>chirch</i>
1. 1428	0	0	0	0	0
2. 1436	0	3	0	0	0
3. 1437?	0	0	0	0	0
4. 1437/8	0	1	0	0	0
5. 1440/1	0	0	0	0	0
6. 1451	0	0	0	0	0
7. 1453	0	1	0	5	0
8. 1454	0	0	1	0	0
9. c.1454	2	0	0	0	0
10. Pre 1459	0	0	0	0	0
11. n.d	0	0	0	0	0
12. 1466	0	0	0	0	0
13. 1477	0	0	0	0	0
14. 1483	1 ⁷⁵	1 ⁷⁶	0	1	0
15. 1490	0	0	0	0	0

6.8.1 Observations

'Whilk': *Which* is the dominant form in these documents and dialect levelling is evident. There are, however, a few uses of the regionally marked *q*-graph around mid-century.

'Much': There are just two texts which use *mykill* in the 1430s and four other occurrences of this feature are of the *much*-type.

'Such': *Swilk* is used in two documents (c1437 and c1454). *Such* and *swych* are found in the 1430s and three documents from the end of the fifteenth century display *such*.

⁷⁵ *solde*

⁷⁶ *shold*

‘Each’: There is just a single use of *ilk* in 1453 and the reduction of the regional feature cannot be seen from the findings.

Third person singular present indicative: Both the regional variant *-s* and the levelled variant *-th* are represented in the documents studied here. There are more uses of the levelled form in the first half of the century.

‘Shall’: The northern *sall* is clearly recessive in these documents as there is only a single instance of this variant. There are some uses of *schall* but *shall* is dominant towards the end of the century.

Present participle: The northern *-and* is used in a document from mid-century. The levelled variety *-ing* is dominant throughout the period.

‘Should’: There are two documents with *suld*-type usage (one of these, from 1483 also uses *shold*). There are three other documents which use *shuld*.

‘Church’: Only two documents have this feature (1453 and 1483). Interestingly, they both use the northern *kirke*.

From the above findings in §6.8 it is not always clear if levelling is taking place as some features are not fully represented. What can be said is that, with the exception of the third person singular present *-s*, there are only a few examples of the regionally marked variants and they were clearly in recession.

6.9 Evidence of Dialect Levelling

This chapter argues that the marked increase of non-local words and morphology together with the decrease of northern words and morphology is representative of dialect levelling manifest in the written language of Yorkshire. Such reduction of regionally marked varieties was most conspicuous in the writings of the fifteenth-century lawyers.

This finding is not contradictory to the observations made by sociolinguists, as seen in the comment made by J. Milroy (1999: 37) given below.

It is in legal and administrative documents that the need for standardisation is strongest and not in the elite literary tradition, because these have to be very precise and not subject to differing interpretations.

Milroy and Milroy (1999:25) also make an important observation concerning the manner in which innovations become widely adopted by a population. They comment that ‘personal channels of communication are much more influential than mass media channels in persuading persons to adopt innovations’. It seems to me that the hypothesis that Chancery papers sent around the country standardised written English could be likened to ‘mass media channels’ of the fifteenth century. On the other hand, the Yorkshire lawyers who were trained in London would certainly have been influenced through ‘personal channels of communication’ at the place of learning.

7 Variation and Change in the Written English of Late Medieval East Anglia

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is based on analyses of selected linguistic features of written English from East Anglia. As was the case with Yorkshire documents, this chapter considers documents which include personal and official letters, civic documents and wills. The documents are mostly from Norfolk, but materials which are available from Suffolk are not excluded. The greater proportion of material from Norfolk is purely due to the importance and the prominence of the town of Bishop's Lynn (now King's Lynn) and the city of Norwich in the late medieval period.

On a traditional late Middle English dialectal map (e.g. Lass 1992: 34), East Anglia belongs to the large area labelled East Midland which extends from South Yorkshire to London. Baugh and Cable elaborate on the description of East Midlands as being

the part of England that contributed most to the formation of this standard... and it was the East Midland type of English that became its basis, particularly the dialect of the metropolis, London (1993: 187).

The important questions here are: *Is East Anglian English the same as East Midlands English?* and *Is East Midlands English the same as London English?*

Wyld contends that 'the differences between E. Midland and London English in

the fifteenth century are comparatively slight, since the latter was becoming more and more E. Midland in character' (1936: 77). Likewise, Meech (1934:72) notes that 'the morphology of Drury's writings⁷⁷ we may dismiss briefly. for the morphology of East Anglia at this period is very similar to that of London and of the whole South East Midland'. If East Midlands and London display very similar linguistic features, there is little justification for considering East Anglian dialect material. In my view, however, the role of East Midlands influence has been much overstated. The misleading view that East Midland English was the basis for London English which later became Standard English is loosely based on the findings of Ekwall, who had a particular interest in finding out why the language of London (spoken language) had changed from a Saxon dialect to that of East Midlands during 1250-1350 (1956: xv). This is what Ekwall concluded:

It was found that on the whole the number of people of Midland provenience was less than that of people apparently hailing from Southern counties, especially the Home Counties, but that the number of prominent and influential people, especially in the Roll of 1319, exceeded that of people of Southern origin. I came to the tentative conclusion that so far as can be judged from the Subsidy Rolls, the contribution to the London population from Southern counties about the beginning of the fourteenth century was larger than that from the Midland counties, and that *the Midland character of the later London language could hardly be due to immigration on a large scale from the Midlands than from the South*. On the other hand it seemed probable that the upper classes of London, those of wealthy merchants and the like, were recruited to a greater extent from the Midlands than from the South, and it might be suggested that the upper stratum of London society came to be influenced linguistically by Midland dialects (1956: xii-xiii; Italics mine).

⁷⁷ Cambridge University Library Add. MS 2830, written by a scribe of Beccles in Northeast Suffolk, c.1430.

What Ekwall claims above is that changes in London English cannot be explained merely by the numbers of immigrants moving into London, an important point which many have overlooked.

It would be easy to dismiss the English of the East Anglian area, which belongs to the East Midlands, as being a ‘natural’ influence on London English. This kind of view has led many (e.g. Wyld 1936 above) to regard London English with East Midlands influence as the precursor to the present-day Standard English. A closer look, however, reveals that in the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries, East Anglia still exhibited a distinct, local written language within the so-called East Midlands area. Therefore East Anglia is a region which is suitable for studying the effects of dialect contact. The first part of the present chapter on the East Anglian dialect during the fifteenth century is primarily concerned with identifying features which were an integral part of the written language of the East Anglians. Some East Anglian features are outlined in the next section and the disappearance of these features will be considered in the rest of the chapter.

7.2 East Anglian English: Idiosyncratic, Peculiar and Recognisable

Beadle, in his study of some Middle English Norfolk materials, stresses that East Anglia had developed its own ‘idiosyncratic and readily recognizable spelling system’ (1991: 91). Beadle points out some literary evidence which demonstrates the linguistic distinctness of the Norfolk region (1991: 94). He states that ‘both Chaucer and Langland make jocular or characterizing references to Norfolk dialect’. Beadle illustrates:

Oswald⁷⁸ of Bawdswell's repeated *Ik* for 'I', the phrase, 'So theck' (i.e. the imprecation *So thee-ik*, 'as I may thrive' (I(A) 3864) and his 'melle' for 'mill' (I(A) 3923) were doubtless intended to be recognized as East Anglianisms. In Passus V of the B version of *Piers Plowman* Sire Hervy Covytise also uses 'so the Ik' (228), and says he 'can no Frenche ... but of the ferthest ende of Norfolk' (239)... (1991: 94).

Chaucer's use of the northern character illustrates the view of the late fourteenth-century Londoner, who considered East Anglian English as being different and outside of his community. There are other references to the dialect of Norfolk in the late medieval period. Beadle (1991: 92) refers to the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, one of the earliest English-Latin dictionaries. It was completed in Lynn in 1440 and the compiler makes a comment about the Norfolk dialect which he has used in the dictionary, as follows:

However, I have kept to the manner of speech of the county of Norfolk, which is the only one I have used since childhood, and down to the ground, is what I have known most fully and most perfectly (translated and cited in Beadle 1991: 92).

The fact that there evidently was a strong distinction between the English of East Anglia and London is significant. It provides a basis for studying the effects of dialect contact. Furthermore, McIntosh et al. (1986, I: 47) note the early replacement of distinctively local forms on materials which require the 'upper register'. They state:

...the language of writings for local use, like commonplace books and literary texts, may differ markedly from the language of those administrative and legal writings intended for a wider or more exalted public. This dichotomy is especially striking in the Norfolk material, and since it appears there well before

⁷⁸ Chaucer describes Oswald the Reeve:

Of Northfolk was this Reve of which I telle.

Biside a toun men clepen Baldeswelle (I (A) 619-20); Benson 1987: 33).

English had become the regular language of government, it can hardly be ascribed to the spread of Standard English as ordinarily understood (McIntosh et al. 1986, I: 47).

Such observations lead me to believe that written East Anglian English of the late medieval period merits study in its own right.

East Anglia in the late fourteenth century stands out linguistically in the guild returns of 1388/9. This is because it is the *only* area outside of London to produce the guild returns in the English language (Wright 2001⁷⁹). All other areas produced the guild certificates addressed to the King in Latin, French or in a mixture of the two languages. The certificates were to outline the guild activities and the financial status of the guild, and it was up to each guild to select the language in which it was to be written. We are not told why some chose to have the certificates written in English, but by considering the history of Bishop's Lynn and Norwich, their selection of English can be better understood. Moreover, the history of these places sheds light on the character and identity of the region which is quite different from that of Yorkshire, and so understanding this regional characteristic is essential in discussing the linguistic features in the sections which follow.

These guild certificates were produced as a result of the order given by Richard II on 1 November 1388 to all guilds and fraternities in each shire. According to Gerchow (1996: 113), the answers to the inquiry were to be produced 'in writing' by 2 February 1389. There are 484 returns extant and they are in three languages; Latin (75%), English (12%), French (9%) and combinations of languages (4%). Of the 56 English language returns, 46 emanate

⁷⁹ I am grateful to Dr Laura Wright for allowing me to read her chapter in advance of its publication.

from Norfolk guilds and 10 from London guilds. Since they were all produced within the period of three months, these English certificates can be used for comparing the written language of London and Norfolk. I hope to identify certain features of the written Norfolk dialect from these certificates which can be used as a diagnostic in comparing later written documents from East Anglia.

7.3 East Anglian Linguistic Features

Despite many comments concerning the distinctive language of East Anglia over the years, the description of written linguistic features for late medieval East Anglia has been hitherto general and sketchy. As Turville-Petre (1998: 63) notes:

Up to now our knowledge of the Norfolk dialect of the early fourteenth century has been speculative. That is to say that texts localized in Norfolk have been from the late fourteenth and the fifteenth century... Fifteenth-century Norfolk English is strikingly peculiar in some features, such as the spelling *xal* for 'shall', *qu-* or *w-* for Old English *hw-*, and forms such as *ryth* and *browth* for 'right' and 'brought'. We have had very little direct evidence to chart the development of such features.

The table below shows distinctive variables which were available in East Anglia and in London at the end of the fourteenth century. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, but this is what I have observed from the guild certificates. There is a detailed discussion concerning the language of the guild certificates in Wright (2001).

Table 21: Features available around 1400

	East Anglia c.1400	London ⁸⁰ c.1400
<i>wh-</i>	<i>qu-, qw-, qwh- w-, wh-</i>	<i>wh-</i>
<i>sh-</i>	<i>x-, ch-, sch-, sh*-, s*-</i>	<i>sh-, sch*-</i>
'such'	<i>swilk, swech, such</i>	<i>such, swich</i>
'much'	<i>mekill, mech</i>	<i>much, moche</i>
'each'	<i>ilk, iche*</i>	<i>eche, iche, ilk*</i>
3 pers. pres. singular	<i>-s, -th, -t3, -3t, - t, -n*, -ø*, -3*</i>	<i>-th, -s*, -ø*</i>
3 pers. pres. plural	<i>-(e)n</i>	<i>-e(n), -ep*</i>
strong past. participle	<i>-(e)n</i>	<i>-e(n), -ø</i>
present participle	<i>-and, -end</i>	<i>-ing, -nd*</i>
deverbal noun suffix ⁸¹	<i>-ing</i>	<i>-ing, -nd*</i>
infinitive suffix	<i>-(e)n</i>	<i>-ø, -(e)n*</i>

The asterisks (*) denote a minority form.

