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Morphological Spelling: Present-tense Verb Inflection in the Early Editions of *The Book of Good Maners*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at contributing to the discussion on the role of the early printers in the regularisation and standardisation of the English spelling. It assesses the degree of early printers' (in)consistency concerning morphological spelling, in particular the spelling of third person singular present tense (indicative) inflectional endings of verbs in six editions of *The book of good maners* (1487–1526), printed by William Caxton, Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde. The analysis suggests that early printers could have been interested in regularising spelling already before normative guidance from scholars became available in the form of grammars and spelling books, that is before the middle of the sixteenth century. However, the levels of the printers' spelling consistency varied, depending on the particular printing house and edition.

KEYWORDS: History of spelling; Early printed books; Early printers; Standardisation; Early Modern English.

1. INTRODUCTION: GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS

English spelling in the Early Modern English period is generally considered highly inconsistent, or even chaotic and random (e.g. Brengelman, 1980: 334; Salmon, 1999: 15; Scragg, 1974: 64). The situation is believed to have changed in the seventeenth century, with the regularisation and standardisation of orthography virtually completed between 1650 and 1700. These two processes are usually discussed jointly (see, for example, Brengelman, 1980: 334–335; Nevalainen, 2012: 133, 155; Rutkowska, 2005: 128–129, 2016: 165, 187; Salmon,

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1999: 20, 23, 28, 43), which is understandable because standardisation may be considered to involve regularisation and a standardised spelling system normally displays regularities of various kinds, including, among others, systematic (though potentially intricate) correspondences between graphemes and phonemes as well as consistent spellings of particular morphemes.[1]

Standardisation has been defined and explained in various ways, and here it is understood mainly as "suppression of optional variability" (Milroy & Milroy, 2012: 15) and "reduction of variation" (Moessner, 2012: 700). It affects mainly written language, spelling in particular, because "[i]t is only in the spelling system that full standardisation really has been achieved, as deviations from the norm (however logical) are not tolerated there" (Milroy & Milroy, 2012: 18). It is also generally agreed that standardisation is a multi-stage process. The best known (and most often cited) is probably Haugen's (1972: 110) division of this process into four stages, including selection of norm, codification of form, elaboration of function and acceptance by the community. Milroy and Milroy (2012: 22) expand this sequence of the steps leading to standardisation, dividing the whole process into selection, acceptance, diffusion, maintenance, elaboration of function, acquisition of prestige, codification, and prescription. This process, especially its stages of selection, diffusion, maintenance and codification, has been attributed to the activity of theoreticians (spelling reformers, grammarians and orthoepists), schoolmasters (Brengelman, 1980: 333–334; Salmon, 1999: 18; Scragg, 1974: 64) as well as to printers (Krapp, 1909: 172; Meurman-Solin, 2012: 674; Salmon, 1989, 1999: 19; Scragg, 1974: 70; Strang, 1970: 157–158).[2]

Nonetheless, there is still no consensus as to the nature of printers' contribution to the process of spelling standardisation, especially with regard to the situation in the first half of the sixteenth century, when grammars and spelling books are not yet available. Scragg states that "initially printing proved only a hindrance in the move towards orthographic uniformity" (1974: 64). He also explains that because of extended periods of time spent abroad (William Caxton) or non-native background (Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde) the early printers were "incapable of regularising the spelling of the material they set up in type" (1974: 66). One can find similar views in Brengelman (1980: 340), Nevalainen and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2006: 289) and Salmon (1999: 19). Brengelman also claims that "[i]t was clearly to the printers' advantage to maintain spelling flexibility, not to standardize" (1980: 333). Nevertheless, without detailed assessment of the orthographic usage of early printers, which can only be achieved by a whole sequence of various corpus-based studies, any such statements remain largely impressionistic and potentially incorrect. Some studies on early printers' orthographic practices (before 1700) have already been conducted (Aronoff, 1989; Blake, 1965; Horobin, 2001; Howard-Hill, 2006; Osselton, 1984; Rutkowska, 2005, 2013a, 2013b) and they all reveal some patterns and norms in their spelling. Recent corpus studies, especially Tyrkkö (2013) and Condorelli (in press b), referring to the notion of the community of practice, and/or examining large-scale corpora (Condorelli, in press a, in press

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b) shed new light on the importance of the printers' role in the orthographic regularisation and standardisation of English. This, however, is not yet sufficient for finally settling the question of printers' contribution to standardisation, because all the relevant studies published so far are necessarily limited and fragmentary by either focusing on few orthographic features (especially if offering a large-scale perspective) or investigating relatively small and homogeneous corpora, or both. Numerous other studies are still needed and welcome.

