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SALEM WITCHCRAFT TRIALS AS EVIDENCE OF SPELLING DIVERSITY IN EARLY AMERICAN ENGLISH

I Introduction

1. The aim of the work

In the present study I will try both to demonstrate and prove the fact that Early Modern English spelling was characterized by the existence of no proper spelling code which would provide the language users with prescriptive rules.[1] Although the process of standardization was just about to start at the end of the 17th century we will see in a specific example what form this process had at a particular time, in a particular geographical area and a particular society. To some the fact itself may well seem not to need any further discussion, yet I assume the source used as a basis for this study can neither be regarded as unattractive nor fully examined. The literal records of Salem witchcraft trials serve as an inexhaustive source of information offered not only to historians but also to linguists, both of whom can look at the problems from a different stand-point. My motivation to deal with this topic arose from a random encounter with the authentic verbatim transcripts of the texts and a possible interdisciplinary approach. On the whole, the merger of general history and history of language is still appealing enough to encourage research in its own right.

The key concept of this study is an analysis of Early Modern American English orthography based on three randomly chosen pieces of text from the *Salem Witchcraft Papers*[2], ie. verbatim transcripts of the legal documents covering witchcraft trial proceedings which took part in Salem in 1692. The pieces include three legal cases, more precisely the case of *Nehemiah Abbot Jr., John Alden* and *George Burroughs*. I concentrate on spelling variations in a selection of words. First, the selection will be limited to words that do not follow the present-day American English spelling rules. Second, this group of words will be compared to contemporary 17th century spelling variants. Third, the results of the comparison will be duly analysed. The analysis will draw on the *Oxford English Dictionary* in electronic form.

2. A note on a current study of Early American English

A new, at the time perhaps unnoticed, variety of English language started to emerge slowly with the arrival of the first settlers to New England (colonies es-

tablished for instance in Plymouth in 1620, Massachusetts in 1630). In her 1993 article Merja Kytö points out that the early settlement period marks the beginning of a time which can be characterized as *transitional.* The external conditions shaped the language considerably until approximately the early 1700s when it more or less settled down. I refer to Kytö as one of the linguists taking part in the project of the Helsinki Corpus.[3] The American English section gathers a variety of written documents from numerous areas such as law, science, history (sermons, trial proceedings, witness depositions, official as well as private letters, travelogues and diaries) in order to form a comprehensive basis for further comparative study. The work of the Helsinki University centre is supervised by Professor Matti Rissanen and it is closely tied to a research centre based at the University of Virginia, USA, where the Salem Witch Trials Documentrary Archive and Transcription Project is continued.

3. The sources

I based my research on two major sources: the electronic version of the literal transcripts of court records from the Salem trials of 1692 and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (further referred to as the *OED*).

As far as the former source is concerned it is a part of a new transcription project of the original records to be published under the title *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*. At the same time current transcriptions (published by De Cappo Press, 1977) are gradually being updated. The edition groups the material into 155 cases, arranged in alphabetical order according to the name of the accused. The project draws heavily on the manuscript and rare book collections of several participating libraries, archives and historical societies. Funding has been secured by several grants (cf. Ray).

The selected texts which are the basis for this study cover three legal cases. In the first case of *Nehemiah Abbot Jr.* I have studied an *examination*; in the second case of *John Alden* I have examined a *warrant,* an *account of examination,* a *mittimus* and a *recognizance;* in the third case of *John Burroughs* I examined a larger amount of texts: one *complaint*, one *statement*, one *warrant,* one *examination and summary of evidence,* four *indictments,* three *summonses,* twenty-two *depositions* and one *letter* to the court.

As for the latter source the *OED* presents its users with a comprehensive body of information on its individual entries since each entry is described in a historical perspective and its development is exemplified by quotations from both scholarly as well as popular works (journals, magazines, newspapers, Biblical text, government documents, manuscripts, collections of letters, diaries, works of prose and poetry etc.) In total I have been able to support my analysis with a selection from more than two and a half million quotations (for 290, 500 entries) contained in the second edition.

In the subsequent analysis I will attempt to illustrate the orthographic diversity of the new, slowly establishing, variety of English on the American continent. First, I will exemplify numerous variant spellings and second, I will compare these with the spellings displayed by the OED.

