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Sociolinguistic and Geolinguistic Approaches to the Historical Diffusion of Linguistic Innovations: Incipient Standardisation in Late Middle English

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ABSTRACT

The diffusion of linguistic innovations and changes has become a common object of sociolinguistic and geolinguistic research. As such, the process has been studied from four complementary perspectives: (a) the communicative or interpersonal, (b) the time dimension, (c) the social perspective and (d) the geographical or spatial. Despite the successful application of these methodologies to tracing the diffusion of innovations in progress and recently attested changes, attention is hardly ever given to reconstructing these four dimensions in connection with the diffusion of changes in the past. In this paper we consider the possibility of applying these methods and findings to the different faeets of the diffusion of a well attested change in the history of English: the spread of incipient standard spellings from London in the late Middle English period. Particular attention is given to the unfolding of this process in the course of time, its diffusion across social ranks and networks, as well as to its possible geographical circulation.

KEYWORDS: sociolinguistic diffusion, social network, social rank, geolinguistic diffusion, English standardisation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Diffusion is one of the areas that modern sociolinguistic research is recently privileging. At large, this is the process by means of which linguistic innovations and changes are "communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rogers 1985: 5). The interest of modern linguists in diffusion refers mainly to the synchronic task of tracing the courses of innovations in progress or recently attested changes. In contrast, attention is hardly ever given to reconstructing the diffusion of changes in the past, which very often are still discussed in handbooks on the history of languages as relatively static and inonolithic processes (of the type OE /a:/ > ME /ɔ:/), without showing great concern with either discovering the social and geographical origins of the changes, or their extension in the course of time. Obviously, this exercise is complicated and demands to "rnake the best use of bad data" (Labov 1994: 11). However, we believe that the recent advances in historical (socio)linguistics have contributed to overcome some of these difficulties and, as a result, are inclined to apply the tenets that have guided research on the diffusion of present-day changes in progress to past stages of language development.

II. SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND GEOLINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO THE DIFFUSION OF LINGUISTIC INNOVATIONS

An integral approach to diffusion entails that the process is seen at least frorn four different angles: (a) the individual or communicative dirnension, the transmission of innovations and changes' from one individual to another as a result of interpersonal acts of communication; (b) the temporal one, the logical demand that diffusion unfolds in the course of time and the special patterning that it may adopt accordingly; (c) the social perspective, the conditions afforded by the social system and structure; and (d) the effects of space, the relocation of innovations frorn one place to another and the possibility that traces of one linguistic variety can be found in areas that are geographically apart.

II.1. The individual or communicative dimension

In the late 1920s, the philologist Henry Cecil Wyld, in attempting to connect certain changes in the English language to the linguistic production of the late Middle Ages, proposed that "[t]he drama of linguistic change is enacted not in manuscripts or inscriptions, but in the mouths and minds of people" (1927: 21). This risky staternent at the time has nowadays turned into one sociolinguistic truism historically unattended: "it is speakers and not languages that innovate" (Milroy: 1992: 169). A basic and widely accepted tenet, in this respect, is that linguistic changes are the result of the communicative activity of speakers in face-to-facc interaction and that interpersonal contact is a requisite for innovations and changcs to diffuse (Trudgill 1986: 40; 1992: 76).

In all respects, the development of social psychology in the last decades of the 20th

century, and particularly the theory of *linguistic accommodation* (see: Giles 1973 and Giles, Taylor & Bourhis 1973), inasmuch as a dialect contact process, have provided plausible explanations for the spread of linguistic features from one speaker to another. Accommodation is the modification of the speech produced by speakers of different linguistic backgrounds when they are in conversational face-to-face interaction. In general terms, the process is determined by attitudinal factors —like solidarity between individuals, the importance of meeting with the approval of interlocutors, or the irnitation of some characteristics of the speech of prestigious speakers— and one of its outcomes is linguistic convergence/divergence: the reduction or increase of dissirnilaritics in the linguistic production of speakers in contact, when the salient features of one's repertoire are imitated by thc other(s). Sociolinguists have also pointed to the curnulative structural effect of rnicroacts of linguistic accornmodation in the course of time (long-term accornmodation): lirniting thc differences between varieties in contact by facilitating the diffusion of innovations from one to the other (Trudgill 1986).

11.2. Diffusion in time

Linguistic changes result from the initial coexistence of at least two variants within a speech comrnunity and, eventually, from the systematic and, norrnally, unidirectional replacement of one with thc other in the course of a pcriod of time. Linguistically speaking, change goes through a number of stages in the transition from a categorical use of one variant to its categorical replacement by another (see: Bailey 1973). Table 1 displays the progress of diffusion in the course of time and through linguistic environments.

Table 1: **Variation model of** change (Wolfram **& Schilling-Estes2003: 716)**

Stages of Change	Characteristics	Linguistic Environment	
		E_1	E_2
Stage 1	Categorical **status, before undergoing change**	X	X
Stage 2	Early **stage begins variably in restricted environment**	**XIY**	X
Stage 3	**Change in** full **progress,** greater **use of new** form **in E, where change first initiated**	**XIY**	**XIY**
Stage **4**	**Change progresses toward completion with movement toward** categoricality **first in E, where change initiated**	**Y**	X/Y
Stage **5**	**Conipleted** change, **new variant**	**Y**	**Y**

By splitting time into fractions, historical linguists have been able to consider different rates of diffusion of changes in progress and have proposed that a great number of them extend gradually along generations of speakers and contexts of usage (norrnally the lexicon), adopting a typical S-pattern: they start slowly, then speed up at the intermediate stage of development and spread like a snowball from one speaker to another; finally, they lose rnomentum and decelerate until slowly again they bccome general (Chen & Wang 1975; see also: Aitchison 1991: 80-88). **A**

result of this proposal is the distinction of stages within the S-curve and the interesting observation that any given linguistic process behaves differently in each of the phases: 'incipient', 'new and vigorous', 'mid-range', 'nearly completed' or 'completed' (see: Labov 2001: 166-171).

11.3. The social dimension

Modern sociological research has resulted in the widely accepted tenet that diffusion entails social changes of a greater or lesser order. More relevant for our purposes here is the idea that innovations occur within social systems and that their diffusion is highly conditioned by the system's structure. In this sense, the application of the *social network theory* to the diffusion of linguistic innovations and changes has proved to be a successful sociolinguistic explanation of the process (see: L. Milroy 1980; Milroy & Milroy 1985).

James and Lesley Milroy have pointed to the existence of a covert and informal pressure for the individual to maintain the linguistic variety that he or she normally uses. This is exerted by the members of his or her own social network —those related to him or her by kin and friendship. This norm-enforcing pressure is stronger when the ties are dense and the network is close-knit: virtually everybody knows everybody else in the group and theii mutual relationship affects more than one sphere (profession, family, acquaintance, etc.). Situations like this prevail at the highest and lowest social layers of the speech community and usually result in resistance to the forces of innovation. Nevertheless, there are also social and geographically mobile speakers falling in between. These individuals, who, by virtue of their social and spatial mobility, may establish weak ties within loose-knit networks, are more exposed to linguistic pressures originating outside the group. Particularly when they belong to upward mobile sections of the population they are highly liable to be linguistically influenced, either in a covert way. when the speech habits that they adopt are characteristic of speakers from the highest strata, or overtly, when the variety is enforced by the institutions through public channels. It seems, therefore, that the social and geographical mobility of potential adopters contributes to the diffusion of innovations and that weak ties between different groups provide the bridges for the process to unfold: they promote the establishment of interpersonal contacts between a great number of speakers —greater at least than those afforded by strong ties and close-knit communities—, they are established with a lot less effort and, finally, they facilitate contact with different linguistic varieties (J. Milroy and L. Milroy 1985: 363-366; L. Milroy 1980: 209; L. Milroy and J. Milroy 1992: 5-1O). Lesley and James Milroy have also stated that the micro-level type of analysis based on networks cannot be dissociated from —and is in no way contrary to— the macro-level analysis based on social structure. In this sense, they have constructed a two-level sociolinguistic theory, "linking small-scale structures such as networks [...] with larger-scale [...] social structures [...] that themselves give rise to the social and geographical mobility associated with loose-knit networks" (L. Milroy and J. Milroy 1992: 16).

11.4. Geolinguistics and the spatial diffusion of innovations

Geolinguistics, as conceived by Trudgill & Chambers (1980), is primarily concerned with the relationships between language and geography: the study of language in its geographical context, in addition to the socio-cultural ones (see: Britain 1991, 2002; Hernández-Campoy 1999), or, more specifically, the study of "the geographical dispersions of linguistic elements" (Chambers 1982: 1).This plain definition makes the subject a useful locus for the analysis of the geographical settings where the maintenance or shift of language features take place and, particularly, for the relevance of geographical aspects to the study of linguistic innovation and change: in the same way as the linguistic variable, with the help of sociological theory and methods, can improve our knowledge of the relationship between language and society, "the linguistic variable, together with a number of methodological and theoretical insights from humun *geography*, can improve our knowledge of the relationship between language and geography, and of the geographical setting of linguistic change" (Trudgill 1983: 52)[2]. From a geolinguistic perspective, three factors are of paramount importance in the study of the spatial diffusion of linguistic innovations: (a) the population density of the areas involved and its distribution, (b) the geographical distance between them, and (c) the distance or similarity of the linguistic systems peculiar to each area.

