Ladylikeness and Sociolinguistic Submission in Late Medieval English Society: Gender-based Use of Negation in John Paston I and Margaret Paston

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As is widely known, Historical Sociolinguistics studies the evolution of languages in their social, historical and cultural context. During the last forty years, the study of the relationships between language and gender has been one of the most important and best publicised areas of sociolinguistic research. Such research, carried out both synchronically and diachronically, has shown differences in gender-based patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour between current and past societies. The aim of this paper is to show the results and conclusions from a historical sociolinguistic study correlating the factor of gender with linguistic features such as mood and polarity in a married couple of the Paston family (John Paston I and Margaret Paston), from one of the most important linguistic corpora of late medieval English (the *Paston Letters*). Although their statistical validity and representativeness cannot lead to generalisation, the analysis does allow us to detect some tentative differences in the sociolinguistic behaviour of men and women in late English medieval society that might be reflected in interpersonal epistolary communication. Both social and linguistic extrapolations are inevitable, implying the ways in which language may reflect and help to maintain social attitudes towards women and men.

Keywords: historical sociolinguistics; language and gender; submissiveness; uniformitarian principle; statistical validity; representativeness

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Propiedades de una dama y sumisión sociolingüística en la sociedad del inglés medieval tardío: uso de la negación condicionado por género en John Paston I y Margaret Paston

La sociolingüística histórica estudia la evolución de las lenguas en su contexto socio-histórico y cultural. Por su parte, el estudio de las relaciones entre la lengua y el género ha sido una de las áreas más tratadas en la investigación sociolingüística durante los últimos cuarenta años. La investigación en lenguaje y género, sincrónica y diacrónica, ha demostrado la existencia de distintos patrones de comportamiento sociolingüístico condicionados por el género del hablante

tanto en la sociedad actual como en la antigua. El presente trabajo muestra los resultados y
conclusiones alcanzados sobre un estudio sociohistórico en el que se correlaciona el factor
género con los rasgos lingüísticos de modo (indicativo-subjuntivo) y polaridad (afirmativa-
negativa) en un matrimonio de la familia Paston (John Paston I y Margaret Paston), de uno de
los corpus lingüísticos más relevantes del inglés medial tardío (las *Paston Letters*). Si bien carece
de validez estadística y representatividad, el análisis nos permite detectar tímidamente algunas
diferencias en el comportamiento sociolingüístico de los hombres y mujeres de la sociedad
medieval inglesa que podrían reflejarse en la comunicación epistolar interpersonal. Resultan
inevitables las interpretaciones y extrapolaciones tanto sociales como lingüísticas, sugiriendo la
forma en que la lengua refleja, y ayuda a mantener, actitudes sociales diferentes ante hombres
y mujeres.

Palabras clave: sociolingüística histórica; lenguaje y género; sumisión; principio de uniformidad;
validez estadística; representatividad

1. Introduction: Historical Sociolinguistics and Language and Gender

Since its proposal by Romaine (1982), Historical Sociolinguistics studies the relationships between language and society in its socio-historical context. As Figure 1 shows, it is a multidisciplinary subfield emanating from Historical Linguistics and Sociolinguistics, which "focuses on trajectories of changes completed at early stages of the language, and employs variationist methods to investigate these changes" (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 176). It is an increasingly important field (see Ammon, Mattheier and Nelde 1999; Jahr 1999; Kastovsky and Mettinger 2000; Bergs 2005; Conde-Silvestre 2007; or Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre 2012, among others), despite the widely-recognised difficulties concerning representativeness and statistical validity (see Hernández-Campoy and Schilling 2012). In theoretical terms, its main objective is "to investigate and provide an account of the forms and uses in which variation may manifest itself in a given speech community over time, and of how particular functions, uses and kinds of variation develop within particular languages, speech communities, social groups, networks and individuals" (Romaine 1988: 1453). Methodologically, "the main task of socio-historical linguistics is to develop a set of procedures for the reconstruction of language in its social context, and to use the findings of sociolinguistics as controls on the process of reconstruction and as a means of informing theories of change" (Romaine 1988: 1453), based on analyses/ methodologies largely developed by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1996, 1998, 2003). The development of electronic corpora, with the contributions of Corpus Linguistics and Social History has conferred 'empirical' ease and 'historical' confidence to the discipline.
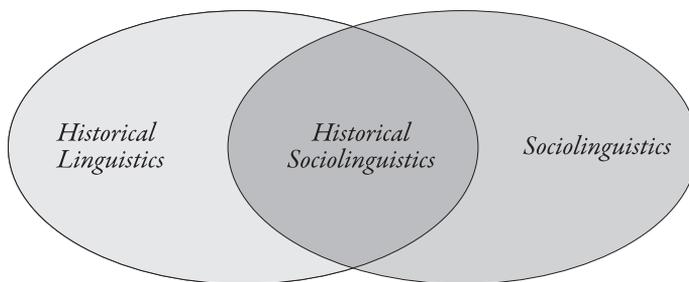

Figure 1. Scope of Historical Sociolinguistics

Furthermore, the study of the relationships between language and gender has been one of the most important and best publicised areas of sociolinguistic research during the last forty years or so. Since the 1970s, descriptions of gender-related issues in languages with very different structural foundations and socio-cultural backgrounds have been carried out (see Lakoff 1973; Vetterling-Braggin 1981; Cameron 1985, 1995, 2008; Smith 1985; Coates 1986, 1996, 1998; Coates and Cameron 1988; Philips, Steele and Tanz 1987; Graddol and Swann 1989; Swann 1992; Tannen 1993; Holmes 1995; Johnson and Meinhof 1997; Bing and Bergvall 1998; Hellinger and Bußmann 2001; Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak 2002;

Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003; Holmes and Stubbe 2003; García-Mouton 2003; Okulska 2006; Mullany 2007; and many others). As Klann-Delius states,

> The basic assumptions of all these studies are genuine sociolinguistic ones, claiming that a) with respect to its structural properties and rule-governed uses, language has to be conceived of as a product of cooperation between (historically specific) socialized subjects as members of (historically specific) societies, which in turn influences the way people think about themselves and the world; b) membership of society as well as socialization differs for men and women because of the differences in the organization of labor and the different interpretations societies have developed for the biological difference of the sexes. (2005: 1564)

Generally speaking, the relationships between gender, linguistic structure, lexicon, language use, language acquisition, and dialect as well as accent have usually been explored. Many of these studies have highlighted sex-differentiated varieties of language, i.e., sex differences in the use of particular linguistic features. Others have focussed on investigating the way in which language reflects and helps to maintain stereotyped images of the sexes and social attitudes towards women and men, and sex differences in the use of conversational strategies, as well as sexism in language. Admittedly, as Klann-Delius points out, "many studies do not take into account the obvious interrelation of gender as an independent variable such as social class, ethnicity, race, age, education, type of situation" (2005: 1573).

Like any other research dealing with social change, this sociolinguistic area of research, as a consistent field of study, has been subject to controversy as a result of the inherent susceptibilities of its provocative concerns:

> [M]uch of the increase of interest in the subject has been related to the contemporary growth of the feminist movement, and a corresponding growing awareness of phenomena such as sexism and sex-role stereotyping. The study of language and sex has focused on a number of different issues, including sexism in language, but also including differences in the use of language and conversational strategies on the part of men and women, as well as dialect and accent differences of a mainly quantitative sort. (Trudgill 1985: ix)

2. Objectives

The disappearance of mood in English took place during the Middle English (ME) period,[1] when the levelling of final unstressed vowels to /-ə/ or Ø and the unstable quality of inflectional /-n/ affected the conjugation of ME verbs: the synthetic expression of tense, person and number was reduced and even led eventually to the gradual loss of certain

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[1] See Pyles and Algeo (1964), Millward (1989), Blake (1992, 1996), Nevalainen (2006a), or Hernández-Campoy (2012).

moods (see Nevalainen 2006a, 2006b). If the effects of analogy were felt in the ME verbal system, the evolution from a synthetic to an analytic system was strengthened during the Early Modern English (EModE) period.[2]

The preservation of written correspondence collections from the period prior to the attrition of mood in English medieval times enables us to carry out correlations of extralinguistic factors (such as gender) with linguistic features (such as mood and negation). Aprioristically, the interpretations of these results would seem to be merely concerned with sex as an independent social parameter —in addition to social status, style, age or ethnicity— in the correlation of sociolinguistic variables, which would be linguistic in intent. However, social as well as linguistic extrapolations suggest ways in which language may reflect and help to maintain social attitudes towards women and men.

The purpose of this paper is to show the results and conclusions from a historical sociolinguistic study correlating the factor of gender with linguistic features such as mood and polarity in the correspondence of a married couple of the Paston family, from one of the most important linguistic corpora of late medieval English (the *Paston Letters*). The study aimed to detect whether there was any gender-based sociolinguistic behaviour in men and women of English medieval society that might be reflected in interpersonal epistolary communication through the use of the subjunctive mood and negation in the language of the Middle English period.

Analyses cross tabulating different linguistic and extralinguistic factors in the *Paston Letters* have shown patterns of co-variation of standardness, social class and social networks (Gómez-Soliño 1997; Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre 1999; Conde-Silvestre and Hernández-Campoy 2004; Bergs 2005), the end of the inflectional subjunctive (Hernández-Campoy 2012), composite predicates and phrasal verbs (Tanabe 1999; Schäfer 1996), along with the effects of covert prestige and the standard ideology (Hernández-Campoy 2008), word-order and stylistic distortion (Escribano 1982), rhetoric (Escribano 1985; Watt 1993), as well as critical discourse analysis (Wood 2007).

3. Methodology
3.1. Linguistic Variables
One of the achievements of Sociolinguistics has been the identification of the fact that linguistic variation is not normally free, but rather is constrained by social and/or contextual factors, where the *linguistic variable* is "a linguistic unit with two or more

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[2] In current English, most of the functions of the old subjunctive have been assumed by auxiliary verbs like *may* and *should,* and the subjunctive survives only in very limited situations, such as formulaic expressions (*God help him, be that as it may, come what may,* and *suffice it to say*), *that*-clauses (*I insist that she do the job properly*), in concession and purpose clauses (*Even though he be opposed to the plan, we must try to implement it; They are rewriting the proposal so that it does not contradict new zoning laws*), in some conditional clauses (*Whether he be opposed to the plan or not, we must seek his opinion*), or in a few other constructions expressing hypothetical conditions (*If I were rich..., If he were rich..., If they were rich...; I wish you were here*) (see Harsh 1968; Khlebnikova 1976; James 1986; Övergaard 1995; or Peters 1998).

variants involved in covariation with other social and/or linguistic variables" (Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 60). Those linguistic features whose variants denote a social and/or stylistic meaning are then *sociolinguistic variables*; i.e., sets of alternative ways of saying the same thing, although the alternatives have social significance.