II Organization of the Analysis

<u>The criteria of the analysis – First stage</u>

While analysing the selected legal texts I started by picking those words whose spelling did not correspond to spelling rules for present day American English (some 800 entries). This was done by using the *Webster's New 20th Century dictionary of the English Language*. The next step in the analysis was the questioning of to what extent the selected words, some of them having several variant spellings, correspond to the 17th century standard. As has already been pointed out, the *OED* was used as a solid base for this part of the analysis. A subsequent study of the spelling variants has revealed **three** large groups characterized by three different features. The criteria defining the three groups mentioned above are:

- the first group contains words whose spelling is not justified on the basis of the *OED*
- the second group contains words whose spelling was partly justified by the *OED* (only on the basis of a list displaying all existing spelling forms as documented for different centuries, not on the basis of quotations)
- the third group contains words whose spelling is clearly justified on the basis of the *OED*

<u>The criteria of the analysis – Second stage</u>

In this stage of the research, **each single word** (or entry) as selected in the previous stage was compared with corresponding entries in the *OED* and consequently listed in one of three charts. The chart entries are arranged in alphabetical order and are specified by information relating to:

1. the **entry proper** in the exact form as found in the source text
2. a **source text quotation –** a sentence or a phrase as found in the source text
3. the **Modern English spelling**
4. a **list of forms showing historical variant spellings in different centuries –** the overall time scope in the list of forms reaches as far back as the Early Middle Ages and stretches to the present day; in most cases I have indicated by bold print the nearest or exact time reference based on the rough time line assigned for this study (1630–1700).
5. **quotations consisting of the year and the title of the source which is being quoted –** for each entry I have sorted out two or three quotations to illustrate its use. Where possible the examples cover both the former as well as the latter half of the 17th century, occasionally reaching the first half of the 18th century.

6. a **short commentary** attached to some entries

Cf. the example using the entry **dauter**, which fits the criteria of the first group:

> **dauter**
> *… well acquainted with his wife w'ch was dauter to mr John Ruck of Salem…* (163)
> daughter, n.
> Forms: 1 dohtor, -ur, 1–3 dohter, 3–4 douter, -ir, 3–5 douter, -ir, -ur, 3–6 (9 dial.) dowter, 4 dohuter, -ir, -yr, dowghtur, douther, 4–5 doghtir, -ur, douter, 4–5 (8 Sc.) doghter, 4–6 doughter (dowghter, 5 doughtur, dughter, dowtir, -yr, Ṭowtur, thowghter, 5–6 Sc. dochtir, 5–9 Sc. Dochter, 6 doughtour, Sc. douchter), (6 dial. dahtorr, doffter, 6–7 dafter), 6 daughter
> 1667 Milton P.L. i. 453 The Love-tale Infected Sions **daughters** with like heat.
> 1684 Bunyan Pilgr. ii. (Hanserd Knollys ed.) 339 Dispondencie, good-man, is coming after, And so also is Much-afraid, his **Daughter.**

As for the time scope which determines the selection of the quotations I will primarily focus on the period from the 1630s to 1700s although sometimes I may be forced to resort to references stretching to a time prior to 1630 as well as to a time after the 1700s.

As has been already mentioned, the time of the initial settler period in the area concerned is roughly dated from the 1630s on. I am trying to capture one aspect of the written language in the period before the orthography became considerably more fixed in the 18th and 19th centuries and when the English of the British settlers exhibited both unifying and dialectal features (Viereck 1985: 565).[4]

The users of the language

Last but not least, when analysing such a piece of historical evidence one of the criteria to be considered is whether one deals with popular or cultivated language users and what purpose the analysed piece of writing served.

From the general point of view I deal with white colonial English whose detachment from the British variety did not very probably reach any major scope at the end of the 17th century, yet there is no doubt about the existence of some transitional features in the language itself (the English of some other speakers of non-British origin, like Tituba's for instance, is not the subject of this study). When handling this highly specific courtroom discourse one has to take into consideration that most of the people examined belonged, from the social point of view, to either uneducated rural class or their level of education and literacy aquired was not very high. Moreover, these people were not accustomed to speaking in public (Hiltunen 1996: 31).

In one of the three presented cases, *Nehemiah Abbot Jr.* defends himself when accused of witchcraft,[5] allowing for a literal record of his speech. *John Alden,* a Boston mariner, accused of witchcraft as well, speaks for himself too, but his words are recorded only in a reported way.[6] The same applies to George Burroughs – accused and eventually executed.[7] Neither can his words be ana-

lysed in direct speech wording (Hiltunen 1996: 22). If it had not been so, it could be most exciting to look at his speech as he was the most educated person out of the three concerned. There are altogether some thirty cases containing material in direct speech. Nevertheless, I concentrated on the spelling variations found in various types of texts rather than use of direct or indirect discourse (cf. Hiltunen 2001). Although the general purpose of the records is explicit I could divide them into two subgroups formed according to the level of formality used (cf. later in the text).

