



UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN
Centro de Estudios de Postgrado

Master's Dissertation/
Trabajo Fin de Máster

SPELLING VARIATION IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH: THE CASE OF -IC VS -ICK.

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July, 2022.

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ABSTRACT.

This dissertation deals with spelling fluctuation in the history of English, focusing mainly on the origins and development of the *-ic* suffix and its variants in order to determine whether there was a linguistic competition between them and, if so, which one finally became the dominant suffix. This study uses corpus-driven analysis to explain the development of the ten most frequent two or more syllable nouns with this ending from the Early Modern English onwards. The study also explains why some words did not develop as expected, with influencing phenomena such as blocking or linguistic specialization. The corpora used as sources of evidence are the *Early English Books Online* corpus from the 1470s to the end of the EModE period, the *Google Books Corpus* from 1700 to 1850, and the *Corpus of Historical American English* for the analysis of spelling in American English.

Key Words: corpus-based analysis; Early Modern English; spelling variation; *-ic*; *-ick*; standardization; suffixes.

RESUMEN.

Esta investigación aborda la variación ortográfica en la historia del inglés, centrándose principalmente en los orígenes y desarrollo del sufijo *-ic* y sus variantes, con el fin de determinar si existió una competencia lingüística entre ellas y, de ser así, la forma que lideró el proceso de estandarización. Este estudio utiliza un análisis basado en corpus para explicar el desarrollo de los diez sustantivos de dos o más sílabas más frecuentes con esta terminación desde el inglés moderno temprano en adelante. El estudio también de cuenta del desarrollo irregular de algunas palabras, influyendo fenómenos tales como el bloqueo o la especialización lingüística. Los corpus utilizados como fuentes primarias son el corpus *Early English Books Online* desde la década de 1470 hasta el final del período del inglés moderno temprano, el corpus de *Google Books* desde 1700 hasta 1850 y el *Corpus of Historical American English* para analizar los cambios en la ortografía del inglés americano.

Palabras clave: análisis basado en el corpus; estandarización; *-ic*; *-ick*; inglés moderno temprano; sufijos; variación ortográfica.

1. CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION.

Spelling has been highly *unstable* since the adoption of the Latin alphabet. Anglo-Saxon sounds did not match Latin letters, and Latin letters did not correspond to Anglo-Saxon phonemes (Crystal, 2013: 19-20). This was the first major problem with English spelling. Since then, many efforts have been made to standardize it, mainly from the introduction of the printing press, but it would take centuries for the spelling to be truly stabilized.

The present study is *relevant* because it shows the difficulties English spelling had to overcome to be stable, and how important pronunciation was to the development of written words. Several centuries ago, it was of extreme importance to double the following consonant if the vowel was short, or to add a *silent -e* if the vowel was long (Algeo, 2004: 118), both premises not free of exceptions.

As for the research *hypothesis*, although there was a remarkable degree of spelling uniformity at the end of the Early Modern English (henceforth, EModE) period (Nevalainen, 2006: 36), the *-ic* suffix was not still dominant as the *-ick* form was also widely used at the time. This means that there was no spelling standardization yet. There was no real competition between *-ic* and *-ick* in the EModE period and it was necessary to wait until the beginning of the Late Modern English (hereafter, LModE) period for the eventual adoption of *-ic*. Prescriptivism could have played a role in the standardization of spelling, but it does not seem that it had a direct impact on minor aspects such as the standardization of *-ic*. As a matter of fact, Johnson advocated for the *-ick* suffix during the mid-eighteenth century, but his recommendation was not implemented since the *-ic* form was already popular.

This study examines the origins and development of *-ic* and its variant forms in nouns with more than one syllable. It also introduces prescriptivism to determine whether prescriptive rules contributed to the stabilization of the spelling under study. Additionally, it analyses the general development of *-ic/-ick* spellings and other variants in both EModE and LModE to discern when this suffix became stable and if there was any actual competition between them. The study concludes that the *-ic* suffix was eventually standardized by the mid-eighteenth century after a competition with *-ick*, and that the prerogatives of prescriptive grammarians did not participate in the final stabilization of this orthographic form in combination with two or more syllable nouns. In the attempt to make English resemble Latin, writers might have favoured the *-ic* form in view of the similarities with the Latin suffix *-icus*, considered to be more appropriate than its counterpart *-ick*.

2. CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW.

Spelling has been a remarkable aspect of the history of the English language from the first writings in Anglo-Saxon England with the first monks who came into the isles at the end of the sixth century, whose priority was to get the language written and transmit Christianity to those who did not speak Latin. (Crystal, 2013: 12-13). From this moment on, spelling has been adapted so that it did not look so alien to people writing it. Those missionaries found a rather serious difficulty: some Anglo-Saxon phonemes did not match the Latin alphabet (Crystal, 2013: 14-15). It is here that the story of English spelling begins. Therefore, it can be gathered that “contemporary spelling is the heir of centuries of English writing in the Latin alphabet” (Algeo, 2004: 47), and that it has been largely influenced by it. Not only Latin, but also the arrival of the Normans and the printing press, to name a few, contributed to shaping it until the eventual standardization of the English language.

The history of English spelling will be traced in this chapter, contextualized within the historical and sociocultural milieu of the different periods of the English language, including Old English, Middle English and Modern English (henceforward, OE, ME and ModE respectively). This will facilitate a better understanding of its evolution since, more often than not, it is essential to look back to the earlier periods to understand the spelling of a language.

2.1. Pre-Modern English.

2.1.1. *Old English spelling.*

English spelling “no longer represents the pronunciation of the words” (Baugh & Cable, 2002: 45). Yet, there was a time when it did, particularly during the OE period, which lasted from 450 to 1150 (Baugh & Cable, 2002: 46). As the Anglo-Saxon tribes came, they brought their language, which formed the basis of OE grammar and vocabulary. However, at least three other languages influenced OE at this time, namely Celtic, Latin and Scandinavian, especially in terms of vocabulary. Latin was the most influential, mainly after the arrival of Christian monks in the British Isles in 597 AD. They needed this language written down in letters that could be understood by other monks, so that they could read homilies and spread Christianity. As a whole, the isles were then inhabited by the Scandinavians, who spoke Norse; the Britons, who spoke Celtic; the Anglo-Saxons, who spoke OE; and also, by the Roman missionaries, who spoke and wrote in Latin (Mugglestone, 2008: 62).

This blend of languages would have probably led to a mix of sounds during the period. For the first monks, the sounds were really important because they needed to transcribe what they heard. They would have preferred to do so in a completely regular way – a letter for each sound –, but they would have required an alphabet with about thirty-seven letters (sounds in OE at that time), and they did not have that (Crystal, 2013: 19). Here is when the problem with English spelling began. In fact, these missionaries needed to introduce some letters taken from other alphabets, such as *ðæt* – today known as *eth* (ð) –, as well as the runes *thorn* (þ), *wyn* (ƿ) or *ash* (æ), among others (Horobin, 2016: 3). Furthermore, the fact that every letter in OE was pronounced is relevant to understanding why English spelling often seems erratic once it began to evolve (Crystal, 2013: 78). These were some of the weaknesses of the English language, and they were subjected to some reform later, with more or less accuracy. It started to happen when Normans and their scribes came to the isles, which led to a new era for the language: ME. (Crystal, 2019: 30).

2.1.2. Middle English spelling.

The Norman Conquest in 1066 brought Norman French to the isles, a language that differed from OE not only in spelling but also in the lexicon, grammar, and pronunciation. A new linguistic identity was born (Crystal, 2013: 41), which lasted from about 1100 to 1500. In the years following William of Normandy's coronation as King of England, "French was rapidly established in the corridors of power" (Crystal, 2019: 30). Norman-French became the language of politics and government, and "those who wanted to be accepted by the Norman power structure had to learn French" (Green, 2020: 12). It is then understandable that hundreds of words entered OE, both from French and Latin, and they had to be written, which may have added more irregularities to the language and contributed to shaping the spelling of English. On the whole, all changes brought by Norman scribes made English spelling a mixture of two systems, OE and French, by the beginning of the fifteenth century (Crystal, 2019: 41). Nevertheless, by this time Latin was also the language of the church and learning, so England became trilingual. Though English eventually was the official language of the country because of several factors, such as Wycliffe's translation of the Bible into English, the Statute of Pleading, Chaucer's literature and the fact that the Chancery office also began to write in English (Algeo, 2004: 113), the contact between the three languages would greatly influence its shape.

French scribes also brought their continental spelling habits, who tried to eliminate alien letters or combinations of letters, as did Christian monks. According to Barber et al., "the new

orthography gave English writings quite a new look” (2009: 161). One of these changes was to gradually replace OE letters *eth* (ð) and *thorn* (þ) for <th>, much more usual for the Norman people. Similarly, the <uu> combination, used for <w>, also replaced OE *wynn* (Algeo, 2004: 116). Also, seemingly odd combinations of OE letters, such as <sc> or <cw>, evolved into more common ones for Norman French scribes, becoming <sh> or <qu>, respectively. Then, OE *scip* changed to ME *ship* or OE *cwēn* to ME *queen* or *quene*. In addition, Norman scribes used the continental style of handwriting, which made it difficult to “tell how many strokes had been made when letters like <m>, <n> or <u> occurred together” (Barber et al., 2009: 163). French scribes, therefore, changed the letter <u> for the letter <o> when it occurred in combination with the letters mentioned above as well as <v> and <w> (Algeo, 2004: 118). Thus, OE *sunu* became ME *sone*. These are just a few changes introduced in ME spelling.

The orthography changed, but the sounds generally stayed the same. This was a problem in writing many words, especially when dealing with long vowels. Scribes tried to solve this vowel length problem in two different ways: adding a *silent -e* at the end for long ones when they were not marked yet with a double vowel (*hopa/hopian* > **hop* – inflection drop- > *hope*) and doubling the following consonant for short vowels (*hop* > *hopping*) (Crystal, 2013: 42-43). These two general rules still needed to be improved but, as it can be imagined, they were applied to many words which survived for centuries. This could help explain several letter combinations that occurred in EModE and still exist in Present-Day English (hereafter, PDE).

2.2. Modern English Spelling.

ModE, which spans from around 1500 to 1900, brought major changes to the English spelling to eventually become the standard English as it is known today. Historically, linguists and historians subdivide the period into EModE, from 1500 to 1700 (Görlach, 1991: 9-11.; Singh, 2005: 139), and LModE, which spanned from 1700 to 1900 (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 9). The turn of the century ushered in a new period, twentieth-century English, while English in the twenty-first century is elsewhere referred to as PDE. This chronological division is adopted in the remainder of this research.

2.2.1. Early Modern English. (1500 – 1700)

In the sixteenth century, Europe underwent a great deal of change, not only as a result of the discovery of new lands in Africa or America, but also as a result of expanding learning and culture, along with new discoveries and developments. After these events, it was obvious that

the language required more words to express such a large number of new ideas, and many new terms were introduced in this period. Therefore, this was a transformative era, not only for England, but also for the language (Algeo, 2004: 139).

