

Style-Shifting and Accommodative Competence in Late Middle English Written Correspondence: Putting Audience Design to the Test of Time¹

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Abstract

Style constitutes an essential component for the non-referential indexicality of speakers' sociolinguistic behaviour in interpersonal communication. Historical Sociolinguistics applies tenets and findings of present-day research to the interpretation of linguistic material from the past, but without giving intra-speaker variation the same relevance as to inter-speaker variation. The aim of this paper is to show results obtained from the investigation of style-shifting processes in late Medieval England by applying contemporary models of diaphasic variation of Audience Design to historical corpora of written correspondence. The study is carried out through the analysis of the use of the orthographic variable (TH) by male members of the Paston family from the *Paston Letters* corpus when addressing recipients from different social ranks. The data show addressee and referee-based accommodation patterns in the communicative practice of Medieval individuals. In addition to tracing language variation and change in speech communities, private letters may also shed light onto the motivations and mechanisms for intra-speaker variation in individuals and their stylistic choices in past societies.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, audienceship, addressivity, style-shifting, accommodative competence, uniformitarian principle, historical corpora, private written correspondence

1. INTRA-SPEAKER VARIATION AND HISTORICAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS

1.1. Sociolinguistics and Contemporary Models of Intra-speaker Variation

The exploration of the relationship between language and society through the correlation of linguistic constituents with extralinguistic factors allowed Sociolinguistics to account for the social meaning of linguistic variation and its indexical nature. In this correlation stylistic variation appears as connatural to sociolinguistic studies and is currently

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becoming a major focus in the research field (see Eckert & Rickford 2001; Coupland 2007; Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa 2012; or Hernández Campoy 2016a). As Rickford & Eckert (2001: 1) stated, given its ubiquity in language production, style-shifting constitutes an essential component of speakers' sociolinguistic behaviour in interpersonal communication, and its indexical nature is presently being explored by Third-Wave Sociolinguistics (see Johnstone, Andrus & Danielson 2006; Coupland 2007; Johnstone & Kiesling 2008; Bucholtz 2009; Johnstone 2010; or Eckert 2012, 2018; for example). Style, therefore, enjoys a central position in the connotative correlation of *social* and *linguistic* variation, legitimating the distinction between *inter*-speaker (social) and *intra*-speaker (stylistic) variation (Halliday 1978; Bell 1984). After all, linguistic variation and change interact in complex ways with patterns of stylistic variation, since the diaphasic range of a given language is one of the most sensitive sociolinguistic symptoms of social change and differentiation (Ure 1982: 7).

While everybody would agree that intra-speaker variation is a phenomenon conditioned by extralinguistic factors, the resources and mechanisms for reflecting its presence in language production and effective social meaning have been associated with different linguistic constructs and theories trying to account for its nature and functioning. To simplify somewhat, in the 1960s, Labov's (1966) mechanistically-based paradigm conceived style-shifting as a primarily conscious social reaction to a situation through speech self-monitoring. Focusing on context and topic mainly, he used style as a mere independent variable assuming that the diaphasic repertoire is predetermined and conditioned by major macro-sociological categories. In the 1980s, new theories based on 'responsiveness', 'audienceship', 'addressivity', and 'speaker agency' put the audience (listener) at the epicentre of stylistic variation. Bell's (1984) ethnographic-based paradigm of the 1980s viewed stylistic variation as a fundamentally responsive reaction to the characteristics of a present or absent audience –rather than to situations and shifts in amount of attention paid to speech: “[i]ntraspeaker variation is a *response* to interspeaker variation, chiefly as manifested in one's interlocutors” (Bell 1984: 158). More recently, socio-constructionist-based tenets are conceiving intra-speaker variation as a sociolinguistic resource with which to investigate speakers' style management, its effective use, and how it reflects and transmits social meaning –which is both social and linguistic (see Coupland 1985, 2007; Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa 2012). With this in mind, different theoretical models have approached the phenomenon of style-

shifting with their own perspectives, as either reactive (responsive) or proactive (initiative) motivations in speakers' agency in society (Hernández-Campoy 2016a).

1.2. Historical Sociolinguistics and Intra-speaker Variation

Since the 1980s, Historical Sociolinguistics is applying the theoretical assumptions and findings of contemporary sociolinguistic research to linguistic data from the past (see Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1996, 1998, 2003; Ammon, Mattheier & Nelde 1999; Jahr 1999; Kastovsky & Mettinger 2000; Bergs 2005; Conde-Silvestre 2007; or Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 2012, amongst others). This interdisciplinary field favours the study of heterogeneity and vernacularity in the history of languages, reconstructing patterns of language variation and change longitudinally in chronologically remote speech communities assuming: (i) that the evolution of linguistic and social systems always occurs in relation to the socio-historical situations of their speakers, (ii) that the past should be studied in order to understand and explain the present (and viceversa), and (iii) the probable feasibility of universal and temporal validity of the *Uniformitarian Principle* (Labov 1972: 275; 1994: 21-25).

The development of electronic linguistic corpora, together with the assistance of Corpus Linguistics and Social History (see Bauer 2002; Schneider 2002; and Cantos 2012), is allowing Historical Sociolinguistics to explore the internal functioning of a language and its users' sociolinguistic behaviour in social interaction in earlier periods more accurately. Its results have consolidated the historical validity of some 'sociolinguistic universals' –like the curvilinear hypothesis, the distinctions between 'overt' and 'covert' prestige, 'changes from above' and 'changes from below', among other regular patterns (see Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1996; 2003; Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 2012).

Research based on corpora of historical correspondence has confirmed the relevance of letters to reconstruct the sociolinguistic contexts of language variation and change in the past (see Dossena & Fitzmaurice 2006; Nevalinen & Tanskanen 2007; Dossena & Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008; Dossena & Del Lungo Camiciotti 2012; Auer, Schreier & Watts 2015, for example). The study of historical letters has favoured the interest in tracing heterogeneity and vernacularity in the history of languages, constituting a crucial contribution to the detection of long-term changes as well as to trace their social origin (see Biber 1995: 283-300; 2001: 98-99; Biber & Finegan 1997; Nevala & Palander-Collin 2005; Nevalainen & Tanskanen 2007; Palander-Collin 2010; Conde-

Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2013). As stated in Hernández-Campoy & García-Vidal (2018), following First and Second-wave synchronic Sociolinguistics, this approach to language variation and change has been macroscopic, longitudinal, uni-dimensional and focused on the speech community as a macro-cosmos (see Chambers, Trudgill & Schilling-Estes 2002; Milroy & Gordon 2003; Tagliamonte 2006, 2012, 2015; Bayley & Lucas 2007; Chambers & Schilling 2013; Schilling 2013a; Holmes & Hazen 2014; or Drager 2018, among others).

Yet the proved validity of private written correspondence in Historical Sociolinguistics now becomes of paramount importance not just to detect the nature and direction of language change longitudinally along a group of homogeneous speakers at a macro-level, but also to find out how a change in progress acts at a micro-level (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; Kopaczyk & Jucker 2013). New studies are now focusing on the analysis and reconstruction of the sociolinguistic behaviour of individual speakers in social interaction microscopically (see Palander-Collin 1999; Elspaß 2002; Auer 2015; Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 2015; Conde-Silvestre 2016; Schiegg 2016; or Hernández-Campoy & García-Vidal 2018; or Voeste 2018, for example). Speakers constitute the intersection between the speech community and the socio-demographic characterisation of its diverse array of social groups. Consequently, in addition to approaching language variation and change holistically in a speech community as a macro-cosmos, atomistic observations within the community of practice as a micro-cosmos may provide us with a wider and more accurate picture of speakers' sociolinguistic behaviour in earlier periods, as in the case of late Medieval times. This conveys a shift from the sociolinguistic study of collectivity and inter-speaker variation to that of individuality, intra-speaker variation and even authenticity in tune with Eckert's (2012, 2018) Third-wave Sociolinguistics (see Tagliamonte 2015; Hernández-Campoy 2016a; Conde-Silvestre 2016). In fact, the individual speaker is the crucially inevitable constituent in the adoption and diffusion of linguistic practices.

With the study of their interactional communication in letters, informants are put under the lens of the microscope and their sociolinguistic behaviour is observed on the basis of their addressees –rather than addressers– and context types, approaching them atomistically, cross-sectionally, and microscopically. As Elspaß (2002) claims, after more than 150 years ignoring the use of oral features in written language, linguistic research of recent years is stressing the importance of this dimension. According to Auer (2015: 134), “[t]he question thus arises as to how stylistic variation is reflected in written documents,

i.e. in particular in written records from earlier stages of a language”. In addition to tracing language variation and change throughout a speech community, private letters from historical corpora may also shed light onto the resources and driving forces for sociolinguistic variability and stylistic choice by individuals in remote societies such as those of the late Middle and early Modern English periods. Koch & Oesterreicher (1994) understand the relationship between the characteristics of written and spoken language as a more-or-less continuum rather than as an either-or dichotomy, beyond the phonic-graphic distinction. Within their orality-literacy model, oral language is seen as the ‘language of immediacy’ and typically associated with private settings, high degree of familiarity and low emotional distance between the interactants, like private family/friends talks. Contrarily, written language is viewed as ‘language of distance’ and typically associated with public/official settings, situations of distance and formality, like legal texts. But a piece of writing can be medially written but conceptually oral –like church sermons–, and vice versa –like postcards. Consequently, private correspondence belongs to the written level from a medial perspective, although conceptually closer to the immediacy end of the continuum. According to Romaine (1998: 18), “personal letters are among the most involved and therefore oral of written genres” within this continuum of communicative immediacy and communicative distance. As letters were not conceived for publication, corpora of epistolary documents provide a rich source of information on less carefully monitored styles (Biber & Finegan 1989). Private written correspondence is intended as a dialogic exchange (Bakhtin 1935/1981) where addressivity, reciprocity and relationality are key elements. As a result, they reflect the personal communicative style of an author who maintains and negotiates a particular social relationship with their addressees in the situation and purpose of the letter and often as part of the accommodative competence available to the members of the speech community: whether the relationship is closer (e.g. kinship, friendship) or more distant (professional, business-like)(see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; Kopaczyk & Jucker 2013; Conde-Silvestre 2016). Written correspondence, therefore, can be understood as better suited than other genres for research on the variety of styles that could have conditioned changes in the history of a language, since, typologically, letters may contain as many styles of writing as the relationship between participants may allow: “family correspondence [...] tends to be more informal and involved than letters written to more distant acquaintances, which often concern business, administrative or legal matters” (Palander-Collin, Nevala & Nurmi 2009: 12).

