

**–s and –th Variation in Early Modern English Depositions:
Case Studies from Northern England and London**

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction – A Standard History	2
2. Theoretical Framework and Method	4
2.1 Theoretical Framework	4
2.2 Method	5
3. Previous Literature of <i>-s</i> Versus <i>-th</i>	8
4. Results and Discussion	13
5. Conclusion	21
Works Cited	23

1. Introduction – A Standard History

Variation in terms of spelling and morphology was not uncommon in Early Modern England (c. 1476-1776). During this period a single form of English did not exist. In fact, the diversity of the English language was so great that spelling would often vary intratextually.

Remarkable to us in the present day, but of the ordinary in Early Modern England, is the notion that some individual writers would show inconsistencies in their own spellings of a single word. Orthographic differences were often minor; for instance, *day* could be represented as either *day*, *daye* or *daie*. In the latter case, *day* can still be recognised; however, variation in spelling could also cause confusion, e.g. consider *hard*, *herd* and *heard* for present-day English *heard*. The Early Modern Period is, nevertheless, a period of change towards standardisation of the English language.

Since the Middle English Period (1066-c. 1476) the English language has changed considerably. In writing, the English language was characterised by many local or regional dialects, and conventions hereof were not always well-defined (Lass 1992: 23). By the beginning of the sixteenth century, however, the local and regional forms had become “unlocalisable” due to the emergence of standardisation processes (Auer and Withoos forthc.: 6). The English language had thus become more uniform, and one could say that a supra-local “standard” had appeared in the Early Modern Period. Phenomena such as urbanisation, better infrastructure and the introduction of the printing press in 1476 could all have influenced the emergence of a standard form of English. Nevertheless, full standardisation in writing was not established until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the form of grammars and dictionaries.

In the fifteenth century attitudes towards the English language began to change. French and Latin used to dominate official documentation in the Middle English Period, and as a result the English language was less well regarded in status (Blake 1992: 5). Over time,

however, the English language gradually became accepted in their place. Yet unlike French and Latin, there was not a standard form of English in use throughout the whole country. Some assemblages and individuals began to use the own more uniform form of English. The London Chancery, for instance, held prestige, and their more uniformed English gained some followers among professional scribes outside of London (Salmon 1999: 15) (Note: counterarguments for the “Chancery Standard” will be presented below). William Caxton, an influential man who introduced the printing press into England in 1476, also desired to develop a more uniform form of English because of the commercial advantages that would advance of having people all over the country being able to read and understand his texts. Nevertheless, in most peoples written correspondence signs of regional dialects remained omnipresent.

The most prominent theory on the ancestry of Standard English is that its origins lie in the Chancery English of London that spread across the country due to the advances of the printing press. This theory has been presented in many textbooks as factual (e.g. Freeborn (1998), Baugh and Cable (2002, 5th ed.), and Van Gelderen (2006)), yet there seems to be no consensus among scholars on the origins of present-day English. Other theories include that Standard English is a development from a Midlands dialect that came into London through migration; Standard English developed through the prestigious, educated speakers of the Oxford, London and Cambridge triangle; Standard English came into existence through natural language change processes (Wright 2000: 1). Thus, as of yet, theories on the source of present-day English are inconclusive and much research on that matter is still needed.

A notable connection between the existing theories on the origin of present-day English is the assumption that there is a single ancestor dialect. Recently, however, there have been scholars begging to differ. Hope (2000: 53) argues that Standard English is too typologically rare to have developed from a single dialect. Even though there are many

features from the Middle English London dialect still present in the English we use today, there are also aspects to be found which are native to other parts of England. One of these features is the present indicative third person singular inflection *-s*, which is distinctively Northern English. Associated with the Southern dialects of England, including the language forms applied by Caxton and the Chancery, is the *-th* inflection.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the variation and change of the linguistic variants third person present singular *-s* and *-th* in Early Modern English depositions in terms of regional variation and diffusion, as to acquire a better insight into how the *-s* inflection developed into the English language of today. Lots of work has been done on the historical development of *-s* and *-th* (e.g. Holmqvist (1922), Kytö (1993), and Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995), discussed in chapter 3) but there has not been a systematic study of the linguistic variable *-s* in depositions so far. The focus on regional variation, in particular between London and Northern England, is also unique to this study.