2. OBJECTIVES AND THE CORPUS

The present study aims at joining the efforts to determine the role of the early printers in the regularisation and standardisation of the English spelling. It assesses the degree of early printers' (in)consistency concerning the spelling of inflectional endings of verbs in the editions of *The book of good maners* [sic], published between 1487 and 1526. The analysis offered here focuses on the third person singular present tense (indicative) exponents in verbs, because only these present tense endings display variation necessary for a comparative study (see section 3 for details). The consistent orthographic shape of inflectional endings (as well as derivational affixes) is an aspect of morphological spelling. This term is included among the four linguistic criteria listed by Salmon (1999: 21), considered crucial in the process of spelling standardisation in English, beside the indication of vowel length, the level of homography and etymological spelling.[3] These issues can be found in the proposals of theoreticians and schoolmasters whose first treatises and handbooks, in which they expressed their views on spelling, emerged in the second half of the sixteenth century, gradually increased in number in the seventeenth century and proliferated in the eighteenth century. Whereas in the case of books printed in the second half of the sixteenth century and later printers' practices could potentially have been influenced by normative writings,[4] such impact is not a likely explanation for any consistent patterns in the late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century books, because prescriptive and proscriptive recommendations concerning orthography were then not yet available. Some studies (e.g. Aronoff, 1989; Rutkowska, 2005, 2013a, 2013b) confirm that early printers showed interest in regularising spelling without normative guidance from scholars.[5] Nonetheless, it remains a valid question how much orthographic regularisation can be noticed already in the earliest documents, printed before the middle of the sixteenth century.

There is evidence (e.g. Horobin, 2001: 256; Simpson, 1935: 49) that printers tended to imitate the spelling of important authors, so in order to identify the potential spelling policies of printers rather than authors, one should examine the spelling in an anonymous book, a translation, or an edition of a book whose original author had passed away by the time of its production and thus could not have any influence on their spelling (see also Rutkowska, 2013a: 17). These considerations motivated the choice of material to be investigated in the

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present corpus-based case study. The material for analysis comprises all the known English editions of *The book of good maners* (henceforth *BGM*), the first published by William Caxton (c. 1422–1491) in 1487, two editions by Richard Pynson (1448–1529), issued in 1494 and 1500, and three by Wynkyn de Worde (1455–1534),[6] printed in 1498, 1507 and 1526.[7] The book is Caxton's translation of *Livre de bonnes meurs* [sic], a collection of homilies, providing spiritual guidance, authored by Jacques Legrand (c. 1365–1415), aka Jacobus Magnus, first written in a manuscript (1400–1410), and first published in the printed form in French in 1478.[8] The editions were consulted in the form of facsimiles, and the surviving part of Caxton's edition also as a text transcription (available at EEBO). Following proofreading and some necessary corrections (introduced after careful comparison with the relevant facsimiles), this transcription of Caxton's edition, counting 42,601 words, formed the basis of the main corpus for this study. All the third person singular present tense forms were tagged in this text, and then the corresponding instances of relevant forms were identified in the facsimiles of the remaining editions under consideration. In the course of the examination of the facsimiles, it turned out that all the available copies of the editions (except the last one), were defective, with a few pages missing in each of them. In order to ensure full comparability across the witnesses, only the parts of the book overlapping in all the versions are taken into consideration in the analysis provided in the following sections. These parts represent 75% of each edition, corresponding to c. 36,000 words. Multiplying this amount by the number of editions, one can assume that the approximate size of the whole corpus searched through here amounts to 216,000 words. For the purpose of the calculation of and comparative analysis, a database (in the form of a set of tables) was set up, containing all the identified verb types and tokens.

3. LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS: PROCEDURES AND FINDINGS

The inventory of third person singular endings in the present tense recorded in the corpus under consideration comprises *-eth*, *-ethe*, *-yth*, *-ythe*, *-ith*, *-ithe*, *-th* and *-the*. The last two endings have been recorded almost exclusively in the verbs DO, GO, FLEE, HAVE, SAY, SEE and SLAY (with a few exceptions). The third person form of the verb BE has not been taken into consideration due to the low level of variation (nearly always *is*, exceptionally *ys*). The second person singular ending (*-est*) can also be found in the *BGM* editions, but variants are predictable in this case (*-st* in verbs with stems ending in a vowel and *-t* in *shalt* and *wilt*), rather than characteristic of individual printing houses, so they have not been included in the analysis. No inflectional endings have been found in the plural instances of the verbs in the present tense.

