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Supralocalisation Processes in Early Modern English Urban Vernaculars: New Manuscript Evidence from Bristol, Coventry and York

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to existing studies that are concerned with standardisation and supralocalisation processes in the development of written English during the Early Modern English period. By focussing on and comparing civic records and letter data from important regional urban centres, notably Bristol, Coventry and York, from the period 1500–1700, this study provides new insight into the gradual emergence of supralocal forms. More precisely, the linguistic variables under investigation are third person indicative present tense markers (singular and plural). The findings of this study reveal that each urban centre shows a unique distribution pattern in the adoption of supralocal -(V)*s* singular and plural zero form. Furthermore, verb type as well as text type appear to be important language internal and external factors respectively.

KEYWORDS: Supralocalisation; Urban vernaculars; Letters; Civic records; Third person indicative present tense markers; Bristol; Coventry; York.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of written Standard English has received much scholarly attention in English historical linguistics. While earlier studies focussed on the origins of written Standard English from a historical dialectology point of view (Fisher, 1977, 1996; Samuels, 1963), in more recent years, the focus has shifted to explaining the processes involved in its development over time (Benskin, 1992; Wright, 1996, 2000). Moreover, the development of the field of historical sociolinguistics and the application of the corpus linguistics approach have led to the study of new data, e.g. ego-documents, letters, drama dialogues, that in turn have shed new light on standardisation processes (Culpeper & Kytö, 2010; Evans, 2015; Nevalainen, 2000, 2003; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003). After all, this type of data, which can be relatively informal and closer to the oral register, may be seen as complementary to more formal data which has traditionally been studied. The combination and comparison of this multitude of data allow us to better understand language variation and change, as well as the role of relevant factors, in the period under investigation; more precisely, the investigation of corpora such as the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC), *A Corpus of English Dialogues (1570–1800)* (CED), *The Old Bailey Corpus* (1674–1913) (OBC) allows researchers to correlate social factors such as gender, level of formality, age and social standing with linguistic variation. It is this combination of formal and informal sources that the current paper will be concerned with. In addition, in line with Hope (2000: 49; as well as Benskin, 1992; Nevalainen, 2000; Wright, 1996, 2000), this paper challenges the "single-ancestor dialect hypothesis", which was based on a small set of texts from the metropolis alone and was scrutinised for features resembling those of the so-called Chancery Standard, glossing over the fact that many of these texts showed a wide range of variations in other respects (c.f. Fisher, 1977, 1996; Fisher et al., 1984; Samuels, 1963).[1] After all, as Nevalainen (2000: 329) notes, we are dealing with "a variety of processes of supralocalisation which involved linguistic features of diverse regional and social origins". Considering different text types from different regions will therefore provide us with a better understanding of the standardisation processes.

The current study is couched in the project *Emerging Standards: Urbanisation and the Development of Standard English, c. 1400–1700* (EMST), which investigates the role of regional urban centres in the supralocalisation of national norms. While London is often identified as the catalyst of linguistic innovation due to its demographic as well as economic and political prominence, considerably less is known about how and at what rate supralocal forms diffused to and from London. To tackle this, the EMST project systematically investigates the written varieties of four regional centres with high levels of literacy and text production over the period 1400–1700 in the main Middle English dialect areas (broad subdivision), i.e. York (North), Bristol (South West), Coventry (West Midlands), Norwich (East Anglia). The investigation of selected linguistic features and the comparison across time, text type and place sheds light on the supralocalisaton processes that took place in the Late

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Middle English (LME) and Early Modern English (EModE) periods. Moreover, even though a substantial amount of EModE texts is by now available from existing corpora, the project's urban centres are underrepresented in these corpora. To that end, digital corpora of local texts representing both formal and informal types of writing have been and are being compiled as part of the project.

Within this context, the main objective of the current paper is to investigate linguistic variables that displayed much variation and eventually changed during the period 1400 and 1700, namely the third person indicative present tense inflections; in particular the replacement of the suffix -(V)*th* by -(V)*s* in the singular (cf. Auer, 2018; Cole, 2014; Evans, 2015; Gries & Hilpert, 2010; Holmqvist, 1922; Kytö, 1993; Moore, 2002; Nevalainen, 2018; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003; Stein, 1987; Wright, 2002) and the emergence of -∅ over -(V)*s*, -(V)*th* and -(V)*n* in the plural (cf. Bailey & Ross, 1988; Cole, 2014; McIntosh, 1983; Schendl, 1994; Wright, 2002). As regards the singular, the Northern variant -(V)*s* can ultimately be found in the written norm today, which is why this morphological change provides an interesting case study of supralocalisation processes. According to Holmqvist (1922) and other accounts (cf. Moore, 2002; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003), the spread of the Northern dialect feature may be explained through mass migration from the North into London, from where it then spread further across the South and the rest of the country. As London is to date considered to be the place from where the supralocal form was transmitted, the question arises as to what data from regional urban centres reveal regarding the spread of the -(V)*s* variant. More specifically, based on the data that have been transcribed and digitized so far, this paper will investigate how the third person indicative present tense inflections (singular and plural) developed in Bristol, Coventry and York, and what a comparison of the findings contributes to the traditional supralocalisation account.[2]