2. Theoretical Framework and Method

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The research field within which this thesis is conducted is that of historical sociolinguistics. As defined by Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre (2012: 1), historical sociolinguistics is “the reconstruction of the history of a given language in its socio-cultural context”. The field has emerged over the last thirty years and bears many features of two areas; sociolinguistics and historical linguistics. Scholars within this discipline not only look at variation and change but also at other macrosociolinguistic facets, such as language contact, attitudes to language, multilingualism, and standardisation. Historical sociolinguistics follows the principle of uniformitarianism, which essentially means that “human beings as biological, psychological and social creatures have remained largely unchanged over time” (Nevalainen

and Raumolin-Brunberg 2012: 24). With regard to language change this means that the present can be used to explain the past and vice versa. Furthermore, since we are looking at historical regional written language diffusions rather than a standard language form, this study also takes dialectology and philology into account as its framework.

2.2. Method

For a reliable analysis of everyday language used by the people of Early Modern England, I will provide data from a corpus of depositions from this period. The corpus I use is a new corpus that has been available since 2011, and is suitable for empirical studies on the regional variation of *-s* versus *-th* in depositions, as these texts have not been studied in this regard before. *An Electronic Text Edition of Depositions 1560– 1760* (ETED) is a corpus that covers an entire two hundred year period of the Early Modern English period. ETED includes 905 depositions from thirty manuscript collections. Additional social information such as the occupation and gender of the witnesses are provided in the corpus. Underrepresented in other text types, yet greatly present in depositions are people of the lower ranks and women. In fact, nearly one third of the trials featured in ETED include women. Moreover, the voices of people from all ranks from as young as 14 to the age of 80 are captured in the corpus. The themes discussed in deposition texts range from small offences, such as defamation and thievery, to higher felonies, such as murder and rape. Latin is highly present in depositions, but naturally those phrases are disregarded in this study.

The transcribed manuscripts have been sorted by region. This is very useful, since my study restricts itself to certain geographical areas, namely London and Northern. These regions have been chosen because Northern covers Northern parts of England, where the third person singular *-s* inflection used to be a distinguished dialectal characteristic before the standardisation of English began; London was chosen as some scholars believe that the

Standard English feature *-s* originated from this capital region. The London depositions are divided into four periods in ETED, these are: (Period 1) 1560-1599; (Period 2) 1600-1649; (Period 3) 1650-1699; (Period 4) 1700-1760. The Northern depositions fit into the last three periods only. The London sub-corpus consists of 42,147 words, whereas the Northern sub-corpus contains 26,948 words.

Spoken language is naturally distinguishable from written language, and as such discovering precisely how people of the past spoke is a difficult task. That is why I have chosen to study texts written by scribes on trial cases. According to Schneider (2002: 74) trial records most resemble spoken language, as the speech events have actually taken place at a given moment in time and are recorded directly by the scribes. The oral testimonies typically include examples of direct speech and messages from the deponent to the scribe, and scribes would often use informal lexis that represented the vocabulary of the witnesses in such cases (Kytö et al. 2011: 48). However, scribes also had to “balance faithfulness to the deponent’s language and the legal demands for precise language” (Kytö et al. 2011: 3). Some elements of depositions therefore represent written language. The lines framing the witness’s testimony often contain more conservative spellings. These lines enclose phrases that are formulaic and genre-specific. Typically present in these formulaic phrases is the verb form *saith*, as in “he saith upon oath...”, and “...further saith not”.

John Dokeson of Thongs bridge in the county aforesaid clothier
saith vpon oath that vpon Munday the tenth of this instante May
 aboute nyne of the clocke in the euenynge he this Informer
 goeing towards ouer Thonge on the hygh way found one
 Rychard Litlewood in the said way lying on the ground, and his
 face bloody; & this informer said to him, will you goe home, but he

could not speake to him: wherevpon he this informer went
to the house of one James Hurst and told him that there
was a man lying in the way, I pray you helpe me vp with
him, wherevpon he ryse out of bed, & they tooke the said Rychard
Litlewood vp betwixte them, & led him betwene them into the
house of the said James Hurste, but he could not speake to them,
but how the said Litlewood came to his hurte he this informer
knoweth not, & about an hower after they carryed him on horse
backe to one Humfrey Hursts of Ouer Thounge & farther
saith not. /