Linguistic variables can be segmental —phonetic-phonological, grammatical, semantic, lexical, and even orthographic— or suprasegmental, depending on the nature of the linguistic feature selected (see Milroy and Gordon 2003). In the case of the present study, the linguistic variable used is the verb *to be*. In any given tense, person or number form (*to be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been*, and contracted *'m, 's* and *'re*), this is the most frequently used verb in both written and oral English. A quick look at its presence in Mark Davies' *Variation in English Words and Phrases* (VIEW, <http://view.byu.edu/>), based on the 100 million word *British National Corpus* (BNC, <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>), and his *Corpus of Historical English* (CHE, <http://view.byu.edu/che/>), based on the material in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, <http://www.oed.com/>) with 37 million words of texts from Old English to Present-Day English, would allow us to quantify its use both synchronically and diachronically throughout the history of written English, estimating it to be between 3% and 4.22% of all words in these corpora.

To simplify somewhat, the development of verb morphology from Old English to Middle English is, as has been stated earlier, determined by the levelling of final unstressed vowels to /-ə/ and -Ø and by the unstable quality of the inflectional /-n/ (see Table 1).

Table 1. *To Be* in Middle English

		SOUTH/MIDLANDS	NORTH
Pret. Indic.	1st sg.	was	was, wes
	2nd sg.	we(o)re	was, wes
	3rd sg.	was	was, wes
	plural	we(o)re(n)	war(e), wes
Pret. Subj	sing.	were	war(e)
	plural	were(n)	war(e)

In the British Isles, the study of past *be* is not recent at all, dating back to the work of traditional dialectologists. At a macro-level, Ellis (1889), for example, reported on: i) levelling to *were* detected in different areas of England —such as Bedford in the East Midlands, Pakenham in Suffolk, Chapel-en-le-Frith in Derbyshire or Skipton in Yorkshire; ii) levelling to *was* in Enfield in the South-East, West Somerset, Norwich in Norfolk or Southwold in Suffolk; and iii) their variable use, especially in negative polarity, such as *weren't* in the contexts of standard *wasn't* (see Britain 2002: 20-21; and Figure 2).

More recently, Cheshire, Edwards and Whittle (1989) were able to evidence and measure the geographically heterogeneous nature of the past *be* forms across the regions of Great Britain using an indirect method (a postal questionnaire sent to schools): 80% of the informants were users of the non-standard *was* (levelling to *was*), except in the urban northern areas of England and in Glasgow. Non-standard *were* (levelling to *were*) was
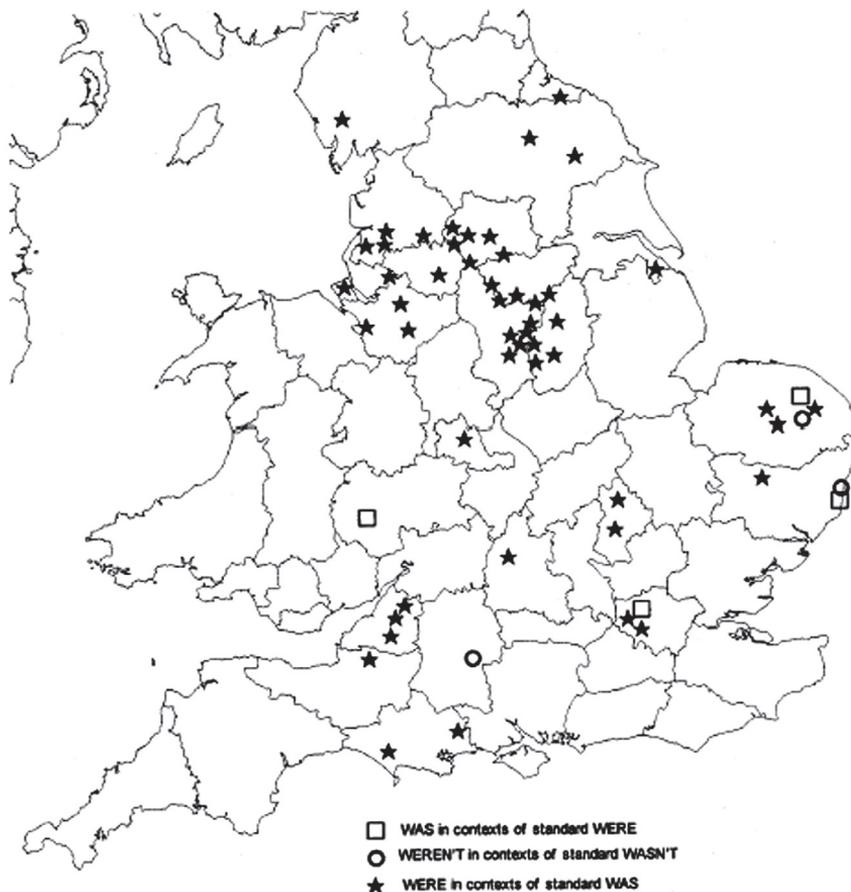
Figure 2. Comments on past *be* in Ellis (1889), from Britain (2002: 21).

more frequently present in the North West, Yorkshire and in the Midlands, and less so in the South.

