Marco Bagli
University of Genoa

Heark, *Hark Ye*, *Harkee*: A History of Forms

Abstract

The present paper investigates the relationship between Early Modern English spelling fluctuation and grammaticalisation, by looking at the evolution of the different forms of the pragmatic marker *harkee*, which emerged from an imperative matrix clause headed by the verb *hearken/hark*. The phenomenon of spelling fluctuation intervenes at multiple levels in the data and in the process under scrutiny. Firstly, the verbs that constitute the matrix clause present alternative spelling forms, with or without the digraph <ea>, and with or without final <e>. Secondly, an attentive review of the grammaticalisation process of the pragmatic marker *hearkee/harkee* reveals that this form emerges from a constellation of alternative spelling forms at the end of the 17th century. This paper offers a quantitative analysis of the occurrences of the different spelling forms of the verbs in the matrix clause from which the pragmatic marker emerged. Furthermore, it provides empirical data towards models of the syntactic development of pragmatic markers, by mapping the frequency of evolution of distinct syntactic environments in Early Modern English.

1. *Introduction*

The pragmatic marker *harkee/hearkee* developed in Early Middle English (hence, EME), lived through Late Middle English, and disappeared in Present Day English. The Corpus of Contemporary American English does not contain any occurrence for the sequences *harkee/hearkee*, and the Oxford English Dictionary does not have a separate entry for this form. Yet, the online corpus Early English Books Online (hence, EEBO) contains tokens with both spellings. As a matter of fact, EEBO reports more than 'just' these two spellings: variants for this pragmatic marker include *harkey, harke'ee, heark'ee*, just to name a few.

The form *harkee/hearkee* have developed from the auditory verb to *hearken* /hɑːkᵊn/, which may also be spelled as *to hark* /hɑːk/ (OED, *hark*, v.). According to the OED, the Early Middle English *herkien* may derive from an Old English type **heorchian*. Corresponding forms of this verb may be found across the spectrum of Germanic languages: e.g., Old Frisian *herkia*, *harkia*, Middle Dutch *horken*, *horcken*, Middle High German and modern German *horchen*. The relationship with the verb *to hear* is not specified by the OED, yet the Online Etymology Dictionary suggests the form *hark* may be an intensive form based on the verb *hieran*, the Old English form of the verb *to hear*. The usage of the intensifier suffix *-k* may also be observed in English pairs such as *tale/talk*, *steal/stalk*.

EEBO contains yet other spelling variants of the verb forms in the imperative (1-4):

(1) **Harke** vnto me good syster, I say that we should lament theyr deth (1545)
(2) But **Hearke** what tragedies he makes. (1561)
(3) **Heark**! I hear his voice (1664)
(4) **Hark** ye, sir, what have you been doing all this while (1699)

The OED reports two separate entries for the two forms of the verb, which are glossed as follows (5-6):

(5) hearken, v.
    1. *intransitive.* To apply the ears to hear; to listen, give ear.
    †2. To listen privily; to play the eavesdropper; to eavesdrop.
    3. *intransitive.* To apply the mind to what is said; to attend, have regard; to listen with sympathy or docility.
    4. *transitive.* To hear with attention, give ear to (a thing); to listen to; to have regard to, heed.

(6) hark, v.
    1. *transitive*. To give hear or listen to; to hearken to, hear with active attention.
    2. a. *intransitive*. To give hear, hearken, listen.
    2. b. *absol*. Chiefly in *imperative*.
    2. c. In the imperative the nominative *ye* is often added (also written *hark'ee, harkee*); less commonly *hark you*, and by confusion *hark thee* (cf. *fare thee* well).

The two forms show perfectly assimilable meanings, despite their confusion in spelling. According to the OED, the form *hark* followed by second person pronouns has coalesced into the pragmatic marker *harkee*.

