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Letter Writing and the Labouring

Poor in Kent between 1795 and 1834

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1. Introduction

Standardisation and prescriptivism were very important for the codification of the English language in the eighteenth century (Auer, 2012: 940). There are divergent definitions of when a language is considered to be standard. Anita Auer points out that a "standard language is referred to as a recognized exemplar with a certain degree of perfection and correctness, which should be fixed forever" (2012: 940). Every variety that does not meet up with that degree of perfection and correctness "will necessarily be evaluated as less perfect and can therefore not be communally accepted" (940). From the eighteenth century onwards, people wished to standardise the English language. For instance, Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) and Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) wanted to prevent the language from changing in order to achieve the perfect English language (Yañez-Bouza, 2 par 2). Furthermore, several attempts had been made to establish an English academy, but it never really came into being. Instead, English became codified in grammars and dictionaries by self-appointed writers, who were well-educated individuals (Auer, 2012: 941). The published grammatical works "were considered as authoritative works on the 'correct' use of the English language" (941).

The written variety of English that had been established by the end of the eighteenth century was a taught standard "associated with a certain level of education and social position" (Blake 1996:24 in Auer, 940). The differences between language use and social positions differed greatly. The upper and upper-middle classes in England learned the standard language by dictionaries, grammars and handbooks, which were of great importance in the process of the rise of prescriptivism. The development of standardisation of the language took place mainly among educated people in England, and could therefore not reach the lower classes (Görlach, 10). The London language used by gentlemen is usually referred to as polite language. The language use of the lower classes was colloquial and ordinary

(940). Access to education paved the way for these differences. Even though elementary compulsory schooling had not yet been introduced, people were partly literate. "By about 1800 so many people could write something so that they formed the majority of those normally called 'literate'" (Auer & Fairman, 3).

One of many self-appointed writers was William Cobbett (1763-1835), who published a grammar book in 1818. He was self-educated and he persuaded people to learn grammar as well, because "incorrect use of language was connected to being unintelligent" (Auer, 2012: 942). Arising from the wish to climb the social ladder, the lower classes aimed to adhere to the norm of a so-called "standard of correctness" (Labov 2001: 277 in Auer, 2012: 941). A growing body of grammars and dictionaries became more widely available to the public in the nineteenth century (941), which was motivating for the lower classes to become better-educated. Moreover, the industrial revolution, the improvement of technology and the introduction of compulsory elementary schooling in 1870 contributed to the consolidation of a standard, fixed language (942).

Nevertheless, there is a lack of sources for the lower classes, which makes it difficult to study their language use. Although the lower classes formed the greater part of the population in the nineteenth century, there is little known about their part in the history of the English language. However, there is a unique letter corpus sampled by Tony Fairman. This corpus contains application letters for poor relief from throughout England. These letters are of major significance for linguists and social historians, because they provide insight in the language use of the labouring poor. In addition, as there are not many corpora available from the lower classes in nineteenth-century England, this unique letter corpus is of great significance for the English language history.

The letter corpus gives important information about the lower classes in the nineteenth century and their education in writing before the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which

made education available to all children between the age of five and twelve. The letters give insight into the written language of the labouring poor, probably more than plays, diaries, and court depositions, because these letters were more often written by the poor people themselves (Auer, 1). The letters show what these people had learned in school and how they applied what they had learned.

The letters were written because of the Poor Laws. From 1795 to 1834, the Old Poor Law allowed people outside their parish to apply for relief by writing to their home parish (Fairman, 166). When in 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act was enacted, it was only allowed to relieve applicants who lived in the parish workhouse (166), and as a consequence, there were no more application letters for poor relief written. The surviving letters are now preserved in English County or Metropolitan Record Offices, and collected by Tony Fairman.

The writers of the application letters belonged to the lower classes of society who formed sixty to seventy per cent of the population in the Late Modern English period (Auer and Fairman, 1). Most of the labouring poor had little training in writing since they had restricted access to education, because elementary schooling became compulsory only after 1870. Moreover, books were too expensive for the lower classes, so it was also difficult to teach themselves or others at home. Furthermore, people in the higher classes believed that education would raise awareness of the social position the poor were in and were therefore "not in favour of education for all" (Görlach, 11). Mass education would endanger the social position of the higher classes, as, in their opinion, education would encourage the lower classes to revolt, because it "would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity (Quoted from Bailey 1996:29-30)" (Görlach, 11).

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the language and education of the lower classes in the nineteenth century in England. Tony Fairman collected the application letters and investigated the language and schooling of the lower classes (2000, -3, -7, -8).

David Cressy examined the dimensions and value of literacy in pre-industrial England in order to understand its importance for social cohesion and change (1980). John Lawson & Harold Silver discussed the history of education in England in the context of population structure and literacy (1973). In 2003, Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg published a book in which they described sociolinguistic variation and language change with the main focus on the Tudor and Stuart times.

To this date no systematic investigations of the corpus data exist. However, there is access to the unique corpus at Utrecht University. Therefore, in this thesis, a case study is carried out on one county, Kent, by focusing on different aspects, e.g. spelling. The Kent file is one of the largest files of the entire corpus. The linguistics features reflected in the letters give insight into the language and education of the lower classes, especially in Kent. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to examine the education in writing for the labouring poor in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and how their language looks like in the Kentish pauper letters from the period between 1795 and 1834, focusing on punctuation, spelling, morpho-syntax and reflection of speech. The spelling part discusses five words which are frequently used in the letters, namely 'opportunity', 'affectionate', 'consideration', 'received' and 'family'. The section on morpho-syntax elaborates on pied piping and preposition stranding and lastly, the reflection of speech in the Kentish pauper letters examines h-dropping and h-insertion. The main question covering this thesis is: what does the language of the poorer people look like in the Kentish application letters between 1795 and 1834?