Population density and distribution are important ingredients in the study of the spatial diffusion of linguistic clements, if only because of the unquestionable tenet that the larger the population of an urban centre is, the higher the probability that an individual from elsewhere may establish interpersonal contact with a speaker from that city (Trudgill 1986: 40; 1992: 76). In fact, one interesting aspect posited by Human Geography is the possibility of considering every single urban centre from an interurban perspective —regarding its form, size, function, historical transformations, etc. This, eventually, may inspire the establishment of a hierarchy of central places (see: Christaller 1966), as regards the flow systems amongt the different settlements, and lead to the exploration of the influence of one over the others in correlation with demographic and functional distance. The former is attained by calculating the differences in population size between the settlements, while the latter considers, in connection to population size, the kind of activities and functions (services) —administrative, defensive, cultural, etc.— associated with each of the urban nuclei and the agglutinative force derived from them (Jones 1990).

The significance of geographical distance is connected to the communicative dimension mentioned above. Given that face-to-face interaction is crucial in the process of diffusion and adoption of linguistic innovations and that communication is an act that decreases with distance, then the nearest to the source of innovation (or to a centre where it has already been adopted) the potential adopting unit is, the greater the possibility of being adopted will be. We believe that physical distance, and the neighbourhood effect that results from it (see: Rogers 1985), are basic geographical components in the analysis of spatial diffusion, if only because of the truly evident tenet —stated by Trudgill (1992: 76)— that "people, on average, come into contact most often

with people who live closest to thern and least often with people who live furthest away". Yet distance does not have a linear relation to interaction, since the extent of influence from the source of innovation to the nearest potential unit is inversely proportional to the distance between thern and directly proportional to their size (range). That is, cornmunication (interaction) is a function that decreases with distance and size. Thus, the *gradient principle* (see: C. Clark 1967 and W. Clark 1982), together with the possible neighbourhood effect, are decisive during the hierarchical irradiation of the innovative influences generated in the diffusion nuclei of a change, ernphasizing the decreasing effect of innovations with distance and population size.

Geolinguistics also takes into consideration the third factor rnentioncd above: the distance or sirnilarity between the linguistic systerns peculiar to each area. This is fairly irnportant for the study of the diffusion of linguistic innovations, because the higher or lower cornpatibility of an innovation with the characteristics of the variety receiving it will rnake the process of adoption easier or more cornplicated. Quoting the words of Trudgill (1974: 234) " it appears to be psychologically and linguistically easiest to adopt linguistic features from those dialects or accents that rnost closely resernble one's own, largely, we can assume, because the adjustrnents that have to be rnade are smaller".

In order to explain the reasons why a given innovation appears and spreads to a centre B frorn A rather than C, for instance, *gravity models* have been devised (see: Hagerstrand 1952) These probabilistically-based rnodels are intended to reflect the interaction between two or more centres and the possibilities of mutual influence on account of their respective population sizes and the distance frorn one to the other (*population potential* index). The inodel was originally borrowed frorn Newton's ***law*** of ***universal*** *gravitation* and adapted by geographers and sociologists with the airn of rnathernatically establishing the possible rnovernents of population, goods or inforrnation between related urban centres. Paraphrasing Newton's law, the rnovernent between two cities (M_m) is directly proportional to the product of the population sizes (P_i and P_j) and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between thern (D_{ij}). In fact, although people are not rnolecules, they can be regarded as predictable in their aggregate behaviour on the basis of rnathernatical probability (Jones 1990: 189).

Two rnain patterns of spatial diffusion have been established: relocation and expansion. The former is a change in the spatial situation of a given feature without any increase in the nurnber of individuals that possess it, while the latter entails an actual increase in the total nurnber of individuals affected by the innovations at different localities (Bailey *et al* 1993: 366). Normally, linguistic diffusion expands, adopting any of the following pattems: epidernic, hierarchical or contra-hierarchical. In the case of epidernic (or contagion) diffusion the spread is centrifugal, from the source of the innovation outwards, in connection to the proximity of actual and potential adopters in interaction (see: figure 1). The neograrnrnarian wave theory is founded on this type of diffusion, where sorne linguistic changes are perceived as radiating frorn a focal area and reaching physically nearby locations before those at greater distances.

Hierarchical (or cascade) diffusion implies that transmission occurs along a system of ordered nuclei, first horizontally between centres of the same size or weight, and then vertically, down the hierarchy, to smaller places (see: figure 2). The opposite process characterizes contra-hierarchical diffusion, when innovations move from small (usually rural) spaces to larger (urban) ones.

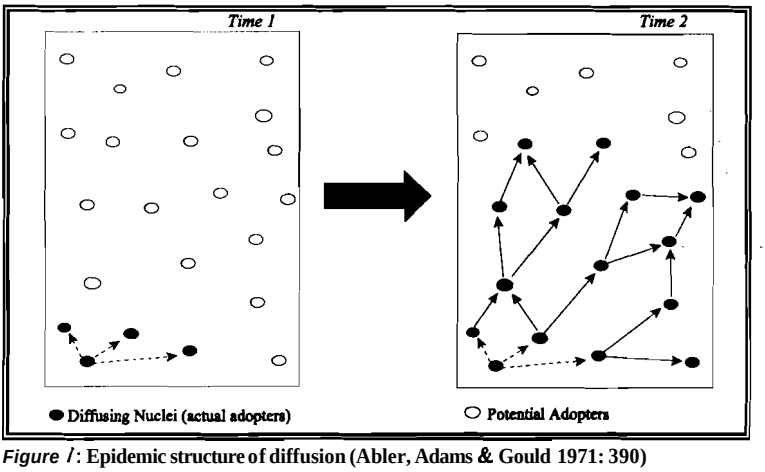


***Figure 1*: Epidemic structure of diffusion (Abler, Adams & Gould 1971: 390)**

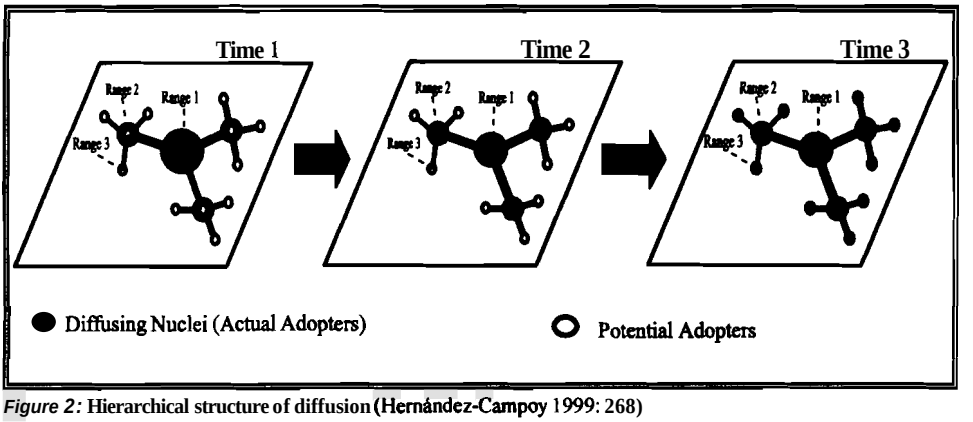


***Figure 2:* Hierarchical structure of diffusion (Hernández-Campoy 1999: 268)**

A most likely and frequent pattem of the geographical diffusion of linguistic innovations, at least in the industrialised Western World, is the hierarchical one, as attested in studies by among others, Trudgill in East Anglia (United Kingdom) and Brunlanes (Norway) (1974, 1983, 1986), Callary in lllinois (1975), Britain in the East British Midlands (1991), Boberg in the border between Canada and the USA (2000) and Hemández-Campoy in Murcia, the Southeast of Spain

(2003a, 2003b). Generally speaking the process is connected to "the general economic, demographic and cultural dominance of towns over country and the structure of the communication network" (Trudgill 1995: 147-149), which means that innovations normally arise in large, heavily populated areas that have historically been powerful socioeconomic and cultural centres, and spread out from there to other moderately sized cities falling under the area of influence of the larger focal centres, thence to towns, until they ultimately and gradually reach the smallest and most sparsely populated villages, even though they are quite close to the original focal area.[3]

III. A CASE STUDY

111.1. Tracing the diffusion of linguistic innovations in past stages of language development

Tracing the diffusion of linguistic innovations and changes in the past is a difficult, if not an impossible, task, in view of the necessity of "mak[ing] the best use of bad data" (Labov 1994: 11): writtenmaterials, which have very often survived by sheer chance and are isolated from their immediate communicative background, so that they can hardly be correlated with the original social and stylistic contexts of production and reception. In spite of these inconveniencies, the work of some historical sociolinguists in the late decades of the 20th century (see, among others: Romaine 1982; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1996; 2003) has contributed to overcome some of these difficulties and, by refining research tools, have allowed scholars to apply the methods and conclusions of recent sociolinguistic studies to a diversity of diachronic materials. One area of research within historical linguistics which may lend itself to the application of the sociolinguistic approach is the process leading to the standardisation of national languages during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when the centralized national states of Europe were formed. The basic reason is that standardisation is normally anovertprocess, which works 'from above' —if we adhere to the classical sociolinguistic terminology (Labov 1972)— and that, as a result, it may be easier for historical linguists to detect the circumstances that accompanied the diffusion of innovations associated to standard processes than to trace the extension of other types of changes, whose courses in the past may remain obscure.

