Introduction: Lower class language use in the 19th century

WIM VANDENBUSSCHE and STEPHAN ELSPASS

‘In looking back upon the history of ordinary people, we are not merely trying to give it a retrospective political significance which it did not always have, we are trying more generally to explore an unknown dimension of the past.’ (Hobsbawm 1998: 270)

The historiography of modern Western languages has traditionally concentrated on unification and standardization processes. This approach was deeply rooted in 19th and early 20th century (language) ideologies and (language) politics. The language discourse in many Western countries displayed a remarkable collaboration of linguists with politicians, historians and writers in constructing a picture of unified nations with autonomous cultural, especially literary and linguistic, traditions that were sometimes projected backwards to the Middle Ages and beyond. Hence, generations of scholars and teachers have presented language history as a long march toward a uniform standard. Variation and other linguistic digressions were usually either ignored or stigmatised as corrupted language and not considered as suitable data for linguistic research. Up to the end of the 20th century, many textbooks on national language histories were dominated by this teleological view, portraying ‘classical’ authors as role models for language norms and style. As such, language history was largely reduced to the study of literary language, often coinciding with the high variety employed and received by only a tiny minority of the population. ‘Non-standard’ variation — let alone language use from the non-elite — was usually regarded as corrupt and vulgar and, in an act of ‘sanitary purism’ (Milroy 2005, 324–326) or ‘verbal hygiene’ (Cameron 1995), simply cleansed from textbooks.

What the editors like to call the ‘German sociohistorical tradition’ in linguistics was an exception to this rule. Since the late 1970s an impressive series of publications from German scholars (an overview is given in Vandenbussche 2006) has focused on what was then still labelled as ‘Arbeitersprache’: the written language of those at the very bottom of the social ladder in 19th century Germany, as found in original handwritten archive documents. Apart from establishing one of the core research topics in European historical sociolinguistics, this pioneer work pre-
sented one of the first systematic attempts to look beyond an upper class
dominated historiography of language — very much in the way that the
approach of *Alltagsgeschichte* and ‘history from below’ (Hobsbawm
1998) fundamentally changed both the focus and the foundations of so-
cial history proper.

In recent years, scholars have continued to call traditional views of
language historiography into question and presented alternative perspec-
tives on the histories of Western languages (e.g. Watts and Trudgill 2002;
Elspaß 2005; van der Wal 2006). The impact of modern pragmatic and
sociolinguistic theory has led to different methodological approaches,
but also to a search for texts beyond the textbook canon. Historical
sociolinguists, in particular (or linguists with a certain interest in or lean-
ing towards social history) — many of them inspired by the aforemen-
tioned German research — started to unearth a wealth of documents
belonging to text types and written by people who had hardly been no-
ticed in the historiography of languages so far: private letters, chronicles
and personal diaries written by farmers, soldiers, artisans, or house-
maids; ‘pauper letters’ in which poor people pleaded with the authorities
for material relief; meeting reports/minutes from workers’ organizations,
etc. In a traditional bird’s eye view ‘from above’, measured against pro-
fessional writers of their times, such texts may be considered as the dregs
of a culture of writing. Historians (and the odd ethnologist), however,
have long recognized the importance of such sources for a social/socio-
cultural history and a historical anthropology of our nations or our
hemisphere (e.g. Burke 2004), whereas — with a few exceptions (e.g.
Spitzer 1921) — they remained virtually unnoticed by the linguistic pro-
fession.

In a ‘view from below’, such texts are not only of interest to the his-
torical sociolinguist. In fact, they constitute the only authentic trace of
people who did not form part of our cultural memory via literary texts,
pamphlets, treatises, printed speeches and other documents. Up to the
19th century, these people had been a ‘silent majority’, insofar as most
of them were not able to read and write and their texts certainly made
up only a minority of texts that were actually written. With the mass
literacy drives of the 19th century, this situation changed rapidly. Even
people from the lower middle and lower classes learnt to write, and the
numbers of texts which have been brought to light testify that these
people actually produced masses of texts. Such texts provide not only a
‘worm’s eye view’ of everyday life, but also give a valuable insight into
variants and varieties of the written language of their time. Language
historians can no longer ignore these texts, as they do, in fact, constitute
a part of our language histories and sometimes even contain the germ
of linguistic change.
In this special issue, we present six studies into lower class writing of the 19th century from six different languages (Danish, Dutch, English, French, German and Finnish). What induced us to assemble studies from these languages is the observation that essential features and developments of the linguistic developments in the history of the Western languages of the ‘long 19th century’ are very similar, if not basically the same.

The Industrial Revolution and the making of the middle class, to name but two examples, were 19th century socio-economic transformations that affected the lives and identities of individuals all over Europe, across national borders. At about the same time, the aftermath of the Enlightenment ideals on popular education and ‘lifting up the masses’ met the demands of the rising workers’ movement for, eventually, the right to upward social mobility. One of the many factors involved in those turbulent times was the spread of literacy among the lower walks of society, giving a voice to that huge majority of the population that had hardly ever left a trace in writing before. At a time when language planners were still actively forging standards and norms for a number of prestige languages all over Europe, a huge mass of paupers and ‘small people’ started to write their real everyday language according to their own needs and competence, far away from academic and official considerations. That language and those documents are the central focus of this edition.

Several years ago, when first comparing the data and the results of our own research on 19th century lower class language (on Dutch and German) the editors were not only struck by the remarkable parallels in the outcome of our analyses, but perhaps even more by the common methodological and practical problems of both ‘isolated’ projects. Whether it concerned language-related issues of norm description and the boundaries of orthographic variation, or ‘external factors’ such the social categorization of lower class members and the nature of 19th century language teaching methods, it was manifestly clear that the gains to be expected from international collaboration in our field were worth the effort to try and bridge both linguistic and academic boundaries.

In this respect, we think that it is high time to not only offer alternative views on national language histories but also to overcome a view that is firmly fixed on single languages — yet another legacy of 19th century language ideologies — and to look at cross-linguistic and contact-induced developments in the languages of our hemisphere. This special issue is, therefore, very much intended as a trigger for similar comparative research on lower class writing from other languages.

We would like to thank all the contributors for their cooperation and their inspiring articles. As guest editors, we are greatly indebted to the
general editor of *Multilingua*, Richard Watts, for his willingness to accept our proposal for a special journal issue, for his understanding, patience and advice during the editing process, and for his continued support of yet another step in the direction of a permanent research forum on historical sociolinguistics.

**References**


‘Everyday language’ in emigrant letters and its implications for language historiography – the German case

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Abstract

The mass literacy drives of the 19th century have proved to be a landmark in German language history, as for the first time the majority of the people in the German-speaking countries were able to participate in the culture of writing. The full impact of the spread of writing among the lower social classes on language variation and change has, however, not yet been recognised in language historiography. With examples from grammar and spelling in private emigrant letters, the present article strongly argues for an alternative approach to language historiography, using such texts as a starting-point for a ‘language history from below’.

1. Introduction

In the 19th century, writing High German was no longer a privilege of the upper and upper middle classes. As a result of 19th century literacy drives, for the first time in Western history not only members of the social elite, but also large parts of the ‘ordinary’ population (farmers, artisans, soldiers, housemaids, etc.) were able to put pen to paper — although they had relatively rarely reason or opportunity to do so. Migration constituted one of the occasions when letter-writing was compulsory in order to continue personal communication after a disruption of face-to-face interaction. In the context of mass emigration, members of the lower and lower middle classes produced a volume of letters which is unprecedented in the history of writing in German. Thus, emigrant letters from the 19th century represent the first text sources in language history — perhaps not just of the German-speaking world — which give us an authentic and representative picture of language as it was used by the vast majority of the population.

The original letters provide a wealth of linguistic data about everyday language beyond the emerging standard varieties of the 19th century. (It
should be noted, however, that they do not represent local dialects.) They enable historical linguists to view language history from a drastically different perspective than earlier generations have done in their narrow and often deadening focus on the language of elite writers. Following a corresponding paradigm in socio-historical studies, this approach might be termed ‘language history from below’ (Elspaß 2005). Emigrant letters not only depict a wide range of hitherto barely recognized linguistic variation, which is gradually re-emerging in current research on substandard or colloquial standard language. They also reveal astonishing linguistic developments and changes under the surface of the written standard variety, which have practically gone unnoticed by traditional historiography. In this paper, examples will be given from the grammar and spelling of New High German.

2. Preliminaries — linguistic norms in lower-class writing

As compared to present-day professional texts, a great deal of spelling and grammar displayed in 19th century letters by unprofessional writers would nowadays strike us as simply wrong and incompetent. If we stick to this perspective for the moment, several questions may arise:

– How can the writers’ grammar and spelling be ‘wrong”? Who determined what the ‘right’ norms were?
– Did the writers know what they wrote was ‘wrong”? And ‘how’ could they know it was ‘wrong”?
– What’s exactly ‘wrong’ with the writers’ grammar and spelling? What’s maybe progressive or even radical about their grammar and spelling?

Trying to find an answer to the third pair of questions will be at the heart of section 4 of this paper. Let us consider first what ‘the’ (prescriptive) norms were, who had set them up and how or whether they affected the writing practice of ‘ordinary people’ when they sat down to compose private letters.

2.1 The status of 19th century prescriptive norms

The standardization process of the German language was not yet finished by the end of the 19th century. The first orthographic reform came into effect in 1902, and although Adelung’s Sprachlehre from 1781 is often considered the most influential modern (school) grammar of New High German, there was in fact no authoritative grammatical codex like today’s Duden grammar until the beginning of the 20th century.
What many readers intuitively feel, however, when they read 19th century texts, i.e. in their original German script and in their original spelling and grammar, is that this is not modern German, but something we may call ‘Middle New High German’ (ca. 1650 to ca. 1950).

We might rightly ask which of the 19th century school orthographies and grammars represented a norm that would allow us to pronounce any form found in a text from this century as ‘wrong’ or ‘incorrect’. Even if we acknowledge the existence of prescriptive norms, i.e. a consensus among most of the leading school grammars about acceptable and unacceptable spellings or grammatical forms, and that most texts used by non-professional writers did not match the grammar book norms, texts by lower class writers do not display mere orthographic and grammatical chaos. It is the linguist’s task to determine what exactly could be ‘wrong’ about individual forms, or rather: in what way they differ from school grammar norms and why.

2.2 Linguistic norms in the lower-class writers’ perspective

The development of prescriptive (grammar school) norms of the time was, to a certain extent, a circular process. These norms are based on printed role-model texts, which were originally written by a routine elite of writers (‘the best writers’) and have passed through an editing process in which professional proof-readers adapted the texts to the grammar book norms. Those who read printed texts may have received a passive knowledge of such norms. People did not, however, only read printed, but also hand-written texts. Non-proficient writers had certainly not acquired their active writing competence by studying and exercising grammar book norms. Firstly, primary school children from the lower classes could simply not afford books. Secondly, there is no clear evidence that grammar books were actually used in such primary schools; so far, I have come across just one single 32-page long grammar (Bohm and Steinert 1851) which was explicitly intended for use in primary schools. The ‘famous’ 19th century school grammars, e.g. by Heyse (1838) and Becker (1831), were addressed to grammar school teachers, not to the ‘common writer’.

It is well-known that the schooling of lower-class children, particularly in the first half of the 19th century, suffered from poor or even non-existent formal instruction of their teachers (cf. Elspaß 2005: 50 and 290f. for examples). Moreover, there is plenty of evidence that pupils learnt to write from old grammar books or small collections of texts (religious texts, in particular) that were available to their local teacher; sometimes they even had to bring in hand-written texts from home, which were used for writing exercises, e.g. simple copying (Messerli...
2000). It is clear that such ‘model texts’ would not present up-to-date orthographic, grammatical or even stylistic norms, but they may constitute the viewpoint from which we could rightly judge the ‘norm-conformity’ of 19th century lower-class writing.

In this context, it is worth noting that lower-class writers — at least those from my corpus — are certainly aware of linguistic deficiencies. But they have a clear sense for the relevance or irrelevance of mistakes in relation to the formality of the text or text type:

(1) Ich habe mich in der Eile oft schlecht ausgedrückt und schlecht geschrieben; aber ich denke das macht unter Brüder nichts aus. ('In the hurry I have not expressed myself well and have written badly, but I think that does not matter between/among brothers.') 
[Johannes Hambloch, 02. 12. 1853]

(2) dieses Schreiben wierd gewies viele velers Sein aber ihr müßet Es mierh nicht vor übel nehmen ('this letter is certainly full of mistakes, but you must not take it amiss') 
[Dedert Farwick, 29. 12. 1867]

Interestingly, many writers seem to consider bad handwriting rather than orthographical or grammatical mistakes as a possible offence to their families and friends (cf. Sandersen, this issue) — when they apologise for ‘bad writing’, they clearly have bad handwriting in mind:

(3) Ich muß mein Schreiben schließen mit der Bitte, mich zu entschuldi- gen, wegen der schlechten Schrift, das dieser Brief nur als Aufsatz geschrieben wurde, u. ich ihn noch einmal abschreiben wollte, weil aber die Madlena gerade schnell schreiben mußte, so hatt ich nicht mehr Zeit ihn noch einmal abzuschreiben. ('I must end my letter by asking for apologies because of the bad writing; I had written this letter as a draft, and I intended to copy it, but I had no time to do this because I also had to write a quick letter to Magdalena.') 
[Anna Katharina Beck, 25. 09. 1854]

(4) Enschuldigen meine Handschrieft. Ich bin in große Eile, bitte um baldige Antwort. ('Excuse my handwriting. I am in haste. Please answer soon.') 
[Balthasar Schmitz, 10. 06. 1866]

(5) Muß mein schlechtes Schreiben entschuldigen, die Kinder stoßen einem so oft an. ('Must excuse my bad writing. The children keep bumping/kicking me.') 
[Paula (Große Osterholt-) Greving, 30. 12. 1888]
3. Concept and corpus: The ‘language history from below’ approach

The results presented in this paper form part of a larger project on a ‘language history from below’ (Elspaß 2005). This concept implies a radical change of perspective in language historiography and has two aspects. Firstly, a ‘language history from below’ focuses on the language use of the sections of the population that have been rather neglected in historical linguistics so far, i.e. the lower classes and lower middle classes, which at least in 19th century Germany account for the vast majority of the population (about 95 percent). Large parts of the ‘ordinary’ population, and not only members of the social elite, were able to put pen (or pencil) to paper, particularly as a result of massive literacy drives in the 19th century.

Secondly and more importantly, the concept of ‘from below’ pleads for a different starting point in the description and explanation of language history. In linguistics, the shift of perspective involves an acknowledgment of language registers which are fundamental to human interaction and which are prototypically represented by speech in face-to-face interaction. A ‘language history from below’ would thus set off with the analysis of texts which are as close to actual speech as possible. Such material is best represented by ego-documents such as private letters or autobiographies. From an overall corpus of some 9,000 to 10,000 letters of emigrants’ correspondence which are accessible in public archives, I have analysed 648 letters by writers from all German-speaking countries and regions with a total of 375,000 words (or rather graphic units). 60 of these letters were written by 25 people (mostly men) with secondary or higher education, and 588 letters by 248 writers — men and women — with primary education only. Most letters were written by people who were in the process of emigrating or who had just emigrated (mainly to the US), a small proportion of the letters stem from relatives or friends of emigrants at home. To my knowledge, this is the biggest and most representative corpus of 19th century informal writing in German which has been analysed linguistically so far.

4. Reconstructing linguistic norms and variation in 19th century lower-class writing

In what follows, I will give six examples of norms of usage which were not accepted in 19th century prescriptive grammars. The first three cases present examples of ‘old norms of written usage’, which have survived in present-day substandard regional varieties. The second group comprises grammatical and graphical features which are becoming or have already become standard in modern German.
4.1 Old norms of written usage

Double negatives

Double negatives are heavily stigmatised in many Germanic languages today and considered as substandard features (Cheshire 1998), whereas they are fully integrated into Romance languages like French (cf. Martineau in this issue). The stigmatisation process started rather late (18th century). In early German grammars, double negation was presented as a ‘legitimate, sometimes even positive [...] rule of German’ (Langer 2001: 167). According to nineteenth-century grammarians like Schöten-sack (1856: 557), New High German had adopted the ‘law’ in Latin grammar that a double negative makes a positive, i.e. an affirmative statement. If we believe what Admoni claims in his standard textbooks on the historical syntax of German (Admoni 1990: 187), double negation had virtually disappeared from written German by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Schiller, Goethe and some nineteenth-century writers, however, employed double negatives repeatedly in their works, as they seem to have appreciated the stylistic nuances that the use of double negatives can create (Paul 1920: 334). We cannot say whether they considered double negatives as ‘substandard’ (in relation to which ‘standard’?) or bad language. Judging from actual language use, many of the lower- and lower middle-class letter writers in the nineteenth-century certainly didn’t. Out of 248 writers who had primary education only, 32 (12.9 percent) could be identified as using double negatives in their letters. 28 of them came from Central or Upper German dialect regions where 149 writers had received basic school instruction only (18.8 percent). It can be concluded then that double negation had not disappeared from written German and that it had basically become a variant in southern written German.

Prepositions ‘vor/für’

Another stigmatised feature of present-day German is the use of the preposition vor instead of für and vice versa (in most cases equivalent to ‘for’). Although grammarians attempted to set up a grammatical distinction between vor and für as early as the eighteenth century, these two prepositions remained free variants in texts of that century (similar to the use of the conjunctions wie and als after an adjective in the comparative, cf. von Polenz 1994: 210). As for the nineteenth century, again the analysis of written language use does present a different picture from the prescriptive grammar school norms ‘vor and für may not be confused’ and ‘to use vor instead of für is wrong’. Out of 540 instances of the use of vor, in 229 cases (42.4 percent) it was used where grammarians would
have had *für*. It is revealing to compare this grammatical feature in texts written by educated writers and texts from writers with primary education (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>writers with …</th>
<th>vor instead of <em>für</em></th>
<th>‘correct’ use of <em>vor</em></th>
<th>Σ (= 100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… secondary education</td>
<td>5 (by 1 writer)</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… primary education</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures show quite clearly that for 19th century writers with primary education, *vor* and *für* were variants in contexts in which prescriptive grammars would have *für* only. All but one writer with secondary education followed the prescriptive norm.

This norm of usage with two variants, however, did not remain stable during the whole of the 19th century. In Table 2, the results for writers with primary education are differentiated according to age groups of writers. According to these figures, younger generations of lower and lower middle-class writers increasingly adopted the grammar school variant in their usage. However, *vor* instead of *für* remained a frequently used variant. As with double negatives, the regional distribution of this variant displays a noticeable pattern: Writers in the west of Germany, in the West Central German dialect area in particular, use *vor* instead of *für* very often.

Regional preferences can also be found in certain spelling variants. In words like the present tense forms of the verb *geben* ‘give’, *gibst* (2nd person sg.) ‘give’, *gibt* ‘gives’, *gib* (imper.) ‘give’, and in the past tense...
forms of the verbs *gehen* ‘go’ (*ging(-)*), *hängen* ‘hang’ (*hing(-)*), and *fangen* ‘catch’ (*fing(-)*), the variants *giebst*, *giebt*, *gieb*, *gieng*, *hieng* and *fieng* were used throughout the 19th century. However, there is a noticeable difference between the use of the present tense forms of *geben* (*giebst*, *giebt*, *gieb*) and the past tense forms *gieng*, *hieng* and *fieng*. The spelling forms *giebst*, *giebt*, *gieb* were written in all German-speaking countries and regions, and they were considered the ‘correct’ form by many grammarians. Konrad Duden, for instance, in the first edition of his orthography (Duden 1880: 62), has *giebst*, *giebt*, *gieb* as dominating and preferable variants to *gibst*, *gibt*, *gib*, whereas he rated the *ie*-forms in the past tense of *gehen*, *hängen*, *fangen* (*gieng*, *hieng*, *fieng*) as secondary variants to the *i*-forms *ging*, *hing*, *fing*. In the first Orthographic Conference (1901), the *i*-variants were declared as standard spelling. Tables 2 and 3 present the results of the corpus analysis, again differentiated according to the age groups of the writers.

Table 3. *ie/-le*-spellings in *gib(-)* in 19th century letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year of birth of writers</th>
<th><em>gieb(-)</em></th>
<th><em>gib(-)</em></th>
<th>Σ (100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤ 1825</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826–1839</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 1840</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. *ie/-le*- spellings in *ging(-)*, *fing(-)* and *hing(-)* in 19th century letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year of birth of writers</th>
<th><em>gieng</em>, <em>hieng</em>, <em>fieng</em></th>
<th><em>ging</em>, <em>hing</em>, <em>fing</em></th>
<th>Σ (100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤ 1825</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826–1839</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 1840</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two things become apparent. Firstly, the *ie*-spellings in the *gieb*-forms were much more frequently used than the *ie*-variants in the past tense forms of *gehen*, *hängen*, *fangen*. Secondly, as with *vor* instead of *für*, the *ie*-spellings are less frequent in the younger age groups. (This is very obvious in the case of the *gieb*-forms, but less clear in the other case, where there are rather few instances per age group.) The results indicate a trend towards the variants which eventually became the orthographic norm. Here, the interesting question arises as to whether the orthographic norm followed actual language use or whether the *i*-variants
were taught more and more as the only acceptable norm in schools, so that their rise reflects the changing norms. There is no clear answer from the present data.

The ie-spellings are highly motivated insofar as they reflect spoken long /iː/. In the gieb-forms, <ie> ‘matches’ the orthoepic standard, so <i> is actually an exception to the general rule in present-day standard German that /iː/ in a stressed syllable is represented by <ie> (like Liebe ‘love’, lieben ‘to love’, schieben ‘to push’, etc.). Thus, in this case, ‘wrong’ pronunciation, i.e. short /i/ in gieb-, would not automatically result in wrong spelling. By contrast, ‘non-orthopoetic’ /iː/ in the past tense forms of gehen, hängen, fangen, which is standard pronunciation in the southwest of Germany (König 1989 II: 159), consequently leads to gieng, hieng, fieng. In fact, whereas the gieb-spelling appears in 19th century letters from all German-speaking regions, all but one of the gieng-, hieng-, fieng-variants come from writers in the southwest (the West Upper German and the Central West German dialect regions).

Thus, again we have an old norm of usage which is still used as a (substandard) regional variant in present-day German. The next group of variants comprises variants which are gradually emerging as standard features in present-day German.

4.2 Non-written standard norms of usage

**Progressive am-construction**

Periphrastic tun and the am+INF+sein-construction are both analytical constructions that can convey habitual and progressive aspect in German. (6) is an example of habitual aspect, (7) of progressive aspect with tun+INF.

(6) sie brauchten den Doctor der that mehrere Tage 2 mal den Tag ihn besuchen⁵
   (‘they needed a doctor; he came to see him twice a day for several days’)        [Bernd Farwick, 03. 1867]

(7) jetzt tun wir Treschen aber ganz anders wie dort
   (‘now we are (at) threshing the grain but very different like at home’)        [Josef Schabl, 13. 08. 1922]

The tun-periphrasis is another example of stigmatised grammatical features like those presented in section 4.1, which writers used (very) frequently in 19th century private letters, but because of stigmatisation have only survived in substandard German today (cf. Langer 2001).
The *am*-construction has gone in the opposite direction. It has made its way up from regional (sub)standard to standard German. Again, many grammarians consider this a fairly recent tendency. But it can already be found in 19th-century texts of writers from the west of Germany – I found 15 instances and another 15 with the phraseological expression *am Leben sein* ‘to be alive’ – and it has even been spotted in Swiss German texts, e.g. novels by Jeremias Gotthelf (van Pottelberge 2004). As examples (8) and (9) show, by using the *am*-construction writers can express exactly those categories of aspect, i.e. habituality and progressiveness, that can be conveyed by periphrastic *tun*:

(8) er war im einen neügegrabenen Bierkeller *am Arbeiten* und eine alter Steinere Wand fiel um und traf ihm zu Tode
(‘where he was working in a recently dug-out bierkeller when …’)
[Bernd Farwick, 12.07.1868]

(9) die Arbeit ist hir rar auf die Zechen kann man jetz noch keine Arbeith krigen wir *sint* jetz auf der Eisenbahn *am Arbeithen* [my emphasis, S.E.]
(‘… we are now working on the railway’)
[Matthias Dorgathen, 07.05.1881]

The *am*-construction is presumably somewhat too ‘young’ to have attracted the attention of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammarians. In the twentieth century, it was frequently criticised as ‘bad German’, but this may have come too late to prevent it from becoming very popular in present-day German, first ‘under the surface’ of standard German, later in standard German. What we have here, then, is an interesting example of a grammatical form which emerged from regional varieties of German to fill a gap which was caused by the suppression of another form in the standard.

*Paratactic weil*

In current research on German grammar, ‘paratactic *weil*’, i.e. verb-second position of the finite verb in clauses introduced by the causative conjunction *weil* ‘because’, is heatedly discussed and often seen as a fairly recent syntactic or lexical tendency in modern German.6

(10) da war unser akord gebrochen *Weil wir wusten nicht* daß sei [sie] zusammen hielten (‘then our contract was breached BECAUSE WE KNEW NOT that they conspired’)
[Heinrich Küpper, ca. 1847]
(11) Getroschen haben wir auch nicht viel weil man mußte schon den Hafer bald grün verfüttern
(‘we haven’t threshed much BECAUSE ONE HAD TO feed the grain [to the cattle] while it was still green’)
[Mathes Josef Windirsch, 02. 04. 1896]

As examples (10) and (11) show, paratactic weil is much older than the interest that it has aroused among linguists in recent years (Ágel 2000, 1887), and it is certainly older than the examples from Brecht’s Mutter Courage, which are often cited as first examples of this construction in written modern German. It has been speculated whether there could be a continuity of the use of paratactic die weil/weil from Early New High German to present-day German (Selting 1999). Researchers have brought to light only isolated instances of weil in 18th and 19th century German texts so far, which left in doubt whether there really is such a continuity. As opposed to ‘hypotactic weil’, examples with paratactic weil remain relatively rare in the corpus, but they do exist. Some of these instances cannot be identified as ‘clear’ paratactic weil cases, like example (12) in which the prepositional phrase in Herbste and the object zwei Küh u eine Kalbin could also be interpreted as extrapositions, which would leave the finite verb hatte in the end position of the weil-clause:

(12) weil wir hatten in Herbste zwei Küh u eine Kalbin
(‘because we had in the autumn two cows and a calf’)
[Mathes Josef Windirsch, 02. 04. 1896]

However, the fact that a) we have a clear case of paratactic weil from the same writer (cf. example [11]) and that b) this construction is documented for the dialect region of the writer (Schiepek 1899: 42) points to the fact that the writer knew the construction and may have adopted it from his dialect.

I will not further discuss paratactic weil and other causative conjunctions here. It will suffice to say that verb second position after weil is by no means a recent development in German and that its origin has to be analysed in context with the complex system of 19th century causative conjunctions (da, denn, but also indem, nämlich, wegen and others) and syntactic development such as extraposition – something which researchers in historical and present-day grammar have hardly attempted to undertake (cf. Elspaß 2005: 296 ff. for details).

**Enclitic s**

Like Adelung (1781: 367 f.), 19th and early 20th century grammars and orthographies allow enclitic s forms representing the pronoun es ‘it’ only
in connection with prepositions, e.g. *ans, aufs, durchs, ins*. For contracted forms of verbs, conjunctions and pronouns with *es*, which were allowed in exceptional cases only (i.e. literary dialogues), the orthographies demanded to mark the dropped schwa by an apostrophe. This ‘spelling rule’ was not even observed by literary writers, as can be seen by numerous examples of *gehts* and *wenns* in works by Lessing, Lichtenberg, J. Paul, Hölderlin, Schiller, Goethe, Grabbe, Grillparzer, Hebbel, Droste Hülshoff, Raabe, Gotthelf, Fontane, etc.

Table 5. *Spelling variants with and without enclitic s (without apostrophe) in geht es, gibt es, wenn es, wird es, mir es, dir es, wir es.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>spelling variants</th>
<th>enclitic s forms</th>
<th>‘full’ es forms</th>
<th>Σ (= 100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gehts/geht es</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gi(e)hts</td>
<td>gi(e)bt es</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wirds/wird es</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wen(n)/wen(n) es</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mi(e)rs, di(e)rs, wi(e)rs</td>
<td>mi(e)r es, wi(e)r es</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the frequent forms *geht es* (‘GOES-IT’), *gibt es* (‘GIVES-IT’), *wird es* (‘BECOMES-IT’), *wenn es* (‘IF-IT’), and *mir es* (‘ME-IT’)/*dir es* (‘YOU-IT’)/*wir es* (‘WE-IT’), enclitic *s* appears in 15 to 20 percent of all cases. Moreover, enclitic *s* was used in many other, less frequent contexts:

(13) Nun will ich *Schreiben wies* auf dem Schief war.

(‘Now I will write HOW-IT was like on board of the ship.’)

[Heinrich Möller, Frühjahr 1866]

There is no discernable preference for *s*-enclisis in any of the German-writing regions. Thus it can be seen as a supra-regional variant in the emigrant letters. Interestingly, enclitic *s* has repeatedly been mentioned as a typical spelling variant of modern German chat-language. The letters show, however, that it is certainly not a variant which has crept up in ‘netspeak’. In the 24th edition of the *Duden* orthography (2006: 36), *s* enclisis is accepted in ‘umgangssprachlichen Verbindungen eines Verbs oder einer Konjunktion mit dem Pronomen “es”’ (‘colloquial word formations of a verb or conjunction with the pronoun *es’*) like *gehts, nimms* or *wenns*. This can be seen as a late if not overdue acknowledgment of a spelling norm of usage which has long been starting to glide down the slippery slope of grammaticalisation.
4. Conclusion

In German language historiography, the ‘long 19th century’ has predominantly been presented as the age of the Bürgersprache (‘the language of the bourgeoisie’) and the spread of standard German, with a focus on literary language and the ideological roots of codification efforts and modern language purism. This, however, entails a narrow view of what is ‘of value’ in an account of a nation’s language history. From a broader perspective (including a ‘view from below’), the 19th century must rather be hailed as the century in which, for the first time in more than 1,100 years of writing in German, not only a selected few, but the majority of the people were able to communicate in spoken and written German. Mass literacy can thus be seen as a crucial landmark in the history of German. The analysis of ‘everyday language’ in the private letters of ordinary people can not only provide us with an insight into the language use of the vast majority of the population, but also carries valuable information on linguistic developments which have gone unnoticed in language historiography and in the research on present-day German grammar. They have demonstrated that ordinary people’s writing remained relatively unaffected by official standards that were set up in school grammars and by the language norm debates of the 19th century. The emigrants’ writings rather show clear traces of norms of usage which partly date back to the 18th century or even older writing conventions and which can partly be linked to language use in spoken vernaculars that have gradually emerged as new variants of present-day German.

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Notes

1. As far as I can see, the claimed ‘influence’ refers to influence on other grammars and textbooks. Few researchers (like Konopka 1996; Takada 1998; Langer 2001) have investigated the actual influence on the writing practice so far.

2. Likewise, it is not clear to which extent ‘common people’ had access or did actually use ‘model letter writers’, which arose in the mid-19th century. Some of them, like Ludwig Kiesewetter’s, Otto Friedrich Rammler’s or Wilhelm Campe’s ‘model letter writers’, did have dozens of impressions (which does not tell us much about their actual circulation, of course). Some lower-class writers may have consulted them to see how to start a text of a specific text type or which phrasing may have been appropriate in highly formalised texts, but it may be safely assumed that they did not bother to consult them when in doubt about individual spellings or grammatical forms in a private letter.

3. Cf. Peter Koch’s and Wulf Oesterreicher’s (1985) well-known concept of ‘language of proximity’ or ‘conceptual orality’ (as opposed to ‘language of distance’ or ‘conceptual written language’).

4. Phraseological vor, as in vor allem (i allen) ‘particularly’, vor kurzem ‘recently’, vor Augen (haben/sein/ …) ‘to have/be/ … before one’s eyes’ etc., was not counted.
5. Emphasis in italics added here and in the following examples by me, S. E.
6. Basically, some researchers interpret paratactic weil as yet another example of a
general tendency to give up subordination in German, whereas others think that
weil simply replaces the more formal denn and ‘adopts’ its sentence structure (cf. Wegener 1993; Wegener 1999; Selting 1999).
7. Cf. Bohm/Steinert (1851: 26), Duden (1880: XV), and Duden (1914: XIV).
8. Hermann Paul (1916: 244) observed that forms like er hats (‘he HAS-IT’), ich bins
(‘I AM-IT’ = ‘it’s me’), ichs (‘1-IT’) or ers (‘HE-IT’) were frequent in colloquial
(spoken) language of his time. Admoni (1990, 221) believed that ‘full’ es forms
indicated the ‘stability’ of the inflectional system of German since the 18th century;
exceptions, i.e. enclitic s, appeared only in texts which imitated ‘gröbere Umgangs-
sprache … (z. B. bei Nestroy)’ (‘coarse/crude colloquial language’). Admoni’s con-
clusions have to be weighed against the fact that his analyses of 19th century texts
were always restricted to printed texts.

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Writing and ‘the Standard’: England, 1795–1834

TONY FAIRMAN

Abstract

This article gives a detailed description and discussion of seven applications for poor relief, as found in the archives of English County Record Offices. All letters were written by or for poor writers between 1795 and 1834. As the variety used in these letters is not ‘Standard’, nor ‘dialect’, the second part of the article is devoted to the question of how this variety relates (or does not) to traditional linguistic views on standardisation. Contrary to the prevailing ‘standard language ideology’, it will be claimed that the present letters can only be interpreted adequately through a linguistic theory ‘which treats all varieties of English equally and discards none’.