At a closer look at the EME data, the pragmatic marker emerged from a clause matrix consisting of verbal forms presenting different spellings. A usage-based account of the history of these forms and of their linguistic development is at the core of the present paper. The process that has led to the formation of the pragmatic marker started in EME, as observed by Brinton (2008; 2010), a period of the history of English that has witnessed many changes and subsequent instability of linguistic forms and their spelling (Nevalainen 2006, 31-6). Example (7) illustrates the meaning of the pragmatic marker:

(7) This is more intricate still, i can't understand either of 'em: **harkee**, come hither, did not you bring me a letter lately for which i gave you money, sir? (EEBO 1698)

Although traces of the literal, perceptual meaning glossed by the OED (*hark, v.*, 3c) remain in (7), the context of the utterance suggests that the item *harkee* is not used referentially, but interpersonally, i.e., to convey an interpersonal and pragmatic meaning. I understand the main pragmatic function of the discourse marker in (7) as to attract the attention of the addressee of the utterance. Thus, the item *harkee* in (7) conveys a different meaning than the other occurrences of the verb *harken* (8), which retains the literal meaning of the verb, i.e., its perceptual and auditory meaning.

(8) If thou think that Baptisme can not be taken for geuing of the holy ghost, **harken** what Iohn the baptist sayth of our Sauiour Christ, math and him self. (1560)

The present paper aims at describing the evolution of the different forms of the pragmatic marker *harkee/hearkee*, starting from the distinct spellings of the verb that are present in EEBO, and how these forms relate to the pragmatic marker spelling alternation. The data were retrieved by means of a corpus analysis of the occurrences of the distinct forms in EEBO, and they were processed through the software R, using the packages dplyr and ggplot2 (Wickham 2016). The script and the data analysed are available at the following link: github.com/marbagli/harke. The objective of the study is to support with quantitative data the theoretical description of the development of the forms *harkee/hearkee* proposed by Brinton (2008; 2010), in analogy to the forms *lookee, lookey, looky*.

The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction, I offer a theoretical assessment of discourse markers in grammar and of relevant theoretical

models of their semantic and syntactic evolution. Following a detailed methodology of the coding of the data retrieved, I present the results of the analyses, before offering some concluding remarks. The paper aims at answering the following research questions: what is the difference in the syntactic behaviour, if any, between the different forms of the verb? What can spelling variation tell us about the grammaticalisation pattern of the discourse marker? Furthermore, when did the phonologically reduced form *harkee* appear, and how did it develop in EME? The results of this investigation will shed light on a phenomenon of spelling alternation in EME and contribute to future research in standardisation processes.

2. *Pragmatic Markers, Interjections, Inserts*

Pragmatic markers are a controversial group of lexical items. They are often not considered a separate word-class, rather a group of lexical items that constitute a function class (Hansen 1998, 357-8; Bazzanella 2006, 451), whose members may belong to distinct word-classes, such as adverbs, prepositions, or conjunctions. Interjections share some formal and pragmatic features with pragmatic markers, and recent historical pragmatic accounts have argued for a prototypical approach to the descriptions of the two categories (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013; Bagli 2023). Only recently have interjections and pragmatic markers exerted an interest in formal linguistic accounts: both are mainly found in oral registers, are typically thought of as a sign of poor style and have been considered an idiosyncratic expression of subjectivity (Brinton 1996, 2). These characteristics have hampered the development of formal descriptions of these phenomena. Contemporary linguistic accounts instead recognise the centrality of conversation and of the oral medium in linguistic theories (see for instance Dingemanse 2023), and technological advances in the digitalisation of historical texts has fostered the development of historical approaches to pragmatics. Central to this renewed interest in a diachronic account of conversational practices is the digitalisation of large quantities of historical linguistic data. EEBO is perhaps the most notable example of this joint effort towards digitalisation of historical texts.

Biber et al. (1999) group interjections and pragmatic markers under the label of 'inserts', that is, a class of words which are characterised by their inability to entertain syntactic relations with other structures in the sentence (Ibid.: 1082).

The more central members of the class of inserts typically display six defining features: "a) they may appear on their own, i.e., not as part of a larger grammatical structure; b) on the other hand, they may appear attached (prosodically, or, in the transcription, by absence of punctuation) to a larger structure, which may be a clausal unit or a non-clausal unit; c) they rarely occur medially in a syntactic structure; d) they are morphologically simple; e) they are not homonyms of words in other word classes; f) semantically, they have no denotative meaning: their use is defined rather by their pragmatic function" (Ibid.). Together with interjections and discourse markers, the class of inserts includes items such as greetings and farewells, attention signals, response elicitors and response forms.

