

Sociolinguistic perspectives on Tudor English

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ABSTRACT

Tudor English is the English of the Renaissance, of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, of Caxton and Shakespeare. It is also a period of language change during which a large number of linguistic features supralocalised and spread throughout the country. Most, but not all, of these changes were diffused from the capital region to the rest of the country. My discussion is focused on some of these processes in their social contexts. How did the third-person singular verbal ending *-(e)s*, for instance, replace *-(e)th* in the south and make its way to the supralocal usage, later becoming part of Standard English? Particular attention will be paid to establishing, literally, the role played by the King's English in processes such as this. I will show the multiple sociodialectal layers ranging from the Royal Court to the City of London, East Anglia and the north that can be uncovered when analysing processes of linguistic change in Renaissance England.

The work to be discussed has been made possible by the project 'Sociolinguistics and language history; the mechanisms of change in Renaissance English' launched by Dr. Helena Raumolin-Brunberg and myself at Helsinki University in the early 1990s. Our research is based on the electronic *Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC)* compiled by our team for historical sociolinguistic studies. The 1998 version of the corpus covers the period from the early fifteenth to the late seventeenth century. Some pilot studies based on this material appeared in the collection published in Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1996); a more comprehensive discussion of our findings on grammatical changes characteristic of Renaissance English is presented in Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (in press).

1. INTRODUCTION

The text in (1) presents a transcript of a personal letter written by King Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn in 1528. The letter is holograph in that it was composed, written, and signed by the monarch himself. The original is the property of the Vatican library, but a facsimile of it can be found, for instance, in Theo Stemmler's edition (1988), which is used here.

- (1) Syns yors last letters, **myne** awne derlyng, Water Welche, Master Browne, Jhon Care, Yrion off Brearton, Jhon Coke the potecary **be** fallen off the swett in thys howse, and thankyd be god all well recoveryd. So that as yet the plage is nott fully ceasyd here, but I trust shortly it shall by hys marcy off god. The rest off vs yet **be** well and I trust shall passe it, other nott to have it, or att the lest as easily as the rest have don. As tochyng the mater off Wylton, my lord cardinall **hathe** had the nunnys byfore hym and examynyd them, Master Bell beyng present; **wyche hath** certefied me that, for a trawght, that she **hath** confessyd herself (**whyche** we wolde haue had abbesse) to have hadde to chyldren by tow sonderly prestes and further sins **hath** bene keppyd by a servant off the Lord Broke that was, and that nott long agoo. Wherefore I wolde nott for all the golde in the worlde clooke your consience nor myne to make her ruler off a howse **whyche** is off so vngudly demenour. **Nor** I trust, **yow** wolde **nott** that **nother** for brother **nor** syster I shulde so dystayne **myne** honour or consience. And as tochyng the prioresse, or dame Ellenors eldest sister, thought ther is **nott any** evident case provyd agaynst them and that the priores is so olde that off meny yeres she colde nott be as she was namyd, yet nottwithstandyng, to do yow pleasure, I have donne that nother off them shall have itt, but that summe other, good and well disposyd woman shall have it; werby the howse shall be the better reformyd, wheroff I ensure yow it had moche ned, and god muche the better servyd. As tochyng your abode att Hever, do therin as best shall lyk yow, for **yow** know best what ayre **dothe** best with yow. But I wolde it wer comme thereto (yff it pleasyd god) that nother off vs nede care for that, for I ensure yow I thynke it longe. Suche is fallen syk off the swett, and therfor I send yow thys berar, bycause I thynke **yow** longe to her tydyng fromme vs as we do in lyke wyse fromme yow. Writtyn with the hand *de vostre seulle* — H Rx (A 1528 FN HENRY8 124)

The letter not only gives some interesting information about the King's person and his relation to Anne Boleyn, but also about his language. The following features, printed in boldface in (1), are worth pointing out:

- In the beginning of the letter, in *mine own darling*, the King uses *mine* in the determiner function; similarly, halfway through the letter, in *myne honour*.
- He also uses the form *be* in the indicative plural when he writes: *Water Welche, Master Browne, Jhon Care, Yrion off Brearton, Jhon Coke the potecary be fallen off the swett and the rest off vs yet be well*.
- His consistent third-person singular verb forms are *hath* and *doth*: *my lord cardinall hathe had the nunnys byfore hym and what ayre dothe best with yow*.