2. Methodology

The materials used for this thesis were application letters for poor relief from Kent, which were written between 1795 and 1834. The corpus of Kent consists of 769 letters from 26 parishes. Letters from the area of Kent were chosen, because this county holds most letters in comparison to other counties, of which some contain only five letters (Auer & Fairman, 7). The letters were collected by Tony Fairman from archives of English County Record Offices. He also counted the number of letters and classified their stage of schooling, indicated as categories of mechanically-schooled or grammatically-schooled. There are two files containing letters from Kent. The first file contains 271 letters from the parish of New Romney, of which 211 are written by mechanically-schooled people and 60 letters were written by grammatically-schooled people. The second file contains 498 letters from other Kentish parishes of which 441 were written by mechanically-schooled people and 57 by grammatically-schooled people. In total, there are 652 mechanically written letters and 117 grammatically written letters. The letters were written by poor people who needed help from their home parish and therefore asked for support in order to survive.

For this thesis, research was conducted in the domain of philology. It was decided that the best method to adopt for this research was a close reading of the original texts and thereafter an analysis of the letters in the context of their time. In the first chapter, an historical overview of education in writing will be given, what teaching methods existed and what the differences were in access to education for upper and lower classes and which type of education one could receive. Subsequently, the focus will be on different aspects of the letters. Punctuation will focus on its function in texts and how it was used by less-educated and better-educated writers. Then, spelling will look closer at how people spelled five words which are frequently used in the letters. The aspect of morpho-syntax will focus on preposition stranding and pied-piping in order to determine whether preposition stranding was

still used by the lower classes where pied-piping was the correct form to be used by the well-schooled individuals. The last aspect looks at h-dropping and h-insertion. It will discuss how this reflects speech and when and why it occurs in the letters.

3. Schooling of the labouring poor

Until the fifteenth century, only a small part of the population was skilled in writing and reading, and a somewhat greater part was able to read, however, they were not in the possession of writing skills (Cressy, 176). This was in all probability a consequence of the educational system in which reading was taught before writing. Children learnt to read by saying letters and combinations of letters out loud without learning how to produce the graphs on paper (Cressy, 20). The same method was applied to the understanding of grammar and spelling (21). However, learning to read and write as an oral process was not considered to be the best, as, for instance, Richard Mulcaster argued that reading depended on writing: "For can reading be right before writing be righted, seeing we read nothing else but what we see written?" He argued that "writing should be considered before reading, 'as the matter of the one is the maker of the other'' (22). Nevertheless, this did not change the conventional teaching method (22). The acquisition of writing often depended on the teacher's efforts and devotion, so writing was often a subordinate part of the elementary curriculum (23). When children or adults had access to being taught writing, one would first learn to draw the letters, diphthongs, syllables and words that one already had learned to read (24). In 1588, William Kempe's *The Education of Children in Learning* prescribed the method that "the master shall teach his scholar to write by precepts, of forming the letters in due proportion, of joining them aptly together; by practice, of drawing the pen upon the figures of shadowed letters, then of writing without shadowed letters by imitating a copy, lastly of writing without a copy" (24).

Educators started to develop teaching methods in the sixteenth century and the same methods for reading and writing were used until the nineteenth century without major modifications (Cressy, 20). The teachers based their methods on their own classroom experience to pass on to their successors (19). This growing body of literature on teaching

methods focused on adults as well as children, in order to enable this mixed-age clientele to become fully literate (26).

During the centuries, education became widely available to a greater part of the population. As a consequence, a shift took place from restricted to mass literacy in the period from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. The acquirement of reading and writing skills was no longer the privilege of only the clergy and upper crust, but it became also within the bounds of possibility for the lower classes (Cressy, 175). With this development England gained the lead in early modern Europe with a high level of literacy in the seventeenth century (176).

According to Lawson and Silver, "the English radicals of the 1790s saw education as one of the objectives in their search for a just and sensible social order. In a society of strong traditions and relatively unchanging status and standards of life, schooling for the poor had in general appeared irrelevant" (228). However, education for the poorer social classes was accessible through Sunday schools, charity schools, dame schools and/or they taught themselves (Lawson and Silver in Auer & Fairman 6). Nonetheless, education in writing had not always the priority in schools for the poor. Only those skills were taught which were essential for the social status and for the specific occupation of the poor classes, as in eighteenth-century charity schools (Lawson and Silver, 238). The endowed schools tried to provide the basics of literacy and at the same time tried to remain provider of higher classical education (Lawson and Silver, 238). The varied degree of literacy depended on the activity, status and prosperity and the requirements of the occupations of the labouring poor (Cressy, 188). Therefore, the poor in charity schools were less likely to be taught writing, since it seemed irrelevant for their occupations.

Between 1750 and 1835, schooling and literacy had still been mostly the privilege of the upper classes. However, the greater part of the society could be called literate, since most

people had the ability to write at least something (Auer & Fairman, 3). In 1870 the

Elementary Education Act was passed, which made elementary schooling compulsory. Before

this law, the opportunities for schooling of the labouring poor differed greatly. Since

education was not compulsory, education was not a high priority for the poor, because it was

of greater importance to earn money to survive. This means that the greater part of the

population had no or little access to education, and education remained a prerogative for the

higher classes. As a consequence, most of the poor could not write properly, although they

were able to write something. In fact, a study by Cressy on literacy and the social order shows

that forty per cent of the English men and sixty per cent of the women were not even capable

of signing the marriage register (179), which shows high incompetence of writing.

Nevertheless, the poor people who found themselves in dire straits needed to write these

letters of application for poor relief because without help from the parish funds they would

not have been able to survive. The laws for poor relief gave the poor classes this opportunity

between 1795 and 1834 (Auer & Fairman, 1).

According to Tony Fairman, education in the Modern English period was divided into

two types: mechanical schooling and grammatical schooling (Fairman, 2008). Artisans and

the labouring poor had restricted access to education, so they were often merely taught how to

write mechanically, which only consisted of learning how to draw graphs. The upper layers of

society were taught the mechanical aspect of writing and they also had the opportunity to

learn grammatical English (Auer & Fairman, 6).