Altogether, 1,110 full sets of verbs (tokens) have been identified in the corpus, where each set comprises six token equivalents (one from each edition). Eighty-five sets were

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excluded from the corpus for different reasons, namely obliteration and omission of some tokens in particular editions, the use of forms other than the third person singular present indicative, typos rendering impossible the interpretation of the exact ending intended, lexical replacements preventing comparison across the editions.

For example, the finite form *wryteth* in Pynson (1494), in example (2) corresponds to the original present participle *wrytyng*, in example (1).[9]

(1) And to this purpoos Saynt gregory *wrytyng* to Nepocian sayth that the people of the chyrche ought not to take of theyr benefyces nomore (1487, D6v)
(2) And to this purpose seint gregory *wryteth* to Nepocyan seithe that the people of the church ought not to take of their benefices no more (1494, C8v)

Printers' morphological modifications included also changes from the present to the past, as in examples (3)–(4) and (5)–(6).

(3) And thus thauaricyous man *lyueth* al way in myserye (1487, C8v)
(4) And thus the auarycyous man *lyued* alwaye in myserye (1498, F6v)
(5) And Cassyodore in y^{e} .xiiii. epystle *sayth* that a man ought gladly to gyue (1507, E2r)
(6) And Cassyodore in the .xiii. ypystle *sayd* that a man ought gladly to gyue (1526, E2r)

Apart from morphological modifications, switches to a different lexical item are recorded, as in examples (7)–(8) and (9)–(10).

(7) and gyue them to the poure peple and folowe me as *recyteth* Saynt Mathew in his xvij chapytre (1487, D2r)
(8) and gyf them to the poure peple and folowe me. as *rehersith* Seint mathewe in his xvii chaptre (1494, C5v)
(9) as *enseyneth* macrobe in his book of saturnelles (1487, C7v)
(10) as *sayth* macrobe in his boke of saturnelles (1494, C4r)

The full sets included in the analysis cover 169 types of verbs, with each type corresponding to a separate lexeme. The most common types comprise SAY (220 tokens),[10] APPEAR (188 tokens), HAVE (96 tokens), RECOUNT (55 tokens), MAKE (48 tokens), RECITE (39 tokens) and SEEM (29 tokens). In the following analysis, most types of verbs are examined jointly, with the exception of the verbs in whose inflectional forms the distinction between the stem and the ending is problematic, because the former ends in a vowel. These verbs include 122 sets of tokens of the verbs HAVE, DO, GO, FLEE and SEE, which are discussed separately. Also the verb SAY is studied individually, as it is the most common type and also one yielding the biggest number of variants, amounting to ten.

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	-eth	*-ith*	*-yth*	*-ethe*	*-ithe*	*-ythe*	*-th*
1487	160/612	4/77	4/76	-	-	-	2/3
1494	147/543	30/158	5/7	28/48	4/9	2/2	1/1
1498	161/580	-	1/188	-	-	-	-
1500	149/594	2/3	1/5	55/165	-	1/1	-
1507	162/754	-	1/5	5/9	-	-	-
1526	162/764	-	-	3/3	-	-	1/1

Table 1. Third person singular present endings in the *BGM* editions (types/tokens).

Table 1 presents the ratio of types to tokens for the endings evidenced in the *BGM* editions.[11] The total number of types considered in this table is 162 and the number of tokens 768. The tokens sum up to the same total for each edition, but the types do not (except for de Worde's edition of 1498), because the same type of verb may be expressed by different variants of the ending, e.g. in Caxton's edition APPEAR may take the endings *-eth*, *-ith* and *-yth* in the third person singular. Caxton employed altogether four exponents of the third person singular in different proportions, including *-eth*, which covers 79.7% of the tokens, *-ith* (10%), *-yth* (10%) and *-th* (0.3%), but *-eth* is used in 160 out of 162 types of verbs.