Similarly, the speakers' sociolinguistic behaviours found by studying historical corpora of private correspondence and other written preserved sources also permit the detection and reconstruction of ancient community values as reflected in the communicative and accommodative competence developed for language choice and use in style-shifting processes and the transmission of linguistic as well as social meaning in communicative interaction. Furthermore, epistolary communication also allows the application and validity of intra-speaker variation theories, providing us with a range of contexts, situations, registers and relational treatments in written interpersonal communication.

2. OBJECTIVES

In the application of the tenets and findings of contemporary sociolinguistic research to the interpretation of linguistic material from the past, intra-speaker variation has not been given the same attention as to inter-speaker variation and change in Historical Sociolinguistics. However, the analysis of linguistic patterns across styles is crucial for both the (socio)linguistic description of languages and for the development of cross-linguistic theories of use and change (Biber 1995: 5). The recent prolific research output in Historical Sociolinguistics is reflecting the growth of interest in style within the field, highlighting the role of new genres and text-types (travel accounts, court records, recipes, diaries, letters, etc.) as materials worth studying for intra-speaker variation. Although many of them do not explicitly refer to sociolinguistic theory, a good number of studies deal with letter material and intra-speaker variation at the level of genre categorisations and text type letters, and/or specific aspects of formulaic epistolary language such as formality levels, literacy and linguistic repertoire, politeness strategies, address formulae, etc. (see Kytö 1991; Rutkowska 2003, 2005; Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, Katovsky & Ritt 2006; Dossena & Fitzmaurice 2006; Nevalinen & Tanskanen 2007; Dossena & Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008; Sairio 2009, 2017; Pahta, Nevala, Nurmi & Palander-Collin 2010; Dossena & Del Lungo Camiciotti 2012; Alexandropoulos 2015; or Auer 2015). According to Bell (1984: 146-147), in this strand diaphasic variation is mostly examined as a broad category of macro-styles qualitatively and making use of macro-extralinguistic variables –as usually practiced by discourse analysts, conversationalists and ethnographers.

In tune with this claim for more attention to stylistic variation within Historical Sociolinguistics, the aim of the present study is to show results from the investigation of

the linguistic and extralinguistic mechanisms and motivations for the use and effect of style-shifting in the social interaction of late Medieval England by applying contemporary theoretical models of intra-speaker variation of Audience Design to historical corpora of written correspondence. The exploration of style-shifting processes takes place not so much at the macro-level of qualitative linguistic phenomena (gender categorisations, text type letters or formulaic epistolary language), but rather as a quantitative variationist study of micro-style variables and macro-extralinguistic factors, as practised by Bell (1984; 2001). The speaker's sociolinguistic behaviour is examined in communicative and relational epistolary social interaction, focusing on the diaphasic accommodative competence used in the context of interpersonal relations and its derivational nature: audienceship and addressivity. The analysis of our Medieval sociolinguistic data is based on the main dimensions of Bell's model: responsive addressee design and initiative referee design, as well as the role of the resilience of speakers' range of variability and age in the context of language change. Other theories on intra-speaker variation are also applied to specific phenomenological cases for broader contrastive discussion beyond Audience Design –such as Labov's (1966) Audio-monitoring Model or the Register Axiom proposed by Biber & Finegan (1994).

Following the main theoretical and methodological tenets of Historical Sociolinguistics, the extension and extrapolation of conclusions obtained from sociolinguistic studies on patterns of diaphasic variation of current English situations to Late Middle English and Early Modern English communities also allow us to test the validity of current theoretical models of stylistic variation assuming: (i) the socio-historically conditioned evolution of social and linguistic systems, (ii) the use of the past to understand and explain the present (and vice versa), and (iii) the feasibility of universal and temporal validity of the *Uniformitarian Principle* (patterns of variation in the past must be similar to those observed in contemporary speech communities).

Bell's Audience Design Theory is crucial for our study on the role of audienceship and addressivity in style-shifting in Medieval private letters. Bell (1982, 1984) developed a theory on accommodative competence through audience-based style-shifting with the observation of the individual sociolinguistic behaviour of radio newsreaders working for two radio stations in the same New Zealand public broadcasting service. Bell found that the speech of the same newsreaders was different when reading bulletins in one radio station or the other, making considerable style-shifts to suit their audience: they tended to

shift systematically from the more standard conservative form on YA to the less standard form (t-voicing) on the lower-status ZB (Figure 1).

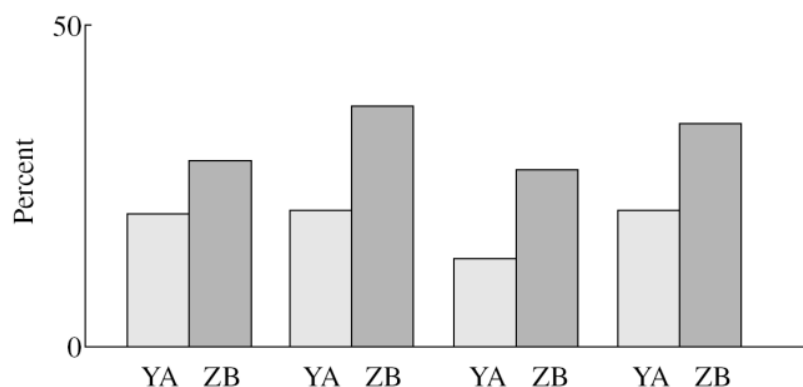


Figure 1: Scores of *T*-voicing in intervocalic contexts by newsreaders on YA and ZB New Zealand radio stations (Bell 1982: 162)

The explanation provided by Bell (1982, 1984) for this sociolinguistic behaviour in the newsreaders observed turned to their convergent (addressee design) and/or divergent (referee design) linguistic accommodation depending on the nature of audienceship responsively or initiatively. His theory was founded on ten essential principles (see Bell 2001, 2007b):

1. *Relational activity*: Style is what an individual speaker does with a language in relation to other people;
2. *Indexicality*: Style derives its meaning from the association of linguistic features with particular social groups;
3. *Responsiveness and Audienceship*: Speakers design their style primarily for and in response to their audience;
4. *Linguistic repertoire*: Audience design applies to all codes and levels of a language repertoire, monolingual and multilingual;
5. *Style Axiom*: Variation on the style dimension within the speech of a single speaker derives from and echoes the variation which exists between speakers on the 'social' dimension;
6. *Accommodative competence*: Speakers have a fine-grained ability to design their style for a range of different addressees, as well as for other audience members;
7. *Discoursal function*: Style-shifting according to topic or setting derives its meaning and direction of shift from the underlying association of topics or settings with typical audience members;

8. *Initiative axis*: As well as the ‘responsive’ dimension of style, there is the ‘initiative’ dimension, where the style-shift itself initiates a change in the situation rather than resulting from such a change;
9. *Referee design*: Initiative style-shifts are in essence ‘referee design’, by which the linguistic features associated with a reference group can be used to express identification with that group;
10. *Field and object of study*: Style research requires its own designs and methodology.

Thus, as his results and those of similar studies carried out by Coupland (1980, 1981) and Selting (1983, 1985) had also suggested, the Audience Design model would predict that the language production of individuals is directly influenced by that of their present or absent audience, probably as in the case of our late Medieval English letter writers here. Admittedly, we are comparing different points in time, with also new modes of communication (radio *vs.* letters), distinct channels (speech *vs.* writing) and probably different audience effects as well, in order to put the Audience Design model and the *Uniformitarian Principle* to the test of time. But, as stated above in Section 1.2, historical written correspondence (both private and official) constitute perfectly adequate social and linguistic data to methodologically observed intra-speaker variation and progress in the exploration of the mechanisms and motivations for style-shifting.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Variable (TH)

In order to explore patterns of intra-speaker variation in late Medieval English society, the focus is on an innovation in the spelling practices of the period: the progressive adoption of the new orthographic variant <th> at the expense of the old runic <þ>.

$$\text{OE } \langle \text{þ} \rangle / \langle \text{ð} \rangle \rightarrow \text{ME } \langle \text{þ} \rangle / \langle \text{th} \rangle \rightarrow \text{EModE } \langle \text{th} \rangle$$

The autochthonous spellings <þ> and <ð> were indistinctively used in OE for the voiced and voiceless dental fricative consonants [θ] and [ð] but both began to be replaced by the Roman-based form <th> (see Scragg 1974: 10; Benskin 1977: 506-507; 1982: 18-19; Lass 1992: 36; Hogg 1992: 76-77; Stenroos 2006; Bergs 2007a, 2007b; or Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2013).