Given the continuing existence of mood differentiation (albeit in the process of extinction) in Middle English, and considering that our corpus belongs to the very end of this period, indicative and subjunctive uses in our past *be* forms were quantified. The subjunctive mood in past *be* used to be *were* for both singular and plural, requiring both the syntax and semantics of the sentence to be analysed in order to differentiate between them.[3] If Indicative represents a thing as a fact, or inquires about some fact, contrarily, Subjunctive expresses condition, hypothesis, contingency, possibility, wishes, commands, emotion, judgement, necessity, and statements that are contrary to fact at present in

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[3] The contracted forms *wasn't* and *weren't* were not considered in this study given that they did not begin to appear in writing until the seventeenth century (see Pyles and Algeo 1982: 204).

subordinate clauses, implying some kind of indirectness (see Harsh 1968; Khlebnikova 1976; James 1986; or Övergaard 1995). Cases of subjunctive with past *be* forms have been found with sentence connectors such as *as son(e) as, till/tyll, in cas(e), if/yf, before that, as ever, in as much as,* so *that, for (if), after that, as, so, that soone aftyr that they, whether,* I pray + clause, *I wish/wold* + past, etc.

- *After that*: "…and he tolde my modyr and me wanne he was comme hom þat he cargeyt yow to bey it **aftyr þat** he **were** come ovte of London" (Margaret Paston, letter addressed to John Paston I 1441, 12, 14).
- *In cas(e)*: "If þer myt ben purveyd any mene þat it myt ben dasched **in cas were** þat it xuld passe aȝens ȝowr moder it were a good sport,… " (Margaret Paston, letter addressed to John Paston I, 1449).
- *I wish/wold* + past: "I wold she **war** her in Norffolk as well at es as evyr I sy hyr, and as lytyll rewlyd be hyr son as evyr she was" (Margaret Paston, letter addressed to John Paston III 1475, 01, 28).
- *So*: "… but thys she promyseid, to be helpyng **so** it **wer** fyrst meuyd by the consayll" (John Paston III, letter addressed to John Paston II 1472, 09, 21).
- *Till/Tyll*: "So God help me, ye maye alegge a pleyne excuse, I reke not who knoweith it, that thees dyrk werrys haue so hyndyrd me that hyr lyuelode and myne bothe shold be to lytyll to leue at oure ease **tyll** I **wer** ferther befor the hand than I kowde be thys two yer, and she fownd aftyr hyr honourre and my poore apetytt" (John Paston III, letter addressed to John Paston II 1473, 03, 08).

Each token of past *be* form from the Paston Letters collection was analysed and coded for subject type: 1st, 2nd, 3rd person singular and plural, 3rd person singular and plural Noun Phrase, and 3rd person singular and plural Existential, and Polarity (see Table 2). Two distinctions were specified: i) levelling to *was/were* in contexts of Indicative Mood, and ii) levelling to *was/were* in contexts of Subjunctive Mood.

Table 2. Subject Type

SINGULAR SUBJECT	PLURAL SUBJECT
First	First
I was	*We was*
I were	*We were*
	Second
	You was
	You were
Third NP	Third NP
The farm was	*The farms was*
The farm were	*The farms were*
Third Pronoun	Third Pronoun
It was	*They was*
It were	*They were*
Third Existential	Third Existential
There was a farm	*There was farms*
There were a farm	*There were farms*

The authors' experience with cases of variability in spelling in previous studies of the writings of this family (see Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre 1999, and Conde-Silvestre and Hernández-Campoy 2004) made us also take into consideration other possible orthographic forms for both *was*, such as *waz, wos, woz, wos, wus*, or *wuz*, that were not present in the corpus, and *were*, such as *wer, werre, weere, weer, war* or *ware*. We also had to be cautious with mispelling phenomena such as *were* instead of the conjunction or the relative adverb *where*, occasionally.

In order to facilitate the detection and quantification of the different possibilities for each variable in each possible syntactic combination, we used the Concordance Package *MonoConc Pro* (ver. 2.0, Build 228, by Michael Barlow).

Our sample consisted of 151 samples from 2 informants (husband and wife), which yielded 848 tokens of the linguistic variables under study: 243 for the male informant and 605 for the female one, comprising 490 instances of *was*, and 358 of *were* (see Table 3).

Table 3. Typology of Informants

Groups	Type of informant	Number of informants	Number of samples	Number of words	Tokens
Group 1	Male	1	44	33,198	243
Group 2	Female	1	107	67,847	605
Total		2	151	101,045	848

3.2. Informants and Instrument

The informants used for the present study were two members of the Pastons, who are the most well-documented gentry family of late medieval England: John Paston I and his wife Margaret Paston.[4] The Pastons were not nobility but *nouveau riche* landowners (Wood 2007: 52; Caston 2004: 73). The family fortunes had improved with William Paston I (1378-1444), who, after training as a lawyer in the Inns of Court in London, acted as counsel for the city of Norwich from 1412, and in 1415 became steward to the Duke of Norfolk, whence he began a successful career at the royal court and gained a good local reputation. He married Agnes Berry in 1420, and became Justice of the Common Bench in 1429. After his death, the family became involved in lawsuits, intrigues, and conflicts, at times violent, about land and legal rights.

John Paston I (1421-1466), our male informant, was educated at Trinity Hall and Peterhouse, Cambridge, and the Inner Temple in London. As he was the eldest son, he took over the family estates and wealth on the death of his father, William Paston I. In 1440 he married Margaret Mautby and they had four sons and two daughters: John II, John III, Edmund II, Margery, Anne, Walter and William III (see also Fitzmaurice

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[4] Further information on the Paston Family can be found in Davis (1971), Richmond (1990, 1996), Barber (1993), Bennett (1995), Gies and Gies (1998), Coss (1999), Castor (2004), or Bergs (2005).