From the list of available features in East Anglian English of the fifteenth century, the key diagnostic features may be summed up as follows:

- spelling for *sh-*: *x-, ch-, sc-*
- spelling for OE *hw-*: *qw-, qu-, w-*

⁸⁰ London forms have been selected from my observations from the London guild certificates and from the selection given by Samuels (1983: 28-9).

⁸¹ Deverbal noun suffixes are not considered in my analysis, but as there is an interesting distinction in the Norfolk material, it is included in the list for comparison. Wright (2001: 87) notes:

The Norfolk scribes distinguished between *-nd* for verbal forms and *-ng* for substantive forms in 1388/9... This is in distinction to the London scribes, who did not discriminate between verbal and substantive usages, and did not use any *-nd* forms at all in 110 tokens, making this one of the most divergent features between Norfolk and London English'.

- Spelling for *sh-*: *xall*, *xuld*
- The past participle ending (strong verbs): *-(e)n*
- The infinitive suffix: *-(e)n*
- The third person singular marker: *-s*, *-t3*, *-3t*, *-t*, *-3*, *-n*, *-∅*⁸².

Included in the above list are also features which may not be typically East Anglian in origin. *Swilk* and *mickel* for *such* and *much* respectively were typical Northern features in the fifteenth century as the maps from *LALME* indicate⁸³, but they were also evident in the MSS from northern East Anglia. They are northern features, but I have included them in my analysis since they are becoming rarer and their use may be seen as being old fashioned, so they are good indicators as to whether the writer employs a new or an old form. The purpose here is not to identify linguistic features with its origins in East Anglia or to describe a ‘pure’ dialect of East Anglia, but what may be perceived as a feature much used and established in the region by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Nor are these the only possible variants, but the above list represents the more regionally marked forms which occur or those old-fashioned forms that are declining. The assumption is that such regionally marked features are reduced during the course of the fifteenth century in the writings of the East Anglians, but that this reduction occurs earlier and at a faster pace in the writings of those who have contact with London. It is anticipated that the present analysis would demonstrate a similar trend as seen in the study of the language of fifteenth-century Yorkshire (chapter

⁸² The *-∅* endings for the third person singular form of the verb include both indicative and subjunctive uses. For a discussion of this, see below.

⁸³ 10 ‘such’ (1)-(6) (vol.II, 39-44), 16 ‘much’ (1)-(6) (vol. II, 75-80).

6 of the present thesis). The following section contains additional comments concerning the selected East Anglian features.

7.3.1 Spelling for *sh-*: *x-*, *ch-*, *sc-*

Seymour (1968: 167) gives the ‘free variation of *sch* and *ch*’ as one of the orthographic features of two manuscripts⁸⁴ held to be the work of an East Anglian scribe. For the provincial nature of the use of *xal*, see quote by Beadle (1981) above.

7.3.2 Spelling for OE *hw-*: *qu-*, *qw-*, *w-*

Spellings with *qu-*, *qw-* and *qwh-* are marked East Anglian usage which occur frequently in the guild certificates from East Anglia, and Lucas refers to them as ‘characteristic idiosyncrasy of Norfolk writers’ (1997: 220). Seymour (1968: 168) also gives the ‘frequent variation of initial *w* and *wh*’ as being characteristic of an East Anglian scribe. Variants with *q-* graphs were found in the north, but they become recessive by the mid-fifteenth century. On the other hand, *q-* continued to exist as a variant in East Anglia until the end of the fifteenth century (J. Milroy 1992b: 175).

7.3.3 Spelling for ‘*such*’, ‘*much*’

In the East Anglian guild certificates *swilk* and *mekil* are used although they are a minority form. Lucas (1973: 344) notes that the forms *mech* and *swech* do not

⁸⁴ Two manuscripts considered by Seymour are Cambridge University Library MS. Gg. IV. 27 written around 1420-40 in Norfolk containing works by Chaucer and Oxford Bodleian Library MS. e Musæo116 written around 1420-1440 containing Chaucer’s *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, *Mandeville’s Travels* and a treatise on vine-trees.

occur often outside the Suffolk area in Maps 4 and 5 of Samuels' 'Some Applications of Middle English Dialectology'⁸⁵.

7.3.4 The Present Plural Ending: *-(e)n*

This is a general Midland feature rather than an East Anglian characteristic. Bryan (1921: 121) comments on this feature, stating that 'the present plural indicative ending *-e(n)* is probably the most marked single characteristic of the Midland dialect'. As a dialectal feature commonly in use in the late ME of East Anglia which was gradually declining, this will be included in my analysis.

7.3.5 The Past Participle (Strong Verbs) Suffix: *-(e)n*

Seymour (1968: 167) lists the retention of the final *-n* in the past participle as a dialectal characteristic of the East Anglian scribe. This is a feature markedly dominant in the guild certificates of East Anglia.

7.3.6 The Infinitive Suffix: *-(e)n*

One of the developments during the ME period was the 'loss of the infinitive ending' (Lass 1992: 145). Wyld (1920: 121) notes that 'the final *-n* [in the infinitive] is, on the whole, used more regularly in E. Midland than in more southerly texts'. The guild certificates show a strong preference for the use of *-n* in East Anglia, but much less in the London certificates. 'The retention of final *-n* in the infinitive' is also given by Seymour (1968: 167) as a dialectal characteristic of an East Anglian scribe.

⁸⁵ This is shown on the maps in Samuel's original paper of 1963 published in *English Studies*, but not is not discernible on the dot maps on the later reprints of the same paper.

7.3.7 The Third Person Suffix: -s

This is a northern feature but appears in late fourteenth-century East Anglian texts. Lass notes that ‘the best regional indicators are the present third-person singular and the plural: 3 sg. -s is northern (though it occurs in the midlands as well)’ (1992: 137). Other northern features such as *kirk*, *swilk* and *mickel* appear in northern East Anglia (e.g. *LALME* map 98 ‘church’ (1)-(6), McIntosh et al. 1986. II: 249-254) and it is likely that the third person singular -s is a similar phenomenon.

The use of the -s suffix has been regarded as a precursor to the use of the modern Standard English third person singular -s, and if this is the case, the use of -s in texts like the guild certificates is strikingly modern. In view of the fact, however, that the use of the third person singular -s in northern texts has been perceived as a regional feature by upwardly mobile northerners (chapter 6 on Yorkshire English) and since -th had been the stable dominant form during the fifteenth century, it seems difficult to accept the use of -s in East Anglia as a straightforward development of -s moving south and an early phenomenon of the modern Standard English third person singular -s. It existed only as a minority feature in the fifteenth century for people like the well educated (both in London and Cambridge) Lynn friar Capgrave (Lucas 1994 [1997]: 241). A study by Bambas (1947: 183) shows that even when -s and -th co-existed as variants in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries there was a clear distinction between the two forms with -th being the more formal form and the -s being more colloquial, established first in spoken English rather than in the written. It remains to be seen if there is a link between the use of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century written East Anglian -s and the -s later adopted as part of the standard English usage and this question will be discussed further following the language analysis.

7.3.8 The Third Person Singular Suffix: *-n*

This is a rare form, but it occurs several times in the East Anglian guild certificates. Wright makes the same observation and refers to *-n* as a ‘minor variant’ of the third person singular present indicative suffix (2001: 101).

7.3.9 The Third Person Singular Suffix: *-t*

Seymour (1968: 167) states that ‘the associated weakening of *th* to *t*: e.g. *hat* ‘hath’, *hyndit*, *sethet*, *faylt*, *breystyt* (all of which forms are pr. 3s.)’ is a dialectal feature of an East Anglian scribe. This is not a dominant feature and although Davis, as shown below, has tried to dismiss the use of this East Anglian variant, it nevertheless does occur in different East Anglian manuscripts including Drury’s grammatical text and some of the Paston letters as well as in the guild certificates.

Davis simply classifies *-t* endings as errors:

There are one or two odd forms, such as *wrythetyth*... evidently a mere confusion of spelling, beside *wrytht* in l. 7 of the same letter. In view of the absence of syncopated forms elsewhere, this latter is presumably also a spelling error’ (1952: 216).

In the same discussion, Davis also comes to the same conclusion regarding another writer: ‘One or two spellings with *-t* are presumably errors - *levyt*... *scheweyt*’.

7.3.10 The Third Person Singular Suffix: *-t₃*, *-3t* (and Others)

The *-t₃* suffix appears in the East Anglian guild certificates and in early writings of Capgrave, but is eliminated in his later work (Lucas 1994: 100). Beadle states that ‘these *-t₃* forms are common with some Norfolk scribes, especially at Lynn, though not exclusive to that place’. Beadle also gives other variants, *-t₃*, *-tht*, *-hth*, *-ht* (1977: 59) as being characteristic of East Anglia.

7.3.11 The Third Person Singular $-\emptyset$ for Indicative and Subjunctive:

The uses of the zero morpheme for the third person singular verbs in the 1388/9 guild certificates are difficult to determine. The certificates list the regulations of the each guild which are often expressed in terms of fines in the event a guild member fails to meet them and the distinction between the verbs in the indicative mood and the subjunctive mood in each instance is not clear-cut. Due to the nature of the context, it may seem at first glance that most of the third person singular verbs are subjunctive and this must be the conclusion of those who analysed the guild certificates without any comment on the use of the third person singular $-\emptyset$ (Wyld 1920; Meech and Allen 1940), for in late Middle English, the singular subjunctive ending was usually zero or with *-e*. An additional difficulty is that as Wright (2001: 88) explains:

...the subject is often a group singular ('any brother or sister'), which is notorious for attracting both singular and plural agreement, so a zero marker cannot confidently be taken to express the subjunctive.

Fischer (1992:349-50) also mentions problems which may be associated with expressing conditionality in late Middle English texts:

It is not quite clear what the basis was for subjunctive assignment in Middle English: different manuscripts often show different moods in the same text and sometimes indicative and subjunctive are found side by side within the same sentence:

(395) eke if he *apparailleth* (ind.) his mete moore deliciously than nede is, or *ete* (subj.) it to hastily by likerousnesse; (CT X. 376 [12: 376])

According to Fischer (1992: 350), the subjunctive is 'more frequent when the condition is entirely 'open' i.e. when potentiality is stressed'. She gives two examples to illustrate this point:

(396) But & she *haue* (subj.) children with him þey leten hire lyue with hem to brynge hem vp... (Mandev. (Tit) 114.8-9)

(397) If that a prynce *useth* (ind.) hasardrye,/ ...He is, as by commune opinioun,/ Yholde the lasse in reputacioun. (CT X. 599-602) [12: 599-602])

Fischer (1992: 350) explains the difference between the above two examples:

In (396) the subject may either have children or not and this is important for the effectiveness of the action expressed in the main clause. In (397) the speaker is not interested in whether a prince uses ‘hasardrye’ or not, but rather he wishes to state that every prince who *is* a ‘hasardour’ loses his reputation as a result of it. In the latter case the *if*-clause is almost equivalent to a temporal clause.

The difficulty in determining the mood of the verb in the guild certificates is that the moods seem to vary even when describing exactly the same situation.

Illustrated below are variable examples from different guild certificates from Lynn which describe the same situation.

(1a) And if the den *fayle* [subjunctive] of hys somouns, he xal paye, for euerilk broyer y^t is in toune and nowt somouned, iij.d... (*Shipman's Guild, Lynn*. Toulmin Smith 1870: 54-57).

(1b) And if ye deen *faylith* [indicative] of his somonse, he schal pay... (*Guild of St. Mary, Lynn*. Toulmin Smith 1870: 65-6).

(2a) And who-so *entres* [indicative] in to ye chaumbere yer ye ale lyth in, and askes non leue of ye offesers of ye gilde, he schal pay... (*Guild of St. Mary, Lynn*. Toulmin Smith 1870: 65-6).

(2b) And who-so *entre* [subjunctive] in to ye chaumbre yer ye ale lyth in, and askes non leue of ye offecers of ye gilde, he schal pay... (*Guild of St. James, Lynn*, 1870: 69).