(Northern 1646-1649: F_2NC_Northern_011)

Saith is often used in regions and periods where the *-s* form would be expected in colloquial speech, indicating its formulaic nature. Moreover, Cusack (1998: 96) suggests that it is most likely that the scribes did not use the *-th* form when speaking, yet did in writing, because the conservative form was deemed most appropriate in formal contexts. In addition, Cusack proposes that the *-th* form was a means of distinguishing the words of the scribe from the words of the deponent, because scribes would often switch to the *-s* form when rendering the deponent's words. Kytö, nevertheless, disagrees and suggests that the *-th* form in those cases are merely formulaic, as there are instances in ETED where the scribe uses the *-s* form after using a stock phrase when they are speaking, i.e. "He saith that he thinks" (Kytö et al. 2011: 48).

A notable difference between the London and Northern sub-corpus is that the data from the London sub-corpus comes from a diocesan or church court and the data from the Northern sub-corpus is from a criminal court (Kytö et al. 2011: 101-146). This results in a

distinctive structural organisation and content. More importantly, criminal courts generally counted more scribes, for scribes would vary from town to town. In fact, some of the data from the ETED diocesan courts feature only one main scribal hand. This is the case for the corpus data from period 2, 3 and 4 for the London records. In my results I will therefore consider the possibility that the spellings applied by the scribe are of personal preference and not necessarily representative of the general community. Furthermore, not much is known of the background scribes. All scribes are skilled in writing as they all exhibit clear writing conventions, but only of the scribes who write for the church courts is known that they probably have had some sort of training.

In this study I carefully check for all *-s* and *-th* inflections of every third person present singular English verb in the corpora of the London and Northern region. A distinction is made between the verbs *say*, *have* and *do*, and the other verbs, since the noted verbs are said to be more conservative in nature (see chapter 3). This thesis contains five chapters. In the following chapter, chapter 3, I will highlight some of the most important studies that have previously been conducted on *-s* and *-th* variation, and display the way in which the variants behave in other text types. Chapter 4 will be concerned with the results of my study, and subsequently I will discuss them. Finally, in chapter 5, I will draw conclusions to my findings.

3. Previous Literature on *-s* Versus *-th*

As a means of background information for this study, I will first shed light on what is known of the history of the development of *-s* and *-th* variation from previous research. Holmqvist (1922: 9) attested that the precise origins of the third person singular *-s* variation can be traced back to the late tenth century, where the ending initially emerged in Northumbrian texts, and the inflection was fully adopted through Northern England before the year 1300. The *-s* form, however, does not occur outside of Northern England until the fourteenth

century, when poets in London first started to use the inflection as a means of poetic expression. From the late Middle English Period onwards, people from the North abundantly left for London, causing the dispersal of non-native Northern features into the area, such as the third person singular inflection *-s* (Lass 1999: 4-5). Nevertheless, the *-th* ending remained the prevailing form in the London area. A shift only started emerging towards the late fifteenth century – around the time when steady developments towards a standard form of English were advancing. The use of *-s* in writing became increasingly popular. Whereas the *-s* suffix was still relatively rare at the end of the sixteenth century, within a century the tables had rapidly turned. Around 1700 the *-th* form was restricted to ceremonial use, merely occurring in highly formal texts, often of biblical nature (Kytö 1993: 115).

Change in written language is often the result of a change in spoken language (Milroy 2000: 14), as seems to be the case in the *-th* to *-s* shift. Holmqvist (1922) and Kytö (1993) have commented on the colloquial use of the *-s* inflection, whilst the *-th* inflection was still dominant in writing. Indications hereof can be found due to the early prominence of the *-s* form in poems and private letters; genres that are known to be closer to colloquial speech than literary and official texts. Additionally, there is textual evidence by Robert Hodges, a seventeenth century contemporary, who explicitly remarks on the identical pronunciation of *-s* and *-th* in third person singular verbs and plural nouns (Kytö 1993: 115). Hodges indicates that people in his area would attribute various different spellings to a single form of pronunciation. In this fashion, people customarily pronounced /s/ or /z/ where they would write *-th* or *-s* in third person singular indicative verbs.