Despite becoming the language of government, it did not mean that English was the only language written in the isles. Latin was still the language for education and did not disappear completely from other fields (Barber et al., 2009: 52). In any case, “with the growth of education, the introduction of the printing [press], and the new interest in learning, this began to change” (Viney, 2008: 30). The arrival of the *printing press* in 1476 with William Caxton substantially contributed not only to establishing and fostering norms of an English spelling and helping in its standardization, but also to reproducing many copies of the same document and allowing the spread of the English language more easily. It is true that Caxton was not so strict regarding norms to write, “as long as a word was recognisable” (Crystal, 2013: 137), but it is also undeniable that the printing press was definitely a noticeable first step in the consolidation of English. This *journey* towards standardization, however, was not immediate, and it would take “another two hundred years before a standard language became established in its modern sense” (Crystal, 2004: 697). It is, in fact, undeniable, that printing was a powerful force to promote the use of this vernacular and spread it “throughout the territory in which it was understood” (Baugh & Cable, 2002: 187).

The *Great Vowel Shift* also influenced English spelling. It consisted of great changes in pronunciation that took place in the vowel system in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Barber et al., 2009: 201). In fact, all long vowels became closer and the closest ones became diphthongised. This explains why ME *hūs*, often pronounced /u:/, with a close vowel sound, is now pronounced /aʊ/, as a diphthong. By the time printing arrived, the Great Vowel Shift had already begun (Crystal, 2013: 663), so these changes found some room in printed words from fairly early on. In addition, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were crucial because “*literacy* was becoming much more common” (Baugh & Cable, 2002: 188) among people of the middle class. The fact that more and more people were able to read, due in part to the periodical publication in newspapers, penny dreadful, or the popularity of novels, may have also contributed to the idea of standardization.

There were also many *discoveries and developments* at the time, mostly in the fields of science, technology and commerce, among others, that needed to be named after. The English language lacked many specialized terms, and many of these new words were mostly borrowed

from Latin, since it had traditionally been associated with learning and knowledge. Furthermore, Renaissance England used Latin loanwords in other fields as well: there were a number of translations from Latin, and translators did not often have a term in English to express what the Latin word did (Barber et al., 2009: 188-189), so the Latin word was retained in the translation and eventually incorporated into the English lexicon. Many of these Latin loanwords were called *inkhorn terms* which, according to Baugh & Cable (2002: 202), did not meet universal favour, chiefly because of their length, their alien form and their connection to the learned field. Thus, it is likely that “there was a strong tendency for writers to invent English technical terms by adapting those of the Latin originals” (Barber et al., 2009: 188). And these new words were often created through affixation.

Additionally, the English lexicon increased so much that the first dictionaries appeared during this period, explaining not only “hard words” (Algeo, 2004: 157), but also suggesting proper spelling. Robert Cawdrey, who published his *A Table Alphabeticall* in 1604, (the first attempt at an English dictionary), was among the most prominent writers recommending particular spelling usage at the time. However, the true age of dictionaries began in the next century, with authors like Samuel Johnson, who published his *A Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755. In fact, his work highly contributed to “fixing” the disorder found in English spelling.

2.2.2. Late Modern English. (1700 – 1900)

The nineteenth-century saw Britain emerging as the most powerful industrial nation and, consequently, the most main economic force in the world (Grant et al., 2019: 191). This was accompanied by a great overseas empire, with many colonies around the globe. Even though America had become independent after the Independence War (1776-1783) some decades before, Britain remained the world’s most powerful country. This leads to two conclusions. The first is that, though America was already an independent country, it was English that was spoken there. This fact had a much greater significance than it could ever have been imagined at the time: the language would develop slightly differently in the States (a sign of nationalism), giving rise to the most important and influential variety of the English language today: American English (AmE). With his *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), Noah Webster made a significant contribution to it. The second conclusion is that the different British colonies were run with English as their language, which led to the emergence of new English varieties outside the British Isles, such as Indian English or Australian

English, and so forth. However, according to Algeo (2004: 183), despite its geographical spread, all varieties of English are quite uniform.

Apart from all innovations and new words entering English due to the Industrial Revolution (1760–1840), the scientific and medical development, as well as the contact with other countries, the nineteenth century is widely known as the *age of the dictionaries* (which in fact started with Johnson’s work some decades before). As vocabulary grew, more and more dictionaries were published. By 1859, sixty-four dictionaries were published in Britain (since Jonson’s) and thirty in America (since Webster’s), apart from more than two hundred specialized dictionaries and glossaries and more than thirty encyclopaedias (Crystal, 2013: 201–202). Although published in 1928, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth, OED) started to be compiled then (Viney, 2008: 45). In addition, *borrowings* are constant in the English language, not only from other world Englishes, but also from other languages, as French or Spanish, and from exotic languages, such as Indian, Arabic or Chinese, apart from regional varieties (Denison & Hogg, 2006: 297).

2.2.3. Twentieth-century English.

The twentieth century saw America become a worldwide superpower after the Second World War, which contributed to the configuration of AmE as the most important language in the world, and so did the technical, scientific, cultural and social American development. One of the most influential developments of the past few decades that continues during the twenty-first century has been the Internet, which is not only helping in creating new words, such as *website*, but also in developing a new informal way of communicating via chats (Viney, 2008: 48). This indeed can lead to wonder whether this could be the beginning of a new linguistic era.

2.3. Modern English variation and standardization.

Although English spelling was quite erratic at the beginning of the EModE period, the last decades of ME were a turning point in both the spelling and pronunciation of English. Aside from the two general rules¹ outlined above, some other efforts were made after the loss of OE inflections, but more exceptions and irregularities came, particularly when Latin words were borrowed in the Renaissance, which usually retained their original form to better show their etymology, as Latinists sought.

¹ Adding a final *silent -e* to mark long vowels and doubling the following consonant if the vowel sound is short.

The EModE period started with the feeling that “there was no clear notion of spelling reform in the fifteenth century” (Crystal, 2013: 143). But it was all about to change. In fact, it is observed that “by the end of the Early Modern Period, the spelling had become standardized in printed books, though there was still considerable variation in people’s private writings” (Barber et al., 2009: 213). The printing press did manage to give English spelling some order but, “in some respects, Caxton’s choices made English spelling more, not less, irregular than it was already”. (Crystal, 2013: 138). Sometimes, those irregularities came from scribal practices such as adding a final *silent -e* to finish a line to “fill it up”. Moreover, Caxton’s helpers were mainly Dutch, speaking and reading Flemish and with little idea of English, which brought more irregularities to the language (Crystal, 2013: 139-140). Anyway, it goes without saying that Caxton and the printing press significantly contributed to the standardization of the English spelling.

By the sixteenth century, there were so many irregularities in English spelling that serious attempts to reform it began to take place. One of those factors contributing to its regularization was the introduction of Latin borrowings, which were practically not adapted to the English spelling system (Crystal, 2013: 145). In fact, Latin influence led reformers to rely upon etymology, serving them to turn to it as a way of explaining and regularizing English spelling. Barber et al. (2009: 190) explain it as a process of remodelling words, like reconstructing them back so that the loanword resembles as much as possible the Latin one. This led to the incorporation of many silent letters (ME *dette* > EModE *debt*, to make it seem similar to Latin *debitum*). Despite the fact that it may have been seen as a way to regularize English spelling at the time (since many literate people knew Latin), today it seems like a process that brought even more irregularities to it, as most people lack knowledge of Latin. In addition, etymology served reformers to try to respell words because they seemed similar to another one. They assumed that both were spelled in the same way, but sometimes, they were wrong, so even more irregularities would have come into the language that way.

From the sixteenth century, the influence of reformers such as John Hart or Richard Mulcaster (among others) deeply helped the English spelling system to seem more regular. They contributed, with their treatises and dictionaries, to the standardization of English spelling. Following Crystal (2013: 145-146), Mulcaster tried to introduce some simplifications to reform spelling with his *Elementarie* (1582). They were quite popular at the time, and even half of them are still retained today, as the use of the *silent -e*. In this sense, it can be seen that there was a growing feeling that “English needed to be ‘ruled’ or ‘regulated’” (Barber et al.,

2009: 215). There were not only more and more dictionaries published, as Johnson and many others did in England, or Webster and other lexicographers did in America, but also some important figures in this field arose: prescriptive grammarians such as Lindley Murray, whose work prescribed how people should write and speak. In fact, they were so important that a chapter to prescriptivism will be devoted below.

Concerning the variation that existed during the ModE period (and still today), much of it can also be traced back to the formation of new words, using Latin words along with prefixes and suffixes. Affixation was not a new phenomenon in EModE, but it had been used since OE to create new words (Horobin, 2016: 18). However, many suffixes and prefixes came into the language from classical languages to create new words. Affixation, according to Barber et al. (2009: 192), was the most common method of word formation during EModE, creating new nouns, adjectives and verbs, as in the case of the forms *-ise/-ize* (Calle-Martín, 2021).

Especially important is the fact that BrE and AmE were differentiated after the American Independence War (1775-1783). In this way, while BrE kept suffixes such as *-our* or *-ise*, (Pacheco-Franco & Calle-Martín, 2020; Calle-Martín, 2021), AmE differed from BrE by developing other forms, such as *-or* and *-ize*. This gave rise to suffixes in competition in words such as *colour* vs *color*, or *realise* vs *realize*. According to Crystal (2006: 165-166), one of the changes AmE incorporated before BrE was the dropping of the letter <k> in the ending *-ick*, as it happened in *musick* or *physick*. Algeo (2006: 193) states that this was proposed by Noah Webster. Instead, Johnson had recommended years before that the letter <c> is never written at the end of a word, as in *politick*. This particular suffix competition did exist for a while in the English language, but “not even spelling, it seems, can resist the power of people” (Crystal, 2013: 142). In fact, before Johnson’s recommendations, many other writers also decided to drop the final <k> in two-syllable nouns, giving rise to forms as *public* or *politic*. Though Johnson did a lot to fix and standardize BrE, there were aspects of the spelling that he might have been overgeneralized, as the *-ick rule* also applied with one-syllable words, as in *black* or *stick*, which has been traditionally written that way. In fact, the rule states that “the <ck> is used immediately after a short vowel (...), usually in single-syllable words, but this group may include multi-syllable words when the syllable is closed or a suffix is added” (Fulford, 2012: 51). Moreover, note that the <ck> combination can be seen as the doubling of consonants to mark the previous vowel as short (one of the first general rules in spelling), as the <kk> combination for plosive sounds has not been used because it

seemed alien to Christian scribes and Norman people. Thus, traditionally, the combination <ck> has been used instead (Crystal, 2013: 193-194).

2.4. Conclusion.

The EModE period was mainly an age of linguistic awareness and anxiety, particularly concerning the spelling, “in which Caxton’s writing represents a dawning appreciation that the language is in a mess and needs sorting out, and the rise of the prescriptive movement represents the feeling that the matter is about to be satisfactorily resolved” (Crystal, 2004: 735). In the same way, by the eighteenth century, “the English spelling system had become stabilized” (Scragg, 1974, cited in Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 39), so there was not so much spelling variation by this time. Despite that, Gohlach (1991, cited in Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 39) reports that LModE still presented a small number of spelling competitions that could be analysed, such as the variation between *-ick* and *-ic* in *musick* / *music*, which is precisely the subject of this dissertation.