… in writing the history of powerless people, drawing on conventional, published sources is far from enough.

Adam Hochschild (2002: 104)

1. Introduction

This contribution has two parts; the first is practical, the second theoretical. The core of the practical part consists of seven applications for poor relief, which were written by or for poor, presumably lower-class writers between 1795 and 1834. Each letter is followed by an apparatus, in which I discuss the language and add information about the writer or applicant and the act of writing. In the second part I discuss a theoretical question: how writing fits, or doesn’t fit, into the major linguistic categories, ‘Standard’, ‘nonstandard’ and ‘dialect’. Throughout the article I highlight topics which these applications seem to suggest need research.

Two laws define the period 1795 to 1834. Ever since ‘An Act for the Relief of the Poor’ (43.Elig.I.Cap 2) in 1601, the state had placed on parishes, as the smallest units of civil administration, the obligation to
relieve the poor who ‘had settlement in the parish’ (to use the phrase of the time). For almost two hundred years parishes fulfilled their obligation only if the destitute entered the parish workhouse. But on 24 December 1795 Parliament enacted ‘An edict to empower Overseers &c. to distribute occasional Relief to Poor Persons in their own Houses, under certain Circumstances and in certain Cases …’ (36.G.III.Cap.23). This law empowered the destitute to apply in person, or, if they lived in another parish, write to their social superiors without entering a workhouse. A few wrote before 1795, but from about 1800 the word seems to have spread among the poor that the applicant only needed to make a convincing case and the parish would pay them ‘out-relief’, as it was called, wherever they lived. Since the writers applied to parish authorities, their letters were on official business. This may be why a few overseers kept them as evidence, in case the magistrates who annually audited parish accounts required any.

Each parish was a separate economic unit. Vestries, as they were called, were elected from those who owned property and businesses in the parish. They taxed all owners of land and property in the parish annually, and spent the money on the parish church, roads, bridges and the poor who had settlement in the parish. As the numbers of poor and applications for relief grew, the vestries set higher taxes. Eventually, the tax payers persuaded government to change the law. On 14 August 1834 Parliament enacted ‘An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales’ (4&5.Will.-IV.Cap.76, usually known as the Poor Law Amendment Act). This law enacted that, as before 1795, parishes could relieve only applicants in the parish workhouse. The applications stopped abruptly. I calculate this window of opportunity for the destitute and researchers alike was open for thirty-eight years, seven months and twenty-one days, plus ten for leap years.

The letters are now preserved in parish overseers’ files in English County or Metropolitan Record Offices (sometimes called Archives. Henceforward sometimes abbreviated to R.O.). There are letters in Welsh Record Offices and in The National Archives of Scotland. But I have limited my research to England in order to avoid problems with English as a second language. English County Record Offices must be distinguished from The National Archives in London, which contain records of national importance, a few of which were written by members of the lower classes especially if the government thought them subversive. The County Record Offices contain local records — of parishes, law courts, local businesses, churches, chapels, schools and other organisations, and of local families, aristocratic or commoner.
Record Offices preserve between ten and fifteen thousand applications. I have visited at least one R.O. in each English county and metropolitan area and sampled letters from most (237) parishes that have them, about 1.7 per cent of c.14,000 in England and Wales. Scaling up the average number of letters sampled per parish, I estimate a national total of 90,143, which is certainly too few.

One parish, Kirkby Lonsdale, a township in Cumbria (formerly Westmorland), seems to have kept all its letters about poor relief (1283). This yields a national total of 17,962,000. But this total includes letters written by overseers, who were neither poor nor lower class, although some of them wrote English as far from ‘Standard’ as poor applicants did.

Two other urban parishes appear to have complete sets of letters for limited periods of 16 and 11 years (New Romney and St. Margarets, Rochester, both in Kent). If these two parishes had received letters in the same proportions throughout the 38 years, New Romney would have received about 890 and St. Margarets about 2,050 letters. But most parishes are rural with about 1,500 inhabitants. So, probably less than 17 million applications were written in the 38 years.

There are two other known sources of letters by or for the poor:

1) the National Archives, formerly called Public Record Office,
2) private and published sources of emigrant letters.

Family historians may also have letters.

Several hundred people wrote the letters in my corpus, but often it is uncertain whether the name at the end of the letter is the writer’s name. Wives often signed their husband’s name. The contents of some letters suggest that the letter was written for the applicant. The contents of other letters suggest that only the applicant could have written the letter, but there is no proof.

Even if we can be certain who wrote a letter, recovering more than the dates of baptism, marriage and burial of most poor writers is time-consuming, or even impossible, though researchers may be lucky to find a family historian, who can provide details. I have information only on the first twenty-one years in the life of just one writer in my corpus — Stephen Wiles, one of whose letters is below.

Though the identities of the writers are uncertain or unknown, we can be certain the applicants were poor, and it is reasonable to assume that both writers and applicants belonged to the lower classes. If an occupation is mentioned, it is always an occupation which the middle and upper classes associated with the lower classes.

In 1806 Patrick Colquhoun calculated the population of England and Wales as 9,343,561, and sorted citizens by source of income (1806: 23,
fold out table). The occupational classes can be further roughly sorted into lower, middle and upper classes. The lower classes formed about two-thirds of the total population. Labourers, servants, hawkers, shoemakers, dock-workers, market-stall holders, and their wives, the sick, the old and the bereaved — they were the people who were most likely to claim poor relief and to be either without schooling and unable to write at all, or beneficiaries of free, or almost free charity schooling.

From about 1800, therefore, the lower classes entered English recorded history for the first time ever. We no longer have to try to detect their voices through the interference of the ‘Standard’ English of other writers, as we do, for example, when reading the records of trials in courts of law, or what writers of fiction made them say. In their own words, these writers expressed their own opinions and gave a limited picture of their own lives because they wrote only ‘in hard times’.

Although a few letters are set out as formal petitions, a petition was inappropriate as an application for poor relief. Most writers, therefore, claimed relief as their right. Some wrote with a confidence they would receive their rights, and with a directness and minimum of deference — sometimes none at all — to their social superiors which surprises some modern readers.

Applicants (and their scribes) wrote Englishes which vary from full ‘Standard’ to very ‘nonstandard’ on any or all linguistic levels: handwriting, orthography, lexis, grammar, syntax and the epistolary style appropriate in the early 1800s. No series of letters written in the same hand over a period which can stretch up to fifteen years contains signs that the writer tried to ‘improve’ his or her English. They seem to have felt no need to try, first because by the early 1800s parish relief had been a legal right of those in distress for two hundred years.

Secondly, overseers noted on some applicants’ letters how much relief they paid. These annotations seem as likely to appear on letters written in the most ‘nonstandard’ as they do on those in full ‘Standard’ English. Writers seem not to have got the idea that ‘refined’ English would be more effective than ‘vulgar’ English.

2. The Maidstone corpus

This corpus consists of almost 1600 letters containing about 270,000 orthographic units — that is, groups of graphs which a writer separated from other groups with two intended spaces. At least 90 per cent of these units correspond to ‘Standard’ words. The corpus has two main aims: first and foremost, the letters are the best examples of the writing of the lower classes, for which I had searched for several years before stumbling on the letters about 1993.
Secondly, it is a corpus of a variety of written English which I had never seen before. This variety is not ‘Standard’, nor ‘dialect’, which at first I had assumed was the variety which lower-class writers wrote. Nor is it like any of the Englishes I had become familiar with in my work as a teacher of English as a second or foreign language. These were mother-tongue writers, nearly all of whom lived at the time of writing in England. Their English has to be called ‘nonstandard’. But to call it that is as biased as to call humanity male, but there are nonmale humans. The study of these letters raised a fundamental question: not ‘What variety is this?’, but ‘How is written language to be described?’

I have always collected letters in densest ‘nonstandard’ English, by writers who had no ability or apparent wish to write ‘Standard’. I have sampled the other letters in ordinary ‘nonstandard’ English, especially those which contain perilinguistic data which illuminate the main aims of the corpus. Most letters are applications to a parish overseer for relief but a few in the same files are private letters or by informers who gave information or exposed claims they thought – or made out to be – false.

The corpus also contains two types of letter in ‘Standard’ English:

1) about 60 letters by members of the middle and upper classes, which Record Offices store in business or family files. I have collected these letters for two reasons: i) some were written in linguistically interesting circumstances; two upper-class writers, for example, were writing under stress, which suggests the question: Did the stress affect their control of language? ii) others deal with topics, particularly schooling, which are relevant to the corpus as a whole;

2) about 50 letters by two overseers: i) all the drafts written by an overseer who was the teacher of the only writer about whom I know more than the basic biographical details; ii) all the drafts written by another overseer, whose abundant scriptal alterations show that he was concerned to avoid ‘vulgar’ English.

When I began assembling the corpus, I made assumptions about this new variety which turned out to be wrong. So, I have revisited most of the Record Offices which I visited early in my researches, in order to bring the corpus up to date with my current understanding of what is important linguistically and perilinguistically.

For example, I became aware of words and phrases, such as ‘nourishment, tramp, able, be at’, which the writers used in meanings not recorded in the \textit{OED}, or which it records as obsolete before they wrote them in the early 1800s. Perilinguistic features include data on schooling, ailments and ‘the system’, that is, the arrangements which the gentry

One linguistic feature stood out: the different uses which members of the different social classes with their different schoolings made of Anglo-Saxon and Latinate content words, phrases and word formation strategies. Writers of nowhere-near-'Standard' English used Latinate words which had entered English with the Norman invasion in 1066, if not earlier, at least seven hundred years before they lived. But most of them used none of the newer Latinate words, or new meanings of old Latinate words (Inkhorn terms), which had been introduced into English from the mid-1500s onwards.

Because the corpus focuses on lower-class writings, assembling it has not been as straightforward as assembling a ‘Standard’ English corpus. Most sources for ‘Standard’ English are printed, so they can be scanned into the corpus very easily. Corpus-users can be sure the corpus text is a perfect copy of the source text. If sources are handwritten in ‘Standard’ English, corpus-users can also rely on the accuracy of the corpus text. If, as often happens, the handwriting becomes a scrawl where some graphs are illegible but the sense is clear, assemblers have sufficient reason to assume that the writer knew ‘Standard’ orthography and grammar and can, therefore, guess what they cannot read, with no risk to reputation for reliability.

But a researcher who proceeds like that when assembling a corpus of lower-class writings won’t produce a sufficiently reliable corpus. In particular, the corpus is likely to be more ‘Standard’ than the scripts are, because scholars, like all readers today, have been trained to read only ‘Standard’ discourse, so that is what they will tend to see in a ‘nonstandard’ and hard to read script.

But these source writers didn’t know ‘Standard’ English. Their scripts, therefore, have difficulties on two levels, lexical and graphic, which intertwine. Lexically, reading ‘nonstandard’ written discourse requires skills scarcely needed by readers of ‘Standard’ discourse. For example, just as skilled readers of ‘Standard’ withhold judgement on the word ‘read’ until the context reveals which meaning it has, so readers of ‘nonstandard’ discourse need to learn to withhold judgement on ‘meet, gorge, were, of, as, serves, think’ and many other orthographic units. This skill grows with practice.

Graphically, there are orthographic units whose orthography and grammar readers can’t predict according to the ‘Standard’. If writers show that they couldn’t write ‘Standard’ grammar, there is no reason to assume they knew ‘Standard’ spelling. Before a corpus can be assembled from such sources, a new skill must be acquired. Where the handwriting is a scrawl, or idiosyncratic, researchers must approach it as if they were
learning a new script. Converting such handwriting to text is, therefore, more like transliteration than transcription.

Graphologists claim to be able to read a writer’s character from his or her handwriting. Scholars should not allow graphology to put them off studying handwriting with the same care as they study phonetic material. Handwriting can tell us something about the writer’s schooling and familiarity with writing.

Transliterations of nowhere-near-‘Standard’ scripts must assume nothing on any linguistic level. As they gain experience, they may begin to detect regularities, which aren’t ‘Standard’.

Transliterations can be of two types: interpretive and literal. An interpretive transliteration is one in which the transliterator writes the graph they assume the writer would have written had they written, or known how to write that graph in a ‘Standard’ form. A literal transliteration is one in which the transliterator writes the ‘Standard’ graph which the graph in the Script actually looks like. Sometimes the transliterator must interpret, because the writer produced a shape which doesn’t look like any ‘Standard’ graph. Transliterations should always be aware whether they are transliterating literally or interpretively, and make the readers aware too.

Finally, very little lower-class writing is in print. Therefore, to collect it into a corpus, researchers must explore sources uncharted by linguists. The contents of Record Offices are easy to access compared to whatever resources family historians might have.

3. Seven scripts

3.1 Script 1

Hampshire Record Office: Lyndhurst, 25M84/PO71/26/4

(A strictly literal transliteration would be too confusing, so I have produced a basically interpretive one, and underlined graphs which are literal transliterations)

```
stafeard monday night
ny dear misses Walden i hop you and your
famely is queet Wil i hop that poor geane
is letter and myoyneng perfect health for
5 i loves her as ny oun sester and you ny dear
and kindest frend and mother Wilest i Wear
ny you to me and ny dear loy you xx—
rememler that ?? you youest to tel me
after i Ware you that i shoeld think no more
10 alout you but how could i lee so uenyreatfu l [CRAM
as to fovyet your kindest and willingnes
```
to me nou ny dear nisses Walden that is not
ny d-------- temper bleeve me — ?deceeveng?
We yot on perty Will in our yenery hom
15 think yod it was A fine day and We got hom
to mothers alout nine A clock i Weare
verrey much ferteged and so Wear ny peor
dear lettle loy l—he Wear not recorved
of the yuvney for severel dayes after
20 all ny frinds Wear glad to see us co[m]
hom you ould hav leen much
suprised

Apparatus

Orthographic Units 133 monosyllabic units (80.0 percent) in 165 units.
Content words by source

Anglo-Saxon Types 27 Tokens 46 (79.3 percent)
Latinate Types 10 Tokens 12
Inkhorns Types 0 Tokens 0 (21.7 percent)

Handwriting and writer: this Script is the first page of three-page letter,
and is one of the rare private letters which have ended up in overseers’
records. Apart from register-related lexical differences, the language of
these private letters is still recognisable as lower-class language and is
not otherwise different from that of the letters of application they wrote
to their social superiors.

Ann Legg wrote to a friend, possibly a former employer, in Lyndhurst,
Hampshire, from a house called Stafford, near Dorchester, where she
was a cook. Legg didn’t date her letter and the paper has no franking
nor watermark, so I can date it no more precisely than 1810—1835.
On the last page of her letter she wrote

i hop that you Will bee eable to read ny
lad ritning iam verrey cold and all the
serventes ar gone to bed

which, with a possibly weak rush light or candle, may partly explain her
far-from-‘Standard’ handwriting. She may also have been in a hurry to
finish, so she didn’t always write the words in her head; for example, in
line 9 she may have intended to write ‘after i left you’, or ‘if i Wear you’
and not after i Wear you. And in line 11 she confused affixes.

Ann Legg had regular forms for each upper and lower case letter of
the alphabet, but several forms are identical, or nearly so. For example,
by not dotting her <i>s, she gave readers the common problem of distinguishing <i> from <e>. In *queet* (l. 3) it is impossible to decide whether she meant <i> or <e>, but her affixes, which look like <-eng> can be safely interpreted as <-ing> because there are no clear examples of <-eng> in the corpus. She also, but more often than other writers without practice, failed to form enough legs to <m>, so that it looks like <n> and <my> looks like <nj>. Her <a>s are indistinguishable from her <u>s, but fortunately her <o>s are different from her <a>s.

She has some potentially confusing idiosyncrasies:

i) <r> and <v> look like each other;
ii) She usually formed lower case <b> and <l> identically, because she flattened the cup of the <b> so much that it looks like the ligature with the next graph (for example, <lee> in line 10);
iii) Her lower case <g>, <q> and <y> are often identical.

A consequence of so many identities is that the permutations of possible graphs in some units (the second unit in line 13, for example) make it difficult to decide which word Legg actually meant to write.

**Line 1, hop:** Writers with least knowledge of the rules of ‘Standard’ spelling tried to spell phonemically. Vaguely remembered ‘Standard’ spelling systems interfered with their phonemic inclination. For example, the unknown writer of ‘theay [have sent you Dafter hom with hur Indenters]’ seems to have been aware that ‘Dafter’ had partly unphonemic spelling but, unable to remember which letters were unphonemically ‘Standard’, wrote <f>, which is as indefensible phonemically as <gh> (Buckinghamshire R.O. Stony Stratford, PR 200/18/1/55: no date).

This phonemic inclination came from two sources: 1) the first drills the writers did as learner readers were all phonemic, based on some of the shortest words in English, for example, ‘do, go, lo, no, so, wo’. The fact that some writers wrote ‘dou’ for ‘do’ suggests that some teachers made ‘do’ rhyme with ‘so’ when they drilled their scholars; 2) phonemic spelling (‘enuff’, for example) is easier to remember than etymological spelling. Some vowel sounds, as in ‘heard’ or ‘board’, have no dedicated vowel graphs and also present phonemic spellers with a problem.

**Line 4, intoyneng perfect health:** Legg was probably writing to a former employer (hence *Mrs*). But this would not be sufficient to make her try to write ‘correctly’ and thereby confuse ‘enjoy’ with ‘enjoin’. Writers of the letters quoted later didn’t try to write ‘correctly’ to overseers, who were their social superiors. Nevertheless, this phrase, and others later on, show that she had picked up some English, which the families she worked for used. For example,
i) Among lower-class writers a conventional expression of concern for someone’s health is something like ‘I hop those fue lins find you well as it leeves me at preasant’. This expression is not limited to the English lower classes. It was and is also used in other parts of the world. I have seen examples written near Hadrians Wall in northern England in the first century AD, on Pacific Islands in the 1800s, and in modern Africa;

ii) Legg chained nouns and information at phrase level, which is more typical of the higher-class than of lower-class writing, for example, ny dear [and kindest frend and mother (lines 5–6) and your kindest and willingnes [to me (lines 11–12). The effort to write the English she had heard may have caused her to lose focus on the affixes.

iii) ‘Ferteged’ was not a lower-class word or affliction. In a list of their afflictions I have ‘cancer, colra, gathering in hir belley, palsey, poorly, smallpox’ and others, but no word suggesting mere tiredness.

**Line 5, i loves, Line 9, i wear:** Writers of ‘nonstandard’ rarely added ‘-s’ as a ‘nonstandard’ verb ending, and the verb form ‘i Wear’ is also very rare. The corpus has only eight examples of ‘iWear/were/where’, which were written from Cornwall to Northumberland, whereas it has 206 examples of ‘I was’, which were written as commonly in the north of England as in the south. The only verb feature which is identifiable as local ‘dialect’ is the East Anglian Present Tense form, ‘he love’, of which the corpus contains examples in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, and nowhere else.

**Line 10, CRAM:** The writer reached the edge of the page and had to cram the last few graphs above or below the line.

**Line 16, nine A clock:** One might think that writers of this class wouldn’t know the time. But many of them did. They noted the time of death surprisingly often; on July 23, 1835, for example, Mary Jenkins (or someone writing for her) wrote *My Dear Husband Departed this [Yesterday Afternoon 3 o clock. (Devonshire R.O. (Barnstaple): Nor- tham, 1843A/PO42).

**Line 21, you ould:** most writers of ‘nonstandard’ seem to have known that they must write full words. Spellings like this occur when the writer seems to have been unable to identify the syllable /ad/ with a ‘Standard’ word.

The editors of this issue suggested the following explanation for ould:

‘You ould’ sounds exactly like ‘you would’ when read aloud quickly – the writer may not have felt the need to distinguish between word-final (in ‘you’ /jjuw/) and word initial (in ‘would’ /wud/) /w/.'
This does not explain the kind of problem which this kind of writer faces. But it does illustrate the kind of problem which readers like the editors and I face when trying to understand and explain scripts like these six.

The writers of these scripts had learnt only to letter and copy (mechanical writing) and were less familiar with the visual patterns of conventional spelling systems than with the aural patterns of sound. For compositional writing these skills are only elementary.

Aural writers tend to spell the sounds in their heads phonemically. Usha Goswami and Peter Bryant write, ‘Children do depend heavily on letter-sound relationships when they write words’ (1990: 46). These scripts show that adult writers learn to write compositionally by the same steps as children do.

For all learners /w/ is a problem, because it is not word-final in English pronunciation, but in spelling <w> can be word-final. The sometimes conflicting English spelling systems interfere with learners’ first, phonemic attempts to write.

The problem for experienced visual readers like the editors and me is to recover the elementary stages of learning to write, which we all went through. Rather than reading by eye alone, as experienced readers tend to do, we have to learn to read by eye and by ear, so that we hear the speech on which mechanically trained writers modelled their compositional writing.

3.2 Script 2

Cambridge County Record Office: Swaffham Prior, P150/18/1
(to save space I now produce texts with run-on lines, indicating line-breaks in the Script with a single right-facing square bracket)

Sir i am Sir to [SEAL] trubel you [wit another let[SEAL] i have had lent [one giny and Sixpance Since i [was at youre parish wit was [inof is then he yoused me very ill i have had no more ther [sic] the [above t of my husband in all [this time i falered him to bu ckby worf meardanity in [narthamtonShire this last [ougust he got of i asked him [hou i mush get back he tould i mit go to the brasnokers [[BLOT] and beg i think it is the [pariSh duty to Sened me [som think or make him [it is hared that i must pirish][CRAM [and my husbanb [sic] get a ginny [awick i beg you will Sen [d me Som think or make [him if you do nither i Shall [be lost with [Ann leeland

Apparatus

Orthographic Units 106 monosyllabic units (84.8 percent) in 125 units.

Content words by source
Anglo-Saxon Types 22 Tokens 29 (80.6 percent)
Latinate Types 6 Tokens 7
Inkhorns Types 0 Tokens 0 (19.4 percent)

General comments: this letter has no date, but it may be about 1812. In 1793 the employer of her husband (Francis Leeland, Boatwright) wrote a letter, saying Ann was ‘deranged in her mind’.

Handwriting: i) Leeland is ‘a minimal pointillist’ writer, that is, her handwriting is well-formed, fairly neat and easy to read, which indicates a fair amount of practice when she was a scholar. But she didn’t write her words, she drew them graph by graph. Minimal pointillist writers also drew the more complicated graphs (like <m>) stroke by stroke.

ii) Another sign that she lacked experience in writing is that she wrote to the edge of the page before she had finished a word four times. She did it even with short words like ill and send.

[SEAL] indicates where the seal hides what was written.

Line 1: Leeland wrote the second Sir, instead of ‘sorry,’ as an echo of the first. This is not unusual.

Line 2, wit: = which

Line 3, [sic]: sometimes it is necessary to add ‘[sic]’ to reassure readers (and myself) that this really is how the script reads.

Line 5, he got of: this probably means ‘he avoided paying’. The use of a two-word phrasal verb is typical of writers of this class.

Line 7, pariSh duty: like many other poor she knew that the parish was obliged by law to give her relief, if she needed it. Writers of this class frequently failed to write the genitive <‘s> demanded by ‘Standard’ English. She used pariSh as an adjective with duty. This was not in accordance with ‘Standard’ English either, which favoured adjectives (‘parochial’) in adjectival positions.

Line 8, husbanb: inexperienced writers, like children learning to write, can confuse ascenders with descenders and forward loops with backward loops. So, they write <p> for <d>, or <b> for <d>.

As usual, the language doesn’t reveal where the writer came from.

3.3 Script 3

Dorset Record Office: Blandford Forum, PE/BF/OV/13/1

Mr Skendell this is to a quaint you [that the parish of Bimmster ont [pay me som of 3s wick Tell thay have [a --freff order from Oveasers and [and the pay as been stop 10 wicks [and $f I ham in Great want for [I Cant worke in no shop for my [Breath is so verey Short that I

5 [Cant worke Bott verey Littel at my [Tread and I Cant Gett nott a bove four [Shilens a wick and if you wont pay [the full som that is Back I most [Com
Writing and ‘the Standard’: England, 1795–1834

home to Blandford and my wyeff [and Famley and ad nott Been for Esq [Bastard I most Com B four now [and I hope that you will Let me [wat I ham to dou By nex Sondey [I Cant Bide year no
10 Longer [and Sf no mour
from a pour Augustine
Morgan

Bimmster May 8
1804
[1804 written over ‘1704’]

Apparatus

Orthographic Units 120 monosyllabic units (90.9 percent) in 132 units. Content words by source

Anglo-Saxon Types 24 Tokens 32 (78.0 percent)
Latinate Types 6 Tokens 9
Inkhorns Types 0 Tokens 0 (22.0 percent)

Writer: I have copied all nine letters (1803 to 1810) by this interesting writer. He was almost 52 years old when he wrote this one. He was born in Blandford Forum but lived in Beaminster and wrote to his birth parish for relief. They sent money fairly regularly. He married Sarah Dike in Beaminster on 20 Nov. 1785—he signed neatly, she made a cross in the marriage register. They had at least five children, including twins. He may also have fathered a ‘bastard’ daughter, born shortly after his first child with Sarah. I don’t know what his tread was, but in another letter he says wat /I dou is a Littel a at Dayley /Lebear.

Line 1, a quaint: writers of ‘nonstandard’ English tend to separate unstressed initial syllables in a ‘Standard’ word (Fairman 2007).

Lines 1 and 13, Bimmster, Bimmester: people have tried to change English spelling to reflect pronunciation. But these spellings show that, in fact, pronunciation has been changing to reflect the spelling, where possible: for example, i) unlike cities such as Leicester, Gloucester, Worcester and London, which have enough inhabitants to prevent speakers changing the pronunciation to reflect the spelling, the inhabitants of small places like Beaminster don’t form a critical mass who could prevent change. When I lived in the area in the early 1980s, I heard /ˈbəmɪnɪstə/, not the pronunciations which Morgan’s spellings suggest; ii) the pronunciation of some uncommon content words has changed to reflect the spelling: a) ‘almond’ is now often pronounced as it is spelt; b) R.O. documents show that in the 1700s and 1800s speakers of all social classes pronounced ‘conduit’ as /ˈkɔndɪt/ or /ˈkɔndɪt/, but now it is pronounced /ˈkɒndwɪt/ in the media and by people who work in Conduit Street in central London.
Line 2, *freff order*: possibly a miswrite for ‘fresh order’. Where applicants lived outside their birth parish, the procedure was for the overseer of the birth parish to send an order to the overseer of the host parish to pay relief, which the first overseer refunded when he received a bill.

Line 3, *for*: writers of ‘nonstandard’ hardly ever used ‘because’ as their causal conjunction.

Lines 5–6, *I Cant Gett [nott a bove four [Shilens ... the full som that is Back*: multiple negation is, of course, conventional for such writers. *a bove and back* are metaphors. Writers of ‘Standard’ might have avoided them and written ‘more than’, or ‘the complete amount which is overdue’.

Line 7, *I [most [Com home to Blandford and my wyeff [and Famley*: as I pointed out above, writers of ‘nonstandard’ rarely chained two nouns in the same grammatical place. By adding *and my wyeff [and Famley* at the end of the proposition instead of after *I*, Morgan did in phrases what he and other writers did in clauses — chained information at the end of a proposition instead of embedding it. Conditional clauses are the only ones they regularly embedded initially, but they can seem as if they are not embedded, but balanced, rather like ‘the more you eat the fatter you get’, for example:

I have a frind lives in Bristol on the Cay [his name Is Mr Ching he lives att the Barnstabel all [hous and If you have eny mind to help the Child he will [Safely Convayyet to me I desire If you have eny pity or [Compacion Come or send In distres Some help to sucker the [Child (Richet foxell, Aprel ye 14 1767. Cornwall R.O.: Padstow, DDP170/16b/1/3)

Line 8, *Esq [Bastard*: Morgan wrote these two words larger than all the rest in a neat copperplate hand. These words were no insult. There really was a Bastard family in Beaminster at the time.

Line 8, *B four now*: a very rare example of syllabic spelling.

Line 8, *I Cant Bide year no Longer*: Dorset speakers today instantly recognise this clause as their dialect.

Line 10–11, *no mour [fron*: Morgan always ended with a variation of this valediction, conventional in ‘nonstandard’ writing, never with the ‘Standard’ ‘Your humble Servant’.

3.4 Script 4

Essex Record Office (Colchester): St. Peter’s, Colchester, D/P 178/18/23

\[i\] have sent to you mister holdon that i have no wark to doe and you [must send me sum muney i have Bean hout of wark a 11 weeks [have not arnt But
pound i was at wark wen vou sent me that muny [at muster pues it was But afue
days i have arnt But 2 shilens [for
three weaks i have pond all my things and i have got my [furest and
if you doe not send me sume muney i shall came [home ass possiBle my wife
expcts to Be put to Beed every day [and thear is a procts for me in a few weaks
[But when i git in to warke praps i may never truBle [you no more But if you wil
not help me thirow [kurtor you
must surport my wife and famely all ther [lifestme when =itheare is a
nesety i nevery will try [to make my self a setelmenet aney more [you sent ward
that my wife arnt a greate deal [of muney sureny she youst to arn a goudeal But
she have arnt nothing latly neot and she is not likeley [to arn aney more for
sumtime you sed i might have [Bean at
mister Clopper tl this time But your [perther node neot nothing a But
my busens [you may tel mester rouse to cole at mester pues [then e wil tl you all
aBut my busens [ples to send me sum muney Buy rouse on fridy [sm to pay sum
of my deats of if not i shall [cume over next munday and git ahuse in my houn
[parshes
[from Benjamin Brooker: 2 December 1825]

Apparatus

Orthographic Units 218 monosyllabic units (82.0 percent) in 266 units:

Content words by source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57 (76.0 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inkhorns</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (24.0 percent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General comments: i) I have chosen this letter because Thomas Sokoll
prints it three times in his work on Essex pauper letters: on the dust
to TS). Differences between my transliterations and Sokoll’s illustrate
problems which transliterators must solve and skills they must learn. As
Sokoll says, writing seems to have been ‘hard work’ for Brooker (2001:
46). But as a writer, he was above the level of pointillism. His line direc-
tion was certainly poor but he formed each graph in the same way every
time he wrote it. He was not, as Sokoll says, a phonetic speller. His
spelling was phonemic, like that of all ‘nonstandard’ writers. I shall dis-
cuss this topic later; ii) Note how Brooker chained his clauses with
ands – six of them.

Line 1, *holdon* (TS, ‘holden’): the overseer spelt his own name
‘Holden’. A comparison of Brooker’s penultimate graph in this word
with his <e>s and <o>s elsewhere shows that he often wrote <o> as
he did in *holdon*, but never wrote <e> in the same way.

Line 5, *pond*: = ‘pawned’. Such writers also used a phrasal verb in the
same sense, ‘made away with’.
Line 5, *i have got my furthest*: Anglo-Saxon phrasing for a ‘Standard’ expression, such as, ‘I have attained the limit of my resources’.

Line 7, *put to Beed*: such writers also knew the technical, ‘Standard’ word, ‘confined’.

Line 7, *procts*: = ‘prospect (of a place of work)’. ‘Prospect’ is an Inkhorn import into his basically Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. He probably heard it and tried to spell what he heard but, as happens with unfamiliar words, apparently couldn’t remember all the consonant sounds or their order (see Fairman 2007 for similar events).

Line 8, *praps* (TS, ‘prars’): Brooker often wrote <p> like <r>, compare *surport* in line 8. He usually altered his nonsensical or unphonemic spellings (l.1: *mst*, l.10: *tu*, l.13: *not*) but not in this word. Therefore, it is *praps*. Note that, like other ‘nonstandard’ writers, Brooker didn’t alter his spellings to make them ‘Standard’, but only to make them represent more closely what we assume he said.

Line 12, *surenry*: = ‘certainly’. It can be assumed that Brooker uttered a glottal stop here. There is other evidence in the corpus of glottal stops in the early 1800s in other parts of England and in what is now known as the Estuary English area.

Line 15, *perther* (TS, ‘pertner’): ‘partner’ makes sense, but Brooker formed his <n>s in ‘Standard’ form and never like <h>, which is what the graph looks like here. I have no suggestion for his intended word.

Line 19, *git ahuse in my houn [parshes*: Brooker lived in Ipswich, about fifteen miles north-east of his home parish in Colchester. This is a threat to the overseer; if he rents a house in his own parish, he will be more ‘troublesome’ to the parish than he is in Ipswich. ‘Nonstandard’ writers often used ‘trouble(some)’ (in a variety of spellings) for their relationships with their parishes. ‘Come troublesome to the parish’ and ‘fall on the parish’ were two of their expressions for the ‘Standard’ ‘make application to the parish for relief’.

3.5 Script 5

Centre For Kentish Studies (Maidstone): New Romney, P309/18/15

Mr Cohen

Rye June 2 1821

Sir/ I have taken the liberty [of writing these few lines] Saying i should be very much a bledge to you if you will have the Good ness to make me a Wheskoaa te of that Cloth i sent you [if you please Sir/ a young man that lodgd at Mr vaughan gave that to me for he

5 says that i wanted a Wheskoate to work in [Sir/ i am sorry to troubbel [you Sir i really am very much [Drove for one Sir if you will [have the Kindness to send it i ]should be very much a bledge [to you Sir that
hapern that [you sent me is quite Whore [out for thay save my Close [very much and i have not Got [noither one now from yours respectfully Stephen Wiles

**Apparatus**

*Orthographic Units* 100 monosyllabic units (84.7 percent, counting only the main letter) in 118.