The Kentish pauper letters were written by mechanically-schooled people and

grammatically-schooled people, partly-schooled people and well- or fully-schooled people.

Tony Fairman investigated the Late Modern English period and in particular the writings of

lower-class writers in England between 1750 and 1850. In one of his studies, Fairman (2008)

defined the degree of writing skills as 'letteracies', because the letters do not imply anything

about the degree of reading of the writers (Fairman 2008:193). Fairman identified four different degrees of 'letteracies'. Writers could be mechanically-letterate, partly-letterate, letterate and fully-letterate (Fairman 2008: 193). Mechanically-letterate writers were the least competent at writing which conditioned them only to write what was highly necessary (Fairman, 2008:193). Fairman points out that:

> Mechanically-letterate people have not been taught to express their own thoughts in writing. Therefore, they rarely write according to contemporary letteracy requirements for any linguistic level, including handwriting, and readers may need to develop new reading skills to understand what the writer meant (Fairman, 2008:193).

Partly-letterate people were able to write "according to contemporary letteracy requirements, but only to a limited extent on most, sometimes all linguistic levels" (Fairman, 194). The writing of letterate people was standard (194). Fully-letterate writers were:

> [L]etterate writers, who (a) use a high proportion of Latinate words, and may include Latin (or another language), and (b) successfully embed information in complex ways at phrase and clause levels. This type of writing should be isolated in the Late Modern English period because a small but socially and linguistically influential group sometimes wrote like this, and others tried to copy the style (Fairman, 2008:194).

These four degrees, as suggested by Fairman, draw a distinction between the less educated writers who focused particularly on grammar and spelling and the better-educated writers who

paid attention to style in order to achieve politeness and sophistication (Dossena & Tieken –

Boon van Ostade, 15).

Fairman emphasises that writing is a learning process and not something that one

easily picks up (Fairman, 2007:40). Therefore, people must be educated in writing; auto-

didactically or in school (Fairman, 2007:40). Fairman (2008) discusses two stages in which

people learnt to write in the nineteenth century. The first stage includes the acquirement of the

mechanical part of writing, which means that people "learnt to form all the graphs (upper and

lower case) in at least three handwriting styles" (Fairman 2008:195). The second stage exists

of the grammatical part, which consist of compositional writing as taught in schools (Fairman

2008:195). However, many people in the lower classes could not afford schooling. Therefore,

most people in lower-classes only learnt to write mechanically (Fairman, 2008: 196).

4. Punctuation

In his *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), Robert Lowth points out that "the doctrine of punctuation must needs be very imperfect: few precise rules can be given, which will hold without exception in all cases; but much must be left to the judgment and taste of the writer" (Lowth, 169). According to Görlach, punctuation was not fixed because it was dependent on "rhythmical considerations as well as personal options, even mannerisms, especially in the literary styles" (Görlach, 52). This implies that even in the Late Modern English period, punctuation was not of great concern to language experts, which is supported by Ian Michael who reported that only sixty per cent of the grammars until 1800 contain sections about punctuation (in Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 11). In addition, Edwin Abbott stated in 1879 that punctuation in the Modern English period was seen as an art, which meant that there were no specific rules for the use of it (Görlach, 52). As a consequence, punctuation was used when people thought it was right. However, in the early nineteenth century, punctuation became under greater discussion. Several works on punctuation were published, alongside works from Lowth (1762), Robertson (1785), Steel (1786), Stackhouse (1800) and Murray (1795) there were also practical guides published by Pinnock (1811), Rousseau (1813), Hartley (1818), Addison (1826) and Greenleaf (1829) (Schou, 211-2).

In Early Modern English texts punctuation fulfilled several functions, e.g. it was used in a stylistic manner rather than grammatical, because the English language was still going through a change from a synthetic language towards an analytic language (in van Gelderen, 161). During the centuries, the English word order became more fixed and a better system for punctuation was needed. Mainly through Ben Jonson's work, punctuation became more grammatical, since he paid attention to the introduction of syntactic punctuation (in van Gelderen, 174). In the seventeenth century, punctuation was used to identify syntactic units, which defined punctuation as becoming grammatical (Schou, 213). The change from stylistic

to grammatical punctuation arose from the emergence of a grammatical description that was independent of Latin (Schou, 213). In his study of the "syntactic status of English punctuation", Karsten Schou concluded that a deep-rooted system of punctuation existed by the beginning of the nineteenth century:

> It was a system that combined rhetorical and grammatical considerations: the connection of clauses can be traced back through the punctuation practice in the Renaissance to ancient rhetoric of classical times; within the clause the syntactic system of verb valency was used to define a principle of indivision that proscribed punctuation, and finally there was the rule that a grammatical clause, be it reduced or fully represented, should always be marked by at least a comma. (Schou, 211)

According to Schou's study, punctuation marks had two functions, namely to separate units or to specify the grammatical function (Schou, 196). Punctuation marks are "the full stop, the colon, the semicolon, the comma, the hyphen, word-space, parenthesis, dash and quotation mark, […] question mark, exclamation mark, italics, underlining, dot, capitals and apostrophe (Schou, 196).