The article is structured as follows: section 2 provides a brief overview of the linguistic variables under investigation and discusses some relevant previous studies. Section 3 describes the relevant datasets and outlines the method employed in some detail. Section 4 presents and discusses the findings from the different urban regional centres. Finally, the concluding remarks section considers the main findings of the current study and outlines future research directions related to the data under investigation.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THIRD PERSON PRESENT TENSE MARKERS

The distribution of the possible variants for both the singular and the plural third person indicative present tense inflections can shed light on supralocalisation processes in the LME and EModE periods. Firstly, as regards the development of the singular inflection, the Northern inflection -(V)*s* initially existed alongside two other forms, i.e. -(V)*th* and the zero morpheme -∅. It eventually became the supralocal form between 1400 and 1700, as well as part of the

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written standard variety (cf. Kytö, 1993; Nevalainen, 2018; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003). The same three variants, as well as -(V)*n*, were also used in the plural, and the -(V)*s* and -(V)*th* forms even had similar geographical origins (Schendl, 1994: 146). Despite this overlap, most studies have only considered the variants of the third person singular indicative present tense to date, except for Schendl (1994), Wright (2002) and Gordon (2017). As Schendl (1994: 146) noted that some of the plural inflections, chiefly -(V)*s* but to some extent also -(V)*th*, may have been introduced into the paradigm through analogy with the third person singular forms, it seems conducive to investigate both the singular and plural in order to determine possible patterns and tendencies in the overall distribution of the third person indicative inflection, and through that the supralocalisation of -(V)*s* and -∅ in the singular and plural endings respectively. Both singular and plural forms of the third person indicative present tense in Bristol, Coventry and York will therefore be focussed on in the current article.

2.1. General development of the third person indicative present tense inflection

The earliest instances of the -(V)*s* form were found in tenth-century Northumbrian texts. By the LME period, -(V)*s* was most frequently used as an inflectional marker for both the third person indicative plural and singular inflection (Kytö, 1993; Lass, 1992, 1999; Schendl, 1994; Stein, 1987). The -(V)*th* form was initially associated with the south of England, for both the singular and plural inflection (cf. Gordon, 2017: 334), and to some extent the Midland areas, where the -(V)*s* inflection was also sometimes used around 1300 (Lass, 1992: 137). By the fourteenth century, -(V)*s* was increasingly used in London texts for the singular (Kytö, 1993: 115), and in the sixteenth century, the Southern -(V)*th* briefly competed with -(V)*s* in the North (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003: 178). The -∅ variant for the singular inflection only emerged during the fifteenth century. Few examples have been found so far, which may be explained through the functional load that the variant had gained as a marker of other inflections, such as the infinitive, the present subjunctive and the prevailing third person plural present indicative (Kytö, 1993: 118). The -(V)*n* ending for the plural inflection (especially written with medial *e*) is considered to have been a "distinctively midland plural" (Lass, 1992: 137), although the -(V)*s* form, which was more common in the North, has been attested there as well.

Regarding the plural inflection during the LME period, McIntosh (1983: 235, 243) argues that a so-called "Midland paradigm" was in place between the 'Chester-Wash line' and a line running "roughly […] from Shrewsbury to the Thames estuary". In this paradigm, -(V)*th* was used for the third person singular indicative present tense inflection and -*e*(*n*) or -∅ for the plural in the above-defined Midland region. The -(V)*s* form was no longer found here, and south of this area, -(V)*th* was used both in the singular and the plural (see above). This crude geographical division does not seem to work entirely, as Schendl (1994: 148) remarks that the -(V)*th* form was on occasion used for the third person plural indicative in LME texts from the

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Midlands, which McIntosh (1983) considers a result of language contact between people from the Midland region and the North. Stein (1987: 431) furthermore points out that "older plural forms in th continue in the Midland area in hath and doth". What is more, in LME Northern texts, -(V)*th* also occurred as a variant of third person plural -(V)*s*, which coincides with the period in which the third person singular -(V)*th* was competing with -(V)*s* in both the South and the North (Moore, 2002; Fernández-Cuesta, 2014). Even though McIntosh's (1983) division may account for the majority of the attested plural inflections, this indicates that there are other forms to be found in the different regions. Further investigation of other localities is necessary to better understand the geographical distribution of this variable.