Pynson was much less consistent, especially in his first edition (1494), employing as many as seven different endings: *-eth* (70.7%), *-ith* (20.5%), *-ethe* (6.3%), *-ithe* (1.2%), *-yth* (0.9%), *-ythe* (0.3%) and *-th* (0.1%), but despite the high number of alternatives, *-eth* prevails over the other variants. This becomes even clearer in his second edition (1500), where the share of *-eth* rises to 77.3% of the tokens, and *-ethe* replaces *-ith* as the second best variant (21.5%), with *-yth* (0.7%), *-ith* (0.4%) and *-ythe* (0.1%) as marginal options.

The ending *-eth* also predominates in de Worde's editions, already in the first one (1498), occurring in three quarters of the instances (75.5%), which is a number slightly lower than in Caxton's edition and Pynson's edition of 1494. At a closer look at de Worde's usage, it can be argued, however, that his level of consistency was not lower than Caxton's, because his use of the variants is far from haphazard, as he employs *-eth* for all but one lexeme, APPEAR, for which he reserves the ending *-yth* (see example 13). Moreover, not a single verb type in this edition has more than one variant of the third person singular, compared to seven verbs (types) with two variants each in Caxton and 39 in Pynson (both in 1494 and 1500) as well as one verb with three variants in Caxton, and 11 verbs with three to five variants in Pynson's edition of 1494 (lowered to two in 1500). In his second edition (1507) and the third one (1526), de Worde uses the variant *-eth* in 98.2% and 99.5% of the tokens, and abandons *-yth* as a special exponent of the third person singular for the verb APPEAR. However, in 1507 he also allows for slight inconsistency to creep into the usage, with *-ethe* occurring in 1.1% and *-yth* in 0.7% of the tokens. In 1526 the use of *-ethe* is limited to 0.4% of the tokens. The only instance of *-th* could be a typo. In fact, the single instances of endings other than the default *-eth* in the last two editions of the *BGM* can be explained as the result of (presumably)

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using Pynson's edition (1500) as the copy-text. On the other hand, the employment of *-yth* in de Worde's first edition (1498) could have been caused by the abundance of the *-yth* variant in the first pages of Caxton's edition, which de Worde must have followed when preparing his own version, where the form *apperyth* is particularly common. Apparently, although Caxton used also other variants for the verb APPEAR later on in his edition, and most commonly *-eth*, de Worde must have decided to keep employing *-yth* for this particular verb to ensure consistency, as it was probably too late to change it (the first pages could have been already printed or at least typeset), when he realised Caxton's inconsistency. This is remarkable because it shows de Worde's attempt at lexical distinction among verbs, testifying to a high degree of linguistic awareness. Examples (11)–(14) illustrate typical endings of APPEAR, one of the most common verb in the *BGM* (188 tokens), and their evolution in equivalent passages in selected editions.

(11) as it *apperyth* the fyfthe chapytre of the book of hester / By the whyche hystoryes it *appereth* how many somtyme were ryght renomed for their lyberalyte (1487, C8r)
(12) as it *apperith* in the v chaptre of the boke of hester. By the whiche histories it *apperithe* howe many somtime were right renomed for their liberalite (1494, C4r)
(13) as it *apperyth* the .v. chapytre of the boke of Hester. By the whiche hystoryes it *apperyth* how many somtyme were ryght renõmed for theyr lyberalyte (1498, F6r)
(14) as it *appereth* the .v. chapytre of the booke of Hester. By whiche hystoryes it *appereth* how many some tyme were ryght renõmed for theyr lyberalyte (1507, E3r)