þing > *thing*
broþer > *brother*
comeþ > *cometh*

Obviously, current sociolinguistic theory has mostly been based on spoken language, using both phonological and grammatical variables mostly, which is, however, a challenge for Historical Sociolinguistics. How do we know that orthographic variation in written data behaves in the same way, especially when the variation has no implications for pronunciation? That is, how can it be applied to written data and especially letters? The scientific reliability of orthographic forms as variables for variationist research was argued by Rutkowska & Rössler (2012) and Stenroos (2004) as well as demonstrated by different studies: Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre (1999, 2005), Rodríguez (1999), Taavitsainen (2000 and 2004), Oldireva-Gustafsson (2002), Rutkowska (2003 and 2005), Stenroos (2004 and 2006), or Sairio (2009). As Rutkowska & Rössler (2012: 213) point out, structural variability “exists not only at the generally recognized levels of phonology, morphology, and syntax, but also at the level of orthography”, and its evolution, according to Smith (1996: 78), has to be understood as part of the interplay between intra- and extra-linguistic processes and pressures. The nature of variation in orthography is functionally constrained by diachronic, diatopic, diaphasic, diastratic, diasituative, and aesthetic variants as a reflection of external factors (Rutkowska 2012: 217-219). Thus, “an orthographic variable is a feature of an orthographic system of a given language, related to the phonological, morphological, or lexical levels of that language system, and realized by different variants under specific extra-linguistic circumstances” (Rutkowska 2012: 219). The extra-linguistic factors conditioning the use of different spelling forms in those cases of variability are usually production, geographical location, socio-demographics (sex, age, rank), social networks, text type (and genre), style, register, and medium (handwritten *vs.* printed). In fact, in a period when written correspondence was one of most frequent means of communication and with the inexistence of a well-established and fixed standard variety, orthographic variation must have been a source of social meaning (see also Baddeley & Voeste 2012; or Voeste 2018).

Sociolinguistically, in our case, the special nature of variable (TH) is due to its status of marker (in Labovian terminology), denoting a prestige pattern within the speech community of the period and also exhibiting a specific indexical meaning.

... and **therfor** be ye avysed whate grauntes ye make, for ye hafe made to manye.
John Paston I (To Sir John Fastolf, 1458, 05, 2)

... **perfor** I lete yow wete I wold know hym or he know myn ente[n]t, ...
John Paston I (To Margaret Paston, John Daubeney, and Richard Calle, 1465, 06, 27)

... my **brother** is redyn to Yarmowth for to lette brybours that wold a robbed ship vndyr colour of
my lord of Warwyk, ...
John Paston III (Perhaps to Thomas Playter: Draft 1461, 03)

... he shall send my **broþer** vp or not, for he wold have his owne men abowte hym ...
John Paston III (Perhaps to Thomas Playter: Draft 1461, 03)

According to Benskin (1982: 19), the use of the modern digraph <th> had already been attested in the Old English period, particularly in the spelling of vernacular names found in Latin texts, but it was reintroduced through Latin influence on Anglo-Norman scribes in the 12th century. As found in Stenroos (2004, 2006), Jensen (2012) and Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy (2013), the presence of the digraph <th> in both Latin and Biblical texts acted as a certainly influential external prestigious norm that triggered the *actuation* of this orthographic change, so that the Roman-based form became overtly popular during the 15th century as a historical change operating above the level of social awareness. This process inevitably took place in connection with social and stylistic factors and diffusing along the social space in the careful and conscious styles, thus acquiring overt prestige and becoming part of the accepted linguistic norm: the presence of the digraph <th> in both Latin and Biblical texts acted as a highly influential external prestigious norm triggering the outset and spread of this new orthographic practice as a typical Labovian ‘change from above’ (Labov 1994: 78; Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2013; Hernández-Campoy, Conde-Silvestre & García-Vidal *fc*).

3.2. Audienceship

In Bell’s model developed in 1984, audienceship was demonstrated to be essential for intra-speaker variation processes (see Bell 1982, 1984, 2001), prioritising addressivity, reciprocity and even relationality (Coupland 2011: 146). The emphasis was focused on the influence that the audience as well as the speaker’s orientation and attitude to addressees has on style-shifting, as reflected in the accommodation processes of interpersonal social interaction: “... the context of style is a *speaker* –a first person, an I, an ego, an identity or identities– together with the *situation* she or he is in –however we may believe that situation subsists or is identified, either theoretically or specifically”

(Bell 2007a: 139). In fact, as Meyerhoff (2006: 42) points out, the term ‘audience design’ “both classifies the behaviour (the speaker is seen as proactively designing their speech to the needs of a particular audience) and encapsulates the presumed motive for the behaviour (who is the speaker’s audience)”. The classification of audienceship for the present study derives from the nature of the relationship between addresser and addressee as well as their status, following the characterisation of historical ranks regularly found in letter corpora (see Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 26):

- i) *Royalty*: king, queen, prince, princess;
- ii) *Nobility*: duke, marquess, earl, viscount;
- iii) *Clergy*: archbishop, bishop;
- iv) *Gentry*: knight, esquire, gentleman;
- v) *Relatives*: brother, sister, mother, father, etc.;
- vi) *Partner*: wife, husband; and
- vii) *Legal Professionals*: army officer, government official, lawyer, medical doctor, etc.

These profiles of recipients and their interactional intensification afford a measure of the complexity and density of our informants’ social networks and interpersonal relations, exerting an overt influence on their language choice and use in their epistolary communication (Figure 2).

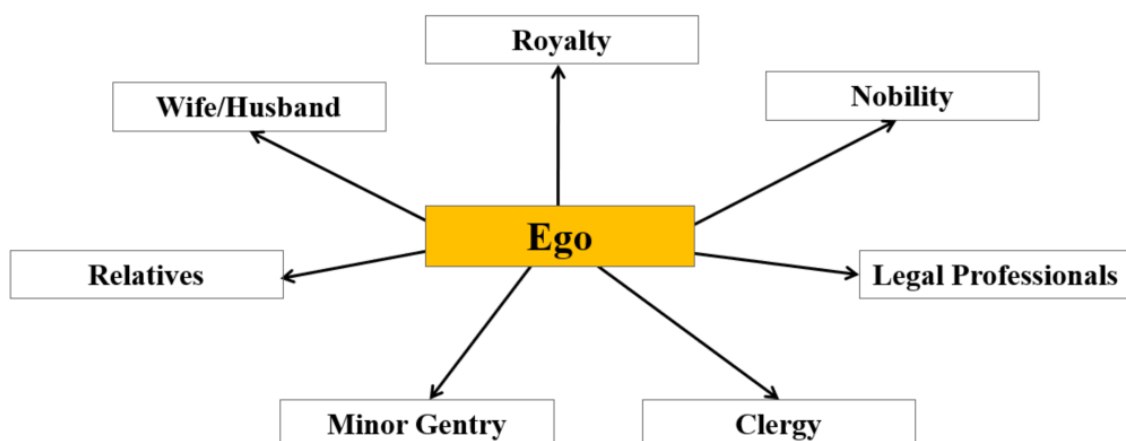


Figure 2: Recipients (audienceship) and social ranks in *The Paston Letters*

3.3. Informants

For the purpose of our study, the informants observed were male members of the Paston Family, born between 1378 and 1479, and about whom we have extensive biographical information, as it is the most well documented family of late Medieval England. The Pastons were *nouveau riche* landowners that rose from the peasantry to the aristocracy within just two generations. The family belonged to a minor gentry rank, owners of rural estates, ambitious and highly mobile (Davis 1971; Richmond 1990, 1996; Barber 1993; Bennett 1995; or Gies & Gies 1998).

Unlike Auer (2015) with her study on nineteenth century female writers, we could not rely on female members of the family given the widespread illiteracy characteristic of those historical periods among women and their subsequent use of scribes (see Bergs 2005; Wood 2007; Hernández-Campoy 2016b and Cutillas-Espinosa & Hernández-Campoy 2017). Methodologically, the use of the female members of the Paston family might have definitely affected authorship and representativeness –with a serious risk of gender distortion– and thus the reliability and empirical validity of results from a socio-demographic perspective (see Hernández-Campoy & Schilling 2012).

Table 1: Letters per addressees and size in words in John Paston I and John III									
Context		John Paston I			John Paston III			Total	
Power Relationship	Addressee & letters	letters	words		letters	words		words	
High	Royalty	#2	1,958	2,863	#0	-	1,446	1,958	4,309
	Nobility	#2	905		#2	1,446		2,351	
Equal	Minor Gentry	#7	6,231	12,164	#2	703	36,348	6,934	48,512
	Wife	#8	5,933		#0	-		5,933	
	Relatives	#0	-		#61	35,645		35,645	
Low	Legal Professions	#4	3,432	3,432	#4	1,560	1,560	4,992	4,992
Total		#23	18,459		#69	39,354		57,813	

This study focuses on John I and his son, John III, given their complex social networks and high amount of written correspondence. Other members of the family did not have the so extensive audienceship probably because of their more limited social networks, or the usually fragmentary availability of archival sources or simply because of a statistically reduced number of tokens, an inherent problem in historical sociolinguistic research (see Hernández-Campoy & Schilling 2012). Other members have already studied individually (see Hernández-Campoy 2008; or Hernández-Campoy & García-Vidal 2018). Obviously, the reconstruction of this sociolinguistic information comes from the internal evidence afforded by the preserved letters themselves, allowing

to speculate on possible reasons why these members of the family had their written practices in the way they had; and all this is based on the fact that, admittedly, this is an exercise of socio-historical reconstruction where the non-existence of evidence does not allow for conclusions about the non-existence of individual facts (Bergs 2005: 71).

