

STANDARDISATION PROCESSES IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: THE CASE OF MORPHOLOGY

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RESUMEN

Los procesos de estandarización han sido de gran interés no solo para la sociolingüística contemporánea, sino que también han surgido como estudios de particular relevancia en lo que respecta a distintos periodos del inglés, valorando aspectos que hasta el momento se restringían al estudio intralingüístico. Estos procesos son particularmente relevantes para el periodo de 1400-50, cuando muchos aspectos lingüísticos se consolidaban. El ritmo y el grado en que estos aspectos estandarizaban no varían de uno a otro. En general, este trabajo postula que la morfología adquiere sus rasgos estándares con posterioridad a la sintaxis.

PALABRAS CLAVE: vínculos fuertes, vínculos débiles, cambios no conscientes, jerarquías de estandarización.

ABSTRACT

The processes of standardization have now for long been a topic that proves of interest not only for studies on contemporary socio-linguistics. In the 1960, some approaches showed interest on historical processes (not exclusively intralingüistic), but it was not until the 1990's that this interest increased. These processes are particularly valuable for the period 1400-50, a historical moment in which the standards of the English language were consolidating. The speed and degree to which a language standardises is different for each linguistic aspect. In this paper I'm trying to prove that morphological standardization as regards my sources and in general took place after syntax.

KEY WORDS: strong ties, weak ties, changes below the level of consciousness, standardising hierarchies.

The Late Middle English and EmodE^{*} periods undergo several changes that took place throughout the transition between both of them. The diffusion of these new features led to a process standardisation following the decision taken by Henry the V in 1430 about the use of the English language as the official language of the country. Fifteenth century London was linguistically characterised by the survival of at least three different varieties of English, which did not coincide historically: 14th and 15th c. Wyclifite texts from the Central Midlands, the earliest variety of London English, an Essex type from the 14th c., and 14th and 15th c. texts

comprising London Corporation records as well as texts by Chaucer and Hoccleve and finally a fourth type related to London speech. Other influential varieties were entering the areas of London and having a relevance on the growth of the later standard, mostly in the form of population movements from the 14th c. onwards. The actual existence of some of these varieties in a spoken form has been frequently discussed as some of them could just be a media for bureaucratic documents to be recorded. The fact that some features might or might not represent a change in the way London speakers used their language does not, in any case, impede their actual influence on the London speech. One of these varieties was that found in Chancery English, the language of the Corporation of London, Guildhall Records and the like. Some of them considered possible antecedents of the later Standard. Chancery documents for example feature certain forms that might not imply change when compared to texts written in non-chancery English and translated into chancery forms. However, chancery English shows uses that have been considered landmarks for a process of Standardisation (English Chancery 1400-50). The documents analysed here were those edited by Fisher, Richardson and Fisher (1984).

As regards standardisation processes, a specific order has been proposed in some studies in the manner of a hierarchical linguistic process, this is, a process that would take place following a specific scale or ordering seen as conclusive in some studies. Thomason and Kaufman (1988), Gerritsen (1992) and Gerritsen & Stein (1992), Siwierska (1988), Van Coetsen (1988), etc., consider that linguistic domains do not follow the standard language to the same degree. They comment on the following order for some languages:

Syntax > lexicon > morphology > phonology

These are even regarded as some kind of polarity. However, both the ordering and the individual aspects that would change first or last depend conclusively on speakers' attitude towards theirs and other varieties spoken at the same time. Individual feelings of belonging might hinder a process of adaptation to other ways of expression (J. Milroy) and evidence for this can be found in the fifteenth century as proven for phonemic changes. Even though personal feelings of prestige might contradict the previous assumption, it can also be expected that they led speakers to chose certain variants connected to French or Latin over others, in an obvious way as regards the lexicon, but less obviously and therefore, most importantly syntactically¹, in a way that such a polarity could be left out straightaway. In any case, there are many aspects to be taken into consideration when dealing with such a process as

* Abreviaturas: IME (Late Middle English), EModE (Early Modern English), IOE (Late Old English)

¹ So the fact that they were not aware of specific limits between these languages makes this below the level of consciousness change important from the cognitive point of view and obviously, sociolinguistically so too.



standardisation in the 15th c., we are not dealing with them there. So far Exposito (2002) draws attention to the fact that one of the first aspects to standardise as regards chancery documents from 1400-50 and the nominal structure of the sentence studied at the clausal level was syntax²: the order adjective-noun, the position of the inflected genitive in relation to the noun and in opposition to the pattern noun-of-phrase, the noun-noun structure, the kind of adjectival morphemes etc., on were proof of that.