Therefore, it is unlikely that the reasons affecting the choice of mood are simply semantic and/or pragmatic. However, there is an alternative explanation. It is that the choice of the mood depends on the geographical location. The examples (2a)

and (2b) from the guild certificates are clauses introduced by the pronoun *who* and there are numerous examples of *who* in the Norfolk guild certificates. Most of these clauses have the verb in the subjunctive although there are a few examples with the verb in the indicative, as in (2a). In her study of the Middle English phrase *as who say / saith*, Nevanlinna (1992: 68-69) comments on the use of the subjunctive with the indefinite pronoun *who*. She points out that ‘in the first ME subperiod *who* first turned up with the verb in the present or past subjunctive’ and gives an example of the present subjunctive use in a MS of *The Wooing of Our Lord*, ‘probably written in northern East Midlands’. She further notes the geographical connection of the use of the subjunctive with the indefinite pronoun *who*, stating that ‘the present subjunctive in the *as who*-phrase was common in northerly areas’ (1992: 69). Fischer makes a similar comment:

in Middle English conditional clauses are frequently found in the subjunctive mood: in Late Middle English *the subjunctive is almost the rule, especially in the north* (1992: 349-50; Italics mine).

By the Early Modern period, the indicative becomes the norm as in ‘Who *hateth* him an honors not his Father...’ (Shakespeare *2 Henry VI* IV.vii, cited in Rissanen 1998: 229). Thus the preference for the indicative in the south is the more modern form and the subjunctive use in the north and in the north East Midlands must be seen as old-fashioned. In addition, this would indicate that the subjunctive zero endings are a northern feature which were also used in northern parts of East Anglia.

There are, however, other factors which must be considered in this discussion. It is also possible that at least some examples of the zero endings in the guild certificates were verbs in the indicative mood - that the zero-ending is a

variant of the third person singular present indicative in use in late medieval East Anglia. Although rare, zero endings for the third person singular are found in some of the letters from the Paston collection. Since they were unusual, Davis (1952: 216) dismissed them as confusion or errors on the part of the writer: ‘There are two endingless forms in no. 629: *me thynke* l.3 (which, of course, is common in ME.) and, much more strangely, *haue* l. 44, which looks like a mere slip... *he hath bowthe hym a leuery in Bromeholme pryory & haue 3euen vpe þ^e woord*. Concerning another writer’s letter, he comments likewise: ‘In addition, a few endingless forms, the meaning of which is not clear, appear in no. LXXXV only- *recummauwnd... pray... send... byd*’.

According to Trudgill (1974: 55-63), in present-day Norfolk the zero-ending for the third person singular present indicative exists as a variant. He notes that ‘it is likely that this feature was at one time more widespread geographically in the south of England than it is at present... but it has recently gained some recognition from linguists as a typically East Anglian feature’ (1974: 55).

7.3.12 The Study of East Anglian Features

The rest of the chapter focuses on the study of two spellings and two morphological variants from East Anglia, which are:

- The spelling of *wh-* words
- The *sh-* spelling of the words *shall* (singular and plural) and *should*
- Third person singular present indicative marker
- Infinitive suffix *-en*

Here, I have selected what I consider to be four salient features of East Anglian written English, and these are markers identifying regionality in the fifteenth century. The infinitive suffix *-en* is certainly not limited to East Anglia, but the

strong preference for the continued use of *-en* in the fifteenth century is a marked regional characteristic. Another strong characteristic of East Anglian written English in this period is that the spellings of *wh-* words, *shall* and *should* and the variety of the third person singular present indicative suffix all demonstrate great variability and choice.

7.4 Letters

7.4.1 The Paston Letters

The Paston letters are a valuable source of Middle English linguistic analysis in which we know some things about the background of the letter writer. There have been objections to using the Paston letters, however, as in the comment below:

Other letter collections of the period, such as that of the Pastons, present less certain evidence [i.e. of the influence of the London dialect] in that many members of these families spent considerable periods of time in London and the families lived closer to London (Blake 1981: 46).

My argument is that this (the fact that the persons have spent considerable periods of time in London) is precisely why the Paston letters are a good source for an analysis such as mine. It would require time for levelling to take place and because of this, their language (of those who have spent time in London away from Norfolk) will have become levelled. The reasons for using the Paston letters as evidence in demonstrating the loss of regional written language should become clear from different comments of those who have studied the language of some of the Pastons:

Dialectal usage also, of course, persisted in the South in (e.g.) the practices of private letter-writers, who were under different pressures from those experienced by professional scribes who wrote for wider audiences beyond their own immediate circle.

The stay-at-home Pastons, for instance, as opposed to their more mobile relatives (see further Davis 1954, 1983), continued to use grossly provincial usages until quite late in the fifteenth century (Smith 1997a: 13-14).

It is a commonplace that as the fifteenth century progressed local varieties of English were increasingly modified by the influence of the growing London 'standard'... Obviously the speed of this movement must have varied in different places, and even in the writing of different individuals. Two things are worth study: on the one hand, the process and progress of the move towards conformity; on the other, the persistence of distinctively regional usages in the latter part of the century. The Paston Letters provide unique evidence on both these matters at a level of writing that is neither literary (and so self-conscious) nor legal (and so largely conventional and formulaic) (Davis 1959: 95).

An important point which can be gleaned here is that not all the Pastons spent time in London and those who did were there for varying periods of time. As Smith (1997a) indicates above, differences were seen between those of the Pastons who were mobile and those who stayed at home.

The earliest record which could be traced with certainty of the Paston family is the will of Clement Paston I made in June 1419 and proved in October of the same year (Davis 1971: xl). Clement Paston I is described as a 'careful, far-seeing man' (Bennett 1932: 2) who borrowed money to send his son William to school. In an account supposedly written by one of the enemies of the Paston family (Davis 1971: xlii), the speedy rise in the family's fortunes is described:

Also the seyde Clement had a sone William qwhych yt he sett to scole, and oftyn he borowyd mony to fynd hym to scole; and afr yt he yede to Courte wyth ye helpe of Geffrey Somerton hese uncle and lerned the lawe. and yre bygatte he myche good and yanne he ws made a S'jaunt. and afrward made a Justice. and a ryght connyng mane in ye lawe.

Other known events in his life testify to his son's notable rise in status. Bennett (1932: 2) notes:

William Paston soon became a noted man, and his rise was rapid. He was early appointed Steward to the Bishop of Norwich, and the trust that was placed in him is seen by the number of families which appointed him as a trustee for their properties, or as an executor to their wills. In 1421 he became a serjeant of the Court of Common Pleas, and eight years later was raised to the bench, receiving a salary of 110 marks.

The earliest letter in the Paston letter collection is that of William Paston I. The collection, which consists of letters and memoranda written by the members of his family and of their acquaintances, reveals the family's growing interest in protecting, defending and furthering their newly found wealth and social position. In this respect, their interests were similar to other gentry families of the time, such as the Plumptons from Yorkshire.

The letters of the Pastons have been the object of linguistic study over the years. A notable contribution is that made by Norman Davis (e.g. 1954; 1959; 1972), but there are others more recently who have considered the letters using sociolinguistic methods (Gómez Soliño 1997; Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre 1999; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2000) and who have shed light in understanding the changes in the written language of that period. Further insight can be gained, however, from the study of this famous collection, and my findings of some of the selected letters are outlined below. In this survey, I have selected letters for which the writer has produced multiple copies. They are all thought to be autograph. One of the aims of this chapter is to compare their linguistic preferences against other text types and the data from the Paston men are useful in this respect. I also include the study of the writings from two lawyers associated with the Pastons, who have hitherto received little attention from a linguistic perspective. The following five people's letters are considered below and some information regarding their background is also given:

7.4.1.1 John Paston I (1421-1466)

Son of Judge William Paston I. John I was educated at Trinity Hall and Peterhouse, Cambridge and at the Inner Temple (Davis 1971: liv). He was on the commission of the peace for Norfolk in 1447; a commissioner of array in 1450; became a chief legal advisor to Sir John Falstolf c.1450; Justice of the Peace in 1460-6; M.P. in 1460-1 and 1461-2. 4 letters of John Paston I are considered:

1. c1449 A letter to an unidentified person in London, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 27446, f. 41). Printed in Davis (1971: 53-54), no. 37.
2. 1452 A letter, probably to the sheriff of Norfolk, mostly autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 27444, f. 16. Printed in Davis (1971: 68), no. 44.
3. 1465 A letter to Margaret Paston, John Daubeney and Richard Calle, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34889, f. 9). Printed in Davis (1971: 131-134), no. 73.
4. 1465 A letter to Margaret Paston, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 27444, f. 147. Printed in Davis (1971: 134-136), no. 74.

7.4.1.2 William Paston II (1436-1496)

Brother of John I. He was educated at Cambridge and was sometimes in London from 1450-1456 (Davis 1971: lvii). In addition:

He became one of Fastolf's trustees, with John I and others, in 1456, and went to London on John's behalf soon after Fastolf's death in 1459 to try to negotiate administration of the estate... He served on the commission of the peace for Norfolk in 1465-6, 1469-70, and 1473-4, and on a few other commissions. He was pardoned in 1468, as 'of London, of Caister, of Norwich, and Wymondham, gentleman'... He was M.P. for Newcastle under Lyme in 1472-5, and for Bedwyn, Wiltshire, in 1478 and 1491-2, and perhaps other parliaments in Henry VII's reign. By 1474 he was living in London at Warwick's Inn near Newgate (Davis 1971: lvii).

9 letters by William Paston II are considered:

1. 1452 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 27443, f. 103. Printed in Davis (1971: 149-150; no. 81).
2. 1450-1454 Memorandum on French Grammar, autograph. NRO, MS Walter Rye 38, ff. 64-66, Printed in Davis (1971: 150-153; no. 82).
3. 1454 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 43488, f. 19. Printed in Davis (1971: 154; no. 83).
4. 1454 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 34888, f. 107. Printed in Davis (1971: 155; no. 84).
5. 1458 A letter to Margaret Paston, autograph. BL Add. MS. 33597, f. 5. Printed in Davis (1971: 156-7; no. 85).
6. 1459 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 34888, f. 140. Printed in Davis (1971: 157-8; no. 86).
7. 1460 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 27444, f. 74. Printed in Davis (1971: 163-164; no. 89).
8. 1462 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 27444, f. 119. Printed in Davis (1971: 166-167; no. 91).
9. 1467 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 33597, f. 8. Printed in Davis (1971: 167-169; no. 92).

7.4.1.3 Clement Paston II (1442-dead by 1479)

Brother of John I and William II. Educated at Cambridge and under a tutor in London in 1458. Davis (1971: lviii) notes that his surviving letters are from 1461-6, and they were all written in London, suggesting that he either stayed there or frequented London. Not much else is known about him, and he certainly was not active in local politics as were his two older brothers. 12 pieces of document by Clement Paston II are:

1. 1461 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 43488, f. 55. Printed in Davis (1971: 197-198; no. 114).
2. 1461 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 27444, f. 97. Printed in Davis (1971: 198-199; no. 115).
3. 1461 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 34888, f. 191. Printed in Davis (1971: 199-200; no. 116).

4. 1464 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 34889, f. 2. Printed in Davis (1971: 202-203; no. 118).
5. 1464 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 34889, f. 7. Printed in Davis (1971: 203-204; no. 119).
6. 1466 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. BL Add. MS. 27445, f. 12. Printed in Davis (1971: 204-205; no. 120).
7. 1466? Part of Agnes Paston's draft will, hand of Clement Paston. BL Add. MS. 27445, f. 7. Printed in Davis (1971: 45-47; no. 32).

7.4.1.4 Hugh atte Fenne (born c.1418-died 1476)

Hugh atte Fenne was a lawyer from a prominent Great Yarmouth family and had kinship ties with a number of East Norfolk gentry families. It is thought that from his interest in books at Cambridge University as noted in his will, he may have studied at Cambridge (Virgoe 1991). He probably trained in law at Gray's Inn, since he retained chambers there until his death. Virgoe (1991: 92) makes some interesting observations about Fenne:

By 1444, ...he had entered the service of the Exchequer, having become clerk to one of its auditors, and he was to pursue a successful career in the great finance of the Crown... He was also increasingly called upon as trustee, feoffee and executor for both London and Norfolk people, for he was active in both regions. His official work kept him for much of the time in London, but he made frequent visits to East Anglia and acquired considerable amounts of landed property there to add to that which he had inherited.