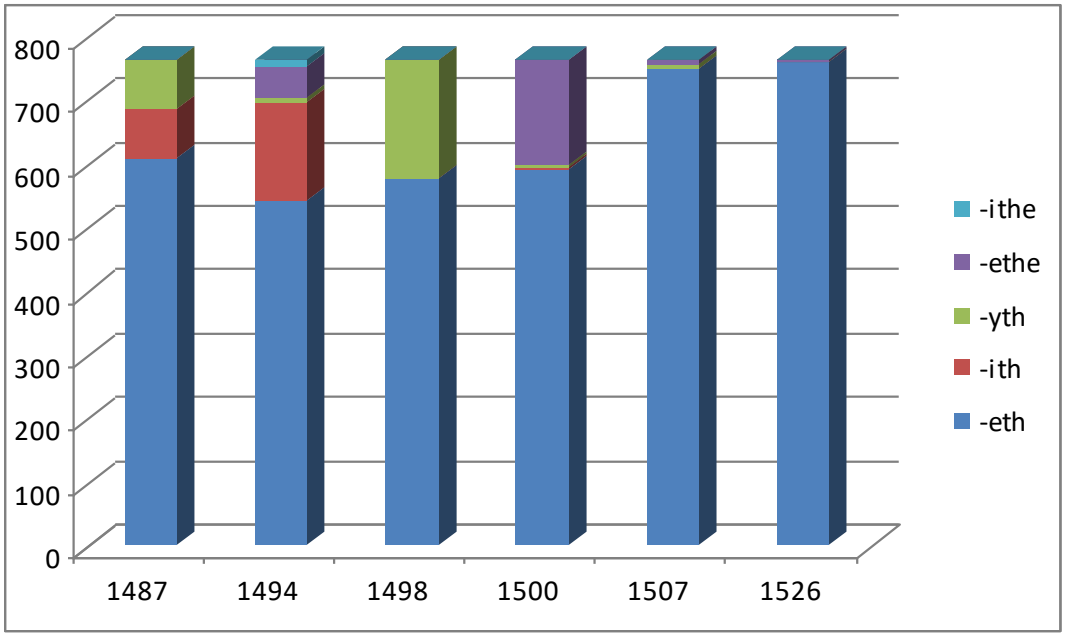

Figure 1. Tokens of the third person singular present indicative endings in the *BGM* editions.

Figure 1 (based on the data provided in Table 1) visualises the choices of the endings (tokens) by particular printers. This figure contains only the main five variants, excluding the

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marginal *-ythe* and *-th*. It shows clear prevalence of *-eth* as the exponent of the third person singular indicative in all the editions, with the growing level of consistency regarding its use in the last editions, as well as the changing importance of the other endings, from both *-ith* and *-yth* in Caxton, to *-ith* in Pynson (1494), *-yth* in de Worde (1498) and *-ethe* in Pynson (1500).

	HAVE	**DO**	**GO**	**FLEE**	**SEE**	**SLAY**
1487	*hath* (96)	*dooth* (10) *doth* (6) *doeth* (3)	*gooth* (2)	*fleeth* (1)	*seeth* (3)	*sleeth* (1)
1494	*hath* (91) *hathe* (5)	*doth* (13) *dothe* (6)	*goth* (1) *gothe* (1)	*fleeth* (1)	*seth* (2) *seethe* (1)	*sleth* (1)
1498	*hath* (96)	*doth* (10) *dooth* (9)	*gooth* (1) *goth* (1)	*fleeth* (1)	*seeth* (3)	*sleeth* (1)
1500	*hath* (57) *hathe* (39)	*doth* (9) *dothe* (6) *dooth* (4)	*goethe* (1) *goth* (1)	*fleeth* (1)	*seeth* (2) *sethe* (1)	*sleeth* (1)
1507	*hath* (79) *hathe* (17)	*doth* (14) *dooth* (3) *doeth* (1) *dothe* (1)	*goth* (2)	*fleeth* (1)	*seeth* (3)	*sleeth* (1)
1526	*hath* (89) *hathe* (7)	*doth* (14) *dooth* (2) *dothe* (2) *doeth* (1)	*goth* (2)	*fleeth* (1)	*seeth* (2) *seth* (1)	*sleeth* (1)

Table 2. Third person singular present forms in the *BGM* editions ending in *-th* and *-the.*

Table 2 contains all the tokens of the full forms of the remaining verb lexemes (HAVE, DO, GO, FLEE, SEE and SLAY) in the third person singular, ending in *-th* and *-the*,[12] following a stem whose final sound is a vowel. Admittedly, forms such as *fleeth*, *seeth* and *sleeth* could also be classified as containing the ending *-eth*, but by analogy to forms such as *dooth* and *gooth*, I have decided to consider the doubling of the grapheme, <ee>, as indicating vowel length and thus constituting an integral part of the stem of each relevant verb. Once again, it turns out that variation is high in Pynson's versions of the book, but variants appear also in Caxton's edition, in the verb DO, and in de Worde's one, in DO, GO, and later also in HAVE and SEE. In nearly all the verbs included here (presumably apart from HAVE), the variation can be connected with the uncertainty as to whether the length of the vowel in the stem should be indicated by doubling the vowel grapheme. The preferences can only be reliably determined in the case of the verb HAVE, with *hath* as the only allowed variant in Caxton and the first edition of de Worde (1498), and the largely prevailing one in Pynson's first edition (1494),