III Analysis

The three charts presented in the main body of this study should offer a glimpse of what is further expanded in the appendices. These are to be found in the final passage of the study, thus expanding the total of the entries examined and should be refered to as well. For each individual chart two representative entries are displayed (for more cf. chapter VIII. Appendices).

The quotations from the source text (the second item in each cell of the chart) are followed by a page number (in brackets) under which it can be found in the original text. This is to be found in the appendices with a pagination not corresponding to the overall pagination in this text.

1. Chart I – Introduction

In this group I have included entries from the source text for which it was not possible to find a valid example in the *OED*, i.e. a quotation that would contain the respective form. However, since very often the spelling forms documented by the the *OED* (which represents the contemporary usage of Early Modern English and has been taken as a basis for my comparative work) are very close to the source text entries, we can regard most of the source text entries as other variant forms.

I have traced several specific features. These are as follows:

1. words in which one letter or a part of the word is **written apart**: *above*, *a long*, *affore said*, *after noon*, *all most*, *be fore*[8], *be wicth*, *sume times*, *wher abouts*,
2. words that are **fused** with their preceding vowel: *afitt*[9], *anoise*
3. words where we can see specific changes in **consonants**. These are the following:
    a) omission or addition of a letter in *aforesaid*, *againt*, *agast*, *anser*, *apperishtio*, *apperishtion*, *comunion*, *dauter*, *deposicon*, de-posistion, *depotion*, *diappeared*, *draed*, *execuion*, *exept*, *gunn*, *hipp*, *jugling*, *kithin*, *mallasses*, *mallassoes*, *pichforks*, *raperres*, *recog-niscance*, *rquier*, *sreife*, *thro*
    b) consonants appear either in single or doubled form in the source text in *agged*, *allmost*, *allso*, *aprehend*, *bitt*, *caried*, *comand*, *re-veall*, *runing*, *vittals*

        c) change of *c/s* and *s/c* in *conseive, elce, lycense*; change of *t/d* in
askt

        d) letter/-s placed in a considerably different position in *apparanec,
bewicthed, hnad, left, peritculars, vliage, wicth, wicthcraft, wicthes,
won*

        e) forms with considerable changes so that their legibility when
taken out of context is questionable in *anner, throde, thru*[10], *weche,
wicth*

4. words where we can observe specific changes in **vowels**. These can
further be divided into the following subgroups which are primarily
concerned with the position of the letter e. It has been found in dif-
ferent positions:

        a) *e* added as a suffix to the following words: *afternoone, againe,
agone, alsoe, arme, cheife, flore, hevie, one, upone*

        b) *e* stands at the beginning of words: *ellness, emmedtly*

        c) *e* replaces other letter within words: *afflect, afflected, beleive,
cheife* (interchangeable position), *emmedtly, evedence, examened,
letel, lettel, lettell, magestrates, malasses, mallases, meening, me-
nester, provence, sacremental, thes*

        d) *e* is inserted within the word: *delievered, feell, fleesh, keept, mal-
lasoes, persones, recognizeance, sinceible*[11], *sundrey, thereaboutes*

        e) *e* stands at the final position of stems in continuous forms: *ac-
cordeing, comeing, haveing, refuseing*

        f) *e* in final position omitted: *differanc, notic, non, provenc, shapp,
sinc, thos*

        g) *e* in final position added: *one*

        h) *e* in internal position omitted: *carrid, emmedtly, ownd, rquier*

        i) *e* is replaced by a different vowel in *barill, barrill*

        j) changes in other vowels:

            i) addition of a vowel withnin a word in *hevie, villiage*

            ii) omission of a vowel within a word in *beleve, blod, discorce,
fashon, hevest, dy, graned*

            iii) replacement by a different vowel/-s in *apone, come, coot,
conjurar, contrivercy, cunjurer, deponant, feet, har, has,
malasses, meening, naibours, ownid, sheat, weak*

The following chart has been abridged for the purpose of this article (a full-
length chart and two others applying to next chapters are to be found in the
study).

Aprehend

… I Recd an order from the Gov'r & Council to aprehend mr George Buroughs…(153)

1645 Rutherford Tryal & Tri. Faith (1845) 63 A lame hand that cannot <u>apprehend</u>.

1680 Butler Rem. (1759) I. 204 Children Improve their nat'ral Talents without Care, And <u>apprehend</u>, before they are aware.

1712 Steele Spect. No. 532 _2, I cannot <u>apprehend</u> where lyes the trifling in all this.

Askt

… and that was what he askt… (163)

ask, v.