Görlach mentioned that the sentences of prose in the nineteenth century were very long, which led to a high frequency of punctuation. Commas were used in a very high proportion, often between the verb and its complements (Görlach, 52). The following pauper letter shows that commas were used very often, however, in this case not between the verb and its complements:

Sir

I am induced to trouble you
with this Letter in Behalf of a poor
Woman resident in the Parish (S^{t}.
Mary on the Castle) but who belongs
to New Romney. Her name is

Mary Hollands, she lost her Husband
about two Months ago, who was
Waiter at the Castle, Hotel, and
being left with one child in arms,
and having no means of supporting
herself, but by taking in Needle Work,
which, from the number of Competitors
is very uncertain
in the same employment ^, I believe her
to be in great distress. And she has
requested me, as one of the clergymen

of this Parish, to write to you in her behalf.
And I really think that relief in this
case would be very properly bestowed.
I have every Reason for believing, that
Mr Dendney, the Overseer of this Parish,
will corroborate this statement.
> I am
> Sir
> Your &c
> John Oliver (letter: KE(M)/NR/243)

On the contrary, the letter below shows that commas were often left out as well. It is a letter from

Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury in Kent, written by Sarah White. She was a mechanically-

schooled writer.

Dear Sir I will humbele thank you if
you Will Spake to the Gantelman to be
So Good as to Send me a trifel of munney
to Git my Childern Sum Cols for thay are   Cols] = *clothes*
All most Naked for I have no Worke and in Deed
the munney Will But Gest pay for the Bread   Gest*] = just*
in Deed Gentelman and if thare his no Work
I Ralley must Cum back a Gain for in Deed   Ralley] *or* 'Rulley'
Gentelman I due not no Wen I Shall See my
Husbon for he his Stasyaned on the Cost   Stasyaned] *stationed?*
of a Markeary Dear Gentelman I hope you   *Murkeury? = America*
Will a [Lowe] me a trifel and, a trifel to Cloeth   [*lacuna*]
the Chi[ldern] or Elceth I must be a Blight
to a Plie to [t]he Gentelman Ware I ham Wish
I Shall be Very sory to Due
> Dear Sir I will thank
> you if you will Send me
> a Nancer ples to Drated   direct it
> to Sarah White to be
> Left at the New End
> Stratford Essex

I Remain your most
humbel Srvent
> July 14 1814

> (letter: KE(C)/CC/2)

As one can see, there are no punctuation marks in this letter at all. Moreover, this letter is only one example of the many mechanically-schooled letters. What is striking in this letter is the capitalization, which seems to be very random. Nouns, verbs, auxiliaries, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions could have been written with capitals. Even the second syllable of words that were divided in two parts contains a capital, as in *a[Lowe]* (allow) and *a Plie* (apply).

It ought to be pointed out that few punctuation marks were used by some partly-schooled writers. If punctuation was used, it were mostly commas, dashes, a few semi-colons and full stops in abbreviations. Commas were used in many letters. Nonetheless, they sometimes appeared only once in a letter. Commas and semicolons as well, were mainly used to indicate the end of a sentence or a listing of words:

> Gentlemen Parishoners of this
> Parish,
>   I here <u>Tender</u> to serve
> the Poor House, with good Beef
> Mutton, Cheaks, Shin & Suet
> weekly,to commence from the fust
> Monday in May, for the term of
> Six Months following, with the
> undermention'd Prices;
> viz Beef & Mutton at seven pence P Pound
>   Cheaks, Shin & Suet at five pence do
>   Richd Brissenden <u>Butcher (letter</u> KE(M)/NR/116)

In addition, dashes occurred everywhere in a letter, as shown in the following letter from New Romney:

> Mr Woollett
>   I have Receiv'd your Letter — —
> Respecting the Child — for wich favour I am
> greatly Abloiged — thare as not bean any —
> thing Alowed — for this Child — wich you —
> may now by the — name My Child name
> Is Sare — and the Child you now alow
> for — name is Fanney —
>   I am Sir Your Hble St
> Decr 7th 1812 Ja^s Smith —
>   (Letter: KE(M)/NR/4)

Full stops are rarely used by mechanically-schooled writers. Grammatically-schooled people, one the other hand, used the full stops more often, but usually only in abbreviations, such as

M^r. and *Serv*^t.. There is only one grammatically-schooled person found in the file, Sir Jeffery

Amherst, who used full stops to start new paragraphs with completely new topics (in letter

KE(M)/AM/1).

Well-educated individuals also used commas and dashes to indicate endings of

sentences, as can be seen in a letter from Thomas Woollett, the overseer of New Romney in

Kent:

> Madam
> I was from home yesterday
> or would have answer'd your Letter,
> I beg to inform you the enclos'^d
> half of Ten Pounds came safe
> to hand, you say in your Letter—
> you will herewith receive enclos^d
> the half of a £5.0.0 note" — it should
> have been the half of a
> £10.0.0 — which
> I acknowledge to have <u>reced</u> and
> on receipt of the other half
> immediately reply —
> New Romney   with great respect
> 26 th Oct 1818   I remain
> Madam
> your very obedt Sert
> <u>Thomas Woollett</u>

However, it is interesting to see that even a well-schooled person used the same kind of

punctuation as less-educated people did. In his letters, Thomas Woollett often used only

mainly dashes and commas.

There were seven instances found in which an exclamation mark is used. It was only

found in grammatically written letters. For example: "Surely our dear George may be

expected daily!" (from Harris, letter KE(M)/HR/2) and in "Few indeed have been the Friends

to whom I could address myself without Reserve!" (from Knatchbull, letter KE(M)/KN/1)

As can be seen in the letters, punctuation marks were often used as one thought fit. As

mentioned earlier, Görlach stated that the use of punctuation was dependent on personal

options. Lowth also mentioned that there were some rules, but punctuation was left to

someone's own judgement and taste. The sentences and word groups of mechanically-

schooled writers have a simple structure, which do not necessarily require punctuation (Fairman 2000: 78). Furthermore, the content of the letters seemed to be of greater importance to the writers than its form was, because of the lack or random insertion of punctuation marks. In addition, the results confirm that punctuation by the lower classes was still used when they preferred to use it, whereas grammatically-schooled writers seemed to have been better aware of the grammatical function of punctuation. As stated above, Schou pointed out that a grammatical clause should always be marked with a comma. Letters from grammatically-schooled individuals contained many commas, whereas mechanically-schooled writers hardly used any.