Until c. 1350, -(V)*th* was the only variant used in London for the plural inflection. After this point, the Midland -(V)*n* form was occasionally used as well (Lass, 1992: 137). However, the Midland -(V)*n* inflection in the plural quickly disappeared from writing throughout England, and the use of this variant after 1500 "has generally been interpreted as a literary archaism" (Schendl 1994: 144). The fast disappearance of -(V)*n* may be linked to the infinitive suffix -*an*, which developed into -*en* through the neutralisation of unstressed vowels (Lass, 1992: 96–97; cf. Schendl, 1994: 146). The vowel in third person indicative -(V)*n* ending, usually an *e* as well, became less distinctive as a result, similar to how -∅ for the third person singular indicative present tense became less marked, as the same form also developed in several other verbal paradigms (see above). In both the plural indicative and infinitive forms, -∅ eventually became part of the standardised variety of English. Even though both conjugations show a similar tendency to loss between 1250 and 1450, they seem to have evolved independently, with the infinitive -(V)*n* ending starting to drop later but "picking up speed until it outruns the plural" (Lass, 1992: 97).

All in all, texts from the LME and EModE periods present us with a fairly complex set of third person singular and plural inflections: initially, -(V)*s* and -(V)*th*, but also -∅ could appear as third person plural and singular markers in the North and South. Eventually, in EModE texts, -∅ came to prevail over -(V)*th*, -(V)*s* and -(V)*n* in the third person plural inflection, while -(V)*s* became the majority singular marker that almost completely supplanted -(V)*th*.[3]

3. DATA AND METHOD

In order to trace the development of supralocal forms in the written varieties of the respective regional centres in the period 1400–1700, the *Emerging Standards* project compiles digitally searchable corpora. By including newly transcribed ego-documents and other text types that are representative of urban text communities, e.g. ordinances, accounts (of guilds, cathedrals, parishes, etc.), various civic records, court leet documents, deposition, wills, plays (mystery plays), letters (private, business) and diaries, the project complements existing datasets and

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corpora in English historical linguistics (cf. Auer et al., 2016).[4] As the project aims at capturing written language as it was used in an urban setting, the origin of a text's scribe was not a text selection criterion (but served for the interpretation of the results), whereas the place and purpose of writing was. For instance, most civic records were written in the relevant city and intended for the local community. For personal correspondence, on the other hand, more careful considerations have to be made as letters were generally less restricted to space. The content of the letters and autobiographical information allowed us to determine whether the authors lived in the relevant city at the time of writing or whether they had lived in the city previously and maintained close connections with people there.

Based on the material that has been transcribed and digitized so far, in the following subsections, the datasets from Bristol, Coventry and York on which the current study is based will be briefly presented.

3.1. *Emerging Standards* data

3.1.1. Bristol dataset

The Bristol dataset comprises a collection of letters covering the period 1550–1700 and council and guild ordinances covering the period 1500–1600. The ordinances are contained in a volume called *the Council ordinances of Bristol* (henceforth COB), which appears to be a continuation of two earlier volumes known as the *Little red book* and *Great red book of Bristol* respectively. There is evidence to suggest that the earlier entries of the COB are fair copies of parts of a missing volume which must have been copied into the COB somewhere between 1506 and 1570 (see Stanford [1990: xviii] for a more detailed discussion). Based on this, we can say that at least the data give an insight into variation and change in the last half of the sixteenth century. Very little is known about the scribes who produced the texts.

The correspondence is drawn from two collections: the Southwell papers and the Ashton Court collection. The Southwells owned property in Kingsweston, just outside of Bristol (Barnard, 2004). The collection consists of ten volumes of which the first two volumes contain late seventeenth century letters that were written in Bristol and addressed to the Southwells. The Ashton Court collection contains correspondence by and to the Smythe family, who, starting out as merchants, became extremely wealthy and influential in the Bristol area through clever land investments and intermarriage with prominent families of the landed gentry as well as nobility that had close ties with the royal court (Bantock, 1982; Bettey, 1982, 2004; Vanes & Angus, 1974).

As concerns the authorship of the letters, a substantial number of the Ashton Court collection was written by female family members. Given the low literacy rates amongst women at the time, there is a possibility that they dictated their letters (Cressy, 1980). However, there was no reason to assume that this was the case for the letter writers of the Bristol corpus (for a more detailed discussion see Gordon [2017]).

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3.1.2. Coventry dataset

The Coventry dataset under discussion here consists of four sources. Three can be grouped under the label 'civic records', and one under 'ego-documents' as it concerns a personal notebook: (1) a collection of 36 indentures (1499–1600), (2) the Cordwainers Company Roll Book and Register (1577–1627), (3) the second Coventry Leet Book (1588–1700), and (4) Robert Beake's mayoral notebook (1655–1656).

The collection of indentures, of which the majority was written in the second half of the sixteenth century, comprises a variety of different texts that concern legally binding agreements between multiple parties, such as leases, grants, feoffments and sales. The local town clerk and recorder were likely involved in the creation of these documents given their legal expertise, and the handwriting indicates that a group of scribes (who would have worked for/with the town clerk) wrote down the majority of the texts. While we might be dealing with copies rather than originals, there is no reason to assume that the documents were written in years different from those mentioned in the opening statements of the individual texts.

As regards the Cordwainers Company Roll Book and Register, nothing is currently known about its compilers and scribes, other than the fact that they were likely members of the local Cordwainers guild. The book is a collection of ordinances and rules for the guild written mostly in 1577, with some additional material being written between 1569 and 1596, as well as the early seventeenth century.

