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SCRIBAL NETWORKS AND THE LANGUAGE OF URBAN AD-MINISTRATION: VARIATION AND CHANGE IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY COVENTRY*

1 INTRODUCTION

Research on Early Modern English (1500–1700) often highlights the importance of the printing press, increased education, the Reformation, and the Revolution in relation to language change during this period, in particular related to processes of supralocalisation[1] and standardisation (Nevalainen 2000, Nevalainen/Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006, Nevalainen/Raumolin-Brunberg 2017: 30–43). Besides these important developments and events, however, England also saw the continued expansion of pragmatic lay literacy in the form of increased urban administration, which had started in the late medieval period (Rees Jones 2014). The need for trained lay literates in the form of scriveners, town clerks, etc. grew, evidenced by the fact that we observe a significant increase in text production related to record keeping and general administration on both local and national level in sixteenth-century England (Bishop 2016: 114). This undoubtedly had an effect on the English language, but, in contrast to the Late Middle English period (see e.g. Alcolado Carnicero 2017, Stenroos/Thengs 2020), local administration from the Early Modern English period has thus far not received much attention. Instead, researchers have focused more on ego-documents (chiefly letters and diaries) and printed material, which both witnessed an exponential increase after 1500. Furthermore, the few existing studies on comparable text types from the early modern period only consider printed works from the London area, most notably the Statutes of the Realm (Rissanen 1999a, 2000).[2] Two of the main reasons for this are that 1) most local administration was not printed (and as such is now more difficult to access), and 2) it (arguably) carries less value from a socio-historical viewpoint compared to for example private correspondence, as little is often known about the scribes involved (Gordon 2017: 188, 310).

1 In this paper I follow Britain (2010: 193) in his definition of supralocalisation, namely "the process by which, as a result of mobility and dialect contact, linguistic variants with a wider socio-spatial currency become more widespread at the expense of more localised forms".

2 As discussed in more detail by Baker (1999), in the early modern period statutes were only printed, and "no manuscript statute-books were made after 1500 (Baker 1999: 422; see also the first volume of Dawsons of Pall Mall edition from 1963: xxi–xxviii). Moreover, for his studies on the Statutes of the Realm, Rissanen (1999a; 2000) uses later editions from the nineteenth century (reprinted in 1963 by Dawsons of Pall Mall), which had been included in the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts.

However, when scrutinising early modern urban administration in its proper local socio-historic context, much can still be learned from how English was used in different places across the country during a time in which a more supralocal/standardised variety became increasingly discernible (*cf.* Gordon *et al.* 2020). On the one hand, urban administration was chiefly meant for a local audience, and can thus reflect local linguistic characteristics (*cf.* Stenroos 2020), whereas on the other hand scribes – who were often part of a larger network of scribes, scriveners, and clerks (Cuenca 2018, see also Sections 2 and 3 below) – also picked up new forms and phrases from elsewhere as this text type evolved (Oudesluijs 2019: 301–310), making urban administration a highly interesting source from a supralocalisation/standardisation perspective. Furthermore, administrative texts are official, often concern legislation, and their language favours invariance, lacks affect, and, in the early modern period, were considered more prestigious than many other text types (Rissanen 1999a: 191). As such, when appropriately contextualised, local urban administration constitutes an invaluable resource when it comes to better understanding how a more supralocal form of English developed during the early modern period.

As mentioned above, investigating early modern administration in its proper socio-historical context can be difficult due to the anonymity of most scribes working on this text type. One method that has proven successful for scrutinising comparable data from the Late Middle English period concerns social network theory (Alcolado Carnicero 2017; *cf.* Hartrich 2017). Although this model is usually applied to data written by known authors (e.g. Bergs 2005), its principles and mechanisms can still be successfully applied to communities of largely anonymous writers, especially when they form a so-called community of practice. This concerns "a collection of people who engage on an on-going basis in some common endeavour" (Eckert 2006: 683), such as members of a specific society, a study group, or – in this case – a group of professional scribes. Members of such communities often have shared repertoires, including linguistic elements, as a result of active participation (Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 1999: 185). As such, the aim of this paper is twofold: first, to highlight and substantiate the potential of early modern local administration with regard to better understanding the supralocalisation and development of (Standard) English in the sixteenth century, and second, to demonstrate the benefits of applying the principles of social network theory to mostly anonymous scribal communities and networks in relation to language change in the early modern period.[3] To achieve this, I closely scrutinise the use and development of periphrastic DO – a well-researched feature for this period (see e.g. Denison 1985, Nevalainen 1991, Rissanen 2000, Söderlund 2017) that has already been discussed in relation to standardisation (e.g. Stein 1990, Stein/Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1994) – in a collection of 35 indentures from sixteenth-century Coventry, both in the relevant local urban and scribal contexts, as well as in light of the developing supralocal variety (see also Oudesluijs *et al.* 2022).

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3   This paper concerns a case study based on work I carried out for my doctoral dissertation (Oudesluijs 2019) within the framework of the Emerging Standards project. See https://wp.unil.ch/emst/home/project-description/ for more information.

First, I discuss urban administration and scribal networks in early modern England (Section 2), followed by an overview of the situation in Coventry (Section 3). I then consider the language of administration (Section 4) before presenting the data (Section 5) and the case study on periphrastic DO (Section 6). In Section 7, I conclude this paper by returning to the aims set out in the introduction and providing some final thoughts.