This competition was the result of centuries of coexistence of the Romance suffixes *-ic* and *-ick*, the former coming from Latin and the latter from French, which had already varied from their original form during the ME period. Despite the details of their development will be dealt with in the following chapters, it can be said that “this suffix, in both forms, was so common at every historical and linguistic stage that (...) it was virtually autonomous” (Partridge, 1958: 3926). Indeed, given the importance of Latin and French in the spelling of English, and their influence in different fields, it is quite likely that both suffixes developed independently from each other and survived throughout the ModE period. However, in the sixteenth century, many words were borrowed from Latin, and there was a trend to keep Latin borrowings as close as possible to their etymology, so it can be interpreted that there was a gradual preference for the suffix *-ic*. In fact, Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2009: 41) affirms that “*music* (happens) nearly ten times and *comic* five times as often as their counterparts in *-ck*” by the eighteenth century. Even though Johnson in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) recommended the use of the *-ick* form, *-ic* had already taken hold among people (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 41). It is, then, likely that the combination of this fact with Webster’s recommendation for the *-ic* suffix a few years later contributed to the final adoption of this suffix. All in all, following Pacheco-Franco & Calle-Martín (2020: 2) all this information “comes to corroborate the lack of orthographic standardisation in the rendering of these suffixes in the EModE”. Thus, it is time to review the prescriptivism, which contributed

to the stabilization of the English spelling, to analyse to what extent their prescriptions contributed (if any) to this *-ic/-ick* suffix alternation.

3. CHAPTER THREE. THE PRESCRIPTIVIST BIAS.

The OED defines *prescriptivist* as an “adherent or advocate of prescriptivism”, or characteristic to it². Therefore, the term *prescriptivism* is defined as “the practice or advocacy of prescriptive grammar; the belief that the grammar of a language should lay down rules to which usage must conform” (OED, n.d.). In addition, in Crystal’s words (2019: 388), “prescriptivism is the view that one variety of a language has an inherently higher value than others, and that this ought to be imposed on the whole speech community”. This claim implies that only one “variant of a language” would be taken as the basis for the standardization process of English, labelling the rest of dialects and accents, as well as vernacular languages, as incorrect or inferior. It is also an authoritarian view, presented in dictionaries, grammars, and other official manuals. Be as it may, it can be said that rules to understand and explain language usage are of paramount importance to prescriptivists.

There have not always been “prescriptions” dictating the usage of the English language. In fact, the variations in the spelling of the same word did not seem to bother writers in the late Middle Ages. It is difficult to speak about rules of use in ME, since the “usage is highly variable and rapidly changing” (Crystal, 2006: 28). It was a problem in the fifteenth century, when the English language lacked spelling manuals, punctuation guides, grammars or dictionaries, as well as for printers like Caxton, who irremediably made several inconsistent spelling decisions. In the same way, the grammar in the Renaissance was mainly “an attribute of Latin” (Romaine & Algeo, 1992: 482), as English lacked norms in spelling, pronunciation, syntax or morphology, thus being largely irregular. In addition to these factors, this age was a period when Latin was retaken as the language of learning and many borrowings from other languages were introduced into English. This led to many inconsistencies in every area of the language, which also made English even more complicated. Consequently, it brought the feeling that the language should be ruled, governed, or prescribed.

It was in the sixteenth century when people started to reflect on language, considering English grammar or spelling to be a mess. In Crystal’s words (2006: 28), “spelling, inevitably, was the first target” in the standardization of the language. From this moment on, standard English

² The word *prescriptive* was mainly a legal and political term, but in 1788, another sense for the word emerged from Trifler’s periodical: “*Prescriptive rules for the preservation of health*”, which is the common sense today.

would take more than two centuries to develop into what it is today. This does not mean that some attempts to consolidate or eradicate uncontrolled usage were not made before that time. They certainly were.

Throughout this chapter, the attempts and concerns of different authors to stabilize and consolidate the English language are discussed, both before and after the mid-eighteenth century. The chapter ends with a review of the prescriptive prerogatives on the use of *-ick* and *-ic* to see whether there was any existing rule.

3.1. The importance of prescriptive grammars in the Early English.

Prescriptive grammars can be defined as a “grammar mainly concerned with prescribing the right forms of language” (Algeo, 2004: 294). There is a difference between prescriptive and proscriptive rules: the first state acceptable usages, while the latter state those that should be avoided (Crystal, 2019: 206). However, both of them, in contrast to a descriptive grammar, are considered normative, like those that emerged in the eighteenth century (van Kemenade & Los, 2006: 545).

The use of this type of grammars enabled authors to address aspects that dictionaries (such as Johnson’s) could not: “dictionaries have limitations” (Crystal, 2006: 94) if what they wanted was to create a standard language. In the same way that spelling is essential to writing words correctly, grammar is critical to defining a standard. Prescriptive grammars were important for the English language, in part, because “it posed a major challenge to those who sought to impose linguistic order on English” (Crystal, 2006: 98).

3.1.1. Sixteenth and seventeenth century: first attempts to rule language usage.

Prior to the sixteenth century, little effort was made to standardize the English language, with the exception of spelling reformers, academics, and writers, who began to reflect upon this issue. One of the most important spelling reformers was John Hart, who advocated spelling reform in *An Ortographie* (1569). In it, he criticized the spelling of the time, which he considered to be quite erratic and not based upon rational principles (Crystal, 2006: 28). His life took place during a period of renewed interest in classical languages and cultures, along with an interest in *etymology*³ as a new perspective on spelling, which, instead of giving language order, complicated it even more. Further, the desire to find the similarity between

³ *Etymology* is defined as “the facts relating to the origin of a particular word or the historical development of its form and meaning; the origin of a particular word” (OED, n.d.)

English words and Latin ones led to the introduction of *silent letters*⁴ into the English language, which Hart considered unnecessary and proposed to eliminate. He also claimed for just one letter for one sound, and proposed several new symbols and conventions to solve this problem. However, his proposal did not work. Similarly, Richard Mulcaster sought to simplify English spelling in his *Elementarie* (1582), which included three main premises, namely: a) eliminating unnecessary letters (*put* instead of *putt* or *putte*); b) adding a letter if not enough letters are present to represent the sound (as to ad <t> before <ch> as in *scratch*); and c) advocating the use of the mere *silent -e* at the end of the word, to better distinguish *mad* and *made*. It was a remarkable work, as half of his proposals are used today (Crystal, 2013: 147). Moreover, his work collected over 8,500 words with recommended spellings, based on what people used in their handwritten texts. In fact, his views “did a great deal to hasten the growth of regularization at the end of the century” (Crystal, 2019: 69).

The end of the century brought another significant spelling reformer, William Bullokar, who wrote *A Short Introduction or Guiding to Print, Write, and Reade Inglish Speech* (1580). His work contained rules for using the English language, which rhymed. His rules, however, proved ineffective. For instance, his <i> before <e> rule⁵ contained exceptions and exceptions to exceptions, which made it extremely difficult to follow. Still, his *Pamphlet for Grammar* (1586), even if it is only a sketch, stands as the first English grammar” (Crystal, 2006: 56).

Literary authors from the sixteenth century, such as Spenser, Sidney, Marlowe or other Elizabethan writers, among whom William Shakespeare stands out, were also crucial in stabilizing the English language. Crystal (2006: 57) describes them as “resourceful”, claiming that their lexical invention brought not only new words, but also new meanings to the existing words. Despite this lexical inventiveness being highly praised today, it was not that way at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as many critics began to feel that language was more out of control than ever.

The beginning of the seventeenth century finally brought what is considered to be the first attempt at an English dictionary: Robert Cawdrey’s *A Table Alphabetical*, published in 1604. It contained “2,449 defined words”, collected “both alphabetical and definitional, compiled

⁴ ME *det*, *dett*, or *dette*, whose source was Lat. *debitum*, became ModE. *debt* (and that is the reason by which the letter in this word is not pronounced).

⁵ The <i> before <e> except after <c> was a rule devised as mnemonic for words such as *receive* or *ceiling*, but it was famous for its exceptions, as one can find a number of words containing the combination <c> plus <ie>, such as in *society*, *efficient* or *ancient* (Crystal, 2019: 284).

for no other purpose than to explain meaning and usage” (Crystal, 2006: 56). Although it was “a long way from the modern desk dictionary which aims to cover the most common English words” (Horobin, 2016: 41), Cawdrey’s work can also be seen as an attempt to take the English lexicon under some kind of control. He was followed by Ben Jonson, who wrote *The English Grammar* (1640). It was intended to guide foreign learners of English and to illustrate grammatical points, based on Latin grammar categories for his description (Crystal, 2006: 57).

For the sake of simplifying the English language, Thomas Sprat suggested avoiding rhetoric, metaphors, and classical vocabulary that impeded clear thinking (Crystal, 2006: 62); and hoped the Royal Academy to do so. He reflected this thought in *The History of the Royal Society of London* (1667). Basically, what he meant was that he did not want “rhetorical and figurative language” in the discourse (Barber, 2009: 228). However, this kind of scientific approach is a myth (Barber, 2009: 229), since even science makes use of metaphors. In this century, though, some grammars were still written in Latin, such as John Wallis’ *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* in 1653. Algeo (2004: 159) states that “the rules it proposed were never accurate”. However, Wallis introduced the distinction of the usage between *will* and *shall* in order to prescribe the use of the future form in English, which other prescriptive grammarians followed later. He wrote it “because there was clearly a great demand for it from foreigners, who wanted to be able to understand the various important works which were written in our tongue, which is why he, as others of his time, wrote in Latin” (Crystal, 2019: 82).

In the mid-seventeenth century, several authors, looking at France, considered creating an English Academy to fix the deteriorating language. John Dryden, a member of the Royal Society, was one of the supporters of an academy, who believed that an institution like that could compile a grammar and a dictionary, collect dialect words, or offer a guide to a spelling reform, among other things, to eliminate what he considered “gross” from the English language, such as the use of double comparative in a sentence (**It was more bigger than that*). Literary authors like Daniel Defoe also supported the idea of academies in his article “Of Academies”, a chapter in his work *An Essay Upon Projects* (1697), in which he argued that academies were necessary “to polish and refine the English Tongue” (Crystal, 2006: 69), as well as to remove irregularities and innovations from English. Also, Jonathan Swift’s “Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue”, written in 1712, advocated for the elimination of “language corruptions”. Despite this, there were no academies or purges in the English language in the seventeenth century. Rather, it was

Samuel Johnson who would achieve it with the publication of his *Dictionary* in the eighteenth century.