2002 and Wood 2007). As far as his career is concerned, he tried to follow in his father's footsteps, becoming JP for Norfolk (1447, 1456-1457 and 1460-1466), knight of the shire (1455), and MP for Norfolk (1460-1462).

Margaret Mautby (1420?-1484), our female informant and daughter and heiress of John Mautby of Mautby, was a 'businesswoman' in charge of the management of the households and manors. She occupied a powerful position within her family and the community: "Margaret, as will be seen, takes an active role, or even a lead, in state management and is a shrewd businesswoman and negotiator, pulling in support from dukes and bishops when it suits her purpose" (Wood 2007: 53). She lived mostly at Norwich. Along with personal subjects, her letters also deal with family matters and lawsuits and provide us with linguistically important documents which were possibly written by a woman who had barely stepped outside the locale of her country manor. It is quite likely, however, that Margaret did not write the letters herself, but rather the family clerk and chaplain —James Glowys. Bergs' (2005: 79-80) analysis of her letters suggests this scenario would affect phonological or graphological variables, but not morpho-syntactic ones.

The body of letters used for the present study was taken from the Middle English Collection of the Internet electronic edition of the *Paston Letters* (First Part) from the Virginia University Electronic Text Center (<http://lib.virginia.edu/digital/collections/>). The *Paston Letters* is the name given to a collection of 422 authored documents (letters and notes) with roughly 246,353 words, written by 15 members of different generations of this Norfolk family, mainly during the fifteenth century (from 1425 to 1503).

4. Results, Analysis and Interpretation

Linguistic factors (past *be* forms, mood, and polarity) were correlated with the independent socio-demographic parameter gender of the informant. The results obtained for the use of *was* and *were* in positive and negative polarity and mood according to the gender of the informants in the married couple John Paston I and Margaret Paston are shown in Table 4 and Figures 3-4.

Table 4. Correlation per Gender, Mood and Polarity

| Contexts		Group 1: John Paston I		Group 2: Margaret Paston	
Polarity	Form	Raw Data (#)	Percentages (%)	Raw Data (#)	Percentages (%)
Positive Polarity	Indicative Mood	*was/were*	171/243	70%	413/605	68%
	Subjunctive Mood	*was/were*	60/243	25%	160/605	27%
Negative Polarity	Indicative Mood	*was not / were not*	12/243	5%	27/605	4%
	Subjunctive Mood	*was not / were not*	0/243	0%	5/605	1%
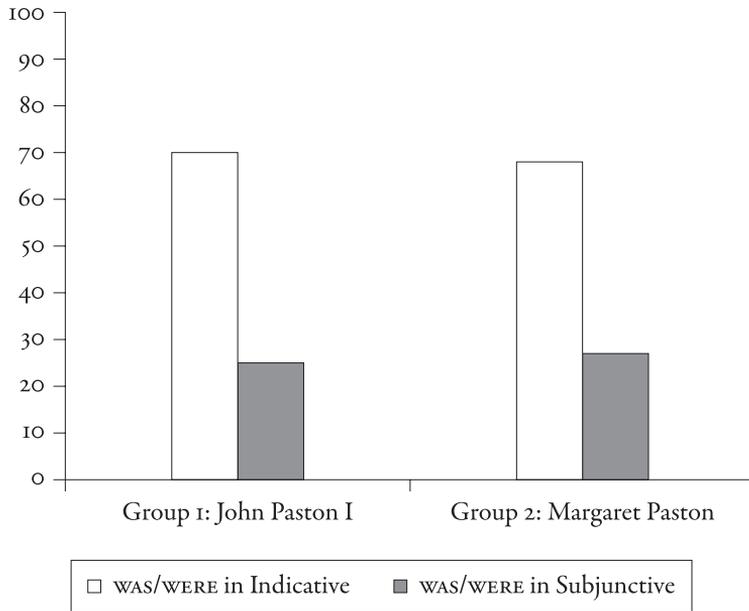
Figure 3. Correlation of past *be* forms with gender and mood
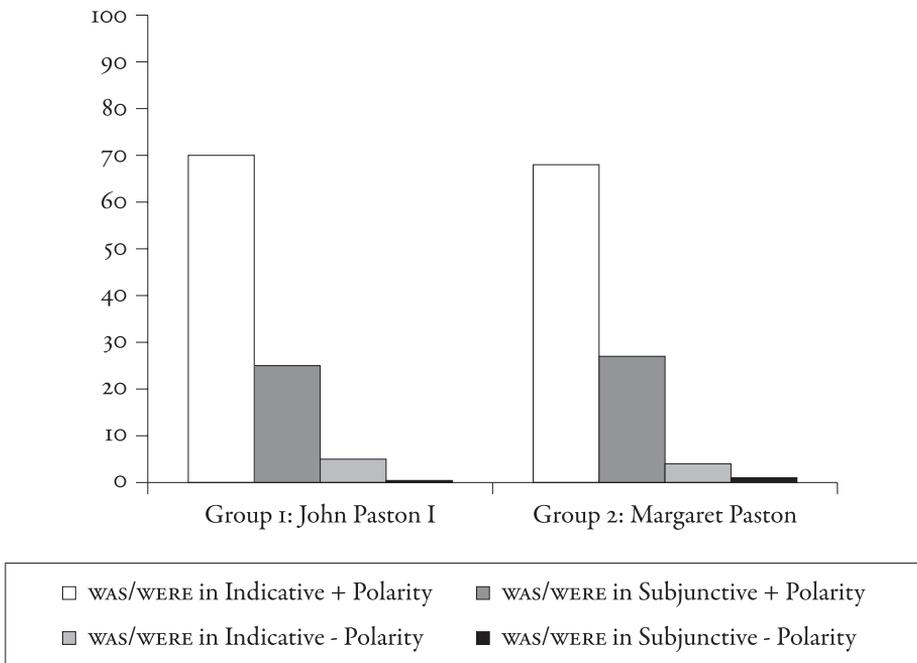
Figure 4. Correlation of past *be* forms with gender, mood, and polarity