2 EARLY MODERN ENGLISH URBAN ADMINISTRATION AND SCRIBAL NETWORKS

Besides the development of schools and education across the country in the first half of the sixteenth century (*cf.* Orme 2006), the early modern period in England also saw the continued expansion of pragmatic lay literacy in the form of increased administration in towns and cities, which had started in the late medieval period. This involved the "production, uses, and preservation of records for the purposes of municipal administration" (Mostert and Adamska 2014: 4). These activities are also sometimes grouped under the term 'institutional literacy' or 'civic literacy' as they were primarily exercised by municipal institutions. The latter term was proposed by Rees Jones (2014: 220), who defines civic literacy as the capacity of urban governments to generate both records and archives as part of their processes of self-government, and also the uses of that writing in creating a sense of identity and purpose within a civic community. As pointed out by Mostert and Adamska (2014: 4), the 'legal setting' of an urban community played an important role in this development, as a growing amount of legal records were required for municipal administration. In contrast to merchants who became increasingly familiar with reading and writing skills (*cf.* Stenroos 2017), civic literacy concerns pragmatic literacy associated with trained professionals like town clerks and scriveners, who were employed by civic institutions such as guilds and city councils (Cuenca 2018: 3).

Town clerks were civic administrators familiar with local customs and law, and they often copied, compiled, changed, and sometimes even authored different kinds of texts (Cuenca 2018: 3–4). They often had a background as scrivener,[4] and as such they "read and wrote and performed secretarial and administrative duties that traditionally included composing legal instruments" (Bevan 2013: 30). Town clerks often had multiple roles within city councils, meaning that they not only narrated many events that took place, but also often played a role in those events (Bishop 2016: 129). Since town clerks were almost completely in charge of the collections of documents in their respective archives, they "were able to shape and control the narrative that was told through

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[4]   The term 'scrivener' refers to the profession under which many town clerks, recorders (see Section 3), and secretaries would have fallen. Scriveners have been called many things by historians up to this point, including scribe, notary, copyist, secretary, and clerk, which reflects the different offices that scriveners frequently took from the thirteenth century onward (Bevan 2013: 29–30). Besides being apprenticed to a scrivener, some (town) clerks would have been trained at university level, although the available evidence to back this up is patchy (Cuenca 2018: 9). Other means of education included business schools in Oxford, where scriveners trained boys in legal administration, accounting, letter writing, etc. (Bevan 2013: 201). Before becoming a town clerk, many scriveners often worked as a so-called underclerk (Cuenca 2018: 8), i.e. clerks working for other (town) clerks, where they could become acquainted with local customs and writing practices.

their archives" (Bishop 2016: 119–120). As a result, town clerks, as well as their teams of scribes and scriveners, can increasingly be considered literary agents and political actors in early modern England (Bishop 2016: 113–114).[5]

Like many merchants and various town officials, town clerks did not work in a social vacuum, but in a network spanning multiple cities and towns wherein they compiled "their town's histories, customs and traditions" (Cuenca 2018: 22). Many provincial towns interacted with each other on a civic level, and town clerks would have been very active members of such networks. Related to this, Rees Jones (2014: 222) points out that, despite the general tendency towards centralisation in late medieval England, there were still widely disparate regional cultures in the language, form, and use of civic writing. Rees Jones (2014: 223) also observes "regional groupings in the cultures of English towns" as many provincial towns interacted with each other on a civic level. Recent research by Hartrich (2017) on charters and inter-urban networks, as well as by Cuenca (2018) on town clerks and the authorship of custumals, confirms this. These studies show that "borough customary law was not always a reflection of urban practice rooted in specific places, but could be a copy of traditions from older, more prominent towns" (Cuenca 2018: 15), and that "urban elites were frequently in contact with wealthy merchants and civic officers from other towns" (Hartrich 2017: 224). Considering that the urban elite was often in charge of a town's government (Dobson 2000: 280), as well as responsible for its administration, English towns became part of inter-urban networks. London was of course often a prominent part of such networks, and clerks working in other towns frequently based new registers and compilations on writings from London, e.g. in King's Lynn, Bristol, and Exeter (Cuenca 2018: 15–16).

As with the language of individuals and speech communities in a social network, the language used by people in different urban centres would have undergone change in an inter-urban network, i.e. through contact with individuals from other towns. In brief, social network theory tells us that linguistic innovations often flow from one community to another by means of accommodation and through what are usually called 'weak' network ties or links (Milroy/Milroy 1985, Nevalainen 2000, Bergs 2005). Such ties exemplify the relation that people commonly have with their acquaintances – who tend to come and go during one's lifetime – rather than with their friends and families – who are exemplified by strong ties and tend to form more close-knit networks. Individuals who belong to or move between multiple social networks (and tend to act as weak ties between them) can act as bridges and linguistic innovators, "channelling new or required information between different networks" (Alcolado Carnicero 2017: 43). Generally speaking, individuals who maintain stronger social ties in more close-knit networks tend to resist language change, whereas those who maintain weaker ties can induce it (Nevalainen 2000: 255). Despite having been developed for investigating

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5   Bishop's 2016 study on the London Goldsmith's company in the sixteenth century is an excellent example of the influence and power of clerks within companies, and she emphasises that, rather than the straightforward compilation of factual events, "record-keeping was always a creative process, involving the construction of narrative and storytelling" (Bishop 2016: 127). For other studies on the increasingly important role of town clerks in the late medieval and early modern periods, see Clanchy (2013 [1979]), Bevan (2013), Rees Jones (2014) and Cuenca (2018).

language change in speech communities, social network theory has successfully been applied to historical – i.e. written – data (e.g. Bergs 2005). However, in the case of town clerks and scribes basing their writings on documents from other towns, it becomes more difficult to point to an individual and/or weak tie to help explain attested change. Instead, the lasting quality and portability of physical texts become the means by which language (including potential innovations) spreads from town to town, rather than through an individual's speech, which, due to its ephemeral nature, requires their physical presence in a particular place and time. There are still linguistic agents involved of course, namely the writers of the texts that are being copied, the copying scribes, and (indirectly) those who transport the texts from town to town. Additionally, town clerks and recorders (see Section 3) often travelled around after their education, and ended up working for various institutions across the country. They therefore would have acted as weak ties between different communities of scribes as their linguistic and writing practices travelled with them.