- **Anglo-Saxon** Types 22 Tokens 28 (77.8 percent)
- **Latinate** Types 5 Tokens 6
- **Inkhorns** Types 2 Tokens 2 (22.2 percent)

**General comments/writer:** Stephen Wiles was baptized on 11 May 1802 in New Romney on the south coast of Kent. His parents signed their names in the marriage register, but they seem to have been poor, because the parish gave Stephen a free schooling. His teacher was Thomas Woollett, who was also a parish overseer and wrote ‘Standard’ English. Woollett billed the parish for teaching Stephen only during the winter months from 1812 to 1817. In his lessons Woollett used slates, copybooks (they were not called exercise books then) and Joseph Guy’s recently published *A New British Spelling Book* (1810, in print to 1864).

Schools for the poor didn’t use grammar books, which taught the more active skill of writing. Most grammar-book writers echoed Robert Lowth’s statements, ‘Grammar is the Art of rightly expressing our thoughts by Words’ and ‘[it is] indispensably required of every one who undertakes to inform or entertain the public, that he should be able to express himself with propriety and accuracy’ (Lowth 1762: 1 and ix). Such schools used spelling books, which taught the more passive skills of reading and copying from the Bible. James Burgh (1747: 10) put it thus:

> The art of Writing, being a mechanical thing, may be acquired by a youth of any sort of genius, bright or dull, through dint of practice and application.

The gentry drew up similar rules for other Charity Schools. For example, the rules of the Charity School of the parish of St. Mary-le-Bone in London defined the schooling given as: ‘such only as fits them for the condition they are to hold in life’ (Anon 1794: 2).

Woollett was not alone in appearing to assume that Wiles and his other lower-class scholars wouldn’t have any thoughts which might entertain or inform ‘the public’ — that is, the upper classes. These people
Tony Fairman

had been trained in all aspects of ‘Standard’ English and seem to have regarded it as, in modern terms, a ‘dialect’ (or rather, a sociolect), whose use they restricted to themselves, though, as with social class, the restriction was not insurmountable. Therefore, Woollett didn’t teach Wiles to write as he himself did. He taught him ‘a fair hand’ (in fact, his hand was not especially fair).

The New Romney vestry seems to have thought Wiles a bright boy because in 1817 they paid a large premium (£25) to apprentice him to John Vaughan, a watch and clock maker in Rye, about ten miles west of New Romney. Vaughan may have taught Wiles a practical use for the graph-forming skills Woollett had taught him — how to draw up bills and write business letters.

The apprenticeship indenture says that Vaughan should provide all Wiles needed, except clothes. So it was for clothes that Wiles wrote to New Romney. This is the second of his eight surviving letters, which got more desperate the raggeder he got.

A possible sign of Wiles’s linguistic skills is the two occasions when he embedded a relative clause with a Subject (ll. 3–4, a young [man that lodged at Mr vaughan], and ll. 6–7, that hapern that [you sent me]). Such embedding shows some ability to plan ahead and grade his information before writing. He might have chained the same information and written, ‘a young man lodged at Mr vaughan and gave that to me he says that i wanted a Wheskcoate to work in’.

Line 1, *I have taken the liberty of writing these few lines* [Saying]: this is one of the opening formulas conventional for letters by such writers. Another is ‘I make bold to …’. The theory of formulaic writing seems as applicable to ‘nonstandard’ as to ‘Standard’ writing, in which writers were taught not to repeat themselves (Wray 2002).

Lines 4–6 *Sir* (3 times): like other not-very-‘Standard’ writers, Wiles didn’t punctuate in a ‘Standard’ way. He hadn’t been taught to do this, because Guy, the writer of the spelling book his teacher used, did what other spelling- and grammar-book writers did — they taught punctuation as an aid to reading aloud not to writing one’s own thoughts with propriety and accuracy. But Wiles did punctuate in a very ‘nonstandard’ way. He started each proposition with *Sir*. In his own mind he was speaking to Mr Woollett. Another way in which other writers used ‘nonstandard’ punctuation was topically — they started each topic not with a new paragraph but with vocative punctuation.

Lines 6 and 7, *drove, hapern, whore*: it is more accurate not to class these forms as local ‘dialect’, for they and their like appear in letters written all over England. In their widespread usage among the majority of the population, therefore, they had the potential to be selected for a standard, but they weren’t because, among other reasons, they were unsupported by schooling and its tools.
3.6 Script 6

Cumbria Record Office (Kendal, formerly in Westmorland): Kirkby Lonsdale, WPR/19/1823/51

dear frends i got to mancster [on wensday and 19 shilens det [but to my soro found gorg very [porly and of work and he ad [got hus cols and wat he could [and he is very porly he ad [bored a short and i beleve he [has ben damp he is not habel [to work and whe ar all layeng [on stro for want of mony to [get our beds filling i have [ben so throng binding for thum [to live on i could not writ no [sooner i have not had my clos [of but 3 tims sins i left hom [till i ham very porly my self [i ham very sory that i ham a blidch to writ for relef [again this is forst work [if you wod send hus 1 pound [it wood be releing the pourest {CRAM [famley in the woll world o [our chelder is laying on [shavens

NEXT PAGE

10 hear is plenty of work if whe was [all well gorgs as ad 3 masters to sek [hem and wod give him 1 pound [awek to cut for them becos he [as ben so very stedy and you [se he is fast now for the want [of helth this sunday night [he is a letle beter thank god [for it o pray for our helth [and then we could do any [her your well weser AT ??] [you must Derect to Danly [mod mellgat[BLOT] man-

FRANKED: NO 18 1823

Apparatus

Orthographic Units 187 monosyllabic units (82.7 percent) in 226.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inkhorns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Handwriting and writer: A pointillist writer, easy to read for the most part, but not copperplate. There are two letters in the same hand by this writer, Daniel Mod. The contents suggest he wrote them himself. He and others in the family seem from references to have been working in or for mills in Manchester. Mod is an unusual surname, of which I have found no trace in the Kirkby Lonsdale records, neither in this spelling nor in any other possibility I can think of.

Line 1, dear frends: this is a fairly common salutation to an overseer. It doesn’t mean ‘friend down the pub’. From uses in other letters it combines two semantic elements: a) someone familiar from my home town, and b) someone likely to help me, ‘a friend in need’.

Line 1, mancster and mellgat (= Millgate, line 17): Mod proves that what James Kay-Shuttleworth (later Sir) wrote in his highly refined Eng-
lish of the Irish who lived in Millgate nine years later was true of the English who lived there too. Kay-Shuttleworth inspected the Manchester slums. His report (and at least one more, written in Kent by Frederick Liardet) spurred the upper classes to use state money to provide schooling for the poor. In 1839 Kay-Shuttleworth was the first to hold the governmental post now known as the Secretary of State for Education. In his report in 1832 Kay-Shuttleworth wrote (1970: 32):

The habitations of the Irish are most destitute. They can scarcely be said to be furnished. They contain one or two chairs, a mean table, the most scanty culinary apparatus, and one or two beds, loathsome with filth. A whole family is often accommodated on a single bed, and sometimes a heap of filthy straw and a covering of old sacking hide them in one undistinguished heap, debased alike by penury, want of economy, and dissolute habits.

**Line 4, habel:** Mod might be expected to have written ‘cant’. But, like other ‘nonstandard’ writers, for him ‘able’ meant ‘Having general physical or material strength; strong, vigorous, powerful’ (*OED*. able. 5)

**Line 6, throng:** = busy. ‘Nonstandard’ words with limited local use like this one are rare in ‘nonstandard’ letters. But chelder (l. 23) is common in northern writing.

**Line 13, becos:** rare in such writing. By far the commonest causal conjunction is ‘for’.

**Line 14, fast:** in this context this seems to mean ‘bedfast’, i.e. ‘bedridden’. But other northern examples in the corpus suggest it could, in ‘nonstandard’ English, mean ‘strapped for cash’.

### 3.7 Script 7

Centre For Kentish Studies (Maidstone): Horsmonden, P192/18/12

Back of the Duchess of Brunswick
Brunswick Square
Deptford Kent
July 21 1832

Gentlemen
Absolute necessity in consequence of my having been discharged [from my Situation as Labourer in the Royal Dockyard of [Deptford upwards of two months & during which interval [I have not been able to obtain any kind of employment [compels me to make this
application to you for the purpose [of obtaining some parochial
relief. On making application [to Mr Hodgskins some time back & stating my
destitute [situation to him, he had the kindness to remit for my use [one
Sovereign which is now entirely expended. In [consequence thereof & being
reduced to the most [abject state of
poverty (thro, want of employment) has urged [me to make this
application. I am now advanced in [years & I make no doubt but you are fully
aware that [in the present times old age stands very little
chance to [meet with employment. Gentlemen, if you will [extend the hand of
Benevolence to one now utterly [destitute by remitting to
me the Sum of Three Pounds [I doubt not but that by purchasing
some articles [for sale, be enabled by the proceeds of such sale to support [my
Family untill I should be able to obtain some kind [of employment. In case of
refusal my only alternative [will be to present myself my wife & family at your
[threshold to claim the allowance
which the Law in matters [of this kind, awards to the unfortunate.

With great Respect I beg
to Subscribe myself Gent[1]
Your Humble Servant
John Wimble

PS,
an immediate answer will [greatly oblige To [The Gentlemen the Parish Offi-
cers of
Horsemunden
Kent

PS. Gentlemen since the above was wrote [I am promise a
perment employment [which will take place in October

Apparatus

Orthographic Units 157 monosyllabic units (69.8 percent, counting only
the main letter) in 225 units.

Content words by source

Anglo-Saxon Types 22 Tokens 30 (32.3 percent)
Latinate Types 40 Tokens 55
Inkhorns Types 7 Tokens 8 (67.7 percent)

General comments: someone with considerable schooling and knowledge
wrote this letter for John Wimble. The writer was able to see beyond
Wimble’s abject poverty to the wider situation. The clause claim the al-
lowance which the Law in matters [of this kind, awards to the unfortunate,
the date (1832), the competence and organisation of the letter and the
place of work (a Royal Dockyard) suggest that the writer might have
been a self-schooled labourer and trade unionist.

Ideologically and condescendingly we might say the letter was written in
trying-to-be-but-not-quite-‘Standard’ English.
This letter differs lexically and syntactically from the others. Between 76.0 percent and 80.6 percent of all content words in the others are Anglo-Saxon; the rest are Latinate. But the proportion is reversed in this letter. Anglo-Saxon content words make up only 32.2 percent of the total.

This letter also differs from the others in its Latinate lexis. The six other not-even-trying-to-be-‘Standard’ writers used only three Inkhorn tokens between them (prospect Script 4/6; really, apron Script 6/5 and 6/7). But this trier used eight (abject, urge, advance, destitute (twice), article, alternative, award). The same lexical difference between ‘nonstandard’ and ‘Standard’ writers is in other letters (Fairman 2007). More than two hundred years after Inkhorns had been introduced into the language, the majority of the population didn’t use them.

Some examples of this writer’s choice of Latinate before Anglo-Saxon lexis are: in consequence of’, interval/time’, obtain/get’, for the purpose of/to’, stating my destitute situation/telling him how bad of i am’, advanced/getting on’, compels/forces’. ‘Force’ is Latinate, but the lower classes used it, perhaps because it is a monosyllable.

Lexically, the limits of the writer’s knowledge appear at least twice: 1) upwards of (l. 3), ‘more than’ would get rid of the ‘low’ metaphor; 2) some time back (l. 6), ‘some time previously’, for the same reason.

Syntactically, his limits appear in embedding in sentence structure. As was the fashion then, Wimble’s writer began his letter by embedding long, finite and nonfinite clauses before the main verb of the sentence. In fact, he showed off, by doing it for his first three sentences. Notice also that he didn’t embed just one clause before the main verb, but two, which shows considerable competence as a writer of ‘Standard’ English. But once again he wrote beyond his competence; 1) in the second sentence the implied subject (‘I’) of the two initial, nonfinite embedded clauses is not, as it should be, the same as the subject (he) of the main verb, had; 2) he started his third sentence with a phrase coordinated with a nonfinite clause. Readers expect a subject before they reach the main verb. But there is no subject, so the phrase and the nonfinite clause have to act ungrammatically as the subject. Not-even-trying writers never embedded nonfinite clauses before the main verb.

A far more experienced writer twice got bogged down in complex embedding in the middle of his letter, before choosing something simpler (Centre for Kentish Studies (Maidstone): U1590/C131/1, July 20th, 1814):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{it is not so much the extent} \\
\text{Another principle is that – it is not the quantum & clearness of conception with a facility of illustrating & animating the quantum of knowledge is & facility} \\
\text{such which is desirable as the power } ^\wedge \text{ of applying it,}
\end{align*}
\]
Very few, if any, readers of that can condescend to that writer, for he was Philip Henry, Viscount Mahon, 4th Earl Stanhope (1781–1855), a member of one of the foremost aristocratic families of England, the Stanhopes of Chevening. This is a draft, which Stanhope kept. Unlike the poor, he could afford paper for drafts.

Another ‘Standard’ writer actually complained he was handicapped by the demands and prohibitions of ‘Standard’. In April/May 1806 Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote (Coburn 1962: 2835, 15.222):

‘In reading Pindar, I was “struck to a heap” (to use a very vulgar but yet forcible & could it be divested of its associated meanness, highly poetical phrase) …’

A full ‘Standard’ style for writing made great demands on everyone’s time and finances, because it was so different from the syntax of the everyday speech of members of all classes, especially of what we have reason to assume from the evidence of the first six Scripts was the ‘vulgar, mean’ speech of the poor. It appears that, at a time when more members of the lower classes were being schooled, the need to use Ink-horns and to embed made competence in ‘Standard’ English harder to attain and helped keep the classes apart.

_Handwriting:_ there are three handwriting styles in this letter: 1) the near copperplate style of the main letter and the first PS. This hand also wrote the address on the other side of the paper; 2) the signature, John Wimble, in clear copperplate, which Wimble himself probably wrote neatly because he must have practised it many times when being schooled; 3) the second PS. The handwriting is shaky and the English is far-from-‘Standard’, so Wimble could have added it himself just before he posted the letter. If he did, his attention seems to have been divided between forming graphs clearly and thinking about his message.

**Line 5, parochial:** if the writer had written ‘parish’, he would have converted a noun to an adjective. Conversion was ‘nonstandard’. Following Latin grammar, a noun had to be given adjectival form for use as an adjective. Another solution was to write ‘parish-relief’. ‘Standard’ writers at this time hyphenated a noun to a noun only occasionally, but they seem to have done it more often later in the 1800s.

**4. ‘Standard’ and ‘nonstandard’ in historical sociolinguistics**

The question I shall try to answer in this section is: How can varieties of written English be classified in the light of these seven Scripts?

James Milroy, discussing the standardisation of written and spoken English, writes of a modern ideology, which posits ‘the centrality of the
standard variety’ (Milroy 2001: 534). If we accept the ideology and take ‘Standard’ as the central variety among all Englishes, the seven Scripts are ‘nonstandard’. Most of the seventh Script might be taken as ‘Standard’, but only if we assume ‘Standard’ is achronic, because it would be judged inappropriate written English today.

Milroy writes, ‘it is not merely the standard language that must be maintained; it is the language as a whole, and in the non-professional mind the idealised standard is the same thing as the language as a whole’ (Milroy 2001: 539). But Milroy collocates ‘Standard’ with ‘English’ and ‘language(s)’ about as often as with ‘variety/ies’, so that it is sometimes hard to be sure whether he speaks professionally or nonprofessionally.

Other professionals definitely have two voices on the matter:

1) The Quirk team called their book *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. But they wrote ‘our approach in this book is to focus on the common core that is shared by standard British English and standard American English’ (1985, 18th impression 2003: 33). Their grammar does not comprehend the English language, and if they do include any ‘nonstandard’ grammar, they relegate it to the fringes. For example, they give ‘nonstandard’ multiple negation six lines of 8-point font in a footnote, whereas they give ‘Standard’ double negation three quarters of a page and the ‘Standard’ problem — to split the infinitive or not? — more than two pages of main text (1985: 787, 798–9 and 496–8);

2) The Biber team (or their publishers) called their book *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. But they wrote ‘it is not our purpose here to survey the range of regional and social dialect variants in spoken English’ (Biber 1999: 18). These two titles continue a practice which can be traced at least as far back as the first modern grammar, Robert Lowth’s *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762).

This ideology is anachronistic and inadequate when applied to writing in historical sociolinguistics. It is anachronistic because it assumes that standardisers in the 17 and 1800s had the same aims as those in the 1900s. But they didn’t.

They may, as we saw with Lowth’s title, appear to have been trying to standardise the whole language, but, in fact, until about the mid-1800s they thought no further than standardising their own variety, for two vital reasons: first, the means for standardising all the English used in the UK didn’t exist till about 1870. Nowadays, however, ‘the degree of acceptance of a single standard of English throughout the world, across a multiplicity of political and social systems, is a truly remarkable phenomenon’ (Quirk 1985: 18).
Secondly, to standardisers in the 17 and early 1800s their ‘refined’ dialect seemed unsuited for use by bargemen’s wives, street traders and dockworkers, who worked for their living, had unrefined manners and addresses like *Back of the Duchess of Brunswick* and wore lower-class clothing. Judging by their letters, most workers and their wives seem to have thought so too. John Clare put it like this (Storey 1985: 12, letter to Isaiah Knowles Holland, 1819):

‘Putting the Correct Language of the Gentleman into the mouth of a Simple Shepherd or Vulgar Ploughman is far from Natural’

In the ideology of the 17 and 1800s, ‘vulgar’ (the term equivalent to ‘nonstandard’ in the 1900s) was more honest than ‘nonstandard’ in its designation of the value which the standardisers set on lower-class language. But it was also more descriptive in that the standardisers were Latin scholars, so they understood it to mean ‘*vulgaris*, of, or belonging to, the great mass or multitude’.

The ideology of the 1900s is inadequate for the 17 and 1800s because it doesn’t account for the range of varieties of written English, as illustrated in Scripts 1–6. It extracts some material from the English language for examination as ‘Standard’ and dumps the rest without discrimination on a ‘nonstandard’ spoil heap, a ‘shrug-off’ category, to adapt a phrase from Stephan Elspaß (Elspaß 2002: 49).

Perhaps we can grade ‘nonstandard’ according to how close to ‘Standard’ it is: dense ‘nonstandard’? not-quite-‘Standard’? 45 percent ‘Standard’? for example. But it is hard to see how similarity to ‘Standard’ can be objectively measured. Ultimately, sorting by similarity is inadequate because it only measures the size of the spoil heap; it doesn’t sort its contents by their own qualities.

What is needed is a theory which treats all varieties of English equally and discards none. Perhaps, therefore, we can call these varieties ‘dialect’ — a variety with restricted local or social use. But, as concerns locality, this is inadequate too. I have found only four features of definitely local use in the seven Scripts, which leaves all the rest for the linguistic spoil-heap. It is possible that the ‘nonstandard’ material in Record Offices contains more local features than we know of, because this material is new and hasn’t been analysed. But even if this is the case, the material contains enough nationwide patterns and conventions for us to say they were not what professionals and nonprofessionals call ‘dialect’.

The most recent, comprehensive list of ‘dialect’ in England is *A Directory of English Dialect Resources: the English counties* (Edwards 1990). When I asked for ‘dialect’ in some of the Record Offices which Edwards
lists in her acknowledgements (Edwards 1990: iii), archivists directed me to the sources she lists. They didn’t direct me to the files which contain the Scripts, which archive catalogues don’t list as ‘dialect’ either. All Edwards’ written resources are printed. Her directory lists them under the sub-title ‘Books’. Her next sub-title is, ‘Local Studies Collection’, and all the Local Studies collections I have seen consist almost entirely of printed material. Handwritten material constitutes notes or drafts for books. Edwards’ next sub-title heads a list of spoken resources.

Therefore, to rely on the Directory or archive catalogues for written ‘dialect’ is to rely on printed resources identified by nonprofessionals. But very few members of the lower classes wrote to be printed. As with ‘Standard’, therefore, professional and nonprofessional views on ‘dialect’ overlap and result in a paradox. The lower classes must have spoken dialect. But professionals and nonprofessionals define ‘dialect’ in such a way that the only people who can write it are those who write ‘Standard’ and may never have spoken dialect. The people who spoke only dialect don’t appear in published sources because they didn’t aim to write ‘Standard’, and weren’t expected to by their social superiors.

Ideology, therefore, shuts most of the English-using community and their writing out of the centre of the field of study. In fact, their writing isn’t even on the fringe of the field. Edwards’ list doesn’t include it in the resources for the study of dialect, the language of the poor.

There are two key differences between ‘dialect’ and the language in the Scripts. First, all writers of ‘dialect’ had been well enough schooled to be able to write ‘Standard’ English. Either they had probably never spoken the ‘dialect’ they wrote (Alfred Lord Tennyson in Lincolnshire, for example), or they had, but had been schooled out of it, but had started writing it later in life (Edwin Waugh, Ben Brierley in Lancashire). When they wrote ‘dialect’, they adapted ‘Standard’ spelling systems as their own phonetic systems (‘The Tennyson Phonetic Alphabet’, one might say) in order to spell phonetically the allophonic differences of the local dialect from the ‘Standard’ pronunciation. But those writers who spoke only a local dialect either used ‘Standard’ spelling (as far as they could remember it), or tried to spell phonemically.

Secondly, it is not just the spelling that is different; the grammar, syntax and punctuation are too. In fact, if lower-class writing does appear in print, it is usually easy to distinguish from ‘dialect’.

Those, therefore, who wrote ‘Standard’ monopolised print, whether as ‘Standard’ or ‘dialect’, in England. One major exception to this, the poet John Clare refused to write ‘Standard’. Clare could not, ideologically, write ‘dialect’ either, for he couldn’t write ‘Standard’. His written language, which has recently been printed as he wrote it (Storey 1985), is more like the language in my corpus than like ‘dialect’, which perhaps
is why neither Edwards nor archivists list Clare in the ‘dialect’ resources of Northamptonshire, the county where he was born and lived most of his life.

But the ideology does more than centralise the ‘Standard’ and determine who writes ‘dialect’. It standardises ‘dialect’. The spelling of John Clare and other lower-class writers is unacceptable because it is variable. Some standardisers changed their ‘dialect’ spelling systems, perhaps better to represent ‘dialect’, but they didn’t spell randomly as ‘nonstandard’ spellers did (see Barnes’ different editions).


There is no need of boot or spur,  
There is no need of whip or wand,  
For Johnny has his holly-bough,  
And with a hurly-burly now,  
He shakes the green bough in his hand.

Lindley Murray’s *English Grammar, adapted to the different classes of learners* (1795, 57th edition 1851) appeared three years before *Lyrical Ballads*. In a chapter entitled ‘On Propriety’, Murray wrote ‘Avoid low expressions: such as, “Topsy turvy, hurly burly, pellmell …” &c’ (1795: 276). George Campbell had already described ‘hurly-burly’ and similar words as ‘burlesque, offensive’ in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. (1776, 2 vols: 1.76, in print to 1911). In *Composition, Literary and Rhetorical Simplified*. (1850: 8) the Rev. David Williams described the phrase and 31 others as ‘vulgar, and in disuse by all well-educated persons’. ‘Hurry-burly, fiddle-faddle’ and ‘hob-nob’ are all in Wordsworth’s poem. But they weren’t so much ‘the real language of men’ as iconic, standardised ‘dialect’.

‘Dialect’ poetry by ‘Standard’ writers appeared in print at the start of the Late Modern English period. For example:

1) Before 1743 Josiah Relph wrote a poem entitled *Hay-Time; or The Constant Lovers. A Pastoral [in the Cumberland Dialect]*. Relph must have been schooled in Latin, for he went to Glasgow University, was a reverend and wrote the 19th Idyllum of Theocritus and the 8th Ode of Book 1 by Horace in the ‘Cumberland dialect’;
2) John Collier (1708–1786) wrote Lancashire ‘dialect’ verse under the pseudonym ‘Tim Bobbin’. But ‘he was in fact well educated, familiar with Chaucer, the classics, and contemporary literature of all kinds’ (*New Dictionary of National Bibliography*);

3) ‘Dialect’ poetry seems to have been standardised for at least a hundred years. For example, in a recent issue of a popular local (Yorkshire) magazine, Arnold Kellet writes (2006: 55):

... the ‘Yorkshire Farmer’s Lament’ from the Ampleforth area. Mid-Victorian but sounding so modern, it begins:

\begin{verbatim}
Rainin’ ageean Ah deea declare,
It’s two days wet for yah day;
Warse tahmes than theEase was nivver seen
Us farmers’ll be beggar’d clean.
\end{verbatim}

Note the ‘Standard’ features: 1) Latinate lexis, *Lament, declare*; 2) punctuation, especially the apostrophes. The poet knew the ‘Standard’ lexis and spelling.

If, therefore, the Scripts and other writings like them cannot count as local ‘dialect’ because standardisers and their ideology have hijacked the term, perhaps they can be classified as a social dialect – the English written by members of the lower classes.

But writers’ social origin doesn’t guarantee which variety of English they write. Most lower-class writers wrote ‘nonstandard’ English. But the writer of the almost – (85 percent?) – ‘Standard’ Script 7 was probably a member of the lower classes and so probably were writers of other applications for relief written in ‘Standard’ English.

Perhaps, therefore, it is the writer’s social status at the time of writing, which guarantees the variety. William Cobbett and Charles Dickens were both born into lower-class families but were middle class when they wrote ‘Standard’. But this argument is circular: Cobbett and Dickens are middle class because they write ‘Standard’; ‘Standard’ writers are middle class.

At the upper end of the social scale, in 1792 the mother of George Byron (1788–1824, future Lord and poet) sent him to a school for poor children, because she was a single parent and poor. There he learnt as other children did ‘to repeat by rote the first lesson of Monosyllables – “God made man – let us love him” – by hearing it often repeated – without acquiring a letter’ (Eisler 1999: 22). If relatives hadn’t found money to give him a schooling ‘proper [to a] future peer’ – Aberdeen Grammar School and Latin – he couldn’t have become the poet he did.
Social origin is the context within which a child learns to read and perhaps to write. It may influence what is learnt, but it is not the agent by which a child learns.

A further point about ‘dialect’ is that ideologically it is ‘nonstandard’. It could, therefore, be a linguistic spoil-heap. In a section called ‘On Dialect’ Manfred Görlach treats it thus as well as in the standardised sense (Görlach 1999: 201–214).

The section has eighteen examples of or about ‘dialect’. Görlach says, for example, that text T26b, ‘Anon., “Threatening letter from Durham” (1831)’ (1999: 201) is ‘in the “natural” dialect of County Durham’ (1999: 290). I quote the first two sentences and add data for the whole letter, as I did for the Scripts:

I was at yor hoose las neet, and myed mysel very comfortable. Y e hey nee family, and yor just won man on the colliery, I see ye hev a greet lot of rooms, and big cellars, and plenty of wine and beer in them, which I got ma share on. Noo I naw some at wor colliery that has three or fower lads and lasses, and they live in one room not half as gude as yor cellar.

Orthographic Units 177 monosyllabic units (86.3 percent) in 205 units.

Content words by source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>59 (82.0 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inkhorns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 (28.0 percent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This text has familiar features of standardised ‘dialect’:

1) The spelling is phonetic, based on ‘Standard’ spelling;
2) Too many common and structural words have ‘nonstandard’ spelling (for example yor, neet, myed, nee, ma). Writers of the Scripts would usually use ‘Standard’ spellings for these words;
3) ‘Standard’ sentences;
4) ‘Standard’ punctuation;
5) Every orthographic unit is a ‘Standard’ word.

The writer of T26b might have been born into the lower classes, but the text is evidence of schooling which was not available to the poor. Which class the writer belonged to when he wrote the letter is indeterminable. T26b could even have been written by an agent provocateur from the middle or upper classes.

The seventeen other texts in this section are either in ‘Standard’ English about ‘dialect’, or in standardised ‘dialect’ by writers who had been
schooled well enough to write ‘Standard’ English, except the first text, a letter, T26a (1999: 201). Görlach selected this perhaps on the spoil-heap principle – it isn’t ‘Standard’, therefore it is ‘nonstandard’. He reprinted a transcription of the original script, which is in the Home Office files in the National Archives. A government agent intercepted and redirected it to the Home Office with his own letter in well-schooled English, from which we learn a few details about the writer of the intercepted letter, Aaron Layton, from Ely, Cambridgeshire.

The agent confirms that Layton was a bricklayer. He was wearing ‘a fustian Jacket & breeches’. ‘Fustian and corduroy or flannel were the fabrics of the workers’ (de Marly 1986: 84). Layton, therefore, was certainly a member of the lower classes and the English in his letter is more like the ‘nonstandard’ of Scripts 1–6 than ‘dialect’.

I have put line-breaks into the first few lines of T26a, and added my own readings of the script itself. Layton wrote the letter in London on May 27 1816 to his wife in Ely:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Görlach</th>
<th>Fairman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Dear I have taken an oppertunity in riten to you to let you now that I Got into London on Sunday night about half past Six and went to my uncle James ouse amedetly and then to fishers and did sleep there</td>
<td>May 27 Let Landon Past amedetley SleeP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Orthographic Units 234 monosyllabic units (75.2 percent) in 311 units.

Content words by source

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>83 (85.6 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14 (14.4 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inkhorns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Görlach says this script ‘illustrates many features of the semi-educated speakers of the dialect of the region’ (1999: 290). But, in fact, it isn’t peculiar to speakers from Ely. It has features now familiar to us from Scripts 1–6, whose writers came from Cambridgeshire (Swaffham Prior, about ten miles from Ely), Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Kent and Westmorland. The same features are in letters written in all the other English counties:

1) No punctuation;
2) Phonemic (not phonetic, as Görlach says) spelling, but common and structural words have ‘Standard’ spelling. Note the upper case <P> in sleeP, which is like the upper-case, mid-unit <B>s in Script 4 and in other letters in my corpus.
3) Elsewhere in the letter Layton expresses some of his propositions in nonsentential form and writes monosyllabic units for some ‘Standard’ polysyllabic words.

T26b is ideologically ‘natural’ because it is based on ‘Standard’. T26a isn’t nonideological dialect, for it has no Cambridgeshire feature, unless, as said above, there are unknown local features in this newly discovered material. Nor is it ideological ‘dialect’, for its writer couldn’t write ‘Standard’.

Building on Milroy’s discussion of the ideology of ‘the centrality of the standard variety’ (Milroy 2001: 534), I have tried to show that the ideology does more than place ‘Standard’ at the centre of the field of study. It actually excludes a large area of English usage from the field of study altogether. One result is that after more than two hundred years of work there is still no grammar of the English language which explains how users can understand each other when a statement like ‘The Beatles didn’t know nothing about musical notation’ has two contradictory interpretations of one of the most important grammatical features of any language — negation. Another result is that we still don’t have a history of English in all its variety, only of the ‘Standard’.

But the writings of dialect-speakers exist. None exists in print, except in the work of Thomas Sokoll, a German social historian (2001), who selected over 700 letters from two Essex Record Offices for historical, not linguistic purposes. English, Welsh and Scottish Record Offices contain thousands of scripts. They could be dialect, if professionals and nonprofessionals hadn’t long used the term to refer to standardised ‘dialect’.

In fact, Record Offices contain a complete range of what was written by the English-using community, from the bills of shoemakers who could barely write, to Lords who could write compound-complex sentences of more than two hundred words, some of which might be Latin, Greek or French. The ‘Standard’ ideology is so rigid that it cannot account impartially for English in this range of complexity and gradation on all linguistic levels. For that reason in this chapter I put quotation marks round ‘(non)Standard’ and ‘dialect’.

What is needed is a malleable, achronic theory which accounts equally for all varieties of English, past and present, and dumps none. There are nonprofessional reasons to dump them, but no linguistically valid ones. Some ‘nonstandard’ features are as widespread as ‘Standard’ ones. It is another mistake to dump this large body of written language on the assumption that it is failed ‘Standard’. This was the English which the majority of the English-using community wrote if they attended the schools the upper classes provided for them.
5. Concluding remarks

In this article I have discussed only the written, not the spoken language of poor members of lower-class English society in the early 1800s. Therefore, this is not the place to propose a new theory for the study of the English language. My purpose is only to try to explain why English was, and still is written in an even wider variety than I illustrated in Scripts 1–7. Any theory, hypothesis or explanation must account for everything in writing and not ‘shrug off’ any of it as erroneous, on-its-way-to-becoming ‘Standard’, or some other ‘escape clause’ in a contract of work under which researchers will study written English.

The theme of this journal issue is lower-class English. But, as the Scripts show, defining written variety by social class yields a range of varieties of English, not just one. There are other difficulties in designating a variety of writing as lower-class.

First, from the early 1800s more and more people were upwardly mobile. At some stages of their lives, therefore, it is hard to decide what class they belonged to. Class membership by itself is not enough to determine how anyone writes English, if they write at all. Class membership is the environment not the cause of writing.