Table 5 and Figure 5 specifically show results of the correlation of gender, polarity and mood with *was* and *were* levelling cases:

Table 5. Correlation per Gender, Mood and Polarity: Levelling to *was/were*

Contexts			Group 1: John Paston I		Group 2: Margaret Paston	
Polarity		Form	Raw Data (#)	Percentages (%)	Raw Data (#)	Percentages (%)
Positive Polarity	Indicative Mood	Levelled was	0/31	0%	0/104	0%
		Levelled were	1/140	1.42%	27/309	8.7%
		Total	1/171	0.58%	27/413	6.5%
	Subjunctive Mood	Levelled was	0/19	0%	0/40	0%
		Levelled were	35/41	85.3%	96/120	80%
		Total	35/60	58.3%	96/160	60%
Negative Polarity	Indicative Mood	Levelled was not	0/2	0%	0/7	0%
		Levelled were not	4/10	40%	0/20	0%
		Total	4/12	33.3%	0/27	0%
	Subjunctive Mood	Levelled was not	0/0	0%	0/2	0%
		Levelled were not	0/0	0%	3/3	100%
		Total	0/0	0%	3/5	60%

Figure 5. Correlation of levelling to *was/were* with gender, mood, and polarity

Overall, Figure 3 shows a slightly higher use of the Indicative mood by John Paston I (75%: Ind. 183/243 and Subj. 60/243) than his wife, Margaret (73%: Ind. 440/605 and Subj. 165/605), in their respective letters. In addition, Margaret (27%) exhibits higher use of the Subjunctive mood than her husband (25%). More specifically, according to Table 4 and Figure 4 the male informant shows higher frequencies of past *Be* forms in Indicative mood, with both positive (70%) and negative (5%) polarity than the female one (68% and 4%). Meanwhile in Subjunctive mood, Margaret Paston has higher use of these forms, with both positive (27%) and negative (1%) polarity higher than John Paston I (25% and 0%): hence the female informant shows higher frequencies of the linguistic forms in negative Subjunctive than the male. These patterns are also similarly found in the case of levelling to *was/were* in Table 5 and Figure 5, where in both female and male informants there are much higher levels of levelling to *were* than to *was*, particularly in the contexts of negative polarity, and with more emphasis specifically in Subjunctive mood, which was still most often associated with the subjunctive grammatical contexts, obviously, and thus cannot be regarded as levelling.[5] Yet, the data point to a gender-based pattern of sociolinguistic behaviour, which, as we can see in Table 4 and Figure 4, is the presence of negative constructions and Indicative mood in the male group (Group 1: 33.3%), and its absence in the female (Group 2: 0%). However, the pattern is reversed in the negative polarity context of the Subjunctive mood, where Margaret (Group 2) exhibits 60% of levelling (*were not* levelling particularly: 100%) and it is absent for John I (Group 1: 0%), though this is not statistically significant due to the small number of tokens (G1: 0/0 and although G2: 3/5), i.e., insufficient and/or unrepresentative data.[6]

John I, John II, John III and Margaret Mautby were the most central or important family members, with the rest gravitating towards them (they wrote 74.4% of the documents preserved), followed by Edmond II and Agnes; Walter, William I, William III and William IV seem to have occupied rather marginal roles (see Bergs 2005: 69-71).

As Table 6 shows, Margaret has the highest presence in the corpus of the *Paston Letters* (25.36% of letters written: 107 out of 422). This seemingly indicates she was a strong woman of considerable influence and consequence in the family, as stated in 3.2. However, her control of the family does not extend to decision-making but rather only the reporting of decisions. Despite her knowledgeable and authoritative administration and influential

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[5] In contemporary English, most non-standard varieties have regularised the past tense irregularity by having the same form for all persons and both numbers. In this way, generally speaking, at a macro-level, different non-standard dialects i) either have *were* in all persons and both numbers (*we were, he were*); ii) or they have *was* in all persons and both numbers (*we was, he was*); iii) or they have *was* in all persons and both numbers in the affirmative but *were* in all persons and both numbers in the negative (*I was, you was*, but *I weren't, you weren't*) (see Britain 2002 and Trudgill 2008).

[6] Schneider (2002) and Bauer (2002) highlight the potential and problems (pros and cons) of relying on written sources and public corpora (large collections of naturally occurring language data, including those that are computer-readable/searchable) as linguistic data for variationist analysis. The most important disadvantage of datasets of historical documents is that they very often lack *representativeness* and possibly also *validity*, since, as noted above, the historical record is incomplete, and written materials may or may not be reflective of the spoken language of the time period under study.