All the above-described elements would have, over time, encouraged uniformity across the different written varieties, and by sharing and adopting different writing practices, the language used in administrative texts and civic records can be expected to become more identical over time, potentially fostering supralocalisation processes (*cf.* Oudesluijs *et al.* 2022). Unfortunately, at present there is not enough data available to confirm such developments, especially for the early modern period, though projects such as the Emerging Standards project[6] are working towards filling this gap. By creating more (specialised) corpora for individual towns it is likely that such patterns will become increasingly apparent, and the development of urban literacy, in particular the establishment of inter-urban networks, may prove to be of great importance to better understand the underlying supralocalisation and standardisation processes of Early Modern English.

3 URBAN ADMINISTRATION AND SCRIBAL NETWORKS IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY COVENTRY

The effects of religious reform in sixteenth-century England – including the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the subsequent suppression of guilds and chantries – on cities and towns was substantial, especially regarding administration. As pointed out by Stephens (1969: 264) when discussing Coventry's local government in the sixteenth century:

> in 1574 the mayor's council was strengthened […] by the city's acquisition of much of the property of the dissolved religious houses and all the property of the dissolved guilds and chantries. The later development of local government in Coventry was largely determined by these events which brought wider powers and greater revenue. The council had to handle many more lands, tenements, and rents than before, and had to administer the rectories of St. Michael and Holy Trinity together with a number of charities. The activities of the mayor and his council thus became numerous.

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6   See https://wp.unil.ch/emst/home/project-description/ for more information.

As a result of such developments, which took place across England (Tittler 1998: 59–73), the need for trained lay literates in the form of scriveners, scribes, town clerks, company clerks etc. increased, evidenced by the fact that we observe an increase in text production relating to record keeping at both local and national level in sixteenth-century England (Bishop 2016: 114).

In Coventry, the effects of the Reformation on its local government and administration were significant. When Edward VI continued England's religious reform in 1547 with an act of Parliament ordering the suppression of guilds and chantries (Stephens 1969: 217), many more buildings and lands were confiscated, sold, and demolished. Coventry's city council managed to acquire many of these lands and properties (Stephens 1969: 264, 275, 398, 403), which were subsequently let and as a result provided a yearly income. The council also sold some of the lands, allowing for investments in other properties, including the old guildhall, which became the new Council House. Such investments in lands helped the city through difficult times (McGrory 2003: 125), but also added to the local government's workload as the council had to handle many more lands, tenements, and rents than before.

As in many other English urban centres, in Coventry the local town clerk and a team of scriveners and scribes worked on the increased administration during this time. Coventry's town clerks working between 1400 and 1700 are for the most part known by name (Harris 1913: xvi; see also Oudesluijs 2019: 183), and we know of their tasks and responsibilities, but less is known about their private lives.[7] From 1481 onward, the office also included that of steward of the city (Templeman 1944: 15), which carried the "responsibility for the recording of apprentices' names, renewal of feoffments, and care of records" (Stephens 1969: 266). Coventry's town clerks were thus expected to take on more duties as time went on, including those of clerk of the peace (Templeman 1944: 15), for which increased legal knowledge was required. As mentioned in Section 2, town clerks often had a background as scrivener, but some of Coventry's town clerks had (additional) experience in other positions before becoming the town clerk, such as John Boteler and Thomas and Arthur Gregory, who had been trained as lawyers before their appointments in 1481, c.1550, and 1573 respectively (Templeman 1944: 15, Carter 2011: 12). As town clerk, Boteler had his routine duties such as keeping the mayor's register and acting as clerk of the peace, but he also did much to increase the relevance of this office, e.g. by representing the town in Briscowe's case in London (1481) and in Ludlow (1482), probably due to his legal training. In 1496, Boteler was nominated to be one of the corporation's proctors in the dispute with Laurence Saunders that took place in London, and in 1498 he was there again on the matter of the prior's murage (Templeman 1944: 16).

The town clerk frequently worked together with the recorder, a position that most likely evolved out of the office of town clerk (Bevan 2013: 61). The recorder acted as

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7   Thomas Gregory and his son Arthur are notable exceptions here. Together they held various offices within Coventry's local government from the 1530s until c.1580, including that of town clerk, and over time they accumulated both business and personal letters in their own hands. As a result, much documentation on their lives and business survives to this day. See for more information Carter (2011: Ch. 1).

the town's lawyer and foremost legal advisor (Musson 2001: 66–67), whereas the town clerk would handle the "secretarial aspect of scrivening" (Bevan 2013: 61 fn. 146), and the two would often work together (Cuenca 2018: 10). Recorders often held other official offices elsewhere in the country, most notably in parliament (Whitley 1894; see also a list of Coventry's coroners between 1423 and 1541 in Templeman 1944: 170–171), and whereas little is known about most of Coventry's town clerks, more is known about its recorders, chiefly as a result of their presence in Parliament. For example, we know that many of Coventry's recorders came from outside the city, like Anthony Fitzherbert (c. 1470–1538), a judge and legal writer from Norbury, Derbyshire (Baker 2015), William Shelley (c. 1478–1549), who came from a family of London mercers and aldermen (Whittick 2013), and Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634), who had been a recorder in Norwich, London, Orford (Suffolk) and Harwich before taking up the office in Coventry (Thrush/Ferris 2010). Most of these recorders held the office in Coventry for a period between 7 and 15 years (Templeman 1944: 170), with the exception of Henry Boteler, who held the office for 35 years, and a few others who held it only for one, two or three years. This was most likely because they often also occupied official positions elsewhere at the same time, and the recorder of Coventry was required to live in the city (Templeman 1944: 12, 14).