Secondly, learning to write is a different process from learning to speak. Learner writers don’t pick up writing from those around them as learners pick up speaking. Writers are taught in formal situations, usually by means of books and methods which vary ideologically and diachronically. During the period studied here, social classes were not all schooled in the same ways. If children of poor parents went to school, they learnt only to form graphs and copy religious texts ‘in a fair hand’. This, say the Regulations of the Warrington Female School of Industry (1814) (Cheshire R.O. P316/5448/195), is the ‘mechanical part of instruction’. Other regulations described the early stages of learning to write as mechanical, well suited, it was thought, to those whose future work would be mostly repetitive and mechanical — ‘the performing aspect’, as it is called in this era (Nicholls 1989: 92). Most middle- and upper-class children went to schools where they learnt also to write — ‘the compositional aspect’ (Nicholls 1989: 92). But the connection between schooling, class and variety is not fixed.

Thirdly, in the 17 and 1800s most children learnt to spell before they began to write. Learning to spell included learning to spell in the modern sense and dividing polysyllabic words into syllables. Records show that some teachers kept children of the poor spelling for two to three years before they let them ‘write’ (Fairman 2005). The Latinate and Anglo-Saxon principles of syllabication differed, which seems to have confused some textbook writers, and must have confused teachers and children of any social class too.
Fourthly, the children of the poor weren’t taught compositional writing. If they wanted to learn it, they had to teach themselves. But it was difficult. Schooled writing in the early 1800s was more unlike speech than it is now, especially for them. First, they had to want to learn. Then they needed intelligence and luck — a sympathetic sponsor, preferably with a library, as happened to Dickens.

A key factor, therefore, in writing in the early 1800s and now is its cause: ‘schooling’, that is formal instruction, which can override the association of varieties of English with social class. In the early 1800s types of schooling ranged between free, or almost free mechanical schooling and expensive liberal schooling, where writing in English was learnt by translating into and out of Latin. The English of Scripts 1–6 can be called ‘mechanically schooled’. The English of Script 7 was probably self-taught. Earl Stanhope’s English was ‘liberally schooled’.

The methods, means and aims of the schoolers, whether parents, trained or untrained teachers, vary diachronically. The language standardisers or, to avoid confusion, language conventionalisers in the 17 and early 1800s seem to have tried to ‘refine’ a dialect. Under the influence of repulsion, they tried, on the one hand, to move their own dialect away from ‘low’ English, and, on the other, under the influence of attraction, to move it towards features of the Latin which most of them learned in the schools which they attended but the children of the poor didn’t. By planning to teach the lower classes only ‘the mechanical part’ of writing and not ‘the Art of rightly expressing our thoughts by Words’, they left them free to express themselves as they would and could, free of the influence of organised language conventionalisation, but not free of other influences, such as their own speech, the natural dialect.

‘Standard’ should be restricted to the middle to late 1900s, when conventionalisers had the intention, and more means and money than ever before to spread a ‘Standard’. Schooling a whole nation to write is more complex than schooling a small social class, which must affect the outcome. Conventions in writing are what result when the output of the schoolers interacts with what a nation of learners brings to school. In the 2000s when many ‘Standards’ exist, we might plan for ‘Mainstream’ English, which combines these ‘Standards’.

Conventionalisation, not standardisation, should be at the centre of language study. Standardisation is just one of many conventions by means of which language users understand each other. We know that schooling maintained the convention of ending a letter with ‘Your humble servant’, but we don’t know what maintained the equally widespread convention of ending ‘so no more from’ Tony Fairman.

*Maidstone, Kent*
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Variation in Canadian French usage from the 18th to the 19th century

FRANCE MARTINEAU

Abstract
On the basis of private documents (letters, diaries), this article discusses the language use of Canadian French writers from different social classes from the beginning of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century. It first examines the relationship between the writers and the norm and their use of conservative and innovative features with regard to spelling and grammar. Next, it looks into the extent to which non-standard spelling use could be paralleled with vernacular use of morpho-syntactic features.

ne montre pas mon griffonage
jan ai honte moi-même

‘Do not show my scribbles, I am ashamed of them’ (18th century)

There have been many studies on the 17th and 18th centuries French norm as imposed through grammars such as Vaugelas and Ménage’s grammars and the Dictionnaire de l’Académie française (Ayres-Bennett 2004; Catach 2001). However, we know relatively little about the true usage that French writers of the lower and upper classes made of the language in their private correspondence from the 17th century to the 19th century.

Studying the usage of writers allows us to discover more about the state of a language at a certain period in time. However, since these documents are based on written language, they must be studied with regard to the difference between oral and written tradition. These writers reveal, through their use of the written language, some lexical, grammatical and phonetic features as well as their spelling strategies and the
relation they have with the norm. This article is chiefly concerned with this last aspect, the relation between the existing norm as we know it from prescriptive works, and the usage of writers from different social classes over two centuries, from the beginning of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century.

In the first section of this article, I will present the corpus on which this work is based as well as the problems I will be addressing. In section two, I will compare French Canadian writers’ use of conservative and of innovative features in the 18th and 19th centuries. Finally, in section three, I will examine how non-standard spelling use could be paralleled with vernacular use of morphosyntactic features.

Reconstructing the older states of a language

Aside from dictionaries, grammars and, written documents left by writers of the times are the only traces that can be used for reconstructing the older states of a language. The most easily accessible documents are literary or administrative texts. However, the language used in these texts is quite formal and has to be compared to other types of documents from the same period. Documents that are more private in nature give us a glimpse of another level of language. Research done on these types of documents is relatively rare, given the time investment needed to build such corpora (with sources often random and private letters not well identified in archives). For more than a decade, however, this area of research has been growing for English, German and Dutch with studies bearing mostly on social history or historical linguistics (Fairman 2002; Romaine 1988; Vandenbussche 2002; Vandenbussche, De Groof, Vanhecke and Willemys 2004, among others). Compared to research on other languages, studies on European French have been rare (see Branca-Rosoff and Schneider 1994; Bruneton and Moreux 1997; Caron 1992; Chaurand 1989, 1992; Ernst and Wolf 2000) and texts are most often studied for their social/historical interest.

In order for these private documents (letters, diaries) to be useful for reconstructing older states of the French language, they must be organized according to modern sociolinguistic criteria. Without this internal organization, these documents remain fascinating witnesses of the language of the writer, but cannot be used to generalize on the language of that period. Since 1995, I have been building a corpus of vernacular French (Corpus de français familier ancien, Martineau 1995–2006), from correspondence between parents and friends and from account books, with the main objective being to understand the origin and evolution of Canadian French. My corpus contains over 1000 letters, twenty travel journals and ten account books, with the majority having been
transcribed (almost 15 million words). It is structured by date, by dialect, by social criteria and by type of text.

The corpus covers the period between the 17th century and the first oral sources in the middle of the 20th century. From a dialectal point of view, the documents come from the birthplaces of the first French settlers in Canada (Paris and the northwest region of France), from the first two French settlement areas in America (the St-Lawrence Valley and Acadia—the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island), and the areas to which the first settlers emigrated (Louisiana, New England, the Great Lakes, Western Canada, the Mississippi Valley and Missouri.) I have taken great care in distinguishing the origin of the document (where it was written) from the origin of the writer (where he or she was born). For example, a text written in Quebec by a writer from France would remain a document written in European French. I have also organized the corpus according to social groups. This classification was difficult, as the social hierarchy in New France and then French Canada was not as rigid as it was in Europe (Havard and Vidal 2003). Even within the French settlement areas, social class distinctions may be different. To avoid this problem, I decided to organize the writers by profession, with a special category for women.

Each writer’s profile includes his birthplace, his date of birth, his profession, and his mobility. Since the first wave of emigration to Canada was small (about 10,000 immigrants, according to Charbonneau and Guillemette 1994) and genealogical sources are well documented, this helps follow the lives of the writers even if they were not well known.

Finally, the documents were organized by type of text: letters, receipts, account books, personal diaries. Most of the documents are letters written to other members of the writers’ families, usually in a context of private or semi-private communication. Letters follow writing conventions just as much as literary texts, reports and account books (Grassi 1998). This is why the opening of the letters is usually a salutation similar to: Je vous aist crist cette Lettre pour vous faire asavoir de mes nousvelle qui sontres bonne dieu mersie, ‘I am writing you this letter to give you good news, thank God’ (1800). Even so, between the opening and closing expressions, the letter as a text type gives us examples of morphosyntactic structures which are much less rigid, especially when the letter is long and written by someone with little experience in the art of letter-writing.

Receipts are shorter texts, sometimes written by lower-class individuals. The disadvantage of a receipt is that, even if it is signed, it does not provide much linguistic information on the writer because it is so short. This is one of the reasons why I added the account books to the
corpus: their advantage is that traces of the writer’s identity remain, and they are of an adequate length.

The research of Juneau and Poirier (1973) has shown how account books are important documents for retracing lexical terms or dialectal and regional pronunciations. Account books also allow us to study many aspects of verbal morphology and highly lexicalized syntactic structures, such as the use of prepositions. However, structural elements such as arguments of the verb (subject and object), negation and modality (interrogation, imperative) are less frequent and are difficult to interpret because of the fixed syntax of account books.

I have integrated audio files dating from 1930 to 1960, including sociolinguistic interviews, traditional stories and songs. These documents allow us to bridge the gap between 19th century and 20th century French; they also, to a certain degree, serve as a point of comparison for the written documents (see Martineau 2005).

All of these written documents that serve to reconstruct an older language — be they literary, administrative, or private documents — are still merely traces of the state of an older language. Even an informal letter, written by an almost illiterate writer, must be approached as a written text, and not as spoken traces. We must remember that the prestige of the norm had an even greater impact on these written documents than on oral language. Without native speaker intuitions on the language, it is difficult to place these texts in the proper linguistic context.

Researchers are often surprised when they realize that many letters written between the 17th and 18th centuries, which, at first glance, seem to be distanced from the norm of the time, as in (1a), actually follow the rules of normative grammar, once spelling is standardized, as in (1b).

(1) a. *Je soiteres pour voir vous*  
   *En donner de marque de vive voix ce ce*  
   *res une satisfaction des plus grande*  
   *que Je pus Ja mes expéré*  

   (Madame de Lavaltrie, 1751)

b. *Je souhaiterais pouvoir vous en donner des marques de vive voix,*  
   *ce serait une satisfaction des plus grandes que je pus jamais espérer.*  

   ‘I would like to be able to give you news in person, which would be an even greater satisfaction than I could ever hope for.’

Does this mean that these documents cannot tell us anything about vernacular grammar? What is the relationship between the individual as a writer and the same individual as a native speaker? Can we deduce the grammar of a speaker from a written text, or is the scrambling of the written code too much for us to learn about it this way?
This article will examine the relationship between the writer and the norm, with regard to spelling and grammar, and what this relationship reveals to us about these writers as speakers of a language. The importance given to spelling as a gauge of social status seems only to have increased during the 19th century in the majority of countries that had an increase in the literacy of their populations with urbanization and industrialization.

To understand the way literacy increase had an impact on writers, I have compared private documents from the 18th century to the 19th century. The documents come from French Canada, which is an interesting area to study given the relationship between France and its colonies in the establishment of a linguistic norm. A colony of France at the start, from 1534 to 1763, in contact with France but far from the main centres like Paris, French Canada was quite isolated from France after the British Conquest. My corpus consisted of texts chosen from the Corpus de français familier ancien. I selected more than one hundred letters between parents and friends, from writers belonging to the upper class (the ‘bourgeoisie’) to writers belonging to the lower classes, and three diaries. In total, 35 writers, all born in Canada, were selected. The documents were categorized according to the writers’ birthdates, instead of by the date they were written, in order to measure the impact of a changing norm on the years that the writers received formal education.4 For instance, two different people who wrote in 1880 may have received different educations depending on if they were born before or after 1840, which marked the middle of an important transition period which parallels the progression of literacy in Quebec (Verrette 2002).

Which norm to follow?

I first examined the linguistic choice of writers in a context of variation between conservative and innovative features. As Seguin (1972: 49) pointed out, referring to spelling in the 18th century, ‘The paradox is that the necessity to follow the spelling norm comes about before the norm itself has been fully defined. For this reason, the 18th century is a century of “spelling instability” [...]’. How did the upper class react to this variation, being the group that was most exposed to the norm? Can we distinguish this upper class from a lower class simply by comparing the two groups’ spelling? Does conservatism with regard to spelling go hand in hand with a conservative use of morphosyntactic elements?

One of the spelling variants that has long been considered a characteristic of the older state of the French language is the oi spelling, found in certain people names (françois, anglais for French, English), in adjectives (foible, ‘weak’, and mauvais, ‘bad’), in the inflection of the imperfect (avois,
‘had’) and conditional tenses (auroit, ‘would have’) as well as in the root form of certain verbs (paroıˆtre, ‘to seem’). The new variant, ai, was only approved by the Académie française in 1835, even if it was in variation with the older spelling all through the 18th century and used by printers, editors and certain authors such as Voltaire (Catach 2001: 307). In fact, the oi spelling had another variant, at least for verb inflection: e, as in avoislaves. This spelling was put forward in the 17th century by grammarians such as Lesclache (1688) and Lartigaut (1669), who suggested replacing the older form, oi, by é, which would be closer to the pronunciation and in keeping with inflectional morphemes (Biedermann-Pasques 1992: 155). According to Lesclache (1668: 23): ‘Nous devons donc écrire j’aime´s, il aime´t, je parle´s, il parle´et, ils parle´ent (‘We should write j’aimés, il aimé,t, je parle,t, il parle´et, ils parle´ent’). How was the spelling of writers affected by this variation (oi, e, ai) during the second half of the 18th century? Did they adhere to the innovative usage or did they stay attached to the existing norm imposed by the Académie?

As shown in Table 1, the majority of writers kept the old spelling for people names, except for two (writers 9 and 12). Most of our writers born in the first half of the 18th century were also conservative in their spelling, using oi or e in most cases instead of ai for the imperfect and the conditional. There was no progression of the innovative ai variant from 1700 to 1750, which corresponds to the period in which the writers were born. This means that most of the writers followed an older spelling; they chose either oi which was at the time the norm in the various editions of the Dictionnaire de l’Académie, from the first edition in 1694 to the four others that followed during the 18th century (the second in 1718, the third in 1740, the fourth in 1762 and the fifth in 1798) or e which was proposed at the very beginning of the 17th c. For instance, in contexts other than people names, some writers prefer e rather than oi as the conservative variant. In that context, frequency of use of e is 97.7 percent for writer 1 (vs 2.3 percent of oi); 100 percent for writer 2; 65 percent for writer 6 (vs 3.5 percent for oi); and 69.6 percent for writer 9. In the same context, other writers prefer the oi variant; frequency of use of oi is 95.4 percent for writer 3 (vs 4.6 percent of e), 74.4 percent for writer 12 (vs 1.2 percent for e), 94.7 percent for writer 13 (vs 5.3 percent for e), 100 percent for writers 5, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16 and 17.

However, three writers (4, 10, 11) show a higher rate of use of the innovative variant ai (frequency of use of e is 10 percent for writer 10; for writer 4, frequency of use of e is 18.3 percent and frequency of use of oi is 13.6 percent). Can the use of the ai variant be paralleled to a social class distinction? This is what Dubois (2003) suggests for the use of the ai variant in France. In her study of how writers born in Louisiana or emigrated to Louisiana from France adhered to the spelling norm
Table 1. Rate of use of the innovative (ai) variant versus the conservative variants (oi or e) in writers born during the first half of the 18th century in the St-Lawrence Valley*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers and birthdate</th>
<th>1 1696</th>
<th>2 1697</th>
<th>3 c.1700</th>
<th>4 c.1700</th>
<th>5 c.1704</th>
<th>6 1705</th>
<th>7 1707</th>
<th>8 1709</th>
<th>9 1722</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of ai in people names</td>
<td>0% (0/7)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0% (0/2)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0% (0/20)</td>
<td>0% (0/11)</td>
<td>(0/1)</td>
<td>87.5% (7/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ai in contexts other than people names</td>
<td>0% (0/43)</td>
<td>0% (0/3)</td>
<td>0% (0/22)</td>
<td>68.1% (15/22)</td>
<td>0% (0/7)</td>
<td>31.5% (25/80)</td>
<td>0% (0/51)</td>
<td>0% (0/23)</td>
<td>30.4% (14/46)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers and birthdate</th>
<th>10 1727</th>
<th>11 c.1730</th>
<th>12 c.1730</th>
<th>13 1731</th>
<th>14 1733</th>
<th>15 1738</th>
<th>16 1740</th>
<th>17 1743</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of ai in people names</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(1/1)</td>
<td>88.2% (15/17)</td>
<td>0% (0/7)</td>
<td>(0/1)</td>
<td>(0/1)</td>
<td>(5/5)</td>
<td>(0/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ai in contexts other than people names</td>
<td>90% (9/10)</td>
<td>100% (14/14)</td>
<td>24.4% (21/86)</td>
<td>0% (0/18)</td>
<td>0% (0/15)</td>
<td>0% (0/27)</td>
<td>0% (0/15)</td>
<td>0% (0/5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

during the 18th and 19th centuries, Dubois showed that the upper class from France, born between 1685 and 1760, very rarely used the conservative spelling variants (only 36 percent of the time, on average) whereas immigrant farmers (77 percent) and merchants and military figures (78 percent) used them much more frequently. Dubois concluded that this difference was due to the fact that the two latter groups were less educated and thus less exposed to the new norm coming from Paris.

In Table 1, the writers belong to the class of merchants and military officers. In New France, social class distinction was less pronounced than in France; noblemen could therefore participate in the fur trade, and there were marriages between noble families and merchants (Gadoury 1998). Among our writers, three social groups can be identified although the social distinction is not very sharp: the merchants and militaries oc-
cupying the higher class, the merchants and militaries of a lower social status, and the wives of these merchants and militaries, either from higher or lower class. This distinction demonstrates an inverse relationship than the one found by Dubois, where the conservative variant was associated with the higher class. In (3), percentages are for the innovative ai variant:

(3) a. Merchants and militaries of a higher social status (writers 6, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17): 16.6 percent (25/150)
   b. Merchants and militaries of a lower social status (writers 2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 13): 17 percent (23/135)
   c. Wives of these militaries and merchants (writers 1, 3, 4, 11, 12): 26.7 percent (50/187)

These results must be examined carefully since there is sometimes a high level of variation within each group. In the group of women, for example, writer 11 used the innovative variant 100 percent of the time. If she is excluded from the group, the percentage falls to 20.8 percent, very close to the other two groups. In the second group, there is also some significant variation, from 0 percent to 100 percent, even between writers that are brothers, all of the same generation and all merchants (writers 10 and 13). However, the data still point in the same direction: the oi variant is well ingrained, probably even associated with the elite.

At first glance, the difference in the degree of exposure to the norm from Paris and the difference in education cannot explain why the oi has the upper hand in New France whereas the ai variant is in progression in France. Writer 14, François Baby, studied at the collège des Jésuites in Quebec and writer 15, Pierre Guy, first studied at the Petit Séminaire in Quebec but then in La Rochelle, France; both used the oi variant. Writer 16, who was born in the St-Lawrence Valley, was exiled to France in 1760, at the beginning of the Conquest. His last letters, written around 1817, were thus written when he was in regular contact with the usage in France; he still used oi.

This gap between the usage in France and the usage in New France is also visible in the use of grammatical variables. In the 18th century, the adverbs pas and point are in variation; they both appear in non partitive contexts where the verb is negated as in (4), and in contexts where the negation falls on the noun, as in (5):

(4) Non-partitive context: Je ne veux pas|point.

(5) Partitive context: Je n’ai pas|point d’amis.
Variation in Canadian French usage

In Old and Middle French, the use of *pas* and *point* as adverbs was in complementary distribution, *pas* being used in non-partitive contexts and *point* in partitive contexts (Price 1997). But gradually, this difference faded and *pas* began to be used more broadly. In the 18th century, there was still variation between the two adverbs but the use of *pas* kept progressing in France as well as in New France. This progression was slightly more rapid in France than in New France, the latter having a higher percentage rate of *point* (Martineau 2005).

Are these writers who held on to the usage of *point* the same ones who used the *oi* variant? Is there a connection between using a conservative spelling variant and using a conservative grammatical variant? If we compare the behaviour of the writers in their usage of *ailoi* in Table 1, results repeated in Table 2, and their usage of *pas*/*point* in Table 2, we see that there is a gap in usage.

Table 2. Rate of use of the innovative (*pas*) variant versus the conservative (*point*) variant / rate of use of the innovative (*ai*) variant versus the conservative (*oi* or *e*) variant in writers born during the first half of the 18th century in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of <em>pas</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57.3% (265/463)</td>
<td>57.6% (34/59)</td>
<td>66.6% (10/15)</td>
<td>83.3% (5/6)</td>
<td>88% (46/59)</td>
<td>42.8% (6/14)</td>
<td>64.3% (18/28)</td>
<td>0% (0/5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of <em>ai</em> in contexts other than people names</td>
<td>0% (0/43)</td>
<td>0% (0/3)</td>
<td>0% (0/22)</td>
<td>68.1% (15/22)</td>
<td>0% (0/7)</td>
<td>31.5% (25/80)</td>
<td>0% (0/51)</td>
<td>0% (0/23)</td>
<td>30.4% (14/46)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of <em>pas</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93.7% (15/16)</td>
<td>70% (7/10)</td>
<td>76% (19/25)</td>
<td>100% (8/8)</td>
<td>86.6% (13/15)</td>
<td>91.3% (21/23)</td>
<td>70% (7/10)</td>
<td>(0/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of <em>ai</em> in contexts other than people names</td>
<td>90% (9/10)</td>
<td>100% (14/14)</td>
<td>24.4% (21/86)</td>
<td>0% (0/18)</td>
<td>0% (0/15)</td>
<td>0% (0/27)</td>
<td>0% (0/15)</td>
<td>0% (0/5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

In general, the innovative variant is much more obviously adhered to for the grammatical variant than for the spelling variant; many writers have integrated the new usage of *pas* well, but use of the *ai* variant is
slower to come about. This divergence could be due to the fact that usage of *pas* rather than *point* was not an important linguistic issue among grammarians as it was rarely mentioned in grammar books. However, the spelling norm — *oi* or *ai* — was debated and the position of the Académie, through its Dictionary’s editions, was clearly stated. A good knowledge of spelling implies a formal education; the usage of *oi*, even if it was in regression for higher class writers in France, might have been seen by New France writers as closer to the Académie’s norm.

In 1763, New France was conquered by the British. The isolation that followed, according to Poirier (1994), was the source of the progression of archaisms in Quebec French. Regular exchanges with France did not begin again until the middle of the 19th century. The French Canadian upper class gradually became aware of the gap that had grown between Canadian French and European French and tried to strengthen these ties once more.

Did the isolation brought about by the British Conquest help maintain the conservative spelling variants in Canada, while the innovative spelling variants progressed in France (in all social classes, according to Dubois 2003) and were even approved by the Académie? I have distinguished two groups of writers: those born in the St-Lawrence Valley (today’s Quebec), and those born in the region of Detroit (today’s south of Ontario), which was much more geographically and politically isolated. For this period, the corpus also shows a marked social class distinction in the St-Lawrence Valley between the upper class and the working class. In the Detroit region, this distinction was much more difficult to establish. There was a French upper class made up of fur merchants that gained wealth in the middle of the 19th century, but this upper class was much more recent than the one in the St-Lawrence Valley.

Table 3 shows that the conservative *oi* variant has a tendency to be maintained for certain writers born between 1750 and 1850, but that there is much more variation. However, there must have been a certain prestige associated to it because it still shows up in 1840 in the writings of Amélie Panet (writer 22), *amie des lettres* and a member of literary clubs. We can feel the weight that this old spelling variant must have had because it is one of the only archaisms that this writer uses. For example, she systematically writes modern variant *i*, instead of *y*, at the end of words like *lui* and *si*.

Even writers from lower classes born at the beginning of the 19th century adhered to the *ai* usage, as shown in Table 4.

This general tendency for St-Lawrence Valley writers to move towards the norm prevailing in France is also apparent with the use of *pas* and *point*. All social classes considered, the use of *pas* predominates in non-partitive contexts for writers born at the end of the 18th century or in the first half of the 19th century, as shown in Tables 5 and 6.
The region of Detroit, being more geographically isolated, adjusted less rapidly to changes in the norm and the innovative variants did not become used as easily. This is the case for the *ai* variant, and also, more visibly, for *pas*. 

Table 3. Rate of use of the innovative (*ai*) variant versus the conservative (*oi* or *e*) variants in upper class writers born between 1750 and 1850 in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers and birthdate</th>
<th>18 (c.1752)</th>
<th>19 (c.1769)</th>
<th>20 (c.1772)</th>
<th>21 (c.1786)</th>
<th>22 (c.1820)</th>
<th>23 (c.1840)</th>
<th>24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of <em>ai</em> in contexts other than people names</td>
<td>23.5% (4/17)</td>
<td>0% (0/19)</td>
<td>20% (2/10)</td>
<td>100% (42/42)</td>
<td>2.9% (1/34)</td>
<td>88.8% (8/9)</td>
<td>100% (11/11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

Table 4. Rate of use of the innovative (*ai*) variant versus the conservative (*oi* or *e*) variants in lower class writers born between 1775 and 1860 in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers and birthdate</th>
<th>25 (c.1775)</th>
<th>26 (c.1820)</th>
<th>27 (1806)</th>
<th>28 (1820)</th>
<th>29 (1840)</th>
<th>30 (1860)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of <em>ai</em> in contexts other than people names</td>
<td>16.6% (1/6)</td>
<td>(2/3)</td>
<td>89.7% (34/38)</td>
<td>100% (6/6)</td>
<td>100% (26/26)</td>
<td>100% (16/16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

Table 5. Rate of use of the innovative (*pas*) variant versus the conservative (*point*) variant in non partitive contexts in upper class writers born between 1750 and 1850 in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of <em>pas</em></td>
<td>83.3% (45/54)</td>
<td>100% (42/42)</td>
<td>94.1% (16/17)</td>
<td>87.1% (34/39)</td>
<td>91.6% (22/24)</td>
<td>71.4% (5/7)</td>
<td>100% (35/35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

Table 6. Rate of use of the innovative (*pas*) variant versus the conservative (*point*) variant in non partitive contexts in lower class writers born between 1775 and 1860 in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>26</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>28</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of <em>pas</em></td>
<td>80% (4/5)</td>
<td>83.3% (5/6)</td>
<td>91.1% (226/248)</td>
<td>100% (61/61)</td>
<td>100% (44/44)</td>
<td>96.5% (82/85)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are less than five occurrences.
By the end of the 19th century, the Detroit region adopted the norm of the St-Lawrence Valley, probably because of the large number of St-Lawrence Valley immigrants having moved there. The *oi*/*ai* and the *point*/*pas* variants both lead to the same conclusion: in the St-Lawrence Valley innovative variants were integrated more slowly than in France. This difference seems to be the consequence of the emergence of a local usage in a relatively geographically isolated context, rather than caused by differences in social class or less exposure to European French usage. This isolation is also the reason why conservative variants were maintained longer in the Detroit area than in the St-Lawrence Valley.

Was this difference enough for speakers in the Detroit area at the beginning of the 19th century to feel linguistically different from speakers in the St-Lawrence Valley? Based on the preservation of lexical archaisms and the introduction of neologisms or loanwords used to describe the region’s fauna and flora, several authors have proposed that French was so different in this area that they called it ‘français de la frontière’ (‘Border French’) (Johnson 1966; Halford 2003). The fact that there was also a usage gap between the St-Lawrence Valley and the Detroit region for the use of *point*/*pas* suggests that this may have been the case.

We saw that, starting at the beginning of the 19th century, there was a constant leveling towards a unique norm, with the consequence being that variation decreased as the norm became more and more stable. The next section will describe how the growing prestige of the norm — and how a fixed norm — had an impact on the use of non-standard variants.

**Outside the norm**

The creation of the *Académie française* in the 17th century started a major normative wave in France, reflected by the publication of Vaugelas’ grammar and the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (Ayres-Bennett...
Variation in Canadian French usage

2004). While the upper class was debating over the way French should be written and spoken, correct spelling became more and more prestigious. By the end of the 19th century, correct spelling had become an important social issue (Furet and Ozouf 1977).

When did this sensitivity to correct spelling become a social issue in the writings of our French Canadian writers? And has this sensitivity towards a spelling norm affected the selection of normative morphosyntactic variants? In other words, can writing well in the 18th century be defined the same way as in the 19th century?

In the 18th century, writing proficiency is almost certainly synonymous with the graphical form of letters — penmanship plays an important role in the teaching of spelling. When Mrs. Bégon writes to her son-in-law about her granddaughter, saying that *il ny a` qua lescriture que nous avons de la paine* (‘It is only handwriting that gives us trouble’), it seems that she is referring above all to her granddaughter’s penmanship, and not her spelling. The situation is the same for Mrs. Contrecoeur, who writes to her husband about their little girls:

(6) *tes petites filles qui arive de fair des visittes on voulu*  
*Ecrire dans malétre mais elle eotoit avéc leur corps*  
et avoit bien chauet ce qui leur fait dire quelle on  
*biën malle Ecrite’*  
‘Your little girls, that have just come back from visiting, wanted to write in my letter, but they were in their undershirts and were quite warm, which is the reason why they wrote quite badly’

Should ‘writing badly’ be interpreted as not forming letters correctly, or as not having a good knowledge of spelling? In studying this aspect, I considered two very simple spelling rules: the agreement of the noun in number, and the past participle ending (ending in *é*) for verbs in the first group:

(7) *Les (petits) amis*  
‘The-plural little-plural friends’

(8) *Nous avons essayé* (as opposed to *essayer*, etc.)  
‘We-1st p. pl. auxiliary-1st p.pl tried-past participle’

In written French, the plural form of nouns and qualitative adjectives is generally marked with either an *-s* or an *-x* at the word’s end position. This plural mark in spelling is generally not phonetically represented. In (7), the *s* in *amis* is not pronounced whereas for the adjective, the pres-
ence of the s is sometimes pronounced with the liaison (petits-z-amis). Because of this phonetic difference, we focused on the spelling of number agreement on the noun only and on the presence or absence of the written s (or x) which reveals a knowledge of the underlying spelling rules of agreement in nominal phrases. In (8), the final /e/ of the past participle can be correctly represented as a past participle ending (é), or, wrongly, as an infinitive verb ending (er) or the inflection of the 2nd person of the plural (ez7) for verbs of the first group (ending in -er). In this context, I have not taken into account whether or not the agreement of the past participle was correctly achieved (e.g. ils sont allés; les pommes que nous avons mangées).

This section will examine what these non-standard spellings reveal about the relationship of writers with the norm, rather than the cognitive processes that could possibly be at the root of these spellings (see Desrochers, Martineau and Morin 2007; Chaurand 1989, 1992).

Table 8 gives the results for the 18th century writers.

Table 8. Rate of use of spelling number agreement of nouns / rate of use of the past participle ending (é) in writers born in the first half of the 18th century in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of agreement in number</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(42/84)</td>
<td>(1/26)</td>
<td>(14/28)</td>
<td>(0/28)</td>
<td>(8/64)</td>
<td>(15/92)</td>
<td>(24/32)</td>
<td>(45/56)</td>
<td>(35/141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of past participle (é)</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>(3/3)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38/50)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(6/8)</td>
<td>(13/13)</td>
<td>(21/25)</td>
<td>(22/54)</td>
<td>(18/18)</td>
<td>(22/22)</td>
<td>(30/30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of agreement in number</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>96.4%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0/22)</td>
<td>(5/22)</td>
<td>(38/50)</td>
<td>(21/23)</td>
<td>(16/16)</td>
<td>(21/34)</td>
<td>(55/57)</td>
<td>(29/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of past participle (é)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>96.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12/12)</td>
<td>(26/30)</td>
<td>(32/33)</td>
<td>(15/15)</td>
<td>(9/9)</td>
<td>(31/31)</td>
<td>(17/17)</td>
<td>(17/18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

In Table 8, all writers have a good grasp of the difference between past participle ending and other endings. Only writer 6, a military whose level of education is unknown, has difficulty with this. However, knowledge of past participle ending is not generally sufficient to predict a general knowledge of spelling. Some writers who deftly grasped the dis-
tinction between past participle and infinitive endings had difficulties with the spelling agreement of plural nouns: this was the case for writers 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11.

In the previous section, we saw that writers 4, 10, and 11 tended to use the innovative \( ai \) variant. It is therefore not possible to associate the \( ai \) variant to a high level of education in the upper class, as was possible for writers from Louisiana. In fact, the steadfastness of the \( oi \) variant suggests that this variant had a different value than the one it had in France. Writers 13, 14, 16 and 17 could thus represent an upper class model: the use of the \( oi \) variant in conjunction with perfect spelling in all other areas.

Writers with poor agreement number proficiency show weaknesses in most aspects of their spelling. Some features are clustering of words, truncation, major difficulties with lexical spelling of words, and incorrect verb inflection, as shown in the following examples:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(9) } & \text{ ont } \text{ fent } \text{ défrais de fette} \\
& \text{ fa } \text{ font } \text{ ce } \text{ font } \text{ toute forte de coupon } / \\
& \text{ des poille } \text{ toute rouy}^2 \text{ez 7 } \text{ père debas} \\
& \text{ drapé } \text{ or } \text{ de } \text{ vente mangé des miste} \\
& \text{ ‘we would get rid of it this} \\
& \text{ way, they are all kinds of samples,} \\
& \text{ rusted pans, seven pairs of socks with gold thread, and (the meaning of the word is unclear) eaten by moths’ (writer 4)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(10) } & \text{ enfain me voila biento a la fain} \\
& \text{ de mes painne je me réjouii de voir le prentan} \\
& \text{ ‘here I am finally almost at the end} \\
& \text{ of my problems, I am happy to see the springtime (arrive)’ (writer 2)}
\end{align*}
\]

Can we deduce from their limited knowledge of normative spelling rules that their usage of grammar will also contain features that are outside the norm? In other words, based on the hypothesis that these writers received little or no formal education, can we deduce that their writing contains traces of vernacular features?