Table 6. Informants and Letters

Informants	Letters	Words	% Letters Written
William Paston I	12	8,160	2.84%
Agnes Paston	22	7,865	5.21%
John Paston I	44	33,198	10.43%
Edmond Paston	2	502	0.47%
William Paston II	33	15,418	7.82%
Clement Paston II	7	3,303	1.66%
Elizabeth Poynings	4	3,969	0.95%
Margaret Paston	107	67,847	25.36%
John Paston II	86	49,551	20.38%
John Paston III	77	43,993	18.25%
Edmond Paston II	8	3,856	1.90%
Walter Paston	4	1,327	0.95%
William Paston III	9	4,569	2.13%
Margery Paston	6	2,658	1.42%
William Paston IV	1	137	0.24%
TOTAL	422	246,353	100%

social agency in managing household and estate-related business, her letters —particularly in the case of her use of negation and mood— suggest a woman who adopts a mere reporting role in relation to these events, clearly revealing her position in the social hierarchy of the medieval English household and her community (see also Archer 1992; Watt 1993; Gies and Gies 1998; Coss 1999). This characterisation as a chronicler, according to Barratt (1992: 12-16), has traditionally been identified as a strategy of submission used by women to attach themselves to a man's authority in order to participate in his activities. As Creelman points out, in adopting this role, she exhibits a "subordinate position as a wife obligated to provide her husband with frequent written reports in governing estate business in his absence" (2004: 112).

Therefore, though this is undoubtedly not conclusive enough given the small number of tokens and thus the lack of statistical validity, according to these data and results with this particular linguistic variable, we might surmise that in medieval English society,

i)   men make higher use of affirmative constructions in indicative than women;
ii)   men make higher use of negative constructions in indicative than women;
iii) women make higher use of affirmative constructions in subjunctive than men
iv)   women make higher use of negative constructions in subjunctive than men;

This points to the fact that it was more typical and acceptable for ME male speakers to use direct negation than for females, whose negative polarity statements had to be expressed more indirectly and remotely through subjunctive. This sociolinguistic behaviour might be understood as a feature of a gender-affiliated pattern, a fact that clearly relates to issues in language and gender studies, such as language use, dialect/accent use or directness. Although both sexes do use the same language system, there is certainly evidence to imply that certain

words are sex-exclusive, i.e., feature in only men's or only women's verbal repertoires, or that some structures and/or uses are more prototypically gender-based. There is a common widespread belief, bolstered by stereotypes, that women's language is more polite and refined (more 'ladylike'). The distinction between language use differences in male and female speech needs to be considered here: the use of certain hesitation markers, syntactic devices, such as ellipsis and tag-questions, as well as particular communicative and conversational strategies in men *versus* women (see Tannen 1993; Aries 1996; James 1996; Kothoff and Wodak 1996; Palander-Collin 1999; Hollway 2001). Dialect and accent differences in male versus female speech (the use of prestigious/non-prestigious linguistic forms) need to be investigated as well. Whereas at the level of language use, women and men may try to achieve different things, through dialect and accent variants women and men employ socially different, but linguistically equivalent, ways of saying the same thing (Trudgill 1972, 1985). The fact that the male informant shows less reliance on hesitation markers and more use of levelling to *were* in negative polarity in Indicative mood than the female, and the reverse in Subjunctive contexts (conditional and potential), indicates the more prominent role of men in medieval society: a society where women were excluded from politics and public office and received less education than men (see Goldberg 1992 and Wood 2007).[7] According to Robin Lakoff (1973), women traditionally have had certain unfavourable connotations because of the lower status they typically held in society: until very recently, women were conceived of as being responsible for the integrity of the domestic sphere of life, whereas men are conceived of as having more social power, and therefore as being active participants in the sphere of public debate and political decision-making.

Lakoff (1973) in her study on contemporary industrialised Western-world societies claimed that women use certain grammar structures more frequently (e.g., tag-questions) or supra-segmental elements (e.g., the use of question-intonation in statements) in their conversational interactions with men. These features, in Lakoff's view, carry the social meanings of insecurity, hesitancy, or uncertainty. Yet, many subsequent empirical studies have failed to corroborate Lakoff's claims (see Dubois and Crouch 1975; Edelsky 1979; Baumann 1979, etc.): nor is it certain that tag-questions always function as indicators of hesitancy or uncertainty (see also Holmes 1986), or that the use of question-intonation in statements is more characteristic of female than male speakers.

Preisler (1986), for example, carried out a most detailed and thorough study of women's and men's use of indicators of tentativeness. He analysed the correlations between the speech of 48 speakers from Lancaster, in the North West of England and their age and

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7   "However, Archer (1992) suggests that although there is little evidence of formal education of women, wives of estate owners were perhaps more prepared for their roles than historical documents suggest. Also, although by law married women's lands and legal status were controlled by their husbands, Archer suggests looking beyond the law. She argues that women were often left as the sole representatives of their absentee husbands and that, whatever the law might dictate, in actual practice, all married women of property took on responsibility for estate management even though, since legal documents are in the man's name, the evidence is lacking. The historical record is fuller when it comes to widows as they received one third of their husband's property over which they exercised full control" (Wood 2007: 53).

socioeconomic status. After setting up controlled conversation situations with groups of four informants of the same age and employment status, participants were given conversational topics to discuss and asked, if possible, to reach some kind of agreement. He found out which speaker was more dominant in each group (i.e., introducing new topics, taking a particular line of reasoning, making suggestions, using more imperatives and less interrogatives, etc.). In his study, dominant speakers made less use of tentativeness markers (tag-questions, use of modal verbs, and other markers such as *maybe*, *perhaps*, *certainly*, etc.) than the less dominant speakers, who were, in general, females. Not only did women tend to use tentativeness signals more often than men in mixed-sex groups, but also in single-sex groups. Bent Preisler explained his results by suggesting that women and men have developed certain "sex-specific speech patterns" (1986: 288): since usages in single-sex groups do not differ from those in mixed-sex groups they cannot depend on the submission of women to male domination as such but rather on the probable institutionalised reflection of women's 'historical social insecurity'. These aspects, in historical context of power and politeness relations, have also been investigated by Tiisala (2007) and Nevala (2007).