Even though we can mostly speculate about the professional networks of Coventry's town clerks, we know that they often worked with high-ranking officials within local governments, some of whom, such as the town recorder, often travelled and worked in other parts of the country. As mentioned above, town clerks did so as well on occasion (e.g. John Boteler). We also know that many of Coventry's town clerks and recorders had ties to the local guilds, most notably the Trinity Guild, of which the recorders John Weston, Henry Boteler, and Edmund Knyghteley, as well as the town clerk John Boteler were members (Templeman 1944: 15, 170). Coventry's town clerks were furthermore almost always housed within the Trinity guild (Templeman 1944: 15), and since most, if not all, city officials were members of a local guild, it seems likely that the anonymous scribes and scriveners working for the town clerk were as well. As such, it appears that a professional network of town clerks, recorders, and their team of scribes and scriveners had strong ties within Coventry's local community on the one hand, and weak ties with officials from other towns and cities on the other. As discussed in Section 2, the latter can be expected to lead to the adoption of different writing practices – including linguistic innovations – from elsewhere, and in this process the language of civic records can be expected to become more invariable over time, potentially fostering supralocalisation (and in turn standardisation) processes.

4 THE LANGUAGE OF ADMINISTRATION

Different realisations of language are often considered to lie on a cline with a highly formal register at one end and a highly informal register at the other (see e.g. Koch/Oesterreicher 2012, Elspaß 2015). Private correspondence between friends, for example, can then be placed more towards the informal end of this spectrum, with urban administration more towards the formal end, much like laws. These last two text types are,

of course, different in some ways – most notably regarding their audience[8] – but they also share many characteristics, chiefly the fact that both were legally binding.[9] With an increasing amount of legally binding records required for municipal administration (*cf.* Cuenca 2018: 3–4), laws and administration could potentially be called upon by any official with regard to various matters. Moreover, regardless of the exact composition of the contemporary audience for certain laws and administration in early modern England, both text types were also written for a future audience as they were registering official procedures that should also be followed by individuals at a later point in time or otherwise expanded on by future officials.

Scholars frequently point out the conservative nature and compliance with tradition of both the people working in law and the language they use (Mattila 2006: 90, Gotti 2012: 52–53). In this regard, the objectives of legal language have changed very little over time, and can be described as to "transmit legal messages with absolute clarity and without ambiguity" (Mattila 2006: 66; see also Gotti 2012: 52, Hiltunen 2012: 39, Kopaczyk 2013: 21) in order to provide legal certainty with the intention "to have an effect on the understanding, rather than the feelings, of the reader or listener" (Mattila 2006: 74). As pointed out by Kopaczyk (2013: 21), the way in which laws and regulations were and are communicated should not only be clear, unambiguous, authoritative, and transparent, but also solemn and formal. As such, accuracy and precision are of fundamental importance in legal texts, and this is often achieved by using certain linguistic features as well as being consistent regarding their structural organisation. This in turn often results in the use of fixed formulae on the sentence and phrase level, and legal texts frequently contain "ready-made sentences and petrified phrases" (Mattila 2006: 81–82), instead of more recently coined words or phrases (Gotti 2012: 52).[10]

One of the most well-known linguistic characteristics of legal texts concerns vocabulary, chiefly the use of legal jargon and specific terminology (Mattila 2006: 4–5, Mattila 2012). Legal language also tends to contain more compound nouns, archaic words, and foreign (i.e. Latin and French) phrases (Mattila 2012: 31–34). On the syntactic level we often find longer sentences and more textual complexity (Gotti 2012: 53), which is chiefly acquired through the organisation of clauses in patterns of parataxis (coordination) and hypotaxis (subordination) (Hiltunen 2012: 41). Legal texts also tend

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8   (Legislative) administration is generally meant for those who work in a particular professional environment that at some point in the future might warrant some degree of examination as to what exactly happened in the past, whereas laws are generally intended for a much larger audience. For example, many of the regulations written down in the Coventry Leet Books (Harris 1907–1913) applied to everyone living within the city walls, whereas an indentured lease only concerned the parties involved.

9   See Bhatia (1987) and Moessner (2018) for more on models and classifications of legal documents and their language.

10 Aiming for clarity and avoidance of ambiguity often leads to repetition and verbosity in legal texts, particularly when the reference relations of the texts are made as explicit as possible. However, it is not only due to the desired clarity and unambiguousness of legal texts that repetition and verbosity are some of its key characteristics. Another reason for this lies in its oral origins (Kopaczyk 2013: 15–20), as oral cultures valued formulaic language use because repetition was key in not losing (i.e. forgetting) important information. To a large extent, "writing meant fixing what used to be rather fluid" (Kopaczyk 2013: 18), and over time an increasing amount of legal and administrative texts were put into writing.

to avoid "grammatical ties across sentence boundaries" (Hiltunen 2012: 41) and as such include more anaphoric references preceding a noun such as 'the said [NAME]' rather than using a personal pronoun, as well as conjunctions (Rissanen 1999a: 192, Mattila 2006: 66, Gotti 2012: 54–56). Furthermore, legal language places less emphasis on verbs than ordinary language (Mattila 2006: 91), which is partly explained by the notion that nouns can give more objective impressions than verbs, notably in cases involving findings of fact. As a result, legal language often contains many fixed noun phrases as well as compound nouns.[11] Considering verbs, legal language frequently contains passive constructions, which "brings the object of the action into the foreground" (Mattila 2006: 73; *cf.* Hiltunen 2012: 41).

During the early modern period, according to Rissanen (2000: 120), who investigated the Statutes of the Realm,[12] neutrality and generality remain key characteristics of legal language, as are avoiding subjective and personal attitudes, and strong regional marking. He furthermore states that to "ensure correct and unambiguous transmission of information, it must be conservative in its choice of structure and lexis and hostile to stylistic variation. It aims at maximum disambiguation in its text and discourse structure" (Rissanen 2000: 120). This makes the language of legal texts repetitive and complex on the one hand, but also "innovative in some aspects of syntactic and lexical usage" on the other (Rissanen 2000: 120–121). Concerning spelling, Rissanen (2000: 121) notes that "it seems that in spelling the standardising model offered by documents [i.e. administrative texts] and statutes had a strong influence on other genres of writing", indicating that legal records played a part in the ongoing supralocalisation of certain spelling forms. Concerning syntax and lexis, Rissanen (2000: 121) argues that legal texts seemed to have adopted forms from other genres and subsequently decontextualised and deregionalised them, thus marking them as part of a more supralocal written variety. Rissanen (1999b) also hints at this role of legal language in relation to standardisation processes by means of its invariance, lack of affect, generality, and prestige (Table 1).