3.4. Archival Source

The Internet electronic edition of the *Paston Letters* was used as our archival source of historical written correspondence for the present study. The *Paston Letters* is the name given to a collection of 422 authored documents (246,353 words) written by 15 members belonging to different generations of this Norfolk family from 1425 to 1503. The socio-historical and linguistic importance of these documents is exceptional, as they offer data on the political and domestic history of 15th century England: historically, a period of great turbulence and anarchy within the framework of the War of the Roses (1455-1487), and, sociolinguistically, crucial for the development of the English language –with the implementation and diffusion of the incipient standard norm (see Constable 1976; Schäfer 1996; Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 1999; Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2004; or Hernández-Campoy 2008). Additionally, such epistolary documents may provide us with a measure of the vernacular reality present both in their writers and their periods and style-shifting processes.

The software package WordSmith 5.0 was used for the detection and quantification of the presence of <th>/<p> forms for variable (TH).

4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. Audience Design Patterns of Intra-speaker Variation in John Paston I

4.1.a. Responsive Addressee Design

The members of the Paston family exhibit different practices as for the use of the prestige innovating variant <th> but similar patterns in correlation with addressees. In the case of John Paston I (1421-1466), twenty-five documents and eighteen separate unsent draft letters written by him between 1440 and 1469 are preserved in the *Paston Letters* collection. He was educated at Trinity Hall and Peterhouse in Cambridge and the Inner Temple in London. Following his father's steps, as a lawyer he became Justice of Peace for Norfolk (1447, 1456-1457 and 1460-1466), Knight of the shire (1455), and MP for Norfolk (1460-1462). John I married Margaret Mautby and inherited the family estates and wealth. His multiplex social networks are reflected in the amount and social array of

addressees found in his private written correspondence: higher (Royalty and Nobility), equal (his Wife and Minor Gentry people), and relatively lower (Legal Professionals). With an average of 80% in ‘standardness’ (2007/2507)², the sociolinguistic behaviour of John I exhibits unambiguous attunements in the use of the prestige innovating variant <th> in correlation with the social rank of recipients, like the ‘stylistic chameleon’ in Rickford & Price (2013): 100% when addressing Royalty, 97% with Nobility, 82% with his Wife, 74% with other Minor Gentry interlocutors, and 73% with Legal Professionals (see Table 2 and Figures 3-4).

Table 2: Scores for Variable (TH) in John Paston I					
Context		Standard variant <th>		Non-Standard variant <p>	
Power Relationship	Addressee & letters	#	%	#	%
High	Royalty: #2 letters (1958 words)	259/259	100%	0/259	0%
	Nobility: #2 letters (905 words)	86/89	97%	3/89	3%
Equal	Wife: #8 letters (5933 words)	670/813	82%	143/813	18%
	Minor gentry: #7 letters (6231 words)	594/801	74%	207/801	26%
Low	Legal Professions: #4 letters (3432 words)	398/545	73%	147/545	27%
Total (23 letters) (18459 words)		2007/2507	80%	500/2507	20%

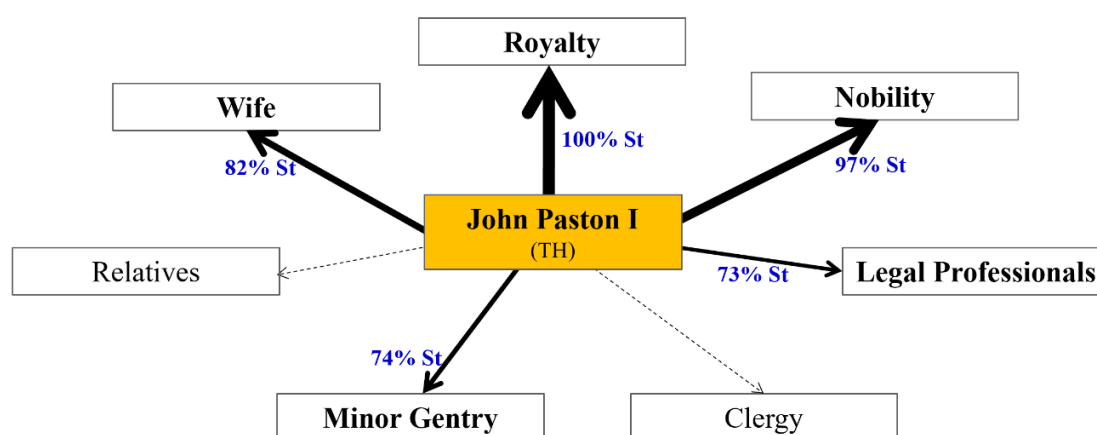


Figure 3: Percentages of standard forms for (TH) in John I and audienceship

² Assuming it was still an embryonic Standard English variety, or proto-standard, that was developed during the 15th century and later fixed and codified between the 16th and 18th centuries (see Fisher 1996; Wright 2000).

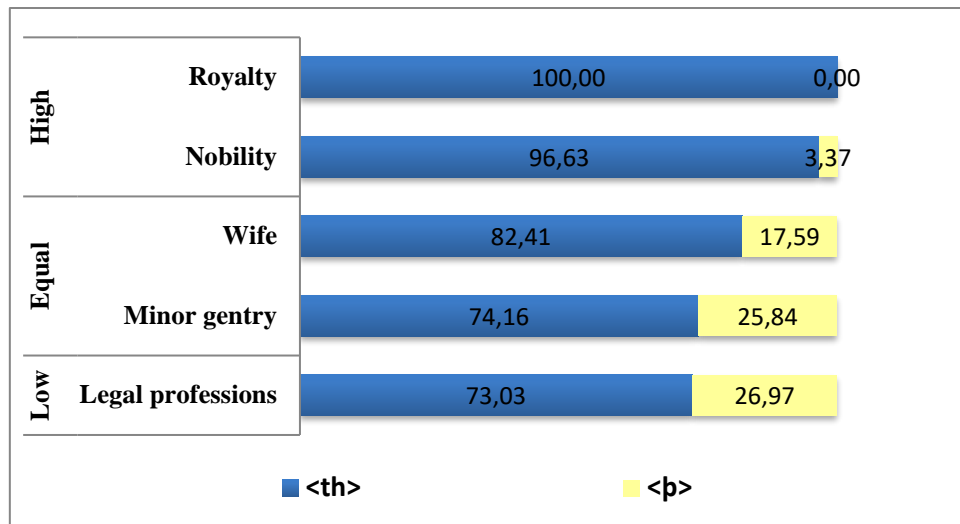


Figure 4: Contrast of percentages of usage for variable (TH) in John I and his letter recipients: innovative form (<th>) and conservative form (<p>)

Inferential statistics through a non-parametric Pearson's Chi-square test of significance (Cantos 2013: 75-80) confirms that the different sociolinguistic practices in John I's results when addressing different social-ranked recipients did not occurred by chance: the relationship is significant at $p < 0.01$ ($\chi^2 = 116.98$; $df = 4$). Individual comparisons inter-groups also suggest the existence of significant variation between them at $p < 0.01$, except between Legal Professionals (398/545: 73%) and Minor Gentry (594/801: 74%), where $p > 0.05$.

Once the risk of arbitrariness in distributions has been dismissed through significance tests, the normalisation of data³ and the subtraction of the deviation standard to the relative means allows us to see how much range of variation there is within the body of letters sent to individual audiences (Figure 5). As Cantos (2013: 9-10) suggests, the comparison of the means (\bar{x}) and the standard deviations (σ) allows us to find potential differences in dispersion when examining relationships between variables. Thus, from the data we can see that the distribution of variability in John Paston I when addressing Royalty ($\bar{x} = 13.14$; $\sigma = 1.61$) and Nobility ($\bar{x} = 9.50$; $\sigma = 1.01$) recipients is least and more homogeneous –more consistently higher use of <th>–, as they have smaller standard deviation indexes. Conversely, John I is more heterogeneous and makes use of both variants more variably when writing to his Wife ($\bar{x} = 10.11$; $\sigma = 4.25$), Minor Gentry ($\bar{x} = 10.58$; $\sigma = 2.96$) and Legal Professionals ($\bar{x} = 10.53$; $\sigma = 3.99$).

³ Number of standard variants per 100 tokens.