In her study, Merja Kytö (1993) looks at a wide variety of texts and at many extralinguistic and linguistic factors that could be of influence on the choice of *-s* or *-th*. Kytö uses a variety of texts available from the Early Modern British English section of the Helsinki Corpus. These texts are divided into three consecutive sociohistorical sub-periods; the pre-

Reformation decades (Period 1: 1500-1570), the period of social turmoil (Period 2: 1570-1640), and the stabilisation of conditions (Period 3: 1640-1700). Each text chosen from the corpus conforms to one of the following six text types, namely diaries, history writings, private letters, official letters, sermons and trial proceedings. The influence of the dates of composition or publication and text type as well as other extralinguistic factors, particularly the relationship of the text to spoken language, the level of formality of the texts and the background and gender of the authors, are carefully scrutinised in Kytö's study. The linguistic factors taken into account are the influence of the type of verb, stem-final sounds and negation. The results show that the *-s* inflection was practically unknown in Britain until 1570. In the decades surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century the use of the *-s* ending rose to 20 per cent. Finally, a drastic increase can be observed in the period from 1640 through 1700, as the *-s* ending accounts for 76 per cent of all attested instances. Some relatively frequent verbs behave notably differently from other types of verbs, due to their formulaic usage and the level of formality of the text. The frequent auxiliaries *have* and *do* as well as verb *say* tend to naturally behave more conservatively. This has also been observed by Holmqvist (1922), Stein (1987) and Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1998). Kytö's results indicate that by the end of the seventeenth century a near full adoption by the other verbs of the trending *-s* ending in writing has occurred. Some verbs, however, lag behind; *have* adapts the *-s* ending in 29 per cent of the cases, *does* occurs 54 per cent of the time, and *says* occurs in 83 per cent of the instances from 1640 through 1700. Private letters, diaries, sermons and trial proceedings are thought to reflect spoken language more closely than other text types. When focussing on text type, Kytö's results show that the first instances of the *-s* form in the data are all found in private letters and during period 2 the use of the *-s* ending has risen to 79 per cent in this text type, whereas *-th* dominates in all other text types. From 1640 to 1700, nevertheless, the *-s* ending dominates regardless of text type in over 90 per cent

of the total instances. When looking at text type, *has* and *does*, yet again, notably lag behind. In period 2 *has* only occurs in private letters and trials and in period 3 no breakthrough of *has* is found except in official documents and trials. *Does* is most resilient to change as the form does not appear in the corpus until after 1640. The trend, when looking at formality, is that all verb forms are introduced through informal texts. Yet from 1640 onwards *has* and *does* become relatively more frequent in formal texts, while the level of formality does not make much of a difference for the other verbs, as both informal and formal texts show a near full adoption of the *-s* ending in verbs other than *have* and *do*. A curious discovery by Kytö is that women show a greater implementation of the *-s* form for *have* and *do* than men do in all of the studied sub-periods. This is also the case for the other verbs until 1640. The explanation that Kytö gives for this phenomenon is that women generally did not receive formal education and therefore were not as exposed to the demands of writing traditions, which favoured the preservation of older prestige forms (Kytö, 1993: 128). To continue, Kytö notes that some linguistic factors contribute to the choice of *-s* or *-th* inflection. As such, verbs ending in vowels have been shown to be slightly more resistant to the *-s* inflection. Verbal stems ending in /s/, /z/, and affricates are more resilient to the *-s* inflection than other verbs. Moreover, negation does not seem to play a significant role in the promotion of *-s*, albeit suggested in Stein's 1987 paper.

Furthermore, a study by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1998) also shows a link between the use of the *-s* ending and colloquial speech. However, this study additionally connects the *-s* use to social status. The study mainly looks at a set of informal written letters by the Cely family from 1472 through 1488, and at letters written by the Johnson brothers, their master and a fellow apprentice from 1542 through 1553. What links these two groups together is that all members are men, who were active as merchants in the London wool industry. Both the Cely and Johnson family were affiliated with the upper level of the