The second Coventry Leet Book concerns a collection of mayoral elections and court sittings, as well as orders and rules regarding life in the city as they were proclaimed by the leet council. It was written between 1588 and 1834, and is the direct successor of the first Leet Book (1421–1555, cf. Harris, 1907–1913). As the EMST project investigates the vernacular in different urban centres up until 1700, no transcriptions were made of texts dated after that point in time. Furthermore, since a transcription of the entire volume was beyond the scope of the project, a selection of entries was made based on (1) the amount of usable data, and (2) the chronological distribution of the various entries.

The last source from the EModE section of the Coventry Corpus concerns the notebook of Mayor Robert Beake (d. 1708), which was written between 12 November 1655 and 8 May 1656. While the local archive's catalogue describes the text as a diary, today's meaning of the term, i.e. a private and personal account of events and thoughts in chronological order, does not apply to Beake's book.[5] Similar to Henry Machyn's (1496–1563) well-known diary, Robert Beake's notebook contains accounts of his activities and responsibilities as mayor of Coventry. In that, it resembles more impersonal texts such as accounts and chronicles (Gibbs, 2006; Mortimer, 2002).[6] The content of the notebook reveals that Robert Beake was a strict Presbyterian, and that he, being a draper, was elected Master of the Drapers Company in Coventry on 1 January 1656. He also represented Coventry in the Protectorate Parliaments for various years between 1654 and 1679 (cf. Henning 1983), and held various offices in Coventry for several years between 1650 and 1688.

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3.1.3. York dataset

As regards the York dataset investigated here, the focus will be primarily on a set of 22 letters written by the York merchant adventurer and freeman James Hutchinson junior (life dates unknown; mid-seventeenth century). The surviving letters were written during Hutchinson's stay in Danzig in 1646 and addressed to Joseph Oley in Königsberg. The letters may be classified as business letters in that they relay information regarding the arrival and departure of ships with cloth from England and the contemporary market situation (cf. Bisset, 1991). Apart from displaying features typical of a letter, e.g. the place and date as well as valedictory formulae, Hutchinson's letters are written in a note style, with the personal pronouns often lacking (presumably *I* or *we* in most cases).

Other relevant but earlier sources that exist from the city of York are the York Memorandum Books (A/Y and B/Y), which contain notably guild ordinances, accounts of important events, and information on general conduct in the city (cf. Sellers, 1912; Stevens & Dorrell, 1974: 45), and the York Corpus Christi Plays (cf. Beadle, 2009). Both the York Corpus Christi Plays and the A/Y Memorandum Book (c. 1377 to 1491),[7] which serve as the basis for investigation in the EMST project do not contain material that goes beyond the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the data will partly serve as a point of comparison for the letter data (cf. Auer, 2019; Oudesluijs & Auer, 2019).

3.2. Method

Due to the relatively small size of the three datasets, the approach applied for this paper was that of close-reading the texts. With regard to the third person singular indicative present tense, we adopted the method used for previous studies of this variable (e.g. Auer, 2018; Kytö, 1993; Nevalainen, 2018; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003; Stein, 1987) by considering the three possible variants: -(V)*s*, -(V)*th*, and a -∅ form (see section 2). In this study, the focus is on the distribution of these variants with lexical verbs and the auxiliary verb *have*. Similarly, for the third person plural indicative present tense we considered the possible variants, i.e. -(V)*s*, -(V)*th*, and -(V)*n* (see section 2.1 above). We documented the variation in the respective datasets and subsequently compared the findings across the datasets, as well as to existing studies on both the singular and plural inflection.

4. THIRD PERSON PRESENT TENSE MARKERS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH URBAN VERNACULARS

In this section we present the results of this empirical study per urban centre during the EModE period, i.e. Bristol (section 4.1), Coventry (section 4.2) and York (section 4.3). We discuss both the singular and the plural inflections per urban centre respectively.

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4.1. Third person inflections in the urban vernacular of Bristol

As mentioned earlier, the Bristol data consist of a council and guild ordinance volume (COB) and a letter collection. The COB covers the period c. 1500–1600 and includes c. 32,590 words, but as pointed out above, the earlier data are very likely fair copies that were written down somewhere between c. 1506 and 1570. The letter collection spans the period c. 1548–1700 with a total of 30,975 words, the bulk of which was written in the period 1600–1650 (70%), while only about 9% was written between 1548–1600 and approximately 21% between 1650–1700.

Table 1 below shows an overview of third person singular inflectional forms as found in the ordinances and the letters. As concerns the third person singular present indicative forms in the ordinances, it is clear that -(V)*th* is used categorically. When zooming in on the letter collection, a slightly different pattern emerges. Here -(V)*s* is the most dominant form in lexical verbs (79.4%), while -(V)*th* still lags behind in auxiliary *have*. It is important to note that -(V)*s* only makes its first appearance in the letters of the 1600s, which is when it instantly seems to be the most prevalent form in lexical verbs. In the letters dated 1650 onwards, -(V)*th* no longer occurs. The shift from -(V)*th* to -(V)*s* seems rather sudden given that there was not a single occurrence in any of the text types over the period 1500–1600. However, it has to be borne in mind that the data for the letters are scant for the period 1548–1600, while it is possible that ordinances were more conservative, thus not showing any signs of the arrival of an innovative form.