One writer, Charles-André Barthe (writer 9), who was born in Montreal and traveled to Detroit regularly for the fur trade, seems to indicate that there may be such a parallelism. Barthe is not as well-known a fur trader as François Baby, who was also from Montreal and managed an extensive network of fur traders with his brothers and other merchants from Montreal. The winter diary Barthe kept resembles a travel journal and an account book (Bénéteau and Martineau 2006). It is in the diary of this merchant, who was educated enough to write but not so much
that his writings were dictated by the norm, that we find an example of a very vernacular expression, that of the verb *falloir* (‘to have to’ usually written with the impersonal pronoun *il*) with a personal subject: *ont fallut pourté on fallu porter*, or ‘we had to carry’.

In order to analyse the potential parallelism between limited knowledge of normative spelling and use of vernacular features, I systematically compared the use of three morphosyntactic variables in the 18th century, shown in (11):

(11) Three morphosyntactic variables:
    a. Absence / presence of the negative *ne*
       *Je ne pars pas / Je pars pas* (I don’t leave)
    b. Variation between *je vais / je vas* in the first person singular of the present tense of the verb *aller* (to go)
       *Je vais partir / je vas partir* (I will leave)
    c. Variation between *nous* and *on* in the first person plural, with restricted meaning
       *Nous allons partir / On va partir* (We will leave)

For all three cases in Modern French, there is a social class distinction for the variable, with the second variants in (11) being more colloquial than the first. The results presented in Table 9 show that the 18th century upper class in the St-Lawrence Valley clearly favored a standard usage of the variable. In the case of *ne*-deletion, the reason is probably that the phenomenon is not widespread, either in the lower or upper class. This is why *ne*-deletion is so weak in Table (9) during this period but also in 18th century literary parodies with colloquial speech representation (barely 1.4 percent) (see Martineau and Mougeon 2003). However, there is variation according to social classes for the two other variants, at least in France (Ayres Bennett 2004). As shown in Table 9, upper class writings contain mostly *je vais*, the variant *je vas* being associated with colloquial speech. Table 9 shows also the rate of use of *on* when the reference group is restricted. In such contexts, *nous* is the dominant form in the writings of upper class writers. However, this third variable, *on/nous* in restricted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of the non-standard variant</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ne</em>-deletion</td>
<td>0.5% (2/426)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Je vas</em></td>
<td>3.5% (2/57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>On</em></td>
<td>21.8% (29/135)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
contexts (for example, On a reçu ta lettre, ‘We received your letter’), is less stigmatized than je vas/je vais. This less stigmatized use, although it was considered non-standard, may be explained by the fact that the use of on (vs nous) was increasing rapidly in another context, where the reference group is unrestricted (for example, On a eu du beau temps, ‘We had nice weather’).

Although upper class writings are clearly linked to use of standard variants, is there any trend for unskilled writers from this upper class to use more vernacular variants? Table 10 compares different writers’ use of two variants (on/nous and je vas/je vais alternance) as well as the rate of successful spellings of the nominal number agreement (results from Table 8 repeated below).

Table 10. Rate of use of two morphosyntactic variants in upper class writers born in the first half of the 18th century in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% je vas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0/2)</td>
<td>(2/2)</td>
<td>0% (0/9)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0% (0/37)</td>
<td>(0/1)</td>
<td>(0/1)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2/3)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14.2% (4/28)</td>
<td>4% (2/50)</td>
<td>16.7% (72/430)</td>
<td>16.6% (2/12)</td>
<td>8.1% (2/11)</td>
<td>25% (3/12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% agreement in number</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

Although there is not a large amount of data for each writer in Table 10, what we have is sufficient to state that we cannot generally rely on differences in spelling proficiency to predict the use of vernacular variant or not for 18th century writers. The rate of use of the on variant is similar in most writers, except writer 9 who, strangely, uses on very rarely. We cannot draw conclusions from the small number of occurrences of je vas; however, it is one of the writers with the weakest spelling proficiency, a merchant and interpreter, who uses the je vas variant:

(12) je va ferre mes desvion dan troi jour
‘I will do my religious duties in three days’ (writer 2)

As we discussed, ne deletion is very rare in the 18th century. The only occurrences of ne-deletion we found in our 18th century writers’ letters are in writer 6’s letters who shows spelling difficulties:

(13) cela nous avance pas.
Whereas strong spelling proficiency allows us to label a writer as a member of the upper class and predict his standard usage of grammar, having a weak knowledge of spelling is not enough for us to label an 18th century writer as belonging to the lower class, and we cannot predict his usage of vernacular features. Nevertheless, if there are colloquial variants to be found in a text, it will most likely be in this type of document, showing non-standard spellings.

At the beginning of the 19th century, a greater sensitivity to the spelling norm appeared in the upper class. Table 11 shows that in the upper class born between 1750 and 1850 and who are writing at the beginning of the 19th century, the distinction of the past participle ending is perfectly assimilated and spelling agreement in number is also largely followed, with the exception of writer 20.

Table 11. Rate of use of spelling number agreement of nouns / rate of use of the past participle ending (é) in upper class writers born between 1750 and 1850 in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of agreement in number</td>
<td>100% (44/44)</td>
<td>62.5% (20/32)</td>
<td>25% (6/24)</td>
<td>97% (33/34)</td>
<td>95.5% (43/45)</td>
<td>100% (14/14)</td>
<td>100% (20/20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of past participle</td>
<td>100% (31/31)</td>
<td>100% (17/17)</td>
<td>100% (18/18)</td>
<td>100% (30/30)</td>
<td>100% (15/15)</td>
<td>100% (6/6)</td>
<td>100% (34/34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

As in the 18th century, these upper class writers also use little if any stigmatized grammatical variants, such as je vas, the on pronoun to refer to the first person plural or the deletion of ne, which began to progress during the 19th century.

Table 12. Rate of use of three morphosyntactic variants / rate of use of spelling number agreement of nouns in upper class writers born between 1750 and 1850 in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of ne-deletion</td>
<td>0% (0/22)</td>
<td>0% (0/40)</td>
<td>0% (0/50)</td>
<td>0% (0/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of je vas</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of on</td>
<td>(0/2)</td>
<td>(4/4)</td>
<td>10.9% (13/119)</td>
<td>(2/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of agreement in number</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.
This greater awareness of the spelling norm created a gap with the lower classes. The progression of the prestige of spelling proficiency, coupled with access to formal education, had a tendency to dissociate upper and lower classes writings, as shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Rate of use of spelling number agreement of nouns / rate of use of the past participle ending (é) in lower class writers born between 1775 and 1860 in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>26</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>28</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of agreement in number</td>
<td>70.5% (12/17)</td>
<td>18.1% (2/11)</td>
<td>34.3% (24/70)</td>
<td>9.6% (6/62)</td>
<td>87.5% (169/193)</td>
<td>87.3% (282/323)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of past participle</td>
<td>83.3% (5/6)</td>
<td>80% (4/5)</td>
<td>94% (47/50)</td>
<td>33.3% (7/21)</td>
<td>85.7% (24/28)</td>
<td>100% (20/20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are less than five occurrences.

Writers 25, 26, 27 and 28, born before 1840, have weaker spelling proficiency. Even the distinction of the past participle ending is a problem for writer 28, who often uses the *er* ending instead of *é* ending (*j’ai aimé*).

In the 18th century, weak spelling proficiency did not allow us to make judgments on the sensitivity of writers to the grammatical norm; however, in the 19th century, weak spelling proficiency is often coupled with the use of non-standard morphosyntactic variants. For example, writers 27 and 28 exhibited a high rate of *ne*-deletion, of use of *je vas*, and use of *on* instead of *nous* for restrictive groups.

Table 14. Rate of use of three morphosyntactic variants in writers (27) and (28) in the St-Lawrence Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ne-deletion</td>
<td>39.5% (102/360)</td>
<td>100% (15/15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Je vas</em></td>
<td>78.1% (25/32)</td>
<td>33.3% (2/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>On</em></td>
<td>31% (135/431)</td>
<td>80% (8/10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.

Of course, the rate of use of these variants in the text is not a reflection of their use in spoken language: there must have been a necessary gap between spoken and written language. Even so, the fact that these vari-
ants appear in the text reveals that the writer has a more flexible relationship with the norm. For writer 28, who was not a proficient speller, penmanship is still the key to communication. He criticizes his son, who has a very good grasp of spelling, for not properly forming his (alphabetical) letters: *jai eune chause a te demander quand tu repondra tu tachera de forme tes lettre pour quon puis les lire,* ‘I have one thing to ask you, when you reply, make sure the writing is readable so we can read your letters’.

Writers 29 and 30 are both members of writer 28’s family: 28 is the father, 29 is his wife, 20 years younger than her husband, and 30 is the couple’s child, who was 20 years old when he wrote the letters. We have three generations (60, 40 and 20 years old), the younger two members born after 1840.11

According to Verrette (2002: 92), only 15.4 percent of Quebec’s population was literate by the beginning of the 19th century. The industrialization of Quebec in the 1800s made it more and more difficult to live off the land alone, and several farmers left the country to settle in cities. From 1850 to 1900, the urban population grew from 15 percent to 36 percent in Quebec (Frenette 1998: 79). The new economic situation puts pressure on the majority of the population to seek an education, which in turn fosters the development of a permanent public school system (see also Charland 2005). Quebec’s literacy efforts after 1850 resulted in the rate of literacy going from 26.7 percent in 1840 to 74.4 percent at the end of the 1890s (Verrette 2002: 92). Thus our three writers belong to three distinct groups: writer 28 was born in 1820, before the increase in literacy, writer 29 was born at the very beginning of the period of change and writer 30 was born during the period when the school system was developed.

As Table 15 shows, writers 29 and 30, members of the more literate post-1850 generation, were more sensitive to morphosyntactic variants belonging to the norm. These two writers were also proficient spellers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ne</em>-deletion</td>
<td>12.8% (10/78)</td>
<td>19.8% (28/141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Je vas</em></td>
<td>(0/4)</td>
<td>10% (1/10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>On</em></td>
<td>25% (2/8)</td>
<td>0% (0/32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rate is given when there are fewer than five occurrences.
Is literacy the only factor that has an effect on their writing? In fact, the two writers were both fervent ultramontanes like most of the upper class of that period. Both of them read ultramontane newspapers frequently, and the son even incorporated an extract from a newspaper directly into one of his letters:

(13) a. Onésime Jr.
«l’influence que l’introduction / des capitaux français parmis / nous ne manquera pas de donner / a / l’Élément franco Canadien un / nom qui va aller toujours de / mieux en mieux»
‘the influence of the introduction of French funds will without a doubt give French Canada a name that will not cease to improve’

b. Opinion publique newspaper, Sept. 10 1880
«L’année 1880 fera époque dans les annales de notre histoire. L’amélioration des affaires à laquelle la protection a dû contribuer, en partie du moins; l’établissement de relations financières avec la France, la fondation de l’industrie sucrière, l’exploitation de nos mines, la création d’un grand nombre d’industries, l’influence que l’introduction des capitaux français parmi nous ne manquera pas de donner à l’élément franco-canadien (…) voilà autant d’événements dont le pays peut à bon droit se féliciter.»
‘The year 1880 will go down into the annals of history. The improvement of business, at least partly helped with an increase in security; the establishment of financial relationships with France; the successful development of the sugar industry, our successful mining operations, the creation of a large number of industries, the influence of the introduction of French funds which will without a doubt give French Canada (…) these are accomplishments the country should be proud of.’

This adherence to the values of the French Canadian upper class (the presence of the clergy in the political sphere, as well as the choices of standard linguistic variants) by these two lower class writers is very likely related to the importance they give to spelling proficiency, which is part of the identity of the Quebec bourgeoisie in the 19th century.

This leads us to wonder if this value is shared by the developing upper class, to the west of the St-Lawrence Valley, because, as we have seen in the preceding section, this region seems to integrate changes in the norm more slowly, being isolated from Quebec. The importance attached to standard spelling as a social value seems to have happened at a much slower pace in the region of Detroit, even in the upper class. And this is probably why we can still find, in 1818 upper class writer 33, sentences
as in (14), with no nominal agreement in number and incorrect past participle endings:

(14) C est avec douleur est truste[ses] que Je vous Informe de L’Acci-
dents qu il est Ariver a notre cher Fresre Denis Jeudis dernier a
Midis Il etoit coucher dans jon Lits

‘It is with pain and sadness that I inform you of the accident that
our dear brother Denis had at noon last Thursday, he was lying in
his bed’

**Conclusion**

Before the spelling norm was well established, the upper class in France
and in its colonies did not seem to behave as a linguistically uniform
group. While in France and Louisiana, the innovative *ai* was progressing
according to Dubois, we found that in New France it was the conserva-
tive *oi* variant that was more common. This upper class conservatism,
also displayed in a certain degree in the use of *point over pas*, diminished
with the increased prestige of the norm; spelling proficiency as well as
observance of the norm in France became more important social issues
for the French Canadian upper class. The region of Detroit, however,
being more isolated, integrated these new values more slowly.

The analysis of the usage of writers in the St-Lawrence Valley and in
the region of Detroit allows us to better understand the benefits of study-
ing texts of a private nature (letters, diaries) for reconstructing the older
state of a language, as well as the social issues impacting writers. This
paper suggests that before the 19th century, spelling proficiency was not
a strong enough criterion by which to gauge the grammar of writers.
Writers strayed from the spelling norm, but without revealing much of
the vernacular. In fact, from a linguistic change point of view, spelling
errors in 18th century writings reveal very little about speakers’ grammar,
since these speakers may either follow the norm or not.

And herein lies one of the greatest challenges of historical linguistics:
reconstructing a vernacular language from a time when those who spoke
this language could not write it or (if they could) only left very disparate
records, if any (short letters, receipts). Yet some of the 18th century texts
from upper class writers or even middle-to-upper class writers reveal a
grammar with colloquial features, especially if these colloquial variants
were not very stigmatised. The global perspective of historical sociolin-
guistics acknowledges the contribution of the upper and middle class
speakers to linguistic change; in this light, upper and middle class writ-
ings help us to better understand social dynamics by the presence, or
absence, of variants.
The development of the school system caused a major change as far as the presence of colloquial features in writing is concerned. The lower classes found a voice in writing for the first time through an increase in literacy. As more lower class speakers started to learn how to write, they left more texts and gave us a glimpse of the vernacular and the dynamics of linguistic change that were previously only voiced through the upper and middle classes.

University of Ottawa

Notes

1. This article has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (MCRI project Modelling Change: The Paths of French, directed by F. Martineau; project Évolution et variation dans le français du Québec du XVIIe au XIXe siècles, France Martineau (director), Alain Desrochers and Yves-Charles Morin.


3. In the 17th and 18th centuries, New France covered a large region, from Canada to Louisiana as we know them today. After the British Conquest in 1763, New France was restricted to what is now called Canada.

4. The level of formal education of many of our writers is not known, given the difficulty in finding sources for that aspect.

5. Despite having gone through a large number of documents, I found that certain writers still used the variant only very few times, if any. The decision to study individual writers, which was necessary to understand the dynamics of the social group, resulted in some dispersion of data.

6. Variation between pas and point is tangible through corrections writers made, as in the following sentence: lès a bitans ne save point pas de quel paroicce (‘the settlers do not know from which parish …’) (writer 6).

7. In the 18th century, it was also possible to spell plural past participles with an ez ending; therefore, I considered that writers using this ending for plural past participles were not making an error with regard to the norm.

8. The pronoun on can refer to either a group excluding the speaker (on m’a donné un cadeau, ‘they have given me a present’), a group including the speaker but so wide that the speaker does not know each one (on a du beau temps, ‘we have nice weather’) (unrestricted meaning), or to a group including the speaker in which the speaker knows everyone (on est allés au cinéma, ‘we have gone to the cinema’) (restricted meaning). In this paper, I only studied the variation between on and nous for this last meaning.

9. Results in Table 9 are from Martineau and Mougeon (2003) for deletion of ne, Martineau and Mougeon (2005) for je vais/je vais, and King, Martineau and Mougeon (2005) for on/nous. However, in this paper, I examined a much larger number of writers and data and I followed each writer individually to analyse the sociolinguistic interaction. Thus, the results in other tables come from this present systematic study.

10. The style of the travel journal may have had an effect on the more frequent use of the nous variant.

11. See Martineau and Dionne (2007) for an analysis of the education these writers could have received.
References


King, Ruth, France Martineau, and Raymond Mougeon (2005). J’allons/Nous allons/On va: l’emploi du pronom de la première personne du pluriel en français diach-
ronique. Talk presented to the International Conference *Les variétés des français parlées en Amérique du Nord*, Université de Moncton: Moncton.
Abstract
This paper analyses a number of typical features of lower-class writing in 19th-century Finland. The data consists of business letters written by local traders and farmers. These letters are compared to letters by Forest Finns, a group of early Finnish migrants to Scandinavia. The business letters are marked by three distinct influences: the older literary tradition, local dialects and the ‘rising literary genres’ of the 19th century. On the basis of the morpho-phonological level of the corpus texts, it will be argued that the lower-class writers intended to write a standard language, not a dialect.

1. Literary history and literacy in Finland under Swedish administration between 1500–1800

Finland is geographically situated between Sweden and Russia, and between the so-called ‘West-European’ and ‘eastern’ cultural spheres. After an almost 500-year period of Swedish rule – a peace treaty in 1323 officially tied the western and southern parts of Finland to Sweden – Finland became an autonomous grand duchy within Russia in 1809. Only in 1917 did the country obtain the status of an independent republic. Across the centuries, these changes of regime and political power have affected the linguistic situation and literacy levels in Finland, as well as the Finnish language itself. This paper will focus on linguistic developments in Finnish during the 19th century, but the influence of the Swedish regime on literary development in Finland will be commented upon as well.

The first books in Finnish appeared in the 16th century, along with the Reformation. The history of standard written Finnish has its origins in translations of religious texts (including the Bible) into vernacular Finnish, the ‘language of the common people’. Most often, these translations were based on Swedish, German and Latin originals. For 300 years,
i.e. up until the 19th century, Finnish literature mainly consisted of religious texts. Common people hardly ever came into touch with ‘worldly’ or non-confessional literature; they were familiar with the language of the Bible, but few families possessed other reading materials than hymn books or catechisms. In church, sermons were held in Finnish and royal statutes and edicts were orally transmitted from the pulpit. These texts were the literary models for the common people that percolated into the earliest manuscripts and letters. As such, the language use of the religious and the secular powers largely shaped the image of written Finnish that the common people held.

During the Swedish regime, secular literature in Finnish was scarce. In the 19th century, however, the official status of Finnish changed. In 1863 Finnish was put on a par with Swedish by decree, as far as its official status in Finland was concerned. Towards the turn of the century it also became a fully-fledged cultural language that was used in education, administration, culture, science and literature. Until today, the standardisation process of Finnish has mainly been studied in relation to the latter prestige domains and with regard to the group of writers commonly associated with this prestigious sphere: the educated classes. This paper aims, however, to look at the standardisation of Finnish from the viewpoint of the ‘common people’. This approach urges us to address a number of questions that have been neglected or left unanswered so far. How did the rural population gradually become literate? How did the usage of written Finnish spread from ‘educated’ to ‘uneducated’ circles? Which societal needs triggered the increasing literacy among the lower classes in the first place? In order to provide a number of linguistic observations that may help to answer these questions, this paper will try and analyse a number of the typical features of lower class writing in 19th-century Finland and compare these results with data from similar research on 19th-century lower class writing from other languages.

2. Literacy in 19th-century Finland

The first literacy campaign in Finland was conducted in the 17th century; its aim was to install a general level of reading ability amongst the adult population for religious reasons. While reading was taught at home, parish clerks controlled the population’s reading skills in regular catechetical meetings. The ability to read was the key to participation in everyday parish life: it was a prerequisite to be allowed to engage in Communion, and it was also required before marriage. As such, reading in the modern sense (i.e. as an intellectual pursuit) was not sought for initially: the objective was to allow the population to read and memorise familiar — religious — texts in order to be able to cite them by heart afterwards, so-
Double diglossia — lower class writing in 19th-century Finland

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called ‘rote reading’. It was not until the 19th century that reading as a means towards real comprehension spread amongst the rural population. While educational and enlightening texts started to appear in Finnish in the middle of the 19th century, it was often maintained that people in rural areas were not able to read these, as they were only accustomed to biblical and to some extent administrative texts (Mäkinen 1997: 64–67).

Reading difficulties were both caused by the contents of the texts and by the language that was actually used. Since Turku (Åbo) — located in the south-west of Finland — remained the Finnish capital until 1827, standard Finnish developed primarily out of south-western dialects, and the basis of the Finnish literary language was characterised by features from this region from the 16th until the early 19th century onwards. Soon after this 300-year period, however, the dialect basis of standard Finnish became the topic of heated debates resulting in an increasing impact of eastern Finnish dialects on the nature of the standard language. It proved difficult, however, for the lower classes to read written texts containing eastern dialect features. This was even the case for the actual speakers of these eastern dialects (Mäkinen 1997: 77). I will illustrate below (in the section on Early lower class writers and the biblical tradition) how the persistence in regarding old Biblical Finnish as the model for the written language can be traced in the manuscripts of self-educated writers from the lower classes.

The common ability to write, i.e. widespread literacy among all social classes, was a much later phenomenon. Up until the end of the 19th century, the mastery of writing was thought to be useless and even harmful for the lower classes as it was argued that it would disturb daily agricultural work and — in the worst case — even separate the agricultural labourers from their own class. Even lower class members themselves were often opposed to education and writing and regarded these skills as useless and ‘genteel’ (Mäkinen forthcoming). It has been estimated that at the beginning of the 19th century no more than five percent of the male population in the Finnish countryside could write. Towards the turn of the century the share had risen to about 30 percent and it was not until the 1920s that the ability to write became more widespread, under the influence of the law on compulsory education (Mäkelä-Henriksson 1988). Full literacy, the ability to both read and write for all social classes was achieved slowly, in other words. However, a change, no matter how gradual and slow, seemed inevitable as it was backed and promoted by several tendencies that were in the air at the time: the development of an elementary school system, the Enlightenment and ideas in favour of popular education and — towards the end of the 19th century — growing professionalism and increased vocational training.
It is important to bear in mind the literacy statistics on the early 19th century in Finland. Given that the writers of the data used in this paper are probably among the very earliest lower class members who could write, they are statistically ‘non-existent’. Their texts, however, are rather typical when one considers what causes the need to develop writing skills in general. Early attempts to write among the lower classes usually arise from practical needs, for example book-keeping or the necessary correspondence between clients and manufacturers. A form of ‘early writing’ typically found in agricultural societies are short daily notes, so-called ‘journals of weather and work’ in which ploughing and sowing times, spawning seasons and changes in game stock were written down. Early correspondence between family members often emerged in more special conditions: military service, seafaring and migration led certain lower-class members to write in times when most members of their social class (and, accordingly, society at large) were still illiterate. (See, e.g., Lorenzen-Schmidt and Poulsen 2002; Elspaß 2002; Kauranen 2005; Nordlund 2005.)

3. Lower class letters

In this paper, two different letter corpora are looked at. The first group of letters consists of business letters that were sent to the Bergbom trading house in Oulu in northern Finland. These letters deal with the trading of agricultural products, for example tar or butter. The second group of letters are written by Forest Finns, a group of early Finnish migrants to Scandinavia.

3.1. 19th century business letters

The data of Bergbom business letters consists of 45 letters from 31 writers and the letters date from 1802 to 1828. All the writers come from the eastern parts of Finland; they were farmers or local traders who acted as suppliers of agricultural products for the trading house at Bergbom. The first letter below serves as an example of a typical letter in the corpus. It is a trading letter sent by A. Keijonen from Pöljä in 1825. Like most of the letters, it is an invitation of tender: the writer asks about the price of butter in Oulu and offers to sell a few hundred talents of butter collected from local farmers. Some local traders also operated in the Russian market in St. Petersburg and in their letters they negotiate the best prices for these products as well.
I have tried to preserve the message and the tone of the original letter in the English translation. Original capitalization and punctuation, where present, have also been preserved. It must be borne in mind that the original letters often do not follow the norms of written 19th century Finnish — not to mention modern Finnish. The texts are mostly comprehensible for a modern speaker, however.

_Herra kauppa mies G. Bergbuom_

_Tämän Kautta waiwaisin minä teitä tutun puolen Herra Kauppa mies että työ olisia nön hyvä ja Kiriottasia mitä teitään ajatuxen jälken eli mitä työ satatta anta woista oikjalla voi marckinan aijalla nön minä kerän Hääntä mutamia satoja ttt ja jos mitä Latuva wenäjän olis käypä Teitään kaupunkisa eli jos työ ite tarwihtetta Tupackia eli pumulpja eli mitä semmosta nön olka nön hyvä ja kirio tatta Tämän miehen myötä teitään nöyrä Palveljanna

A. Keijonen

_Pålja p 14 julij 1825_

Mr. merchant G. Bergbuom

Through This I trouble you as you are known to me Mr. Merchant that you would be so kind as to Write to me how much in your opinion that is how much would you pay for the butter when the market time comes so that I will collect up a few hundreds of barrels of It and if some Kind of Russian is needed in Y our town and if you yourself need Tobacco or cotton or anything then please send an answer with This man your humble Servant

A. Keijonen

_Pålja d[ay] 14 july 1825_

The anonymity of lower class writers sometimes causes problems for the (socio)linguistic analysis of their texts in the sense that no personal information is available about most writers. It is usually not known who these people were, nor how they learned to write in the first place. Nor is it always certain whether they wrote the letters themselves or used a local scribe instead. There are several possibilities as far as the authorship of a letter is concerned. Firstly, it is possible that the rural traders and farmers were able to write and that they were ‘pioneers’ in their linguistic community. Secondly, it is equally possible that another person in the same community acted as a scribe. A person who was able to write easily acquired confidential posts in the community: next to being scribes, they could act as lay members, vergers, parish clerks, village elders, rural police chiefs, schoolmasters and even as members of parlia-
ment in the peasant class (Laurila 1956: 16; Laurikkala 1959: 116). The possibility that part of the data was produced by local scribes usually does not raise a great theoretical problem, as the writing can still be identified as lower class writing. Besides, up to the middle of the century, more educated scribes always used Swedish.

The next example illustrates how a writer sends a message on behalf of another farmer at the end of his letter:

Ja wielä mattsoinoinen Lähettä palionTerveysiJa woita Lähettä 45. ttt. Ja hään Rukoile wijelah Etta Te Lähettäisättä Hänenellä 100. Rixiä Pangesa Raha Ja Kruutia Ja plyiyö 1.xi ttt Kumbistakin Ja Jos mitä lähetätten Nijn Pangad Kijni Seilatten

(Mats Pakarinen, Lieksa 8. 9. 1812).

And mattsoinoinen Sends his best Regards And he Sends 45. talents of butter And he Begs You to Send Him money a 100. Rix and Gun-powder And lead 1. pound Each And Whatever you send Then Seal it up.

(Mats Pakarinen, Lieksa 8. 9. 1812).
A third possibility for written communication was to use a Swedish scribe. The Bergbom trading house was mainly Swedish and Swedish was also the mother tongue of Bergbom himself. However, as a merchant who had to trade with the surrounding rural area and its people, Bergbom knew some Finnish and could therefore receive Finnish letters. Both languages were used in written communication: the farmers wrote in Finnish but sometimes received answers in Swedish.1 In some cases, Finnish local traders and farmers used Swedish scribes in their correspondence and apart from the Finnish letters, there are several letters in Swedish in the archives. These are not included in the data, but they have served as comparative material to form a general view of the nature of business correspondence in early 19th-century Finland.

Until the middle of the 19th century, the overall linguistic situation in Finland was diglossic. Swedish was the language of the educated classes. It was used in writing, culture, education and administration. Finnish was the spoken vernacular, the language of the common people who formed the majority of the population. Without knowledge of Swedish, a Finnish-speaking person, even if literate, was not able to take part in the local administration. For a literate Finnish-speaking person, however, especially from Eastern Finland, the linguistic situation was diglossic in another way as well. As will be illustrated in this paper, the form of written Finnish used in the Bergbom letters was very different from the local dialect of the speakers, and it contained many foreign elements. These were not only features of foreign languages that belonged to the older literary tradition and its translated-like structure, but also features of ‘foreign’ dialects, the western dialects that used to serve as the basis of written language. Accordingly, for the early lower class writers of eastern Finland a different variety — in many ways a different language — was used in writing and everyday speech. The linguistic situation in which they found themselves can therefore be described as a state of double diglossia, consisting of diglossia on both the ‘national’ (Finnish versus Swedish) and the ‘local’ (vernacular versus Biblical Finnish) level.

From a linguistic point of view the lower class letters represent a transitional form between writing and speech, and they are marked by three distinct influences. Most strongly, they are influenced by the 300-year old literary tradition. They also include features of local dialects. In addition, the letters illustrate one of the ‘rising literary genres’ of the 19th century, in this case the genre of ‘commercial correspondence’.

3.2 Comparative data: letters from Forest Finns

Forest Finns were early Finnish immigrants who colonised vast areas of central Scandinavia. The migration began in the 1580s and the immi-
grants were encouraged by the crown who wanted to have the vast forest areas populated. Forest Finns had the ability to burn over forested land for farming, the so-called ‘slash and burn agriculture’ or ‘burnbeating technique’. Most Forest Finns came from Savo, located in the sphere of eastern Finnish culture. Their dialect was approximately the same as that of the Bergbom letters. By the 1650s the immigration stopped, however, as burnbeating was prohibited and up until the 19th century Forest Finns continued to live in a linguistic vacuum, without contacts with other Finnish-speaking communities or with the literary development in Finland.

Forest Finns were ‘discovered’ at the beginning of the 19th century by Carl Axel Gottlund, an explorer, scholar and writer, and one of the early Finnish ‘national awakeners’. Gottlund made two trips to communities of Forest Finns, in 1817 and 1820–1821. After his trips, Gottlund continued exchanging letters with Forest Finns, and tried to influence the government to make efforts to improve their situation. The archives of the Finnish Literature Society store letters sent by Forest Finns to Gottlund, and in this paper a selection of these letters is used as comparative data to support the arguments made about the language of lower class writers in Finland.

4. Did the local traders and farmers write in dialect?

Historical lower class writing sometimes tended (and still tends) to be considered primarily as ‘dialect writing’, a point of view which favours analyses that concentrate on finding and evaluating the colloquial features in the texts at hand. The presence of written language features in the text material are usually ignored in this approach and the same holds true for the absence of certain salient dialect features. However, from a linguistic point of view, the vernacular features that are missing may be more revealing about the writers’ intentions than those features that are actually present.

In Finnish lower class texts from the 19th century, the writers’ aspirations towards the standard are especially clearly revealed on the morphophonological level; their syntax seems to be more colloquial. The term intended standard as used by Vandenbussche (2004: 30)² is applicable here: these writers use a variety that operates like the standard as far as its function is concerned but that does not conform to (all of) the formal criteria of the standard language. However, the term standard itself is problematic, as the process of the standardisation of Finnish was at its height in the 19th century. What exactly was the standard that the lower classes were striving for, or, was there a standard at all? As will be shown in the next section, for the earliest writers the idea of the standard was
clearly formed on the basis of Biblical Finnish. For the later writers, the question becomes more complicated as the possible sources of literary influence on their vision of the standard language become stronger and more versatile.

As to morpho-phonology, the most typical features of eastern Finnish dialects are missing almost totally from the Bergbom letters. These features are prototypical and salient, and stereotypically distinguish the eastern dialects from the western. These features include, for example, certain vowel changes (e.g. diphthongisation of long vowels /aas > /oaas/ /uaas ‘again’) that are very common in these dialects. Other features that seem to be missing altogether or occur very rarely are schwa vowels (e.g. /hiljainen > /hiljainen ‘silent’) and palatalised consonants (/tuli > /tulj [he/she/it] ‘came’).

There are several explanations for the absence of the salient eastern features. Firstly, they may have been subconscious, and left unmarked as there was no model for writing in local dialect. In contrast, in the letters by Forest Finns, exactly the same features are present, as the following example illustrates. To reflect the colloquial tone, all well-known phonological and morphological dialect features are marked in bold:

Norin väkeä on jo monta satoa (SF sataa) ja monena vuonna muuttan (SF muuttanut) Bergenstista ja Nummedahlista Poihjus = Amerikkaan, van ej yhtää (SF yhtää) Suomalaista teáltää (SF täältää) vielä oo (SF ole) pois muuttanu (SF muuttanut) vaikka monen taitaisi (SF taitaisi) olla hyvin tarpeen männän (SF mennän) sinne kuin jossa paremmin leipeä (SF leipää) löytys (SF löytyisi). (Pekka Karvainen 1848). ‘Many hundreds Norwegians from Bergenstad and Nummedal have moved to North America for many years now, but no Finns from here have moved even though it would be necessary for many to leave to a place where it is easier to win one’s daily bread.’

As the abstract above illustrates, the letters of Forest Finns typically have colloquial features such as vowel changes that are typical for eastern Finnish dialects. They also have allegro forms, reduced forms of be (e.g. colloquial oo versus standard ole), and other features of colloquial Finnish such as the loss of the final consonant or vowel (e.g. colloquial yhtää versus standard yhtään). The letters of Forest Finns are thus characterised by phonetic spelling. What the difference between the two groups of letters reveals is that the writers in Finland were strongly influenced by the written culture and literary Finnish from a very early point onwards, whereas Forest Finns had lived almost totally outside the influ-
ence of written Finnish. They were not allowed to read in Finnish, Finnish Bibles were prohibited, and religious sermons were held in Swedish.