3.1.2. Eighteenth and nineteenth century prescriptive grammars.

It was after 1750 when “all kinds of manuals appeared for people with social aspirations, especially grammars and pronouncing dictionaries” (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 3), that is, the germ of what is known as the prescriptive tradition. It is also considered the final step in the standardization of the English language started centuries earlier. By the mid-eighteenth century, the “culmination of the first major effort to impose order on the language” was materialized in the form of Johnson’s *Dictionary* (Crystal, 2019: 82). However, this kind of prescriptivism, when seeking more order in the language, favoured just one variety of the language as the correct one, relegating other varieties, accents, and dialects to a lower level. Even so, the eighteenth century saw the first remarkable prescriptive grammars written in English, which offered guidance on what was correct English. Several authors were responsible for rules such as not ending a sentence with a preposition, among others.

One of the most influential authors in the eighteenth century was Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). It was not the first dictionary to emerge: Cawdrey made the first effort in 1604, and authors such as John Kersey and Nathan Bailey had also compiled dictionaries at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Crystal, 2006: 83). Nevertheless, their influence was not sufficient to serve as a guide for English usage among people. Instead, Johnson proposed to “fix” the language, and his work was one of the most important linguistic events of the century, as it “established a kind of standard for the use of words” (Algeo, 2004: 158). Crystal (2006: 85) further notes that Johnson’s *Dictionary* consisted of over 200,000 quotes, which served to substantiate his definitions, and it classified the words in what he viewed as *adequate* and *inadequate*. As a result, his work helped consolidate English spelling more than ever before, emphasizing the idea of a “correct spelling”, which was a significant shift in public perception, since people had never been that concerned about it before. Yet, Johnson’s work did not suffice. The grammar guide for English contained in it was just a sketch in the first pages and not a serious attempt to present the entire grammar of the language. Further, AmE emerged shortly after Johnson’s death with Noah Webster’s ideas, “dissatisfied with the lack of an American perspective in the texts he had to use” (Crystal, 2006: 164). In his *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789), he proposed a distinctive use of the language to differentiate AmE from BrE, practically declaring the linguistic independence of Great Britain after the political secession of the

American colonies (van Kemenade, 2006: 594-595). In addition, his *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828) proposed the omission of all superfluous and silent letters and, thus, different spellings for the same word can be found in AmE and BrE, as *behavior* and *behaviour*, or *catalog* and *catalogue*. Webster also introduced another change related to the study in this dissertation: the dropping of a final *-k* from words ending in *-ick*, thus *musick* > *music*, or *physick* > *physic*. During that time, the same was happening in Britain. Both BrE and AmE were trying to simplify words and, in the case of AmE, to create a new and unique linguistic identity.

However, the first major prescriptive grammar was written in 1762 by Robert Lowth (Crystal, 2006: 108). With his work, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, Lowth “aimed at bringing English into a Latin-like state of perfection” (Algeo, 2004: 159). Van Kemenade (2006: 540) defines it as “a normative grammar which, to judge by the number of its editions and reprints, became very popular immediately upon its publication”. He proposed a series of prescriptions with which he was able to critique the language coming from the preceding centuries, saying that it “oftentimes offends against every part of grammar” (Lowth, 1762, cited in Crystal, 2006: 108). Since prescriptivists often believed in universal grammar, Lowth also considered the English language to be “easily reducible to a System of rules” (Algeo, 2004: 159). Among his most relevant rules are the use of *whom* and *who* in a direct object position, or the difference between *shall* and *will* when using the future, as well as the rule about the two negatives in English producing an affirmative (Lowth, 1762: 139; cited in van Kemenade, 2006: 540), as if it were a mathematical statement. He is often known as “the responsible for introduction the proscription against ending a sentence with a preposition” (Barber et al., 2009: 218). His grammar was influential and had followers, including the “well-known Lindley Murray, as well as James Buchanan’s *The British Grammar* (1762), and John Ash’s *Grammatical Institutes* (1763), the latter “designed as an easy introduction to Dr. Lowth’s *English Grammar*” (Baugh & Cable, 2009: 259).

Amongst those imitators was Lindley Murray with his *English grammar* (1795), thought as material for a local girls’ school. It was so popular that school grammars were based on Murray’s up until the mid-twentieth century (Crystal, 2006: 108-109). Murray also promoted the correctness in the same way Lowth did, with titles such as “Of purity”, “Of property” and “Of precision” included in the appendix. *Purity* refers to using only English words and avoiding borrowing from other languages. By *property*, he meant “the selection of such words as the best usage has appropriated to those ideas which we intend to express by them; in

opposition to low expressions” (Murray, 1795: 251), as well as avoiding ambiguous terms or overuse of words. Furthermore, precision meant avoiding “superfluities” (Murray, 1795: 257), advocating that care should be taken to choose accurate words. He also sought *Perspicuity*, which meant “quality of style”. Despite this, it seems that not every aspect of grammar can be reduced to clarity, precision and origin of words, and sometimes he and other prescriptive grammarians proposed unrealistic rules that were bound to be broken (Crystal, 2006: 120). Moreover, as Barber et al. (2009: 215) claim, “no language which is being used can be prevented from changing”. And this is something that those prescriptive grammarians overlooked.

Precisely, John Walker strongly condemned language variation regarding pronunciation in his 1791 publication *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*. With this work, Walker wanted to do with pronunciation “what Johnson had done for vocabulary and Lowth for grammar” (Crystal, 2019: 81). Additionally, it warned against the peculiarities of other people’s language varieties, accents or dialects, such as Scottish or Irish. In fact, he stated in his preface that the diversity of pronunciation was “ridiculous and embarrassing” (Walker, 1791: 6). In *A Dissertation on the Causes of Difficulties, Which Occur, in Learning the English Tongue* (1762), Thomas Sheridan argued the same. He wrote, “Nothing could bring about a union more effectively than a common language” (Sheridan, 1762: 213; cited in Singh, 2005: 178). In both cases, they considered that accent variation did not follow a standard to be vulgar and incorrect. But it was impossible to keep the language in a cage, to eliminate regional accents.

Even so, the nineteenth century, preceded by the codification of language rules into grammars and dictionaries (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 3), saw both the triumph of English linguistic variation and the culmination of linguistic prescriptivism. It was also a century in which English grammars were prolific, although they were often repetitive and scholastically naïve (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 4).

3.2. Prescriptive prerogatives towards the variation of *-ic* and *-ick*.

The suffix *-ic* has not always had the same form, the list including *-ik*, *-ique*, *-ike*, *-icke*, or *-ick* which, at some point, standardized to *-ic*. There was a high level of variation in ME and EModE, when the issue still seemed not to bother the writers of the time. But, by the end of the EModE, once several reformers such as Hart or Mulcaster had already made the first efforts to simplify the language, English spelling started to seem more regular. Then, it is likely that the number of variants for *-ic* decreased by this time. In any case, Berg & Aronoff

(2017: 13) notice that the crossover point of the suffixes *-ick* and *-ic* was in the mid-eighteenth century. Originally, the dominant form was *-ick*, which gradually declined after that point, and thus, *-ic* became dominant from then on.

By the mid-eighteenth century, “most of modern orthography is in place, and only minor matters like *-c* rather than *-ck* (*musick*, *publick*) remain to be sorted out” (Romaine & Algeo, 1992: 11). At that time, several important dictionaries and treatises had already been published or were in the process of being published. One of those was Johnson’s *Dictionary* in 1755. About the letter *c*, he said: “*C*, having no determinate found, according to the English orthography, never ends a word; therefore, we write *stick*, *block*, which were originally *sticke*, *blocke*, in such words”. However, many other writers were later starting to omit the final *-k* in words of two or more syllables, “and this practice is gaining ground, though it is productive of irregularities; such as writing *mimic*, but *mimickry*” (Murray, 1795: 21). Moreover, Johnson only proposed monosyllabic words that, according to Crystal (2013: 193), had had the spelling *-ck* for centuries. The problem was with longer words, which nobody quite knew how to spell them properly. The word *politic*, for example, had been written in more than 50 different forms by the eighteenth century, such as *politike*, *pollitick*, or *polyticque*, in which the combination of letters <c> and <k> were used in many different ways. Noah Webster, who claimed that the *-ck* spelling was an “absurd” practice (Crystal, 2013: 199), proposed the spelling without the final <k> as a more natural and easier one and then, *-ck* was definitely condemned to disappear. In fact, Lowth (1762) already wrote *public*, *traffic* or *politic*, whereas Johnson had *publick*, *traffick* or *politick*. And Murray, at the end of the century, took the same line as Lowth. Even Murray’s dictionary did not deal with spelling rules such as that: to know whether *-ic* or *-ick* were to be used, “the reader was evidently expected to consult a dictionary” (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 48). By the 1760s, “the *-ic* spelling had become common practice” (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 109) over the Johnsonian spelling.

While it is true that the prescriptive attitudes during the eighteenth century were influential in the spelling variations of *-ic* and *-ick*, it is also true that actual usage played its role too since people before Johnson had already dropped the final *-k* from words like *music*.

4. CHAPTER FOUR. METHODOLOGY.

The literature review has provided insight into the high spelling variation and fluctuation in the EModE period. Though “by 1650 the printed word was already characterized by a

remarkable degree of orthographic uniformity”, there were still a few conventions that distinguished the spelling of that time with the PDE, amongst which it could be found “the spelling *-ick* for the suffix *-ic* and *-or* for BrE *-our*, and of capitalization to signal content words, especially nouns, often for expressive foregrounding” (Nevalainen, 2006: 36). In fact, English spelling became stabilized in the eighteenth century practically completely (Scragg, 1975, cited in Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 39). In this paper, the forms of the suffix *-ic*, specifically *-ic* and *-ick*, are analysed. Despite the efforts of prescriptivism, this suffix displayed still some variation at the beginning of the LModE (Gorläch, 1991, cited in Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 39-40). Considering all, it seems appropriate to examine both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the suffix *-ic* and its main variations to discover how these variant forms have evolved until their final configuration in PDE, or what words were affected, among other questions.

4.1. The Corpora.

The source data come from the *Early English Books Online* corpus (henceforth, EEBO), since it offers sizeable input which can be used both quantitatively and qualitatively (Pacheco-Franco & Calle-Martín, 2020). EEBO consists of an online collection of 25,368 texts with a total of 755 million words, which makes it a comprehensive collection of early modern English printed works. The corpus includes texts ranging from the 1470s to the 1690s, providing sufficient information to investigate any linguistic aspect occurring at this time. Table 1 shows the number of words of the corpus per decade. As seen in the table, this corpus began with 712,130 words (and only 18 texts) in the 1470s and ended with over 79 million words in the 1690s (in 2,999 texts), so it gradually increased throughout the EModE period (Davies, 2017). Many factors contributed to this increase, including the arrival of the printing press, the proliferation of texts from the Renaissance on, to name a few.

Decade	Words	Decade	Words	Decade	Words
1470	712,130	1550	7,219,423	1630	42,826,013
1480	3,706,937	1560	16,084,901	1640	47,129,000
1490	1,992,503	1570	26,927,229	1650	99,452,875
1500	1,288,091	1580	31,955,245	1660	63,491,742
1510	946,117	1590	24,105,385	1670	74,600,805
1520	3,042,934	1600	40,031,223	1680	92,583,947
1530	7,099,997	1610	42,901,535	1690	79,719,722
1540	8,709,681	1620	38,550,967		

Table 1. Number of words per decade in EEBO.