Forms: 1 ásci-an, ácsi-, áhsi-, áxi-, áhxi-, áhxsi-, áxsi-an, -_an, -_ean, ćcsian; 2_3 axien, acsien, 3 ćxi, axi, 4 acsi, acsy, oxi, oxy, oxsi, oksi, 3_5 axen, (5 axse, exe,) 4_6 axe, ax, (6_dial. Ax). Also _. 2 esci-, eski-en, 3 easki, (Orm.) asskenn, 3_5 ask-en, 3_7 aske, (5 haske, ascke, axke,) 4_ ask. Also 3_4 esch(e, esse, 3_5 asch(e, 5 ashe, 5_6 asshe, (north. Asse, pa. tense ast).

1611 Bible John ix. 19 They <u>asked</u> them, saying, Is this your son?

1662 Fuller Worthies Westm. (1811) II. 105 (D.) His head was <u>ask'd</u>, but never married to the English Crown.

Be fore, beefoar

… did owne hir testimony to be the truth be fore the Juriors… (170)

… hee would kil mee beefoar morning… (172)

before, adv., prep., and conj.

Forms: 1 bi-, beforan, 2_4 bi-, beforen, 4_ before. (Also 3 biuore(n, biforenn, byuore, biforr; 4_5 bi-, byforne, bifor(e, 4_6 byfore, 4_7 beforn(e, 5 befoore, 5_6 Sc. Befoir, beforrow, 7 arch. Beforen, biforn, 8 arch. Beforne.)

1652 Needham tr. Selden's Mare Cl. 96 Wee decree that every Man possess his Vestibula or Seas lying <u>before</u> his lands.

1697 Dryden Virg. Georg. iii. 822 Tisiphone <u>Before</u> her drives Diseases and Affright.

1711 Addison Spect. No. 12 2 The Mistress scolds at the Servants as heartily <u>before</u> my Face as behind my Back.

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2. Chart II – Introduction

In the second group are displayed entries for which, on one hand, it was possible to track respective forms in the list, but on the other hand, the *OED* (as a basis for the survey) does not offer any quotations that would prove their use; in other words, I have listed the forms in which the entries occurred in the 17th century (sometimes the use is indicated also for an earlier time) but I do not provide any quotations as these are not contained in the OED. Based on this fact I have not recognized these entries as fully fitting the criteria of the third group. Within this group I have indicated several different features. These are as follows:

    1. varieties concerning **consonants**

        a) where a consonant is doubled in *anny, Aprill, att, benne, catt, dammage, divell, felloniously, mallasses, mallasoes, seall, sett, sonne, uppon*

b) where a consonant is omitted in *al, apeared, apperane, comand, jugling, kiled, muzle, sumoned, warant, witnes, writen*

c) a consonant replaced by a different consonant in *t/s* change: *occation*

   s/c change: *plase*

2. varieties concerning **vowels**

a) where a vowel is added in *aiged, read, smouthered, strainge, tould*

b) where a vowel is omitted in *apperance, apperane, beleve, ben, grat, gratly, kild, received, redy, squese, ther, travil, vengance, yer*

c) where there is an internal change of vowels or/and consonants in *brake, deier, pail, thier, tounge, thare, thare*[12]*, whose*

d) where a vowel is replaced by a different vowel in *clarke, differance, greet, hir, mayd, malassoes, parson, parsons, perticuler, sarjant, secrit, sex, sovereigne, sum, thay, ware*

e) changes in the position of *e*:

i) final *e* added in *appeare, appere, arme, armes, beene, clerke, complaine, goe, grate, myselfe, saide, sheriffe, sovereigne*

   ii) final *e* omitted in *hom, se, sum*

   iii) internal *e* added in *lyeing, malassoes*

f) change in the ending in *continewed*

Apeared, appeare, appere

The persons above named where all every of them sumoned to appeare… (159)

… but that they should appere their: thes morning… (167)

… the last second day at night There apeared a little black beard man… (170)

appear, v.

Forms: 3_6 apere, 4_5 apeer(e, **6 7 apear(e**; 5 appeere, -iere, **5 6 apper(e**, **6 7 appeare**, 6 appear.

   1667 Milton P.L. ii. 113 His Tongue_could make the worse <u>appear</u> The better reason.

   1712 Steele Spect. No. 445 7, I am afraid of making them <u>appear</u> considerable by taking notice of them.

Aprill

Salem Aprill the 30'th 1692 (152)

April Forms: 3_4 averil, 4_5 averel, -ylle, avyryle, 4_5 aprille, -yll, apprile, -ille, 5 apryle, -el, 6 -elle, **-ill**, 7_ April.

   1687 Congreve Old Bachel. i. iv, That's one of Love's <u>April</u>-fools, is always upon some errand that's to no purpose.

   1712 Steele Spect. No. 432 12 The Present I received the second of <u>April.</u>

Beleve

… but I should not beleve them… (167)

believe, v.

