

Standardisation as an evolving or an involving process? Evidence from sixteenth and seventeenth-century English spelling

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Donnerstag,
05.03.2020
11:15–11:45
VMP5 2098/2194

Within the context of an insightful discussion about the nature and development of a linguistic standard, Hope (2000: 53) affirmed that standardisation often results in an unconscious trend towards more complex structures, because of the sense of prestige linked with the differences between standardised conventions and non-standard ones. My paper departs from Hope's statement and aims to test the extent to which developments in the graphemic system of historical English provide evidence for an increasingly more complex spelling structure, as a paradigm for understanding spelling 'evolution'. In order to discuss my point of view, I will draw on the distribution of word-medial <y> and <i>, one which promises to provide a challenging test case. In the early sixteenth century, the grapheme <y> was mostly used in lexical words and <i> was generally found in function words, which means that word-medial <y> and <i> were distributed contrastively, rather than being used in free variation. The contrastive distribution of word-medial <y> and <i>, however, disappeared when <i> almost completely replaced <y> between the second half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century (cf. Rutkowska 2013: 121–130). My investigation of the distribution spelled out above will be based on a corpus created from *Early English Books Online, Text Creation Partnership (EEBO TCP 2015–ongoing)*. My discussion argues for the influence of Latin conventions in the shift between the early standard and the new standard, and questions whether we can always understand spelling 'evolution' as a forward-facing process.

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References: Early English Books Online, Text Creation Partnership, <<http://www.textcreationpartnership.org/tcp-eebo/>> [accessed 15th May 2019]. Hope, J. (2000). Rats, bats, sparrows and dogs: Biology, linguistics and the nature of Standard English. In L. Wright (ed.). *The Development of Standard English 1300–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 49–56. Rutkowska, H. (2013). Orthographic systems in thirteen editions of the *Kalender of Shepherdes (1506–1656)* – Polish studies in English language and literature. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.