- We also find the relative pronoun *which* used with reference to human antecedents, as in *Master Bell beyng present; wyche hath certefied me*.
- Moreover, the monarch employs multiple negation in cases like: *nor I trust, yow wolde nott that nother for brother nor syster I shulde so dystayne myne honour or consience*.
- Finally, he uses the pronoun *you* as a subject form in *for yow know best*.

What are we to make of a combination of features like these? A textbook answer would be that they simply represent typical sixteenth-century English. Some more specific answers are given by language historians. *A History of Modern Colloquial English* by Wyld (1936), a classic in the field, offers a whole section on the English language from Henry VIII to James I. Somewhat disappointingly, Wyld has nothing to say about the language of King Henry himself, but he refers to the Royal Court when he writes:

The dialect of the Court is definitely stated to be the 'best' form of English, the one to be acquired, and as far as possible to be used in the writing of poetry, that is, for the highest possible purpose to which language can be put. (Wyld 1936:99)

Wyld's comment identifies a particular Court dialect, and is presumably derived from contemporary views of writers like George Puttenham. If a Court dialect existed at the time, we may ask whether it also meant that all aspects of the King's usage would have been followed by those around him, including courtiers and the King's secretaries, who were in charge of the Monarch's official correspondence.

The more general topic that will run through my paper is language change in the Tudor era. In particular, I will relate individuals like King Henry to overall developments in the changing English language at the time. I will emphasize the need for *baseline data* on processes of language change in any historical period. In order to be able to see whether something like a uniform Court usage existed, for instance, in King Henry's time, we need descriptions of the language of a number of people attached to the Royal Court in the first half of the sixteenth century. Moreover, we need to compare these descriptions with others representing the City of London, and even the country at large. In other words, in order to be able to assess idiolects, we need quantitative evidence of the changing usage of the time.

As the linguistic examples of Henry VIII's usage given above suggest, I shall be looking at morphological and syntactic features of the language, not phonology. In order to minimize genre differences, my descriptions will be based on a corpus of personal letters. But it is, of course, clear that the impact of language change is not limited to non-literary material like

correspondence. The concern for baseline data on contemporary language use has similarly been raised by those who study literature, for instance, by Shakespeare scholars like Lynn Magnusson (1999:3-4), who wish to anchor Shakespeare and his contemporaries more firmly in the linguistic practices of their time. My contribution to the late Tudor period is a brief comparison of the language of Queen Elizabeth I and her entourage with that of her father in the latter half of this paper.¹

2. THE KING AND THE COURT

In order to address the issue whether King Henry VIII's private holograph letters reflected a uniform Court usage, we may compare them with his much more voluminous official correspondence. The vast majority of his official letters were drafted and composed by his clerks and secretaries, and only signed by the monarch. They were of two different kinds: letters under the sign manual and those signed at the close. Unlike some later monarchs, who only did the signing, Henry VIII is, however, reported to have often taken the trouble of correcting the drafts presented to him by his secretaries (Akrigg 1984:24).

Most of the government paperwork was signed by the sovereign at the head of the letter, not at its foot. These letters under the 'sign manual' were only authenticated by the monarch, but not drafted or dictated by him. The other category of secretarial letters are those that the sovereign signed at the close. Although monarchs may not have corrected them at the draft stage, letters bearing the royal autograph signature at the close were considered more important than letters under the sign manual. They were often checked by the Secretaries of State (Akrigg 1984:24-30).

But the most important category for our purposes of comparison consists of the King's holograph letters. Theo Stemmler's (1988) edition contains all the surviving seventeen holograph letters by King Henry VIII (1491-1547) to Anne Boleyn (?1501-36), eight of them in English and the rest in French. They are undated but were all written between 1527 and 1528, at a time when the King was in the process of negotiating the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. My sample letter in (1) is drawn from the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, which incorporates all his English love-letters to Anne Boleyn.² The corpus

¹ The research reported here was supported by the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence funding for the Research Unit for Variation and Change in English (VARIENG) at the University of Helsinki.

² *The Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC 1998) covers the period 1410-1681. It was compiled by the Sociolinguistics and Language History team at the Department of

contains altogether ten holograph letters written by the King between 1516 and 1528 and 25 secretarial letters covering the time-span from 1517 to 1542.