Another interesting observation in male-female interaction has been verbal aggressiveness in relation to interruptions. Zimmerman and West (1975), for example, were successful in measuring patterns of turn-taking, pausing, and interruptions in male-female conversations, and found that, while women are more cooperative, men are more competitive: men, overwhelmingly, interrupted more than women did in conversational interactions.

Labov's (2001: 261-93) 'gender paradox' emphasises women's tendency to conform to sociolinguistic norms —usually being more in contact with the standard— and their role in language change (see Nevalainen 2006c), since they have traditionally been attached to the domestic sphere and assigned a predominant function in the education of children and the transmission of culture and societal values: "women conform more closely than men to sociolinguistic norms that are overtly prescribed but conform less than men when they are not" (Labov 2001: 293). This ideology of femininity, as Kielkiewicz-Janowiak states, is also expanded to socialisation patterns:

> In the case of women, a major source of social pressure on women was encoded in the ideology of femininity. For centuries it had been deemed desirable for a woman to be unimposing and considerate to others. This precept, at the level of linguistic behavior, involved listening rather than speaking, understanding rather than arguing. However, when invited to speak, women were expected to display the virtue of 'sympathy'. (2012: 327)

This stereotype of submission and prudence, as characteristics of femininity and ladylikeness, is evidenced here with the much lower use of negation in Indicative (direct assertion), and much higher use of negation in Subjunctive (indirect assertion) by the female member of a late fourteenth-century married couple belonging to the Paston family of medieval England, as shown in their vernacular written correspondence.

Conclusion

As an independent sociolinguistic parameter, with this historical sociolinguistic study on a past society, gender-based differences have been observed, detected, and quantified. The correlation of gender and linguistic features is reached irrespective of whether they belong to a stereotypical dichotomous pattern or not, but very relatedly here in connection with Labov's (1972) *Uniformitarian Principle* for the behaviour of men and women in the course of its historical development along past and present societies,[8] and in this case here with its historical reconstruction in its socio-cultural context.

Obviously, these results are not conclusive given the small number of tokens, and thus the lack of statistical validity, and universalisation is not feasible due to insufficient representativeness; further research contrasting results from other variables and preferably more informants would be needed. Admittedly, this is an exercise in socio-historical reconstruction, where the non-existence of evidence does not allow for conclusions about the existence or non-existence of individual facts. But, despite its limitations, and trying to make the best use of bad data, as Labov (1972: 98; 1994: 11) suggests, some patterns may be perceived on the sociolinguistic behaviour of English medieval society through the analysis of epistolary compositions.[9]

Language use differs for women and men, because gender, culturally and stereotypically, has been demonstrated to aggregately determine use of language, other things being equal. These gender-specific differences in the sociolinguistic behaviour of men and women are therefore manifested in the structural properties of languages, where they have become incorporated in the course of its historical development (Klann-Delius 2005: 1564). We must admit, however, that the establishment of gender as a binary construct where dichotomies are separated by unequivocal boundaries, and thus as a pervasively influential factor of language use, is as controversial as the topic itself (see Bing and Bergval 1998 and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1998). As a matter of fact, as Kielkiewicz-Janowiak (2012: 329) points out, gendered stereotypes "perpetuate and magnify the gender effect in our perception, so that a relatively small gender difference is believed to bring about a true contrast". Also, gender roles can be said to have been more strictly imposed on women than they are today.

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[8] If Historical Sociolinguistics reconstructs the history of languages in its socio-cultural context, the *Uniformitarian Principle* leads us to believe that the linguistic behaviour of ancient sociolinguistic communities may perfectly have been determined, to some extent, by patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour which are similar to the contemporary ones observed by Sociolinguistics (see Labov 1972: 275). Admittedly, as Rankin (2003: 186) points out, reconstruction in Historical Linguistics would not be possible without the assumption of uniformitarianism (see Lass 1997 or Janda and Joseph 2003). But in socially-conditioned language variation and change this principle is not fully convincing due to its limitations (see Labov 1994: 21-25; and Bergs 2012).

[9] As stated in Hernández-Campoy and Schilling (2012), the sociolinguistic study of historical language forms must rely on linguistic records from previous periods —most of which will be incomplete or non-representative in some way— as well as on knowledge and understanding of past sociocultural situations that can only be reconstructed rather than directly observed or experienced by the researcher. As Labov aptly notes, "[t]exts are produced by a series of historical accidents; amateurs may complain about this predicament, but the sophisticated historian is grateful that anything has survived at all. The great art of the historical linguist is to make the best of this bad data, 'bad' in the sense that it may be fragmentary, corrupted, or many times removed from the actual productions of native speakers" (1972: 98) .

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