Virgoe (1993: 33) further notes:

Although Fenne was increasingly busy in the affairs of the Crown, his contacts and interest in East Anglia remained strong. He was appointed escheator of Norfolk and Suffolk for 1456-7 and was a J. P. in Norfolk from 1457 to March 1460, as well as sitting on other Norfolk commissions.

There are 3 letters and 1 will⁸⁶ by Fenne:

1. 1456? A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34888, f. 128. Printed in Davis (1976: 136-137), no. 543.
2. 1456? A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34889, 173. Printed in Davis (1976: 139-140), no. 546.
3. 1468 A letter to John Paston II, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34889, f. 65). Printed in Davis (1976: 384-385), no. 749.
4. 1476 The will of Hugh at Fenne. (London, Public Record Office, Microfilm, Prob 11/6). Printed in Virgoe (1993).

7.4.1.5 Thomas Playter (died 1479)

He was Sir John Fastolf's chief legal advisor and after Fastolf's death in 1459 he was retained by John Paston and Thomas Howes who were Fastolf's executors. He was originally a Norfolk man and it is thought that he may have had his training in the Chancery, since he has been described as 'of the Chancery' (Davis 1971: lxxviii). Richmond (1981: 42) refers to Playter, however, as a 'country attorney', one 'who practised on behalf of men whose proper milieu was neither that of the Court nor the capital, but the country, a lawyer whose labour in their causes was not augmented by service to the government, whether central or local'. His ability was appreciated by the Paston family and his services were much in demand. He was escheator in 1466-7; in 1473 was on a local commission of *oyer and terminer* in Norfolk and Suffolk, but played a limited role in local government. He acquired an estate in Sotterley and established himself as a 'Suffolk gentleman' (Richmond 1981: 43). There are 12 letters by Thomas Playter:

⁸⁶ The will exists in an engrossed copy in the register of wills now in the London Public Record Office. It is therefore not in Fenne's own hand. I have, however, included it in the present study along with his letters since the preference for the selected linguistic variables in the will match that of his letters and therefore could be concluded that the copy represents Fenne's own usage.

1. 1457? A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34889, f. 217. Printed in Davis (1976: 173, no. 573).
2. 1460 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 27444, f. 79. Printed in Davis (1976: 219, no. 615).
3. 1460 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 27444, ff. 80-81. Printed in Davis 1976: 219-21, no. 616).
4. 1461 A letter from William Paston II to John Paston II, in Playter's hand. (London, British Library Add. MS 43489, f. 4). Printed in Davis (1971: 165-66, no. 90.)
5. 1461 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 43489, f.5). Printed in Davis (1976: 229-30), no. 625.
6. 1461 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34888, f. 177). Printed in Davis (1976: 233), no. 628.
7. 1461 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 43489, f. 7). Printed in Davis (1976: 235-36), no. 631.
8. 1461 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34888, f. 181), no. 641.
9. 1461 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 27444, f. 110). Printed in Davis (1976: 262-63), no. 654.
10. 1462 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34888, f. 212). Printed in Davis (1976: 283-84), no. 673.
11. 1463 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 34888, f. 287). Printed in Davis (1976: 287-89), no. 677.
12. 1463 A letter to John Paston I, autograph. (London, British Library, Add. MS. 27444, f. 126). Printed in Davis (1976: 290-92, no. 679).

7.4.2 The Study of the Linguistic Features

The numbers in brackets after the year denote the number of the document as catalogued by Davis (1971, 1976).

7.4.2.1 Third Person Present Singular Indicative

Table 22: John Paston I's use of the third person present singular

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t3</i>	<i>-ø</i>
1. c1449 (37)	3	0	0	0	0
2. 1452 (44)	0	0	0	0	0
3. 1465 (73)	16	0	2	0	0
4. 1465 (74)	5	0	0	0	0

Table 23: William II's use of the third person present singular

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t3</i>	<i>-ø</i>
1. 1452 (81)	1	0	1	0	0
2. 1450-4 (82)	1	0	13	0	0
3. 1454 (83)	2	0	2	0	1?
4. 1454 (84)	4	0	0	0	0
5. 1458 (85)	1	0	0	0	1?
6. 1459 (86)	5	0	0	0	0
7. 1460 (89)	5	0	0	0	0
8. 1462 (91)	1	0	0	0	0
9. 1467 (92)	0	0	0	0	1?

Table 24: Clement's use of the third person present singular

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t3</i>	<i>-ø</i>
1. 1461 (114)	3	0	0	0	0
2. 1461 (115)	1	0	0	0	0
3. 1461 (116)	4	0	0	0	0
4. 1464 (118)	4	0	0	0	0
5. 1464 (119)	1	0	0	0	0
6. 1466 (120)	2	0	1	0	0
7. 1466? (32)	0	0	0	0	0

Table 25: Fenne's use of the third person present singular

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t3</i>	<i>-ø</i>	<i>-n</i>
1.1456? (543)	1	0	0	0	0	0
2.1456? (546)	4	0	0	0	0	0
3. 1468 (749)	3	0	0	0	0	0
4. 1476 (will)	9	0	0	0	0	1

Table 26: Playter's use of the third person present singular

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t3</i>	<i>-ø</i>
1.1457? (573)	1	0	0	0	0
2. 1460 (615)	0	0	0	0	0
3. 1460 (616)	2	0	0	0	0
4. 1461 (625)	1	0	0	0	0
5. 1461 (628)	2	0	0	0	0
6. 1461 (631)	3	0	0	0	0
7. 1461 (641)	1	0	0	0	0
8. 1461 (654)	4	0	0	0	0
9. 1462 (673)	7	0	0	0	0
10.1462 (674)	1	0	0	0	0
11.1463 (677)	8	0	0	0	0
12.1463 (679)	6	0	0	0	0

7.4.2.2 Observations

The three Paston men considered here, John I, William II and Clement II, all had some education in Cambridge and had spent time in London. It seems that it was only John I, however, who had training at the Inns of Court in London. John I was the oldest of the three men here, and Clement II was the youngest.

John I: He uses the London form *-th* except on two occasions when he uses the East Anglian *-t*.

William II: He also uses the London form *-th* most of the time. He uses the East Anglian *-t* in three of his letters. In one document (no. 82), he uses it 13 times. This is found in his memorandum on French grammar (Davis and Ivy 1962) and Davis (1971: 150) suggests that memorandum was written during William's stay in Cambridge. It is full of other strongly marked regional forms, and contains *qwan* (when), *qwech* (which), *chall* (shall), alongside London forms including *such(e)* and *much(e)*. It is probable that this document reflects either William's usage before it was levelled, or is strongly influenced by an exemplar which contains regionally marked language.

Clement II: He uses the London form *-th*, except for one occasion he uses *-t*.

Fenne: He uses the London form *-th*, except in his will there is one instance of the unusual *-n*.

Playter: He uses only the London form throughout.

All the writers prefer the London form *-th* and this morpheme seems to be dominant. Although the Paston men prefer the use of the dominant form *-th*, they still show occasional use of the local *-t* ending.

It seems that out of the many variants for the third person present indicative marker which were found around 1400 (cf. §7.3), levelling has taken place towards the London form *-th*. Yet the dominance of the London form is not standardisation. Regularisation is certainly taking place, but the use of the regional forms such as *-t* and *-t3* does not disappear overnight.

7.4.2.3 Orthography for *sh*- Words

Words considered under this category include *shall* both in the singular and the plural and the word *should*. Numbers on their own, i.e. without brackets and asterisks, denote the use of *shall* in the singular. Numbers in brackets without an asterisk* denote an occurrence of the plural *shall*, the numbers with an asterisk* denote an occurrence of the word *should*.

Table 27: John I's use of *sh*-

	<i>sh</i> -	<i>scha</i> -	<i>schu</i> -	<i>xa</i> -	<i>xu</i> -
1. c1449 (37)	4 (2*)	0	0	0	0
2. 1452 (44)	1	0	0	0	0
3. 1465 (73)	5 (2*)	0	0	0	0
4. 1465 (74)	2 (3*)	0	0	0	0

Table 28: William II's use of *sh*-

	<i>sh</i> -	<i>scha</i> -	<i>schu</i> -	<i>xa</i> -	<i>xu</i> -	<i>cha</i> -	<i>chu</i> -	<i>scho</i> -
1. 1452 (81)	0	1	1 (3*)	0	0		1*	0
2. c1450(82) ⁸⁷		0	0	0	0	7	(1*)	0
3. 1454 (83)	0	0	1	0	0		0	0
4. 1454 (84)	0	2	1 (2*)	0	0		0	0
5. 1458 (85)	0	1	0	0	0		0	0
6. 1459 (86)	0	8	1 (5*)	0	0		0	0
7. 1460 (89)	0	4	0 (9*)	0	0		0	0
8. 1462 (91)	0	1	0 (4*)	0	0		0	1*
9. 1467 (92)	0	1	0 (5*)	0	0		0	0

⁸⁷ In this document, William II spells 'short' as *schort*.

Table 29: Clement's use of *sh-*

	<i>sh-</i>	<i>scha-</i>	<i>schu-</i>	<i>xa-</i>	<i>xu-</i>	<i>xw-</i>
1. 1461 (114)	0	0	0	1	0	2*
2. 1461 (115)	0	0	0	3	0	1*
3. 1461 (116)	0	0	0	4	0	5*
4. 1464 (118)	0	0	0	2	0	1*
5. 1464 (119)	0	0	0	1	0	5*
6. 1466 (120)	0	0	0	3	0	1*
7. 1466? (32)	0	0	0	3	1*	3*

Table 30: Fenne's use of *sh-*

	<i>sh-</i>	<i>scha-</i>	<i>schu-</i>	<i>xa-</i>	<i>xu-</i>
1.1456? (543)	2 (2*)	0	0	0	0
2.1456? (546)	1 (1*)	0	0	0	0
3. 1468 (749)	5 (1*)	0	0	0	0
4. 1476 (will)	9 (6,2*)	0	0	0	0

Table 31: Playter's use of *sh-*

	<i>sh-</i>	<i>scha-</i>	<i>schu-</i>	<i>xa-</i>	<i>xu-</i>
1.1457? (573)	0	0	1*	0	0
2. 1460 (615)	0	1	1*	0	0
3. 1460 (616)	0	1	0	0	0
4. 1461 (625)	0	1	1*	0	0
5. 1461 (628)	0	1 (1)	0	0	0
6. 1461 (631)	0	1 (1)	0	0	0
7. 1461 (641)	0	1	0	0	0
8. 1461 (654)	0	0	6*	0	0
9. 1462 (673)	1	3	2*	0	0
10.1462 (674)	0	3	0	0	0
11.1463 (677)	0	2	1*	0	0
12.1463 (679)	0	9	5*	0	0

7.4.2.4 Observations:

John I: He uses the London spelling *sh-* throughout.

William II: He uses none of the London *sh-*, but uses *sch-* throughout, which is the dominant form in East Anglia.

Clement II: He consistently uses only the marked East Anglian spelling using the *x* graph.

Fenne: He only uses the London form *sh-*.

Playter: There is one instance of *sh-*, but he prefers the use of *sch-* spelling.

The London *sh-* is consistently used by John I and Fenne, but *sch-* spelling dominant in East Anglia is consistently used by William II and Playter. Clement is strongly marked by his use of the East Anglian *x-* graph. Clement's usage is curious, as he had stayed in London under a tutor, but his habits may reflect the fact that he never had prolonged contact with London as had John I (who attended the Inns of Court), and also the fact that 'Chancery English' as such was not taught and enforced.