2.1. General comparison

Some general characteristics of King Henry's love-letters are discussed in Nevalainen (2002). They will be briefly recapitulated here. The 'amatory sentiments' a love-letter is expected to convey are already revealed by the King's informal salutations. In the letter cited in (1), he addresses Anne Boleyn as *myne awne derlyng*. Other terms of endearment he uses in the opening lines of his letters to her include *darlyng*, *myne awne swethhart* and *good swethhart*. They do not differ from the intimate forms of address used by spouses among the highest ranks in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995).

The forms of address found in Henry's letters to Anne resemble some of the more intimate terms he used in his early holograph letters addressed to Thomas Wolsey, Lord Chancellor and Archbishop of York (*My awne good Cardinall*). They convey a close personal relationship if compared with some of the secretarial letters contained in the *CEEC*. The King's letters under the sign manual include forms like *To our right trustie and right welbeloved cousin therle of Cumberland* (addressed to the First Earl of Cumberland) and *To our right trustie and welbeloved the lord Clifford* (to the tenth Lord Clifford).

Another notable feature that runs through Henry VIII's private letters to Anne Boleyn is the absence of the royal *we*. The King consistently refers to himself in the first-person singular. The same level of informality can only be found in some of his other holograph letters. The royal *we* is the form used in the secretarial letters. It is, however, noteworthy that despite the intimacy created through the forms of address and terms of reference in the King's love-letters, the second-person singular form *thou* never occurs in them, but Henry always refers to Anne with the pronoun *you* (or uses French forms, such as *votre* in (1)). *Thou* is similarly absent from the roughly contemporary private correspondence by spouses.

Henry's pattern of pronoun usage may have several explanations. As the second-person singular pronoun was generally going out of use at Court and among the upper ranks at the time, the desired intimate effect could be partly achieved by means of nominal address forms. Henry's use of terms of

English, University of Helsinki: Jukka Keränen, Minna Nevala, Terttu Nevalainen, Arja Nurmi and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg. A sampler version, the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler (CEECs)*, was published in the *New ICAME Corpus Collection CD-ROM* by the HIT-Centre, Bergen, in 1999.

endearment testifies to this. There is, however, evidence in the *CEEC* of the use of *thou* in intimate family letters in the seventeenth century (Nevala 2002). But this is also a period when it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish supralocal patterns from the more local ones, and *thou* does not disappear from regional use. King Henry's usage would presumably have followed the supralocal trend of his time. *Thou* could also be used by social superiors in addressing their inferiors. By employing *you* throughout in his intimate letters, the King avoided drawing attention to differences in social distance between the monarch and his *awne swethhart*.

2.2. Linguistic comparison

Moving on to the gist of this paper, a linguistic comparison of the King and his Court, let us return to five of the six linguistic features introduced at the beginning in section 1. They are listed here under (2):

- (2)
 - the use of *be* instead of *are* in the indicative plural
 - the use of *-th* instead of *-s* in the third-person singular present indicative
 - the use of *which* instead of *who* with human antecedents
 - the use of multiple negation
 - the use of *you* instead of *ye* as a subject pronoun

Comparing the use by the King and his secretaries of the first two items, *be* in the plural and the third-person singular present indicative *-th*, we find them in full agreement. No instances of the plural *are* or the third-person singular ending *-s* appear in either source. Example (3) with two occurrences of *be* is drawn from an early holograph letter written around 1516 by Henry VIII to Cardinal Wolsey.

- (3) So it is that I have resavyd your letters, to the whyche (by cause they aske long wrytyng) I have made answar by my Secretary. Tow thyyngs ther **be** whyche **be** so secrete that they cause me at thys tyme to wrytte to yow myselfe; the won is that I trust the quene my wyffe be with chylde; (A 1516? T HENRY8 126)

The *CEEC* samples of King Henry VIII's holograph and secretarial letters also agree on the use of the suffix *-th* in the third-person singular present indicative. An instance of it from a secretarial letter is shown in (4):

- (4) And therfor now shew yourself as **becomyth** you, that **ye** may answar to that good opynyon we have conceyved of your good and loyal hert towards vs; (C 1536 T HENRY8 24)

As we know from many varieties of Present-day English, including the standard, the plural *are* and the third-person *-s* eventually won the day. They also share another feature: both originated in northern dialects. So we may conclude that the King and his secretaries were not among those promoting the two incoming features at the time. This is more generally true of the Royal Court, as we shall see shortly.