merchant community. As there are only five members in both groups a supplementary corpus was added to each group. The supplementary corpus consisted of texts from additional contemporary merchants. When looking at *-s* and *-th* variation, Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg discovered that the younger generation of the Cely family used the *-s* form 71 per cent of the time, whereas this inflection is not applied by the older generation at all. Richard Cely Junior, in fact, used the *-s* form 95 per cent of the time. However, there is reason to believe that Richard had enjoyed education in the North, as he also used other Northern spellings such as *qweche* for 'which' and *qwher* for 'where' and he had relatives living there. In addition, the supplementary corpus showed a 20 per cent usage of the *-s* suffix. Some 70 years later the older generation of the Johnson brothers, represented merely by master Anthony Cave, similarly applied the *-s* inflection to 21 per cent of all instances. However, the younger generation of the Johnson family revealed a surprising decline in the use of the *-s* inflection, totalling at 6 per cent. The supplementary corpus too, consisting of texts from members similar in age as the younger Johnson generation, exhibited a mere 3 per cent usage of the *-s* suffix. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg conclude that the amount of *-s* usage in the Cely letters and the supplementary corpus is sufficient enough to support the claim that the form was relatively widespread within the merchant community in the late fifteenth century. Presumably this is due to the fact that merchants generally had to travel a lot to do their jobs, consequently coming in contact with many different people and dialects. Travel, nonetheless, was not necessary to come in contact with the *-s* form; in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, London knew a great influx of immigrants, many of whom came from the North (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 96). The subsequent decrease in the use of *-s* in the early sixteenth century is validated as a result of social stratification. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg propose that in London the *-s* suffix became perceived as an innovation by people of lower social status. The *-s* form possibly became stigmatised and

as a consequence people started to adjust their spellings in favour of the *-th* suffix. In early standardisation, the gentry followed the *-th* model advocated by the press and used primarily in official documents and literature. Merchants on the top end of the social scale, such as the Johnsons, aspired to be associated with the gentry (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1998: 73), and people in the early 1600s assumedly adapted their own spellings in favour of those promoted by the gentry. The *-s* inflection thus became degraded to a form of everyday speech.

In conclusion to this chapter, from the studies exemplified above, we can say the following about the *-s* and *-th* ending with respect to regional variation. The *-s* inflection is an originally Northern form. Due to the abundant migration towards the capital city of London by many Northerners in the late Middle English Period, the Southern dialects came in contact with Northern morphology. Londoners, and especially merchants, would also come in contact with the Northern dialect due to travel, trade and family ties. After initial accounts with the *-s* form, there is reason to believe that the form somehow became stigmatised in the London area in the early sixteenth century. Not until the late sixteenth century did the *-s* ending start to rise in usage all throughout Britain. Only by the end of the seventeenth century was there a near full adoption of the *-s* inflection in the whole country.

4. Results and Discussion

In this empirical study the focus lies on how time, region and type of verb influence the choice of the third person present singular morpheme inflection. Table 1 shows the total usage of the *-s* and *-th* inflection per region in ETED. These findings cover the years 1560-1760 of the Early Modern English Period. Out of a total of 882 third person present indicative singular *-s* and *-th* occurrences in the ETED corpus, 25 per cent, or 218 instances, appear with the *-s* inflection. With regard to the total distribution of the morphological endings, the Northern and

London sub-corpus are on par with each other. The London sub-corpus shows a 24 per cent usage of the *-s* inflection, whereas the Northern dispersal comparably totals at 25 per cent. The large number of *-th* inflections in the corpus is consistent with the high level of formality of deposition texts.

	<i>-s</i>	<i>-th</i>	Total
London	140 (24%)	436 (76%)	576
Northern	78 (25%)	228 (75%)	306
Total	218 (25%)	664 (75%)	882

Table 1. Total distribution of *-s* and *-th* per region.¹

In table 2 the amount of *-s* and *-th* inflections that occur in the corpus of the two regions are presented according to the sub-periods. Here depositions seem to lag behind on other texts types. If we look at Kytö's data, we see that a shift to the *-s* form does not start before 1570, but in the seventy years after that the *-s* form has risen to 18 per cent, whereas our corpus shows only a very rare usage of the *-s* inflection. From 1640 to 1710 the *-s* form prevails in 76 per cent of the instances in the Helsinki Corpus. In our data, however, we see that the *-th* ending still dominates, as from 1650 to 1699 the *-s* form merely occurs 28 per cent of the time in the London sub-corpus and 18 per cent of the time in the Northern sub-corpus. Even in the 60 years after the turn of the century the *-s* ending is still in the minority, as the usage amounts to 45 per cent in London and 46 per cent in Northern England. Thus, the genre of depositions overall seems to be more conservative in nature than other text types.