When evaluating the language of Forest Finns, the influence of C. A. Gottlund must be taken into account. In the 1820s in their letters to C. A. Gottlund, many Forest Finns learned to write in Finnish for the very first time. Besides letters, Gottlund also sent Finnish literature to Forest Finns, mostly books of his own. In Finland, Gottlund was a controversial figure. He had imaginative ideas about the dialect basis of Finnish: he suggested that one should write as one speaks and he himself therefore used a kind of eastern dialect in his writings. In Finland, Gottlund’s ideas were ridiculed, but for Forest Finns he was a heroic figure and a literary model. It is obvious that they used his books and letters as models for writing and the exact impact of Gottlund on the language of Forest Finns is therefore an important question for future research.

The absence of salient dialect features in the Bergbom letters is most probably explained by the fact that the writers were fully aware that these eastern features belonged to the colloquial speech only. For example, in some morphological categories where the eastern variant differs from the western one, the writers were mostly able to choose the one used in the standard, that is, the western one. An example of this is given in the next section.

For Forest Finns, the usage of dialect forms is partly explained by the absence of literary models in their community and partly by Gottlund’s model. But even Gottlund’s influence cannot explain their tendency towards phonetic spelling, and thus it must be concluded that Forest Finns on the whole did not have as clear an image of the written standard language as the local traders did.

Even if the most salient eastern features are missing, one cannot escape the fact that the Bergbom letters do give an impression of being colloquial in some ways, nor that they contain some other dialect features. It is these features that on the surface may create an image of dialect writing. There are features typical of eastern dialects, for example, conditional forms with an older non-analogic personal ending (olisia, modern Finnish olisitte ‘[you pl.] would be’), eastern variants of personal pronouns, and some sound sequences such as ht which typically appears as tt in western dialects and as ts in modern standard Finnish – in old Finnish it was written as tz. What is essential in this group of dialect forms is that there is always variation between the dialect form and the standard form. Variant forms may be used by the same writer and even within one and the same letter. The variation appears to be random, and a much larger corpus of written texts will be needed to analyse its potential distribution or function.
5. Early lower class writers and the Biblical tradition

‘Biblical Finnish’ is a notion that refers to the variety of written Finnish that was used during the Swedish regime and in some contexts up until the latter part of the 19th century. Many 19th-century writers used this term in a pejorative way to refer to archaic Finnish that had many features of a translated language. Biblical Finnish was mainly based on the western dialects and was characterised by a lot of foreign influence, especially from Swedish.

What strikes one most in the Bergbom letters are not the dialect features or the non-standard elements but the very salient Biblical Finnish influences. As the following examples illustrate, features from the biblical tradition include, for example, the usage of adpositional phrases, compound verbs and other formulae with Swedish as a model, passive predicates with agents and the usage of articles:

(1) **ADPOSITIONAL PHRASES**

\[\text{Endisen lupauxen Jälken}\]

former-GEN promise-GEN after

‘according to my promise, as promised’

Sw. efter löfte

\[\text{Hinnasta vasikan nahkain päällen}\]

the prize calf-GEN leather-GEN on

‘the prize of calf leather’

Sw. priset på

(2) **AGENTS, COMPOUND VERBS**

\[\text{heinäniijyt on Kuivutelda} \]

haymeadow-PL be-IND.PR.3S dryness-ABL

\[\text{ylös palanet} \]

up burn-PAST.PART

‘hay meadows have burnt up from dryness / because of dryness’

Sw. brunnit upp av torrhet

(3) **ARTICLES**

\[\text{Nijn kuin Yxi nöyrä palwelia} \]

so like a /one humble servant

‘as a humble servant’

Sw. som en ödmjukast tjänare

It can be rather confidently assumed that the local traders and farmers themselves did not know Swedish. This can be seen, for example, in the
way that they write Swedish names. Names are written by ear and contain a lot of variation. The Swedish influence in the Bergbom letters is different from that of the letters by Forest Finns. The influence in the Bergbom letters clearly comes via old Finnish and its biblical tradition, whereas in the letters of Forest Finns, especially later letters, a straightforward inference of Swedish as a dominant language of the society can be seen.

Towards the 20th century in Finland, Finnish gained prestige and drifted apart from the dominance of Swedish. Puristic attitudes led to the removal of Swedish constructions from the Finnish grammar and lexicon. In Central Scandinavia, in contrast, the Swedish influence on the language of Forest Finns became stronger. Due to the changing world, loss of opportunities in the forest and the official pressure from the government to accommodate to Swedish society and norms (and to give up their language), the language of Forest Finns became extinct. The last people who knew Finnish in the forest area were interviewed in the 1930s.

Two letters by Forest Finns from 1823 and 1855 illustrate this growing influence of Swedish. Both of these letters were written by Pekka Karvainen who was in frequent correspondence with C. A. Gottlund for over 50 years, from the 1820s to 1870s. In the 1823 letter, one can see some Swedish influence. This mostly appears in the conventional parts of letter writing, for example, in the usage of the definite article in the date, the same feature that appears in the Bergbom letters (see section The Bergbom letters as business correspondence).

(4)  **sinä** 22. p.  helme kuussa,
‘the 22nd of February’
Sw.  den 22. Februari      (Pekka Karvainen 1823)

Swedish influence can also be seen in other constructions typical for letter writing, for example:

(5)  **vastasitten**  **kiriani**  **piällen**
answer-IND.PRES.3.P.PL  letter-GEN  over-POST
‘answer the letter’
Sw. svara på brevet           (Pekka Karvainen 1823)

There is some Swedish influence in lexical elements as well, for example, a word **punkti** ‘full stop’ is used that did not have a standard Finnish equivalent at the time.

A letter from 1855 shows a much stronger Swedish influence. The lexical interference is much more evident, for example, there are a
number of words and phrases from Swedish. Some of these are written following Swedish phonology and orthography, for example årgång ‘annual volume’, syskenbarnin ‘nephew/niece’, efter omständigheterna ‘under circumstances’. Note that the grapheme ⟨å⟩ is not used in Finnish, and phonemes /f/, /b/ and /g/ do not appear in the phonological system of Finnish, apart from loanwords. There is also influence on syntax, for example, in the usage of the indefinite article:

(6) **yx** *vahva suarnamies*  
    INDEF. ART. strong preacher  
    one strong preacher  
    ‘a strong preacher’

The usage of the indefinite article is a feature from Swedish that also appeared in Biblical Finnish. In the Bergbom letters, it appears in the letters of one writer only, in a politeness phrase *yx nöyrä palvelija* ‘a humble servant’ that is a translation from Swedish *en ödmjukast tjenare*. In the later letters of the Forest Finn Pekka Karvainen, the usage of an indefinite article becomes more frequent and systematic.

In the 1855 letter, an instance of code-switching can also be found. In this case, the writer uses Swedish when reporting the speech of the local people, non-Finns:

(7) **joita** *almuu kuhtuu Helig karler*  
    who-PART public call-IND. 3.P holy men  
    Sw. allmoge Sw. heliga karlar  
    ‘whom the public calls holy men’

This cursory comparison between the letters of local traders and Forest Finns thus serves to illustrate the different nature of the Swedish influence in these two corpora. It also reveals the different source of this influence: for the local traders, the influence is indirect and comes from the literary Finnish tradition. For the Forest Finns, Swedish influence is much more direct and a result of a real language contact.

In addition to the Swedish formulae, the biblical tradition in the Bergbom letters can also be observed in those dialect forms that clearly follow the western tradition, that is, those vernacular forms that do not belong to the writers’ own dialect. To label these forms as ‘vernacular’ is somewhat paradoxical, as in the early 19th century they belonged to the standard; they are dialect features from a modern point of view only. These features include variants of certain morphemes such as the ending of the inessive case; in the eastern dialects this case is formed with a geminate -s but in the western dialects with only one -s (*talossa* vs. *talosa*)
‘in a/the house’). Both variants are used in the letters, but the western form clearly predominates. In the linguistic debates of the 19th century, the eastern variant of the inessive case came to be established as the norm.

6. The Bergbom Letters as business correspondence

The Bergbom letters can easily be identified as formal letters. They were written in a specific institutional setting with specific models of writing in mind. To evaluate the authenticity of these letters as business letters, they should be compared with other commercial correspondence of the time. Unfortunately, business writing in Finnish was very rare in the early 19th century, and even letter writing manuals for this type of letter were not available. I have therefore evaluated the letters against a background of Swedish letter manuals from the middle of the 19th century and the Swedish letters that were found in the Bergbom archives.

The Bergbom letters have several features typical for commercial correspondence. Perhaps the most prominent feature in this respect is the overall structure of the letters that clearly follows a model of a business letter (or what the writers thought it should look like). The letters typically begin and end with salutations. Personal matters, if present, are typically also dealt with at the beginning and the end, and the business matters are properly discussed in the middle. The date is usually at the end of the letter, before the signature, and it follows a pattern from Swedish: it usually has a definite article similar to Swedish (Finnish has no articles), and the names of months are written either in Swedish or Finnish:

(8)    
     Kuopio sinä 19 julii
     Sw. Kuopio den 19 Juli
     ‘Kuopio, the 19th of July’

In addition to the overall structure, the influence of business correspondence models is felt in the phraseology used. There are both phrases that are typical for letters in general, for example, the usage of teidän nöyrä palvelijanne ‘your humble servant’ in signatures, and phraseology that is typical for commercial correspondence, for example, words and phrases that deal with invoicing or giving a receipt such as sisälle lunastaa minun reversini ‘to redeem a check’. Business phraseology in these letters usually consists of loan words and translations from Swedish, as the appropriate terminology in Finnish was only consciously created in the latter part of the 19th century.

The Bergbom letters are clearly institutional and functional in the way that they convey a specific message, for example, an invitation of tender,
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and are understood as business correspondence both by the writer and the addressee, as well as by a present-day linguist. However, even if the writers are able to imitate the style of commercial correspondence, their texts are characterised by the so-called *stylistic ruptures* or *breakdowns* that seem to be typical for lower class writing (see, e.g., Vandenbussche 1999: 53). The writers are able to imitate a certain style in some respects, but fail to do so in others.

To analyse the exact instances of stylistic ruptures in Finnish texts in detail is a challenge for future research that will require a larger set of data. An example of a stylistic breakdown in the Bergbom data can be found in the usage of request markers. As mentioned earlier, the Bergbom letters most successfully follow letter writing conventions at the beginning and the end of the letter. As to the main body of the letter, the stylistics of commercial correspondence is best achieved when the traders write about typical business matters, for example, tenders or invoicing. For these, they have either a clear model or an image of one. To find a locus for a stylistic rupture, the request markers used in the Bergbom letters were looked at in detail. These include all the sequences where the writers request, order or advise the addressee to act in a certain way. The data suggest that a different type of request marker is used for different actions. The tenders seem to have a specific structure, and they typically include several politeness markers:

9) *toivon ~ rukoilen nöyrimmästi että herra Patruul olisi niin hyvä että kirjoittaisi, mitä maksaa leiviskä voita*

‘I wish/beg humbly that master/Mr. merchant is/would be so kind as to write to me what a talent of butter costs’

The directives in other action types seem to be much more straightforward. Outside the business proper, in cases where concrete directions are given on how to act in a concrete situation, a plain imperative is often used. For example, directions as to how to handle money and the letters can be as follows:

10) *laittakaa raha postiin ja kirje kiinni sinetillä*

‘send the money by post and seal the letter’

The usage of different request markers for actions on different levels seems to be a locus for stylistic breakdown: business style can be followed in business matters proper, but when the writers find themselves in a more independent situation, the writing falls out of the model and the request markers typical for literary language disappear. Future research will show if this observation also holds for other types of data.
7. Conclusions

In the 19th century, during a relatively short period of about 50 years, Finnish was standardised and codified from a spoken vernacular to a literary language that came to be used in all fields of society, in administration, education, science and culture. In Finnish linguistics, the process of standardisation has been looked at from the viewpoint of the educated classes; in recent years the metalinguistic level of the process, including debates about the status of Finnish and the norms of the standard, has also awakened great interest. What has been neglected in the research, so far, is the language use of the lower classes. Until recently, the process of literacy has not been looked at from the viewpoint of the Finnish speaking ‘ordinary people’, either. Thus, the Finnish research tradition and the recently growing interest from historical sociolinguistics in ‘real language use in society’ in former times seems to be in resonance with the international tendencies in the study of language standardisation (see, e.g., Deumert and Vandenbussche 2002).

The study of the Bergbom letters is a pilot study for a larger research project that aims to look at the language of the common people in 19th-century Finland. The linguistic study is in its turn part of a wider multidisciplinary project that will combine the knowledge of linguistics, history, social history, church history, cultural research and literary studies to form a coherent picture of the process of literacy among the ordinary people in 19th-century Finland.

As the preliminary results on the basis of the Bergbom data show, the Finnish texts seem to have several features in common with findings from research projects on lower class writing from other languages. At least two important notions that have appeared in this international ‘comparative’ research also prove to be relevant for the Finnish data. These are the notion of an intended standard – the fact that lower class writers intended to write a standard language, and not a dialect – and the notion of stylistic rupture or breakdowns – the fact that despite clear stylistic models or images of these, the lower class writers were not always able to meet these models in their actual written performance. The Bergbom data also reveal that the linguistic situation in the 19th-century Finnish countryside was more ‘pluralistic’ than has been maintained. The situation can be described as a kind of double diglossia, as there was not only the overall diglossic situation between Finnish and Swedish, but also a more local diglossia between the spoken vernacular and the Biblical Finnish with the status of the standard written language.

Research on 19th-century Finnish has often been characterised and influenced by traditionalism, the national canon and mythical pioneering personalities. It is therefore inspiring to see that what has been a domes-
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...tic and national scholarly issue so far, can gain a lot from international collaboration and comparative research. On the methodological level especially, international co-operation will definitely and soon enhance our understanding of the linguistic situation in 19th-century Finland.

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Notes

1. Unfortunately, no letters from Bergbom to local farmers are available in the archives. The fact that answers were sent and received by farmers can be inferred from the letters that they sent to the trading house.

2. The notion of an intended standard has its origin in German historical linguistics. Mihm (1998), for example, uses the German term intendiertes Hochdeutsch.

3. I have consulted several histories of Finnish phonology to ensure that only features that were present in the 19th-century dialect are included in the analysis. This is an important point to bear in mind, as there are some younger features that are very typical for eastern Finnish today that were not common in the 19th century.

4. Abbreviation SF refers to Standard Finnish. In all cases marked in bold here, the standard of the 19th century is similar to that of modern written Finnish.

5. In the German literature the notion ‘Stilzusammenbruch’ is used.

References


Abstract

This contribution focuses on letters written by private soldiers from Denmark around the middle of the 19th century. It investigates whether there were statistically significant differences in the orthographic skills between the social groups into which the rural male population could be classified at that time. Apart from the writers' social rank, I look at the correlation between the percentage of norm divergence and the correspondents' place and time of birth, as well as the length of the letter and the repeated use of specific types of divergences by the correspondents.

‘I am writing to you in order to let you know …’ Several letters written by private soldiers during the war of 1848–1850 between Denmark and the insurgents of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein start in this way. My thesis (Sandersen 2003) investigating a collection of approximately 3,000 letters from soldiers who served in that war has therefore been given this title. The main purpose of the thesis was to see whether there were statistically significant differences in the orthographic skills between the social groups into which the rural male population could be classified in the middle of the nineteenth century.

This collection of letters is of special interest because the private soldiers belong to the first generations of peasants who could be expected to have received instruction not only in reading but also in writing. In the year 1814 the so-called ‘general school law’ was passed. In this law it was resolved that all Danish children between 7 and 14 years of age must be trained in reading and writing. The present collection of letters offers a unique chance to check in how far members of the rural male population had actually received and developed these orthographic skills and stylistic abilities.
Until 1849 the Danish army had been a peasant army, but in February of that year a law on general national service was passed. It was decreed that in the case of war all Danish males between 22 and 44 years of age could be mobilised for active military service. That was in the middle of the aforementioned war. Given that the Danish army remained a peasant army during the whole war, most of the letters in the corpus come from members of the rural population.

The establishment of the collection of letters

The collection was made at the request of the Danish historian C. F. Allen, through an announcement on the front page of the newspaper Fædrelandet (‘The Land of our Fathers’).

Allen was a young academic at the time with strong national and social leanings. He wanted to have a Danish kingdom extending to the River Eider and advocated that Denmark should relinquish Holstein (which was almost wholly German at the time). As an adherent of the Romantic Movement, he considered the peasants just as intelligent and sensible as people belonging to the higher classes, and he was convinced that the suspiciousness — or rather, the hostility — between the social classes was due exclusively to their lack of mutual acquaintance. He saw the war — in which letter writing was the only possibility for soldiers far away from home to keep in touch with their near relatives — as a great opportunity for increased connections and contacts between the various social classes. Under the headline ‘Opfordring’ (‘Request’) he wrote a large essay in which (besides expressing his points of view) he asked officials (especially vicars, teachers and other local officials) all over the country to collect letters in their district, especially from private soldiers. They were asked to borrow the letters and send them to Allen who would deliver them back to the senders after copying the texts.

As the result of the request was initially not satisfactory, the call was repeated (in a shorter form) in a couple of provincial newspapers, and by the middle of May 1850 Allen had received letters from most parts of the country — including Schleswig. The letters from North Zealand were copied by Allen’s secretary and sent back, but the copying went slowly and finally stopped completely. Allen was employed as a professor of history and later was depressed because of the defeat in the second Schleswig war in 1864. When he died in 1872, most of the letters were still in his possession. As a result we still have this great collection, which is today in the possession of the department of manuscripts at the Royal Library in Copenhagen under the reference ‘NKS 1123zm’ (NKS = Ny Kongelig Samling ‘New Royal Collection’). Most of the letters are manuscripts, some others are copies, and both the original manuscript and the copy of a number of them were preserved.
The collection as a basis for sociological investigations

In NKS 1123zm we find a long list which identifies the officials who sent letters to C. F. Allen. The earliest of these were of course friends of his, especially vicars sharing his political convictions. Allen’s annotations show, however, that he later received several smaller or larger collections from senders whom he did not know at all.

The nature of the letters presents another problem. In his request Allen expresses not only the hope but also the conviction that all or most soldiers will share his patriotic feelings and his enthusiasm for the war. We need to ask whether that influenced the sort of letters that were sent to him. We know from the list that he received a rather voluminous collection from Schleswig that was returned to the sender; in the list we find the remark ‘Bad letters sent back’ next to the name of the sender. What did the label ‘bad letters’ refer to: boring letters, letters written in a bad style or letters voicing political convictions opposed to Allen’s? We cannot tell because the letters are no longer there. We may ask, moreover, whether a negative attitude to the war could correlate with low orthographic skills and low stylistic abilities. We can only make the observation that there was a place — a parish — in the south of Zealand where the smallholders and lodgers in 1844 had revolted against the landowner, who was of German parentage and that the collection contains no letters from this parish.

Social classification

Most of the letters were not sent in an envelope but folded, instead, with the return address placed on the last but one page of the letter. By means of demographic sources, muster rolls, parish registers and census papers it should be possible to identify the senders’ social background. Given that — in spite of the above-mentioned problems — the collection seems to be as representative as possible of the rural Danish male population in the middle of the 19th century, it was decided to use it as a basis for statistical sociolinguistic investigation, always realising, of course, that the word representative is not to be understood in its absolute modern statistical sense.

There is only one Danish sociolinguistic investigation on the orthographic skills and stylistic abilities of the male population from the 19th century the outcome of which could be compared with the results of the present investigation. In this previous research the rural population was subdivided into social groups on the basis of housing conditions, and we accordingly classified the private soldiers of the present investigation in the same way. The previous investigation was published in the year 1882
(Bang 1882) and concerns the orthographical skills and the reading and writing abilities of the recruits of 1881. They were categorised as either sons of farmers, sons of smallholders or sons of lodgers, the last mentioned group mainly consisting of day-workers on the farms and single women, i.e., widows and women who had never married and who lived from spinning and different sorts of needlework. The investigation showed a correlation between literacy skills and social background, in that the sons of farmers — especially those who had attended a folk high school — could read and write much better than the sons of smallholders (the division between smallholders and lodgers was dropped in this specific case).

In our present letter corpus there were 50 senders who could be classified as the sons of permanent lodgers or owners of a house without land. All the members of this group were incorporated into the analysis. A further 50 senders could be classified as the sons of real smallholders, i.e. smallholders who lived from cultivating their land, and these writers were also all included in the investigation. The sample for our third social group, the ‘sons of farmers’, was the only one to be composed at random. Because of the great number of senders from Jutland in the corpus, place of birth was chosen as an additional criterion for classification.

Who wrote only one letter?

The c. 3000 letters included in the corpus stem from 657 senders; from a few senders there are more than 30 letters, from some about 10, from still others perhaps 5. A great number of writers are represented by only 1 letter, however. This stresses the relevance of the writers’ identity. Did the sender write the letter himself? Did somebody else serve as ‘scribe’ or ‘draftsman’ and, if this was the case, did this helper only draw up the letter and was the sender still responsible for the content, or is the scribe to be credited for both the content of the letter as well as for the way in which it was written? The corpus offers sustainable examples of both possibilities. It contains examples of letters from senders who always write themselves, from senders who sometimes write themselves and sometimes — when they are in a hurry — have to let somebody else write for them, as well as from senders who are not able to write a letter at all. Whether — in the latter case — they were able to draw words after a model or write word-by-word from dictation cannot be determined, but at any rate, they did not trust themselves to write a free text.

Letters often provide information on the circumstances in which they were written. A great many of the senders find it important to inform
the receiver about the identity of the person who has drawn or written their message, for example, by means of set phrases like written by me or written with my own hand or, in the opposite case, written by so-and-so from the same company. The first utterance is probably written by soldiers who do not always write themselves. As most of the soldiers write for near relatives who know the writing abilities of the sender very well, there are no reasons to believe that they are not telling the truth. In some letters one may even find the remark you know that I cannot write myself. One cannot rely on the absence of this type of confession, however, to conclude that the sender wrote the letter himself. A sender’s occupation, on the other hand, may be evidence of his writing competence: it was a non-commissioned officer’s job to make a copy of the orders of the day and read it aloud to the troops, for example. I have to confess that, in those cases where there are only one or two letters from a specific sender and no information can be found about his military status or the actual writing situation, we cannot know for certain that the sender and the scribe of a letter are one and the same person.

Among the senders we find three brothers, sons of a blacksmith in Træden, a small parish and village in the middle of Jutland. One of them never writes himself. From the second brother we have a rather long letter characterised by many divergences from the norm, many of which are due to his dialect. Although there is no doubt that this writer intends to follow the norms of the written language, his syntax is different (one does not find the expected ‘normal’ hypotaxis, for example); his writing is also often ‘interrupted’ by anacoluthon constructions. From the third brother we have a first letter to his parents, which is actually a reply to their letter in which they expressed their disappointment at receiving an earlier letter from him that he had not written himself. In a second letter, the third brother actually explains why he did not write that message in his own hand: he wanted to send them some money but soldiers were not allowed to do this without an accompanying letter. Given that he was in a hurry and had to send the money at once, he accepted the offer of a fellow soldier who had just arrived to write the letter for him. The linguistic strategy the third brother uses to describe this situation is equally interesting: instead of an indirect ‘written’ account of what happened, he actually reproduces the whole scene and the dialogue involved, using direct speech towards the end without an introductory clause:

Det skal ieg sige Eder Hordan det kom sig for det Vold ieg Kom Hen til Dørrup da Havde Han skreven En Brev for sig sel med Penge i og saa spurte Han mig ad om ieg ikke vilde Have noget af mine Penge Snart Hiem saa svarede ieg io det vil ieg gjærne da tiden nu er saa
kort og Penge skal Hen strag og du ikke Sel Har tid at Bleve saa vel ieg skrive et Brev for dig og sende dem med mine saadan kom det sig Kjære Forældre
(‘That I will tell you how it happened for it happened I went up to Dörrup then he had written a letter of his own with money in it and then he asked me if I would not get some of my money home at once then I answered yes I should like to, as the time is so short and the money must be there at once and you have not got any time yourself to stay, then I shall write a letter for you and send it [that’s the money] with mine, in that way it happened dear parents’)
tion examination. He got confirmed later on, however, without being able to write, which proves that legal rules and decisions (and the intentions behind them) were sometimes leniently observed.

The choice of letter for the analysis

Given that many writers are represented by a single letter in the corpus, we selected one letter from each sender for our orthographic analyses. In those cases where a sender left us more than one document, the question arose as to which letter to choose. For some writers the various letters may be spread over the three years of the war, or, alternatively, written within one or two years. From certain soldiers there are only letters from the last or the two last years of the war; although these writers may also have written letters during the first or the two first war years, the collector who called for letters in October 1849 apparently did not receive any of these. In other cases the absence of ‘early’ war letters is due to the fact that the sender was only mobilised in the later stages of the war. It is evident that the writers grew better by experience and we wished to establish as homogeneous a basis for the evaluation as possible; we therefore chose the earliest manuscript letter from a sender in the corpus as the basis for our investigation. In many respects this choice comes with the advantage that many of these letters were quite similar: the contents are usually a description of the journey from home to the army, leading to a rather homogeneous vocabulary and a comparable letter length.

The methodology for counting divergences

For a detailed discussion of these methodological considerations I refer to my thesis, Sandersen (2003). Basically, two procedures were compared. One is to count the words of the running text and the total number of divergences and calculate the divergence percentage. That is the normal procedure for written texts. The other would be to count the number of divergences of one specific type in isolation and to count the potential divergences of that type. The divergence percentage is then calculated on the basis of the total number of divergences and the total number of potential divergences. Both procedures were tested on a long sample text with many divergences of different types. My conclusion was that the last mentioned method would be less appropriate for our intended evaluation of general orthographic skills. Above all, it would be too difficult to carry out as, in many cases, it would be hard or even impossible to decide if a specific divergence belonged to one type or another. This method seemed to be better suited for the evaluation of organised writing experiments than for the evaluation of free writing.
The choice of orthographic features

In Denmark there was no officially codified orthographic norm until 1889. In the middle of the 19th century, however, there was an official agreement on fundamental orthographic principles and questions. It has consequently been possible to lay down criteria for the marking of elementary orthographic skills. Since the first decades of the 19th century there had been two orthographic dictionaries in Denmark (Baden 1799 and Molbech 1813), and there were also extensive grammars on the mother tongue, written for educational purposes, which equally dealt with orthographic questions (especially Deichman 1800). There was also Ove Malling’s 1777 volume — entitled Store og gode Handlinger af Danske, Norske og Holstenere — which was recommended as the orthographic guide for higher education even before it had been published. With special reference to village schools, there were a couple of handbooks with orthographic rules and manuals for writing letters of different types, especially private letters: one should mention Werfel’s Brevbog for Skoler paa Landet og I Provindserne from 1806, modelled on J. C. F. Baumgarten; Hallager’s Breve for Børn from 1802, translated and adapted for Danish children from the German book Briefe für Kinder; and finally Brevbog for Ungdommen by Thoring from 1806, modelled on Dem kleinen Correspondenten (‘For the small correspondent’).

These handbooks demonstrate that a new orthographic principle was implemented during the first half of the 19th century, the principle of morpheme constancy according to which every morpheme of a root remains intact and is unaffected by inflexion and derivation, for instance god, godt where the neuter until then was written got (‘good’).

For practical reasons, those orthographic issues that are often difficult to identify have been omitted in the analysis of the manuscripts. The main example is whether the initial letter of the nouns and substantival adjectives are written with a capital letter. For the same reason I have refrained from examining whether compounds and derivatives are written in one word or not. There is no doubt, however, that bad handwriting on the whole is often correlated with poor orthographic skills and low stylistic abilities. Finally, in those instances where the correspondents have so little consciousness of any orthographic rule that the choices they make must be random, the feature has also been omitted from the analysis. The features which should be considered must fulfil the following conditions: they must belong to the most important orthographic areas, and there must be a fixed rule, they must not discriminate any age group among the senders, they must be present in every text, and they must be identifiable in the handwritten reproduction. For these reasons — and because the letters are free texts which do not always
Writing ability and the written language of Danish private soldiers

As for foreign words, I have chosen to omit only the use of foreign letters (i.e. graphemes) from the analysis, for the reason that a number of military words of foreign, especially French, origin (often exemplifying rather interesting spelling errors) are common in most of the corpus texts. As foreign letters I have considered \(<c, q, x, z>\) and those graphical reproductions of sounds which are alien to the Danish orthography, for example, \(<ue>\) representing \([y]\). This means that the missing \(<r>\) in the word \(masere\) instead of \(<marsere>\) ‘to march’, \(n\) instead of \(<nd>\) (besides the missing \(<r>\)) in the word \(inkvaterere\) instead of \(<indkvartere>\), are included as errors, while \(kv\) instead of \(<qu>\) in the word \(<inquartere>\) ‘to accommodate’ is disregarded.

The results of the statistics-based investigations

As mentioned above, there were only 50 soldiers who could safely be classified as the sons of smallholders and permanent lodgers. Consequently, the statistical investigation of the orthographic skills of our corpus writers was based on 150 private soldiers, 50 of whom were classified as ‘sons of farmers’, 50 as ‘sons of smallholders’ and 50 as ‘sons of permanent lodgers’. The social classification is based on the highest status attained by the family — that is the father, if necessary the mother — during the son’s childhood, i.e. between the ages of 0 and 14 years, because this was the age at which children left school and in many cases also left home to serve as farm labourers (or to take up a comparable job).

Although there was also the possibility of basing the analyses on a classification according to age, the approach mentioned above was preferred because the results of the investigations based on social classification were comparable with the results of the investigation of 1881 (and were on the whole expected to be more interesting). As for an investigation based on age, one might expect the result to be that the younger senders had higher orthographic skills and better stylistic abilities than the older ones, who went to school before the passing of the 1814 school law or in the first years after 1814.

The main results are as follows:

a. My investigation did not demonstrate any significant correlation between the percentage of norm divergence percentage and the writer’s social rank.
b. There was a significant correlation between the norm divergence percentage and the place of birth of the correspondent: letters written by correspondents from Jutland and Zealand have more divergences than letters written by correspondents from Lolland and Falster.

c. There was a weak correlation between the time of birth and the norm divergence percentage. The correspondents who were to be evaluated were divided into three groups on the basis of year of birth. There was no significant difference between the orthographic skills of these three groups. However, the basis of the divergence percentage is remarkably different. The 5.4 percent, which was the average of the oldest correspondents, rests on a simple dispersion, whereas among the younger ones there are both good ones and weak ones.

d. A further weak correlation was observed between the length of the letter and the norm divergence percentage. Whereas there is great variation in norm divergence among the short letters, the long ones have few divergences. It is important to highlight this because a divergence was counted every time it was found.

e. The most convincing correlation, however, is that between a writer’s overall divergence percentage and his repeated use of specific types of divergences: the higher the divergence percentage of a correspondent is, the more divergences of these types he has. One could say, in other words, that writers make the same type of errors over and again. This correlation is so clear that it would be possible to use these types of divergences as a basis for investigations of spelling competence, or as a set of detectors of spelling competence.

Discussion of the results

The lack of a significant correlation between the norm divergence percentage and social rank, which differs from the results of the investigation of the recruits of 1881, could be explained in different ways. Perhaps the potential correspondents belonging to the lower classes (sons of smallholders and sons of permanent lodgers) were not able to write at all (i.e. the lack of correspondents might be due to the lack of soldiers who were able to write). J. L. Bang, who carried out the investigations of 1881, stresses that especially the sons of farmers who had visited a folk high school were on a higher level than all the others. However, at the time when the correspondents of the present investigation could have been expected to attend a folk high school, such schools did not exist, as the very first was only established in 1844. Perhaps a different choice of orthographic features in both investigations could be part of an explanation. J. L. Bang emphasises the total lack of punctuation by the re-
Writing ability and the written language of Danish private soldiers

recruits who have only attended a village school, a feature to which no attention was paid in the present investigation.

Unfortunately, his study of 1882 does not give complete information on the orthographic features that were analysed; it only brings the statistical results. In my opinion, the most relevant explanation for the different results must be that — at the beginning and in the middle of the 19th century — the mastery of orthographic skills did not carry special prestige (yet) for the rural population. The children all went to the same village school, so it was rather the competence of the teacher that was important. Among the letters in the collection there is one from a young soldier, the only son of a wealthy farmer in the northwest of Zealand (from Kyndby, by Holbek), who takes part in the war as a volunteer. He writes a letter to his father in order to congratulate him on the job as ‘sognefoged’ (an official performing certain judicial functions in the parish), and he adds: ‘Well, I know that you do not write particularly well, but as you have two good friends’ — and here he mentions the names of the vicar and the teacher of the parish — ‘I think you will do a good job, nevertheless.’ It is obvious that the facts of possessing a big farm and being prosperous give the father more prestige than orthographic skills and stylistic abilities would. This isolated example may not be incontestable proof, but it matches the observation that none of those correspondents who belong to the 10 percent best writers, but were at the same time sons of smallholders or lodgers, were able to achieve a higher social position during their lifetime. (This information can be deduced from the 1873 applications for a so-called memory medal, a decoration for soldiers who had participated in the war and were still alive at the time).