Methodologically, it is assumed that the historical implementation of written standard norms requires the 'selection', 'acceptance', 'functional elaboration' and 'codification' of the linguistic variety which —for political and/or socio-economic reasons— is to become dominant amongst a series of historically and geographically related ones (Haugen 1966; Leith 1997: 31-34). It should be clear, therefore, that diffusion ('acceptance') is an essential component of the process of standardisation, which should be understood, with the perspective afforded by modern sociolinguistic and geolinguistic research, as the extension of some linguistic features in the course of time, over social and geographical spaces, as a result of communicative interaction. In fact, two main factors may contribute to trigger the diffusion of incipient standard spellings: firstly, the necessity of ensuring that certain texts and documents (administrative, legal, scientific,

etc.) are properly understood by limiting the variability of spelling forms within them; and secondly, the prestige associated with certain graphemic variants (often derived from the above text-types) which makes them worthy of imitation by people outside the geographical area or social group within which the variety arose (Sandved 1981). As a result, scholars dealing with the diffusion of written standard norms should consider, for a start, the correlation between the achievements of uniformity in the writings of individuals, their social level and geographical location, and, in a second stage, the circulation of prestigious spelling forms between the different groups and individuals located at diverse social levels and geographical spaces within the speech community. ln this sense, we believe that the recent attempts at correlating standardisation with the upward social aspirations and mobility of some speakers may yield fruitful conclusions. Similarly, the employment of 'social networks' for the observation of language use, in connection with social status and mobility, could be useful, from our point of view, for examining the diffusion of standard written norms over the social space. Furthermore, conceming the spatial diffusion of incipient standard variants, we understand that the proposals of geolinguistics may also be considered in connection with the historical stages of language development. As Britain has stated "[t]he analysis of spatiality is critically important if we wish to fully understand the processes involved [...] in the diffusion of linguistic innovations" (1991: 251-252), and this tenet, in our opinion, should hold for both present and past states.

III.2. A sociolinguistic approach to the diffusion of incipient standard practices in late Middle English

Recent approaches to the subject of English standardisation have rejected the traditional assumption that written standard English derives from a single ancestor. Instead it is widely acknowledged, in accordance with variationist methodology, that the process implies the 'selection' of "linguistic features from a range of dialects" (Hope 2000: 51), including the prestigious varieties of London which, from the late 13th century, were at different times and localitiespromoted to the status ofincipient standard norms (see: Samuels 1963; 1972: 165-170). The standardisation of written English is not seen any longer as a "linear, unidirectional development", but as "a set of processes which occur in a set of social spaces, developing at different rates in different registers, in different idiolects ..." (Wright 2000: 6; cf. also: Wright 1996). ln this paper we assume this perspective and will concentrate on the diffusion from London of certain graphemic features, that in the course of time were to become common standard practices.

A number of publications have yielded important findings as regards the meaningful distribution of spelling variation in this period of the history of English, as well as the spread of some of these incipient standard spellings.[4] However, there are few reviews of their adoption by individuals belonging to the different social ranks and network structures in the period. One obvious reason is the unfeasibility of describing the social networks of speakers who died five

centuries ago. Another complication is that the assumptions applied by James and Lesley Milroy to contemporary linguistic situations can hardly be extended to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: the life-modes in which contemporary westem society is divided (self-employed, ordinary wage-earner or high professional) or the importance attached to public channels in the diffusion of innovations, for instance. These difficulties do not discourage our attempt to assess the validity of social network theory for delineating the characteristics of the individuals from certain social levels who may have adopted standard written practices in late medieval England, and contributed to their diffusion. In this sense, the Uniformitarian Principle formulated by William Labov —the idea that languages varied in the same patterned ways in the past as they have been observed to do today (Labov 1972: 275; 1994: 21-25) — allows us to believe that the linguistic behaviour of late fifteenth century speakers may have been determined, to some extent, by attitudes to prestige, by social status and mobility as well as by the everyday contacts of individuals. In a sense, we are also lucky that some collections of late fifteenth century English private correspondence —like the Paston, the Cely and the Stonor letters —have been preserved and that we can make use of them, firstly, to trace the progress in the early adoption of incipient standard spellings and, secondly, to establish the general profile of the individuals who adopted them in the period. The diversity of types of interaction and styles reflected in private letters (wider than those afforded by official and literary documents), and the fact that they are authored texts, provide us with a context where personal information (gender, age, social status, social network and geographical location) can be traced, and supply the data necessary for the proper extension of sociolinguistic and geolinguistic methods to historical language states.[5]

III.2.1. The diffusion of historical innovations in the course of time

In a pilot study (Hemandez-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 1999) we attempted to trace the extension of spellings that were to become well-established standard practices across the eleven letters written by members of the Paston family, from Norfolk, included in the diachronic part of the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts.* The letters were sent and received by four correspondents that belonged to different generations of the family, between 1425 and 1472: a period of 47 years which was crucial for the implementation and diffusion of innovations from London. In fact, that members of the family progressively adopted them is expected in view that some migrated to London and could have established contact with the prestigious varieties from the metropolis.

This was possibly the case of *William Paston I* (1378-1444), the only son of Clement, a yeoman farmer from Norwich who founded the Paston family. Despite these humble origins, William was trained as a lawyer and had a successful career in London, where he became Justice of the Common Bench. Three letters by William Paston are included in the *Helsinki Corpus:* they are all official letters dealing with some of the lawsuits with which, as a lawyer, he was concerned. Consequently, they are all written in a formal style between 1425 and 1430, when he

was in his late 40s or early 50s. The corpus also includes three letters which William's youngest son, ***Clement II*** (1442-1479) wrote to his brother John 1 (1421-1466) between 1461 and 1464, when the former was in his early 20s. They deal with everyday affairs and problems over the family states and provide us with familiar texts sent to an equal by a young man who is in London completing his education. Even though there are no letters in the ***Helsinki Corpus*** by John 1, possibly because he spent most of his life in London as MP for Norfolk and was therefore a recipient rather than a sender of these documents, it offers a brief selection of three letters sent by ***Margaret Paston*** to her husband (John 1) between 1448 and 1449. These letters also deal with family matters and lawsuits and provide us with important linguistic documents possibly written by a woman. It is also likely that Margaret did not write the letters herself. but the family clerk and chaplain —James Glowys— or other scribes connected to the family did so for her. Finally, the corpus includes two letters that ***John Paston II*** (1442-1479) —John and Margaret's firstborn son— sent to his brother John III (1444-1504) in the years 1471-1472, when the former was in his 30s. In the paper mentioned above, we considered that, for the purposes of tracing the chronological diffusion of these innovations, information about the date when the letters were written and the age of each of the correspondents at the time was crucial and were scrupulous in their reconstruction (see: table 2).

Table 2: **Background of informants and chronological ordering of letters (Hemández-Campoy& Conde-Silvestre 1999)**

Informant	Date of letters	Age	Style
William Paston I	1425-30	40s-50s	Formal
Margaret Paston/Family clerks	1448-49	?	Informal
Clement Paston II	1461-64	20s	Informal
John Paston II	1471-72	30s	Informal

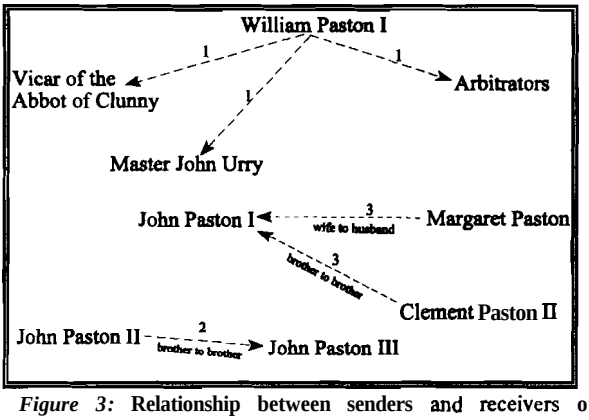


Figure 3: **Relationship between senders and receivers of correspondence from the Paston family (Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre1999)**

We also believed that, in the case of a 'change from above', like the diffusion in writing of prestigious spellings, the formality or informality of the texts involved had to be considered and, as a result, we tried to reconstruct these characteristics on the basis of the relationship between senders and receivers and of the subject-matter (see: figure 3). Thus, the five letters exchanged between brothers and the three letters sent by a wife to her husband, all of them dealing with domestic family matters and lawsuits, were classified as informal and closer to the everyday language of the fifteenth century. However, the three official letters sent by William Paston I were taken as samples of formal style.