Table 1. Genres and features important in the development of the standard (Rissanen 1999a: 191).

	Invariance	Lack of affect	Generality	Prestige
Documentary and statutory texts	+	+	+	+
Scientific texts	-	+	+	+
Religious texts	-	-	+/-	+
Fictitious texts	-	-	-	+/-

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11   Also alluded to by Mattila's (2006: 96) use of the term 'noun sickness'.

12   Rissanen used the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (Rissanen et al. 1991) for his research, which includes sections from the Statutes of the Realm (Dawsons of Pall Mall 1963) from the following periods: 1488–1491, 1509–1512, 1542–1543, 1598–1604 and 1695–1699.

The overview provided in Table 1 does not represent a fixed or exact framework, but instead Rissanen's (1999b: 191) "attempt to illustrate the occurrences of features characterising standardisation in various genres of writing". Related to this, Gotti (2012: 60) emphasises that "[t]extual standardization occurs in all disciplinary fields but it is stronger in legal genres, particularly when a text is not free-standing but is an adaptation of an earlier text, incorporating all data reflecting the new conditions". Given these remarks, as well as the role of legislative texts with regard to standardisation processes in the Late Middle English period (Schaefer 2012: 530), Rissanen's overview provides an interesting framework for similar texts from the early modern period. As his research was based on small case studies that only considered selected entries from the Statutes of the Realm (Rissanen 1999a, 2000), it will be interesting to investigate legal records from other urban centres in that period and compare the attested language variation and change to the developing supralocal variety.

5 DATA

For this paper I investigate a collection of 35 indentures (28.517 words) written in Coventry between 1499 and 1600.[13] An indenture (or chirograph as they were known in the medieval period, see Clanchy 2013 [1979]: 66, 89–90) concerns an agreement between multiple parties that has been indented, i.e. cut in a wavy or indented way, to prevent potential forgery and falsification (Streutker 2016: 6).[14] Different kinds of agreements could be indented, including various types of leases,[15] feoffments, bargains, sales, or mortgages. Given this variety, it can be argued that 'indentures' cannot be considered to be a specific text type. However, besides the fact that they all concern administrative and/or legislative agreements of some sort between multiple parties, the collection from Coventry comprises only leases that all concern land and property transactions (both regarding ownership as well as letting) between multiple parties. Moreover, they were created and kept by Coventry's local urban administrative bodies, and as such lend themselves well for the purposes of this paper.

As regards the chronological distribution of the texts, they are unfortunately not evenly distributed across the sixteenth century, with the majority of the data being from

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13   This collection is part of the *Emerging Standards Project Corpus, Coventry sub-corpus*, accessed August 2022. Compiled by Anita Auer, Moragh Gordon, Femke van Hilten, Mike Olsen and Tino Oudesluijs. Utrecht University, NL and Université de Lausanne, CH. https://wp.unil.ch/emst.

14   The text was written twice (or sometimes three or four times) on the same piece of parchment and subsequently cut in the middle so that each party had a copy of the text (with each copy being authenticated with the seal of the other party). Initially the cuts were straight and divided up the word *chirographum*, which would be used to verify whether the copies were indeed once written on the same sheet by aligning the cut letters, but as the practice grew more common across late medieval England chirographs became more intricate and an increasing amount of security measures were taken (e.g. personal signatures and more detailed personal seals). As a result, the inclusion of the word *chirographum* on the indented cut was no longer customary by the start of the sixteenth century (Streutker 2016: 8).

15   The catalogue descriptions are not helpful in this instance. They mention 31 leases, three demises and one grant, but these all denote the same type of document; a lease, sometimes referred to as a demise, concerns a grant of property. This is further confirmed in the language used in the documents, which all include the verbs *demise* and *grant* in their opening statements.

the period 1540–1580 and the 1590s (see Figure 1). This uneven distribution is primarily due to 1) a general increase in the production of indented texts in Coventry from the middle of the sixteenth century onward (see also Section 3), and 2) the fact that the indented texts from the first half of the sixteenth century were mostly written in Latin.
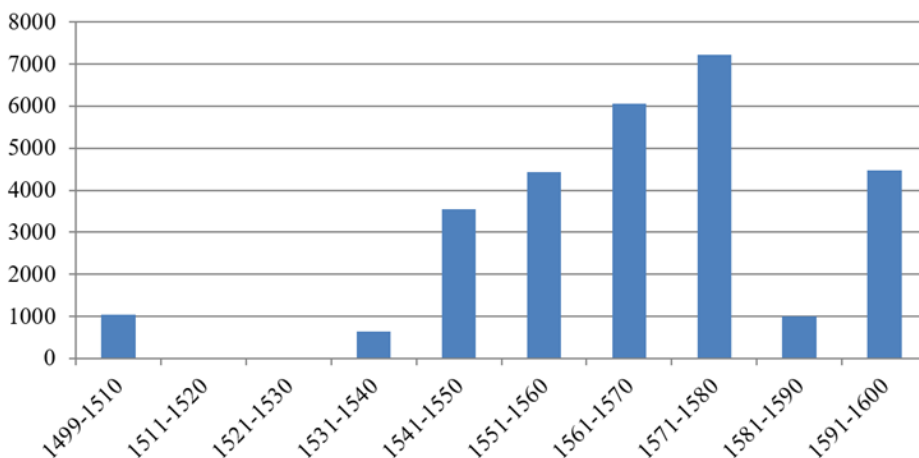

Figure 1. Distribution of the collection of indentures by number of words over time.