To summarise, specific rules for punctuation became more available during the nineteenth century, since educated people wrote about it in grammar books. Additionally, the results indicate that punctuation marks were rarely used by mechanically-schooled writers. When they used punctuation, commas and dashes were most common. Full stops were hardly used by mechanically-schooled writers. The grammatically schooled often used full stops in abbreviations, only a few people used them to indicate the end of a sentence. Commas and dashes were also used the most. To conclude, punctuation was rarely used by the lower classes, whereas grammatically-schooled were better aware of the function of punctuation and used it therefore more often. However, even their punctuation use was not modern yet.

5. Spelling

Görlach maintains that before the 1870s "spelling was one of the most important indicators of social acceptability" (45) and it was also "the best-regulated part of the English linguistic system" (44). Proper spelling meant that someone had received good education. Therefore, the upper classes were expected to spell according to the conventions. As a consequence, writing correctly became a social class marker (Görlach, 45). There were three categories, which are as follows: Firstly, fully-schooled people spelt correctly. Secondly, partly-schooled were people who were able to read, but not to spell, or mainly based on their spoken language and thirdly, a category of people who could not read or write at all (Görlach, 45). Even though the English spelling was very well-regulated, variant spellings still existed. Spelling was not standardised until the 1850s (in van Gelderen, 206). It was common in Early Modern English texts that one word had varied spellings (in van Gelderen, 161). Moreover, Görlach points out that there were only a few attempts to reform the spelling system, but none of these attempts were carried out (44).

Varied spellings still existed, because spelling was not standardised yet. The following tables below show the occurrence and the different spelling realisations of five frequently used words in the Kentish pauper letters, namely 'opportunity', 'affectionate', 'consideration', 'received' and 'family'. The numbers are divided per file, that is a file from the parish of New Romney and the file with letters from other Kentish parishes. The five words that were chosen are all influenced by French or Latin (OED). *Opportunity* and *received* have Anglo-Norman roots. The words c*onsideration, family* and *affectionate* all derived from French or Latin.

5.1 Opportunity

The word 'opportunity' appears thirty-eight times in the letters, written in nine different spellings.

Spelling	New Romney	Others
Opportunity 38x		
1. opportunity	3	15
2. oppertunity	2	7
3. opertunity	0	3
4. opper_tunity	0	1
5. apportunity	2	0
6. upertunity	1	0
7. uppertunity	1	1
8. hopportunity	0	1
9. ouptunely	1	0

For eight out of nine forms, the ending –tunity does not give any spelling problems. The

problem is in the initial syllables, *Oppor-*. Words appear with *opper-, oper-, appor-, upper-,*

uper-. The two most striking variants of all are *ouptunely* and the variant with h-insertion:

hopportunity. According to the OED, the standard today 'opportunity' appeared from the

fifteenth century onwards. Other variants which appear in the OED and in the Kentish letters

are *oppertunity* and *opertunity*. These variants were used before 1700.

5.2 Affectionate

The adjective 'affectionate' has five other forms in the letters and appears in twenty-two

sentences.

Affectionate 22x	New Romney	Others
1. affectionate	1	15
2. afectionate,	0	2
3. affetionate	0	2
4. affectionatee	0	1
5. Efactinate	1	0
6. affectionat	0	1

Again, the ending *–tionate* is not problematic. Except in *Efactinate*, –tionate misses the -o-

and *affectionat* misses the final –e. All twenty other instances end the same. However, the

problems in this word appear in the initial syllables: double ff and the combination of –ct-.

The OED gives only the forms *affectionate, affectionat* and *afectionate*. The latter two dated back to the seventeenth century and after 1700 affectionate became the regular form (OED). Efactinate, affeItionate and affectionatee do not occur in the OED. Even though the OED gives several forms of this word, there are only four different spellings found in the Kentish letters.

Both 'affectionat' and 'affectionatee' are written by the same writer, John Best. He is fifteen years old and his letters contains many variant spellings. Best also wrote 'hopportunity', which might indicate that he wrote down his pronunciation of the words, even though this boy received a few years of education. *Affetionate* appears in only two letters, both written by the same person in the same formula: *I remain your affetionate servat untill death.* The mechanically-schooled writer, John Sinden, wrote to the parish of Dymchurch.

5.3 Received

This verb occurred 137 times in sentences such as "I have received your letter". The varied spellings found in the letters are the following:

Received 137x	New Romney	Others
1. received	25	50
2. receivd	9	2
3. rec^d	8	5
4. receved	8	3
5. reced	4	3
6. recived	5	0
7. receiv'd	4	1
8. rec^{eved}	1	0
9. reseivd	1	0
10. receiv^d	0	3
11. reaiceved	0	1
12. reseived	0	1
13. recieved	0	1

Received is often written with a −c-, and a few times with an −s-. −ei- seemed to be difficult, it can be used as ei, ie, or only and i or e. Moreover, people tend to abbreviate the word. *Rec^d* is quite commonly used, it appears thirteen times. *receiv'd* occurs five times. *Receiv^d* appears

three times, however, it does not occur in the New Romney file. And there is even *rec^{eved}*

written by a mechanically-schooled person, Joseph Auger. Another striking example is

reaiceved in a letter written by someone who also dropped his [h] and made no use of

punctuation. Abbreviations are made by well-schooled individuals as well as by party-

schooled.

5.4 Consideration

This word is written thirty-seven times in thirteen different spellings of which only

concideration is used more than once, apart from *consideration* itself.