7.4.2.5 *Wh-* Spellings

Table 32: John I's use of *wh-*

	<i>wh-</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>qw-</i>	<i>qu-</i>	<i>qwh-</i>	<i>h-</i>
1. c.1449 (37)	7	1	0	0	0	0
2. 1452 (44)	1	0	0	0	0	0
3. 1465 (73)	9	1	0	0	0	0
4. 1465 (74)	8	0	0	0	0	1

Table 33: William II's use of *wh-*

	<i>wh-</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>qw-</i>	<i>qu-</i>	<i>qwh-</i>	<i>h-</i>
1. 1452 (81)	0	2	2	0	0	0
2. 1450-4 (82)	0	6	0	0	0	0
3. 1454 (83)	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. 1454 (84)	0	0	2	0	0	1
5. 1458 (85)	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. 1459 (86)	0	0	2	0	0	0
7. 1460 (89)	0	0	4	0	0	0
8. 1462 (91)	0	3	3	0	0	0
9. 1467 (92) ⁸⁸	0	1	6	0	0	0

Table 34: Clement's use of *wh-*

	<i>wh-</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>qw-</i>	<i>qu-</i>	<i>qwh-</i>	<i>h-</i>
1. 1461 (114)	0	1	1	0	0	0
2. 1461 (115)	0	0	2	0	0	0
3. 1461 (116)	0	0	4	0	0	0
4. 1464 (118)	0	1	0	0	0	0
5. 1464 (119)	0	3	1	0	0	0
6. 1466 (120)	0	0	2	0	0	0
7. 1466? (32)	0	5	3	0	0	0

Table 35: Fenne's use of *wh-*

	<i>wh-</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>qw-</i>	<i>qu-</i>	<i>qwh-</i>	<i>h-</i>
1. 1456? (543)	4	0	0	0	0	0
2. 1456? (546)	8	0	0	0	0	0
3. 1468 (749)	8	0	0	0	0	0
4. 1476 (will)	23	0	0	0	0	0

⁸⁸ In this letter, William II spells 'was' as *qwas*.

Table 36: Playter's use of *wh-*

	<i>wh-</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>qw-</i>	<i>qu-</i>	<i>qwh-</i>	<i>h-</i>
1.1457? (573)	1	0	0	0	0	0
2. 1460 (615)	0	0	0	0	0	1
3. 1460 (616)	2	0	0	0	0	1
4. 1461 (625)	3	0	0	0	0	0
5. 1461 (628)	3	0	0	0	0	0
6. 1461 (631)	2	0	0	0	0	0
7. 1461 (641)	1	0	0	0	0	0
8. 1461 (654)	5	1	0	0	0	0
9. 1462 (673)	4	0	1	0	0	1
10.1462 (674)	0	0	0	0	0	0
11.1463 (677)	7	0	0	0	0	0
12.1463 (679)	4	0	0	0	0	0

7.4.2.6 Observations: *Wh-* Spellings

John I: He uses the *wh-* endings most of the time, but there are 2 instances of *w-* and 1 instance of *h-*.

William II: He seems to prefer the use of the local forms. He does not use the *wh-* at all, but uses both *w-* and *qw-* spellings regularly and there is one use of *h-*.

Clement II: His preference is similar to that of William II, and does not use *wh-* at all. He uses both *w-* and *qw-*.

Fenne: He consistently uses *wh-* spelling and no use of the regionally marked forms.

Playter: His preferred form is *wh-*, but there are occasional uses of the regional *w-*, *qw-* and *h-*.

William II and Clement II continue the use of the East Anglian *w-* and *qw-* forms.

John I, Fenne and Playter who were all lawyers trained at the Inns of the Courts in

London demonstrate a clear preference for the non-regional *wh-* form, and this usage represents the effect of dialect levelling.

7.4.2.7 Infinitive Marker

Table 37: John I's use of infinitive *-en*

	+aux.- \emptyset	+aux.- <i>n</i>	-aux.- \emptyset	-aux.- <i>n</i>
1. c1449 (37)	17	0	12	1
2. 1452 (44)	4	0	4	0
3. 1465 (73)	24	0	17	0
4. 1465 (74)	10	0	5	0

Table 38: William II's use of infinitive *-en*

	+aux.- \emptyset	+aux.- <i>n</i>	-aux.- \emptyset	-aux.- <i>n</i>
1. 1452 (81)	8	0	6	0
2. 1450-4 (82)	2	0	4	0
3. 1454 (83)	7	0	3	0
4. 1454 (84)	4	0	4	0
5. 1458 (85)	0	0	3	0
6. 1459 (86)	11	0	8	0
7. 1460 (89)	10	0	7	0
8. 1462 (91)	10	0	10	0
9. 1467 (92)	23	0	9	0

Table 39: Clement's use of use of infinitive *-en*

	+aux.- \emptyset	+aux.- <i>n</i>	-aux.- \emptyset	-aux.- <i>n</i>
1. 1461 (114)	8	0	8	0
2. 1461 (115)	11	0	4	0
3. 1461 (116)	16	0	8	0
4. 1464 (118)	6	0	0	0
5. 1464 (119)	22	0	7	0
6. 1466 (120)	7	0	4	0
7. 1466? (32)	3	0	11	0

Table 40: Fenne's use of use of infinitive *-en*

	+aux.- \emptyset	+aux.- <i>n</i>	-aux.- \emptyset	-aux.- <i>n</i>
1.1456? (543)	9	0	6	1
2.1456? (546)	9	0	6	0
3. 1468 (749)	9	0	13	0
4. 1476 (will)	33	0	55	0

Table 41: Playter's use of use of infinitive *-en*

	+aux.- \emptyset	+aux.- <i>n</i>	-aux.- \emptyset	-aux.- <i>n</i>
1.1457? (573)	0	0	3	0
2. 1460 (615)	1	0	7	0
3. 1460 (616)	3	0	1	0
4. 1461 (625)	3	0	3	0
5. 1461 (628)	2	0	5	0
6. 1461 (631)	3	0	4	0
7. 1461 (641)	2	0	1	0
8. 1461 (654)	16	0	12	0
1462 (673)	11	0	7	0
1462 (674)	2	0	4	0
1463 (677)	4	0	13	0
1463 (679)	14	0	17	0

7.4.2.8 Observations: Infinitive Suffix

John I: He consistently uses - \emptyset endings except for one occasion in which he uses an infinitive with *-en*.

William II: He only uses the - \emptyset endings.

Clement II: He only uses - \emptyset endings.

Fenne: He uses - \emptyset , except for one instance.

Playter: He only uses the - \emptyset ending.

With regard to the use of the infinitive suffix *-en*, all five men show a marked preference for the loss of the suffix and it seems that levelling out of this feature was well under way.

It can be said that dialect levelling is demonstrated in the selected letters from the Paston collection as regionally marked forms such as *xall*, the third person singular present marker *-t3*, and the infinitive suffix *-en* gradually disappear. The regional features which disappear, however, differ according to the writer. There is a continued use of regional forms by William II and Clement II in their uses of the *q-* graph for *wh-* words. Davis also observes:

Clement alone spells 'shall' and 'should' *xall* and *xwld(e)*. Both the *qw-/w-* and the *x-* spellings are highly characteristic of Norfolk writers, and it is remarkable that they should appear only in the hands of the two younger brothers (1954: 124).

It seems, therefore, that age is not always a salient factor in eliminating regional characteristics in writing. The clear distinction between the linguistic habits of William II and Clement II against the more levelled uses of John I, Fenne and Playter is probably due to the training of the latter group of men in the Inns of Court in London and their subsequent involvement in legal business which kept these men more mobile and in prolonged contact with London.

7.5 The Civic Documents

7.5.1 Norwich

It is clear from the contents of the civic documents that as a medieval city, Norwich was very conscious of the model which London had provided in areas of organisation and the administration of the city. A typical example is seen in extracts from what is known as the ‘composition of 1415’ which outlines the workings of the city, cited below:

And than the Meir shalle 3iffe to ye Comon Speker in comaundement for to clepe to gedder the lxti persones for ye common counseil of ye Cite or as manye as ben ther in to an hos be hemself wiche yere shuln trien ye forseid variaunce uppe ye same fourme as it hath ben and 3et is used in ye Cite of London...

And þise xxiiij thus chosen shul stande perpetuel as thei doon in London be ordinance made expect cause resonable.

Repeatedly, this composition calls on strict adherence to the model of civic government in London. Keene (2000: 101) also mentions that London terminology for local government had replaced that of Norwich, such as:

Aldermen for ‘twenty-four citizens’, wards for leets, and guildhall for toll-house. Likewise, the chapmen and linendrapers of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Norwich and Winchester came by 1400 to be known as mercers, the London term for dealers in fine textiles.

However, despite this evident influence of London felt by the people of Norwich, changes in the orthographic practice of East Anglia are not straightforward. They are not a simple imitation of London forms. A part of the reason must be that fifteenth-century East Anglians understood prestige and status demonstrated by a medieval city such as London in a manner different from the present-day. This medieval civic pride is displayed not so much by means of language or

orthography. The greatness of the medieval city was perhaps indicated more by the ceremonial privileges (such as the right to have its own sword and seal) held by the city. Certain privileges boosted a city's civic pride, and an example is seen in London and York's 'exclusive right to carry gilt or silver maces in their civic processions' (Ormrod 2000: 87-88). An interesting difference between the presentation of the civic registers is noted by O'Brien (1999). The pages of the City of London's *Liber Albus* are ornately decorated using illuminated borders in the manner of the Ellesmere manuscript of Chaucer⁸⁹. The York civic books are rather plain in appearance with no illumination.

The people of late medieval Norwich probably enjoyed immense civic pride. McRee (1992: 74) stresses that Norwich was one of England's largest settlements, ranking second in population to London by the early sixteenth century. As the history of the government of Norwich testifies, people from Norfolk were not always looking toward London for a model to follow. There were problems within the city of Norwich, and the prominent local citizens were deeply involved with domestic events (see §7.7 below). In addition, Norwich itself attracted people from other areas. It has even been pointed out that during a period when many cities were experiencing decline in population, Norwich enjoyed a modest expansion (Phythian-Adams 1979, cited in McRee 1992: 74), indicating its importance alongside the capital.

7.5.1.1 The Guild of St. George of Norwich

This guild deserves a special mention, for not only have many of its records been preserved, but according to the historians, it occupied a unique position in

⁸⁹San Marino, Huntington Library, MS 26 C 9.

medieval Norwich. McRee (1992: 69) notes that ‘In many English towns of the late Middle Ages a single fraternity came to dominate local government’, and the guild of St. George was one such example. It is said that this fraternity became prominent after 1420, and eventually integrated with the city government at mid-century. The prominence of the guild could be gleaned from a glance at the list of its members. It included high-status traders, nobility, gentry and leading churchmen. Names such as William Paston, John Fastolf, William de la Pole (the Earl of Suffolk) and even the Bishop of Norwich, John Wakering appear as its members (McRee 1992: 79). This guild was different from others in that it was able to obtain a charter from Henry V. This was an unusual privilege for a medieval guild, and it is not known how this had been possible. Nevertheless, the implication of this charter was significant, as Grace (1937: 9) explains:

The grant of this charter changed the whole outlook of the Gild. From being a fraternity solely occupied with religious and philanthropic works, this Gild became a perpetual community with royal protection and with franchises and liberties similar to those enjoyed by other corporate bodies in the country... It had rights, and the power to plead and to be impleaded.

The strength of the guild of St. George’s authority was evident, when it was not affected even by the Act of Parliament in 1547 which abolished all fraternities, guilds and processions (Grace 1937: 10). It also had permission to have its own seal.