It is interesting to find that in some respects the King's usage may give the impression of being more conservative than that of his secretaries. This is the case with the nominative relative pronoun *who* and multiple negation. In his holographs, Henry does not use the nominative relative pronoun *who*, a fifteenth-century innovation, but alternates between *which* and *that* with human antecedents, as in (1): *Master Bell beyng present; wyche hath certefied me that*. The secretarial correspondence, by contrast, includes some instances of *who*, as in (5) from a letter addressed to the Earl of Cumberland.

- (5) And understand that one Dicke of the Woodfoote otherwise called Richard Urwen, Scottishman and a simple person **who** hath committed felony within this our realme upon our subjectes on our borders of Scotland is taken and in ward with you under your charge with our castle of Carlisle. (C 1528 T HENRY8 36-37)

Incidentally, our earlier studies indicate that in the first half of the sixteenth century *who* was more frequent among upwardly mobile professional men than among representatives of the highest social ranks (Nevalainen 1996:72).

The same is true of the disappearance of multiple negation. Our earlier research shows that the process was promoted by professional men in the sixteenth century (Nevalainen 1998). A comparison between Henry's private usage and that of his secretaries is, however, complicated by the fact that our royal evidence is sparse. But, as illustrated by the letter in (1), Henry VIII's holograph letters contain both complex constructions with multiple negation and single negation followed by non-assertive forms. Multiple negation is present in: *yow wolde **nott** that **nother** for brother **nor** syster I shulde so dystayne myne honour or consience*, while single negation is found in *ther is **nott any** evident case provyd agaynst them*. Only single negation is observed in the secretarial letters, illustrated by example (6):

- (6) in all these thinges **you** will procede so honorably as **no** good subject be for **any** displeasure damaged nor the great offenders left unpunished. Yeven under our signett at our castle of Windsor the sixth day of October (C 1536 T HENRY8 55)

But to render the argument on the uniformity of Court usage even more difficult to uphold, there is also one process of change where the King's holograph letters clearly differ from the secretarial ones in favour of the incoming form. This is the replacement of the subject pronoun *ye* by the oblique form *you*, which largely took place in the sixteenth century. It is a process where the time course of the change proves to be of particular interest.

Henry VIII's holograph letters in the corpus all date from before 1530, but his secretarial correspondence extends to 1542. The holograph letters suggest that the King only uses one form for the subject, the incoming *you*, as in *for yow know best* in the letter cited in (1). More variation can be found in the secretarial material, where both *you* and the traditional form *ye* are used; cf. examples (4) and (6). It is significant, however, that *you* does not occur in the subject function in the secretarial letters before 1536. Table 1 further indicates that after that date *you* is generalized very rapidly: the frequency of *ye* drops from one hundred to 26 per cent of the cases during the period 1536–42.

	<i>ye</i>		<i>you</i>		Total
Holograph letters 1516–28	–	(0%)	12	(100%)	12
Secretarial letters 1517–35	41	(100%)	–	(0%)	41
Secretarial letters 1536–42	20	(26%)	57	(74%)	77

Table 1. Forms of the second-person subject pronoun (from Nevalainen 2002).

It will be shown in the next section that the King's usage is in keeping with the general sixteenth-century trend to generalize *you* in private letters (and presumably in speech) earlier than in more formal kinds of writing. But significantly, the King's official letters also quickly caught up with the innovation, which indicates that the administrative language of the Court was by no means fixed at the time, and hence far from uniform.

To conclude this comparison of the King and his secretaries, we may say that there were processes of change in which neither participated. On the other hand, there were processes with respect to which the King's idiolect appears to have been less advanced than the usage of his secretaries. And finally, there was at least one process, in which the King proved to be an innovative force at Court.

3. THE KING AND THE COUNTRY

Having reached these conclusions, we may now move on to their general implications. If the King and his secretaries agreed on a particular usage,

was it the Court usage, or more generally the mainstream usage among the literate ranks at the time? More importantly, if the King deviated from his secretaries, who were the more advanced, and set the Court model that Wyld posited for the sixteenth century? Or is this model simply a myth that does not apply to language features undergoing change?