Consideration 37x	New Romney	Others
1. consideration	12	11
2. concideration	2	1
3. considerration	0	1
4. considersion	0	1
5. considration	0	1
6. conSideraShun	0	1
7. considation	0	1
8. conside[—]tion	0	1
9. considason	1	0
10. considarchen	1	0
11. conseatherration	1	0
12. concedation	1	0
13. Conciedration	0	1

The word 'consideration' is derived from French and Latin and came into the English

language during the twelfth century (OED). During the centuries, its spelling remained the

same: consideration. Fairman argued that some minimally-schooled writers could not make

sense of 'take it into consideration'. The minimally-schooled writer for John Argar's wife

wrote *Considarchen* (Fairman, 72) and another example is Stephen Parks who wrote

conseatherration. It seems that *ConSideraShun* reflects the pronunciation of the word.

5.5 Family

The word 'family' occurs 128 times in the letters in many different forms.

Family 128x	New Romney	Others
1. family	28	43
2. famley	15	13
3. famely	5	4
4. fameley	1	4
5. famly	3	1
6. famerley	0	2
7. fammeleys	0	1
8. ffamely	0	1
9. famelly	0	1
10. familiy	0	1
11. famlay	0	1
12. familly	0	1
13. fammily	1	0
14. families	1	0
15. famelley	1	0

Family is derived from Latin *familia* meaning household. According to the OED, there are five forms found in the etymology. From 1500 onwards, spellings such as *famelie, famely, famuly, famylie* and *famell* occur in texts and from 1600 onwards *familly* and *family* are regular forms. The form *family* appeared most in the letters, *Famely* nine times. *Famell* is not used in the letters, however *famelly* is. *Familly* exists also in one letter. The other variants found in the letters do not appear in the etymology section of the OED.

There is a letter from the parish of Hever that contains three spellings of *family*. These are *Famely*, *familey* and *Fameley*, all in the same clause: "My wife and family". He probably was unfamiliar with its spelling and was not interested into producing a correctly spelled letter. Fairman clarifies that the form *famley* is a typical shortening of a Latinate word (2000:72). Shortening often happened when words were long or difficult, such as Latinate words. Mechanically writers were prone to errors because they were used to the "typical one/two syllable pattern of Anglo-Saxon words" (Fairman, 2000:72). This may also explain the many different variants of *opportunity, affectionate, consideration* and *received.*

In conclusion, the explanations for different spelling forms are as follows. As stated before, the mechanically-schooled writers were from the second category that Görlach mentions; they were able to spell, but mostly according to their pronunciation. Therefore, the different spelling forms were often the result of the spoken language of the writers. Moreover, as Fairman explains, the cause of different writings of the same word is that "partly-schooled writers live in an orate culture; so, when they heard unfamiliar Latinate English, they remembered it by Anglo-Saxon word patterns, not by orthography" (Fairman, 2000: 72). Furthermore, the society expected that the lower classes did not need to write for themselves. If they had to write, it was in order to copy someone else's words (Fairman 2007: 41). In the application letters they had to write by themselves, so they also had to decide by themselves how to spell words, instead of copying others. In addition, spellings could vary because new conventions for writing came informally to the attention of partly-schooled writers, after which they started to incorporate those conventions into their writings (41).

6. Morpho-syntax: preposition stranding and pied piping

This section discusses two features on morpho-syntax, namely preposition stranding and pied-piping. According to Denison, preposition stranding is a "syntactic phenomenon whereby a preposition is left in a deferred, i.e. *stranded*, position at or near the end of a clause without any immediately following object" (Denison 1998:220 in Yanez-Bouza, 1). An example is: 'who were you speaking *to*?'. Until the eighteenth century, preposition stranding was a phenomenon that occurred frequently in informal writing and spoken language (Yanez-Bouza, 1). However, even Shakespeare (1564-1616), Ben Jonson (1572-1637) and Dryden (1631-1700) made frequent use of this phenomenon, until grammarians commented on their language use (Auer, 2012: 943). The use of a preposition at the end of a clause or sentence was criticised by grammarians and it was seen as "colloquial, inelegant, improper or even harsh" (Yanez-Bouza, 1). The phenomenon stigmatised and then pied-piping became the advocated form (Auer, 947). Pied-piping is the use of a preposition which is directly followed by its object, as in '*To whom* were you speaking?'.

The decrease of preposition stranding is due to the rise of prescriptivism. As Yanez-Bouza examined, the change from preposition stranding towards the use of pied-piping can be seen as a "change from above (Labov, 1994:78)" (Yanez-Bouza, 5). In other words, the better educated layers of society thought that this was a more sophisticated style, of which the less educated people were aware of. The stigmatisation of preposition stranding can be seen as a direct consequence of the ideals of the well-educated people (Yanez-Bouza, 5). In her study, Yanez-Bouza demonstrated a significant decrease of preposition stranding at the end of the eighteenth century, because of the stigmatisation of preposition stranding that resulted from grammars and dictionaries that "condemned the usage as being improper and unsuitable in the solemn style and correct language of polite society" (Yanez-Bouza, 5).

Moreover, grammarians believed that preposition stranding was the incorrect form

because they compared the English language to Latin, which syntax requires pied-piping (Yanez-Bouza, 3). The educated people took the view that the language rules of the Latin language were also valid for English; so pied-piping was seen as the polite form and therefore given as an alternative for preposition stranding. Although this phenomenon had always been used more frequently in informal style and spoken language (Yanez-Bouza 1), people who still used preposition stranding were considered to be less polite and socially inferior (Yanez-Bouza 4). Lowth formulated this as follows "preposition stranding prevails in common conversation, and suits very well with the familiar style in writing" and pied piping "agrees much better with the solemn and elevated Style" (1762: 127–8 in Tieken- Boon van Ostade 6,1). The use of either concept depended on the linguistic requirements in each particular style of writing or speech (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, chapter 6, 1).

6.1 Preposition stranding

A few examples of preposition stranding are shown below. These letters are from Preston, Rochester, St. Margaret and New Romney, written by mechanically-schooled writers.