As for the significant correlation between the divergence percentage and the correspondent’s place of birth, we have to discuss whether we can actually rely on the result that correspondents from Lolland and Falster are on a higher ‘orthographic level’ than those from Jutland and Zealand. Due to the fact that there are only few correspondents from the two South Danish islands, we had to come to our conclusion through carrying out a probability check, i.e. had there been a larger number of correspondents from Lolland-Falster, the result would have been that these correspondents were on a higher orthographic level than the correspondents from Jutland and Zealand. The reliability of the results depends on the way one looks at the lack of correspondents. Either the lack can be attributed to the rather small size of the Lolland and Falster islands and their lower number of inhabitants compared to Jutland and Zealand (in this case the results might be reliable), or it may be indexical of the fact that some of the potential correspondents were not able to write at all (in which case the result is more questionable). For the latter
It is noteworthy that both islands were dominated by a couple of big estates, of which Christianssæde (on Lolland) deserves to be highlighted. It was owned by C. D. F. Reventlow, Prime Minister of Denmark in 1797, who was one of the key figures behind the school law of 1814. He always worked for the improvement of the village school and after retiring to Christianssæde in 1807, he spent the rest of his life (until his death in 1827) improving the schools that belonged to his estates. This information on the local school system apparently makes the statistical results reliable.

It is also remarkable that only the correspondents from Zealand and Jutland are weaker than those from Lolland and Falster, and not the correspondents from Fyn. This fact may once again be explained to some extent by the educational situation: J. L. Reventlow, the owner of the estate of Brahetrolleborg, was the brother of C. D. F. Reventlow, who reformulated the educational practices in the schools belonging to the barony of Brahetrolleborg; he built three new schools and a teacher-training college.

The correspondents from Jutland and Zealand are equally ‘bad’ writers. This can perhaps be explained in a different way. As we will see below, the orthography of both groups is influenced by their respective dialects. Given that the dialects from Zealand differ less from the writing norm (whether official or not) than the Jutlandic dialects, it might be expected that the correspondents from Zealand were the ‘better’ writers. On the other hand, the Jutlandic correspondents may have been more conscious about the differences between the writing norm and their dialect, whereas the Zealanders may not have paid so much attention to their way of spelling.

The weak correlation between age and orthographic skills is not a surprising result. The 150 correspondents included in the analysis were divided into three age groups: the eldest ones (36 writers) born before 1820 with an average percentage of norm divergence of 5.4 percent, the youngest ones (61 writers) born in 1824 or later with an average of 6.39 percent, and a middle group born between 1821 and 1823 (53 correspondents) with an average of 7.03 percent. That the largest number of participants were born later than 1824 follows from the fact that men could be mobilised for military service between the ages of 22 and 44 and that the war lasted from 1848 to 1850. Even if the differences in percentage are not statistically significant, it is worth mentioning that the oldest group has the lowest average. That might support the interpretation that many soldiers belonging to the oldest group were not able to write themselves because of lack of education, so that those who could were especially used for writing. That we find every level (i.e. both high and low percentages of divergence) in the youngest group can probably be ex-
plained by the fact that they were better educated than the two older groups. They went to school in the 1830s, i.e. at a time when the school law of 1814 had been implemented. They gained experience in writing during their time at school from the age of 7 to the age of 14, and there was a shorter span of time between the time they left school and their mobilisation for military service.

The earliest Scandinavian sociolinguistic work concerning the orthographic skills of 20-year old Swedish recruits (Carl Cederblad 1941) showed a convincing correlation between a low orthographic level of the writers, the length of their school education, and the delay between the moment of leaving school and the time of the investigation. If, for example, the writers had quit school after the 7th form of folk school and did not have any ‘connection’ with the written language afterwards, there was already a relapse after only 1 year to the orthographic stage which was normal for a 5th form pupil. There is little doubt that the rural Danish male population in the middle of the 19th century had little or no contact with the written language between leaving school and mobilisation for military service. Even for the youngest recruits, 8 years would have passed between those two moments. It is, in a way, also amazing that so many soldiers were able to write letters at all (even to near relatives) at that time. They must have been highly motivated.

The high orthographic level in longer letters is interesting but not surprising. We wish to stress that each and every occurrence of a divergent form was counted in the results, for it was obvious that most correspondents are rather inconsistent and the fact that they spell correctly at one time is no proof that they really know how to spell a word. In the short letters we find examples of every level of orthographic skill, which is not surprising either. A letter could be short for different reasons: apart from the possibility that there simply was not much news to tell, the correspondent might either have been in a hurry and would have written a longer letter, had he had the time (we may perhaps also find longer letters from him in the collection), or he might be a ‘weak’ writer who could never manage to write a long letter.

List of divergences

Danish orthography is governed by two different principles: a phonemic principle and an etymological principle. As mentioned above, the latter led to the principle of morpheme constancy during the first decades of the 19th century and, as a result, there is no one-to-one-correspondence between the modern standard pronunciation of a phoneme and the way it is written. In many contexts the norm offers two representations of one single sound, only one of which is correct (and the other wrong) in
a specific context. For example, post-vocalic [d] is written either as <t> – as in *blot* (‘only’) – or as <dt> – as in *godt* (neuter of ‘good’). In other cases, the historically conditioned change of the pronunciation resulted in a modern correspondence between 0 (zero) and a single grapheme. The following example illustrates this correspondence for <g> and <0>: a word pronounced [lu:] can either be written <luge>, which means ‘trap-door’ (noun) or ‘weed’ (verb), or <lue> which means ‘flame’ (noun or verb).

The correspondents in our corpus lived more than 150 years ago and spoke different dialects. One of the main purposes of our research was to find out whether they just tried to reproduce their own pronunciation, or aimed at following the ‘official’ writing norm. We therefore decided to make a pure description of their divergences from the norm first (based on their written language alone), and to interpret these divergences afterwards. To this end the divergences are grouped in the categories ‘wrong choice’ and ‘opposite wrong choice’, interpreting the latter afterwards as hypercorrection.

The result of this analysis was a list comprising 32 groups of divergent forms. These are partly systematic types, partly practical groupings. The systematic types are the following:

(For easy reference, the list below follows the structure used in Sandersen 2003; V = vowel, C = consonant, the correct form is symbolised by < >)

I  
<hvV>/<vV> and <hjV>/<jV>

1.1. vV for <hvV>
  e. g. vor for <hvor> (‘where’)

2.1. jV for <hjV>
  e. g. jem for <hjem> (‘home’)

II  
<hV>/<hvV>
  hV for <hvV>
  e. g. hor for <hvor> (‘hvor’)

III  
<C>/<CC>

1.  
<Ce>/<CCe>

1.1. VCe for <VCCe>
  e. g. bege for <begge> (‘both’)

  læse for <læsse> (‘load’)

  1.2. VCCe for <VCe>
  e. g. hobber for <haaber> (‘I hope’, present tense)

  læse for <læse> (‘read’)

2.  
<VCi>/VCCI

2.1. VCi for <VCCI>
  e. g. frivilig for <frivillig> (‘voluntary’)

  2.2. VCCI for <VCi>
  e. g. betalling for <betaling> (‘payment’)

3.  
VCC for <VCe>
  e. g. oll for <ol> (‘beer’)

(For easy reference, the list below follows the structure used in Sandersen 2003; V = vowel, C = consonant, the correct form is symbolised by < >)
IV  <k>/<g>
1. gV for <kV>
   e. g. begendere for <bekiendttere> ('acquaintance, friend')
2. <Vgge>/<Vkke>
   2.1. Vgge for <Vkke>
      e. g. kloggen for <klokkene>
   2.2. Vkke for <Vgge>
      e. g. likker for <ligger> (I lie, present tense)
2.1.2. Vgge for <Vkke>
2.2.2. Vkke for <Vgge>
   e. g. roge for <rykke>
      e. g. hykelighed for <hyggelighed>
      ('comfort, cosiness')
3. <VCg>/<VCk>
3.1. VCg for <VCk>
    e. g. værgstedet for <værkstedet>
    ('workshop')
3.2. VCk for <VCg>
    e. g. sorker for <sørger>
    ('I mourn' verb)
4. <Vg>/<Vk>
4.1. Vg for <Vk>
    e. g. fig for <fik> ('got' past tense)
    gig for <gik> ('went' past tense)
    kog for <kok> ('cook' noun)
    nog for <nok> ('enough')
4.2. Vk for <Vg>
      no examples
V  <p>/<b>
1. <bV>/ <pV>
   1.2. pV for <bV>
      Poutik for <boutique> ('shop')
3. VCb(e) for <VCp(e)>
   e. g. hiolben for <hiulpen> ('helped')
   slombe for <slumpe> ('stumble')
4.1. VbC(e) for <VpC(e)>
    e. g. tabre for <tapre> ('brave',
       adjective, plural)
4.2. VpC(e) for <VbC(e)>
   no examples
V  <p>/<b>
1. Vb for <Vp>
   e. g. capitagn for <capitain>
2. Vp for <Vb>
   e. g. Jakop for <Jakob>
6. be for <pV> in the second unstressed syllable before stressed syllable
   e. g. hosbetallet for <hospitalet>
VI  <t>/<d>
  <dV>/<tV>
  tV for <dV>
   e. g. regstaler for <rigsdaler> coin
     (cf. German Reichstaler)
2.1. Vd(d)e for <Vtte>
   e. g. foresadde for <foresatte>
      (commanding officer)
2.2. Vtte for <Vdde>
   e. g. rette for <redde> ('save')
3. $\langle \text{VCde} \rangle / \langle \text{VCte} \rangle$

3.1. VCde for $\langle \text{VCte} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{efder}$ for $\langle \text{efter} \rangle$ ('after')

3.2. VCte for VCde
  $\text{enden}$ for $\langle \text{enten} \rangle$ ('either')
  $\text{enten}$ for $\langle \text{inden} \rangle$ ('before', 'within')

4. $\langle \text{VCdi} \rangle / \langle \text{VCti} \rangle$

4.1. VCdi for $\langle \text{VCti} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{flidig}$ for $\langle \text{flittig} \rangle$ ('hard-working')
  $\text{hurdig}$ for $\langle \text{hurtig} \rangle$ ('quick')

4.2. VCti for $\langle \text{VCdi} \rangle$
  $\text{Omstentihederne}$ for $\langle \text{omstændighedene} \rangle$ ('circumstances')

5. Vd for $\langle \text{Vt} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{slod}$ for $\langle \text{slot} \rangle$ ('castle')
  $\text{did}$ for $\langle \text{dit} \rangle$, possessive pronoun

7. $\langle \text{Cd(e)} \rangle / \langle \text{Cet} \rangle$ unstressed syllable after stressed syllable
   V/Ced for $\langle \text{V/Cet} \rangle$
   e. g. $\text{maatted}$ for $\langle \text{maattet} \rangle$ past ptc.
       ('must')
   $\text{hvilked}$ for $\langle \text{hvilket} \rangle$ pronoun
       ('what')
   $\text{korned}$ for $\langle \text{kornet} \rangle$ ('the corn')
   V/Cede for $\langle \text{V/Cete} \rangle$
   no examples

V/Cet for $\langle \text{V/Cede} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{lennet}$ for $\langle \text{linned} \rangle$ ('linen')

V/Ced for $\langle \text{V/Cete} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{lovet}$ for $\langle \text{lovede} \rangle$ past tense ('promised')

VII $\langle t \rangle / \langle dt \rangle$

1.1. $\langle \text{Vt} \rangle / \langle \text{Vdt} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{got}$ for $\langle \text{godt} \rangle$ (neuter of 'good')

$\langle \text{VCt(e)} \rangle / \langle \text{VCdt(e)} \rangle$

2.1. VCt(e) for $\langle \text{VCdt(e)} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{falt}$ for $\langle \text{faldt} \rangle$ past tense verb
     $\langle \text{falde} \rangle$

   $\text{haart}$ for $\langle \text{haardt} \rangle$ adjective $\langle \text{haard} \rangle$

1.2. Vdt for $\langle \text{Vt} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{midt}$ for $\langle \text{mit} \rangle$ possessive pronoun neuter ('my')

2.2. VCdt(e) for $\langle \text{VCt(e)} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{aldt}$ for $\langle \text{alt} \rangle$ neuter pronoun $\langle \text{al} \rangle$ ('all')
  $\text{sente}$ for $\langle \text{sendte} \rangle$ past tense ('sent')
  $\text{omendtrandt}$ for $\langle \text{omtrent} \rangle$ ('about, nearly')
  $\text{dyrdt}$ for $\langle \text{dyrt} \rangle$ neuter adjective $\langle \text{dyr} \rangle$ neuter ('expensive')

1.6. Ce(C)dt for $\langle \text{Ce(C)t} \rangle$
  e. g. $\text{laavedt}$ for $\langle \text{lovet} \rangle$ past ptc. $\langle \text{love} \rangle$ ('promise')
  $\text{veredt}$ for $\langle \text{været} \rangle$ past ptc. $\langle \text{være} \rangle$ ('be')
  $\text{megedt}$ for $\langle \text{meget} \rangle$ ('much')
  $\text{dobeldt}$ for $\langle \text{dobbelt} \rangle$ ('double')
The fundamental principle of Danish orthography is that a short vowel of the stressed root syllable in words with two or more syllables is followed by double consonant, e.g. læsse (‘load’), while a long vowel in the same context is followed by a single consonant, e.g. læse (‘read’). Today most children have already internalised this principle from the fourth grade of primary school onwards. If correspondents have many divergences for this feature, this could be indexical of poor orthography training (cf. type III of the list above).

Another main principle of the relation between pronunciation and the writing system in Danish is that, apart from absolute initial position, the letters <g> and <d> correspond with fricatives, not with plosives; the plosives in non-initial positions are represented as <k> and <t>, instead. Divergences of that sort – writing nad for <nat> (‘night’) or kog for <kok> (‘cook’, ‘chef’), for example – can therefore tell us something about the orthographic competence of the correspondents.

Concerning the vowels, a stressed long vowel in the root syllable corresponds with a grapheme of the same ‘quality’: for example, il: corresponds with <i> and so on. For the short vowels, on the other hand, there is the tendency – but not a rule – that these often correspond with the grapheme that is a ‘degree lower’: /ege/ is written <ikke>, for example. This can be explained historically. The clerk Christian Peder sen, who designed the Danish orthographic system in the 15th century, chose the consistent orthography of the 13th century as the basis for his spelling. However, the Danish sound system had already changed at the time and was still undergoing further alterations. In order to have a
consistent orthography he chose a norm that was already obsolete when it was codified as the foundation for his system. As such, the reproduction of the short vowels might not be expected to be consistent as far as our corpus writers are concerned. Given that the orthographic conventions on this point had not been fixed yet in the middle of the 19th century, we only investigated the instances where $e$ was used for $<i>$ in the root syllable, and $i$ for $<e>$.

**From description to interpretation**

*The dispersion of the divergent forms according to types (or groups) of divergence and according to the correspondents*

The enumeration of the investigated types of divergence resulted in the following list (ordered in falling frequency). Unlike the list above, the types in the following list are interpreted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variant type</th>
<th># of divergences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. $&lt;C&gt;/&lt;CC&gt;$</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. $&lt;t&gt;/&lt;dt&gt;$</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. $&lt;de&gt;$ (pronoun)</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. $e$ for $&lt;i&gt;$ representing short vowel</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. $&lt;n(n)&gt;/&lt;nd&gt;$</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. $&lt;0&gt;/&lt;d&gt;$</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. $&lt;hvV&gt;/&lt;vV&gt;$</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. VC(C)V for $&lt;VCC(C)V&gt;$</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. $&lt;e&gt;/-&lt;er&gt;$</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. $&lt;t&gt;/&lt;d&gt;$</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. $i$ for $&lt;e&gt;$ in unstressed syllable before stressed</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. $&lt;k&gt;/&lt;g&gt;$</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. svarabhakti vowel</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. $&lt;0&gt;/&lt;g&gt;$</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. V for $&lt;Vr&gt;$ in unstressed syllable before stressed</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. $&lt;d&gt;/&lt;dt&gt;$</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. $&lt;vi&gt;$ (pronoun)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. VCCCe for $&lt;VCCe&gt;$</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. $&lt;l(l)&gt;/&lt;ld&gt;$</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. $&lt;r&gt;/&lt;d&gt;$</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. $&lt;re&gt;/&lt;rer&gt;$</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. $e$ for $&lt;eC&gt;$</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. $i$ for $&lt;e&gt;$ representing short vowel</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. $&lt;r&gt;/&lt;rd&gt;$</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. VC2 for $&lt;VC1C2&gt;$</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. $-er$ for $-&lt;er&gt;$</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. $e$ for $&lt;V&gt;$ in the second unstressed syllable before stressed</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. $&lt;ikke&gt;$ (adverb)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. $&lt;hvV&gt;/&lt;jV&gt;$</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. $-er$ for $-&lt;ere&gt;$</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. $i$ for $&lt;e&gt;$ representing long vowel</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. $e$ for $&lt;i&gt;$ in unstressed syllable before stressed</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. $&lt;en&gt;$ indefinite article and numeral</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. C1(C2)V for $&lt;C1C2(C3)V&gt;$</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variant type</th>
<th># of divergences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35. &lt;p&gt;/&lt;b&gt;</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. &lt;hV&gt;/&lt;hvV&gt;</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. &lt;det&gt; (pronoun)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The divergences numbered 1, 2, 4 and 5 are not regionally dispersed but are characteristic for correspondents from all over the country. Features 1, 2 and 5, moreover, concern fundamental systematic principles of Danish orthography. As mentioned earlier, their high frequency can be regarded as an indicator of the low level of the correspondents’ orthographic skills; our writers must have had little training and probably went through a long time during which they had little contact with written language.

Some of the divergences in the list above have not been mentioned before, especially the (highly frequent) pronouns under numbers 3 and 17. The divergence is not the same for all correspondents, but is in accordance with their regional origin or with a standard pronunciation.

Item 3 concerns the highly frequent personal pronoun for the third person plural, spelt <de> (‘they’), but pronounced [di]. It was written incorrectly 262 times. In 229 cases the phonetic form di occurs (this happens with correspondents from all over Denmark). In 29 cases the word is written dig, but exclusively by correspondents from Zealand and Fyn; this can therefore be considered as a specific case of divergence type 14 (<0>/<g>), which is a regional divergent feature due to the disappearance of the fricative written <g> in the post-vowel position in the pronunciation of Zealand and Fyn (this also occurs in the standard Danish pronunciation). The form dig has to be interpreted as a hypercorrection.

We know from the history of orthography that highly frequent words tend to preserve conservative spelling, the clearest example being the word og (‘and’) which was written <ok> in the handwritten texts, long after a fundamental sound law had changed the plosive /k/ to the fricative spelt as <gh> or <g> in the same texts. The many divergent representations of a highly frequent word as <de> are therefore yet another indication of the correspondents’ low orthography level.

The first person plural pronoun <vi> (‘we’) – listed as item 17 – is incorrectly written in two ways: vid is exclusively used by Jutlandic writers and by the above mentioned correspondent from Zealand born among the lowest ranks of the rural community; it has to be interpreted as a hypercorrection (and could be counted as a case of item 6: <0>/<d> and demonstrates the widespread disappearance of the fricative /ð/, which is also to be found in the old Zealand dialect. The hypercorrect
form *vig*, on the other hand, is only used by correspondents from Zealand and Fyn and could have been considered as a case of item 14, just like *dig* instead of *<de>* above.

**Divergences which are probably not due to the relation between the spoken and the written language**

Item 8 in the list above is due to a common convention in the printed publications of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, which was never part of the official norm: the convention of keeping a double consonant of a noun-compound or non-derivative in derivation or inflexion in front of *<r>*. e. g. *<sikker>* (adjective ‘certain, sure’) – *<sikkre>* (either an inflected adjective or the infinitive of the verb ‘to ensure’). Although these cases do not occur in the letters, they do contain doublings like *riggtig* instead of *<rigtig>* (‘right’) and *underrettning* instead of *<underretning>*. I think this is important because it might show that not all divergences are caused by pronunciation but rather by the correspondent’s visual memory of written words. This might tell us that the production of the written text does not always involve pronunciation, especially when the correspondent is aware that his spoken language (dialect) differs very much from the standard written language.

Item 13 refers to cases where an epenthetic/svarabhakti *<e>* is inserted after *<l>*- or *<r>*-sequences at the end of a stressed syllable, for instance *hallem* instead of *<halm>* (‘straw’), *varrem* instead of *<varm>* (‘warm’), *borren* instead of *<børn>* (‘children’). In the case of *<r>*-sequences, this implies an /rt/ pronounced with the tip of the tongue, which is only found in the Jutlandic pronunciation of the written language.

Items 2 as well as 5 and 19 are systematically connected to item 1. The fact that the stressed vowel of the root syllable in the middle of a word is short, is expressed through the doubling of the following consonant of the root syllable. This double consonant could be a real doubling of the same consonant, (e. g. *<gg>*), *<kk>*), *<ll>*), *<nn>*), *<rr>*), etc.) as well as two different consonants (e. g. *<dt>*), *<ld>*), *<nd>*), *<rd>*). This presents a problem for the correspondents because the written *<d>* in these sequences is not pronounced, *<nd>* being pronounced [n], *<ld>* as [l] and *<dt>* as [d] or [t] (the phonemic difference between /tl/ and /ld/ being suspended outside initial position in the latter case).

The use of *e* instead of *<i>* to represent a short vowel (item 4) occurs very often whereas the use of *i* instead of *<e>* (item 23) is much less frequent, an indication that, in this specific case, the correspondents follow their own pronunciation rather than the above-mentioned tendency to write the vowel one degree ‘more closed’ than the actual pronunciation.
Divergences related to the writer’s regional background

Some of the types of divergences can be directly linked to the writers’ dialects. This applies to item 6 as the fricative /ð/ in post-vowel position has been lost in many dialects. Item 9 is a purely Jutlandic divergence and so is item 20.

Items 7 (<hvV>/<vV>) and 29 (<hjV>/<jV>) are regionally dispersed. 17 of the 103 <hvV>/<vV>-errors are made by Jutlandic correspondents, 70 by writers from Zealand and in 16 cases the writer’s origins lie in Fyn and Lolland-Falster. The direct phonetic type – that is the preference for vV instead of hvV – dominates with 87 attestations, e.g. vor instead of <hvor> (‘where’) and vordan instead of <hvordan> (how’). The hypercorrect form occurs 16 times, e.g. hvorres instead of <vores> (‘our’). As expected, the latter (hypercorrect) type was predominantly used by correspondents from Zealand. That this divergence also occurs in letters from Jutlandic correspondents is due to the fact that there are 4 Schleswigians among them: in Schleswig initial /h/ is not pronounced, which is also the case in the eastern Danish dialects and in the standard Danish pronunciation. In the other Jutlandic dialects initial /h/ is pronounced.

Item 29 is also typical for Zealand and the phonetic subtype dominates, e.g. jem instead of <hjem> (‘home’). There are 17 examples, 14 of which are directly phonetic; only 3 are hypercorrections and one of these is due to a Schleswigian correspondent.

In some Jutlandic dialects the initial sequence <hv> is pronounced as [h] which leads to the divergent form /hV/ instead of <hvV>, e.g. hor instead of <hvor> and hordan instead of <hvordan> (number 36 in the list above). These errors are all of a directly phonetic nature.

Item 20 in the list is also a typical Jutlandic variant. There are examples of both the descriptive categories ‘wrong choice’ and ‘opposite wrong choice’. As wrong choice is chosen <r> instead of <d>, e.g. mortaget instead of <modtaget> (past participle ‘received’), flor instead of <flod> (past tense ‘flowed, ran’), afster instead of <afsted> (‘along’), fremar instead of <fremad> (‘forward, ahead’), Gur instead of <Gud> (‘God’) and tirlig instead of <tidlig> (‘early’). Examples of opposite wrong choice, <d> instead of <r>, are for instance, rad instead of <rar> (‘nice’), stod instead of <stor> (‘big’) and svad instead of <svar> (substantive ‘answer’).

Some of the examples of ‘wrong choice’ can be explained as direct phonetic divergences, as when the correspondents come from a part of Jutland where the old plosive /t/ has developed into an /l/. Historical phonology shows, however, that some of the instances where the correspondents have written an <r> did not develop from an old plosive /t/,
but from an old fricative /ð/, which is the case for Gur instead of <Gud>, tirlig instead of <tidlig> and afster instead of <afsted>.

Perhaps there is a correspondence in the dialects concerned between /r/ and old /ð/ in isolated words, but another explanation is also possible. If old /ð/ was weakened in that dialect area and subsequently lost and if the same was the case with the /r/ after a vowel, one might talk of a double hypercorrection which makes an interchange possible. Isolated examples of instances with an unstressed syllable after a stressed one support that interpretation: maaner instead of <maaned> (‘month’) and (the opposite case) helsened instead of <hilsener> (‘greetings’).

Among those divergences which were non-systematic, a reduction of the number of syllables and an increase of the number of syllables can be distinguished. In both cases a number of attestations are due to the dialects; they do not occur in the list of interpreted divergences, but are mentioned as ‘Jutlandic reductions of the number of syllables’. Due to the so-called ‘Jutlandic apocope’, the schwa-syllable is dropped in two-syllabic words made up of a stressed syllable and an unstressed schwa, e.g. sat instead of <satte> (the past tense of <sætte> ‘to place; to put; to set’), sop instead of <suppe> (‘soup’, noun), stel instead of <stille> (‘quiet’) and desver instead of <desværre> (‘unfortunately’).

Other reductions are also to be interpreted as Jutlandic, e.g. gaadt instead of <gaaeet> (past participle ‘gone’) and fodt instead of <faaet> (past participle ‘got’).

Some of the increases in the number of syllables might be interpreted as a hypercorrect ‘opposite Jutlandic apocope’, in the sense that a schwa-syllable is added to monosyllabic words: mige instead of <mig>, (pronoun ‘me’), hane instead of <han>, (pronoun ‘he’), tel vaske instead of <til vask> (‘to be washed’).

A statistical calculation of the significance of the relation between direct phonetic divergences and hypercorrections could not be made, however.

The most important conclusions concern the opposition between the ‘immediate phonetic mistakes’ and ‘hypercorrections’ as this might tell us something about the correspondents’ language consciousness. In modern times, investigations of spelling errors by school children have shown that beginners only make direct phonetic errors, while hypercorrections dominate the next stage of writing acquisition. The results of the present investigations are rather poor, in this respect. They show that hypercorrections are modestly predominant (by 10 percent) for two types of norm divergence in our list, namely <0>/<d> and <l(l)>/<ld>. The <0>/<d>-type is the easiest to explain, as it is common to the three main dialects at the time (i.e. those spoken in Jutland, Fyn and
Zealand). Apart from this, the results of the comparisons of the direct phonetic errors and the hypercorrections are so uncertain that it is not possible to draw further conclusions.

The statistically dominant types of divergences

The most convincing correlation between the overall divergence percentage and the presence of certain specific types of divergences, led to a statistical evaluation of the relation between the dominant types of divergences and their dispersion over the whole group of 150 selected correspondents. In the following cases a significant correlation between the type of divergence and the divergence percentage was found.

- <j>-/<hj>- and <v>-/<hv>- initial position
- <t>-/<dt>- medial and final position
- <o>-/<d>- medial and final position
- <e>-/<er>- at the end of an unstressed syllable following a stressed syllable
- <re>-/<rer>- at the end of an unstressed syllable following a stressed syllable
- <C>//<CC>, <n(n)>/<nd>
- t instead of <d>

It should be possible, in other words, to evaluate a writer’s level of orthographic skills (even today) through an analysis of the presence and frequency of these specific types of errors.

How can one explain the occurrence of non-standard forms characteristic of the 20th century Copenhagen lower sociolect in letters from the middle of the 19th century?

In the entire collection of letters — i.e. also in those letters which were not selected for the statistical investigation — I observed certain divergences from the norm which could not be expected to occur as early as the middle of the 19th century. Special attention was given to single r instead of double <rr> between the vowel of a stressed syllable and a following schwa, reflecting a prolongation of the preceding vowel; the main example is desvære instead of <desværre> (‘unfortunately’). Another interesting divergence in this respect was a instead of <æ/> after <r> in a stressed syllable, e.g. skræder instead of <skrædder> (‘tailor’), reflecting a more open and perhaps prolonged short vowel a. A third divergence we looked at in this context concerns the opening of a closed
vowel after r, a fairly well-known development. Other examples illustrate this opening of a short or shortened vowel outside combinations with r, e.g. *tødskerne* instead of *ty(d)skerne* (‘the Germans’), *Døbbel* instead of *Dybbøl* and *Jølland* instead of *Jylland* (place names).

Brink and Lund (1975) have noticed and observed the sound changes just referred to in the lower Copenhagen sociolect and claim that these changes spread out from there to the rest of Denmark, Copenhagen having been the centre of linguistic innovation for centuries. The examples in my dissertation, however, are from ordinary people from around 1850, coming from all parts of Denmark (as mentioned above, the Danish army was a peasant army).

It is difficult to decide whether the pronunciations which the observed orthographic forms probably reflect, were at that time dialect forms or socially conditioned forms (or perhaps both). I have tried to interpret the forms in their narrowest context, that of the letter. In several cases they are correlated with forms that would be regarded as low-prestige forms, had they occurred at a later time; the question is, however, how they are to be judged around 1850.

One more interesting divergent form needs to be mentioned: the dropping of the final *<r>* after the vowel in an unstressed syllable – not only after *<a>*; e.g. *masere* instead of *<marsere>* (‘to march’), which is a well-known traditional omission – but also after other vowels, e.g. *transpotere* instead of *<transportere>* (‘to transport’), *hvodant* instead of *<hvordan>* (‘how’). Lund (1982) has noticed this divergence from the official norm by schoolchildren of our time.

All these divergences were not observed, however, during the long period between the mid-19th and late 20th century. Rising to the surface again, these features spread, as Brink and Lund (1975) have shown, from Copenhagen (as the linguistic centre) to all parts of Denmark. But this cannot possibly have been the case during the 19th century.

An alternative to Brink and Lund’s spreading theory is given in Sandersen (2003). Probably all the forms and pronunciations concerned, which were either common to the dialects or socially conditioned or both, got the upper hand over other variants at the time of the migration from the country to the towns, especially to Copenhagen. They further became predominant in relation to the current forms and pronunciations of educated people, who depended on the forms of the written language.

In the second half of the nineteenth century school education was intensified. The pronunciation of the village teachers (who also spoke the local dialect) at the time was based totally on the written forms. Through the combination of these two facts, the local or socially conditioned forms disappeared for a period from the orthography of ordinary people. During the 20th century the forms based on (local) pronunciation
reappear in the orthography, and now they are spreading from the me-
tropolis of Copenhagen where the pronunciation in the schools was less
dependent on the orthographic forms than in other places. The speed of
the spread must be due to the fact that the linguistic features involved
were already present as latent forms and pronunciations.

*Is the correspondents’ level of orthographic skills in any way correlated
with their syntax and epistolary style?*

In particular, the results of the orthographic investigations give informa-
tion about the writers located at the extremes of the scale of ortho-
graphic skills. It was therefore decided to focus a number of syntactic
and stylistic analyses on those writers belonging to the ‘strongest’ and
the ‘weakest’ 10 percent with respect to orthography. No evaluation was
made here, but it appears that there are great and many differences be-
tween the two groups, which are significant in certain cases.

The two groups were quantitatively compared for the following fea-
tures:

1. Sentence length (including both main clauses and utterances which
are not sentences), expressed as the ratio of the number of words in
current text and the number of sentences.
2. The number of dependent clauses per main clause.
3. The dispersion of the dependent clauses.
4. Hypotaxis (the number of dependent clauses of the first order, second
order, etc.).
5. The dispersion of the dependent clauses over semantic types.
6. The placement of the dependent clauses (at the beginning, in the mid-
dle or at the end of the sentence).
7. The placement of the sentence adverb of the dependent clauses.
8. The structure of the nexus part (i.e. the word order at the places
before the indefinite verb) of the dependent clause in general.

The sentence length differs significantly between the two groups. In the
strongest group the average length of the sentences is 15.92 words, in
the weakest group 13.8 words (1). In the strongest group the average
number of dependent clauses per main clause is 0.83, in the weakest 0.71.
This difference is not significant (2).

There is no significant difference with respect to the dispersion of the
dependent clauses, either. Because of lack of sufficient data, the calcu-
lation of the significance could only be accomplished for sentences includ-
ing 1 to 3 dependent clauses (3).
As for the comparison between the two groups concerning the degree of dependent clauses, a calculation of significance could only be accomplished for the total number of dependent clauses of the 1st, the 2nd, the 3rd, the 4th and the 5th degree. We were further able to make this calculation for the individual categories of dependent clauses of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree. The result is that the differences between the two groups are significant for the total number of dependent clauses (p-value of 0.0176) and for the dependent clauses of the 1st degree (p-value of 0.0376). The most important result of these comparisons is that there will probably be more dependent clauses on any syntactic level in the strongest group than in the weakest group. The results indicate that the sentence structure of those whose orthographic skills are strong will be more hypotactic than that of those whose orthographic skills are weak (4).

As for the dispersion of the dependent clauses over semantic types, the significance could only be calculated for the use of the conjunction at (‘that’). In the texts of the strongest group, a significantly smaller number of dependent clauses have the conjunction at (‘that’) than in the weakest group (p-value 0.0152).