In this paper, we hypothesise that morphology was standardised to the pattern of the period after syntax and before other aspects. We will use several variables as proof: verbal ending, nominal morphemes, the use of pronouns and their choice ... In any case, even though the process seems to have followed a specific order, so far this order as a universe of language has not been conclusively demonstrated. This despite the fact that the assumption is interesting enough from the scholarly point of view as it leads us to pay attention to those extralinguistic or discursive-communicative facts that justified the regularisation of language³. There are frequent comments on the fact that morphological changes and the state of evolution of the morphological system from IOE had a profound effect on syntax and the typological classification of English from the syntactic point of view. S. Eliasson (1980:130) is concerned with the correlation between morphology and syntax and makes reference to the traditional belief that English word order was fixed due to loss of the English inflectional system: «It is, of course commonplace in the linguistic literature that, as overt case marking gradually breaks down, greater demands are put on the rigidity of syntactic frames». This creates the possibility of understanding certain specific features of languages with one or other phonological and/or morphological structure:

(a) Greater word-length
smaller phoneme inventory

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Decreased word length-more
phonemic distinction

(b) Less fixed word
order-case marking

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More fixed word order-reducion
of case marking

² At first sight, the right branching and trailing sentences of some chancery records have given the impression that syntax was not as standardised as it seemed. The aforementioned variables are proof enough, but those doubt would have disappeared if Greenberg's typological classification was taken into account. The adj-noun position reflect the same pattern at other levels: the position of the genitive, adpositions, the position of the relative towards antecedent, comparative sentences, and the verb-subject position.

³ However, processes of standardisation usually depend highly on those features that linguistic communities consider a marker for their variety, the speakers' weak or strong bond to their community will operate in such processes leading to an acceptance of the standard variant or to the rejection of it. Those linguistic markers will then be the ones to be abandoned first or kept as a sign of those strong ties, one example is the Spanish /R/. Another feature is the preservation of the /θ/ <z> sound in mainland Spain.



This traditional approach obviously shows an overall evolution of the English language and not the processes that took place in each period. Even though it is true that the historical basis for many morphological, phonemic, lexical and syntactic features of the English language is evident from IOE onwards, it is also true that specific processes, such as the standardisation of English, had their own linguistic and social circumstances. The changes that led to a widespread use of certain linguistic features by the groups of speakers that mapped the linguistic situation of London were the same ones that resulted in the standardisation of the language. But whether those features were standardised at the same pace from the phonological, lexical, morphological or syntactic point of view is still uncertain. Specific syntactic features traditionally considered as signs of the incipient standard can be said to characterise this written variety of London English: the position of the adjective, the position of the genitive and the non-human tendency of the *of*-possessive, and so on. Fries (1969:303) uses these parameters as evidence for the rise of the syntactic standard.

It is probable that the standardisation of English, as seen in Chancery documents and other sources discussed below, took place in a slightly different order, as follows:

Syntax, morphology, phonology and lexis

Many morphological aspects became standardised after syntax. Morphological features underwent a sudden change by the IME period, but it is obvious that EmodE morphology did not change until much later. Contextual relevance to the evolution of language is sometimes forgotten. This process of simplification of the system had been taking place long before this period⁴, but the 14th c. is particularly relevant⁵, a time in which social relations and relations within society and

⁴ The grammatical rules that form a language are most frequently described as a theoretical set, and linguistic interaction is left aside as less relevant. However, this is not so when observing language change. These rules change from period to period. And they are, obviously, a continuum. When those changes end up in a different set of rules, it can be assumed, that a new historical period has been developed. Language is a historical continuum in which many historical disruptions may take place due to the internal evolution of the language «proper» or due to factors of a different nature, such as war, disease, population movements, changes in the social ranking of society or natural disaster. The Norman Conquest, the Hundred Year's War, and the 15th c. changes in the population stratification are examples for IME. Some works have not considered this fact, and have mistakenly proposed an earlier dating for the standardisation of morphology, or, simply disregarded the fact that the changes in the grammatical rules between the earliest EmodE and its later moments do show significant morphological discrepancies. Even though, it is not my intention to deny that the history of a language is a continuum, and that the observation of change in progress is possible, sometimes it is convenient to remember that the establishment of boundaries is needed.