Sir
I have rote these fw lines to you saing i received the
money from you on the 12 of
Jany last wich i was verry
thankfull for it
--
I had not the Presents of Mind
to Come to you be fore I Came a Way
Wich I am Weary Sorey for but
I hope Gentelmen that you Will luck over it
--
it is to thenk them for my Cooles
and to beg the favour of a pair of Shoos wich I
am in great want of.
--
I recived a pound noat of Mr Canel
wich you vos soo kind as to send
wich am trueley thankful for
--

it is
To thenk them most kindley for ten
Shillings wich I receivd at your
your hands from them
--
Sir
I feel constraned again to apply
to you for more releife it is
afflicktion wich I am still labouring
under
--
Sir
I receid a Letter from you concerning
a Lad you wish to put a prenties[??], purposing
to give £30 Premeum, wich I cant take
him for

There is one example found in a letter from Thomas Woollett, a grammatically-schooled writer:

Sir/
Rich^d. Wincles the person whom
you have a Warrant out against for a
Female Bastard Child on the Body of the
Widow Hunt, has been with me this
Morning

6.2 Pied-piping

Pied-piping is found in letters written by grammatically-schooled writers. A few examples are

underlined in the following sentences:

Thomas Woollett
The Parish of Romney
direct me to inquire of you respecting the
House and Premises situate at New
Romney in the present occupation of
John Argar of whom they have for
some time past hir'd the Field,

Thomas Woollett
herewith you
also have his reply from which I am
induc'd to apply to you

John Parris
Luke promis'd at going
off to have the cart & Harness back again to
Ashdown of whom he borrowed it

John Parris
the cart was some considerable time after sent back
to me

without the Harness from Mr Hilder of Northiam
for whom I understood Luke went to hoppicking

Assistant overseer F. S. Heller.
One Lady to whom I applied said she knew they
had not bread to eat.

George Joseph Stanhope
she seems to be upon the whole a girl of whom
one justly would be proud.

J Cartwright
I did not give him the slightest hint of having
one in my eye, to whom a thing of this kind might
prov be desirable

W Lushington
I have this morning received a very ur=
gent, & a very unhappy letter from poor

M^rs. Wildman who in consequence ofthe

death of a M^r. Shaw from whom she
had borrowed a thousand pounds

Edward Knatchbull
After a severe misfortune there is perhaps
no greater Consolation to an afflicted mind, than
the commiseration of Those who surround us, and
the Company of a Friend,
to whom We may unburden our mind —
[...]
Few indeed have
been the Friends to whom I could address myself
without Reserve

Pied piping is also found in mechanical written letters. However, it is important to note that

these examples are from letters written by only two writers, John Caister and Luke Bratt.

John Caister
I was handed the inclosed, by M^r. Holmes to —
whom as well, as you I am much obliged

John Caister
I am sure will be most
gratefully acknowledged
by the Parishioners hereof for whom
(wating yr answ—

John Caister
I am sure Mrs Bills perfectly recollects that

to have been ye case, when placed out to M^r
Browne and

Mr Bourne as an instance each of whom reced 3^s
and I

John Caister
Having a pauper by the name of
Joseph Butler belonging to this Parish residing

at a M^r. Whibley's near the Queen Ann in
Maidstone, from whom I have received a Letter
informing me of his Wife having been delivered of
a still=born Child.

Luke Bratt
i have
been unable to Do any thing
for this fortnight in Concequence
of Which My Children Must Suffer

Luke Bratt
i have Done but very Littell this Winter
only With the basket in Consequence
of which it is Got very Low
[...]i have to Aknowledge
the recipe of the one pound
for which i return you Many
thanks

Luke Bratt
i receved your kind Letter Dated january the 19th
with the two pounds Enclosed of which
i am truly thankfull

As one would expect, preposition stranding would be found in mechanically written letters and pied-piping would be found in grammatically written letters. However, both phenomena are used by well- and less-educated writers. Nonetheless, preposition stranding is only once found in a grammatically-written letter and pied-piping only occurs in the letters of two mechanically-schooled writers, John Caister and Luke Bratt. In conclusion, the difference between mechanically-schooled and grammatically-schooled writers is that stranded prepositions were used by the mechanically-schooled and pied-piping was indicative for the grammatically-schooled writers.

7. Reflection of speech: h-dropping and h-insertion

The attitude towards the omission or insertion of the /h/ was quite hostile in the eighteenth century.

> Walker (1791:xiii) warns Londoners in very explicit terms: 'A still worse habit prevails, chiefly among the people of London, that of sinking the *h* at the beginning of words where it ought to be sounded, and of sounding it, either where it is not seen, or where it ought to be sunk' (in Görlach, 58).

The pronunciation of the *h* was a social class marker. For the educated classes the pronunciation of the *h* in stressed syllables is a marker, however, dropping the h is a marker of the lower classes. It was seen as 'uneducated', the 'uncultured', and the 'illiterate' (Mugglestone, 108). H-dropping and h-insertion appeared due to the fact that the pronunciation of French loans was confusing for especially the lower classes. The /h/ in the French words *hour, host* and *hospital* was not pronounced, however in Anglo-Saxon words, such as *hand*, *house* and *hard*, the [h] was pronounced (in van Gelderen, 208). As a consequence of this confusion, the /h/ was deleted in the pronunciation of Anglo-Saxon words. After the eighteenth century, "the absence of initial [h] is stigmatized […], which causes the [h] in *history, hospital,* and *hymnal* to be pronounced. In some contexts, initial [h] is not pronounced, however: *hour* and *heir*" (in van Gelderen, 165). Görlach quotes from G. Hill in *The Aspirate* (1902), saying that "in English an *h* is often put on by those among the uneducated who wish to talk correctly. […] It is not as a rule the very poor who introduce *h*'s, but the small shopkeeper and the villager who reads at home in the evening instead of going to the public house (1954:868-9)" (Görlach, 58).

7.1 H-dropping

The New Romney file contains 31 instances of h-dropping in six words. The other Kent file

contains eighteen cases of h-dropping, in eleven different words. This is a total of forty-nine

appearances.