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covering 94.8% of the tokens. However, the proportions are drastically different in Pynson's second edition (1500), with the share of the still more frequent variant *hath* dropping to 59.4% of the tokens, to the benefit of *hathe*, which covers the remaining 40.6%. Some less evident inclinations among the printers can also be spotted in the usage of DO, with *dooth* dominating in Caxton (52.6%), and *doth* in Pynson (68.4% in 1494, but 47.4% in 1500) and in de Worde (52.6% in 1498, 73.7% in 1507 and 1526). As in the case of the verbs discussed above (see Table 1), also in this group of verbs Pynson is the first printer allowing the final <e> in the third person singular present forms. The proportions of the forms in de Worde's later editions, with *hathe* recorded in 17.7% and 7.3% of the tokens in 1507 and 1526, respectively, might indicate some degree of influence from Pynson's edition presumably used as the copy-text.

	sayth	***saythe***	***sayeth***	***sayethe***	***saith***	***saithe***	***seith***	***seithe***	***seyth***	***seythe***
1487	155	-	1	-	64	-	-	-	-	-
1494	16	8	-	-	83	7	93	7	2	4
1498	220	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1500	99	39	-	1	67	13	-	-	1	-
1507	210	4	3	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
1526	210	6	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	-

Table 3. Tokens of the third person singular present forms of the verb SAY in the *BGM* editions.

As regards SAY, the most frequent verb in the *BGM*, Caxton employed three variants, but his usage, with *sayth* (70.4% of the tokens) prevailing over *saith* (29.1%), was much more consistent than Pynson's. The only one instance of the variant *sayeth* (0.5%) can be interpreted as a typo. No distinction between <i> and <y> is made in Caxton' edition, as they are used interchangeably in the forms under consideration (see also Table 1). This contrasts with the practice in de Worde's printing house, where <y> is favoured in the third person singular form of SAY. Pynson, in 1494, used as many as eight variants, with two nearly equally common endings, *seith* (42.3% of the tokens), recorded only in his first edition, and *saith* (37.7%), as well as six minor ones, including *sayth* (7.3%), *saythe* (3.6%), *seithe* (3.2%), *saithe* (3.2%), *seythe* (1.8%) and *seyth* (0.9%). In the edition of 1500, the number of alternatives is reduced to six, with a switch to *sayth* as the preferred variant (45%), perhaps influenced by de Worde's edition of 1498, and with two other important ones, *saith* (30.4%) and *saythe* (17.7%), as well as three marginal ones, *saithe* (5.9%), *sayethe* (0.5%) and *seyth* (0.5%).

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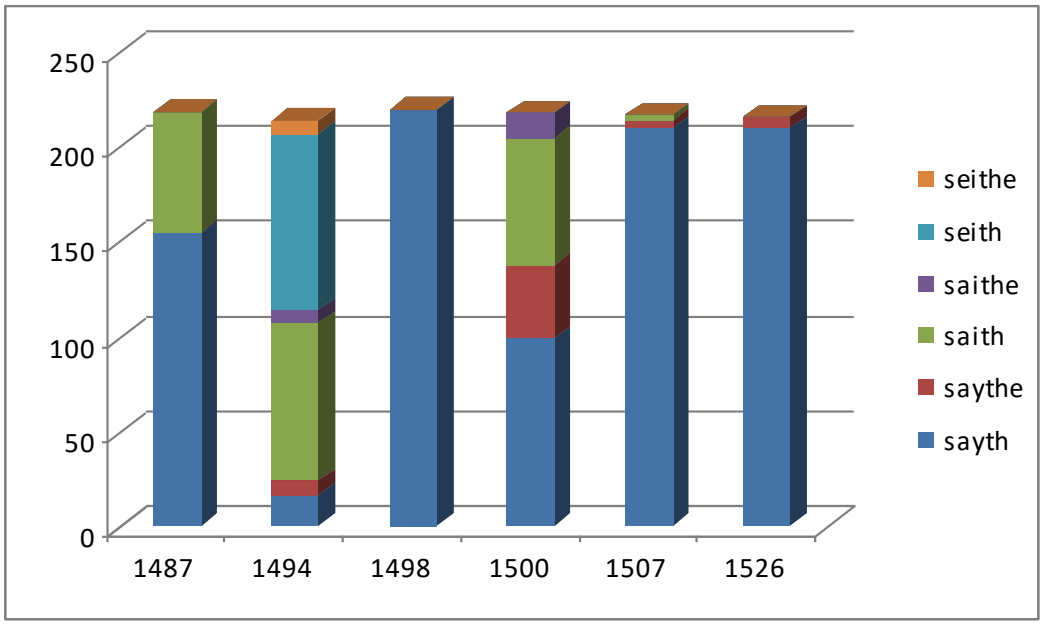

Figure 2. Tokens of the third person singular present forms of the verb SAY in the *BGM* editions.