⁵ Obviously (Expósito 2004), we can consider the evolution of language as a continuum, even though different historical stages prove that the language has changed to such a degree that a new historical stage has been reached. In this respect, and as regards the standardisation of the English language, it is impossible to reject the need to study this process in its own historical setting.

speech communities were important. The continuous turmoil between 1360 and 1430 and the constant later upheavals of the Hundred Years War had a profound effect upon speaker's attitudes within their groups and towards the rest of society and the bonds that they felt, which would ultimately lead to a period in which change took place rather faster. Other factors are also relevant. They seem to be the result of those new attitudes society was assuming, both before and after the decision to use English as the official language of the country. One important aspect is related to the rise of individualism and the concept of the 'subject' and its construction (Aers 1988: 17).

Individualism flourished. The wealthier tenants were accustomed to complete freedom in pursuing profit for themselves and their families, and they expected to wield power in economic terms. In consequence they were ready to resist outside demands which might limit their autonomy and hence their prosperity. Self-interest also dictated that they devote time and money to the manor court. (Aers 1988: 15).

Throughout this period the mobility of the population and the contact with other communities and social classes as well as economic growth are deeply related to feelings of individual identity as well as to the development of bonds within their communities that had linguistic consequences. This is also true of the later fifteenth century, as has been observed by Milroy 1992 and others. The development of the GVS was one important consequence, but most important of all were the relations within the communities and the linguistic reactions that population movements in the 14th c and subsequently had for the London speech communities and the different groups that resulted from the arrival of those newcomers.

[those labourers who refuse to accept the Statute] shall be put in the stocks for three days or more by the said lords, stewards, bailiffs and constables of the villis or sent to the nearest gaol, there to remain until they are willing to submit to justice. For this purpose stocks are to be constructed in every vill. (Dobson 1957: 65).

The political and affective positions towards the different social groups, frequent in the literature prior to and immediately after the early 15th c., led to new attitudes, and as time goes on those newcomers become another part of the London population, which would ultimately receive several influences upon their language. Kökeritz, in his analysis of the language of Shakespeare (1953:4), believes that there was a model for linguistic behaviour among certain circles used by outsiders, most with the conviction that regional dialectal features were to be got rid of, a feeling deeply rooted in the language of the period. These regional differences that he used were in all probability blended together, having a mutual effect on each other. Labov et al. (1968: 147) mentions that «In Shakespeare's texts, for example, Kökeritz finds ample support for the notions that the conservative system was identified with refined and aristocratic speech».

Ekwall (1956:xliv) comments on the fact that «the London language as we find it towards the end of the fourteenth century was a class dialect, the language spoken by the upper stratum of the London population».



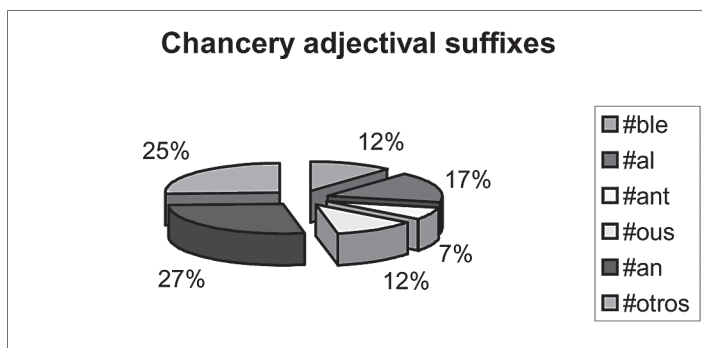
Beier and Finlay (1986:50) remark that «Because mortality was so high and its level largely exogenous to the economic situation of the metropolis, migration was the main cause of the growth of the population in London». Finlay (1981:52) points out that migrants might have come from a number of places, Kent being a possible source. Northern counties in which famine was causing devastation may also have been the place of origin of newcomers as they regarded London as a destination. Later similar movements caused new changes in language attitudes although these differed from those of the fifteenth century. However, the fact that those dialectal varieties were characterised by deep structural morphological differences from those of London and «standard» English is profoundly relevant⁶.