¹ The results have not been normalised, instead percentages have been used. This has been done, because I am comparing the London with the Northern region by way of percentages and this allows me to see which region used which inflection the most.

Moreover, based on Middle English dialect data evidence, one would have expected there to be more *-s* forms in the Northern sub-corpus. My findings, nonetheless, suggest that there was either a “Southern” norm enforced that was used for official text types, or that the scribes, be they Northern or Southern, chose to write according to the “Southern” norm.

When looking at the London data, the numbers on the use of *-s* for the second sub-period are notably decisive. The one scribe that wrote in this period clearly preferred third person present singular words to be written with the traditional London inflection *-th*.

Seemingly, personal preference is important in the decision for a certain spelling variant, and people who were especially conservative in their spelling preferences were less likely to use a mix of two spelling variants. Social markedness could of course also play a part in the personal preference of a certain form. Nonetheless, as we know little of the background, such as age and education, of the scribes, this will always remain speculation.

London				Northern			
	<i>-s</i>	<i>-th</i>	Total		<i>-s</i>	<i>-th</i>	Total
1560-1599	4 (4%)	102 (96%)	106	1560-1599	----	----	----
1600-1649	0	145	145	1600-1649	1 (2%)	55 (98%)	56
1650-1699	19 (28%)	48 (72%)	67	1650-1699	24 (18%)	111 (82%)	135
1700-1760	117 (45%)	141 (55%)	258	1700-1760	53 (46%)	62 (54%)	115

Table 2. The *-s* and *-th* endings according to region and sub-period.

When comparing the London results with the Northern results, the *-s* form seems to be accepted slightly faster during the third sub-period in London than in the Northern region.

However, as pointed out previously, there is only one scribe active in this sub-period and the results can have been manipulated by chance and not at all be representative of London

society as a whole. If, however, we take these results to be demonstrative of the general trend in the London area, then one might say that the people of London were innovative and welcoming towards a new form of writing, whereas the people of Northern England might have been slightly more apprehensive to use the *-s* form in formal texts. The case may be that Northerners have wanted to keep to the writing traditions of the capitol more, such as the *-th* inflection, because London was the city of power and prestige of the time.² Moreover, Northerners may have lagged behind on the writing trends occurring in London. Nevertheless, by the last sub-period this seems to have been resolved, as the usage in London and Northern England are back on par. Once more, these results do not show the expected greater usage of the *-s* form in the Northern region. However, the case may in fact be that the *-s* form gradually moved from the North to the South and from there gradually back to the North. Nonetheless, as we will see below the distribution of *-s* and *-th* will look quite differently when we look at different types of verbs.

The results in table 3 show why it is important to make a distinction between external and internal factors of language change. When I did not make a distinction between *have*, *say* and *do* and the other verbs in table 2, we saw that the Northerners lagged behind the Londoners in period 3 in the usage of the innovative *-s* inflection. However, if we look at table 3, we can see that this is not true for all verbs. In fact, the Northern scribes use the *-s* form more with the other verbs at 67 per cent; the London scribe is more divided and uses the *-s* form 52 per cent of the time in period 3. Seemingly, once a shift towards the *-s* form started to occur in London, it became easier for some Northerners to transfer back to their trusted *-s* form. For some Londoners the initial shift might have been slightly slower, as this

² As pointed out earlier in this thesis, Holmqvist (1922) and Kytö (1993) among others have commented on the fact that people may already have pronounced *-s* in speaking where they made the choice to apply the *-th* inflection in writing.

