

MASTER OF ARTS & DOCTORATE IN ADVANCED ENGLISH STUDIES

Spelling Practice in London, Wellcome Library, MS 3731

Carlos Soriano Jiménez
Universidad de Málaga
csoriano@uma.es

There is a growing body of studies describing the standardization process in Late Modern English (Auer, 2012, pp. 939-952, for example). The influence of the printed press, spelling reforms, normative grammars and dictionaries contributed to the standardization of English, which can be defined as “the suppression of the optional variability” in a language (Milroy and Milroy, 1997, p. 8). Prescriptivism played a crucial role in this process. It has been argued that, by the eighteenth century, English spelling had become standardized and stable (Scragg, 1974, p. 80, as cited in van Ostade, 2009, p. 39). However, van Ostade (2009) points out that, during this period, there existed two spelling systems, a public and a private spelling system (p. 11). Auer (2012) further explains that “printers had to adhere to the standard spelling system” (p. 942) whereas variation persisted in private writings.

This study examines the spelling practice of London, Wellcome Library, MS 3731, an early-eighteenth-century collection of medical and cookery receipts housed at the Wellcome Collection in London. It contains instructions to cure different kinds of illnesses and it was used as a source of advice and medical assistance in the domestic sphere. This paper is part of an ongoing investigation that aims to contribute to the existing area of research by analyzing the correspondence between the printers’ spelling of the eighteenth century and the spelling used in this manuscript. The spelling features analyzed in this study are: (i) capitalization, (ii) hyphenation, word division and line-breaks (iii) the use of superscript letters and (iv) abbreviations.

References:

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