In this pilot study we considered only three orthographical variables: 1) Variable (sh), which refers to the spelling <sh> as used in the words ***should, shall,*** *worship* and ***she.*** In the texts it alternates with archaic spelling forms like <sch>, <ssh>, <ch> and even <x> in the case of the auxiliaries ***shall*** and ***should. 2)*** Variable (wh) refers to the spelling <wh> of the word ***which.*** Its spelling is not wholly regular throughout the documents; alternative spellings include the dialectal forms <qw> and <qu>, which may reflect the influence of northem usage. 3) Variable (u), finally, refers to the ME grapheme <u> as used in the ME words ***such*** and *much*. Alternative spellings for this grapheme include the regional forms <e>, <o> and <y> and the archaic ones <uy>, <wy> and <ui>.

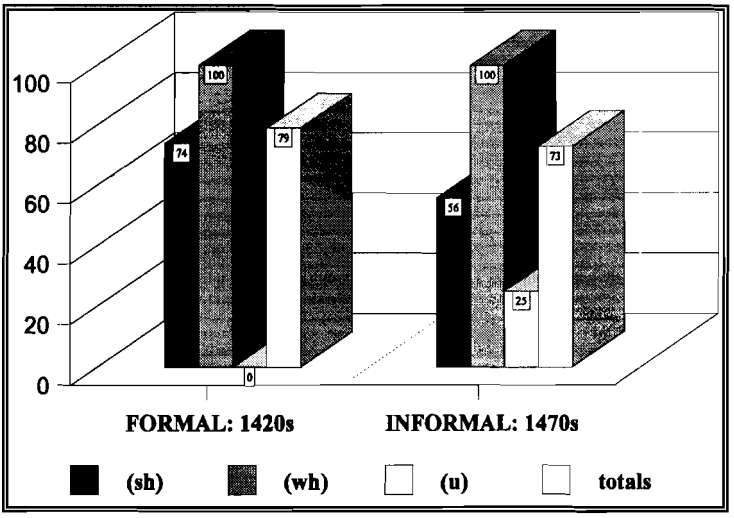


Figure 4: Percentages of standard spelling forms in connection to style in the Paston correspondence (Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 1999)

Correlating the percentage of each variable with the style of the documents, as well as with age and time yielded interesting conclusions. If we believe that the implementation of 'changes from above', connected to standardisation, progresses from fornial to informal styles

over time —the greater the frequency of standard forms in informal/familiar styles, the greater the degree of standardisation—, the comparison of the use of standard variants in the three formal texts written by William Paston I between 1425 and 1430 and those used in the informal letters written by his grandson John Paston II in the 1470s shows a noticeable step in the diffusion of these changes (see: figure 4): the rates of incipient standard variants used in formal texts in the 1420s (79%) is similar to the percentage that appears in familiar ones about 50 years later (73%) in the 1470s. This means that in the course of time the extension of the innovations advanced in a stable direction.

Progress in the implementation of each variable correlated also with the general chronological pattern. As figure 5 reflects, the variant <wh> for the variable (wh) seemed to have completed its course in the 1470s, having reached 100% in the informal contexts. The process of diffusion of the forms for both (sh) and (u) seemed, however, to be still in progress. Variable (sh) in particular was in a stage of great variability, having very close frequencies of usage for both the standard (56%) and the non-standard (44%) forms in the informal texts of the 1470s. This means that the form <sh> is still in transition. However, the use of <u> for variable (u) seemed to be still in the initial stages of change, being wholly implemented in only 25% of cases in informal texts of the same decade.

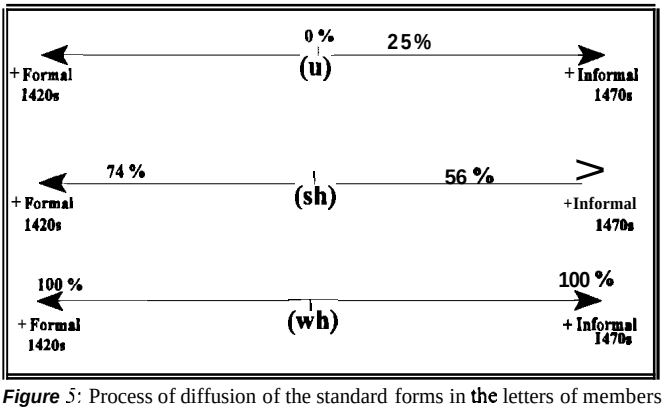


***Figure** 5:* Process of diffusion of the standard forms in the letters of members from the Paston family (Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 1999)

III.2.2. Diffusion across the social space: social ranks and social networks

We have attempted to trace the possible connection of some of these graphemic innovations with the social status and the social networks of potential adopters in "A Sociolinguistic Approach to the Diffusion of Chancery Written Practices in Late Fifteenth Century Private Corresponence" (Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2004). With this purpose, we have adopted the model of social stratification that Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg have successfully

correlated with linguistic variation in late medieval and Tudor England (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994; Nevalainen 1996). On the basis of landownership, titles and lifestyle, they reconstructed a hierarchy of three basic ranks: nobility, gentry and non-gentry. Within sorne of these levels further divisions were introduced. Especially within the 'gentry', upper and lower ranks were established for knights, baronets and bishops, who formed the 'upper gentry', and for squires, gentlernen and ordinary clergymen, who were considered part of the 'lower gentry'. Sirnilarly, additional segments were provided for the 'non-gentry', both urban (including merchants, craftsrnen and artificers) and rural, although no definite evidence is available in this respect. Finally, Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunbergproposed a rank for the 'professional order', which includes lawyers, government officials, army officers and teachers, arnong others, and, in view of the possibilities of social rnobility at the time, conceived a category of 'social clirnbers' —those who "had successful careers and moved several degrees up the social ladder" (Nevalainen 1996: 58).

As regards social networks, it is not necessary to ernphasize the irnpossibility of reconstructing them in the case of late-fifteenth century individuals. However, we believe that this construct remains a very important tool for historical linguistic research, even used at a societal level. James and Lesley Milroy (1985: 370) have concluded that societies undergoing econornic processes that entail social and geographical rnobility and the dissolution of close-knit networks, provide the conditions under which linguistic innovations rnay be transrnitted. Such processes have been linked with industrialization in conternporary societies. Similar conditions have been noticed in England in the course of the late fifteenth century and throughout the sixteenth. The econornic transformation of the Southeast Midlands and, particularly, the city of London, as irnportant centres for the exportation of corn, wool and textiles in the late Middle Ages, led to the increase of demographic rates and the growth of immigration frorn all over the country. The expected social effect of this econornic developrnent was the preoccupation with social status. In addition, some factors, like a favourable marriage, involvernent in trade, government contracting or the law, among others, may have favoured social rnobility within this highly stratified and densely populated area. The existence of realistic chances of social prornotion rnay have led rnany mernbers of the rniddle ranks to aspire to the status of the upper ones, thus creating an atmosphere in which the imitation of social norms was a cornrnon phenomenon (see: Nevalainen and Raurnolin-Brunberg 1989: 106; Raurnolin-Brunberg 1996: 35). This practice rnay be extended to the extension of spellings frorn the written varieties which enjoyed prestige in the metropolis, and their consequent adoption by rnernbers frorn upwardly mobile sections of the population. Similarly, migration, economic diversification, urbanisation and better communications all concurred in the development of loose-knit social networks and in the increase of weak ties between individuals.

We believed that the new sociological structure could be correlated with upwardly rnobile social ranks and with geographical rnobility and that plotting the use of standard spellings against

social rank and network could allow us to trace how written norms were socially diffused. With this purpose, the previous analysis of a selection of letters from the Pastons was extended to a larger corpus of correspondence from different members of three families of the period: the Stonors, the Celys and the Pastons themselves (see: table 4). ***Sir John Paston II*** (1442-1479), ***Sir John Paston III*** (1444-1504) and ***Sir William Stonor*** (c. 1449-1494) —all of them knights— belonged to the 'upper gentry'. The 'lower gentry' was represented by the squire ***Walter Elmes***, who in the 1470s and 80s acted as steward for Sir William Stonor, and by ***Richard Germyn,*** an Exeter squire, who seems to have been in charge of the former's states in Devonshire during 1480-81. In addition, the Stonor collection includes letters by people connected to the 'legal profession': the kentishman ***Thomas Mull***, who acted as legal adviser for Thomas Stonor II, and ***Richard Page,*** another kentishman, tenant of Sir William, who was also a London lawyer and a member of the Temple. Finally, the letters of three merchants, from the 'urban non-gentry', were selected: the Cely brothers, ***Richard II*** (d.1493) and ***George*** (d.1489), who ran the family wool business in London and Calais, and ***Thomas Betson*** (d. 1486), a merchant who became partner of Sir William Stonor in the wool-trade between 1475 and 1479, and was his agent in London and the continent (Calais, Bruges, etc.). All in all, these informants comprised the four intermediate orders in the social ranking of the period and, in the cases where there is enough biographical evidence, showed different grades of geographical and social mobility that could be correlated with particular social networks.