Let us now consider contemporary practices in general, and compare the Court with the rest of the country, or rather with certain regions of it. The Corpus of Early English Correspondence is constructed so as to make it possible to follow the progress of linguistic changes in four localities simultaneously: London, the Court, East Anglia, and the North. Those people who lived in the City of London or Southwark are entered in the Corpus as Londoners. The Court refers to a set of people, mostly resident in Westminster, who were courtiers or belonged to the royal household, or were high-ranking government officials or diplomats, reporting to the monarch, or the Lord Chancellor. Writers resident in Norfolk and Suffolk are entered as East Anglians, and those living in the counties north of the Chester–Humber line as Northerners. This classification does not include people who had emigrated from their native area and settled permanently somewhere else (Nevalainen 2000b; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, in press).

For the purposes of linguistic comparison, four of the processes that have already been referred to, will be discussed, namely:

- (7)
 - the use of *be* instead of *are* in the indicative plural
 - the use of *-th* instead of *-s* in the third-person singular
 - the use of *you* instead of *ye* as a subject pronoun
 - the use of multiple negation

We have already established that the King and his secretarial staff agreed on the non-use of *are* in the indicative plural and of *-s* in the third-person singular. It will therefore be interesting to see how the two features fared among the literate population in the country at large. Figure 1 shows the spread of *are* in the sixteenth century, the first 40-year period corresponding to the time-span covered by King Henry's correspondence in the corpus.

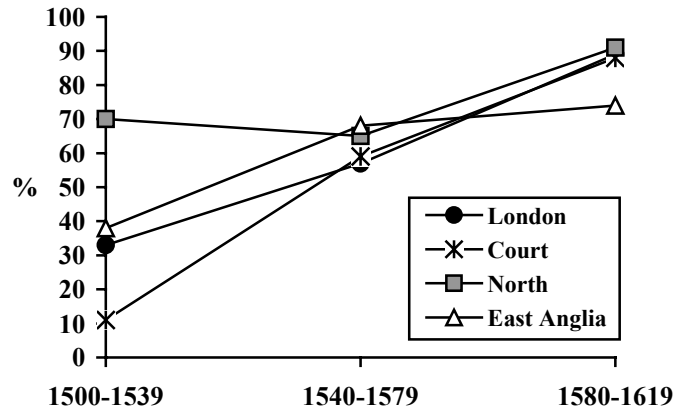


Figure 1. The replacement of *be* by *are* in the indicative plural. Regional distribution of *are* (%). *CEEC* 1998 and *Supplement*.

First of all, Figure 1 simply confirms that *are* is of northern origin: it is used much more frequently by the northern writers than by the southern in the early part of the sixteenth century. The data also support the suggestion that there was something like Court usage at the time at least with respect to early phases of this process of change. In this case it appears that is not the Court but the City of London that promotes the incoming feature in the south. The London figures are low here, but the much more plentiful data from the last couple of decades of the fifteenth century strongly support the interpretation.

But the City and the Court could also pattern rather similarly. Figure 2 presents the regional distribution of the third-person singular indicative *-s* in the sixteenth century. Its frequency in London and at Court agrees with the King and his secretaries: the incoming northern form is hardly used in the capital at all until the last couple of decades of the sixteenth century. Rather, it would appear that the southern *-th* had made deep inroads into the north in the course of the century among the literate sections of the population. It will therefore be interesting to see how the northern form made its way into a mainstream variant at the turn of the seventeenth century. We shall return to the issue in section 4.

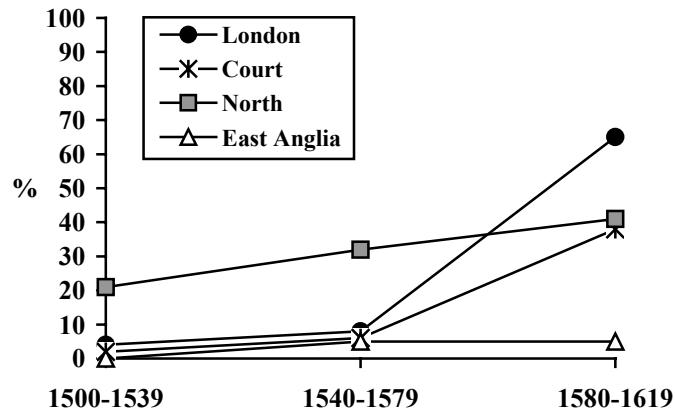


Figure 2. The replacement of *-th* by *-s* in verbs other than *have* and *do*. Regional distribution of *-s* (%). *CEEC* 1998 and *Supplement*.