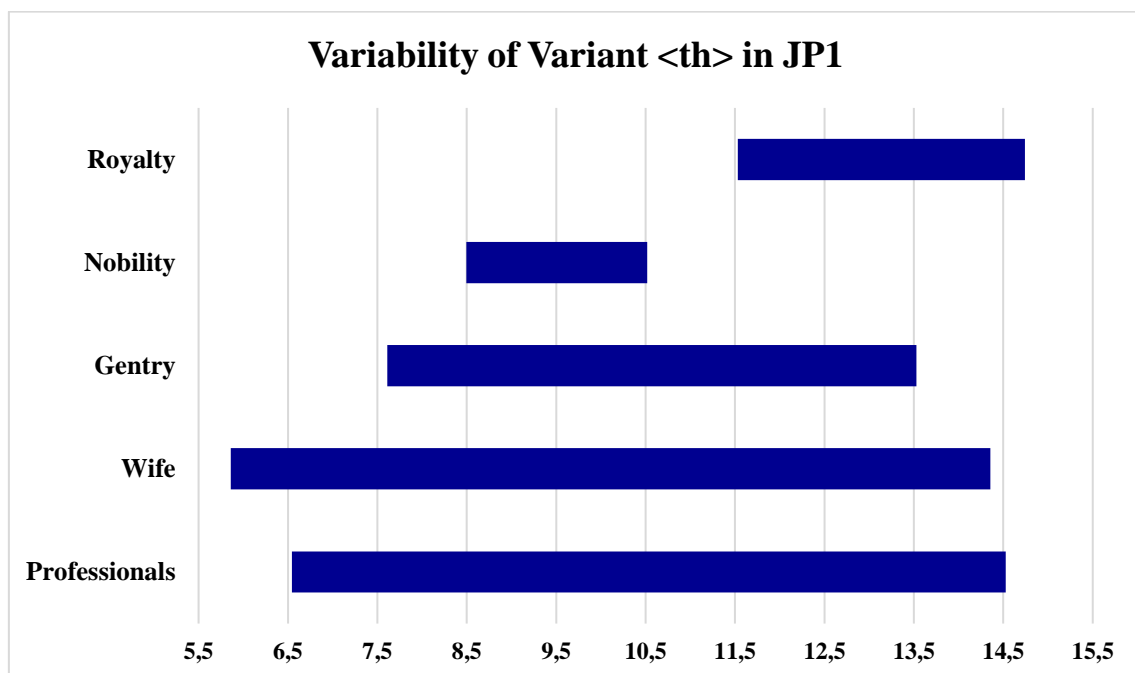


Figure 5: Differences in variability distribution across audienceship in John Paston I: Standard deviation indexes and means ($\bar{x}-\sigma$)

In this sense, John I clearly uses more frequently the innovating variant <th> with the Royalty than with any other groups of recipients in his letters ($\bar{x}=13.1$ and $\sigma=1.61$). However, the variability in his sociolinguistic behaviour as for <th> and <þ> is much higher when writing to other addressees, mostly to his Wife ($\bar{x}=10.10$ and $\sigma=4.25$) and Legal Professionals ($\bar{x}=10.53$ and $\sigma=3.99$). In fact, there are letters addressed to his wife with just 37% use of <th> and, contrarily, others with much higher frequencies of this form than in those written to Nobility. Variability with Nobility ($\bar{x}=9.5$ and $\sigma=1.01$) and Minor Gentry ($\bar{x}=10.6$ and $\sigma=2.96$) recipients is in intermediate stages, although higher in the latter.

Twenty-first century tenets based on sociolinguistic competence and style-shifting through accommodative processes are thus found in these results of late Medieval times under the influence of the same external constraints and also in the spirit of the *Uniformitarian Principle*. John I's sociolinguistic behaviour in social interaction demonstrates that the Principles of *Graded Style-shifting* and *Range of Variability* characterising Labov's (1966) Audio-Monitoring Model also governed intra-speaker variation in English Medieval society: no single speaker is mono-stylistic, though some will have a wider verbal repertoire than others. Subsequently, this also means that the

variation that any individual shows in their speech will never be greater than the differences between the social groups that their style-shifting is derived from (Meyerhoff 2006: 44). Therefore, in addition to derivation, Bell's (1982, 1984) style axiom is also held on a relational function: intra-speaker variation is a function of inter-speaker variation, since the wider social variation is, the wider stylistic variation will be. As the axiom assumes that the same linguistic variables operate simultaneously on both social and stylistic dimensions –and given that social evaluation is the matrix linking both–, the range of variation of style-shifts will never exceed that of social variation at the community level. Some individuals will thus exhibit a much wider range of stylistic variation than others⁴. As stated by Bakhtin (1935/1981), all this entails the use of multiple voices in dialogic events –such as written correspondence–, with audienceship, addressivity and responsiveness constituting crucial factors always at play in the addresser-addressee interaction (see Bell 2007a, 2007b). In Bell's framework, and following Giles' (1980) Speech Accommodation Theory, “speakers have a fine-grained ability to design their style for a range of different addressees, as well as for other audience members” (Bell 2001: 146). John I's stylistic repertoire, as well as his addressivity and responsiveness monitoring based on audienceship, can be observed in his epistolary communication quantitatively (linguistic variants frequency) and qualitatively (social categorisations). His letters reveal that he has a linguistic repertoire and awareness of sociolinguistic conventions on the indexical nature of variable (TH) –whose innovating form <th> is more extended in those groups of the social rank that enjoy overt prestige (nobility and royalty, mostly)–, which enables him to vary and adapt his style according to the addressee and subsequent context type.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (Cantos 2013: 58-63) also indicates a positive correlation, showing a monotonic relationship⁵ between John I styles and his audienceship. This means that there is a function here somehow governed by a predictive model following an implicational scale: high X (social rank) variable go with high Y (TH) variable scores and vice versa, in such a way that an increase in the independent variable (audience type) causes an increase as well in the dependent variable (<th> variant). as Figure 6 shows.

⁴ The Register Axiom later proposed by Biber & Finegan (1994) views this repertoire as the existence of multiple grammars in a multi-competenced speaker, whose degree of knowledge depends on their different experiential situations (praxis)(see Preston 2001; Hernández-Campoy 2016a).

⁵ If in linear relationships both variables increase (positive) or decrease (negative) concurrently and at a constant rate.

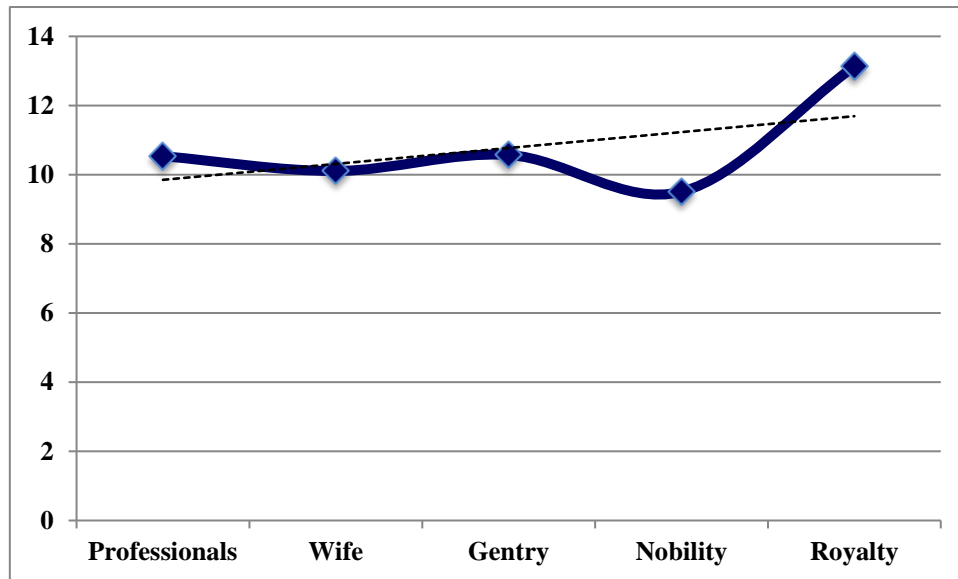


Figure 6: Monotonic relationship between John I's styles and his audienceship: Positive Regression Model in JP1

According to Labov's (1966) model, this monotonic relationship between John I's styles and his audienceship with a positive regressive pattern would be predetermined and conditioned by major macro-sociological categories as well as the formality of the situation following a functional relationship. That is, although different social class groups might have different levels of usage of a given variable, their evaluation of the different variants and pattern of practice would be exactly the same: increase of the percentage of prestige forms in their speech as stylistic context becomes more formal, and vice versa (see Figure 7).

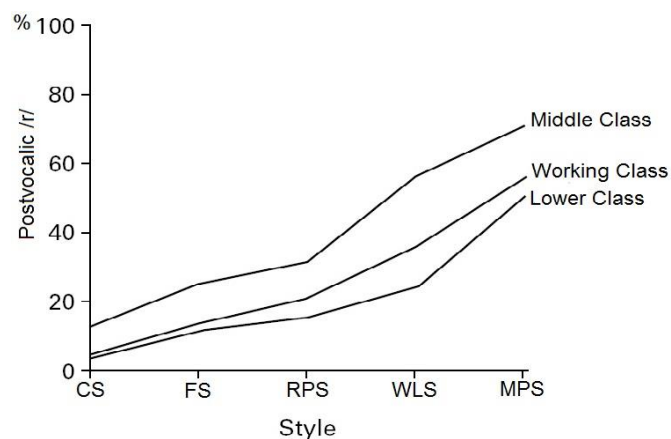


Figure 7: results for postvocalic /r/ in the New York City correlating with social class and styles (CS: casual style; FS: formal style; RPS: reading passage style; WLS: word list style; and MPS: minimal pairs style; adapted from Labov 1966/2006: 141)

It is in this intersection between the stylistic and the social dimensions that makes style be a crucial sociolinguistic concept: there is a point along the symmetrical axis where, as Labov (1972: 240) illustrated, objectively and quantitatively, it would be difficult to distinguish “a casual salesman from a careful pipefitter”.