*The so-called pleonastic at*

The most important of all the syntactic differences between the two groups which were compared, however, is that the so-called pleonastic at (i.e. the use of a double conjunction in front of certain dependent clauses) only occurs in the weakest group, e.g. fordi at (instead of fordi ‘because’), hvis at (instead of hvis ‘if’), som at (instead of som ‘who’, ‘which’ or ‘that’ at the beginning of a relative clause).

In grammars and books on stylistics, the use of at in connection with a conjunction is evaluated differently in different kinds of clauses. There is agreement on evaluating the use of som at, especially som at der as ‘low’. Falk and Torp (1900) evaluated the use of fordi at as ‘vulgar spoken language’ in their work on historical syntax, while some of the style manuals accept its use because it is the old form. Today, the main rule is that at is obligatory after a preposition as the conjunction of a dependent clause, as in the following example with efter at: efter at vi havde spist, kørte vi en tur, as compared to English ‘after we had dined we took a walk’. Its use is forbidden, however, after a conjunction, e.g. han blev hjemme fordi han var syg (‘he stayed at home because he was ill’), han kommer når jeg kalder (‘he comes when I call him’), jeg kender den mand der bor på hjørnet (‘I know the man who lives at the corner’).

The present analyses seem to indicate that this rule had been implemented in the written language by the middle of the 19th century.
The placement of the sentence adverb of the dependent clause

In modern written Danish, the word order of the dependent clause is subject—adverbial—verb, e.g. (han sagde) at han ikke ville komme (lit. ‘he said that he not would come’). Formerly, however, the word order followed that of the main clause: (han sagde) at han ville ikke komme (lit. ‘he said that he would not come’). From our analyses it can be concluded that the introduction of the modern word order was completed in the written language around 1850. There are, however, more examples of the old word order among the weakest correspondents than among the strongest.

The epistolary style of the 10 percent ‘strongest’ and ‘weakest’ correspondents.

The guides to letter writing: During the last years of the 18th and the first 20 years of the 19th century a great many guides to letter writing and other pedagogical literature were published in Denmark, some of which were translated or adapted from German originals. These guides aimed at the various new social groups who began to take part in writing culture; there were specific guides for children, women, village schools, provincial town schools, young people and later on even for young farmers, etc.

Besides giving advice on how to write the almost obligatory family letters, the writing guides for adults mostly consisted of practical information on how to set up a bill, for example, or how to apply for widows’ social benefits. The guides aimed at children and young people were more ideological, in the sense that these publications were all products of the 18th century reflecting the ideals of the Age of Enlightenment in one way or another. Some of the authors were convinced that only wealthy town people could be receptive for these ideals, still considering the peasants as animal-like (i.e. not as rational) beings who would never be able to master the written language on a higher level. Other authors, however, tried to alter people’s view of the peasants under the influence of Romanticism.

On one point the two groups of guides agree, however: because it is considered to be completely outdated, they both refuse Lillie’s translation of a famous guide which is explicitly written for students and the citizenry, namely: Joh. Günth. Aug. Placii, Hoy=Grævel. Stolbergske Kammer—Advocati og Fiscals, Efter nu brugelig Maade Vel indrettede Breve=Bog. Til den studerede Ungdoms og Borger=Stands Personers Nytte paa Dansk oversat, forandret, forbedret og til Trykken befordret af Ludolph Henric Lillie, Philolog. & Typogr. Stud. 1742.
Among the old-fashioned guides, the one by J. Werfel (Brevbog for Skoler paa Landet og i Provinserne. Udarbeidet efter J. C. F. Baumgarten, Kjøbenhavn 1806; ‘Guide to Letter Writing for Village Schools and the Provincial Town Schools’) is particularly relevant for my investigation. In the introduction he writes:

‘That also the children in the village schools should have some education and training in the writing of letters and receipts, etc. has already been said so often and has partly also been realised generally so that we can hope that the great difficulties which the ignorance of the peasant children of their mother tongue causes, their lack of ideas, their infrequent opportunity of reading, further their short and rare school attendance, and many a village schoolmaster may have excused himself for disregarding that training, at least here and there during the honest effort and unremitting trouble of the teacher should be raised to the point at which a good beginning has already been made in several village schools.’

‘Their ignorance of their mother tongue’ alludes to the fact that they spoke their local dialects, not the common spoken language which was being established just at that time and which was partly based on the written language, but only partly. To establish the orthographic norm, it was discussed which dialect was the best, i.e. which dialect was the nearest to the written language. For pronunciation, the motto was: ‘You should write as you speak when you speak correctly’. This might be understood – as Werfel did – as ‘you should write as you speak when you speak as you write’. Werfel’s first orthographic rule is therefore formulated as skriv ligesom du taler naar du taler rigtig, men læg og, for at tale rigtig, nøje mærke til, hvorledes Ordene ere skrevne i velskrevne Bøger, f. Ex see, kjøbe, qvæle, Deel, ikke: se, købe, kvæle, Del (‘write as you speak when you speak correctly, but also notice carefully, in order to speak correctly, how the words are written in well written books, e.g. see (‘to see’) [se:], kjøbe (‘to bay’) [kjøbe], qvæle (‘to choke’ sb.) [kwæle],
Deel ('part'sb. [de:l], not: se [se], købe [købe], kvæle [kvæle], Del [del']). The last mentioned pronunciations — in square brackets — reflect the Danish standard pronunciation.

It is rather important to stress these formulations because there is repeated evidence in the letters that there was a village school pronunciation literally following the written language, which led to some spelling errors. Several correspondents from Jutland write børen instead of <børn>, for example, the dialect pronunciation of some Jutland dialects being [bø:n] without an /r/, whereas the reading pronunciation is realised with a svarabhakti vowel. We also find spellings like manke instead of <mange>; if <ng> is read as /N/ + /g/ it should be natural to reproduce /g/ as <k>. In the same way one can explain the occurrence of du sørker instead of <sørger> ('you mourn'), om morkenen instead of <om morgenen> ('in the morning') and kjerkesanker instead of <kirkesanger> ('cantor').

In the case of met instead of <med>, the everyday pronunciation is [mæ] without a consonant, but the distinct pronunciation being [mæð] with a fricative. We also find senter instead of <sender> ('I send') pronounced with an [n].

We do not know if this guide of Werfel's was used by the village teachers, but Werfel — who was a postmaster in Hørsholm near Copenhagen — wrote the Dansk Brevbog 1795 ('The Danish guide to Letter Writing'), which was the most widely distributed of the guides to letter writing.

We do know that the education of the peasants was not meant to enable them to cross social frontiers. As for the education of teachers in village schools, the directive said that the teacher should be 'a sensible peasant among peasants': he should be no academic, he should not turn his pupils into academics either — no grammar was taught in the village school, for instance — nor should he earn too much money. As a result, the teachers came from the local community and spoke the dialect themselves; most of them were educated at the nearest teacher training college.

M. Hallager's Breve for Børn 1802 ('Letters for Children') deserves to be mentioned as a schoolbook advocating a positive view of the peasantry. It is a translation from the German 'Briefe für Kinder' 1798, adapted for Danish children: some of the letters were omitted, others were added. In the introduction the author says the following about the German original:

It has in every letter brought some learning or warning or education on some object or other in the life of human beings which deserved to be known, and which could contribute to promote the refinement of
manners and customs and the advancement of knowledge by the young people. One of these muster letters has the heading: ‘You should not despise peasants.’ [Due to the unavailability of the original, I have not been able to check whether this claim is actually true; V.S.]. The letter starts: ‘I know some people who despise peasants, who hold them for mean, who will not associate with them, rather not talk to them …’ Later on: ‘It is true that many peasants are in our opinion immoral, coarse and ignorant. But that is not their fault. If they got sufficient education, if we associated with them modestly and affectionately, they would soon be as clever and moral as we are …

This guide is, however, written for children in town schools. It shows that the contempt for peasants must have been rather widespread. But it does not intend to give the peasants self-confidence.

*The correspondents’ letter style*

It is not likely that any of the correspondents in our letter corpus had even heard about Hallager’s translation. That so many of the correspondents are really able to write must be the merit of the single teacher and must also be due to the soldiers’ specific situation in which letter writing was the only possibility of keeping in contact with their homes and their near relatives. Many things had also changed, of course, between Hallager’s time (1802) and the middle of the century.

I have made a more cursory comparison of the epistolary style of the strongest and the weakest 10 percent of the spellers. When looking at the use of opening and closing formulas, the main conclusion is that the strongest group is less dependent on the traditional letter formulas than the weakest group.

Among the introductory formulas are *helsen og sundhed* (‘health and healthiness’) and identical clause structures like *Da …, saa* (‘As …, then’) and the like. *Jeg skriver dig til for at lade dig vide* (‘I am writing to you in order to let you know’) is the simplest way of starting a letter and it is used with some variations. Time as an argument both for starting and finishing a letter is recommended in the formula books and often used in the letters, e.g. *Da jeg id dag har tid og lelighed so vel jeg atter skrive eder til* (‘As I have time and opportunity today I am writing for you again’). Writers often continue with another formula: *og jeg haaber at spørge det samme fra eder igen* (‘hoping to hear the same from you again’).

The most frequently used closing formula is: *Nu maa jeg afbryde min ringe skrivelse for denne gang* (‘Now I have to interrupt my poor letter
for this time’) or Nu maa jeg slutte mit korte brev for denne gang (‘Now I have to finish my short letter for this time’). The closing formulas always express modesty, and we learn that a letter should not be too short when writing to your equals and near relatives. When writing to one’s superior, however, one should be as brief as possible in order not to waste his time.

The religious groups

Some of the letters in the corpus are written by members of particular religious communities. These communities existed both in Jutland, Fyn and Zealand. In Jutland there was the Herrnhutes Brodremenigheden (Hernhuter Brüdergemeinde, ‘the Brethren Community’) who came to Denmark in 1727, founded the village of Christiansfeld in the Duchy of Schleswig in 1773 and stayed there afterwards. In Fyn and in Zealand the communities of Hellige (‘religious people’) were (so-called prægrundtvigske) revivalist movements. Common to all of them was the view that the personal religious feeling of the single human being is the essence of Christianity. These movements arose as antagonistic to the rationalist trend that dominated the Danish church around 1800.

The new movements found most of their adherents among the lower classes, such as tailors and other craftsmen who enjoyed low prestige in the rural community. The letters from these correspondents stand out by way of addressing the recipients as brødre og søstre i Herren (‘brothers and sisters in the Lord’) and by the high-flown rhetorical style: letters often start with elskede (‘beloved’) instead of the normal kære (‘dear’) and the letter itself, i.e. the running text, is a regular sermon full of quotations from the Bible, written in a rather poetic style.

Whether these correspondents spell better (or write better on the whole) than the others remains difficult to say. There are only a few letters of this nature in the whole collection and we do not know how they wrote in normal family letters to their wives and children. There is one single example, however, of a religious community member who writes sermon-like letters to his sister, but normal family letters to his wife (who appears to be not very religious); his letters are neither better, nor worse than the average level found in the corpus.

Some conclusions

The main conclusion of the present analyses is that there are no provable significant differences in the orthographic skills between the social groups that made up the rural male population of Denmark in the middle of the 19th century. For our research purposes, these social groups
were defined on the basis of housing parameters. Perhaps the results would have been different if the social division had been made on the basis of profession. Our writers lived in the times just before the industrial revolution, and in those days agrarians were looked upon differently than craftsmen of different sorts, for example. At the lowest end of the social scale stood tailors, bricklayers and common blacksmiths; the village blacksmith was a highly respected person.

However, working with social categories on the basis of profession was problematic for the present study: the available demographic sources do not always offer sufficient and reliable information on a writer’s occupation. Furthermore, there was no authorised vocational training for these professions; a man might work as farm worker one year and the next as a bricklayer or carpenter.

Apart from these considerations, there were a number of good reasons to choose ‘housing’ as the basis for our statistics-based research. It allowed for comparisons with later investigations using the same criterion to categorise various groups within the rural population.

As to the more general validity of our research results, it is believed that they may be applied to the whole rural communities involved, as all children went to the same village school.

It has been shown, finally, that a great many of the spelling errors are due to the dialect of the correspondent. The occurrence of hypercorrections in the letters, on the other hand, show that the correspondents intended to follow the norm.

Danish Language Council

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‘Lower class language’ in 19th century Flanders

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Abstract

This article discusses the written Dutch of lower class writers in 19th century Bruges (Flanders, Belgium). None of the scribes conformed to any of the prestige norms for Dutch spelling at the time. They all used an idiosyncratic orthography instead, full of variability but not chaotic. On the level of style and syntax, these texts are characterised by ‘stylistic breakdown’. The combination of these orthographical and stylistic features was not typical for lower class writing as such. In Bruges, middle and upper class writers displayed similar writing patterns, but they abandoned this ‘style’ for the standard earlier than the lower class writers did.

1.

It is generally agreed that the 19th century was a vital period for the development, standardisation and even survival of the Dutch language in the present-day area of Flanders (Willemyns 2003). Due to the territorial separation from the Northern Dutch provinces (which coincide with the current territory of the Netherlands) at the end of the 16th century, and under the influence of the French-favouring policies of the successive Spanish (1585–1714), Austrian (1714–1794) and French (1794–1815) rulers, Dutch could not develop towards a standard prestige language in Flanders. The nature of Flemish Dutch around 1830 (the year in which Flanders became part of Belgium) is usually described as a collection of dialects, the functions of which were restricted to the informal and prestige areas. Contrary to the situation in the Netherlands, there was no widely accepted standard Dutch that could be used for supra-regional communication — French was generally used instead for those purposes. Common opinion has it that Flanders’ native language was pushed down the social ladder, ‘where the lower middle class, farmers and workers mingled’ (Witte et al. 2000: 44).
Less than 100 years later (in 1898), however, Dutch was officially recognised (alongside French) as Belgium’s national language due to the successful and continued efforts of the ‘Flemish Movement’ (NEVB 1998) and undergoing all necessary stages of language planning for elaborating and establishing a fully-fledged national language of government.

In spite of the impressive scholarship on the extra-linguistic situation in 19th century Flanders, the intra-linguistic development of the language at the time has consistently been neglected in most standard reference works on the historical development of Dutch, so far (Rutten i. p.). As such, almost every relevant aspect of the context in which the standardisation process of Dutch in 19th century Flanders took place has been studied in remarkable detail, but there is hardly any linguistic data on the precise nature and evolution of the language at the time. Similar to other language communities discussed in the present edition (cf., e. g., Elspaß on German), the scholarly literature traditionally refers to the style of literary icons when a sample of the written language is required (in the case of 19th century Flanders, the likes of Guido Gezelle and Henri Conscience).

In order to ‘disclose’ this uncovered episode of our linguistic history in a systematic way from a (socio)linguistic point of view, a project entitled ‘Standardization mechanisms in 19th century Flanders’ was started in 1995 at the Centre for Linguistics of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) (co-financed by the Flemish ‘Research Foundation’). It concerned a historical sociolinguistic analysis of original archive texts pertaining to various social layers of 19th century society in the Flemish town of Bruges. For comparative purposes the language use in the media, law and official administration of the time was also included in the research programme. The present article concentrates on the analyses of working class texts and takes up a number of observations that were previously published in, among others, Vandenbussche (1999a and b, 2002, 2006); the most recent overview of the results for the other domains and text types is given in Willemyns and Vandenbussche (2006).

2.

Our basic research question — ‘how did labourers write in 19th century Bruges?’ — raised a number of methodological issues. First, who were these labourers or, in other terms, how should one define ‘lower class’ in the socio-economic context of the time? The categorisation of writers in various social classes proved to be a highly sensitive issue, especially when one takes into account that the social and economic structure in Flanders (but also in the rest or Europe) during the 19th century was
constantly changing (Witte et al. 2000). The rise of the middle class, the slow transition from a trade-based to an industrialised economy and the subsequent changes in the relative financial status of certain professions make it a perilous undertaking to define a clear social structure for 19th century Bruges. While the secondary literature on the history of the town only provides partial onsets for a model of the social structure at the time (Michiels 1978; Van Eenoo 1959), it does stress the fact that Bruges ‘missed’ the industrial revolution — contrary to other Flemish cities like Ghent and Antwerp — and, accordingly, remained characterised by a ‘medieval’ artisan economy until the 1890s. For the lower strata of society this implied the firm presence of a craft (or trade) based group at the bottom end of the social ladder. There was a clear-cut division within this group between ‘apprentices’ (or knechten ‘servants’ as they were called in Bruges) and ‘masters’; the first group eventually merged with the emerging proletariat towards the end of the century whereas part of the latter group rose to the ranks of the newly-formed middle class. From an international comparative point of view, one can rightfully question how a trade servant compares to a factory labourer in terms of class membership.

For the purpose of our analyses, however, it was safe to state that trade servants were amongst of the ‘lowest’ social groups at the time, whereas their masters enjoyed a higher moral prestige. Despite the attested close collaboration on social issues between servants and masters in certain trades, the writers of our corpus material belonged to those trades that made a firm distinction between both strata, clearly indicating that the lower group could never join the ranks of the higher and would never be allowed into their social circles.

A further methodological issue followed from the decision to build a corpus on the basis of original and unedited archive material. The feasibility of text-internal research on 19th century sources depends to a very large extent on text-external criteria like the readability, paper quality and even the degree of pulverisation of these documents. A large share of potentially interesting sources turned out to be preserved in an either fragmentary or deplorable state, and had become illegible due to rot, water damage or inadequate conservation. Almost any researcher working with historical documents will be familiar with these corpus issues, but the problem is even more poignant in the case of lower class documents. Considering that that texts written by ‘the man in the street’ were for decades not considered to be of any scientific interest, there are (in Flanders, at least) far fewer documents available in the archives (compared to upper class texts).
3.

Our research corpus consists of original minutes of trade meetings, written by 24 different lower class writers, pertaining to the apprentice rank of the tailor, wool weaver, carpenter, shoemaker and brush maker trades. These handwritten meeting reports cover the whole period between 1800 and 1900. It actually concerns documents of various so-called onderstandsmaatschappijen (‘social assistance companies’) for trade apprentices. These organisations can be considered as early precursors of the present-day social security funds: they guaranteed their members and family minimal financial support in the case of illness, invalidity, pension and death (Michiels 1978).

Similar relief structures existed for the master rank in various trades. In order to compare lower and middle class writing skills, an additional ‘middle class’ corpus was compiled, containing texts by 10 writers from the onderstandsmaatschappij in the baker masters’ trade. A second comparative corpus consisted of a database of upper class meeting reports, stemming from the archives of the Saint Sebastian archers’ guild, one of the most prestigious high society circles in Bruges up until the present day (Godar 1947).

4.

In order to assess the scribes’ skills on the level of orthography and style, one must first determine and describe the ruling norms at the time for these aspects of writing. Ideally, this implies a clear understanding of a writer’s school career, of the writing manuals he used and of the norms he was taught. Like many other contributors to this edition, however, I had little or no information on the lives of the corpus writers. Apart from their work occupations and names, they remain anonymous scribes — all we can say for certain is that they were paupers at the very bottom of the social ladder. We simply do not know whether they enjoyed any organised schooling, nor if they may have been familiar with the ruling orthography norms for Dutch. It is therefore fundamentally problematic to compare the language in our corpus to the latter norms, and to describe it in terms of ‘errors’ and ‘correctness’: the standards we use to assess the scribes’ language mastery are most probably ‘unfair’, in the sense that it is very well possible that the writers were completely ignorant of these norms. This comparison can nevertheless be useful, however, to illustrate the everyday spelling practices of the larger share of the population that existed next to (and, metaphorically, ‘below’) the dominant upper class doctrine of invariable spelling rules.

During the 19th century there was no generally accepted standard for the spelling of Dutch in Flanders: next to the fact that the official or-
thography norms were changed three times between 1823 and 1863, there existed a number of unofficial but widely used alternative spelling models. As such, one can distinguish between at least 5 different spelling systems that carried some prestige in Bruges at the time: the official Siegenbeek-, Commission- and de Vries-te Winkel norms (imposed in Flanders in, respectively, 1823, 1844, 1864) and the alternative models of Des Roches (1761) and Behaegel (1817).

Comparing these models and the variants they proposed, it becomes clear that the core of Flemish spelling trouble was limited to 15 spelling issues (cf. Vandenbussche 2002 for a detailed overview).

Among these main spelling cruces were the representations of long vowels [aː], [eː] and [oː] in open syllables ([aː] in closed syllables, too). Depending on the model, long [aː] could be written <a>, <aa> or <ae>, whereas for long [eː] and [oː] there was a choice between single and double graphemes: <e> and <o> versus <ee>/<eː> and <oo>/<oː>. For diphthongs [ei] and [eː], the different norms prescribed either <ei>/<ui>, <ey>/<uy> or <eij>/<uij>. Problems with consonants were mainly limited to the representation of [z], [x], [t], [p] and [f]. Each of these consonants has a voiceless c. q. voiced counterpart (in respective order [s], [ɛ], [d], [b] and [v]). The different graphemes which normally represent those distinct voiced/voiceless phonemes were used for both the voiced and the voiceless element of the phoneme pair. An additional consonant problem was the spelling of [k]. Different spelling forms within one model could only be used in distinct and well defined circumstances and shared spelling variants across different models did not necessarily have the same distribution in each of these models.

None of the writers in our lower class corpus conformed to any of the spelling norms mentioned above. Their texts are characterised by continuous spelling variation instead and it appears that the corpus scribes were not interested in ‘consistent’ spelling at all. Contrary to common belief, however, this apparently free spelling variation did not lead to spelling chaos (Suffeleers 1979: 19). Each of the lower class authors had developed his own spelling system and used grapheme variants for the representation of the same phoneme within the same text (and even sentence) as an essential characteristic of these spelling systems. As such, one can find the same word or expression written in two different ways – ‘gemeensaemheijd’ (association) next to ‘gemeenzaamheyd’, for example – without any attempt to ‘correct’ this variability.

Writers did not pick their spelling variants at random, moreover. There were clear constraints on the allographs one could use. The corpus analyses actually made it possible to describe the maximal spelling variation within which a writer could operate: for the spelling of [k], for example, the scribes would use <k>, <c>, <ck> or <q>. Some writers
used only two or three of those variables, others all four, depending on the limits and restrictions of their personal spelling system. Given that it was also possible to predict where variants would most probably occur and that real ‘unpredictable chaos’ was only found with two out of 24 lower class writers, one can hardly call this overall spelling image ‘unordered’ or ‘chaotic’. As Jim Milroy (1992: 133–134) points out with respect to the spelling of Early Middle English authors: ‘(I)f the scribes really had used variants “at will”, we would actually be unable to read the texts … There must always be some order in any spelling system that we can read, even if it is a variable system … It is our task to attempt to specify the constraints on spelling under which they were working, always admitting that after we have done this, there may well be residues of apparent randomness that we cannot explain.’

This spelling pattern of limited systematic and consistent variation remained in use among the lower classes in Bruges throughout the 19th century. There is no evidence that writers changed their spelling habits when a new official norm was adopted nor that there was an overall partial move towards one of the official norms around 1900. Some writers from the second half of the century even displayed more variation than their colleagues 50 years earlier.

5.

Describing the stylistic and syntactic properties of the language found in our lower class corpus was highly problematic. The texts produced by our scribes are a long way from the literary examples to which 19th century grammars of Dutch tend to refer — the ‘standard’ variety that was promoted through normative style guides had not overtly percolated into the lower ranks of society. One representative example from 1824 may help to illustrate this observation and to understand the problems faced by present-day linguists wishing to assess the scribes’ stylistic and syntactic qualities:

Ten huyse van Deken Jonkeere / ter presentie van alle De sorgers Deken ende greffier / dat alle De sorgers hun verbinden / aen alle Conparise / die den Deken zal nodig vinden te houden / die Aengaende het ambacht ['At the house of president Jonkeere / in the presence of all the members president and the clerk / that all the members commit themselves / in all meetings / which the president will consider necessary to hold / which concerning the trade'; the separation marks were not in the original text; W.V.]

One may assume that a number of words were omitted from this paragraph by the writer: after ‘the clerk’ one could add ‘it was decided’ and
it helps to imagine something like ‘to be present’ before ‘in all meetings’. There are numerous comparable examples of these ‘omissions’ in the corpus and it is tempting to label this feature as ‘poor language mastery’. However, these texts were written to be read aloud at the relief society’s next meeting and to be consulted by future generations. Given that I could not find one single instance where these omissions were corrected in the text, one has to assume the possibility that these texts (including the omissions!) were both understandable and acceptable — one might say ‘grammatical’ — for the writer’s community.

Instead of the clause ‘die Aengaende het ambacht’ (‘which concerning the trade’), ‘standard’ grammar prescribed either ‘die het ambacht aan-gaan’ (‘which concern the trade’) or ‘aangaande het ambacht’ (‘concerning the trade’). Although the amalgamate form found in the corpus would be ‘wrong’ or ‘erroneous’ according to 19th century grammar books, one cannot simply dismiss it, given the fact that it was effectively used in the present text and, again, that no attempt whatsoever was made to correct it either. What is needed to interpret these examples (and many others in the corpus) is a grammar of ‘real life’ language as opposed to the idealised description of literary prose traditionally found in the 19th century reference grammars.

The continuous occurrence of so-called ‘zusammengebrochener Stil’ (Mattheier 1986) further complicates the syntactic analyses of these lower class sources. This concept (lit. ‘stylistic breakdown’) from German sociolinguistics refers to authors’ inability to control the stylistic and grammatical properties of the text sort used — be it letters or official meeting minutes. The scribe basically manages to use the introductory and closing formulas but ‘loses control’ over his language in the body of the text which results (among other things) in syntactic anomalies, the omission of constituents and, in some cases, the loss of text structure. Once again, labeling this language use as ‘broken down’ may be unfortunate: these structures should not be considered as ‘divergent’ from a standard norm but as the very essence of a type of language use that should not be judged by the rules of ‘standard’ grammar.

6.

Across national and linguistic borders, all researchers involved in analyses of lower class texts from the long nineteenth century appear to find remarkably similar sets of linguistic features that are apparently ‘typical’ for their corpus material. The contributions in this edition can serve as representative examples of the state-of-the-art in this field of inquiry (one could add further references to Branca-Rosoff and Schneider’s (1994) research on metropolitan French or Deumert’s (2004) analyses of
letters in 19th century Afrikaans, to name but two). We see that the writers (or scribes, correspondents) are largely oblivious of the ‘educated’ or ‘schooled’ spelling conventions at the time (irrespective of whether the authority of these ‘norms’ came from an official decision or widespread use in the language community). Contrary to the aspired consistency of spelling rules, our writers make no effort to write identical words (or even morphemes and phonemes) in the same way within the same text or sentence. Variability is a core feature of their spelling behaviour, and in certain cases interference from the writer’s spoken dialect can account for some of the less evident spelling choices. As far as style is concerned, various contributors to this volume referred to the influence of letter writing manuals and other ‘institutionalised’ text examples (the Bible, official reports, etc.). The most striking common feature concerns the scribes’ unfortunate mastery of ‘standard’ syntactic constructions: the references to ‘anacoluthon constructions’, ‘Zusammengebrochener Stil’ and ‘stylistic rupture (or breakdown)’ in the present analyses all testify to the writers’ apparent difficulties with writing a coherent and logically structured text, as well as with adapting to the composition rules of various text types.

One may be tempted to conclude that the widely dispersed appearance of the very same cluster of writing problems among lower class scribes is too much of a coincidence to ignore. This is — in my understanding, at least — what caused a number of German scholars (Mattheier 1986, among many others) in the 1980s to postulate the existence of a 19th-century Arbeitersprache (‘workers’ language’). They found that German labourers from all over the Ruhr area (and beyond) all displayed the above-mentioned linguistic features in their letters and saw this combination of spelling and style problems as typical for 19th century lower class writing. These linguistic features were said to define a language variety of its own (eine eigenständige Varietät), the use of which was restricted to the lowest layers of society. This Arbeitersprache (‘workers’ language’) was not be interpreted as one single variety, however, but rather as a Sprachstil (‘language style’), a spectrum (or continuum) of varieties (Mattheier 1986) — which stood in clear contrast with the bürgerlicher Sprachstil (‘bourgeois language style’).

I see two main reasons to question this concept of supra-regional (and even international) class-specific language features. The first is a sociological one: the literature on 19th century class structures shows that the social circumstances defining the lives of a German Arbeiter, an English labourer, a French ouvrier and a Flemish knecht may have differed enormously. These individuals may occupy similar positions in large macro-economic models of 19th century Europe but that does not necessarily imply that their everyday lives were identical. The acquisition of writing
was very much determined by the latter micro-level, but aspects of everyday life ‘from below’ hardly ever appear in class definitions (contrary to income, housing situation, respect/esteem from peers, etc.). I am afraid that the ‘Arbeiter’-concept is far too abstract and over-generalising to account for actual similarities in writing behaviour between individuals living in completely different worlds. Both Grosse (1990a) and Mihm (1998) elaborated this sceptical view, the first stressing how ‘Arbeitersprache’ was an ‘inappropriate collective term’ (*untauglicher Kollektivterminus*) because of the differences between the language use of individual workers, the latter adding that ‘it can hardly be possible to sum up linguistic features which would be shared by all workers’ and that ‘it is impossible to speak of a ‘Sprache des Bürgers’, neither in a linguistic nor in a sociolinguistic sense’ (Mihm 1998: 294; my translation).

A far more fundamental issue concerns the social stratification of the linguistic features of *Arbeitersprache*. It is by definition assumed that these markers will only occur in texts from lower class writers and not, for example, in middle or upper class texts. Our research on meeting reports from 19th century Bruges proved that assumption to be wrong.

Both Mattheier (1986) and Grosse (1990) hinted at the fact that the individual orthography of members of the industrial bourgeoisie and the gentry from 19th century Germany sometimes resembled both the spelling image found in working class letters, as well as the morphological and syntactic features mentioned above. Our research on meeting minutes from the middle and upper classes in 19th century Bruges confirmed this: all formal characteristics of so-called ‘Arbeitersprache’ (i.e. variable spelling and ‘Zusammengebrochener Stil’) occurred in the texts from both lower and middle class scribes up until 1850. Up until the end of the 18th century, these features even appeared in the upper class corpus, too. Irrespective of the class they belonged to, the scribes consistently used the same set of spelling variants and diverged from ‘standard’ morphology, syntax and style in similar ways (cf. Vandenbussche 2002 for a more detailed comparative discussion with examples of the spelling variation). One could say, in other words, that members from all social classes wrote ‘Arbeitersprache’ in Bruges up until 1800, that the lower and middle classes continued to use this ‘variety’ until 1850, and that the ‘typical’ lower class features only became real social markers during the second half of the 19th century. Both standardised spelling and stylistic and grammatical correctness seem to have been of little importance to any writer before the dawn of the 19th century in Bruges. From that point onwards, however, a sensibility for standard language norms
swiftly spread through society in three major phases, starting at the top of the social ladder around 1800 and gradually reaching the middle and lower classes around 1850 and 1900.

8.

Class as such can no longer account for the combined occurrence of variable spelling and 'stylistic breakdown'. A set of alternative possible explanations should include considerations of literacy and the quality of schooling, as well as the importance of 'standardised' writing (i.e. conforming to the ruling elitist language norms) for the creation of a specific social identity.

Just as in Germany, literacy in Bruges only began to spread among the lower walks of society after 1800. Census statistics indicate that the highest classes were fully literate by 1800. The middle classes reached this stage of language mastery some 50 years later and massive writing acquisition only really started for the lower classes during the second half of the century (Callewaert 1963).

This phased diffusion of literacy co-occurs with the different impact of written language on upper, middle and lower class work careers, a distinction referred to as ‘Schriftsprache orientiert’ (‘orientation towards the written language’) and ‘Handarbeit orientiert’ (‘orientation towards craftsmanship’) in the German literature. In Bruges, the bourgeoisie was characterised by an explicitly writing-oriented work culture from the 19th century onwards, whereas the tasks of labourers and trade apprentices remained craft-oriented (and orally based) up until the period between the two World Wars. The lack of information that has come to us on the educational system in the town at the time reflects this dichotomy: writing skills were hardly taught in pauper schools – Sunday schools for the poor typically taught ‘letter-recognition’ or ‘grapheme-copying’ with so-called ABC-booklets – but grammar and style were core elements of the curriculum of middle and upper class schools (Michiels 1978; de Clerck et al. 1984).

I believe that the language of my corpus scribes should be understood as a set of transitional varieties on the continuum between literacy, semi-literacy and illiteracy: each writer’s written production reflects a different phase in the acquisition of literacy. As long as writing remained a skill of secondary importance and little sociological impact in our scribes’ work life – our corpus documents come from the work-related sphere, contrary to the private letters referred to in the other contributions in this edition – it can be assumed that they will make no specific efforts to refine their literacy skills. This is bound to change when literacy is transformed from a subordinate skill to a powerful tool for social pro-
motion. For the upper classes this probably happened when writing according to the norm became a means to confirm and assess one’s refined social standing. For the trade masters — and much later for their servants — the ‘making of the middle class’ and the possibilities this evolution suddenly offered for upward social mobility may have triggered the orientation towards norm-oriented writing. From those days onwards, writers could no longer ‘allow themselves a much larger variability in orthography, grammar and syntax than today, without being submitted to the sanction of a negative evaluation of their background and social position’ as Mattheier (1986: 225; my translation) puts it.

While there is no more reason that written varieties were determined by class in 19th century Bruges, the impact of class membership is not entirely dismissed in this view: the connection between relative wealth and the accessibility of quality writing education remains a paramount factor for the interpretation of the corpus material.

References