Expectedly (in view of the findings presented in the previous tables), the data in Table 3 show the highest level of spelling regularisation in de Worde (especially in 1498) and the lowest in Pynson (especially in 1494). Thus, in his first edition, de Worde employed only one spelling (*sayth*) of the verb SAY in the third person singular present tense throughout the whole book. He was not perfectly consistent, though, in the following editions (1507 and 1526) using *sayth* in 95.4% of the tokens, and marginally *saythe* (1.8% in 1507 and 2.7% in 1526), *sayeth* (1.4% in both editions), *saith* (in 1507, 1.4%) and *seyth* (in 1526, 0.5%). The marginal variants, again, could have resulted from lack of sufficient care while copying the text from the previous editions. Figure 2 offers a visualisation of the printers' preferences concerning the six most frequent variants of the verb SAY, indicating, among others, the importance of the form *sayth* in the majority of the editions, as well as the dramatic changes in Pynson's usage between 1494 and 1500.

Examples (15)–(17) present the typical variants of SAY in the third person singular in all selected editions. Additionally, these passages contain the equivalent forms of the verbs PLEASE and DO.

(15) THe scrypture *sayth* that obeyssannce *pleseth* more vnto god / than *doth* sacrefyse. (1487, B1r)
(16) THe scripture *seith* that obeisaũce *pleasith* more vnto god than *doth* sacrifice. (1494, A7v)
(17) THe scrypture *sayth* that obeyssaunce *pleaseth* more vnto god than *dooth* sacrefyce. (1498, C1v)

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4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the spellings of the third person singular present tense ending in the editions of *The book of good maners* has shown that even the earliest printers displayed some regularising tendencies in their spelling practice, albeit with different levels of consistency, depending on the particular printing house and edition. It also reveals that morphological spelling was not a new invention of the seventeenth-century orthographers (compare Brengelman, 1980: 346), but that the beginnings of the trend to spell morphemes consistently are identifiable already in the incunabula and early sixteenth-century printed books, at least with reference to the suffix under consideration.[13]

The findings also indicate that the spellings of the third person singular present tense suffix in de Worde's first edition (1498) resemble Caxton's (1487) rather than Pynson's (1494) usage, which suggests that de Worde did not employ Pynson's edition as the copy-text. However, the compositor(s) of Pynson's second edition (1500) may have been influenced by de Worde's edition of 1498 (as implied by the switch to *sayth* as the main variant of SAY). In turn, de Worde seems to have changed the copy-text from Caxton's edition for Pynson's second edition (1500), when preparing his second and third editions (in 1507 and 1526, respectively). It is suggested by several influences from that edition, for example, the higher percentage of tokens representing variants which end in <e>. Nonetheless, de Worde stayed relatively faithful to Caxton's edition and improved upon its consistency. Although, according to Blake (with reference to his edition of *Reynard the Fox*), "it cannot be proved that de Worde was responsible for the changes, for his compositor might have made most of them" (1965: 76), considering the similarity of the findings in the present study to those reported in the earlier ones, by different authors, as regards the level of orthographic consistency in de Worde's editions of various books (Aronoff, 1989; Blake, 1965; Rutkowska, 2005, 2013a, 2013b), it seems very likely that a specific spelling policy must have been among the priorities of everyday practice in his printing house. It turns out then that treating all the early printers in the same way, as unable to contribute to the regularisation of English spelling, is not fair and does not improve the understanding of the actual state of affairs, especially with regard to de Worde.

One can ask why early printers made any efforts at regularising the spelling. According to Krapp (1909: 172), Howard-Hill (2006: 21, 27), Simpson (1935: 52–53, 59) and Voeste (2012: 167–168), clear spelling rules sped up the typesetting process, and thus the efficiency of the business enterprise, so printers' motivations must have been practical rather than theoretical. The practical and socio-pragmatic aspects of early printers' spelling practices and the rationale behind them are further examined and explained in recent studies, for example Tyrkkö (2013), Condorelli (in press a, in press b).