The City and the Court could also take a joint lead in a process of change. Figure 3 shows how the traditional subject form *ye* was replaced by the object form *you* in the course of the sixteenth century in the correspondence corpus. The country seems to be divided along the north-south axis here, with the City and the Court leading the process, and East Anglia and the north following suit. However, as shown by Table 1, at a time when the process began to pick up in the second quarter of the century, King Henry VIII's private usage was much more advanced than his secretaries'.

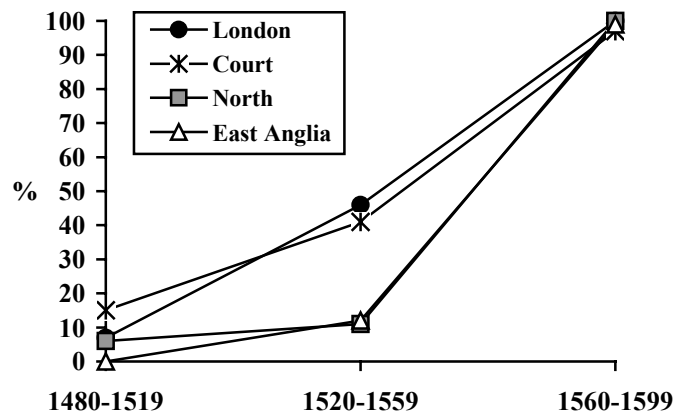


Figure 3. The replacement of *ye* by *you* in the subject function. Regional distribution of *you* (%). *CEEC* 1998 and *Supplement*.

But the opposite could also be the case. Our final example is the demise of multiple negation, presented in Figure 4. Here the Court and the City of London are simply contrasted with the rest of the country in order to get some more primary data. Figure 4 shows a statistically significant difference between the Court and London proper in the first period, and the Royal Court leads the process throughout the century. It is noteworthy that we are only looking at male data here. I have shown elsewhere that there was a significant difference between men and women with respect to the loss of multiple negation, and that it was a process that stratified socially throughout the Renaissance period (Nevalainen 2000a).

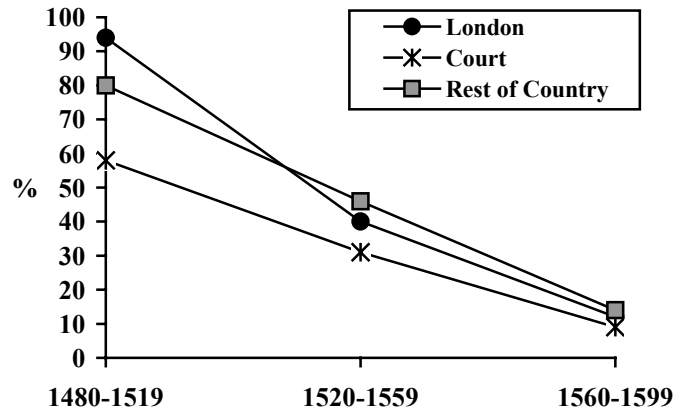


Figure 4. The replacement of multiple by single negation. Frequency of multiple negation (%). *CEEC* 1998 and *Supplement*; male writers.

Unlike the generalization of *you* as a subject form, the disappearance of multiple negation turns out to be a process promoted by professional men at Court.

On the basis of the above evidence, we may provisionally conclude that no uniform Court practice emerges with early sixteenth-century supralocal processes of linguistic change. I have examined four of them, providing baseline data from exactly the same set of people, over the same period of time. It can therefore be assumed that the role of the Court in promoting ongoing changes may range from active to passive depending on several factors. One of them is the origin of the process: the King's Court clearly does not provide the gateway for the introduction of northern features into the south.

4. FATHER AND DAUGHTER

This is not necessarily true of the City of London, which we saw promote the northern plural form *are* of the verb *be*. In the case of the other form of northern origin, the third-person verbal ending *-s*, it was again the City and Southwark that accepted it more readily than the Court of Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn (see Figure 2, above). In the Elizabethan period, the London writers in the *CEEC* include people like Philip Henslow and his theatrical circle writing around 1600. But what about the Queen herself? Was she perhaps linguistically less conservative than her father had been in his day? To move my argument forward in time, I would like to return to the individual and compare Elizabeth's idiolectal usage with that of her Court.

In the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, the holograph material by Elizabeth Tudor (1533-1603) spans almost fifty years from 1548 to 1596. The recipients of her 33 letters include Lord Protector Somerset, King Edward VI and King James VI of Scotland; James in fact receives most of them in the 1580s and 90s. Elizabeth's correspondence includes no love-letters, and there are presumably none extant, which means that we might expect the language of her private letters to be less intimate than that of her father.