The present or absent audience governs style design in letters through the accommodative style shifts exhibited by John I, which tend to converge with the prototypical recipient group rather than with his personal sociolinguistic practices (averagely 80% standard). This also entails that, when addressing different groups through his letters sent to specific members in late Medieval England, he shifted to be more similar to the sociolinguistic characteristics of the recipient groups. In that way, he was involving identification through a kind of referee design practice, in exactly the same way as we do in the 21st century, with the same motivations and through similar linguistic as well as non-linguistic mechanisms. This fact also corroborates the universal nature of Bell’s Style Axiom and its discursual role in the dialogic exchange. The style axiom is held on a function, with a cause-and-effect relationship of intra- and inter-speaker variation pivoting on social evaluation: intra-speaker variation echoes inter-speaker variation. This means that the linguistic features involved in stylistic variation are mostly the same as those marking social variation; i.e. those features typically found at the high end of the social scale are equally high on the stylistic scale, and vice versa. Style-shifting is emanated from the variability that differentiates social groups, since it is social variation that enables style variation. Audience design appears as a speakers’ strategy to reactively draw on the range of linguistic resources available and used through style-shifting mechanisms within their speech community in order to respond to different kinds of audiences⁶.

When data on recipients is pooled in ranks (Figure 8), again a positive correlation pattern is obtained, which is also statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ ($\rho = 0.94229$; $p\text{-value} < 0.05$). These patterns are consistent both in the relative and normalised data obtained from raw numbers (see Bakker 2010: 19-20).

⁶ This quantitative evidence justifies the attribution of stylistic variation to the effect of the addressee, as underlined by Bell (1984). The role of the addressee is such that variation according to non-personal factors –like topic or setting– in the situation also derives from audience design itself; i.e. speakers tend to associate classes of topics or settings with classes of persons. Although topics and settings contribute to the characterisation of the language used in epistolary interpersonal communication, they are inevitably and primarily conditioned by the recipient’s social profile, which presupposes some specificity in those non-audience factors: “the degree of topic-design shift will not exceed audience-design shift” (Bell 1984: 180).

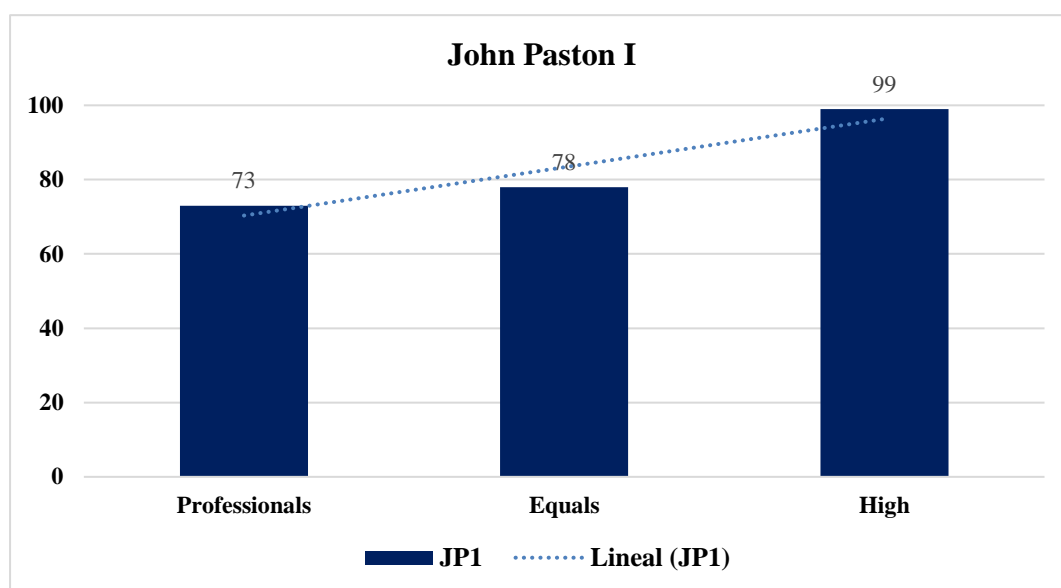


Figure 8: John I's behaviour pooled in ranks ($\chi^2=99.2894$; $df=2$; $p<0.00001$)

4.1.b. Initiative Referee Design

Unlike responsive speakers' speech conditioned by an immediate and present second person audience (addressee), Bell (1984) also mentioned the possibility of non-responsive, initiative style shifts usually occurring as a response to a third person reference group (referees) not physically present but highly influential on the speaker's attitudes and sociolinguistic behaviour (Bell 2007b: 98), as a kind of early normative pressure. Referee design conceives a speaker as if actually talking to the referee rather than to the usual addressee, and whereby the salient linguistic features associated with a particular group are used to express affiliation with that group, typically entailing performative convergence (Bell 2007b: 98). This might be the case in some sociolinguistic practices found in John I and John III.

This linguistic variation found in John I's language production is organised through both upward and downward accommodation patterns, depending on the relative sociolinguistic status of addressees. Upward adjustment occurs when addressing Royalty (100%) and Nobility (97%), which were the most overtly prestigious groups. It is also somehow high with legal professionals (73%), probably because of the technicality of the official language of law, business and administration, as well as, more crucially, due to the distant nature of those trained interlocutors (Palander-Collin, Nevala & Nurmi 2009: 12). But, unexpectedly, there was no symmetrical accommodation between John I and his wife (Margaret Paston), with both participants converging. Contrarily, he divergently

used more <th> forms to her (82%; \bar{X} =10.10 and σ =4.25) than to other addressees of the same social rank (74%; \bar{X} =10.6 and σ =2.96). Considering that his wife was only 68% standard for variable (TH) when addressing him –according to our HiStyVar Project data–, an account for the absence of reciprocity with her is not straightforward. Some kind of referee design might have been affecting John I, which made him assume that his letters were probably read aloud for his wife by her scribes –usually family clerks and chaplains, like James Gloys– owing to her levels of illiteracy (see Hernández-Campoy 2016b). Consequently, the presence of these auditors –as known and ratified third-person present interlocutors though not directly addressed– might have caused him some *cross-over* accommodation, tending towards hypercorrection⁷. This could be understood as an example of outgroup referee design, where a speaker from a group A addresses a member of their own group A as if both of them were members of a group B, which is usually associated to prestige.

4.2. Audience Design Patterns of Intra-speaker Variation in John Paston III

4.2.a. Responsive Addressee Design

John Paston III (1444-1504: 89% standard) was John I's second oldest son and served as MP for Norwich (1485-86), sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, 'councillor' to the Earl of Oxford, and Knight of the shire (1487). He was a highly mobile member in the Paston family, often travelling throughout the country and abroad in the service of the Duke of Norfolk. He joined in matrimony Margery Brews first and, after her death, married Agnes Morley of Glynde. Like his father, his socio-historical background reflects a multiplex social networking and diverse audienceship in his epistolary interaction.

Table 3: Scores for Variable (TH) in John Paston III					
Context		Standard variant <th>		Non-Standard variant <p>	
Power Relationship	Addressee & letters	#	%	#	%
High	Nobility: #2 letters (1446 words)	149/149	100%	0/149	0%
Equal	Minor gentry: #2 letters (703 words)	81/81	100%	0/81	0%
	Relatives: #61 letters (35645 words)	3943/4443	89%	500/4443	11%
Low	Legal Professions: #4 letters (1560 words)	163/214	76%	51/214	24%
Total (69 letters) (39354 words)		4336/4887	89%	551/4887	11%

⁷ By using more exaggeratedly this salient prestigious form to converge with the scribes and not with his wife.