Thus, we reach the conclusion that language can be influenced by other languages to different degrees. That influence may be related to social factors such as the attitude towards the standard language, which by 1430 underwent a strong shift. These factors can perhaps be compared to the impact of the 14th c. population movements and by language contact between the incipient standard and other varieties whose speakers proved to have a «weak tie» to their communities. Those speakers left behind in the with confrontation with the powers that be, and in the political repression that followed.

The standardisation of morphology has usually been defined as the simplification of the morphological system; however, several new linguistic features were introduced in the system that were later abandoned both in the English of Chancery as well as in the general uses of later modern English and in the PDE standard. R. Lass maintains that by 1480 a period when English morphology looks «modern» has become established. Some of the variables he uses are the mark for the plural of verbs and infinitive ending. According to his data, ca 1420 there were 48 unmarked as against 52 marked verbs in the plural and 75 unmarked infinitives as against 25, by ca 1480 they were 72 to 28 plural endings and 98 to 2 infinitives. I have not included morphological data, even though reference will be made to some aspects later on.

The morphological features characteristic of the later standard are usually grouped as those that were simplified or generalised into their present-day forms. Thus, inflectional morphology of English shows several characteristics: the context of the article, noun endings in the plural (-es, -n, \emptyset) are still competing with one another and a constant flow from one system to the other is taking place. The genitive develops several forms other than the traditional ones that will later disappear. Some examples are those of the his-genitive, adjectives declined for number, and comparative and superlative forms (The comment about sixteenth century English «Although forms agreeing with Modern English practice predominated, instances of *more wild*, *learnedder*, and *most unkind*, etc., were frequent in Early Modern English [...].» (Görlach 1991: 36)). On the other hand, we find verbal

⁶ Syntax, on the other hand, was probably more highly influenced by foreign patterns such as those of French and Latin. It seems that in some way syntax was also less foregrounded, this is, rather below the level of consciousness in labovian terminology.



Graphic 1.

endings for the infinitive, the present plural and the preterit plural, verbal suffixes for the past participle, adverbs etc., that exhibit a strong tendency towards standardisation. Other morphological aspects are related to this pattern, adjectival suffixes being an example. The introduction of French elements is diminishing by this period, but still there are certain morphological elements from a French origin, frequently used in chancery, but as happened with the lexicon, more widely accepted as part of the language. These suffixes are «-ble, -al, -(e)ous, -an, -any, -ate, -ive, -ory, -ine». The most common ones are «-able, -al, -ant, -(e)ous and -an».

Suffixes with a French origin constitute 22% of the total number of adjectives, therefore they tend to be less frequent than those of a vernacular origin. Suffixes with a vernacular origin such as -ful, -ed, -y, and -ly are less used than the rest. Obviously, if we extrapolate from this, we might argue that, from the morphological point of view, many of these elements are by the fifteenth century normally used as native suffixes. Warren (1984:18, cited in Raumolin-Brunberg (1991:198)) includes the suffixes «-al, -an, -ar, -en, -ern, -ic, and -ly» and Raumolin-Brunberg finds adjective endings in «-al, -ic, and -ly» as elements with nominal or foreign origin stems.

The morphological features characteristic of the later standard are usually grouped as those that were simplified or generalised into their present forms. Thus, inflectional morphology of English shows several characteristics: the context of the article (pension, assumption «the Assumption»), noun plural endings (-es, -n, \emptyset) are still competing with one another and a constant flow among inflectional paradigms is taking place. The genitive develops several forms different from the traditional ones which will later disappear «pension even of our lady». This and other examples following the same pattern are a characteristic of IME (Lass 1992: 117 y 119) and one of its main transformations. They are usually referred to as «second genitive». The origin of these structures is found in 13th c dialectal varieties:

Beginning in the north and northeast midland in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, a new genitive type arose, with suffixed -(e)s, as in *your(e)s*, *her(e)s*,

our(e)s, etc. These spread gradually southwards, appearing in the southeast midlands in the later fourteenth century. The new forms were used (as they still are) in constructions where the possessed noun did not directly follow the genitive of the possessor [...].» The two examples found in the present corpus exhibit the peculiarity of having a pronoun functioning as head rather than a determiner-pronoun.