It is almost impossible to be completely sure of the authorship of the documents as the signatures do not match the main body of text in terms of handwriting, indicating that a trained scribe most likely wrote the documents and subsequently had them signed by the parties in question. There is a high chance that the town clerk and/or recorder were involved given their legal expertise (see Section 3), although the texts seem to indicate that more than a few different hands worked on them over the sixteenth century. As pointed out earlier, Coventry's town clerk and recorder were very likely working with a larger team of scribes and scriveners to distribute the workload, similar to what seems to have been the case for other administrative and legislative texts that they created and kept in this period (Oudesluijs 2019: 172–173). As for the possibility of potentially dealing with later copies rather than originals (see Oudesluijs 2018 for an example of this from Coventry's urban administration), there is no reason to assume that the indentures were written in years different from those mentioned in their opening statements. They were furthermore written on separate pieces of parchment or paper, which is in contrast to books wherein multiple texts (originally written on separate pieces of parchment or paper) were accumulated over time by copying them (Oudesluijs 2018). Multiple versions of the same indented text can thus only be found on multiple pieces of parchment or paper when they were written on the same page before it was cut in order to provide each party with an official copy of the text, which is the case with only four indentures in this collection that contain different versions of two different texts.

6 LINGUISTIC CASE STUDY: PERIPHRASTIC DO

The main reasons for scrutinising periphrastic DO in this paper are that its general development in the sixteenth century has both been well-documented and is largely agreed upon in the literature (Denison 1985, Nevalainen 1991, Rissanen 2000, Söderlund 2017), and that it is a well-known and widely studied feature that has previously been discussed in relation to the standardisation of English (Stein 1990, Stein/Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1994). It therefore allows me to situate my findings in the appropriate linguistic context relatively easily and focus on the external factors under scrutiny in this paper, i.e. text type and scribal networks. Furthermore, after first occurring in the late medieval period, periphrastic DO spread at an increased rate in the sixteenth century whilst still showing much variation in use, making it more susceptible to the above-mentioned external factors. In contrast, the seventeenth century marks the beginning of the regulation process that would result in the present-day use of periphrastic DO in Standard English (Nurmi 1999: 15). Below I first provide a brief overview of the development of periphrastic DO in Early Modern English (Section 6.1), followed by my case study (Section 6.2).

6.1 Periphrastic DO in Early Modern English[16]

In present-day Standard English, DO-support (or 'dummy do') can be used as the '(empty) operator' in various verbal constructions that lack one (Denison 1993: 255, Nurmi 1999: 15). It is used in finite clauses showing negation (*she did not go* vs. *she went not*), inversion (*does he run*? vs. *runs he*?), post-verbal ellipsis, also known as code (*she wrote a book and he did too* vs. *she wrote a book and he wrote a book too*), and emphasis (*he did see it* vs. *he saw it*).[17] Three of these constructions are periphrastic since DO takes a full lexical verb: negation, inversion, and emphasis. Between 1500 and 1900, however, periphrastic DO was used in four constructions: affirmative declaratives and imperatives (nowadays mostly connected to emphasis), questions (inversion), and negative sentences (Rissanen 1999b: 240–248).

The use of periphrastic DO only began to spread during the fifteenth century in affirmative declaratives, with the most significant increase between 1460 and 1500 in sermons and mystery plays (Rissanen 1991: 332, based on the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*). The spread of periphrastic DO continued at a higher rate in the sixteenth century, including a noticeable increase in negative declaratives and inversion/questions (Nurmi 1999: 23). Rissanen (1985: 165, 177) notes that periphrastic DO seems to have had two main uses in this period: a structural function in texts closer to written language (e.g. legal texts) and a more emotional one in texts closer to speech (e.g. private correspondence). The former could be used to create a sense of textual cohesion, and the latter to emphasise particular actions or strengthen arguments (Nurmi 1999: 16). The relatively high frequency of periphrastic DO in affirmative declaratives in trials

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16   This brief overview serves to highlight the general development of periphrastic DO in Early Modern English, and as such is by no means exhaustive. For more extensive overviews I refer to Denison (1985, 1993), Nurmi (1999) and Rissanen (1999b).

17   These constructions together are often called the NICE qualities (Negation, Inversion, Code, and Emphasis).

between 1500 and 1570 seems to further confirm this difference in function (Table 2). Other text types in which periphrastic DO was increasingly used during the sixteenth century include diaries, educational writing, and scientific works.

Table 2. Frequency of periphrastic DO per 1,000 words in affirmative declaratives between 1500 and 1700, based on the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (modified from DO per 10,000 words from Rissanen 1991: 325).

Text type	1500–1570	1570–1640	1640–1710
Trials	8.8	2.3	2.8
Science	3.4	5.3	1.1
Education	3.1	4.6	1.1
Diaries	2.8	4.2	4.2
Sermons	2.5	4.3	1.0
Comedies	2.3	0.8	0.2
Handbooks	1.1	3.0	0.4
Letters, off.	1.1	4.8	2.6
Fiction	1.1	1.0	0.9
Laws	0.8	1.3	1.2
Biographies	0.6	4.6	1.1
The Bible	0.6	1.2	(no sample)
Letters, priv.	0.4	3.3	1.3
Travelogues	0.4	3.7	0.3
History	0.1	1.5	0.3
Philosophy	(no sample)	3.2	(no sample)

The seventeenth century marks the beginning of the regulation process that would result in the present-day use of periphrastic DO in Standard English, i.e. in questions, negated sentences, and affirmative declaratives for emphasis (Rissanen 1999b: 243). Its use in unemphasised affirmative declaratives decreased and was eventually considered non-standard (*cf.* Klemola 1996). The moment when periphrastic DO in this context started to decrease differs per text type (similar to its initial spread and subsequent use, see also Table 2), and dates ranging between 1570 and 1650 have been argued for by different scholars working with different datasets (e.g. Ellegård 1953, Rissanen 1991, Nurmi 1999, Söderlund 2017). When considering the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*, a general decrease in use can be observed in most text types between the periods 1570–1640 and 1640–1710 (Table 2), although its use in trials, diaries, fiction, and laws appears to have been relatively stable during this period.