Let us begin by examining the diffusion of the two northern features into the south. Examples (8) and (9) illustrate the forms used by the Queen for the indicative plural of the verb *be* and for the third-person singular present indicative towards the end of the sixteenth century.

- (8) Right deare brother, the strangenes of harde accidens that **ar** arrived here, of unloked for, or unsuspected, attempes in Skotland, euen by some suche as lately issued out of our lande, **constraineth** me, as wel for the care we have of your person as of the discharge of our owne honor and consciense, to send ... (A 1585 FO ELIZABETH1 23)
- (9) My deare brother, As ther is naught that **bredes** more for-thinking repentance and agrived thoughtes than good turnes to harme the giuers ayde, so **hath** **no** bonde **euer** tied more honorable myndes, than the shewes of any acquital by grateful acknowelegelement in plain actions; for wordes **be** leues and dides the fruites. (A 1591 FO ELIZABETH1 65)

It is perhaps surprising to see how variable the Queen's usage was at the time. Figure 1, above, shows that the generalization of *are* was nearing completion at Court towards the end of the sixteenth century. But the Queen only used it 50% of the time in her letters to James VI.

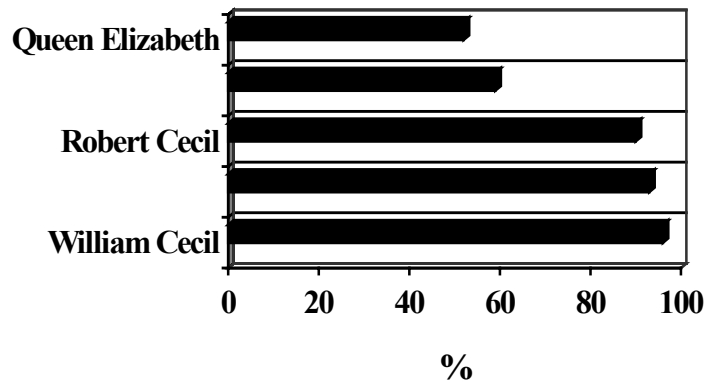


Figure 5. The replacement of *be* by *are* in the indicative plural. Distribution of *are* (%) at Court in 1580-99. *CEEC* 1998.

Figure 5 compares the Queen with some of her well-known courtiers. It turns out that the Queen, now past fifty, is in fact the most conservative of them. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, comes closest to her usage; born in 1532, he was also her age. Robert Cecil uses more the incoming form, and he is more than a generation younger than the Queen; he was born in 1563. But age cannot really explain the differences because both William Cecil and Francis Walsingham were older than the Queen, Cecil was born in 1520 and Walsingham around 1530.

One possible reason for the range of variation in the men's letters might be scribal influence. While Queen Elizabeth's letters are all holograph, the same is true of the great majority, but not all, of the four courtiers' correspondence. However, no clear pattern emerges if we compare their secretarial letters and holographs: both reveal a mixed pattern of usage. With the plural *are* we may conclude that, after zero incidence in King Henry's time, the Court usage had become variable in the course of the sixteenth century. With respect to this feature the Court had not been a trendsetter to begin with, but had rather followed the practice spreading from outside.

Moving on to the third-person *-s*, the picture we get is rather different. Queen Elizabeth uses the incoming feature half of the time, which is considerably more than the Court average towards the end of the sixteenth century. And, as shown by Figure 6, Robert Dudley and Robert Cecil both also use it more frequently than was customary at Court at the time. By contrast, Francis Walsingham and the older Cecil hardly ever employ the incoming form.

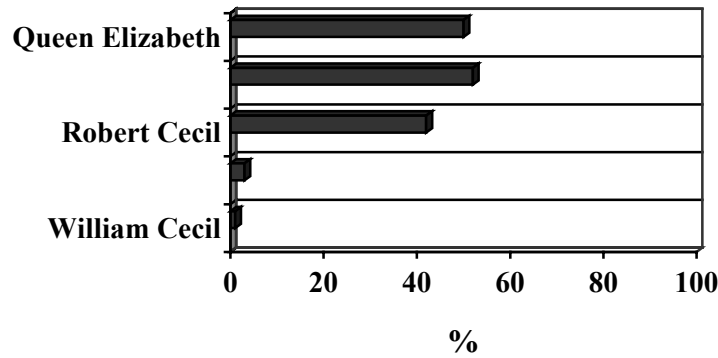


Figure 6. The use of *-s* (%) as opposed to *-th* in the third-person singular at Court in 1580-99, excluding *have* and *do*. *CEEC* 1998.