The records of the guild of St. George are of interest since it had close ties with the government of the city of Norwich. Also, the guild was the centre of much attention when fierce political dispute took place in Norwich in the fifteenth century and the guild books contain documents pertaining to these incidents. The guild records which I consulted for this study include two fifteenth-century guild

books, both volumes bound with wooden boards containing ordinances, inventories, names of members, oaths and guild minutes. The second volume contains similar information to that of the first volume, but has guild minutes dating up to 1602, which is later than the first book. The two books seem to have been known as *Book A* and *Book B*, and also as *Books I* and *II*. The leather covers on the boards have been worn and lost, and the titles of the books have faded. In addition, other documents pertaining to Norwich are studied, and the following is a list of items under consideration:

1. The 'Composition of 1415' (Hudson and Tingey 1906: 93-108)
2. 1424 Tripartite Indenture (Hudson and Tingey 1906: 109-14)
3. 1432 Contract for rebuilding the common quay in Conesford (NRO Deeds of St. Clement in Conesford, case 3h; also printed in Hudson and Tingey 1910: 389-91)
4. 1443/4 Petition to the Bishop and the Earl of Suffolk to intercede with the King for the restoration of the liberties of the city (NRO case 9c; also printed in Hudson and Tingey 1906: 114-16)
5. c.1440 Submission of the citizens to the Bishop and the Earl of Suffolk (NRO case 9c; also printed in Hudson and Tingey 1906: 116-17)
6. 1446-7 Petition to the Marquis of Suffolk (NRO case 9d; also printed in Hudson and Tingey 1906: 117)
7. Oaths of officials in the fifteenth century: year unknown. (Liber Albus fol. 182v, also in microfilm NRO, MF/RO 29/3)
8. St. George's guild ordinances: 15th century, but year unknown. (NRO case 17b)
9. 1452 Judge Yelverton's mediation, in the St. George's guild book I (NRO case 17b)

7.5.2 Four Linguistic Features from the Norwich City Records

Table 42: Norwich (Third person singular present indicative)

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t³</i>	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-n</i>
1415	11	34	6	0	?2	0
1424	8	0	0	0	0	0
1432	3	0	0	0	0	0
1443/4	3	0	0	0	0	0
c.1440	0	1	0	0	0	0
1446	0	1	0	0	?2	0
oaths	18	0	0	0	0	0
St.Geo	4	0	0	4	0	0
Judge Y	7	0	0	0	0	0

Table 43: Norwich (*sh-* spellings)

	<i>sh-</i>	<i>scha-</i>	<i>schu-</i>	<i>xa-</i>	<i>xu-</i>
1415	80 (77)	0	3	0	0
1424	0	0	0	20	0
1432	0	0	0	13	0
1443/4	4	0	0	0	0
c.1440	1 (2)	0	0	0	0
1446	1 (1)	0	0	0	0
oaths	35 (1)	55	0	23	2 (1,2*)
St.Geo	0	42(4)	3(17)	0	0
Judge Y	5 (1)	4 (6)	0 (2)	0	0

Table 44: Norwich (*wh*- spellings)

	<i>wh</i> -	<i>w</i> -	<i>qw</i> -	<i>qu</i> -	<i>qwh</i> -	<i>h</i> -
1415	19	25	0	0	1	0
1424	21	0	0	0	0	0
1432	4	0	0	0	0	0
1443/4	9	1	0	0	0	0
c.1440	5	0	0	0	0	0
1446	5	0	0	0	0	0
oaths	9	0	0	0	0	0
St.Geo	4	7	30	0	1	0
Judge Y	3	2	0	0	0	0

Table 45: Norwich (Infinitive suffix)

	+aux.- \emptyset	+aux.- <i>n</i>	-aux.- \emptyset	-aux.- <i>n</i>
1415	125	49	53	28
1424	15	24	8	19
1432	10	11	0	7
1443/4	16	0	6	1
c.1440	2	1	14	0
1446	7	0	30	1
oaths	109	84	18	12
St.Geo	62	21	46	13
Judge Y	15	3	32	2

7.5.2.1 Observations: Norwich Civic Records

Third person singular present indicative: The uses of *-th* and *-þ* is dominant throughout, but there are occasional use of *-t* and *-t3* endings.

Spelling for *shall*: There is a mixture of *sh-*, *sch-* and *x-* forms. The preferred form differs from document to document.

Spelling for *wh*-: Although every document has some use of *wh*- and *wh*- seems to be the predominant form, the document from 1415 prefers the use of *w*- and the record from the guild of St George prefers the use of *qw*-.

Infinitive ending: The usage of this feature in the civic documents differs significantly from those of the letters discussed above. -*ø* is preferred more than -*en* endings, but there is a marked increase in the use of the -*en* ending when compared to the usage of the letterwriters. A copy of Judge Yelverton's mediation document of 1452 appears in the book of the Guild of St. George. It is not the original document and even if it had been the original, it is impossible to know if Yelverton actually wrote it himself. Yelverton was a royal justice from 1443, and had served as the city's recorder (an elective position) since 1433 until it was usurped by John Heydon. It is interesting that the -*en* suffix is found in this document. It may be or may not be Yelverton's usage. Maddern (1998) notes that Yelverton was unusual as a lawyer in fifteenth-century Norfolk in that he had very few contacts outside Norfolk. On the other hand, Judge William Paston I had numerous contacts both inside and outside the county. The use of -*en* in his mediation document may be related to this.

7.5.3 Bishop's Lynn

The basis for the role of Lynn in East Anglia in the late medieval period can be traced back to the thirteenth century. In 1204 King John granted to the men of Lynn 'a free borough and a gild merchant, saving the customs of the feasts of St Margaret and St Nicholas' (Owen 1984: 34). And in 1205, a charter of the Bishop granted the men of Lynn all the liberties enjoyed by the town of Oxford. Lynn in the fifteenth century was an important international port for the trade on the North Sea littoral. Lynn received many ships from the Low Countries, Baltic and

Scandinavia and it is noted that some ‘aliens⁹⁰’ from Holland, Brabant and Zeeland had established themselves in Norfolk (Kerling 1963: 206). For example, in 1307, there was a ‘distinguished royal servant and burgess of Lynn, Siglan Susse’ (Owen 1984: 46), who was a merchant from Gotland; in 1310, it is said that the Mayor and burgesses of Lynn had confirmed to the German merchants of the Hansa, who were already in some cases burgesses in the town, certain liberties which they had long enjoyed (Owen 1984: 46). Lynn merchants traded with Norway, Flanders, Northern France, Italy, Iceland, Friesland, central Holland, north Germany and the Baltic. Lynn merchants had strong interests in Baltic trade, and this is strikingly evident from the contents of the book compiled by the town clerk William Asshebourne (Owen 1981). Margery Kempe’s family was involved in Danzig trade (Owen 1984: 47-48).

There continued to exist a friction between the men of Lynn and the Bishop who still exercised authority over the town and claimed the profits from the town. In the thirteenth and the early fourteenth century, Lynn was an important port for the trading of items like furs, hawks, iron, timber, wine, spices and fish. Also, corn, ale, lead and wool were some of the items shipped abroad. It is noted, however, that:

In the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries command of the trade seems to have passed to London, and although some Lynn taverners continued to import directly for their own retail trade, they also bought wines from London importers (Owen 1984: 44).

⁹⁰ Kerling (1963: 205) concludes that ‘in ca. 1440 137 aliens lived in Norwich. 66 in Lynn and 70 in Great Yarmouth. The total for the whole county including Norwich, amounts to 440 aliens’.

7.5.3.1 William Asshebourne's Book (King's Lynn Borough Archives, KL/10/2)

William Asshebourne was a common clerk of Lynn in the early fifteenth century. His book is a personal collection of copied documents of local and international importance relating to the town of Lynn. There are documents referring to municipal disputes, trade negotiations and other legal businesses of the town. They are mainly in Latin; some are written in French and some are in English. Not much is known about Asshebourne, except that when he is mentioned in the records in 1408, it appears that he had previously worked for Episcopal courts and had changed his occupation to work for secular authority (Owen 1981: 61, 73).

Owen (1981: 60-61) speculates as to Asshebourne's background as follows:

It is clear that, as well as Latin, he was conversant with some of the mercantile languages of northern Europe, since it was part of the clerk's duty, as the first Hall Book⁹¹ demonstrates, to translate from such languages when the need arose. He had, it seems, not specific legal qualifications; although on one occasion, at least, he showed some knowledge of Britton⁹², yet nothing suggests that he had had any formal training in either a university or an inn of court. Certainly he was not a notary public. On the other hand it is clear enough that he was thoroughly conversant with the conduct of business in a large centre of local administration, and it seems reasonable to suppose that he served an apprenticeship to such work, perhaps as a scrivener, in the courts of the episcopal liberty at Lynn. He may even have had some brief connection with the city of Norwich, for he copied a number of documents which seem to have come entirely from that place.

Influence of London can again be gleaned from a testimonial to poverty, permitting the recipient to ask for alms which was drawn up 'in the manner of London' (Owen 1981: 66). As far as I am aware, hitherto the contents of the

⁹¹ I am grateful to Ms. Susan Maddock of King's Lynn Corporation Archives for pointing out to me this document.

⁹² A medieval legal text.

Asshebourne's book have not been used for linguistic analysis. Below, I consider 8 documents written in English from Asshebourne's book.

1. late 14c. Statutes of the English merchants residing in Danzig (f. 6v). Also printed in Owen (1984: 278), document no. 348.
2. late 14c. Ordinances of English merchants in Danzig (f. 7r-8r). Also printed in Owen (1984: 278-80), no. 348.
3. 1411 Royal mandate ordering the election of twenty-four jurats according to the old custom (f. 24v)
4. 1412-1416 Oath of the eighteen jurats (f. 83v).
5. Year unknown - Instruction given by Mayor (according to the Statute of Winchester 1285) (f. 83v).
6. 1416 Letter of the Mayor and good men of Lynn to the Bishop elect of Norwich (f. 91v).
7. 1416? Letter from the Mayor and community of Lynn to the Queen of Denmark (f. 94v). Also printed in Owen (1984: 286-87), no. 365.
8. 1416 Letter of the Mayor to the sheriff of Norfolk concerning those who still support Bartholomew Petipas (f. 101v). Also printed in Owen (1984: 404-5), no. 450.

Table 46: Lynn (Third person singular present indicative)

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t3</i>	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-s</i>
1. late14c (f.6v)	3	0	1	0	0	0
2. late14c(f.6-8)	0	1	0	7	0	0
3. 1411 (f.24)	3	0	0	0	0	0
4.1412-6 (f.83)	1	1	0	0	0	0
5. ?(f.83v)	0	0	0	0	0	2
6. 1416 (f.91v)	2	0	0	0	0	1
7.1416? (f.94v)	0	0	0	0	0	0
8.1416(f.101v)	2	0	0	0	0	0

Table 47: Lynn (*sh-* spellings)

	<i>sh-</i>	<i>scha-</i>	<i>schu-</i>	<i>xa-</i>	<i>xu-</i>	<i>cha</i>	<i>chu-</i>	<i>scho-</i>
1. late 14thc	0	1	1*	0	0	0	0	0
2. late 14thc	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1*)
3. 1411	0	1	(1, 1*)	0	0	0	0	0
4. 1412-16	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. n.d.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. 1416	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
7. 1416?	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
8. 1416	0	1 (3)	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 48: Lynn (*wh-* spellings)

	<i>wh-</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>qw-</i>	<i>qu-</i>	<i>qwh-</i>	<i>h-</i>
1. late 14c	2	3	0	0	0	0
2. late 14c	3	3	0	0	0	0
3. 1411	0	0	1	2	0	0
4. 1412-6	1	0	0	0	0	0
5. n.d.	1	0	0	0	0	0
6. 1416	5	0	0	0	0	0
7. 1416?	1	0	0	2	0	0
8. 1416	2	0	0	0	0	0

Table 49: Lynn (Infinitive suffix)

	+aux. - \emptyset	+aux. - <i>n</i>	-aux. - \emptyset	-aux. - <i>n</i>
1. late14c	2	1	5	6
2. late14c	15	4	6	2
3. 1411	1	1	4	3
4. 1412-6	4	0	0	0
5. n.d	0	4	4	0
6. 1416	5	0	1	0
7. 1416?	1	0	1	3
8. 1416	5	0	2	0

7.5.3.2 Observations: Lynn Documents

Third person singular present indicative: *-th* is the overall preferred form, but there are interesting uses of *-s* in the documents from 1416.

Spelling for *shall*: *Sch-* is the dominant form and there is only one use of *sh-* and no use of *x-*.

Spelling for *wh-*: There is a mixture of uses. All entries except one use *wh-*, and there are uses of *w-*, *qw-* and *qu-* spellings.

Infinitive marker: *-ø* ending is predominant, but as was the case in Norwich civic papers, there are frequent uses of *-en* endings as well.

Lynn documents studied here from Asshebourne's book represent very early fifteenth-century writing. Considering the amount of variation for each feature found in the 1388/9 guild certificates from Lynn (cf. Wright 2001), documents from Asshebourne's book do not display a great deal of marked regional forms such as *xall* and *q-* graph in *wh-* words. The difference from the usage of the Paston men is seen in the greater number of the infinitive suffix *-n* in Lynn documents.

7.5.4 Other East Anglian Texts

7.5.4.1 The Black Book of Swaffham (NRO, MF/RO 96/1; NRO, PD 52/473)

This book is said to date from the middle of the fifteenth century and had belonged to Dr John Botright, rector of Swaffham between 1435-1474. It contains more than one hand, so it is not entirely the work of John Botright, but it seems plausible that the opening section of the book written in Latin and other sections

written in the same hand are his work. Williams (1962: 244) notes that Botright was probably born at Swaffham in 1400 and he is further described thus:

He was a man of considerable academic distinction and highly regarded at Cambridge. He matriculated at Corpus Christi College... He held various important appointments at the University and became Master of Corpus in 1443. In 1447 he was appointed chaplain to King Henry VI.