There are also a number of -∅ inflections, the occurrence of which can be attributed to two authors.

Source	**Verb**	**sg. -(V)*th***	**sg. -∅**	**sg. -(V)*s***
COB (c. 1506–1600) c. 32,590 words	aux. HAVE	34 (100%)	0	0
	Lexical	10 (100%)	0	0
Correspondence (1548–1700) c. 30,975 words	aux. HAVE	56 (77.8%)	5 (6.9%)	11 (15.3%)

Table 1. Third person singular present tense indicative forms in the Bristol dataset.

Table 2 below shows the results for the third person present indicative plural markers. As can be seen from the results for the ordinances, -∅ and -(V)*th* were the most dominant forms. It is interesting to note that -∅ is more prevalent with auxiliary *have*, while plural -(V)*th* still lagged behind in lexical verbs. Previous research (Gordon, 2017) on third person plural markers in Bristol council ordinances from the period 1400–1500 reveals an even clearer preference for this distribution pattern; -(V)*th* was by far the most dominant form in lexical verbs (78.9%), while -∅ (73.9%) was most prevalent with auxiliary *have***.** This is rather surprising because this

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pattern is the reverse in the singular forms, where auxiliary *have* seems most resistant to innovations.

As for the correspondence, a different picture comes to light. As can be seen from Table 2, auxiliary *have* is again favoured with -∅ (92.3%), but -∅ occurs frequently with lexical verbs as well (48.3%). What stands out is that -(V)*s* seems be to be in the majority with lexical verbs (51.7%). Again it needs to be pointed out that plural -(V)*s* is not found before 1600. Furthermore, the variation pattern shown in Table 1 above and Table 2 below can largely be attributed to one letter writer, Elizabeth Smythe, a summary of which can be found in Table 3 below.

Period	**Verb**	**pl. -∅**	**pl. -(V)*th***	**pl. -(V)*s***
COB (c. 1506–1600) c. 32,590 words	aux. HAVE	32 (94.1%)	2 (5.9%)	0
	Lexical	17 (73.9%)	6 (26.1%)	0
Correspondence (1548–1700) c. 30,975 words	aux. HAVE	24 (92.3%)	2 (7.7%)	0
	Lexical	14 (48.3%)	0	15 (51.7%)

Table 2. Third person plural present tense indicative forms in the Bristol dataset.

As can be gleaned from Table 3 below the reverse patterns in plural and singular inflections are even more visible. The only difference with the council ordinances is that -(V)*s* increasingly supplants -(V)*th*, while at the same time the lexical and auxiliary distinction seems to play a role. In other words, third person singular auxiliary *have* tends to maintain -(V)*th* and third person singular lexical verbs favour the innovative form -(V)*s*. In contrast, third person plural auxiliary *have* initially seems to have been preferred with -∅ (see also Gordon, 2017), whereas lexical verbs were preferred with some type of inflection, be it -(V)*th* in the council ordinances and -(V)*s* in the case of Elizabeth Smythe.

Author	**Verb**	**pl. -∅**	**pl. -(V)*th***	**pl. -(V)*s***
Elizabeth Smythe (c. 1600–1650)	aux. HAVE	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.9%)	0
	Lexical	7 (33.3%)	0	14 (66.7%)
	Verb	**sg. -∅**	**sg. -(V)*th***	**sg. -(V)*s***
	aux. HAVE	0	46 (100%)	0
	Lexical	2 (2.7%)	13 (17.6%)	59 (79.7%)

Table 3. Distribution of third person plural and singular markers in the Bristol data set.

It is striking to note that Elizabeth's contemporaries and subsequent generations generally follow the Standard English third person singular and plural distinction, albeit sometimes variably with -(V)*th* or -(V)*s* in the third person singular. A possible explanation

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for the relative lack of variation in the other letter writers is that these concern mostly men who, in contrast to most women at the time (Cressy, 1980), typically enjoyed formal education, were generally geographically mobile (Bettey, 1982: ix–xxii) and wrote letters as part of their job, perhaps making them more aware of supralocal norms or letter writing conventions.

4.2. Third person inflections in the urban vernacular of Coventry

The overview of third person singular inflectional forms as found in the four above-mentioned sources from EModE Coventry, i.e. (1) a collection of 36 indentures (1499–1600), (2) the Cordwainers Company Roll Book and Register (1577–1627), (3) the second Coventry Leet Book (1588–1700), and (4) Robert Beake's mayoral notebook (1655–1656), is presented in Table 4 below. In the collection of indentures, only 20% of the roughly 29,000 words are from the period 1499–1550, with 80% being from the period 1550–1600. With regard to the other major source from EModE Coventry, the second Leet Book, the data is more evenly spread out, with roughly 8,400 words per subperiod (1588–1625, 1626–1660 and 1661–1700).