		London					Northern		
		<i>-s</i>	<i>-th</i>	Total			<i>-s</i>	<i>-th</i>	Total
1560-1599	say	0	31	31					
	have	1 (5%)	21 (95%)	22					
	do	0	3	3					
	other	3 (6%)	47 (94%)	50					
1600-1649	say	0	49	49	1600-1649	say	0	41	41
	have	0	45	45		have	0	2	2
	do	0	3	3		do	0	3	3
	other	0	48	48		other	1 (10%)	9 (90%)	10
1650-1699	say	0	14	14	1650-1699	say	3 (4%)	76 (96%)	79
	have	2 (13%)	14 (87%)	16		have	3 (14%)	18 (86%)	21
	do	0	4	4		do	0	8	8
	other	17 (52%)	16 (48%)	33		other	18 (67%)	9 (33%)	27
1700-1760	say	0	57	57	1700-1760	say	14 (22%)	51 (78%)	65
	have	2 (3%)	59 (97%)	61		have	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	10
	do	6 (19%)	25 (81%)	31		do	6	0	6
	other	109	0	109		other	28 (82%)	6 (18%)	34

Table 3. The variants *-s* and *-th* presented by region, time and type of verb.

was mostly their first encounter with the *-s* ending in writing, making it more likely that some people were more conservative to the change. Nevertheless, by period 4 a full shift can be seen towards the *-s* ending in London for the other verbs, but here the Northerners lag behind

with a 82 per cent use of the *-s* form. Apparently it was not easy for all Northerners to accept the *-s* ending back into their written language. In addition, as we know from earlier studies (see chapter 3), the verbs *have* and *do* are more conservative in nature, and the verb *say* is used plentiful in formulaic stock phrases that favour the *-th* ending. If we look at the data, we can see that the Northern scribes used the *-th* ending in period 3 a considerable amount more in quantity with the formulaic verb *say* than the London scribe of the same period, and this has affected the results of table 2, making the Northerners seem more conservative in the change towards the *-s* ending. However, again this abundant usage of the *-th* form in Northern England seems to indicate that the Londoners did indeed lead the way with respect to the innovative form.

The transition that the scribes have made over the last three periods is quite remarkable with regard to the other verbs, especially pertaining to the three individual London scribes. In period 2 the London scribe decisively chooses to use only the *-th* form. The Northern scribes of the same period show a similar pattern. Period 3 seems to be the period of transition from *-th* to *-s* in depositions from both the London and Northern sub-corpus. The London scribe of period 3 notably uses the *-s* form in near 50 per cent of the cases. To continue, the London scribe of period 4 exclusively uses the *-s* form for the other verbs. This decisiveness of the London scribes might be due to the training that scribes of diocesan courts received. The Northern scribes of the same period also show a strong tendency towards the use of the *-s* ending, applying the form in 82 per cent of the cases. The scribes from both regions are generally very consistent in the choice of a particular inflection for a particular word. This leads to the assumption that there might be some linguistic or extralinguistic factors at play that influence the choice of either *-s* or *-th* for a word. Such factors could be frequency of the word and the final letter of the verbal stem.

When looking at *say*, *have* and *do* individually their conservative nature becomes

apparent. *Say* is always written with the *-th* inflection in the London sub-corpus, even when the other verbs are all written with the *-s* ending. The scribes of Northern England are clearly more innovative when it comes to the spelling of *say*. In period 3 a shift very slowly starts to emerge and by period 4, the *-s* form is used in 22 per cent of the cases. When looking at the Northern sub-corpus the *-s* form for *say* is mostly used in the formulae instigating some of the depositions, particularly by Hand 14, whereas other usage of *say* is in the *-th* form.

Says that on Saterdag the second day of July 1757 there
 was a Cockfighting at Harden Beck when John Sharp
 and John Rycroft were both present that Sharp said
 that a Cock that had Won one Batle at killed one Cock
 and almost laimed another Rycroft gave some Answer
 but Bayley does not remember what it was That some
 time after Rycroft Seized Sharp by his Coat Collor
 That Sharp desired Rycroft to hold his Hands of him
 and told Rycroft that if he / Rycroft / was for fighting
 he / Sharp / was not That Rycroft then Struck Sharp ^{upon his brest} with
 his Hand further **sayeth** not

(Northern 1724-1758: F_4NC_Northern_016)

Out of *say*, *have* and *do*, *have* is the first to occur with the *-s* form in the corpus. In the first period there is a single occasion in which *has* is used in the London sub-corpus. This is rather curious as the next instance in which *has* is written is not until the third period for both the London and the Northern sub-corpus. Even more curious is that the use of *has* is written in a sentence where verbs are only being inflected with the *-th* form, and the form *hath* is even

used in the clause previous to the use of *has*.

Also shee **saith** that the PROducent **hath** given
 hir a pair of gloves wch hee **hath** again &
 allso a handkercheff woorth soom fifteen shilling
 wch hee allso **has** again.

