

Another Look at the Samuels Standards

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Samuels (1963) distinguished four budding spelling standards in Late Middle English. These standards have subsequently become so ingrained that much standardisation literature refers to them as a matter of course. However, evidence has been mounting to question their existence, and the papers included in Wright (2020) represent a recent step toward decisively putting them to rest. This presentation builds on my paper in that volume (Thaisen 2020): it reviews the evidential basis for the types and presents new empirical data which show the earliest of the three London-based types, Type II, lacks unity.

Previous scholarship's criticisms include that Samuels (1963) advanced an insufficient number of spelling forms as defining characteristics of any of the types and misconstrued chronological overlap between Types II-IV. Another criticism is that any unity within a type may be attributable to other factors than standardisation, such as text type or a shared copyist. It is fuller evidence of this kind this presentation reviews.

It is the spelling forms respectively selected by Scribes 1 and 3 of the Auchinleck manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates' 19.2.1), dated c. 1330–40, which according to Samuels (1963) best exemplify Type II. If these two scribes' respective spelling forms constitute a budding standard, they ought to show greater similarity to each other than to those used by the other four Auchinleck scribes when other factors are controlled for. To test whether they do, I segmented a full transcript of the manuscript (Burnley and Wiggins 2003) and established the segments' similarity to each other. The similarity metrics – perplexity of probabilistic models – do not bear the expectation out. Moreover, the manuscript's physical make-up suggests Scribe 3 worked independently of the other scribes. This empirical evidence, then, discussed in the presentation's second half, throws doubt on the unity of Type II.

Select bibliography

The Auchinleck Manuscript, ed. D. Burnley and A. Wiggins (Edinburgh, 2003), <http://auchinleck.nls.uk>. The transcript is downloadable from the University of Oxford Text Archive: <http://ota.ahds.ac.uk/headers/2493.xml>. Samuels, M. (1963). 'Some Applications of Middle English Dialectology'. *English Studies* 44, 81–94.

Thaisen, J. (2020), 'Standardisation, Exemplars, and the Auchinleck Manuscript', in Laura Wright, ed., *The Multilingual Origins of Standard English*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 165–90. Wright, Laura (ed.), *The Multilingual Origins of Standard English*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.