H-dropping parish New Romney file

Word	Meaning	Frequency
1. As	Has	12
2. Ar	Her	8
3. Is	His	5
4. Umbel	humble	4
5. Usband	Husband	1
6. Ad	Had	1 =total 31

H-dropping other parishes Kent file

Word	Meaning	Frequency
1. As	Has	4
2. Ad	Had	2
3. Im	Him	2
4. Ombell	Humble	1
5. Ombel	Humble	2
6. Omble	Humble	1
7. Umbell	Humble	2
8. Umble	Humble	1
9. Is	His	1
10. a tom	At home	1
11. Ou	How	1 = total 18

As the tables show, the [h] in *has* and *humble* are often dropped. As stated earlier, h-dropping

is the result of its pronunciation in French loans, which led to the dropping of the [h] in

Anglo-Saxon words. In the tables above, only *humble* has derived from French. *Husban*d is

Old English, *home* has Anglo-Saxon roots. Moreover, the *h* in humble was originally muted

in French (OED). According to the OED, "the pronunciation /ˈʌmb(ə)l/ has prevailed down to

the nineteenth century", which explains its deletion as a reflection of speech in the letters.

The other words in which h-dropping occurs are function words, as in *had, has, him,*

his, her.

7.2 H-insertion

There are 86 instances of h-insertion in both letter files of Kent and New Romney. The New

Romney file contains seventeen variants and the other Kent file contains twenty.

H-insertion parish New Romney file

Word	Meaning	Frequency
1. Ham	Am	30
2. Has	As	4
3. His	Is	3
4. Herne	Earn	2
5. Harn	Earn	1
6. Hif	If	1
7. Houre	Our	1
8. Hone	Own	1
9. Harm	Arm	1
10. Hany	Any	1
11. Haney	Any	1
12. Heny	Any	1
13. Hill	Ill	1
14. Hus	Us	1
15. Hew	Who	1
16. Hod	Would	1
17. Houd	Would	1 = total 52

H-insertion other parishes Kent file

1. Ham	Am	11
2. Hame	Am	2
3. Hin	In	2
4. His	Is	2
5. Has	As	2
6. Hotherwis	Otherwise	1
7. Hable	Able	1
8. Hemty	Empty	1
9. Hat	At	1
10. Hare	Are	1
11. Henney	Any	1
12. Hand	And	1
13. Hunhapy	Unhappy	1
14. Hopportu	Opportunity	1
15. Huncles	Uncles	1
16. Hif	If	1
17. Hil	Ill	1
18. Hask	Ask	1
19. Hin	Him	1
20. hour	Our	1 = 34

There were in total 86 instances of h-insertion found in the letters. H-insertion in *I am/ I ham*

occurred most. H-insertion is considered to be due to hypercorrection, which was a

compensatory production because of insecurity about the pronunciation of items (Childs and

Wolfram, 445). The confusion with the French as with h-dropping is also concerning h-

insertion, because h-insertion could appear in words without an historic h in it (444).

Moreover, h-insertion is mostly found in function words, as can been seen above as well.

Furthermore, Labov stated that hypercorrection tended "to be related to social situations

where speakers feel obliged to use more acrolectal forms, or situations calling for more

"careful" speech (Labov 1966)" (Childs, 445). The letter writers could have been in these

"situations calling for more careful speech", because of their requests for relieve.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine what the language of the lower classes looked like in the application letters for relief in Kent from 1795 to 1834.

Punctuation

The Kentish pauper letters show that punctuation was dependent on a writer's own preference. Mechanically-schooled writers rarely used it, because there sentences were simply structured and did not require punctuation. However, when they used punctuation, the comma and dashes were used most frequently. Commas could appear everywhere in a sentence. Full stops were sometimes used for abbreviations, but not to indicate sentence endings. Grammatically-schooled writers used full stops more often and also to indicate the end of a sentence. Grammatically-schooled were better aware of the function of punctuation and used it therefore more often.

Spelling

Spelling was a well-regulated system, but until the 1850s it was not standardised. Therefore, variant spellings occurred frequently. The letter writers often knew how to draw the graphs, but not how to spell the words. Therefore, they often wrote down their pronunciation. However, sometimes they could not make sense of the difficult words, as can be seen in the very different spellings of the words *opportunity, affectionate, received, consideration* and *family.* These long and difficult words were often shortened, because the writers were used to the Anglo-Saxon patterns of words, which mainly existed of only one or two syllables. Furthermore, these people often copied from others and were not used to write by themselves. In addition, the letter writers had no need to write according to spelling conventions, as long

as there message came across.

Morpho-Syntax: preposition stranding and pied-piping

 Pied-piping is found in both mechanically and grammatically schooled letters. However, preposition stranding occurs more often by mechanical writers, whereas pied-piping occurs in grammatically-schooled letters. This agrees with the more elegant style the better-educated used. The mechanically-schooled had a more informal style in writing, in which preposition stranding could be used since it was normal in spoken language. However, the lower classes were aware of the different styles and could therefore also use pied-piping in their writings.

Reflection of speech: h-dropping and h-insertion

The dropping of an *h* was seen as a social marker of the lower classes. Due to the confusion about French loans with unpronounced aitches and insecurity about the pronunciation, aitches were often dropped or added in the spelling. It was mostly applied to function words. H-insertion as hypercorrection was also tended to be related to the social situation and the wish to speak correctly.

If the lower classes had access to education, the skills that were taught were often those which were only necessary for their occupations. Therefore, the writing education of the labouring poor existed often only of the mechanical part; drawing graphs. Grammars and dictionaries were often not available for them to teach themselves. When they needed to write, they wrote what they thought was right. Moreover, to agree with Tony Fairman, "partly-schooled letteracy was effective and those who wrote it felt no need for a schooled script" (2007, 34). The relieve they asked for was granted, regardless of their writing.

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