According to the Cambridge History of the English Language (Vol.II 98) the following developments take place as regard the plural ending of the verb and the ending of the infinitive between 1140-1480:

	Verb Plural		Infinitive	
	Marked	Unmarked	marked	Unmarked
ca 1480	5	95	0	100
ca 1390	16	84	56	44
ca 1420	48	52	75	25
ca 1420	72	28	98	2

As far as the English of chancery is concerned, there are several features that still do not show a morphological standardization. The first can be observed in the 3rd p. sg. Pres. Ind. ending *-eth/eþ* which significantly outnumbers *-es* (8 instances only). Other features, such as the use of plural adjectives are also present in these texts: *possessions Aliens, marchaunte3 artificers, lordes spirituelx and temporellx* (12 plural/11 singular examples), *letteres patentes* (91 versus one in the singular), *graciue or gracious(e)*₃ (examples in the plural and 12 in the singular), *jours severalx, certains endentures, 3our wyse3 discrecions, & gracioues lordshippis*. While they follow the English pattern, that is, if they precede their antecedent, the tendency is not to be inflected and examples are to be found, such as *certains endentures* (2 versus 26 uninflected), *diverse3 parties* (7 / 50 uninflected). The fact that this is not a favoured indication of standardization should in any case be taken into account, since such morphological variation and insecurity on the part of speakers are relevant in considering the consolidation of a standard; namely, premodifying adjectives are not likely to be inflected for the plural.

The plural morpheme *-en* is one of the elements that tends to recede in these documents, becoming a sporadic feature. It is only used in 37 of 212 documents. As regards the verbal inflection of *were*, the form *weren* appears 9 times whereas *were* appears 123 times.

The infinitive also follows the normal evolution and the loss of the *-en* ending is again the recessive feature, as is to be expected at this time. However, a non-chancery document still shows a ratio 18/3 *-en* endings *to prayen, to 3olden, to seyn, ...* Two other verbal features are representative of the later standard, first, forms for the past participle morphemes, since its morphological affixes were being lost: *-y-* is minority and the *-en* ending still used nowadays in some verbs did not appear in the same contexts. Secondly, *ing/-yng* is the usual inflection for the present participle.

As regards the morphology of pronouns, the influence on the third person plural pronouns does not seem to have encompassed all the cases yet since h-forms for the possessive appear at a ratio of 63/126 TH-forms and the dative/accusative ratio is 148 h- / 120 TH-. The nominative form is *they/pey*.

Thus, a possible conclusion is that by that time those features that characterize the syntax of English had undergone more changes and become closer to a standard than other linguistic domains such as morphology or lexis. The morphological features mentioned above are relevant to the rise in their standardization. The amount of simplification in the morphological system is high, but still unstable regarding certain aspects. In any case, I would place it after syntax in a standardisation scale.

Syntax morphology phonology lexis

Lententriccia's (1983:207) comment is relevant in the sense that it is important to pay attention to all cultural, social and historical movements in order fully to understand historical periods. Why a language changes more at some periods than at others. Why syntax was standardised soonest is closely related to the fact that the English language was used for most cultural activities and as the model of «linguistic perfection» (Görlach 1991: 30), a model which was considerably different in the syntactic domain.

[...] (2) the unavoidable given of all cognitive processes - that knowledge, however we may define it, is received through a situated human consciousness that has spatio-temporal location, idiosyncratic colorations, and philosophical and socio-political prejudices - this is in itself no excuse to give up the labors of research or the rigors of historical self-examination».

To sum up, language change, whether syntactic, morphological etc., does not seem to follow some specific pattern that is a universal. Language change is influenced by historical processes that emanate from human relationships; this does not, though, imply that such relations do not exist at deep structure level. However, non-linguistic events exert an important influence on language change. Processes of standardisation, which are after all the diffusion of a linguistic system over others, are particularly likely to be so influenced. By the 15th c. morphology underwent those changes at a different pace from those of syntax as regards patterns that implement the PDE typological construction.

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