In a diachronic perspective, pragmatic markers may develop from an array of different forms and functions, such as adverbs, conjunctions, Noun Phrases, verbs, and even entire clauses (Brinton 1996; 2001; 2008).

According to Bazzanella (2006), pragmatic markers perform three main functions: cognitive (e.g., procedural/inferential, epistemic, illocutionary meanings); interactional (e.g., attention-getting, hedging, turn-taking, agreement-disagreement), and metatextual (e.g., text marking, reformulation). The three different functions may be performed by the same item, and the different functions need not exclude each other. The item *harkee/hearkee* is analysed in the present contribution as an attention getting device, which is used by a speaker to attract the attention of the addressee to what is being said, or to some other contextual cues. Thus, the meaning of the pragmatic marker, despite maintaining some traces of referentiality, performs a more generic pragmatic function. This is evidenced by the absence in many contexts of a direct auditory referent[1], which would be expected in a more literal and perceptual interpretation of the verb form *hearken*.

2.1 *Semantic development of pragmatic markers*

The process that leads to the emergence of pragmatic markers has traditionally been seen as a process of 'bleaching' of semantic content. Traugott

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1 For instance, in the sequence "hark, mother, harke" (EEBO 1590) the noun "mother" may be understood as a direct auditory referent, i.e., someone who could interpret the imperative form *harke* in its perceptual meaning.

(1982) instead argued that lexical items including pragmatic markers follow a general semantic-pragmatic path that allows them to develop their pragmatic meaning. Three tendencies were identified by Traugott and König (1991, 208-9), namely a) a shift in meaning from externally-based to internally-based, b) a shift from externally-based or internally-based meanings to textual meanings, c) a progression towards subjective meanings based in the speaker's belief or attitude. These tendencies have been further modified to include more complex scenarios and paths of development (see, for instance, Traugott and Dasher 2002). Brinton (2008, 26) unifies different lines of research in a simple and effective formulation of semantic change that goes from referential (propositional) meaning to non-referential meaning (pragmatic, metalinguistic, procedural). The semantic development of new meanings is driven by a wide array of processes, such as metaphorisation and metonymisation. For instance, Heine et al. (1991, 45-61) discuss how more abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete ones through metaphor, while Brinton (1996) observes that pragmatic markers emerge in contexts that allow a metonymic shift from one conceptual domain to another. In the case of the verb *hearken*, the path that leads from the propositional, perceptual meaning to the pragmatic, non-referential meaning of *harkee* may be accounted for as a conceptual metaphor. The metaphorical shift from the merely perceptual level to the heedfulness level had already occurred in the roots of both forms of the verb before entering EME, and had already become part of their semantic construal, as testified by the two glosses of the OED. The metaphor that had driven this process may be formalised as HEARING IS HEEDING. This metaphor instantiates a common path of semantic change in Indo-European languages, which was identified and discussed by Sweetser (1990, 37-8). This trajectory of meaning expansion connects verbs referring to audition to meanings referring to heedfulness, as in English expressions such as *I hear you* (meaning 'I understand you') or *listen to me!* (meaning 'do as I tell you') (Sweetser 1990, 41). This metaphorical meaning has crystallised in a form meaning 'pay attention' used in the imperative form, and it came to refer to a general call for attentiveness, not only referring to the immediate conversational context. The development of this pragmatic meaning may be characterised also as a conceptual metonymy, following the model PARTICULAR STANDS FOR GENERAL.