The processes of regularisation and standardisation of the English spelling were undoubtedly complex phenomena which took centuries to complete, but in the absence of any

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institution regulating spelling, one can assume that the joint efforts of individual printing houses (comprising both master printers and their employees) at spelling regularisation could have contributed to the final effect of the standardised orthography, as argued in recent studies reported by Tyrkkö (2013) and Condorelli (in press b). Nevertheless, in view of the findings of the present study, it should be emphasised that regularisation within particular printing houses did not always correlate closely with the final output of standardisation. For instance, some of de Worde's most regular and consistent spellings (such as *sayth* and *apperyth*) did not ultimately become part of the later dominant supralocal modern spelling standard in English. This, however, does not diminish the importance of early printers' efforts at spelling regularisation for the process of standardisation in the long run, because what counts at this stage is not the eventual preservation of particular forms, but rather the modernity of attitude itself, involving the recognition of the need for spelling rules and the care for detail (see Aronoff [1989: 93] and Fisher [1977: 883], for similar opinions).

Obviously, further research, both quantitative and qualitative, concerning spelling patterns in early printed books is still necessary in order to confirm the role of the printers in the regularisation and standardisation of English spelling, taking into consideration different orthographic criteria as well as examining a variety of corpora and text types. The present study is, in fact, part of a larger project (similar to that reported in Rutkowska [2013a]), which aims at investigating other variables within the criterion of morphological spelling (e.g. the spelling of the plural ending in nouns) as well as within the other criteria listed by Salmon (1999: 21), particularly etymological spelling, indication of vowel length and the differentiation between homographs, in all the available editions of *The book of good maners*.

NOTES

1 See Rutkowska and Rössler (2012: 215–216) for an overview of the main types of spelling regularities, translatable into principles governing orthographic systems.

2 The definition of *printer* assumed in this study is a generalisation, comprising the master printer, journeymen and compositors, so it actually denotes a printing house. It should also be stressed that early printers (before the 1570s) were simultaneously publishers and book traders (Raven, 2007: 37).

3 The present piece of research can be considered a follow-up to Rutkowska (2005) based on 6,000 words long samples from all the surviving English editions of *The book of good maners (BGM)*, which investigated the distribution of several variables within these four criteria.

4 Although some correlations between theoreticians' and schoolmasters' opinions and printers' spellings can be found in late-sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century books, clear influences are difficult (if possible) to prove even in the seventeenth century (see Rutkowska 2013a, 2013b, 2016).

5 Compare Berg and Aronoff (2017), who claim that the spelling regularisation of selected derivational suffixes was due to self-organising forces in the English writing system.

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6 I am referring to each printing house by the name of its master printer for the sake of presentation simplicity, as it could be irritating to the reader to encounter such phrases as "Pynson's printing house" or "de Worde's journeymen and compositors" repeated dozens of times.

7 In contrast to EEBO, ESTC suggests the date 1517 for the last edition (see citation no. S104159).

8 French witnesses of this popular book comprise altogether over seventy manuscripts and fourteen printed editions (*Arlima*). Before the English version, a few other French editions were published, in c. 1480, c. 1483, 1486 and 1487. It is not clear which witness Caxton used as the basis of his translation.

9 In the citations from the *BGM*, the capital letter refers to the quire, the number to the leaf and the small letter to the side of the leaf, i.e. *r* to the front side (*recto*) and *v* to the back side (*verso*). Emphasis (italics) in all the examples is mine.

10 Including one instance (per edition) of the compound GAINSAY, spelt either jointly or separately, depending on the edition.

11 All the numbers in the tables are raw values. Normalisation has been considered unnecessary, in view of the ensured comparability among the editions.

12 Excluding the exceptional forms of other verbs (included in Table 1) found in Caxton (*adressth*, *ansuerth*), Pynson (*mayntenth*) and de Worde (*apperth*).

13 According to one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper, the assumption that consistency could be early printers' goal is anachronistic. However, the findings reported here as well as in the other studies cited above seem to provide sufficient evidence to justify postulating printers' agency in the process of spelling regularisation. After all, regularisation and standardisation did not happen overnight, and neither did texts suddenly switch from pre-standard to standard ones. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries these processes were already under way and printers' practices are likely to have contributed to them.

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