Forms: 2_3 bileuen, 4_5 bileue, -leve, -leeve, **4 6** beleue, **-leve**, 6_7 -leeve, 6_ believe. (Also, 3 biliuen, byleuen, 4_5 byleeue, 4_6 byleue, -leve, **7** -leeue**,** -leive.) pa. tense and pple. believed, occas. in 6_7 beleft (still dial.).

   1647 W. Browne Polexander i. 67 <u>Beleeve</u> lesse to your courage then judgement.

   1667 Milton P.L. x. 42 <u>Believing</u> lies Against his Maker.

3. Chart III – Introduction

In this group I have included words for which it was possible to find a respective example in the list of forms as well as to demonstrate the actual use of the word. This is to say that with the following expressions I have been successful in proving their real use in the forms as found in the source text.

As far as the list of forms is concerned, this is added to most of the entries. As for the time scope, our major concern was to cover the second half of the 17th century, however, as became more and more clear, use of some of the entries goes as far back as the early 17th century and I could not ignore this fact. Some of the quotations based on the *OED* thus illustrate their use in the years ranging from the beginning to the end of the 17th century, with minor overlaps with the early 18th century. Later in the text special attention will be paid to the year 1611 when the *Authorized Version* of the *Bible* (also called *King James Bible*) was introduced.

I came to the conclusion that the following expressions in this group can be divided into three major subgroups and one marginal group according to years (the division being only rough):

1. entries exemplified by quotations prior to 1650 such as *behalfe, booke, calfe, convay, crowne, dayes, dreadfull, feare, fift, forbeare, graned, hee* etc.
2. entries exemplified by quotations covering the years 1650–1700 such as *barrell, believe, believed, diabolicall, eys, hur, chimny, itt, kil, laine, legg, lyes, meats* etc.
3. enries that cover the most of the 17th century such as *any thing, crie, denyed, doe, don, dore, dores, doth, downe, dye, enjoyned, faile, field, forme* etc.
4. entries exemplified by quotations after 1700 such as *agoe, stud* etc.

The chief point of interest in this study regards the second half of the 17th century rather than the previous one, nevertheless, as one can see from the entries included in the first subgroup, a certain number of these forms was in active use up to approximately the mid-17th century. Despite the fact that the dictionary does not capture their use after 1650, we find them in the verbatim transcripts as vivid illustrations of contemporary written as well as spoken language, i.e. in a time when they were probably no longer in wider use.

As has been already discussed the first settlers came to the area (which later started to be called Sallem Village and Sallem Town) some time in the 1630s. The expressions displayed by the first subgroup thus may well have been expressions that were kept alive either by the first generation settlers and/or by their descendants who learned these words in their home environment.

Any thing
… and my wife looking up could not see any thing,… (178)
anything, pr.
1611 Bible John xiv. 14 If ye shall ask <u>any thing</u> in my name, I will do it.
1649 Milton Eikon. Wks. 1738 I. 383 This was that terrible <u>Any-thing</u> from which

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his Conscience and his Reason chose to run rather than not deny.

    1677 A. Yarranton England's Impr. 136 These Spouts convey the Corn into the Barges without <u>anything</u> of labour.

    1711 Addison Spect. No. 1 _8, I would gratify my Reader in <u>any Thing</u> that is reasonable.

    Orig. always separated; separation now usually denotes stress upon thing, as any thing, but not any person.'

Agoeing

... on the 9'th of may 1692 I was agoeing to Salem village... (168)

it seems that the fused *a* reflects the bound way of pronuciation used English

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Barrell

... put his fingers into the Bung of a Barrell of Malasses... (161)

barrel, n.

Forms: 4 barayl, 4_5 barele, 4_6 -ell(e, 4_7 -el, 5 barylle, 5_6 barrelle, 6 beryll, **6_7 barrell,** 7_ barrel.

    1611 Cotgr., The <u>barrell</u> of a windlesse, Mouline

    1659 Gauden Tears Ch. 245 (D.) There meanest comrades, which are of the same bran and <u>barrell</u> with themselves.

    1672 Petty Pol. Anat. (1691) 21 Corn was then at 50s. per <u>Barrel</u>.

    1712 Act 10 Anne in Lond. Gaz. No. 5012/1 A <u>Barrel</u> of Soap is to contain 256 pound.

    See also group 1, entries *barill, barrill*. These two other forms can be considered as variations formed by individual scribes, see group 1.