With regard to the third person singular present tense indicative forms in Coventry's local civic records, it becomes clear that the -(V)*th* inflection was the preferred form between 1500 and 1700. This concerns a continuation of the exclusive use of this variant over others in Coventry during the LME period (cf. Oudesluijs & Auer, 2019: 125–127). The first attestations of EModE -(V)*s* (3x) occur in the second subperiod of the second Leet Book (1626–1660), and concern only lexical verbs (the majority of which still took the -(V)*th* ending). Another three lexical verbs with -(V)*s* occur in the last subperiod, 1661–1700 (*requires*, 2x; *appears*, 1x). There are furthermore two examples of -∅ endings in the second Leet Book. One of these could be explained by the presence of a plural noun in between the singular subject and the verb (*ſtreetes* in example 1)[8] –which would also explain the use of *are* as opposed to the expected *is*– although the other example (2) seems to indicate that the -∅ ending was an accepted minority variant of this inflection since confusion with the subject seems unlikely here. Without further examples, it is impossible to provide an explanation for the variant in the EModE Coventry data.

> (1) fforaſmuch as the pavement in the ſtreetes of this City being the kinge highwayes **are** often tymes broken vp for the Amending of the waterpipes lyinge vnder the ſame, and ſoe **remaine** for a greate ſpace of tyme (Coventry Leet Book II, p. 191, 1648)
> (2) ... ſo as no damage or loſs **happen** to any perſon by or thorough theire or any of their defaults or negligence herein (Coventry Leet Book II, p. 106, 1620)

Robert Beake's mayoral notebook shows different findings. Robert Beake only used -(V)*s* inflections for lexical verbs, though he inflected auxiliary *have* with -(V)*th*, similar to the scribes working on the second Leet Book. Based on previous findings in more private writings

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from the EModE period (e.g. Kytö, 1993; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003), this is not unexpected.

Period	Verb	sg. -(V)*th*	sg. -∅	sg. -(V)*s*
Collection of indentures (1499–1600) c. 28,676 words	aux. HAVE	9 (100%)	0	0
	Lexical	120 (100%)	0	0
Cordwainers Company Roll Book (c. 1577–1627) c. 4,953 words	HAVE	6 (100%)	0	0
	Lexical	6 (100%)	0	0
Coventry Leet Book II (1588–1700) c. 25,146 words	aux. HAVE	34 (100%)	0	0
	Lexical	18 (69%)	2 (8%)	6 (23%)
Robert Beake's mayoral notebook (1655–1656) c. 5,302 words	aux. HAVE	2 (100%)	0	0
	Lexical	0	0	6 (100%)

Table 4. Third person singular present tense indicative forms in the Coventry dataset.

Table 5 below provides the results for the third person present indicative plural markers in Early Modern Coventry, and reveals that the -∅ form was the clearly preferred inflection across the different sources. Furthermore, in contrast to the singular inflection, variation can mostly be observed at the start of the EModE period, most notably between -∅, -(V)*n* and -(V)*th* forms.

In the collection of indentures, all the attestations of -(V)*th* (both for auxiliary *have* and lexical verbs) occur in five different texts from the first half of the sixteenth century, and as such do not reveal individual preferences by any of the scribes. In contrast, the five examples of -(V)*n* all occur in one text. This distribution points to the individual preference of the scribe writing that text, and it is therefore not representative of the general scribal practices in Early Modern Coventry, at least up until 1550. It is interesting to note that this variant was still used and apparently accepted by other scribes working in Coventry at the time.

Concerning the other sources from Early Modern Coventry, the Cordwainers Company Roll Book confirms the exclusive use of the -∅ form found in the collection of indentures after 1550, as does Robert Beake's notebook in the middle of the seventeenth century. The second Leet Book also confirms this use of the -∅ form for the third person present indicative plural, although one example of -(V)*s* is found:

(3) ſo farr as theire or any of theire grounds reſpectively **extends** (Coventry Leet Book II, p. 147, 1633)

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Potential explanations for this occurrence include the possible overgeneralization caused by the relatively new -(V)*s* inflection in the singular (see section 2.1 above), at least in this text type. There seems to be no other apparent reason for the scribe to have used this inflection here. It could be an indication that it was an accepted variant for the plural in seventeenth-century Coventry, although, as it concerns only this one example, it does not reflect any particular local convention.

Period	**Verb**	**pl. -∅**	**pl. -(V)*n***	**pl. -(V)*th***	**pl. -(V)*s***
Collection of indentures (1499–1600) 28,676 words	aux. HAVE	66 (94%)	0	4 (6%)	0
	Lexical	82 (80%)	5 (5%)	15 (15%)	0
Cordwainers Company Roll Book (c. 1577–1627) 4,953 words	aux. HAVE	2 (100%)	0	0	0
	Lexical	0	0	0	0
Coventry Leet Book II (1588–1700) c. 25,146 words	aux. HAVE	48 (100%)	0	0	0
	Lexical	34 (97%)	0	0	1 (3%)
Robert Beake's mayoral notebook (1655–1656) 5,302 words	aux. HAVE	1 (100%)	0	0	0
	Lexical	4 (100%)	0	0	0

Table 5. Third person plural present tense indicative forms in the Coventry dataset.