6.2 Periphrastic DO in urban administration from sixteenth-century Coventry

In administrative sources from sixteenth-century Coventry,[18] periphrastic DO was mostly used in affirmative declaratives, with only four instances in negated sentences (Oudesluijs *et al.* 2022).[19] Compared to most text types (see Table 2), its frequency in affirmatives was relatively low in the early modern sections of the first Leet Book (1500–1554) – only 0.19 per 1000 words – and comparable to law texts in the collection of indentures up until 1572: 0.81 per 1000 words (Oudesluijs *et al.* 2022). From 1573–4 onward, however, a significant increase can be observed in the indentures (see Figure 2), and the second Leet Book, which starts in 1588, seems to follow suit (Oudesluijs *et al.* 2022). To help explain the sudden increase in the use of periphrastic DO in the indenture collection, I identified five sub-periods (see Figure 2), based on the changing practices related to verbal inflections and the inclusion of new fixed phrases in the documents (Oudesluijs 2019: 269).
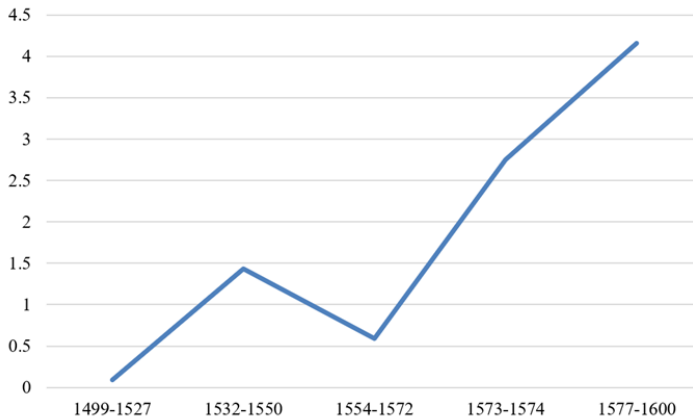

Figure 2. Frequency of periphrastic DO per 1,000 words in affirmative declaratives in the collection of indentures (1499–1600).

From this, it becomes clear that one text, dated 1573–4 and written in a single hand, is responsible for the sudden increase in use of periphrastic DO in affirmatives.[20] After this document, periphrastic DO was used significantly more in the indentures created

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18   These include sections from the first and second Leet Books (Harris 1907–1913) and the aforementioned indenture collection (Oudesluijs 2019: Ch. 6).

19   As such, as well as for comparability purposes with previous research (see Table 2), I will not consider periphrastic DO in negations for this paper.

20   DR429/93a and its counterpart DR429/93b. See their entries on the National Archives for more details: https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/. The text is dated 1573-4 because the year is described as 'the Syxtenethe yeare of the raingne of oure Soueraingne Ladye Elizabethe', which is technically 1573 but could well mean 1574 as she became Queen relatively late in the year, i.e. 17 November 1558. As such, 1559 could have been considered her 'first year' as Queen.

by city officials, as the frequency went up from 2.75 per 1000 words in 1573–4 to 4.16 per 1000 words in the period 1577–1600.

Taking into account the changes in urban administration that happened in Coventry during the second half of the sixteenth century, particularly in the 1570s (see Section 3), it seems that one of three things happened: 1) new writing practices were introduced by officials such as the town clerk or recorder, or by the local scribes/scriveners working for them, 2) there was a change in city officials and/or their team of scribes/scriveners, potentially including new people from outside Coventry's government to deal with the growing administration during this time, which introduced new writing practices, or 3) a combination of both. Regarding a change in city officials, we know that the office of recorder saw no change at this point,[21] but around the time of the 1573–4 document Coventry's town clerk Thomas Gregory died (1573), and his son Arthur Gregory took over. Both this change and the city's acquisition of much of the property previously held by various religious houses, guilds, and chantries in 1574, seems to have had an effect on the language of the indentures. Unfortunately, no direct connection between these developments and the observed change in language can be made as the authorship of the texts cannot be verified at this point, but given the context in which the sudden increase in use of periphrastic DO occurred, it seems likely that either a weak link in, or change to Coventry's scribal network resulted in the increased use of periphrastic DO. In a comparable case study for the late medieval period, Alcolado Carnicero (2017) links instances of language shift from French to English in publications of the Mercers' Company to changes in personnel, with members with weak ties acting as bridges between mercantile communities. Similarly, when Arthur Gregory took over from his father in 1573, it may have influenced the language of Coventry's indentures, including the use of periphrastic DO, be it as a result of his personal writing practices or a change in the scribal community working for him.

Regarding why periphrastic DO in particular underwent a change during this time, this can tentatively be linked to an increase in formulaic language use and fixed phrases (*cf.* Nurmi 1999: 92–93), many of which include coordinating verb constructions such as DO *covenant and grant*, DO *demise*, *grant*, *set and let farm*, and DO *appear*.[22] As mentioned above in relation to the five sub-periods, there were various changes with regard to verbal inflections and the inclusion of new fixed phrases in the indentures over the course of the sixteenth century, and it seems likely that, over time, the scribes involved changed their preferences in how to account for all possible (legal) scenarios that often needed to be addressed in legislative texts, be it because a new local town clerk instructed them to, or as a result of new scribes introducing new practices. Denison (1985: 57) also notes that "a number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century examples of periphrastic DO are also followed by coordinated verbs", and points out that, even though periphrastic constructions comprise more words, there would be fewer inflections.

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21   John Throckmorton I held the office of recorder from 1553 until his death in 1580.

22   These examples account for 30%, 20%, and 13% respectively of all occurrences of periphrastic DO in affirmative verbal phrases in the indenture collection (Oudesluijs 2019: 302–303).