The three short introductions relay the most important findings about the spelling variations discovered in the source text. Leaving out the third group (where the character of the entries is different) variations in consonants, as observed in the first and second charts, are represented in a far smaller number than vowels. The variations with consonants are mostly **doubling** (*agged, allmost, bitt, reveall vittal*)**, addition** (*gunn, hipp, recogniscance*) or **omission (***againt, dauter, depotion, pichforks*) of a consonant. It can be added, with the words of Josef and Elisabeth Wright, that "consonants have changed comparatively little in the history of the English language, but vowels have continuously been on the change, and still are so" (Wright 1924: 8). The charts have confirmed the quoted statement.

    Apparently, vowels do prove more vulnerable to change in terms of variant spellings in the survey, since as many as 13 different variations in the position of the letter *e* have been tracked. For instance *e* stands at the beginning in *ellness*, is added as a final suffix in *afternoone*, replaces other letter within a word in *lettell*, is inserted within a word in *delievered*, stands at the end of stems in *haveing* (this pattern is visible with continuous forms in *haveing, refuseing, liveing* as well as with *accordeing, dureing* – the former examples have not been justified while one of the latter examples (*dureing*) was); on the contrary it is omitted from the final position in some cases as in *differanc* or is omitted from an internal position in *carrid*. Further variants with a similar character in the positions of other vowels have been discovered, such as addition in *hevie*, omission in *beleve*, replacement by a different vowel in *apone*. In the cases of *beleive, cheife, feild,* where two vowels are interchanged from the point of view of present-day

spelling, *beleive* and *feild* have proven to be legitimate forms, while *cheife* belongs to the second group where no quotation is available. All in all, similar variations as with the consonants are also valid for vowels: **addition, omittion, replacement by a different vowel** or **internal change** of different vowels.

The letter *e* seems to produce by far the most vowel variations shown in this study. The third group features a wide use of final *e* in cases such as *booke, calfe, theire.* The use of the final *e* was common until the early part of the 17th century and it started to fade especially in the second half of the century (Wright 1924: 13). This is not the case of some expressions used by scribes in the trial records where the spellings used in the King James Bible of 1611 had been still retained at least until 1692.

When considering the variant spellings as displayed one must bear in mind the character of the text we work with – the court records. As has already been stressed I deal with records of speech given chiefly by uneducated or partially educated people, which offer a remarkable opportunity to approach language at its most natural. More specifically, I deal with written accounts whose recording was carried out under specific conditions; the scribes were very likely ordered to put down as literal wordings as possible. As Rissanen says " it is almost impossible to know how accurately the records reproduce the spoken utterances of the examinations, but the scribes certainly had little or no motivation to alter the wordings. It is worth keeping in mind that in the Salem trials, particular attention was paid to every word and turn of phrase uttered by the suspects" (Rissanen 1997: 185). Likewise, some of the spelling variations can to a large degree be accounted to the scribe's effort to be verbatim and quick at the same time. Presumably, it resulted in forms such as *apparanec, diappeared, depotion, execuion, exept, hnad, vliage, rquier, sreife.*

The first and second charts display entries which have not been exemplified by any quotations showing their real use. However, this does not mean that these spellings should be regarded as illegitimate. A great part of them can be understood as further variants, simply adding to the number of all other variants that have been documented so far. The remaining part can be understood as misspellings, especially those entries where evidently a letter is missing as in *anser* or *diappeared*, where letters are intechanged as in *balde* or *hnad*, or where letters are changed in some other way as in *sreife* or *deier*.

I would also like to stress the importance of the 1611 issue of the *Bible*, broadly known as the *Authorized Version* (or *King James Bible*).¹³ The reason for making this point is that a great number of spellings present in the source text follow the spelling patterns of the time when the *Bible* was issued, i.e. the beginning of the 17th century.

Examples of such variant spellings have been tracked in some entries included in the third chart such as *any thing* (1611 Bible John xiv. 14 If ye shall ask <u>any thing</u> in my name, I will do it.); *arme* (1611 Bible Ezek. xxx. 21, I haue broken the <u>arme</u> of Pharaoh.); *behalfe* (1611 Bible Ex. xxvii. 21 It shall be a statute for euer on the <u>behalfe</u> of [coverd. among] the children of Israel.); *booke* (1611 Bible Jer. xxxii. 12 The witnesses, that subscribed the <u>booke</u> [1885 R.V. deed] of