This book is a personal memorandum, including the inventory and the accounts of the church at Swaffham, and it seems that he was trying to rectify the situation of financial mismanagement which existed.

Botright may have been quite mobile during his years of rectorship. It is explained that:

The rectory of Swaffham being a *sive cure* did not require Botright's continual residence in the parish. The conduct of the church services and the management of the church matters in general were delegated to a vicar.

The contents of the Black Book considered for the present study are:

1. 1444 State of Church finances (f. 8r)
2. n.d. The Bede Roll (ff. 22r-23v).
3. n.d. The Bede Roll in a different hand (ff. 26r-29v).

7.5.4.2 The Register of the Crabhouse Nunnery (London, British Library, Add. MS. 4733)

The document considered here is the register of the Crabhouse nunnery on the banks of River Ouse in Norfolk. The register relates the work of Joan Wigenhall, a prioress of the Crabhouse nunnery from 1420-1444. This part of the register in English (ff. 50v-53r) is thought to have been written after 1470 (Bateson 1892: 7). The book opens with a dispute about a marriage fee dated 1476, but the English section concerning Joan is mostly about 'werkys made in the house of Crabhouse',

including the repair and building which took place. Many of the works mentioned are written as if she had personally been in charge of these works.

7.5.4.3 The Work of John Drury (Cambridge University Library, Add. MS. 2830)

This work was written in 1434 by a scribe of Beccles who refers to himself as Hardgrave in northeast Suffolk, where he copied a small collection of educational treatises (ff. 54v-57r, ff 80r-83v) . Some of the texts are ascribed to Magister John Drury. Meech notes that (1934: 70-71) ‘The title Magister accorded him in the manuscript would indicate that he had proceeded Master of Arts’ and it seems that he had University training.

7.5.5 Study of the Four Features

Table 50: Other East Anglian texts (3rd person present singular indicative)

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t3</i>	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-s</i>	<i>-n</i>
John Drury	28	2	8	2	0	0	0
Crabhouse	4	0	0	0	?1	0	0
Swaffham 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swaffham 2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swaffham 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 51: Other East Anglian texts (Orthography for *shall*)

	<i>sh-</i>	<i>scha-</i>	<i>schu-</i>	<i>xa-</i>	<i>xu-</i>
John Drury	0	0	0	19	3*
Crabhouse	1*	3	0	0	0
Swaffham 1	(1)	0	0	0	0
Swaffham 2	0	0	0	0	4*
Swaffham 3	0	0	0	0	0

Table 52: Other East Anglian texts (Orthography for *wh-*)

	<i>wh-</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>qw-</i>	<i>qu-</i>	<i>qwh-</i>	<i>h-</i>	<i>qh-</i>
Drury	13	1	45	4	6	3	1
Crabhouse	36	4	0	2	0	0	0
Sw 1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sw 2	19	1	0	0	0	0	0
Sw 3	19	4	0	0	0	0	0

Table 53: Other East Anglian texts (Infinitive suffix)

	+aux. - \emptyset	+aux. - <i>n</i>	-aux. - \emptyset	-aux. - <i>n</i>
John Drury	25	8	16	26
Crabhouse	7	0	7	0
Swaffham 1	0	0	5	0
Swaffham 2	1	0	1	0
Swaffham 3	5	3	15	0

7.5.5.1 Other East Anglian texts: Observations

Third person singular present indicative: Drury stands out as being quite ‘provincial’. The dominant form is *-th*, but Drury also uses *-þ*, *-t* and *-t₃*.

Spelling for *shall*: There are no examples from Swaffham, but Crabhouse uses *sch-* and Drury consistently uses the regionally marked *x-*.

Spelling for *wh-*: Drury stands out again in using 7 different variants in his papers. The dominant form for Drury is *qw-* and in this usage, he prefers the regionally marked form. For the other texts, there is variation, but *wh-* is the preferred form.

Infinitive marker: Drury uses both $-\emptyset$ and *-en* endings. For Crabhouse and Swaffham papers, $-\emptyset$ is the preferred form.

This group of texts represents writing by educated people of East Anglia, but perhaps those who have least contact with London, and with no specialised legal training. This may explain the dominance of the regionally marked forms (*x*-graph, infinitive suffix) in this group.

7.6 East Anglian Wills

Wills selected here for study include those of men and women.

1. 1438 Sir Brian Stapleton, knight (NCC Reg. Doke 53)
2. 1438 Richard Edy of Westacre (NCC Reg. Doke 163)
3. 1439 Sir John Spencer, Parson of Schadyngfelde (NCC Reg. Doke 94)
4. 1459 Elyenoor Wellys of Xuldham (NRO Hare MS⁹³)
5. 1465 Henry Noon (NCC Reg. Caston 235)
6. 1477 William Bruyn, Chaplain, St. Stephen's Norwich (NCC Reg. Caston 106)
7. 1484 Margaret Est, St. Martin in the Baily, widow (NCC Reg. Caston 203)

⁹³ My thanks are due to Prof. Maddern for informing me of this will in the Norwich Record Office.

7.6.1 Study of the Four Features: East Anglian Wills

Table 54: East Anglian Wills (Third person present singular indicative)

	<i>-th</i>	<i>-þ</i>	<i>-t</i>	<i>-t3</i>	<i>-o</i>	<i>-s</i>	<i>-n</i>
Stapleton 1438	7	0	1	0	0	0	0
Edy 1438	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spencer 1439	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wellys 1459	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Noon 1465	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bruyn 1477	0	0	0	0	?1	0	0
Est 1484	2	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 55: East Anglian Wills (Orthography for 'shall')

	<i>sh-</i>	<i>scha-</i>	<i>schu-</i>	<i>xa-</i>	<i>xu-</i>
Stapleton 1438	0	9	0	1	(1)
Edy 1438	0	0	0	0	0
Spencer 1439	0	1	0	0	0
Wellys 1459 ⁹⁴	0	0	0	1	0
Noon 1465	1, 3*	0	0	0	0
Bruyn 1477	0	0	0	0	0
Est 1484	0	0	0	2	0

⁹⁴ Her will spells the place name 'Shuldham' as *Scholdham* once and once as *Xuldham*.

Table 56: East Anglian Wills (Orthography for 'wh')

	<i>wh-</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>qw-</i>	<i>qu-</i>	<i>qwh-</i>	<i>h-</i>	<i>qh-</i>
Stapleton 1438	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Edy 1438	15	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spencer 1439	0	0	4	0	0	1	0
Wellys 1459	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Noon 1465	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Bruyn 1477	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Est 1484	2	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 57: East Anglian Wills (Infinitive suffix)

	+aux.- \emptyset	+aux. <i>-n</i>	-aux. \emptyset	-aux. <i>-n</i>
Stapleton 1438	11	4	5	1
Edy 1438	0	0	2	3
Spencer 1439	?	?	1	0
Wellys 1459	0	0	5	0
Noon 1465	5	0	6	0
Bruyn 1477	4	0	?2	0
Est 1484	4	0	5	0

7.6.1.1 East Anglian Wills: Observations

Third person singular present indicative: *-th* is the dominant form.

Spelling for *shall*: There is a mixture of usage. Overall, there are not many instances of the word *shall* in the wills, but there are uses of *sh-*, *sch-* and *x-*.

Spelling for *wh-*: Again there is a mixture of uses and there does not seem to be a marked preferred form. The use differs from will to will.

Infinitive suffix: \emptyset : seems to be preferred, but in the two early wills there are cases of *-en* endings as well.

A selection of East Anglian wills represented here demonstrate a mixed usage and the degree of dialect levelling differs greatly from will to will. The East Anglian *x*- graph is used even in a late fifteenth-century will. A greater number of wills would have to be studied in order to obtain a more conclusive result.

7.7 Conclusion

Virgoe (1981: 73) stresses that ‘socially and politically East Anglia was not typical of the whole of England in the fifteenth century’. In the area of linguistic change, East Anglia also seems to be different.

The linguistic characteristic of East Anglia is that there are many variants for spellings of words and for the third person singular present indicative marker. There seems to be an unrivalled degree of tolerance for variability even by medieval standards (Davis 1954: 130). The reasons for the existence of the wide range of spelling and morphemic variants cannot be explored fully in this thesis, but variability usually occurs as a result of contact (Devitt 1989: 74). In the case of East Anglia, it seems that it was not just dialect contact which affected written English. Language contact may have also played its part in forming its characteristic. East Anglia was a high contact area with people of other languages, such as Middle Low German (the language used by the Hanseatic merchants; Wright 1995b: 170, endnote 3), and there were trade links with Holland and Flanders (Barron 1995b: 2-14). It is also known that Edward III encouraged Flemish textile workers to come to England and some of them did come to Norwich (Sutton 1989: 213). The linguistic implications of contact with Middle Low German is outside the context of the present thesis, but it is interesting to note that some of the East Anglian spellings of commonly used words are found

in Middle Low German. For example, the excerpts from Low German nautical texts from the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries (Röstock 2001) show that a word such as *what* is spelled *wat*, *shall* is spelled *schall*, and infinitives have suffix *-en*. The effect of language contact with Late Middle English and Middle Low German or Middle Dutch is an area which needs to be explored in future research. Language contact which affected the language of East Anglia is not limited to the fifteenth century. There have been interesting discussions relating the effect of language contact on East Anglian English at other periods of history. Poussa (1999) discusses the possible influence of Flemings in Norman Norfolk; Trudgill (1997) and Nevalainen, Raumolin-Brunberg and Trudgill (2001⁹⁵) discuss the possible influence from Dutch and French in sixteenth-century Norfolk.

Out of the three texts types considered in this chapter, the correspondence shows greater preference for London forms and a levelled type of language (§7.4.2). Civic documents from East Anglia showed continued use of the regional forms, although the regionally marked variables were the less dominant forms. The reason for the slower rate of change in the civic documents of Norfolk may be reflecting its internal history related briefly below.

Both Norwich and Lynn were centres of fierce political upheaval during the fifteenth century and the bitter struggle for local power which existed at more than one administrative level is well documented (Blake 1959; McRee 1992; Maddern 1992; Owen 1984; Virgoe 1981). It is said that there were two ‘riots’ in Norwich: in 1437 and 1443. The confrontation in 1437 involved an internal dispute over

⁹⁵I am grateful to Prof. Nevalainen and Dr Raumolin-Brunberg for allowing me to see the chapter on East Anglian English before its publication.

mayorial elections and, in 1443, the riots were sparked by disagreement between the city and the priory. The cause for these riots dates back to 1404⁹⁶, when the city gained its charter, one which apparently ‘rendered the city’s powers and boundaries more, rather than less, ambiguous and contentious’ (Maddern 1992: 179). It was not just the lawyers who were involved in the dispute. The evidence suggests that the whole city must have felt the effects of the upheaval caused by this contention. The city officials also resorted to a public and a ceremonial display of their authority, with almost religious fervour, as the incident below indicates:

In order to claim fishing rights at Trowse, for instance, the mayor, sheriffs, and aldermen allegedly went on an official fishing expedition, and having caught their token fish, paraded back to the city, singing and shouting, ‘We are in possession by right and by our liberties of this City of Norwich we have caught them’. The meeting finished with a ceremonial fish-distribution to the citizens (Maddern 1992: 181).

⁹⁶ Evidently,

the priory of Norwich was geographically attached to the town; the very territory within the city walls was invaded by that of the priory, which held Tombland and Ratonrowe in from of the cathedral precinct, Holmstrete along its northern edge, and the liberty of Normanslond in the Ward-over-the-Water. The priory also had charters to rights in the suburbs and villages surrounding the city, such as Bracondale, Trowse, Lakenham and Easton, and could hold, and receive tolls and profits from, an annual Pentecost fair in Tombland’ (Maddern 1992: 177).