Additionally, the corpus has also been POS tagged, semantically tagged, and lemmatized, which provides users with several ways of displaying and analysing the data. As a final note, it was developed by Text Creation Partnership as part of the SAMUELS project (2014-2016), with special acknowledgment to Mark Davies, retired Professor of Linguistics, who designed, collected, edited, and annotated this and other distinguished corpora (Davies, n.d.). Overall, this corpus proves to be a valuable source, principally due to its chronology and size, for studying English language variation and, specifically, the *-ic* suffix and its variants during the EModE period.

Among Davies' corpora are two others used in this analysis. They are the *Google Books Corpus* (for BrE) and the *Corpus of Historical American English* (henceforth, COHA). The *Google Books Corpus* has been chosen because it is an online collection of texts available for free, with over 34 billion words for BrE only, covering a span from 1500 to 2010 and allowing the researcher to choose the periods to investigate (Davies, 2011). The period 1700-1850 has been chosen for this dissertation, when spelling had virtually stabilised in English (Scragg, 1975, cited in Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009: 39). Table 2 shows the number of words per decade of the *Google Books Corpus*.

Decade	Words	Decade	Words	Decade	Words
1700	21,333,058	1760	90,989,751	1820	827,916,605
1710	29,092,710	1770	97,065,629	1830	922,372,712
1720	36,181,979	1780	117,759,090	1840	1,075,235,205
1730	39,472,414	1790	188,160,772	1850	1,288,015,007
1740	47,042,924	1800	400,357,812		
1750	77,009,435	1810	533,526,506		

Table 2. Number of words per decade in *Google Books Corpus* (BrE).

As in EEBO, words, lemmas, POS, or collocates can be searched, and data can also be compared in two sections of the corpus. It is a tagged corpus that also enables a “qualitative analysis of linguistic and cultural trends as reflected in millions of books written over the past five centuries” (Lin et al., 2012: 169). It also gives the possibility to view the data in an interactive *Google Books Ngram Viewer*.

Furthermore, the COHA has also served to provide raw data for a diachronic study of some of the suffixes under study in AmE, just to check if they behave as in BrE. The corpus is a rather large one, containing more than 100,000 texts from fiction and non-fiction, magazines, newspapers, and other sources, for the period 1810- 2010, totalling 475 million words

(Davies, 2010). The data in this corpus is also easily searchable by decades for words, phrases, or grammatical constructions. Additionally, it is an annotated corpus, for “lemma and POS tags using CLAWS” (Rayson & Garside, 1988, cited in Alatrash et al., 2020: 6959).

4.2. Data retrieval.

This is a qualitative and quantitative analysis, based on the information extracted from the different corpora. In order to conduct the data analysis, the ten most frequently occurring nouns found in EEBO were selected: *catholic*, *ethic*, *logic*, *magic*, *music*, *physic*, *politic*, *practic*, *public*, *republic*. All of them are two or more syllable words, the ones affected by the final <k> dropping, since shorter words did not lose their final <k> due to a pronunciation issue (the kind of doubling <ck> which had traditionally served to mark that the vowel preceding was short). These ten words were searched with different forms for the *-ic* suffix, the list including *-ik*, *-ique*, *-ike*, *-icke* and *-ick*. There were many other variants; in fact, the word *music* could be found in more than forty different forms (Crystal, 2013: 193-194), basically because EModE was a very fluctuating period when words were not strictly fixed yet.

Once the ten words and the six different suffixes are selected, the frequency of the words with these suffixes will be examined. Then, the frequency of each suffix is noted down in a table, per decade, from the 1470s to the 1690s. All of these are raw figures that need to be normalized. Since each decade has a different number of words, it is necessary to use figures that are normalized to a common base to compare the results to be analysed. In order to normalize the EEBO, the *Google Book Corpus (BrE)* and the COHA data to a common base, the raw data for each decade was multiplied by 10,000,000 and then divided by the total number of words in each particular decade. This calculation is shown in Equation 1.

$$\textbf{Normalization} = \frac{\text{raw figure} * 10,000,000}{712,130}$$

Equation 1. Normalization for decade 1470 in EEBO.

5. CHAPTER FIVE. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

This chapter presents the diachronic analysis of the suffix *-ic* and its variant forms to determine whether there was a competition between them in the history of English in the attempt to determine whether there is a particular pattern of use in the period.

5.1. Diachronic analysis of the suffix *-ic* and its variants.

5.1.1. The Early Modern English period.

As shown, Figure 1 presents the development of *-ic/-ick* along with the other variant forms in the period. At first sight, several claims can be made. First of all, it seems true that there was little effort to standardize the language before the sixteenth century, since different forms of the suffix were used at the time, with more or less frequency. Thus, the spelling was rather erratic, the suffix *-ic* in particular. In addition, it is important to remember that the printing press did not appear until the end of the fifteenth century (1476), and that from that moment on, the production of new texts increased, so a higher variation can be observed several decades before its arrival, since more texts and words – without a standardized spelling regarding the suffix under study – were in circulation (EEBO collects only 18 texts for the 1470s, whereas there are 2,999 for the 1690s).

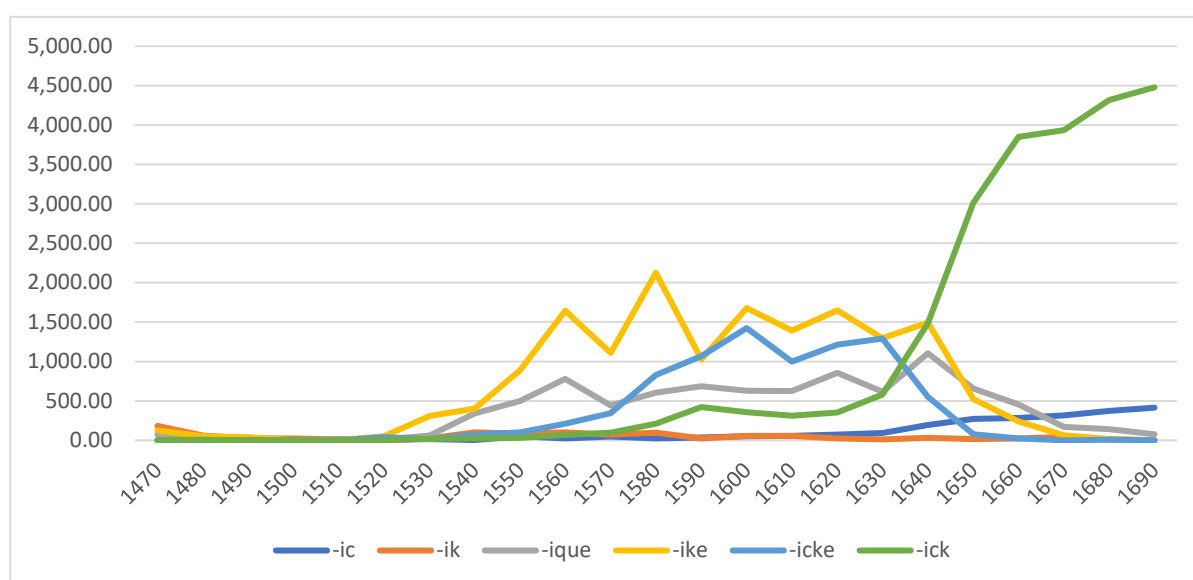


Figure 1. Frequency of *-ic* and its variants in EEBO.

As shown, the variant *-ik* was the most common form until the 1470s, and then gradually faded out until it almost became a marginal form. This seems quite logical if taking into account that, in the sixteenth century, there was a renewed interest in etymology and in the similarities between English and Latin (and thus French) words and, in view of this, the letter <k> by itself may seem alien and not similar to Latin. Thus, the use of Latin (and French) forms such as *-ique*, *-ike*, *-icke* and *-ic* was preferred, and their frequency increased, as can be appreciated in Figure 1. These variants increase and decrease one after another. From the 1520s onward, the frequency of *-ike* increased, reaching its peak during the 1580s and gradually decreased after the 1640s; *-ique* followed a similar trend, increasing during the

1530s and declining after the 1640s; and *-icke* increased slowly after 1540-1550 and decreased dramatically after 1630s. Especially for *-ike* and *-icke*, it seems that Mulcaster's advocacy of the use of the *silent -e* at the end of the word to facilitate pronunciation may have influenced too. After they decreased, they eventually became marginal suffixes. Additionally, the mid-seventeenth century was also a convulsive period with several civil wars, the abolition of the monarchy, and the establishment of a republic, which may have had its effect on the language, together with recommendations such as the ones made by Sprat, who advocated for simplifying the language, avoiding rhetoric and classical vocabulary which impeded clear thinking (Crystal, 2006: 62). Thus, his ideas may have influenced the decrease of atypical or overly complex endings too, such as the ones described above.

As a result, only two variants under study remained in use at the end of the EModE period: *-ic* and *-ick*. The former probably began to be used for the same reasons as the three others above, since it is also a suffix derived from Latin and French. Gradually it gained popularity from 1540, but more quickly after 1630, just as the other variants began to decline. The *-ick* suffix, on the other hand, began to be more frequently used from the 1570s, and its use increased drastically when the other variants except *-ic* began to decline, between the 1630s and the 1650s. By the end of the EModE, *-ick* became the dominant form.

In summary, there seems to be no genuine competition between the *-ic* and *-ick* spellings in EModE, though it seems logical that there should have been one at some point, since *public*, *music*, and *republic* are rendered with the form *-c* in PDE instead of their variant forms with *-ick*. Hence, it can be argued that this competition happened throughout LModE.

5.1.2. The Late Modern English period.

The LModE period was the key moment towards their transition to PDE. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the development of these two suffixes (as the rest remained as marginal forms and have been discarded for further analysis), based on data taken from the *Google Books Corpus* (BrE) and the COHA.

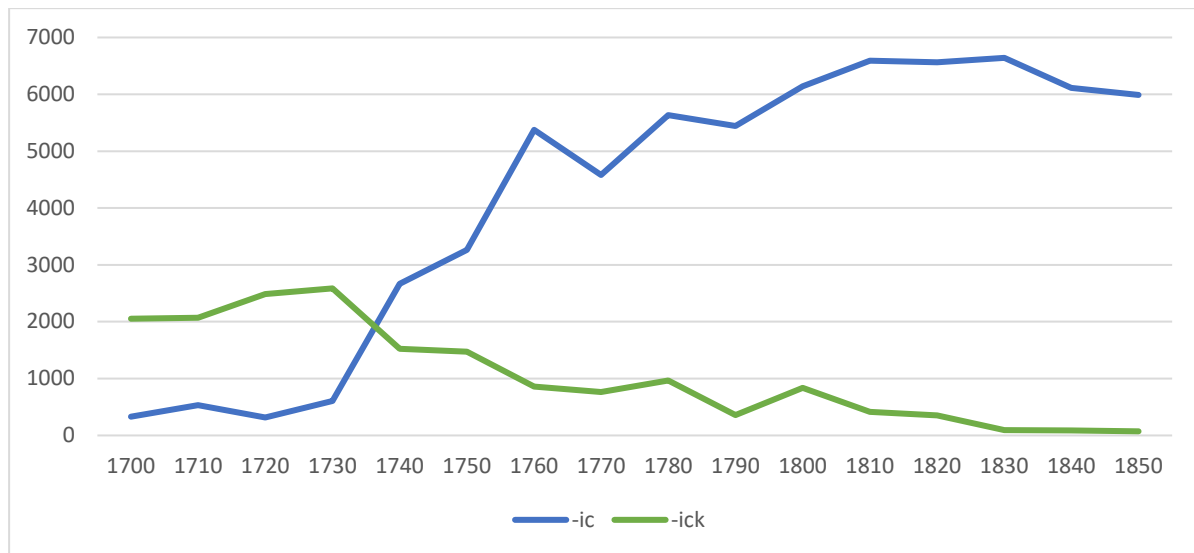


Figure 2. Frequency of *-ic* & *-ick* in *Google Books Corpus* (BrE).