We also increased the three original variables of the original study to fifteen, in order to gain a complete outlook on how advanced each informant was as regards the adoption of the standard spelling practices or, on the contrary, the retention of archaic or dialectal spellings that were not related to incipient standard norms or did not, in the long run, find their way into standard English. The selection of variables has obviously been guided by the absence of a definitive standard norm in the late fifieenth century, which means, as Gómez Soliño has remarked, that we lack a workable graphemic framework for the analysis of medieval English. Therefore, for methodological convenience, spelling practices have been dissociated from spoken ones and are linked to specific lexical items (Gómez-Soliño 1997: 123; cf. also: Benskin 1992: 72). A complete list of the variables is given in table 3. The results of the analysis are summarized in table 4 and figure 6. As regards social rank, they show a fine gradation in the intermediate layers of late fifieenth century English society in connection with the adoption of innovative spellings. The professional lawyers —Thomas Mull and Richard Page— with an average score of 87% lead in the adoption of these forms, followed by the members of the upper gentry (60%) and then, with very similar average rates, by the 'urban non-gentry' (53%) and the 'lower gentry' (52%). It seems, therefore, that social rank is not the only factor that can be correlated with the diffusion of standard practices at the time: contact with the legal profession in London, where some of these prestigious varieties were forged, seems to have been of primary importance in the early diffusion of these forms.

Table 3: Variables used in Conde-Silvestre & Hemhndez-Campoy 2004

Variable	Orthographic system	Variants
(should)	standard	*shuld(e), should(e), shold(e)*
	non-standard	*schuld(e), schold(e), scholld(e), schowld(e), xold(e)*
(which)	standard	*which(e), whych(e)*
	non-standard	*whech(e), wech(e), wych(e), wich(e), qwhych(e), qwych(e), qwhich(e), qwich(e), qwhech(e), qwech(e)*
(such)	standard	*such(e)*
	non-standard	*sych(e), soch(e), sich(e), soych(e), sech(e)*
(much)	standard	*moch(e), much(e)*
	non-standard	*mych(e), mysch(e), mech(e), mwch(e), mekyll, mesch(e), mekell*
(though)	standard	*though*
	non-standard	*thowe, thoghe, thowghe, thowthe, thow*
(these)	standard	*these, thies*
	non-standard	*thys(e), thees(e), thess(e), þes(e), þys(e)*
(self)	standard	*self(e)*
	non-standard	*selff(e), sellff(e), sylf(e), sylff(e), selu(e), selv(e), seilf*
(yet)	standard	*yet(e)*
	non-standard	*yit(e), yitt(e), yett(e), 3et(e), 3eyt(e)*
(them)	standard	*them, theym, thaym*
	non-standard	*hem(e), hym, thym, the, þem, þeym, þaym, þym*
(it)	standard	*it, yt*
	non-standard	*hit, hyt, hytt(e), itt, jt*
(will)	standard	*will(e), wyll(e)*
	non-standard	*wol(e), woll(e), wel(e), well(e), wul(e), wull(e), whyll(e), wholl(e), whowl(e)*
(not)	standard	*not*
	non-siandad	*nott(e), nat, natt(e), noughte, nowt, nowgth(e), nogth, nowth(e)*
(her)	standard	*her(e), hir(e), hyr(e)*
	non-standard	*heer(e), herr(e), hur(e), har(e), yr(e)*
(any)	standard	*any, eny*
	non-standard	*ony, onny, hony*
(through)	standard	*through, thrugh, thurgh*
	non-standard	*thorow, thorowgh, thorrow, thoro, throw(e)*

Table 4: Social rank and the diffusion of standard spellings (Conde-Silvestre & Hemhndez-Campoy 2004)

Social Position	Informant	% **Diffusion** of Standard Spellings (individual)		% **Diffusion** of Standard **Spellings** (group)	
		raw data	percentages	raw data	percentages
Upper Gcntry	Sir William Stonor	#40/74	54%	#550/914	60%
	Sir John Paston II	#267/434	62%		
	Sir John Paston III	#243/332	73%		
Lower Gcntry	Walter Elmes	#41/88	47%	#116/221	52%
	Richard Germyn	#75/133	56%		
Professionals (legal)	Thomas Mull	#147/158	93%	#244/280	87%
	Richard Page	#97/122	80%		
Urban Non-Gcntry (merchants)	Thomas Betson	#170/212	80%	#335/629	53%
	Georgc Cely	#43/189	23%		
	Richard Ccly II	#1221228	54%		

As regards social networks, the analysis also suggested that, as in present-day situations, the establishment of weak ties within loose-knit networks might have been another factor in promoting the adoption of prestigious spelling practices. In fact, most individuals with high geographical and social mobility, specially the members of the upper gentry, had also attained high scores; indeed, as knights they developed political careers at the Court, which made them travel along the country and abroad. For instance, John Paston II's political career started at the court of Edward IV between 1461-63, when he was knighted; it later took him to London, where he was MP between 1467-68; in this year he accompanied princess Margaret to Bruges on the occasion of her marriage and in the following decade he participated in different battles of the War of Roses, in Britain (Barnet in 1471), Calais, Bruges and Neuss (1472, 1473) (Davis 1971: Iviii-lix). This type of geographical mobility is also exhibited by John Paston III and Sir William Stonor and would have encouraged in the three cases the formation ofweak ties within loose-hit networks that favoured the diffusion of innovations.

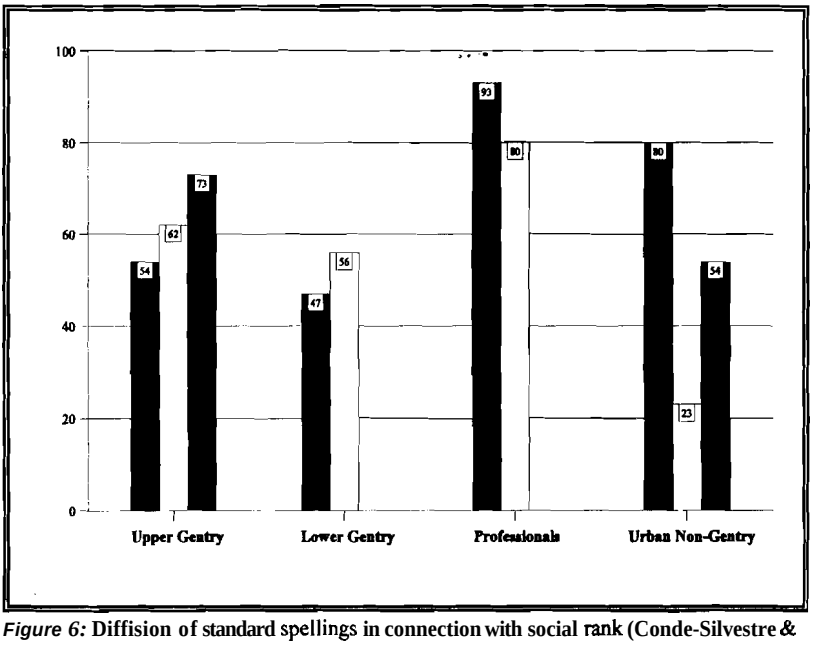


Figure 6: **Diffision of standard spellings in connection with social rank (Conde-Silvestre & Hemández-Campoy 2004)**

The problem arose when the individual scores of the individuals who had the expected and necessary mobility are confronted with the higher rates of informants that belonged to lower orders of society, namely the merchants Richard Cely II (54%) and, especially, Thomas Betson (80%). We explained this apparent inconsistency in the light of James and Lesley Milroy's

principle (1992: 16-17) that the effects of social networks cannot be dissociated frorn social status and, particularly, frorn the constraints that certain ranks rnay have irnposed over individuals by restricting their contact with rnernbers of other groups. This rnay lie behind the differences between the upper gentry and the London rnerchants who rnight have had a less restraining capacity to establish ample social contacts. In fact, Thornas Betson, who shows one of the highest scores (80%), only preceded by the two lawyers, was a rnerchant of the Staple, involved in the wool business, and rnust have often rnade the well-established route that led frorn the Cotswolds or Gloucestershire, where the wool was bought, to London, where it was stored and packed before being shipped to Calais; then he rnust have rernained at this densely populated town paying the current tributes and trying to sell the wool (Power 1963: 152; Hanharn 1975). This high degree of geographical rnobility would have afforded hirn the opportunity of establishing a variety of weak ties within loose-knit networks. In addition, he was a typical 'social climber' who, by his involvernent in the wool-business and his connections with rnernbers ofthe upper gentry, rnay have been aware of the possibilities of social promotion. Thornas Betson was son-in-law of Sir William Stonor's first wife, Elizabeth Ryche, the daughter of a well-off London mercer; he became partner of Sir Williarn in the wool-trade business and was his representative in London, Calais and Bruges. The difference between Sir Williarn's scores (54%) and Thomas Betson's (80%) rnay suggest that the social rnodel to which the rnerchant conforrned was less restricting than the confining, although higher, social role held by knights who, as Hanham suggests, "only sought to rnantain a place in the [...] royal court or the household of great lords" (1985: 29). In addition, sorne of his letters reflect the character of an ambitious rnan who sornetimes attempted to oust other rnernbers of the Stonor household from favour (Carpenter 1996: 56-57; cf. also: Power 1963: 156-158). These personal and social characteristics rnay have rnade him highly aware of prestigious spellings and driven hirn to use thern profusely in his private correspondence.