the purchase) and many others. They illustrate the fact that the *King James Bible* was the *Bible* of the people coming to New England (there was a new issue of the version in Scotland in 1633, in England 1666 – without the Apocrypha, 1701, 1717, 1762). The Bible of that time could well have been an object of everyday use, although access to it was limited by the scope of literacy within the Salem community; nevertheless, it will be interesting to note that an ecclesiastical person acted during a part of the courtroom sessions in the role of scribe. It was the village minister in person, one of the key figures in the whole witchcraft affair. As Kytö mentions "the name of the scribe was not always indicated, but in the majority of the case it seems to have been Samuel Parris…" (Hiltunen 1996: 20), whose household was one of the places where the strange happenings may have had their roots as one of the "afflicted" girls was his daughter. During the examination of Nehemiah Abbot, Parris by his own hand states: "Mr. Samuel Parris, being desired to take in writng the examination of Nehemiah Abbot, hath delivered it as aforesaid, and upon hearing the same did see cause to dismiss him" (*SWP I*, 51). With the local minister functioning as one of the scribes, there appears to exist a connection between the occurence of the the above mentioned entries and the scribal activity of Parris's.

The variants' spelling is also dependent on the the aim with which the text originated. In this context the trial records can be divided into two parts – on the one hand the "official" texts such as warrants, summonses, indictments, recognitions, mittimuses and on the other the direct/indirect speech accounts reported and recorded by scribes such as depositions or examinations. The spelling diversity varies accordingly – the scribes adopted the style of legal language, however, when recording during the examinations (noting down spoken language) they tended to resort to a style of writing which mirrored the spoken language and/or their own perception of orthography (Rissanen 1997: 186–187).

From among other features characteristic of the source text I also dealt with entries represented by more variants such as *apperishtio – apperishtion – apperition, cannoe – cannoo – canoo, choak – choake – choacking, deposicon – deposistion – depotion, emmedtly – imediately – immedetly – immediatly, grate – greet – grat, malases – malasses – malassoes – mallasses – mallassoes – molasses – molossus, peace – peaces – peesees*. Great variations have been documented in the way of recording place names as well as personal names, where not only spelling varied but also the use of capital letters.

All this evidence suggests that at the end of the 17th century one can in no way speak about spelling that was 'correct' or 'incorrect'; simply, this division is not applicable since no prescriptive code for writing was in effect. In certain professional areas (such as law and others) the orthography had some fixed rules. On the contrary, the spelling of private writings (such as letters, diaries, personnal accounts, notes and other) and/or the spelling habits of illiterate or less literate persons proved very flexible.

IV Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the types of spelling variations within a randomly selected piece of writing. The Salem witchcraft court records preserve in a unique way a piece of historical evidence which, when studied in a certain way, yields an ample supply of information concerning the way our predecessors used their language. I decided to carry out a survey which would show to what extent the language users, in this case the court scribes, were able to write.

Having excluded the entries corresponding to the modern American English spelling I was able to base my analysis on those that could hypothetically have been legitimate contemporary spellings. Apparently, the principal task then was to prove which of the variant spellings occurring in the source text were spelled in a legitimate way and which of these were misspellings. I have processed approximately 800 entries (some of them appearing in the initial chart more then once, so that the actual number is lower than the overall number of the entries).

I have created three charts based on different perspectives: the first one gathers the entries for which there is no exemplification whatsover and contains 169 entries; in the second one there are entries exemplified to some degreee – the chart does not list actual quotations but only examples from the list of forms current for each individual century totalling 92 entries; the third one shows entries which are exemplified by actual quotations with 126 entries. The initial number of entries to be examined was some 800 but since some of the entries repeated the final number reached approximately 400.

The first and second categories are characterized by variations concerning both the consonants and vowels. The basic types include: features written apart (*a bove*), cases of fusion (*afitt*), omission or addition of letters (*againt, apperishtion*), displacement of letters (*apparanec, hnad, vliage, wicthcraft*), doubling or simplifying ("un-doubling") of letters (*aged, almost, allso, bitt*); within vowel variations the most numerous changes have been found with the letter *e* – added as a suffix (*afternoone, againe*), replacing a different vowel at the beginning of words (*ellness, emmedtly*), replacing another letter within a word (*afflect*), inserted within a word (*sinceible*) – 13 different positions have been found as well as a few more changes in the positions of other vowels. In spite of the fact that the forms for the second group have been found in the list of forms for the respective centuries, I decided not to regard the entries as fully exemplified because no quotations were offered by the *OED*. Thus the same criteria were used here as for the first group.

The third group is to be viewed from a rather different perspective since it features entries exemplified in the very same form as used in the source text. I further decided to divide the entries into four subgroups according to four different temporal criteria. Thus we could observe that one of the subgroups demonstrates the use of some of the entries even in 1692 despite their use being documented only for the early 1600s up to 1650. Very likely the Holy Scripture functioned as an object of everyday use, especially for the literate inhabitants of Salem; for the illiterate it was mediated by regular sermons. Several expressions, coinciding

with their spelling counterparts in the 1611 *Bible*, could well have found their way to the records through their scribe – the local minister, whose knowledge of the Scripture is undisputed.