As shown in Figure 2, *-ick* is preferred over *-ic* in the first decades of the eighteenth century. It is around 1730 when the real competition begins. Several English authors and members of the Royal Academy were advocating for an English spelling reform at the turn of the century. Their goal was to make English as perfect and refined as “those of Italy, Spain or France”, being aware that the “Latin Tongue, in its Purity, was never in this Island (...), neither was that Language so vulgar in Britain, as it is known to have been in Gaul and Spain” (Swift, 1712: 9). There is a good chance that this was a reason why the form *-ic* (which resembled the Latin suffix *-icus* more) gained ground over its counterpart *-ick*, which did not resemble Latin that much. The rise of the novel and the increasing interest in reading among the middle class may also have contributed to the spread of *-ic* over *-ick*. Many people had already chosen to omit the final <k>, especially when using two or more syllable words. In fact, by the time Johnson published his *Dictionary* (1755), the turning point between *-ic* and *-ick* had already occurred and, from this moment on, the former grew rapidly, remaining dominant, while the latter decreased and, generally speaking, became a marginal form by the turn of the nineteenth century.

Similarly, Figure 3 presents the distribution of both forms in AmE: by the 1820s, there was no competition in the United States (hereafter, US), as the suffix *-ick* was already negligible while the suffix *-ic* was the preferred form.

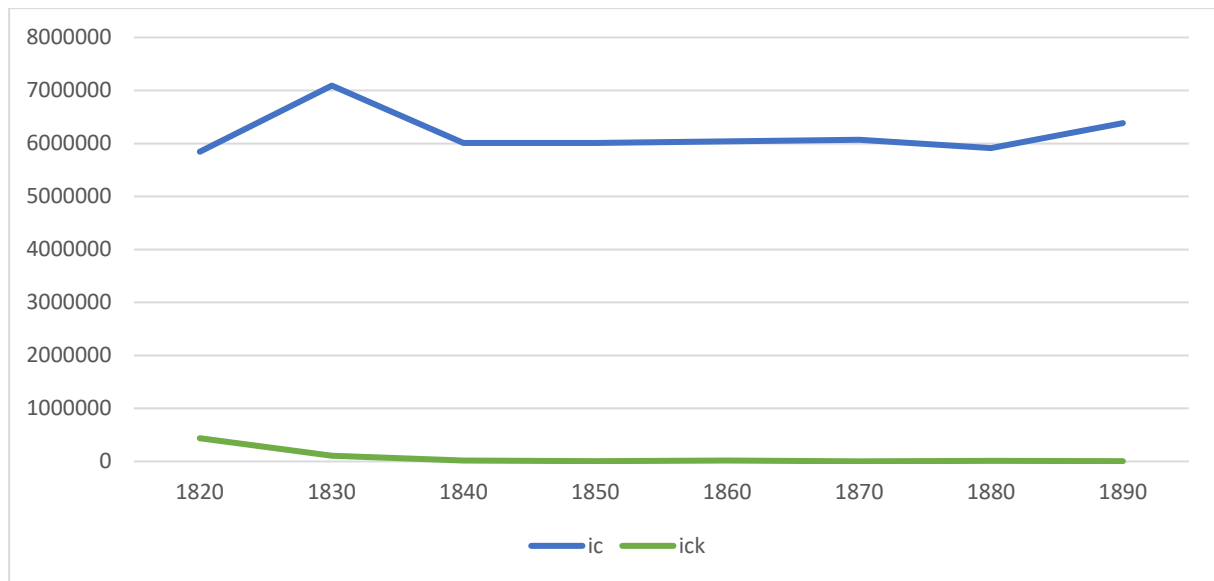


Figure 3. Frequency of -ic & -ick in COHA.

Although Webster's *Dictionary* at the turn of the nineteenth century probably influenced the continued use of the suffix -ic over its counterpart -ick, the preference for the former seems to have begun decades earlier, as there was no competition in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In conclusion, it can be gathered that the suffix -ic has been the dominant form since then, partly because of the spelling reforms coinciding with cultural and historical events that may have contributed to the spread of one form over another, and partly because of the decisive contribution of AmE.

5.2. Particular study cases.

5.2.1. The case of *public*.

Public is a noun of multiple origin, probably originating from Latin (*pūblicus*) and entering English through French (*public*, *publique*), so it can be considered to be of Anglo-Norman origin (OED, n.d.). EEBO lists it as the most frequent two-syllable noun with the -ic form. Figure 4 illustrates the occurrence of this word along with the most frequent variants of the suffix -ic, which coincided with the development of other words under study, such as *catholic*, *republic*⁶, *music*⁷, *magic* and *logic*.

⁶ Between the 1640s and 1660s, the -ic spelling for *republic* had a peak (not surpassing the -ick spelling). It can be hypothesized that this was due to the emergence of the *Commonwealth of England* (1649-1660), governed as a republic (Grant et al., 2019: 172). The republic was born in Rome, so it might be taken as an attempt to make this word resemble Latin and its institution. At this time, Sprat was also recommending a clearer language. The rest of its evolution is as expected, as for the word *public*.

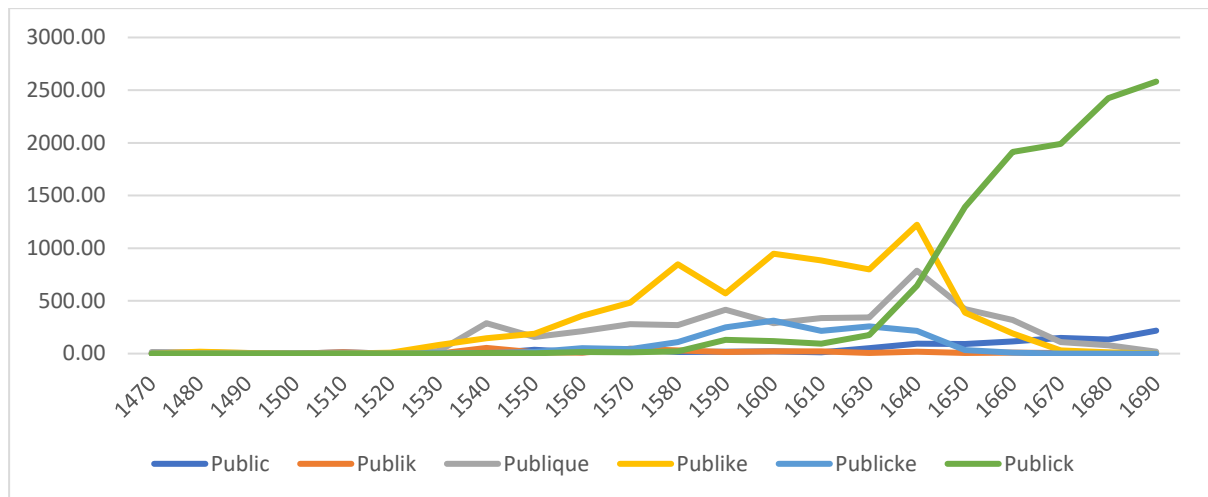
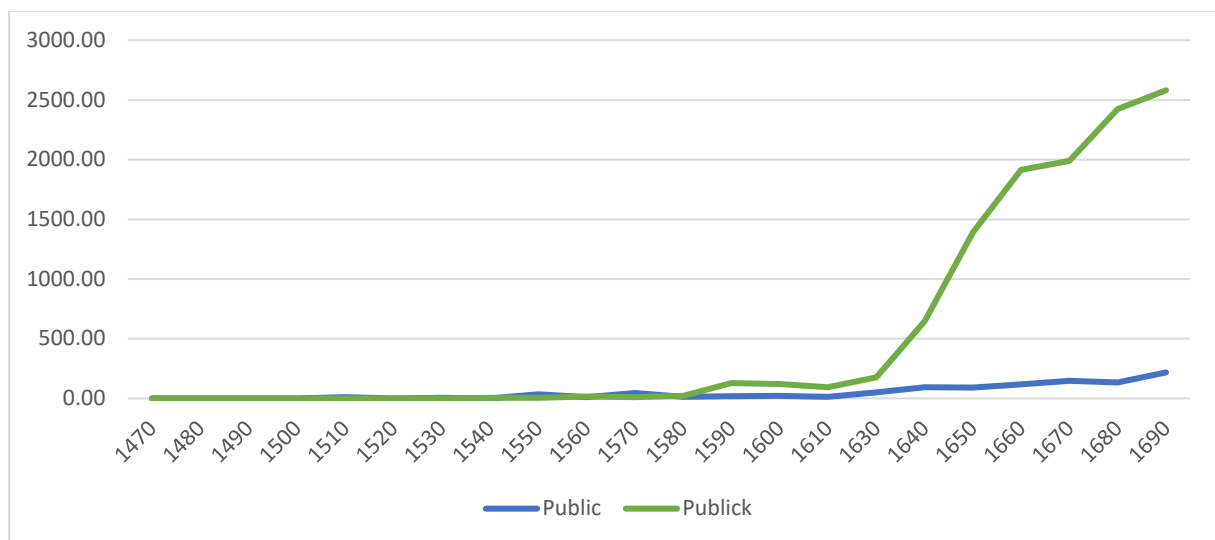


Figure 4. Spelling variation of *public* in EEBO.

There was no competition among these variants, but simply different forms emerged and then died out. The only two suffixes which remained in use at the end of the EModE period were *-ic* and *-ick*. Figure 5 shows the development of these two variants, where a minor competition between them can be observed in the period from the 1540 to the 1580. After that, the *-ick* spelling was obviously preferred. The loss of the final <k> was a minor development that still was to happen by 1700, though the process of stabilization of the language in general was already complete by this time (Scragg, 1975: 80).



⁷ *Music* finally stabilised in the 1780s after a long competition between the *-ic* and *-ick* spellings that began around the 1720s according to *Google Book Corpus*. There were over forty different ways to write this word (Crystal, 2013: 193) in the EModE era. This demonstrates that the word was widely used in different fields by people with different backgrounds, and this may explain why it took more time for the *-ic* suffix to become the dominant form.

Figure 5. Spelling variation of *public* in EEBO.