Looking at the bigger picture, the increase in use of periphrastic DO in sixteenth-century administration from Coventry aligns with the general trend in most other text types (e.g. official letters, laws, history; see Table 2), indicating that this text type contributed to the supralocalisation of this feature in Early Modern English. However, it is often argued that the decline of periphrastic DO in unemphasised affirmatives started in the period 1570–1640 (Section 6.1), but in Coventry's administration the increase in use seen in the collection of indentures continues well into the seventeenth century in the second Leet Book (1588–1700) (Oudesluijs *et al.* 2022), which does not occur in any other text type, including laws (see Table 2). In this case the more conservative nature of urban administration seems to have slowed down the general trend of a more supralocal/standardised variety of English in which periphrastic DO in affirmatives became increasingly restricted to emphasis.

7 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Coming back to the aims of this paper (Section 1), the above case study indicates that, much like for the late medieval period (*cf.* Stenroos and Thengs 2020), early modern urban administration can be a valuable source for linguistic investigation. Moreover, due to the nature of scribal communities and inter-urban networks (Section 2), the principles of social network theory can be applied to better understand how certain features spread in this text type, which in turn informs us how a more supralocal/standardised form of English developed in the early modern period. In the above case study, the increase in use of periphrastic DO in affirmative declaratives is in line with its development in many other text types across the country. Both this result and the nature of legislative texts in this period as described by Rissanen (1999a: 191, 2000:121; see also Section 4) strengthen the latter's claim that legal texts seemed to have adopted forms from other genres and subsequently decontextualised and deregionalised them – thus marking them as part of a more supralocal written variety. However, as shown in Oudesluijs et al. (2022), the increased use of periphrastic DO in unemphasised declaratives in Coventry's administration continued well into the seventeenth century, going against the general trend in other text types. This is perhaps due to the more conservative nature of administration (Section 4), and scribes may have only adopted supralocal features that contributed to ensuring the "correct and unambiguous transmission of information" whilst aiming at "maximum disambiguation in its text and discourse structure" in this text type (Rissanen 2000: 120). The more restricted use of periphrastic DO in affirmatives for emphasis may have compromised the neutrality, clarity, and generality of legal language. As such, urban administration may have both contributed to and hampered the developing supralocal/standardised variety of English in the early modern period, though more research into different variables and from different urban centres is needed. A first look into the use of periphrastic DO in the local administration from early modern Bristol reveals a different development altogether, as it initially declined in the sixteenth century before slightly increasing again in the seventeenth century (Oudesluijs *et al.* 2022: 18; *cf.* Gordon 2017). Regarding different variables, initial research into the third person indicative present tense markers (singular and plural)

reveals that different urban centres – in this case Bristol, Coventry, and York – each reveal a unique distribution pattern in the adoption of supralocal -(V)*s* singular and plural zero form between 1500 and 1700 (Gordon *et al.* 2020), indicating that the development of a supralocal variety of English was anything but straightforward.

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Abstract

SCRIBAL NETWORKS AND THE LANGUAGE OF URBAN ADMINISTRATION: VARIATION AND CHANGE IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY COVENTRY

This paper considers Early Modern English urban administration in light of the developing supralocal/standard variety. Previously, research scrutinising the language of administration has focused on Middle English rather than on Early Modern English, where studies have thus far mostly focused on private correspondence and printed texts. To shed more light on the language of this under-investigated text type for this period, in this paper I investigate a collection of indentured texts written in Coventry between 1499 and 1600 and explore its language. More specifically, I analyse the use of periphrastic DO, which I subsequently contextualise both in Coventry's local civic history – focusing on the people involved in creating the documents, e.g. the town clerk and his team of scribes – as well as in the general development of periphrastic DO with regard to the emerging supralocal/standard variety of English. The analysis reveals that periphrastic DO was used to a different extent compared to other text types from the period, most notably that it did not show a decline in the second half of the sixteenth century after what can be described as a 'slow start' in the first half. This change in use can be tentatively attributed to a variety of factors in Coventry's civic history, particularly in the 1570s, but more data from other urban centres is needed to better contextualise this.

Keywords: Early Modern English, urban administration, Standard English, Coventry, legal language

Povzetek

ZGODNJA MODERNA ANGLEŠČINA KOT JEZIK MESTNE UPRAVE: RAZNOLIKOST IN SPREMINJANJE V COVENTRYJU V 16. STOLETJU

Prispevek obravnava zgodnjo modern angleščino v mestni upravi v luči razvoja nadregionalne/standardne različice. Doslej so se raziskave o upravnem jeziku osredotočale predvsem na srednjo, ne na zgodnjo modern angeščino in se zato v veliko večji meri nanašale na zasebno korespondenco in na tiskana besedila. Pričujoči članek, ki predstavlja poskus osvetlitve te v obravnavanem obdobju slabše raziskane besedilne zvrsti, se ukvarja z jezikovnimi značilnostmi zbirke kirografov, napisanih v Coventryju med 1499 in 1600. Analizirana je raba perifrastičnega glagola DO, ki je nato obravnavana tako z ozirom na krajevno zgodovino mesta Coventry – upoštevaje, kdo so bili tisti, ki so dokumente pripravili, se pravi mestni uradnik in njegovi pisarji – kot z ozirom na splošni razvoj perifrastičnega DO glede na nastajajočo nadregionalno/standardno različico angleščine. Analiza je pokazala, da se je perifrastični DO v obravnavani besedilni zvrsti uporabljal v drugačnem obsegu kot v drugih besedilnih zvrsteh iz tega obdobja, predvsem pa, da njegova raba po "počasnem začetku" v drugi polovici 16. stoletja ni upadla. To spremembo bi morda lahko pripisali raznim dejavnikom v zgodovini mesta Coventry, predvsem v 70. letih 16. stoletja, čeprav za boljšo razlago potrebujemo več podatkov.

Ključne besede: zgodnja moderna angleščina, mestna uprava, standardna angleščina, Coventry, pravni jezik