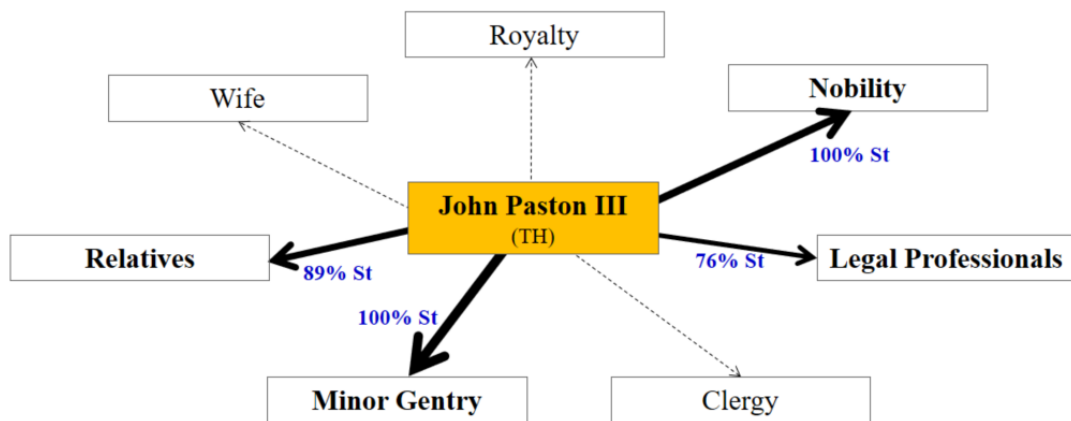


Figure 9: Percentages of standard forms for (TH) in John III and audienceship

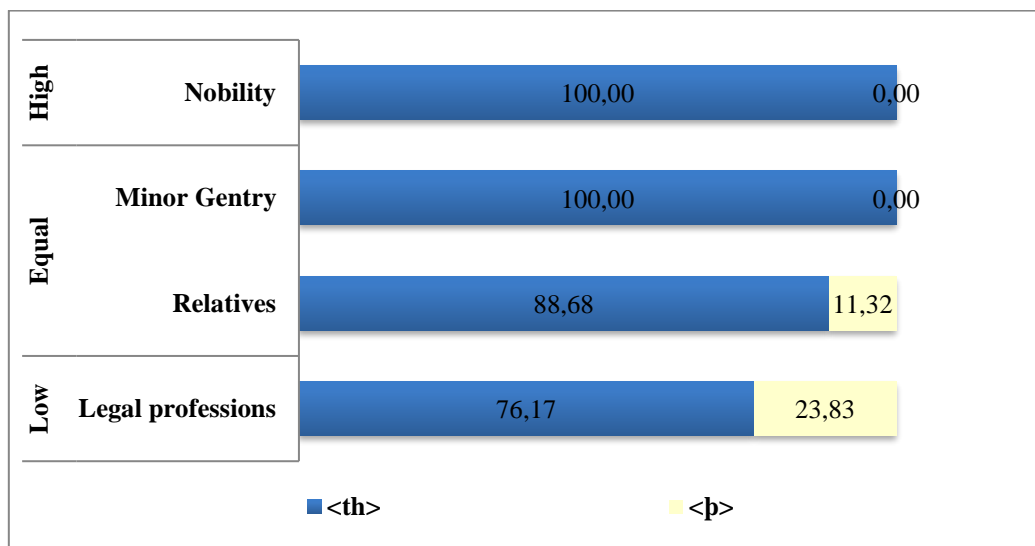


Figure 10: Contrast of percentages of usage for variable (TH) in John III and his letter recipients: innovative form (<th>) and conservative form (<p>)

The Chi-square test of significance confirms that the different sociolinguistic behaviours in John III's results when addressing recipients from social ranks did not operate arbitrarily ($\chi^2=62.960$; $df=3$; $p<0.01$). As in his father, individual comparisons also suggest the existence of variation between the different audience groups also at $p<0.01$, except between Gentry (81/81: 100%) and Nobility (149/149: 100%), where $p>0.05$. The distribution of variability in John III's data when addressing his different rank-based interlocutors is more consistently proto-standard (see Figure 11), with a much constantly higher frequency of the use of the innovative <th> form, with smaller individual standard deviation indexes (Nobility: $\bar{X}=8.7$ and $\sigma=2.74$; Gentry: $\bar{X}=9.71$ and $\sigma=1.71$; Relatives: $\bar{X}=8.7$ and $\sigma=2.2$; and Legal Professionals: $\bar{X}=9.2$ and $\sigma=1.7$).

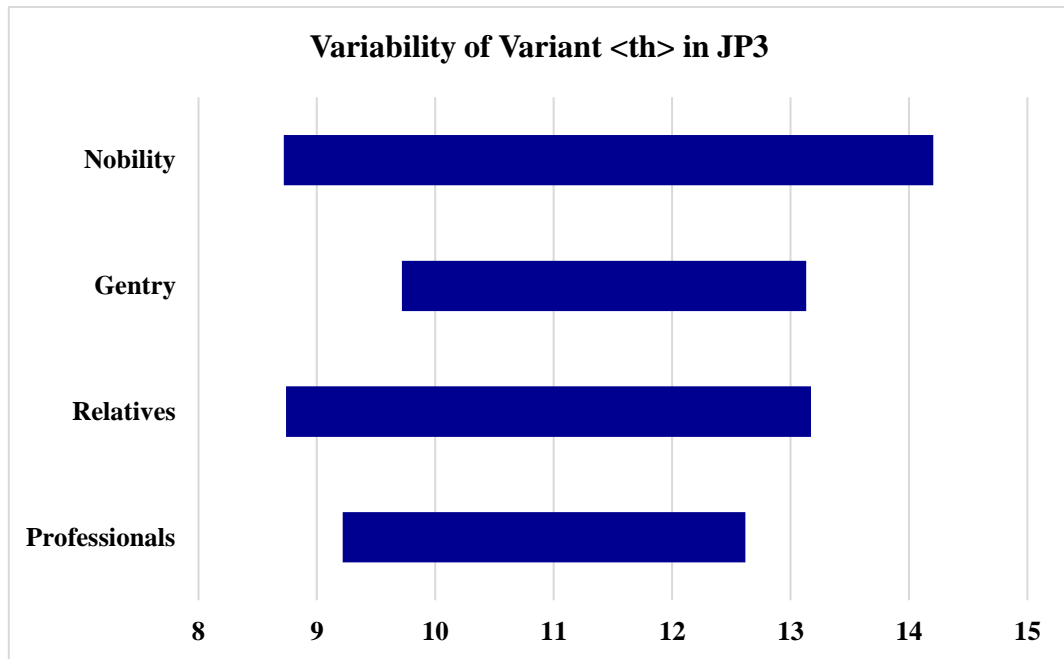


Figure 11: Differences in variability distribution across audienceship and contexts in John Paston III:
Standard deviation indexes

In John III's case, the Pearson correlation coefficient indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables ($\rho=0.929$; $p\text{-value}<0.05$). This means again that there is a clear function here governed by a predictive model in implicational scale: high X (social rank) variable go with high Y (TH) variable scores (and vice versa), as Figure 12 shows.

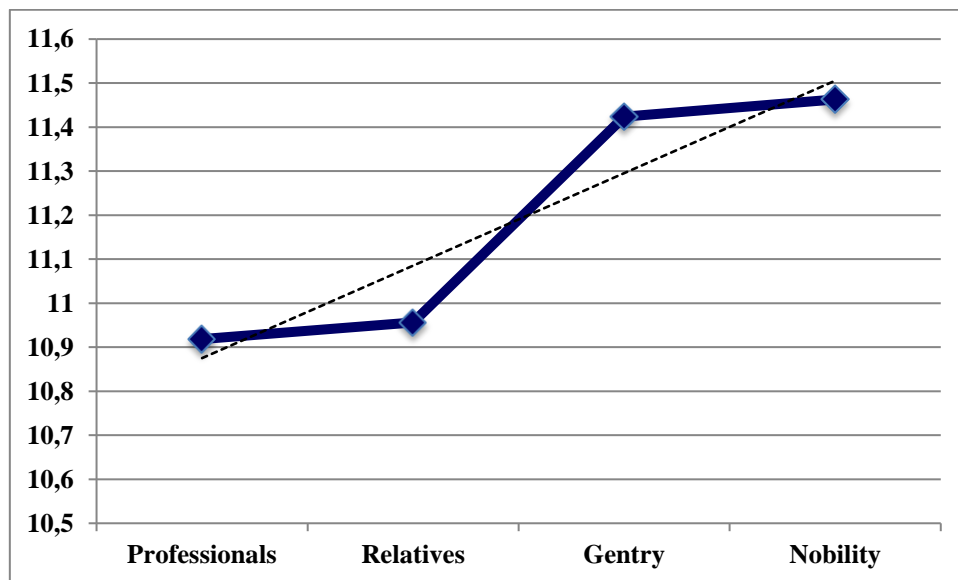


Figure 12: Monotonic relationship between John III's styles and his audienceship

When data on recipients is pooled in ranks (Figure 13), the same positive linear pattern is obtained, which is also statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. Like his father's relationship and regression, the use of variable (TH) shows a significant monotonic relationship between his styles and audienceship ($\rho = 0.9999$; $p\text{-value} < 0.05$).

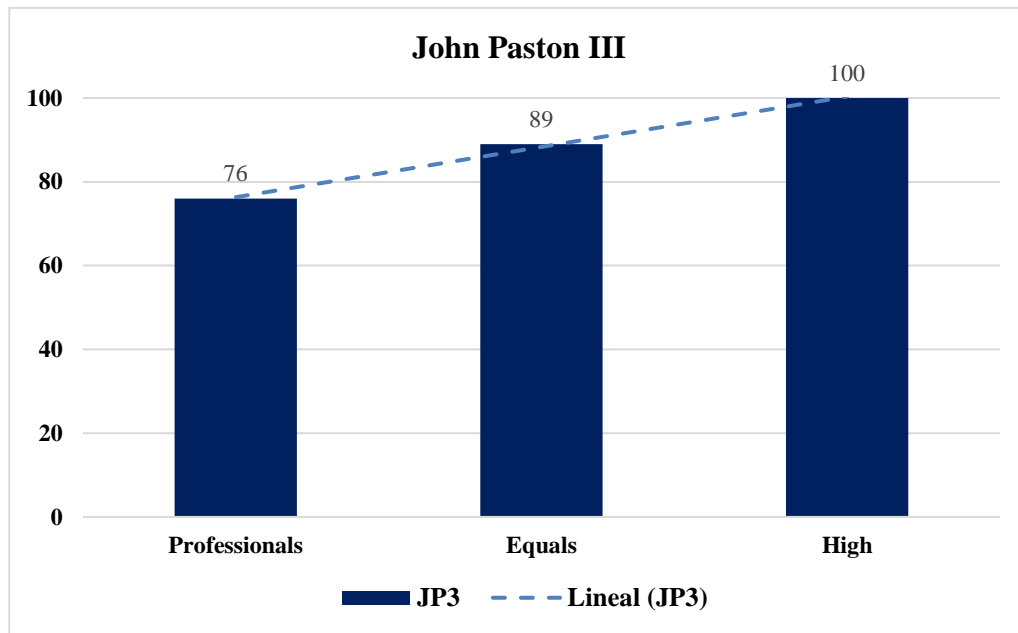


Figure 13: John III's behaviour pooled in ranks ($\chi^2 = 67.415$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.0001$)