The choice of *-ick* over *-ic* ending may reflect the wish to keep Latin and French borrowings as close to their etymologies as possible in the sixteenth century (Crystal, 2013: 153-174); so, if this word entered from French, it is likely to have entered with the *-ick* spelling, and so, it was preferred. Although the competition appears to be over, it can be hypothesized that there will be another later, because *publick*-type words are not found in PDE. Figure 6 seems to corroborate this.

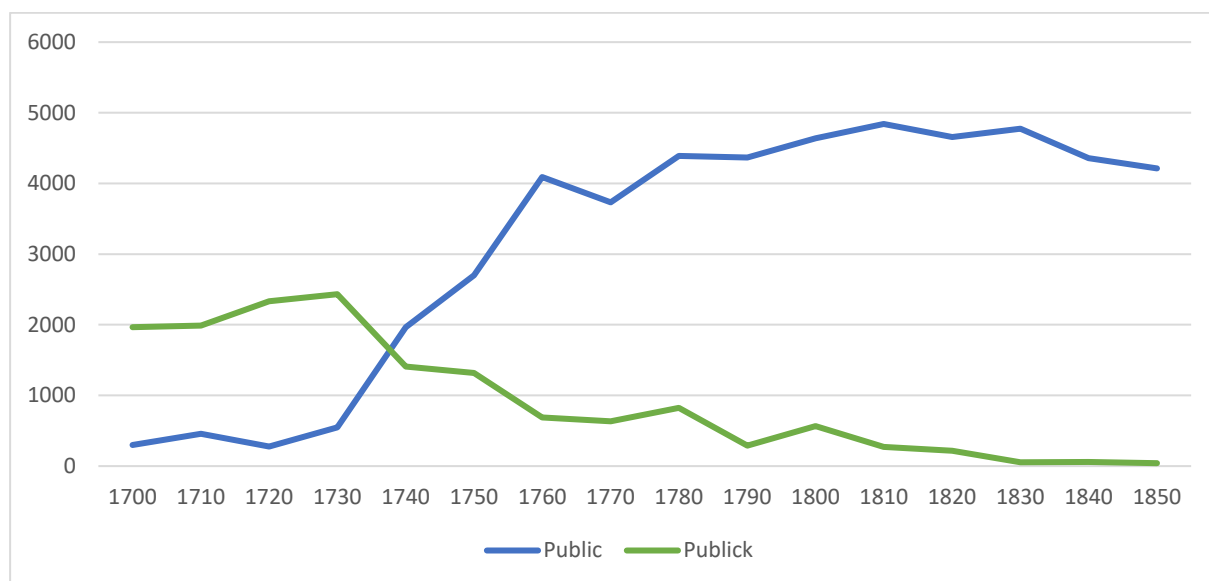


Figure 6. Spelling variation of *public* in Google Books Corpus (BrE).

In the LModE period, their frequency of use changed dramatically, which led to some kind of competition in the first decades of the eighteenth century, probably because of the authors' claims to imitate the Latin spelling (thus, no <k> needed), who advocated for the elimination of language corruptions. After 1730, there was a rapid increase in the use of *-ic* and a decrease in the use of *-ick*, with a turning point around 1740 (the average date of starting the stabilization for *-ic* suffix, except for *music*). This suggests two ideas: the first is that the common nouns which entered in English with an *-ick* spelling did not remain as such, but changed to *-ic*. Additionally, Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) seems not to have had any direct impact on this suffixal competition. In fact, he recommended the use of *-ick*. Its use during the 1760s and 1780s was somewhat maintained, but eventually decreased and ceased to be used for *public*-type nouns. According to the data from the COHA, Webster's *Dictionary* (1828) may not have had a direct influence on this spelling either, since the preference for the *-ic* spelling existed at least from the 1820s (see Figure 7). This also happened with the rest of the words under analysis. Nevertheless, his advocacy for the *-ic* spelling may have prevented the change.

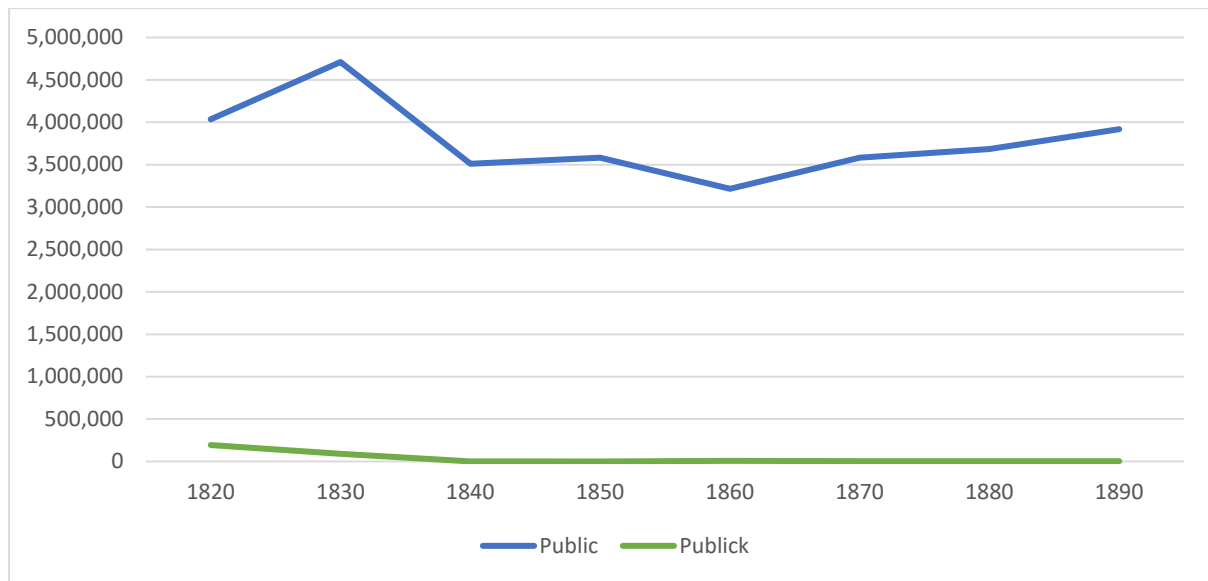


Figure 7. Spelling variation in *public* in COHA.

5.2.2. The case of *practic*.

Practic is also a noun of multiple origin, probably coming from Latin (*practice*) through French (*practik*, *pratique*), thus considered of Anglo-Norman origin. It refers to the application of rules and principles, obsolete in PDE (OED, n.d.). In fact, it was largely superseded by the noun *practice*. This word follows a similar path to the ones analysed above, except that the spelling competition between *-ic* and *-ick* appears as early as the 1510s, when peaks in use can be seen, as shown in Figure 8.

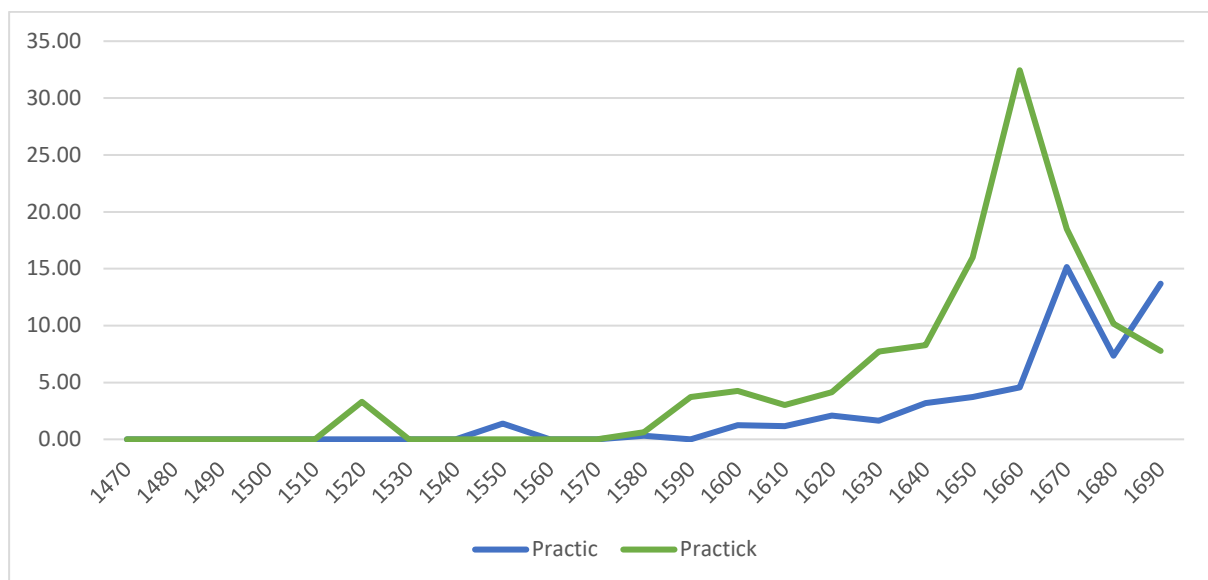


Figure 8. Spelling variation of *practic* in EEBO.

Since both suffixes tend to increase, the instability in Figure 8 that goes from 1510 to 1580 is not common in the other words. The irregularity became even more evident throughout the LModE period, as shown in Figure 9.

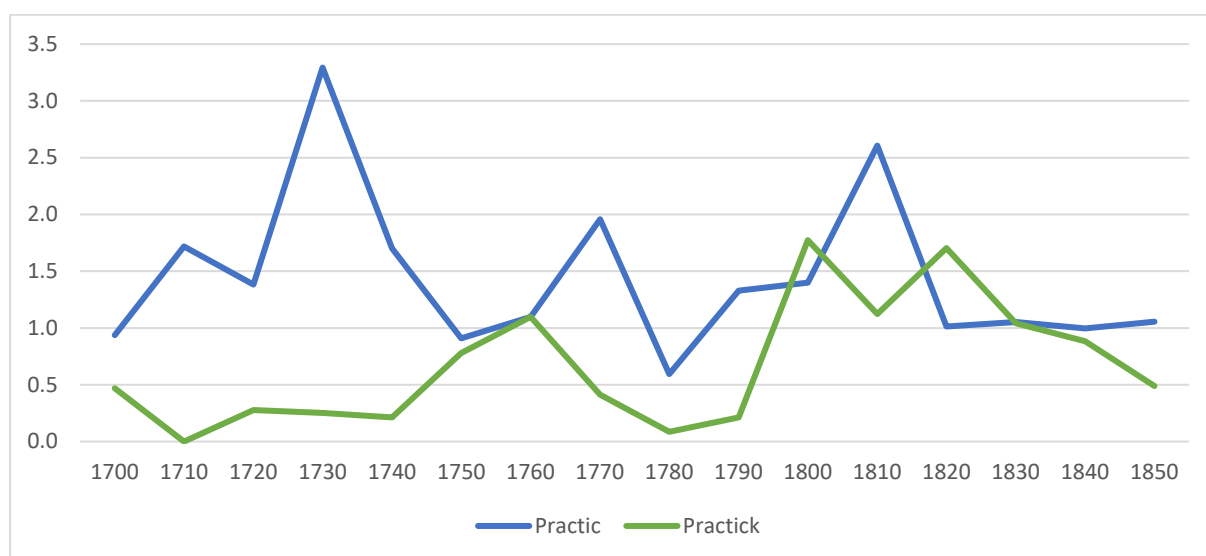


Figure 9. Spelling variation of *practic* in Google Books Corpus (BrE).