III.2.3. The geolinguistic approach: gravity models and spatial diffusion

In this section we intend to round up this case study on the historical diffusion of linguistic innovations by looking at the process frorn a geolinguistic perspective, with the specific airn of discerning whether the geographical and dernographic circurnstances prevalent in late medieval England favoured hierarchical (gravity model) or epidemic diffusion (wave model). Parallels between the historical conditions in late medieval Europe and those of modern underdeveloped countries are often drawn. This procedure rnay underestirnate the dernographic and functional roles of urban nuclei in earlier periods, in view of the existence of dernographic differences between a lirnited nurnber of relatively large concentrations of people and a scattered, more or less even, distribution of population in the country. If this is so, the process of 'epidernic' or 'contagion' diffusion, traditionally represented by the wave rnodel, rnay have been more widespread in earlier times than nowadays, so that linguistic innovations in late Middle English,

like the spellings connected to processes of standardisation, would have radiated from a focal area and reached physically nearby locations before those at greater distances. However, the few studies on the geographical diffision of innovations in earlier periods of the history of English do not wholly support this perspective. Though intuitively, Samuels, for instance, had already stated in 1972 that even if "gradual changes best apply to areas where the population is distributed evenly [...] in the case of changes leading to a regional or national standard those natural expectations may not be fulfilled" (90).

Samuels' intuition has been supported by some research which attempts to diversify standardisation into various processes of 'supraiocalisation', involving linguistic features of different regional and social origins. The perspectivism granted by the adoption of this vantage point allows experts to appreciate diverse changes taking place in particular regions and localities at any given time and eventually helps them to trace the spread of certain features from the area of origin to other ones (Nevalainen 2000: 329-330). For instance, Nevaiainen and Raumolin-Brunberg have reconstructed the geographical diffusion from the late fifteenth to the seventeenth century of some morphological characteristics from the north of England. Among other variables, they track the spread southwards of the verbal form are (vs. be), the third person singular present indicative -es (vs. *-eth*) and the relative *the* which (vs. which) across a number of texts from East Anglia, London and the Court included in the Corpus *of Early* English Correspondence for the period 1460-1680. They conclude that are reached East Anglia earlier than London, whence it finally extended to the Court, following the expected pattern of regular wave-like diffusion (Nevalainen 2000: 348). However, Londoners seem to have accepted -es and the which earlier than East Anglians in a kind of 'dialect hopping process' that may be related to geographical factors like demography, patterns of migration, etc. (Nevalainen 2000: 347-350; Nevaiainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2000: 305-322). It seems that population geography may have played a role in the spatial diffision of English linguistic innovations during the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, and that a hierarchical model of diffusion, typical of modem urban societies, might have coexisted in these periods with the expected wave-like model. As a result, the historical diffision of linguistic innovations would have been not only a question of physical distance —like the wave-model proposes—, but also, like modem geolinguistics assumes, aspects like population size and its spatial distribution, as well as the demographic and functional roles of urban centres and their respective interaction may have had an important effect on the process.

In Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy (2002) we intended to reconstruct some of the geographical aspects that may have contributed to a hypothetical hierarchical diffusion of innovations in the late Middle English period. We believed that the reconstruction of demographic evidence from the late 14th century combined with the analysis of communications in late medieval England might allow us to establish a hypothetical *gravity* rnodel, in the geolinguistic sense, and help to speculate on the interurban courses followed by linguistic features emanated from London —one of the most innovative areas in late Middle English— to

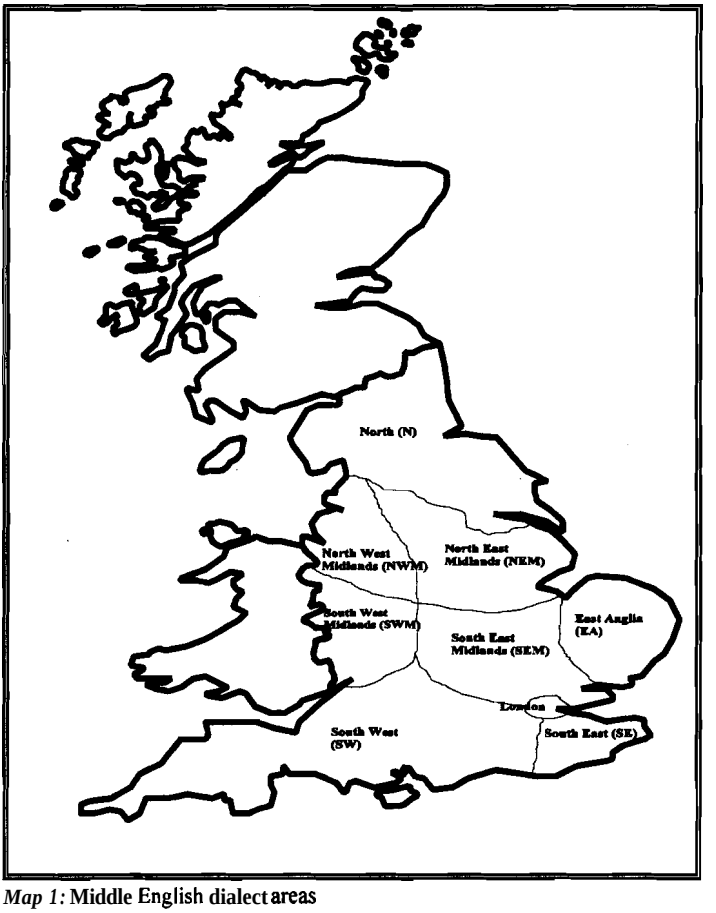
the rest of the country.

The process whereby late Middle English innovations were diffused from London is related to the importance of this city in the late Middle Ages. As was mentioned above, London became a centre for the exportation of corn, wool and textiles, within a large international network that spread into the Netherlands and the North Sea, to such an extent that commerce, manufactures and national wealth started to be concentrated in the area (Keene 2000: 99; see also: Beier & Finlay eds. 1985; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1989: 106). Additionally, the progressive centralization of the state and the "extensive authority of the Crown as the source of justice, peace and economic regulation" (Keene 2000: 99) contributed to the functional relevance of London throughout the rest of the country. Such prosperity is reflected in demography: population raised from around 35,000 people and a population density of 56.2 sq/mile in 1377 to nearly 80,000 in 1545 (86.7 sqlmile) when the metropolitan area of London had already annexed Westminster and Southwark-Lambeth (Russell 1948: 285). It is well-known that the increase in population was due to the attraction of a growing immigration from all over the country: people in temporal business, like political, legal or financia1 errands, and 'betterment migrants' in search of social advancement, were attracted to the metropolis. This population mixture created a fluid social structure that favoured the consolidation and diffusion of certain language changes.

Assuming that innovations from London may have diffused either evenly, in a wave-like epidemic fashion, or hierarchically, we explored the second possibility and adopted modern geolinguistic tenets to reconstruct the diffusion of innovations along a hierarchy of provincial centres. With this purpose, we firstly divided the geographical space of late medieval England into nine large cells or grids (see: map 1) which correspond to the traditional division of Middle English dialect areas: London, East Anglia (EA), the South-East (SE), the South-West (SW), the South-East Midlands (SEM), the North-East Midlands (NEM), the South-West Midlands (SWM), the North-West Midlands (NWM) and the North (N) (see: Fernández 1982: 590).

A second step in the process was the reconstruction of population data and physical distance between the different urban nuclei that may have been affected by linguistic innovations. It is obvious that exact figures on the distribution of medieval England's population are impossible to discern; nevertheless historical geographers have attempted to estimate the rough population of counties, towns and boroughs on the evidence afforded by the poll *tax returns*. For the purposes of our study we relied on the calculations made by Russell (1948), who assumed that 1000 payers of poll tax in one locality corresponded roughly to 1500-2000 inhabitants. Similarly, on account of the imposibility that the details of medieval England's physical geography are reconstructed, we considered modern road distances as a reliable measure of the distance between towns, provided that their construction often adapts itself to the landscape and to earlier routes. We also believed that calculation of the population *potential* index (PPI) for each town —the quantification of the extent of influence exerted by a given settlement on

another, expressed in terms directly proportional to its population size and inversely proportional to the distance—had to be modulated by considering, in addition to demography and distance, the function of towns and their location within the communicative network of late medieval England. These circumstances might have contributed to increase the flow of people to some areas and have favoured the population potential of some towns. Table 5 reflects thepopulation potential index (PPI) of the largest towns within each of the nine dialect areas and the quantification of the following modulators: (a) sea-ports that enjoyed transport advantages (2); (b) towns situated in the course of extensive (primary) rivers and thereby in internal routes of long-distance trade (1.7); (c) urban nuclei situated by other (secondary) river courses which only linked places within nearby counties (1.5); (d) towns located on the main roads leading to London (1.6) or at important junctions in the road network of late medieval England (2); and (e) towns situated near medieval monasteries that attracted pilgrims (1.3).