In view of the results obtained from the charts it can be added that a considerable number of the entries were documented as legitimate spellings (Chart III), and a considerable number of the entries were not exemplified (Chart I and II). Some of the entries have been labelled as variant spellings adding to the whole group of variant spellings already existing, and some were labelled as misspellings.

Due to a generally scarce use of written communication, it was not necessary to make spelling of such terms subject to one way of writing. Even with people of whom one would expect good knowledge of writing, such as scribes, this knowledge may fail; also the task of recording may have been performed by some other person. This does not concern particularly the official documents issued by the court and other authorities, rather the examinations and depositions recording actual speech.

No matter how loosely defined a term we use, there existed some relatively standardized way of spelling – found in numerous spelling and grammar books produced during the 17th century. Very probably some of these found their way to the colonies from Britain and could thus bring the rules governing the language of well-bred, educated higher classes, scholars and the court.

The many spelling variations and misspellings found in the records are also a consequence of a combination of two factors – the effort to be as verbatim as possible and at the same time to follow the pace of human speech with which the utterances were given. In addition, it has also been documented that formalized legal language guaranteed (due to its prescriptive code) many fewer misspellings as opposed to the recording of actual speech which did not follow any structural pattern and strived for immediacy as well as accuracy.

Variant spelling is one of the features which characterizes the whole body of 17th century written English, more specifically, of what later was to be recognized and called 'American' English. In spite of the fact that there existed some kind of standard originating in Britain and this standard was known among the educated classes in the colonies, this was not the case of all who acted as important agents during the court proceedings, as for instance the scribes.

To sum up, let me refer to several books which, unfortunately, I did not get hold of and which I am sure could offer some additional points of view. So far I have not studied the work of F. H. Brengelman *Orthoepists, printers and the rationalization of English spelling* and a study by E. Carney *A Survey of English Spelling.* An ample supply of further reading will certainly be found in studies by Merja Kytö and Matti Rissanen from Helsinki University, who belong to a group of scholars engaged in the Helsinki Corpus Project. A brief outline of the history of English spelling is available in general works such as *A History of the English Language* by A.C. Baugh or under the same title by G.L. Brook followed by *A History of English* by Barbara M.H. Strang. Last but not least to mention is the extensive study of Colonial American English by Wolfgang Viereck and his numerous works on the topic followed by studies by Manfred Görlach. The refer-

ences made by individual authors of the studies which I have used provide further extensive reading on historical as well as linguistic grounds. Eventually, a more profound research of the trial records could be prompted by further study of such features as use of capital letters, punctuation, dates or abbreviations.

Notes

[1] This article is an abstract from a final-year dissertation at the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno, supervised by Prof. Josef Hladký.

[2] Subsequent references to the Salem Witchcraft Papers will be further cited in the text as SWP.

[3] Early Modern British English section and Early Modern American English Corpus.

[4] Further discussion of the dialectal character of the Early American English in relation to the origin of its speakers such as whites, Indians, slaves coming from either Africa or the West Indies can be foudn in Viereck (1985) or in Marckwardt, A.H. American English. New York, Oxford: J.L. Dillard, 1958. For the list of other works on the topic cf. Viereck (1985).

[5] Cf. appendices 47–48, under Examination of Nehemiah Abbot, Jr.

[6] Cf. appendices 48–52, under John Aldern's Account of his Examination.

[7] Cf. appendices 52–78, under George Burroughs.

[8] Cases of division or fusion have been documented also in: *napron* changing to *an apron*, an *eke name* changing into a *nickname* – originally spelling deviations having been accepted as regular forms over the time.

[9] Most probably the scribe regarded the indefinite article as an intergral part of the word in both cases.

[10] In these two expressions the original written form probably reflects the actual contemporary pronunciation.

[11] The similarity between *since* (in the source text *sinc*) as a prepositon and *since* in *sinceible* may lead to a suspition that the assumed pronuciation of the two expressions might have been the same.

[12] *Thare* with the meaning of the possessive pronoun *their*, the following *thare* with the meaning of the adverb *there*.

[13] The efforts to issue a new version of the Bible arose out of the Hampton Court Conference held in 1604 by James I. With the idea of revising the current version, there were finally six companies of scholars arranged to work on the revision, for which the Bishop's Bible was taken as the basis. Two groups were formed at Westminster, two at Oxford and two at Cambridge. It is worth pointing out that no further revision was attemted for over 250 years and that it came out of collaboration of a selected group of scholars and translators, working with enough time and repeated revision. Its achieved literary mastery influenced English literature as well as orthography for many years on.

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