With respect to this change, it can be shown that only 30% of the writers in the *CEEC* had a variable grammar in the third-person singular in this period; that is, most people used either the recessive or the incoming form and only 30% were like the Queen, Robert Dudley and Robert Cecil, who used both of them concurrently (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, in press). This means that a person's age was likely to play a role in this change even at Court: William Cecil and Francis Walsingham were older than the rest of the writers in Figure 6, and hardly participated in this change at all.

Elizabeth's usage is well in keeping with that of her Court as far the use of the nominative relative pronoun form *who* and the decline of multiple negation are concerned. Both features were promoted by the Court back in King Henry's time. In both cases Elizabeth uses the incoming form in almost 90% of the cases. The demise of multiple negation is a feature that may also be connected with the level of education rather than simply high social status or Court residence (see Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, in press). Figure 7 shows that it is this time Francis Walsingham who has a slightly higher frequency of the recessive form than other people in Elizabeth's immediate entourage.

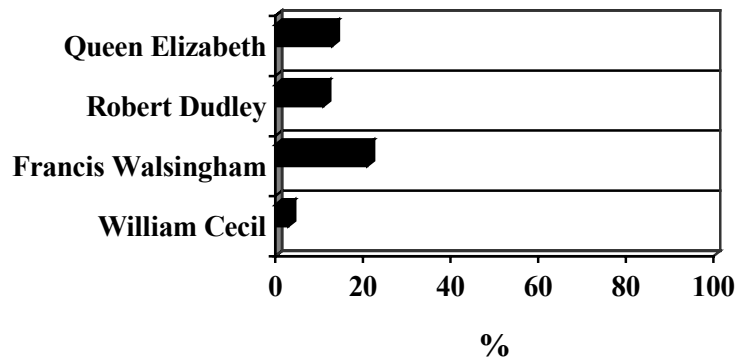


Figure 7. The replacement of multiple by single negation. Frequency of multiple negation (%). *CEEC* 1998 (Robert Cecil excluded because of paucity of data.)

Finally, we saw earlier that King Henry VIII no longer had a variable grammar in some of the incoming forms, notably the subject pronoun *you*. It should therefore not come as a surprise that, as indicated by Figure 3, Elizabeth and her Court had completely gone over to using *you* in the subject function.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to suggest that what the examination of Tudor Court correspondence has revealed to us is *variable usage*, variable both synchronically and diachronically. With findings like this it is difficult to maintain that any uniform Court dialect, let alone uniform sixteenth-century English ever existed. Hence the textbook reality must be regarded as an idealization. What we have found is what we would expect to find today: alternative expressions in varying degrees of competition with each other in the language of the same set of individuals.

There is, however, no denying that the Court had a role, or rather several roles, to play in the diffusion of the changes that took place in Tudor English. In the sixteenth century, the Royal Court formed a centre of linguistic focusing, and so was instrumental in transmitting southern influences to the rest of the country. As these linguistic practices were not prescribed, however, they could be challenged and overridden. We have seen this happen with the plural *be* and the third-person *-th*, which gave way to their northern counterparts *are* and *-s*, first in the City and, after some resistance, also at Court.

Similarly, we have seen that there were linguistic innovations, such as the subject form *you*, which readily made their way in to the Court as soon as they began to diffuse in the language community. Changes like this must have spread from below the level of social awareness, and been adopted more or less simultaneously throughout the capital city.

There were, however, also innovations that were created and promoted at Court by those professionally involved in running the government and its various functions on a day-to-day basis. Processes like the disappearance of multiple negation belong to this group, which originally appear to have had closer links with the written language than the spoken idiom.

It is the language of poetry that writers like Henry Cecil Wyld have in mind when they refer to the dialect of the Court. As there is rarely much poetry in personal letters, not even in love-letters, it might be argued that we have not been looking for the linguistic impact of the Royal Court in the right place. However, I would like to counter this by suggesting that, in order to appreciate the versatility of literary language, we need to be able to place different genres of writing in their wider linguistic context. What was going on in such non-literary registers as personal letters was not without consequences for the language of poetry of the generations to come.

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