Map 1: Middle English dialect areas

On the basis of these calculations, the towns which could have behaved as gravity centres within each of the nine areas were selected: Canterbury (SE), Bury St. Edmunds, Norwich, Cambridge and Lynn (EA), Plymouth, Exeter and Salisbury (SW), Oxford, Coventry and Leicester (SEM), Lincoln and Boston (NEM), Bnstol and Gloucester (SWM), Chester (NWM) and, finally, York and Newcastle (N).

Table 5: Population potential index of towns in late medieval England (Conde-Silvestre& Hernández-Campoy 2002)

Area	Town	Population	PPI	Sea-port	Primary river	Second. river	Main road	Pilg. route	Total
South-East	Canterbury	3,861	4.2			1.5	1.6	1.3	18.48
	Sandwich	c. 1,500-2,000	2.2	2			1.6		7.92
	Romney	c. 1,500-2,000	2	2					4
East Anglia	Cambridge	2,353	3.7			1.5	1.6		11.47
	Ely	2,583	3.5			1.5		1.3	9.80
	Colchester	4,432	5.1			1.5			7.65
	Bury St Edmunds	3,668	4.6				1.6	1.3	13.34
	Ipswich	2,260	3.2	2					6.40
	Norwich	5,928	6.7			1.5	1.6		20.17
	Lynn	4,691	5.3	2					10.60
	Yarmouth	2,912	3.7	2					7.40
South West	Reading	c. 1,500-2,000	2		1.7		1.6		6.60
	Exeter	2,340	2.7	2			1.6		9.72
	Plymouth	7,256	7.4	2			1.6		26.64
	Southampton	1,728	2.3	2			(1.6)		8.28
	Winchester	2,160	2.7				1.6		4.32
	Wells	1,352	1.7						1.70
	Salisbury	4,839	5.2			1.5	1.6		16.12
South East Midlands	St. Albans	c. 1,500-2,000	2				1.6	1.3	5.80
	Leicester	3,512	3.7			1.5	1.6		11.47
	Northampton	2,216	2.7			1.5	1.6		8.37
	Oxford	3,536	3.8		1.7		1.6		12.54
	Coventry	7,226	4.6				2		9.20
North East Midlands	Derby	1,569	2			1.5	1.6		6.2
	Lincoln	5,354	5.8		1.7		1.6		19.14
	Boston	4,307	4.7	2					9.40
	Stamford	1,827	2.2			1.5	1.6		6.82
	Nottingham	2,170	2.7		1.7		1.6		8.91
	Newark	1,767	2.5			1.5	1.6		7.75
South West Midlands	Shrewsbury	3,123	3.4		1.7				5.78
	Ludlow	1,758	2.3			1.5			3.45
	Bristol	9,518	9.8	2			1.6		35.28
	Gloucester	3,358	4		1.7		2		14.80
	Hereford	2,854	3.4			1.5	1.6		10.54
	Worcester	2,336	3		1.7		1.6		9.90
North West Midlands	Lichfield	1,536	1.7				1.6		2.72
	Chester	c. 1,500-2,000	1.8	2					3.60
North	Newcastle	3,970	4.2	2			(1.6)		15.12
	York	10,872	11.3		1.7		1.6		37.29
	Beverley	3,994	4.8			1.5			7.20
	Scarborough	c. 3,500	4.1	2					8.20
	Kingston	2,336	3.3	2					6.60

Table 6: Phonological and **morphological features** considered for **the calculation** of **ME** linguistic **similarity** (Conde-Silvestre **& Hernández-Campoy 2002)**

	London	SE	EA	SW	SEM	NEM	SWM	NWM	N
OE [eo]	[e:]	[e:]	[e:]	[o:]	[e:]	[e:]	[o:]	[o:]	[e:]
OE [æ]	[a]	[e]	[a]	[e, a]	[a]	[e, a]	[e, a]	[e]	[a]
OE [æ:[	[ɛ:]	[e:]	[a:]	[ɛ:]	[ɛ:, e:]	[ɛ:, e:]	[ɛ:, e:]	[ɛ:, e:]	[ɛ:, e:]
OE[a+nasal]	[o:]	[o:]	[o:]	[o:]	[o:]	[ɔ:]	[a:]	[a:]	[a:]
Initial [f]	[v]	[v]	[f]	[v]	[f]	[f]	[f, v]	[f]	[f]
Feminine pp	*sche*	*he, ho*	*sche*	*ho*	*sche*	*scho*	*heo. ho*	*heo, ho*	*scho*
Plural pp	*th-, h-*	*h-*	*th-, h-*	*h-*	*th-, h-*	*th-*	*h-*	*h-*	*th-*
Present part	*-inge*	*-inge*	*-inge -ende*	*-inge*	*-inge*	*-inge -ende*	*-inge -ende*	*-inge -ende*	*-ande*
Present pl	*-en, -e*	*-eþ*	*-en*	*-eþ*	*-en*	*-en, -es*	*-eþ*	*-en*	*-es*
3 present sg	*-eþ*	*-eþ*	*-eþ*	*-eþ*	*-eþ*	*-es*	*-eþ*	*-es*	*-es*

Table 7: **Quantification** of **linguistic similarity in ME** (Conde-Silvestre **& Hernández-Campoy 2002)**

Dialect Area	Main Urban Centres	Linguistic **similarity**
Middlesex	*London*	*10*
South **East**	*Canterbury*	5
East **Anglia**	*Cambridge*	7.5
	Norwich	7.5
	Bury St Edmunds	7.5
	King's Lynn	7.5
South West	*Exeter*	5.5
	Plymouth	5.5
	Salisbury	5.5
South **East Midlands**	*Oxford*	8
	Coventry	8
	Leicester	*8*
North East Midlands	*Lincoln*	5
	Boston	5
South West Midlands	*Bristol*	3
	Gloucester	*3*
North West Midlands	*Chester*	*2*
North	*York*	3
	Newcastle	3

Another **important** factor that we contemplated was the degree of linguistic similarity. Indeed, a linguistic system can **have** either a **restraining (slowing/rejecting)** or stimulating (accelerating) effect on the adoption of a given innovation, **because** the higher or **lower** compatibility of the innovation in question with the characteristics of the **variety** receiving it **will** rnake the **whole** process easier or **more** complicated. In order to **quantify** the degree of sirnilarity

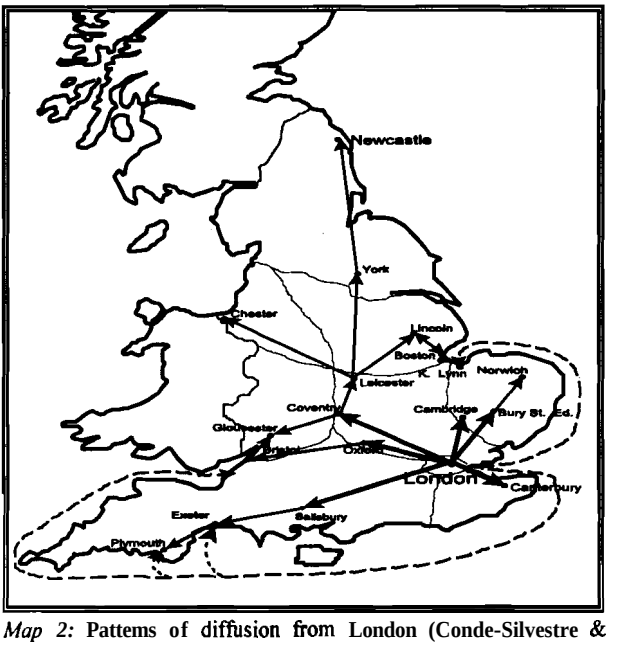
between the dialect areas ten phonological and morphological characteristics of late ME dialects were selected (see: table 6) and a score of 1, 0.5 or 0 was given to each on account of the presence or absence of these distinctive features, so that a numerical value ranging from 0 to 10 can conventionally be assumed to express the degree of linguistic similarity (see table 7).

Calculations of the influence potential exerted and received by every single urban centre are displayed in table 8 in percentages.[6] These figures allowed us to speculate on how linguistic innovations from London might have spatially diffused throughout the country. It is feasible to construct a pattern which combines the wave-like model with hierarchical diffusion (see: map 2). In this sense, linguistic features would have spread more or less evenly to the towns of Cambridge (EA), Oxford (SEM), Canterbury (SE), Bury St Edmunds (EA) and Salisbury (SW); although it is possible to claim, on account of the ***population potential*** index of the different localities in each of these areas, that these gravity centres would have received innovations earlier than other places, despite being nearer to London. The process of wave-like diffusion would possibly have been prevalent in the case of the ports of the Southwest, so that innovations from London must have reached Southampton (not included among the main gravity centres), Exeter and Plymouth successively. Nevertheless, a process of hierarchical diffusion rnay have led innovations from London to Coventry (SEM). Similarly, Lynn (EA) rnay have been affected before Norwich in view of the former's higher potential for influencing (4.9%) and being influenced (5.9%); the reason was possibly the connection by sea between the ports of Lynn and London. The same hierarchical pattern rnay have applied to Bnstol (SWM): as a port-town directly linked to London by sea, innovations from this city rnay have reached Bnstol before other places in the Southwest and the South-West Midlands.