(London 1590-1593: F_1LD_London_008)

In the London sub-corpus implementation of *has* remains relatively rare, as the form does not occur more than twice in the third or fourth period. In the Northern sub-corpus, nevertheless, the form has gradually gained popularity, as the form is used in 50 per cent of the instances in the fourth period. Still, the verb *have* does not occur more than 10 times in that period, so there might be more data needed to confirm this analysis. *Do* is most resistant to change in the Northern sub-corpus, and the verb does not occur with the *-s* form until the fourth period in both the London and the Northern sub-corpus. However, once a shift does start to emerge, the emergence is rather rapid, as the highest percentages of the use of either *say*, *have* or *do* with the *-s* form can be found in the verb *do*. *Does* occurs 19 per cent of the time in the London sub-corpus, but a full shift to the *-s* form can be seen in the Northern sub-corpus. Again, however, the results of the Northern sub-corpus are low in quantity in relation to the verb *do* in period 4. Nonetheless, in general this study shows that the *-s* form is most welcomed in the verbs *say*, *have* and *do* in the Northern sub-corpus than in the London sub-corpus.

The general trend that can be observed in table 3 is that the Northern scribes seem slightly more innovative than the London scribes, though the Northerners use the *-th* form more abundantly in quantity during the crucial period of change (period 3). Besides, what is striking is that the *-s* form is used so marginally in the second sub-period of the Northern sub-

corpus. Expected was that the Northerners would show more variation in that sub-period, as the *-s* form originates from the North of England. As this is not the case, one can wonder how much influence the trends from London had on scribes of depositions. As we know little of the education of the Northern scribes, one may speculate that they learnt to write depositions according to examples set by London scribes.

5. Conclusion

Since we, as of yet, do not know much about the origins of Standard English, this study has been particularly insightful in coming a step closer to solving this mystery. From this study an observation can be made as regards the development of the present indicative third person singular verb inflection variants *-s* and *-th*. The results show that the *-th* form is far more excessively present in the Northern sub-corpus than anticipated, despite the *-s* form being native to this region. Due to the high usage of the *-th* form in depositions, we can safely say that a “Southern” norm was ensued in the written practice of legal cases. The shift towards the *-s* form occurs rather late in the genre of depositions, occurring not until the late seventeenth century. In this period the *-s* form is accepted slightly faster in London than in Northern England. Additionally, Northerners use the verbs *say*, *have* and *do* in this period more copiously in quantity with the *-th* ending. All these reasons have led to the conclusion that the shift from *-th* to *-s* was initiated by the people of London, with the people from Northern England following their lead. However, despite the change being initiated by Londoners, the results also seem to indicate that some people from the North were initially slightly more rapid to accept the change and follow the London trend. This is possibly the result of the *-s* form being previously more prominent in the North of England than in the South. The Northerners by analogy were also more rapid to use the *-s* form with the formulaic verb *say*. This also seems to be true of the auxiliaries *have* and *do*, however, the Northern data on these

verbs is too small to draw any tentative conclusions from. Another limitation of this study is that in the last three periods in the London sub-corpus there was only one scribe active in each of these periods. This asks us to be cautious in our conclusions and to confirm them with more additional data.

In future studies it would be interesting to look at the development of *-s* and *-th* from a sociological point of view. Factors such as gender and rank of the deponents can influence the choices made in language. Particularly of interest would be to look at the language trends of merchants, as Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg have indicated that these people might have been main instigators in the transmission of new linguistic forms to a community. Furthermore, there is a possibility that scribes used spellings closer to spoken language in instances of direct speech. Making a distinction between direct and indirect speech would probably give more insight in how the people of Early Modern English actually spoke. A question that arose in this study is whether some verbs make a slower or faster change towards the *-s* inflection than other verbs, as during the periods of the language shift of the *-s* and *-th* inflection, some verbs only had the *-s* inflection while others only had the *-th* ending. Looking at the frequency of verbs could therefore be an option of focus in future study. Also verb stems that end in vowels, /s/, /z/ and affricates are, according to Kytö, slower to have the *-s* ending in third person singular verbs. Moreover, future studies could also look at the trends in the development of *-s* and *-th* in more different regions.

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