4.3. Third person inflections in the urban vernacular of York

As previously pointed out, the manuscript data available to the project to date mostly covers the LME period (York Memorandum Book A/Y and the York Corpus Christi Plays). For the Early Modern English period, only the business letters by the merchant adventurer James Hutchinson junior from 1647 have been transcribed so far. For comparative reasons, the LME data will therefore also be presented when discussing the third person singular present tense indicative forms.

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Period	**Verb**	**sg. -(V)*th***	**sg. -∅**	**sg. -(V)*s***
York Memorandum Book A/Y (c. 1377 to 1491) c. 33,000 words	aux. HAVE	12 (30.8%)	0	27 (69.2%)
	Lexical	38 (34.5%)	0	72 (65.5%)
York Corpus Christi Plays (inception: 1476–1477) (edited by Beadle 2009)	aux. HAVE	22 (7.6%)	0	266 (92.4%)
	Lexical	23 (4.2%)	0	531 (95.8%)
Hutchinson junior business letters (1647) 7,038 words	aux. HAVE	18 (100%)	0	0
	Lexical	2 (3.3%)	0	58 (96.7%)

Table 6. Third person singular present tense indicative forms in the York dataset.

In the case of York, the -(V)*s* variant is the local/regional form for the singular inflection, and it is therefore interesting to see to what extent it was retained and/or replaced by the southern variant -(V)*th*. Table 6 above presents the LME data, notably civic records and plays, before the EModE letter data. In all three datasets, the -(V)*s* variant, and therefore the local variant, is the clearly preferred form, both with lexical verbs and the auxiliary *have*.[9] Concerning the York Memorandum Book A/Y findings, for both lexical verbs and auxiliary *have*, the -(V)*s* variant is used in approximately two-thirds of the cases and -(V)*th* in one-third. It should be pointed out that the Book is considered in its entirety here, i.e. it is however possible that specific entries or texts contain the -(V)*th* or -(V)*s* variant exclusively (cf. Oudesluijs & Auer, 2019); this will be discussed elsewhere.

In comparison to the partly contemporary Memorandum Book A/Y, the Corpus Christi Plays display different results where the local -(V)*s* variant is found around 95% with both lexical verbs and auxiliary *have*. A close look at the different plays in relation to specific speakers with regards to -(V)*th* or -(V)*s* distribution did not reveal a clear pattern. However, the comparison of the Cardmakers' play (no. 3), of which versions by two scribes (Scribe A and B) exist, and the other plays suggests that Scribe B, i.e. the main scribe, introduced the southern variant -(V)*th* into the text, albeit not to a high degree and not in a systematic way (see Auer [2018] for a detailed discussion of the York Corpus Christi Plays).

Finally, the fundamentally different text type of business letters, dating from 1647, reveals an interesting -(V)*th* / -(V)*s* distribution pattern. The -(V)*s* variant is used with lexical verbs in 96.7% of the cases, i.e. all lexical verbs except for *say*, which is consistently used with the -(V)*th* suffix (3.3%). As regards auxiliary *have*, the -(V)*th* variant is used in 100% of the cases. A clear pattern concerning variant distribution according to verb type is thus discernible (cf. Auer [2018] on depositions; Nevalainen [2018] on letters).

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Another look at and comparison of all three text types raises the question of whether the higher amount of -(V)*th* forms in the York Memorandum Books has to do with the nature of the document, i.e. administrative civic documents, and the close collaboration of the city of York with the capital. In contrast, the York Corpus Christi plays are a local product and therefore less influenced by southern written traditions at the time. In the case of the Hutchinson letters, one may wonder whether the -(V)*s* variant had at some point been replaced by the southern -(V)*th* variant and then made a revival, which would explain the verb-type distribution of variants where *say* and auxiliary *have* behave in a more conservative way than the majority of lexical verbs (cf. Moore, 2002; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003).

As regards the third person plural present indicative markers, a comparison between the LME data and the EModE letters data is not yet possible. For this reason, we only present the Hutchinson letter findings here.

Period	**Verb**	**pl. -∅**	**pl. -(V)*n***	**pl. -(V)*th***	**pl. -(V)*s***
Hutchinson junior business letters (1647) 7,038 words	aux. HAVE	4 (100%)	0	0	0
	Lexical	6 (85.7%)	0	0	1 (14.3%)

Table 7. Third person plural present tense indicative forms in the York dataset.