The high potential for influencing of some of these towns, particularly Coventry (9.4%), Lynn (4.9%) and Bristol (3.2%), makes it plausible that innovations from London rebounded from them to neighbouring towns, in a new wave-like pattern of diffusion. Connection by sea rnay have favoured the diffusion of innovations from Lynn to Boston (NEM), and roads rnay have facilitated their movement from Bristol to the near town of Gloucester (SWM) and from Coventry to Leicester (SEM). It is possible that innovations reached Norwich (EA) either from the port of Lynn, or directly from London and/or Bury St. Edmunds, although in view of the road connection between the last three towns, and the difficulties for transportation in the Fens, we prefer to speculate on the secondpossibility. Finally, it is harder to trace the routes that linguistic innovations from London followed in their diffusion through the northern counties. While it is clear that Newcastle (N) and Chester (NWM) would have been the last places to receive them —if they did at all —; the low potential for influencing and being influenced of towns like Lincoln (NEM) (2.8% and 4%) and York (N) (1.1% and 5%), makes it likely that the former received London innovations from the near port of Boston or from Leicester and that, in a wave-like manner, they finally reached York either from Coventry or from Lincoln.

Table 8: Influence potential exerted/received by urban centres in late medieval England (Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2002)

	Potential for Influencing		Potential for being Influenced	
1	*London*	51.2%	*Oxford*	8%
2	*Coventry*	9.4%	*Cambridge*	7.7%
3	*Lynn*	4.9%	*Coventry*	7.6%
4	*Norwich*	4%	*Leicester*	7.2%
5	*Leicester*	4.4%	*Canterbury*	6.7%
6	*Bristol*	3.2%	*Bury St. Edmunds*	6.1%
7	*Oxford*	3.2%	*Lynn*	5.9%
8	*Boston*	3.1%	*Bristol*	5.7%
9	*Bury St. Edmunds*	3%	*Boston*	5.3%
10	*Lincoln*	2.8%	*York*	5%
11	*Cambridge*	2.7%	*Norwich*	4.7%
12	*Salisbury*	1.8%	*Salisbury*	4.3%
13	*Plymouth*	1.5%	*Gloucester*	4.1%
14	*York*	1.1%	*Lincoln*	4%
15	*Gloucester*	0.9%	*London*	3.7%
16	*Newcastle*	0.84%	*Exeter*	1.6%
17	*Canterbury*	0.83%	*Plymouth*	1.3%
18	*Exeter*	0.5%	*Newcastle*	1.2%
19	*Chester*	0.05%	*Chester*	0.7%



Map 2: Pattems of diffusion from London (Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2002)

IV. CONCLUSION

All in all, we have been able to reconstruct some possible patterns of diffusion of a key linguistic process in the history of English, in connection with the basic dimensions that have derived from research on present-day imovations and changes in progress. Firstly, as regards time, we have managed to trace some chronological progress in the adoption of incipient standard spellings by correspondents from different generations of the Paston family, who exchanged letters in the course of the fifteenth century (fiom the 1420s to the 1470s). Although we were unable to reconstruct any S patterns in the implementation of these changes —due to the scarcity of data— it was possible to demonstrate that the diffusion in time of incipient standard spellings is comected with style, and can be inferred fiom it: increase in the use of early standard variants in the course of time is parallel to their extension from formal to informal documents, as expected in the case of 'changes from above'.

Secondly, changes in the past must also be seen from the social perspective, just as innovations in progress are studied nowadays. In this respect we have been able to extend modern sociolinguistic tenets to the linguistic situation of the late fifteenth century by correlating the incipient standard practices with the social status of authors of letters from the Paston, Stonor and Cely families. As a typical 'change from above', standardisation clearly correlates with social status, and members of the upper-middle layers of society —the 'upper gentry'— were prominent in the use of the spellings that would become standard practices. Nevertheless, social rank is not the only factor that can be correlated with standardisation in writing at that time: contact with the legal profession in London, where the standard variants were most widely used, was of primary importance in the early diffusion of these forms. As regards social networks, we have noticed that, as in contemporary situations, the establishment of weak ties within loose-knit networks might have been another key factor in promoting the adoption of prestigious spelling practices, since most individuals with high geographical and social mobility have also attained high scores —especially some members of the 'upper gentry' who travelled extensively throughout the country and abroad and spent long periods of time in densely populated towns, like London or Calais. Despite these general circumstances, we have also noticed that, in accordance with recent proposals (Milroy & Milroy1992: 16-17), the effects of social networks cannot be dissociated from social status and, particularly, from the constraints that certain ranks may have imposed over individuals by restricting their contact with members of other groups. This may have been the case of the 'upper gentry' whose representatives show a relatively high rate of standardisation, but not as high as that attained by some London merchants who may have had a less restraining capacity to establish extensive social contacts.

Thirdly, we have looked at the historical diffusion of imovations from a geolinguistic perspective and have contemplated the possibility that linguistic processes in late Middle English did not only diffuse in an epidemic, wave-like manner, but that the growth and development of towns may have favoured a process of hierarchical diffusion. In this process demography and

communication networks played a vital role. Following these premises, we have considered the population of late medieval England and have attempted to reconstruct the network of communications that could have facilitated the spread of innovations (like incipient standard practices) from London —the most innovative area in linguistic terms— to other parts of the country. The application of geolinguistic models to late Middle English results —given the lack of data— in a speculative model that combines epidemic and hierarchical diffusion and points to the importance of towns like Coventry (SEM), Bristol (SWM) and Lynn (EA), in addition to London, in the linguistic panorama of the period. Finally, we expect to have shown that it is possible to deal with historically attested processes in their social and geographical complexities, and that the application of sociolinguistic and geolinguistic methods to the past may yield fruitful conclusions.

NOTES:

1. The distinction behveen innovation and change is crucial and based on the concept of diffusion itself. The former refers to spontaneous and individual speech variation which may circulate and progressively reach a larger number of speakers. lnnovations tum into changes in progress when they are diffused and the variants affected reach new adopten, thus acquiring some kind of social significance within the community (J. Milroy & L. Milroy 1985: 345; J. Milroy 1992: 201-202).

2. On geolinguistics, its theoretical tenets and applications, see also: Larmouth (1981), Trudgill (1983, 1986), Gerritsen (1988), Hemández-Campoy (1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2004), Britain (2002) and Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (2003), among others.

3. Linguists have also found instances of epidemic diffusion of innovations and changes in progress —see Trudgill's research on the spread of features from London to East Anglia (1986)— as well as contra-hierarchical models at work in certain speech communities, like Oklahoma where Bailey *et al.* (1993: 371-373) noticed that some innovations spread from rural to urban communities, which represents the reaffirmation and revitalization of traditional norms. Finally, Horvarth & Horvarth have detected a pattern which combines contagion and hierarchy in the case of some features of Australian English which "gain a foothold in both town and country in one particular region before diffusing to other regions" (1997; quoted from Britain 2002: 625).

4. See, among others: Benskin 1992; Bumley 1989; Fisher 1977, 1996; Gómez-Soliño 1981; 1985; 1986; 1997; Heikkonen 1996; Raumolin-Brunberg and Nevalainen 1990; Rissanen 2000; Rodríguez 1999; Samuels 1981 and Taavitsainen 2000.

5. Tracing the extension of early standard practices at this early stage is a difficult task and late Middle English private documents should not be expected to show a high degree of internal graphemic regularity. One basic reason for this situation is that progress towards linguistic uniformity proceeds through the gradual exclusion of variants along the different sections of a pyramidal representation, where a number of supraregional and modified varieties are situated behveen the regional dialects placed at the bottom and the standard norms at the top (Gómez-Soliño 1997: 129-130). Thus, the adoption of this or any other norm does not imply the total abandonment of the local or regional varieties; on the contrary, it very often led to "... a mixed dialect in which the writer replace[d] his most conspicuous local forms [...] with forms from other local varieties, resulting in a colourless regional language" (Samuels 1981: 43; cf. also: Raumolin-Brunberg and Nevalainen 1990: 124).

6. The formula that we have applied is commonly used in geolinguistics and considers that the mutual influence of two towns (I_{xy}) is directly proportional to the product of the population sizes (P_x and P_y) and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them (D_{xy}^2). It also contemplates the effects of linguistic similarity (S) and adds a coda to account for the fact that the total index of every single urban centre has to be defined as the addition of the interaction potential indexes with all towns under scrutiny.

Linguistic Influence Equation

$$I_{xy} = S \cdot \frac{P_x \cdot P_i}{(D_{xy})^2} \cdot \frac{P_x}{P_x + P_y}$$

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