This was resented by the city, and the charter of 1404 which delineated boundaries between the city’s jurisdiction and the crown’s was vague concerning the position of the priory. Apparently, the ‘phraseology’ of the 1404 charter ‘allowed the city to claim rights to grazing, fishing, and (most importantly) court-holding in the hamlets of Trowse, Bracondale, Lakenham, and Eaton, and to jurisdiction in Tombland, Ratonrowe, Holmstrete, and Normanslond’ (Maddern 1992: 179). The claim over these rights were to be bitterly contested during the course of the fifteenth century.

It is possible that this fierce internal political rivalry⁹⁷ which continued throughout the fifteenth century had an effect on the people of Norfolk becoming inward looking towards the region. In addition, the close networks of the two opposing political camps at different periods must have affected the rate and spread of linguistic change in the written mode. What is certain, however, is that the internal problems in Norfolk did take up much time of men like William Paston I, who was a Justice of the Peace at that time. Kerling (1963: 203) comments that the J. P.s were kept so busy with internal affairs that they failed to obey the King's writ of 28 February 1440. She explains:

From the accounts of the Norfolk sheriffs it appears that between 1435 and 1439 only the following men were actually serving as Justices of the Peace; William Paston, Sir Thomas Tudenham, William Goodred, William Yelverton and Sir John Clyfton all of whom were also Justices in 1440. One gets the impression that they all must have been extremely busy. This was partly due to troubles concerning Norwich... In addition the City had internal troubles because of irregularities in the election of officials. For these different reasons the City's liberties were taken away in 1437 and 1438 and again in 1443 to 1447. The Justices of the Peace were very much occupied with the City's affairs.

⁹⁷ Thomas Wetherby, the outgoing Mayor of Norwich is accused of acting unlawfully during the 1433 election and from then on, dispute between Wetherby supporters and opponents continue. It is said that 'from 1433 to 1437, [Wetherby] tried to pack the city institutions with his own supporters, and oust those of the opposing party' (Maddern 1992: 186).

Another private dispute in Norwich immediately follows the Wetherby dispute. John Heydon, who had been a recorder in the city of Norwich was dismissed by the mayor and the commons in 1437, for it was alleged that while he was the recorder of the city, he had 'disclosed to the prior of Norwich evidence on which the city based its case against the priory' (Maddern 1992: 191). Heydon initiated private suits against men of power in Norwich in 1437, 1439, and 1440. Heydon must have become influential, since John Damme, a recorder and a freeman of Norwich wrote in 1448 to John Paston I: 'Lyke it yow to remembre what Heydon doth and may do by colowre of iustice of þe pees, beyng of my lords councell and not yowr good frend nor weell-wyller...' (Davis 1976: 30, cited in Virgoe 1981: 79).

Lawyers working for Norwich seem equally busy during the early 1440s⁹⁸. It is known that by this time, the city was ‘also embroiled in disputes with three other ecclesiastical neighbours’ (Maddern 1992: 194). The arbitrator was called in, but the city remained dissatisfied with the settlement and it is said that ‘The city’s lawyers also evidently worked overtime to devise legal counters to the award [The Tripartite Indenture of 1442, between the city, the prior and the abbot of St Benet’s Hulme]’ (Maddern 1992: 196). The present thesis suggests that this situation of internal dispute limiting dialect contact may be one of the reasons for the slower rate of change evident in the civic documents and explain the sustained use of regional forms.

This study of the documents from East Anglia, mainly from Norfolk in fifteenth century, reveals that there were greater variability in spellings of certain words and inflectional suffixes than in the records of Yorkshire. Against this background, however, educated local men such as John Paston I, Hugh atte Fenne and Thomas Playter focused towards London forms and displayed levelling of marked regional language. These men not only received education outside their region, but continued to be active in more than one region throughout their working lives. The lawyers were particularly mobile and had many contacts both within East Anglia and outside the region (Maddern 1998). The language used by these men was not a strict imitation of London forms in the prescriptive sense, but it displayed a gradual reduction of marked regional forms. The rigorous enforcement of the so-called ‘Chancery’ forms is not seen from the letters of Paston men who had some education in London. The linguistic preferences

⁹⁸ I would like to thank Prof. Maddern of the University of Western Australia for discussing with me the mobility and network of the fifteenth-century East Anglian lawyers and for allowing me to have notes from her research.

differed from individual to individual, and this is expected in the case of dialect contact.

8 Conclusion

The present thesis questioned two main commonly held notions in the history of the English language, which are:

1. The standardisation of written English occurred in the fifteenth century.
2. The English Chancery was the cause of linguistic standardisation, which provided a model called 'Chancery English'.

The 'standardisation' of written English in the fifteenth century has received wide recognition in the handbooks of the history of English (§1.2). The influence of the Chancery and the 'Chancery English' as the incipient 'Standard' English has been reiterated in the new editions of the student textbooks on the English language. It was discussed in chapter 2 of the present thesis that the 'standardisation' of the English language has been described without due consideration to the processes involved in standardising a language. The written English of the fifteenth century has been referred to as 'Standard English' (§1.2) and the problems associated with this view have also been pointed out. Traditionally, Einar Haugen's four characteristics of a standard language have been applied to the fifteenth century, but a careful consideration reveals that other factors were involved in language standardisation. I have stressed that ideological features associated with a standard variety (which mainly affect people's perception of a standard language) cannot be severed from the notion of 'Standard English'. Such ideological concepts which influence the discussions of the

present-day Standard English include prestige, social values, strict uniformity and the ‘standard ideology’ itself, which promotes the idea that there is a ‘correct’ way of using English. Despite the disagreement and the controversy which exist concerning standardisation and Standard English today, the influence of these ideological features must be recognised, even if most linguists disagree with these notions (see for example the chapters in Bex and Watts (2000)).

When these ideological factors are acknowledged, it becomes difficult to sustain the argument that the English language was standardised in the fifteenth century. The ‘standard ideology’ simply did not exist then, as evident from the variety used even in letters issuing from the Chancery. This stance becomes clearer by focusing on the fifteenth-century linguistic environment. It is stressed in chapter 2 that there is a danger of holding anachronistic views in areas such as the role of the printing press and contemporary perceptions of language variety in a pre-standardised society (§2.4.3). Thus the thesis suggests that it is misleading to apply the term ‘standardisation’ to the fifteenth century.

Chapter 2 of the present thesis has also discussed the mistaken basis on which the term ‘standardisation’ has been used. It argues that the premise of ‘standardisation’ has been built on the idea that the ‘standardisation’ process occurs quite ‘naturally’ (§2.4.4). While a certain regularising of language may occur in small communities as language use becomes more focused, this is not the same as standardisation. Standardisation always involves an authority which controls, authorises, enforces and maintains change. In this respect, linguistic change in the fifteenth century can be described more precisely as ‘unintentional’ change as is described by Keller (1994) in his ‘invisible hand’ theory (§4.3.3).

The thesis has also stressed the need to be more selective in the use of the term 'standard'. 'Standard English' is currently used to describe several linguistic states and the use of the term is not uniform. This has led to confusion in identifying linguistic change which occurred in the fifteenth century. It is rather ironic that in the discussions of Standard English there is no uniformity regarding the terminology which is used to describe it. In using the term 'Standard English', the problem has been made more complex by ideological influences from past centuries (§2.5).

Chapter 3 of the present thesis has considered the claim that the medieval Chancery provided the model for 'standardisation' in the fifteenth century. The problems associated with this claim have been discussed, and these include Fisher's criteria (1977) for the modernisation of written English (§3.1), misunderstood role of the Chancery clerks and of the 'household' of Chancery clerks (§3.1) and problems with the term 'Chancery hand' as used by Fisher et al. (1984). It was not possible for writers in the fifteenth century to imitate a 'Chancery' type of 'standard', since such a model was not available. The medieval Chancery did play an important part in the fifteenth century, but the thesis concludes that it did not contribute to a planning and enforcing of Standard English.

In Chapter 4, it is proposed that a contact-based approach to language change would be more appropriate in describing the linguistic situation in the fifteenth century. The reason why a contact-based explanation is lacking in histories of the English language is examined, pointing again to the strong influence of the traditional explanations of nineteenth-century philologists. The chapter also considered some effects of dialect contact, such as accommodation

and dialect levelling, and they are applied to linguistic change found in fifteenth-century written English. It is suggested that dialect levelling, which is the eradication of locally marked variants resulting from dialect contact, can explain many linguistic changes which took place in the fifteenth century. Linguistic change as a result of increased mobility and dialect contact fits in well with the ‘invisible hand’ theory proposed by Keller (1994). Keller suggests that language change is not always intentional, even if it may occur as a result of some human activity.

It is also discussed that explanations which appeal to the notion of prestige do not explain why some London features of written English survive and others do not (§5.3). This also testifies to the fact that ‘standardisation’ as such did not take place in the fifteenth century. The aim of the linguistic study in the present thesis is to study the reduction and the elimination of variation in selected linguistic features. By studying the manner of change in variation which existed in the written language, it is possible to see that what took place in the fifteenth century is different from ‘standardisation’ described in chapter 2. Enforced ‘standardisation’ will not allow any variation, but the reduction of regional variants induced by dialect contact will occur gradually, with often the continued use of some regional forms (such as the third person singular indicative marker *-s* in Yorkshire) along with the levelled variety (e.g. the use of *which* instead of *whilk* in Yorkshire). For the purpose of studying how regionally marked forms disappear, three groups of texts, namely letters, civic documents and wills were selected for consideration, both in materials from Yorkshire and from East Anglia (chapters 6 and 7).

The rate of change and the period of change for various features of spelling and morphology differ, pointing to the conclusion that change in fifteenth-century English was not a case of simple imitation of a single model of 'Chancery English'. For example, in Yorkshire, the wills display very little use of *whilk* and *swilk* already in the first half of the fifteenth century. The northern use of the first person *-s* (the northern subject rule) occurs regularly in the wills up to about 1460, and then dramatically disappears from about 1460 onwards (§§6.7.1-6.7.3). If a Chancery model is promoted by the government, and changes occur as a result of people adapting to 'Chancery English', then all the changes should occur at the same time. A simultaneous change of the features is not seen, however, and there is little support for the idea that 'Standard English' emerged around 1430.

The elimination of regional features is more pronounced in the letters and documents prepared by the lawyers. The Plumpton lawyers demonstrate dialect levelling (§6.6) and a similar levelling of regionally marked language is found in the letters produced by lawyers in the Paston letter collection (§7.4). Especially in the Paston letters, there is a marked difference between the writing habits of those who had received prolonged training in London (and a professional affiliation thereafter) and those who had not.

Some differences between the linguistic situation of Yorkshire and East Anglia become clear. It was found that East Anglia displays more variation for each linguistic feature than Yorkshire. For example, the Yorkshire material only exhibits two variants for the third person singular present indicative marker, namely, *-s* and *-th*. On the other hand, East Anglian material includes *-th*, *-t*, *-t3*, *-3t* and *-n* for the same variable. I suggest that this was caused

by extra-linguistic factors: that East Anglia had been a high contact area not only in terms of dialect contact, but also of language contact. This would introduce variety in language. It was also speculated that the fierce internal political struggle within Norfolk for a prolonged period may have slowed down the rate of change by limiting mobility of some prominent citizens (§7.7).

The thesis concludes that written evidence from Yorkshire and East Anglia points to a contact-induced change of dialect levelling playing a key role in the elimination of regionally marked written language in the fifteenth century. Variation continued to exist while the process of dialect levelling was taking place. Describing fifteenth-century linguistic change as ‘standardisation’ is inappropriate as the term entails planned and controlled enforcement of a certain variety permitting no variation. It must be noted that dialect levelling seen in the fifteenth century formed a basis for the later standard when the English language was eventually standardised from around the eighteenth century.

The linguistic analyses in chapters 6 and 7, although pointed to dialect levelling taking place in fifteenth-century written English, are necessarily limited in the amount of selected materials, geographic location and in the number of linguistic features and overall time period selected for consideration. Other linguistic features such as negation (e.g. Iyeiri 1992; Iyeiri 1996), the uses of the auxiliary *do* (cf. Ellegård 1953; Nurmi 1999) and a more detailed study of some of the graphs (such as *q-* in East Anglia; cf. Benskin 1982; Laing 1999) are examples of areas to explore further in the future. I sincerely hope to address such issues in future studies of the English language. For instance, it has not been possible to apply statistical methods in analysing the data collected. It is thought

that in some cases where the number of tokens permits it, different methods of quantitative analysis will yield clearer results in observing language change.

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