At first sight, there might not seem to be any logical explanation for this distribution. Nevertheless, the OED (n.d.) states that *practic* was replaced by *practice*, so its frequency has been also evaluated and it can be said that, because of its existence, the forms *practic* and *practick* did not develop normally. It can be explained by what Aronoff described as “blocking” (1976: 46, cited in Pacheco-Franco & Calle-Martín, 2020: 176): the “non-occurrence of one form due to the simple existence of another”.

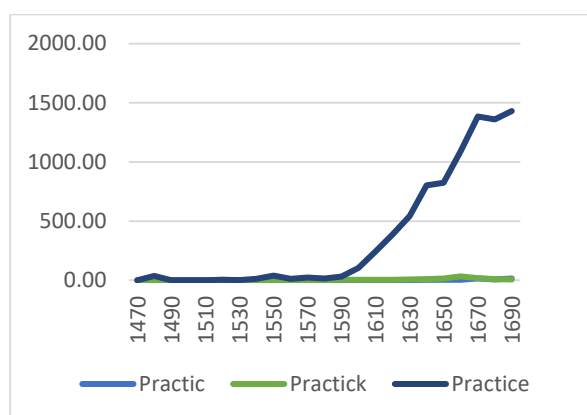


Figure 10. *Practice* in EEBO.

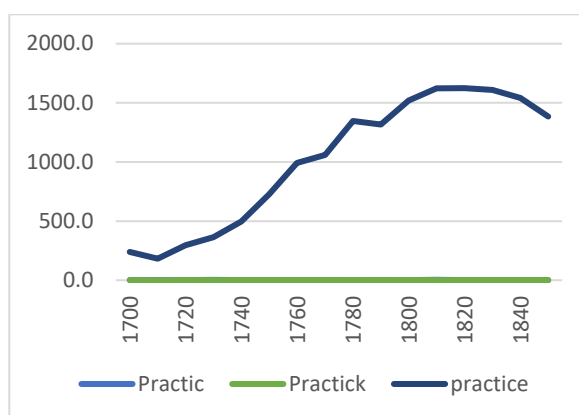


Figure 11. *Practice* in Google Books Corpus (BrE).

While *practice* was not completely well-established in the system before the entry of *practic* or *practick* into the language (as it is required for blocking to happen), *practice* has always been far more frequently used than the others, even during such a fluctuation period as the EModE, so its usage became dominant and made that the other forms of the word eventually

died out as well. Thus, it is plausible to hypothesize that this is one of the reasons why the word *practic* is rare in PDE.

5.2.3. The case of *physic* and *politic*.

Physic is a noun that is partly derived from French (*physique*) and partly from Latin (*physicum*, *physica*), an Anglo-Norman word that meant the science or art of medicine, as well as a drug. According to the OED (n.d.), *politic* referred to the art or knowledge of government; its use in PDE is obsolete, and it derives from Latin *politicus* via French *politique*. Both terms evolved as expected during the EModE: there was a preference for the -*ick* spelling over the -*ic* suffix, as shown in Figures 12 and 13.

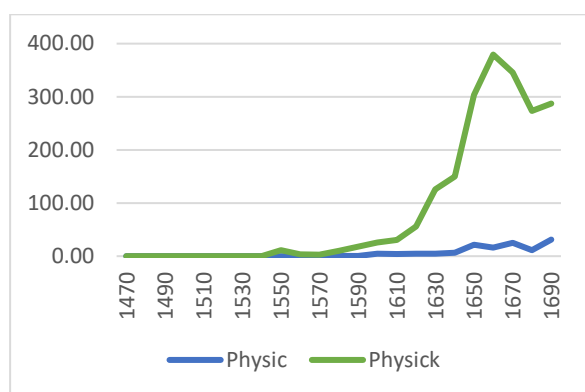


Figure 12. Spelling variation of *physic* in EEBO.

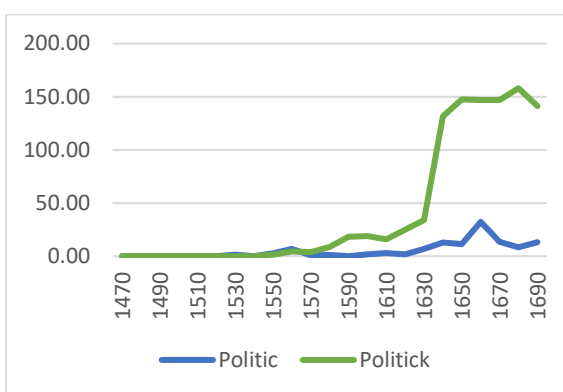


Figure 13. Spelling variation of *politic* in EEBO.

Since these words were also borrowed from Latin and Greek and served as names for treatises and sciences, it is expected that the -*ics* spelling would somehow prevent the evolution of the -*ic* and -*ick* spellings. It did, but in the LModE period, as shown in Figures 14 and 15. Moreover, though Figure 16 does not show a real blocking yet, it can be hypothesized that it will do so later, as in PDE, as *physics* becomes more frequent than the archaic form *physic*. Additionally, a *semantic specialization* occurred: while *physiscs* remained in English to refer to the natural sciences in general (and it was formed within English by conversion (OED, n.d.), modelled on a Latin lexical item), *physic* ceased being used to describe the natural sciences and was instead used to characterize medicine, or physicians collectively, or medical treatment, all meanings now archaic. However, because the pair *physic/physics* were used with a semantic differentiation, they both remained in the language, while the -*ick* spelling practically disappeared from English.

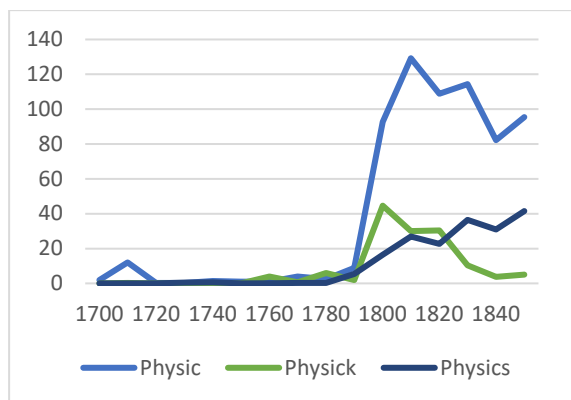


Figure 14. Spelling variation of *physics* in Google Books Corpus (BrE).

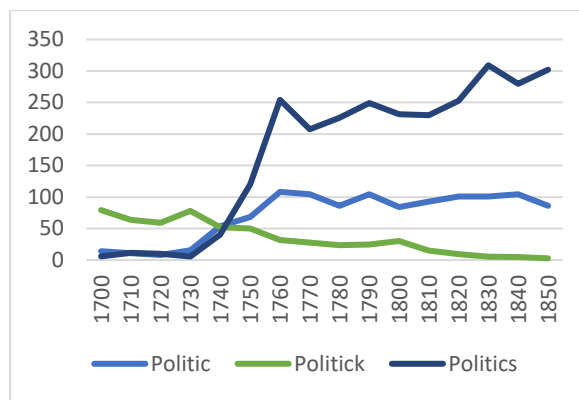


Figure 15. Spelling variation of *politics* in Google Books Corpus (BrE).

Similarly, the term *politic* ceased to be used in the sense of government in favour of *politics*. However, the former remained in the language, used mostly as an adjective and as a part of some compound nouns. This may help explain why the *-ic* spelling for this word did not disappear. Nevertheless, in both cases, the *-ic* suffix appears to have stabilized over the *-ick* spelling, which remained marginal. Interestingly enough, the competition among the three spellings ended later in the case of *physic*, perhaps because of its semantic specialization, whereas *politic* started its stabilization in the expected date.

5.3. Conclusion.

In the EModE period, all the nouns used for this analysis underwent critical changes in their endings, since words had not yet been fixed. There were several forms of the *-ic* suffix, but the most dominant forms were *-ic* and *-ick* at the end of the EModE period. Though by the 1690s there was no real competition between the two suffixes yet, it is assumed that there must have been one because the *-ick* form has eventually disappeared in PDE with two or more syllable nouns (this spelling has been kept just in combination with one-syllable words today). There was then a competition between these two suffixes in the first decades of the LModE period. The 1740s marked off the turning point in their development with the increased use of *-ic* and the progressive decrease of *-ick*.

In the particular case of some terms, the development is not that straightforward, perhaps as a result of the introduction of a new word (*practice*) or a new suffix (*ethics* or *politics*), blocking the normal development of the existing spellings, or as a result of the semantic specialization of a sense of a particular word (*physic* and *physics*).

The adoption of *-ic* over *-ick* before the publication of prescriptive works such as Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) in Great Britain or Webster's *Dictionary* (1828) in the US suggests that

these prescriptive works may not have had a direct influence on this particular spelling. Johnson, on the one hand, recommended the use of *-ick* but actual usage shows the preference for *-ic*. Webster, on the other hand, advocated the adoption of *-ic*, and this very form was already widespread by the time his dictionary was published.

6. CHAPTER SIX. CONCLUSIONS.

This research has examined the historical development of the *-ic* suffix and its variant forms from EModE to the eventual stabilization of the former in the middle of the eighteenth century. The study illustrates the continuous changes that the English language has undergone through its history and how *-ic* was far less frequent than *-ick* by the end of the EModE period. The *-ic/-ick* competition started at the beginning of the LModE period and the turning point is witnessed in the decade of the 1740s, when the *-ic* spelling became the dominant form. In fact, by the mid-nineteenth century, the *-ick* form became practically marginal in nouns.

The study also sheds light on the prescriptive attitudes towards this spelling forms in the period, concluding that they exerted little or no influence in the adoption of *-ic* in English. In the particular case of Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), it was found not to have a significant impact on the adoption of *-ic*. Johnson's efforts in "fixing" the language helped to consolidate English spelling more than ever before emphasizing the concept of correct spelling, but by this time, the *-ic* suffix was the dominant form among English authors, even though its use was slowed down in the 1760s and 1770s, possibly as a result of Johnson's prerogatives. Webster, on the contrary, recommended the *-ic* form as a way to distinguish AmE from BrE, but his recommendation was not positively received as this spelling was already widely used in AmE when Webster published his *Dictionary* (1828).

Furthermore, the analysis of particular words has revealed that they developed differently. This is the case of *practic*: the high degree of instability of this word can be explained by the emergence of *practice*, which acts as a blocking agent. The analysis of the word *physic*, in turn, shows that semantic specialization might have played a role in the development of this word.

Hence, an interesting future line of research is concerned with the study of one syllable nouns and adjectives with these suffixes to determine whether they developed in the same way as more than one syllable nouns. This study may also serve as a starting point for the study of

spelling variation with these and other suffixal doublets in other varieties of English worldwide.

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