4.2.b. Initiative Referee Design

Additionally, in initiative style-shifting—as conceived by Bell (Bell 1984)—the individual speaker creatively uses different language resources to redefine their own identity in relation to their present or absent audience. In this way, divergence is an initiative style-shift, a reaction against the addressee somehow, whereas convergence is responsive (Bell 1984: 182). Despite exhibiting a monotonic relationship based on addressee design (Table 3 and Figures 9-10), John III's attunement practices seem to follow different driving forces from those of this father. John I used to design his style primarily for and in response to his audience by being convergent with his interlocutors (except with his wife, as seen above); contrarily, John III was convergently responsive only with nobility (100%), but totally divergent with the Minor Gentry and Relative groups by practicing an initiative asymmetrical accommodation (100%), probably in order to mark social distance

and social positioning, as a Knight, with his addressees. This initiative referee design has later developed into the socio-constructionist Speaker Design theory in the 2000s (see Coupland 2007; Hernández-Campoy 2016a) and rhetorical stance-taking for identity projection and social positioning (see Johnstone 1996; Englebretson 2007; or Jaffe 2009) –also manifested in the proactively authentic and hyper-vernacular behaviour of John Paston II (see Hernández-Campoy & García-Vidal 2018).

4.3. Range of Variability and Age in John I and John III: from Heterogeneously Standard to Homogeneously Standard

As seen above, both John I and John III exhibit a significant monotonic relationship between their styles and social rank of recipients, though at different degrees of homogeneity in their respective variation patterns. In fact, the relative frequencies in the use of the innovating form <th> in father and son can be explained by their different respective range of variability (see Figure 14). However, their level of standardness conditioning their sociolinguistic behaviour and accommodative competence as for variable (TH) is due to generational differences and the more advance stages of the historic or communal linguistic change taking place and affecting more overtly and intensively to John III. This means an aged-based pattern of variation, with a more homogeneously constant use of the innovative variant <th> in John III than in John I.

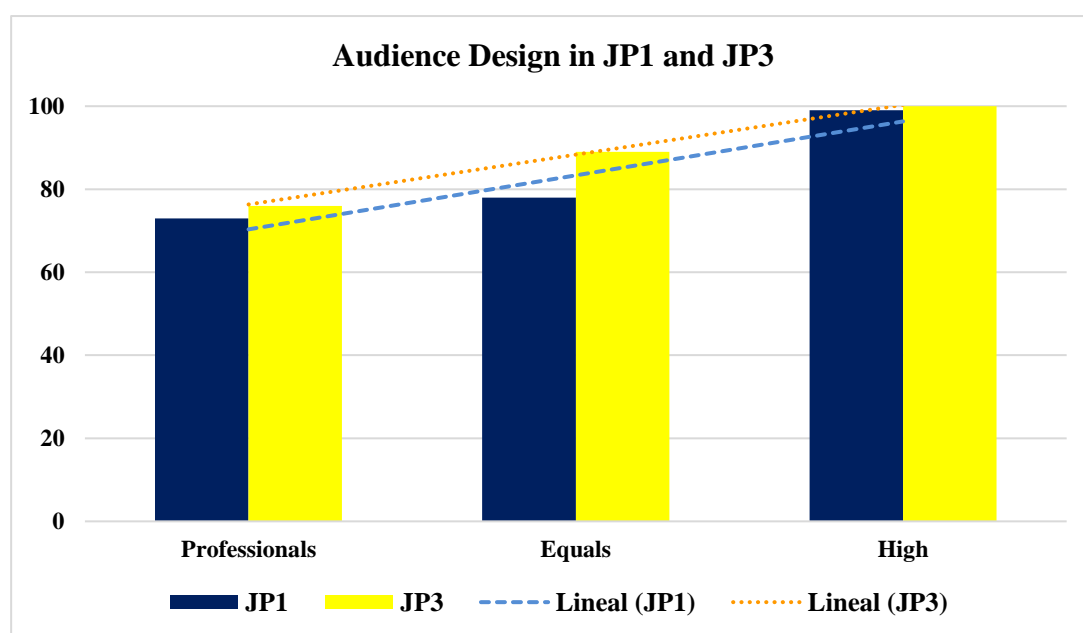


Figure 14: Audience Design in John I and John III's behaviours pooled in ranks showing regression

Yet the use of the incoming innovation <th> to the detriment of <þ> was not exclusively a generational and/or communal change. As a well-advanced historical change in progress, it was also in the process of becoming part of the community norm, not excluding that individuals in their maturity changed their linguistic behaviour, increasing their production of the innovation and, as a result, incorporating a typical change from above into their repertoire (Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2013). These results also suggest that the implementation of the more standard-like innovation (<th>) progressed from formal to informal styles over time, and that the increasing appearance of the new variant in informal texts and informal situations largely implied a greater degree of standardisation –even in the still embryonic stages or proto-standard (see Hernández-Campoy, Conde-Silvestre and García-Vidal *fc*). This positive correlation of the use of the <th> variant with formality and with the rank of addressees clearly confirms the status of the innovation as a change from above, as previously reported by Stenroos (2004; 2006) and Jensen (2012). As we know, in changes from above, if the change originates in the highest-status group of the speech community speakers consciously increasingly tend to use the variants supported by those upper groups (the prestige variants) especially in stylistically more formal contexts (highly-monitored styles), and with the variable showing both regular style stratification and social stratification, as Labov (1966; 1972) demonstrated (see also Romaine 1982; 1988; and Hernández-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 1999). In this way variation itself and patterns of style and class stratification result from and also interact with linguistic change.

CONCLUSION

Style constitutes an essential component for the indexification of speakers' sociolinguistic behaviour in interpersonal communication, enjoying a central place in the connotative correlation of *social*, *linguistic* and *stylistic* variation. Despite the limitations of Bell's Audience Design Model⁸, his studies on intra-speaker variation got to locate style at the centre of sociolinguistic debate both at theoretical and methodological levels, inspiring fruitful research and developing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches accounting for its nature and functioning. Among other advancements, his model was able to account for stylistic variation focussing on the interrelation of intra-speaker and

⁸ The Audience Design model has its limitations, as highlighted by scholars such as Schilling-Estes (2002: 386-388), Coupland (2007: 74-81), Schilling (2013b: 335-338), or Bell (2014: 301) himself (see Hernández-Campoy 2016a: 128-129).

inter-speaker variation and its quantitative patterning through linguistic attunements based on a present or absent audience⁹.

Our Paston results and patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour obtained in their epistolary social interaction have allowed us to apply successfully Bell's theory, putting his Audience Design model and his characterisation of style-shifting to the test of time retrospectively and of the *Uniformitarian Principle*: the data show addressee-based accommodative patterns of style-shifting in the communicative practice of Medieval individuals. The application and extrapolation of the present-day rules and roles for accommodative style-shifting in communicative interaction confirm the validity in late Medieval times of the main features of Bell's (2001) sociolinguistic characterisation of style. In the search for a particular verbal effect, stylistic and rhetorical devices do not necessarily have to be complex figures of speech (*figurae verborum*) or figures of thought (*figurae sententiarum*), but rather mere linguistic variables or just the alternation between standard and non-standard uses in linguistic varieties. The salience of variable (TH) –in the process of an ongoing linguistic change from above– made of it a perfect linguistic resource for style-shifting. The socio-stylistic route followed by the innovating <th> spelling in the 15th century appears here expanding from socially high prestigious groups and stylistically more formal contexts to lower social layers and more informal contexts. Consequently, the indexical nature of this variable illustrates Bell's Style Axiom –intraspeaker variation echoes interspeaker variation– in connection with Labov's *Principle of Range of Variability* –the variation that any individual shows in their speech will never be greater than the differences between the social groups that their style-shifting is derived from.

Historical Sociolinguistics is applying tenets and findings of present-day variationist research to the interpretation of linguistic material from the past, but unfortunately without conceding intra-speaker variation the same relevance as to inter-speaker variation and change processes. Given the ubiquity of diaphasic variation in language production, the analysis of linguistic patterns across styles is fortunately becoming acknowledged as crucial for both the linguistic description of languages and for the development of cross-linguistic theories of use and change. The study of intra-speaker variation is providing us with a better understanding of how the sociolinguistic

⁹ In addition to introducing an element of speaker agency into diaphasic variation (responsive as well as initiative dimensions), later developed by the Speaker Design Model, and also evincing the malleability of sociolinguistic identity.

practices usually ascribed to any given social group work both collectively and also individually within a community, and consequently with the possibility of detecting those linguistic variables which are most salient for the projection of a particular identity and speaker's social positioning. The observation of how a single speaker may be drawing on different resources when the audience changes undoubtedly allows us to gain a better insight into intra-speaker variation. This conveys a shift from the study of collectivity and inter-speaker variation to the exploration of individuality, intra-speaker variation and authenticity.

In addition to tracing language variation and change throughout a speech community, private letters from historical corpora –understood as cooperative dialogic processes between addresser and addressee, where audienceship, addressivity, reciprocity and relationality are key elements– may also shed light onto the motivations and linguistic as well as non-linguistic mechanisms for variability in individuals and their stylistic choices in remote societies such as those of the late Middle and early Modern English periods, 600 years ago.

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