As indicated in Table 7, the findings show very clearly that the zero form is already the preferred variant with the lexical verbs and auxiliary *have*. The letter data only contain 1 example with -(V)*s*, notably *moſt of them ſcarce knowes to pay.* As this is the first York dataset investigated with regard to this variable, no observations concerning text type or development of the feature in York can be made at this point.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As regards the development of singular -(V)*s* during the EModE period, the use of this variant for the third person singular present tense indicative is mostly attested in (1) York and (2) more personal writings, e.g. in correspondence from Bristol and York and in the mayoral notebook from Coventry. Administrative texts reveal more conservative language use as -(V)*th* was longer retained there. The only administrative records from the seventeenth century investigated, i.e. various entries from the second Coventry Leet Book, indicate that -(V)*s* was at that time increasingly used in that text type, gradually taking over from -(V)*th,* which was still the majority form. In line with previous research (Kytö, 1993; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003), auxiliary *have* continued to be inflected with -(V)*th* for a longer period of time, which is for instance reflected in the seventeenth-century business letters by Hutchinson Junior from York, where *have* took -(V)*th* consistently. This indicates that the local -(V)*s*

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variant did receive some competition from -(V)*th* before becoming the norm (cf. Moore, 2002; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003). Our data reveal that verb type and text type are the most relevant underlying factors influencing this inflection in Early Modern England, with region becoming an increasingly less important language-external factor, i.e. compared to the Middle English period (cf. Auer, 2019; Gordon, 2017; Oudesluijs, 2019; Oudesluijs & Auer, 2019). Further research might explore the role of more language-internal factors, most notably subject constraints, which have been found to be of relevance in both the North and the South (Cole, 2014; McIntosh, 1983; Schendl, 1994; Wright, 2002).

Concerning the distribution of third person plural markers in the Coventry and Bristol texts, the period 1500–1600 can be marked as the period in which -∅ gained considerable ground in the civic records of the respective cities. With only a few instances of -(V)*th* or -(V)*n* occurring between 1500–1550, it appears that Coventry was ahead of Bristol, where these variants still marginally occurred alongside -∅ in the COB and letters until the 1650s. In addition to that, it can be noted that the rise of -∅ tended to be more advanced in auxiliaries, whereas lexical verbs lagged behind somewhat. This pattern is more evident in the Bristol texts, but can also be observed in the Coventry documentary texts. In comparison, the plural -∅ variant is used almost categorically in the seventeenth-century York letters. Plural -(V)*s* is relatively rare in all texts, with the exception of one Bristol letter writer who also preferred -∅ with auxiliary *have* and -(V)*s* or -(V)*th* with lexical verbs.

All in all, the study of EModE urban datasets sheds light on processes of supralocalisation in England, i.e. the comparison reveals local practices and the different rates at which a more supralocal form was adopted and other (more regional forms) were dropped. The supralocalisation of singular -(V)*s* and plural -∅ proceeded at different rates in Bristol, Coventry and York respectively, which can partly be attributed to text type differences. While civic records tend to be more conservative, ego-documents adopted supralocal norms earlier. The acquisition of literacy skills of the respective scribes and letter writers, as well as text-type specific literacies, may also have had an influence on the observed linguistic variation and change. Finally, the addition of more data from different regional centres for comparison would allow for gaining a more complete picture of how supralocal forms diffused during the EModE period and what role different factors played in the process.

NOTES

1 Furthermore, recent studies challenge the prevailing notion that by the Early Modern period supralocal standardisation processes had all but eradicated textual evidence for regional variation and provide new insights into the existence of regional norms. See for instance: García-Bermejo Giner (2012) and Ruano-García (2009).

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2 As the Norwich subproject is still at an early stage, i.e. relevant material has been collected but has not yet been transcribed, it will not be included here.

3 According to McIntosh (1983) and Cole (2014), subject type played a role in the selection of the variants in the North, notably the selection of -∅ over -(V)*th*, and later also in the South with -(V)*s* (see also Schendl, 1994 and Wright, 2002 for studies on the latter two variants and the issue of subject constraint in Early Modern London). Even though the effects of subject type may play a role in the distribution of the third person indicative present tense inflection in our dataset, this will be discussed elsewhere.

4 Even though some of the selected texts also exist in older printed editions, they are not reliable for linguistic investigations in that they have often been edited. For this reason, the original sources were re-transcribed in the context of the EMST project.

5 The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) provides two definitions: (1) a daily record of events or transactions, a journal; specifically, a daily record of matters affecting the writer personally, or which come under his personal observation, and (2) a book prepared for keeping a daily record, or having spaces with printed dates for daily memoranda and jottings; also, applied to calendars containing daily memoranda on matters of importance to people generally, or to members of a particular profession, occupation or pursuit (s.v. *diary*, n.).

6 It is not known if Robert Beake's book was meant to be read only by himself (as a means of keeping track of all of his past activities for future use), or by future mayors who were also expected to keep a notebook.

7 The B/Y Memorandum Book, which covers the period 1371–1596 and would therefore give some insight into EModE language usage, has not yet been transcribed by the EMST project team.

8 Underlining and bold in the examples are our own to highlight relevant passages.

9 While -∅ forms were found in the data, they were all subjunctive rather than indicative forms and therefore disregarded here.

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