2.2 *The Syntactic Development of Pragmatic Markers*

Pragmatic markers may evolve from a wide range of distinct syntactic sources: word-classes as varied as nouns, adverbs, verbs, conjunctions may develop new pragmatic meanings, but even phrases and clauses, as in the case of comment clauses (Brinton 2008). Brinton (2010, 299-301) recognises several distinct paths of development of pragmatic markers that have been identified by scholars in the last decades. The evolution of the discourse marker *why* (see Traugott 1982) exemplifies the path from adverb or preposition to conjunction to discourse marker. Lexical items such as *indeed, in fact, besides* were analysed by Traugott (1995) as instantiating a path from predicate adverb to sentential adverb to discourse marker. Some pragmatic markers may evolve from matrix clauses, typically following a cline from first-person matrix clause to indeterminate matrix-clause/parenthetical matrix clause (e.g., *I think*, Thompson and Mulac 1991; *pray/prithee,* Akimoto 2000, see also Brinton 2008); and from relative/adverbial clause to parenthetical discourse marker (e.g., *what's more*, Brinton 2008). The path of development that is most relevant for the present discussion, however, is that from imperative matrix clause to indeterminate structure to parenthetical discourse marker, exemplified by the development of *mind (you), say, see, look/ lookee,* and *harkee/harkey* (Brinton 2001; 2008; 2010). This path of development involves an initial stage in which the imperative form of the verb is typically followed by a subordinate clause introduced by a subordinating conjunction, such as *that, how,* or *what* (in the case of *look*, Brinton 2001, 182). A following stage is represented by the loss of the subordinating conjunction, thus giving rise to syntactic configurations in which the subordinated clause follows the verb with a zero subordinator, in sentences such as "[*Look*] [*you be not late*]*", which in turn fosters the third stage of the grammaticalisation cline, namely rebracketing of the construction to "[*Look you*] [*be not late*]" (Ibid.: 187). Crucially, the author suggests that the pragmatic marker *harkee* follows the same path of development (see also Brinton 2008, 199-200). Thus, the appearance of the attention-getter pragmatic marker *harkee* is analysed as a phonologically reduced form of previous sequences in which the imperative form of the verb is followed by one of the forms of the second person pronoun *ye, yee, you,* or *thee*.

In the case of the verb look, the pragmatic and non-referential meaning had already developed before EME. As a result, the evolution of the different syntactic scenarios proposed by Brinton (2001; 2008) are to be found across

a wider temporal frame. The present paper however exclusively concentrates on EME, thus hampering the possibility of verifying Brinton's claim. Nonetheless, the corpus analysis of EME occurrences provides empirical and usage-based support to the theoretical description proposed by the author.

3. *Methodology*

The research consisted of two subsequent and independent phases. In the first stage, I retrieved the different forms of the verbs from which *hearkee/harkee* emerged, and I analysed the occurrences of imperative forms in all their spelling variation. These forms were retrieved by interrogating the corpus using wildcards in the following sequence: *h*rk**. The aim of this initial stage was to capture the different forms in which the imperative matrix clause could be encoded. This yielded four different spelling variants of the root, exemplified in (1-4). Table 1 illustrates the numerical details of Frequency of the forms. The first column reports the form of the verb, the second column reports the rough number of occurrences displayed by EEBO, while the third column reports the actual number of occurrences retrieved. The two figures are not equal because some occurrences are missing from the 'Context' tab on englishcorpora.org, thus making it unequal to the total number of occurrences displayed in the 'Frequency' section.[2] Despite having analysed the imperative forms of the verb, some of the occurrences retrieved were not used as imperative, but as either infinitive or indicative. The number of these cases is displayed in the fourth column, while the fifth column reports the number of occurrences after cleaning.

FORM	OCCURRENCES DISPLAYED	ACTUAL OCCURRENCES	INFINITIVE/ OTHER	AFTER CLEANING
hark	2307	2299	24	2275
harke	1764	1761	124	1637
heark	840	836	39	797
hearke	424	424	59	365

Table 1. Spelling variants retrieved from the search *h*rk**.

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2 The 'Context' tab is the section of the corpus in which the concordances are displayed; the 'Frequency' section instead reports the overall number of occurrences.

As way of example, (9) and (10) report two occurrences in which *harke* was used in the infinitive or in the indicative, respectively:

(9) [...] they refused t **harke**, &; pulled away their sholder. (1595)
(10) [...] like hounds, they **harke**, and barke about. (1641)

I assigned the remaining occurrences to distinct categories reflecting four types of syntactic configuration in which the form appeared. The categories are distinguished by letters. These are: S for subordinate clause with subordinator, P for parenthetical/absolute usage, O for direct object and/or zero complementizer, and V for vocative construction, in which the verb root was followed by either a second person pronoun, or a noun expressing the addressee of the imperative form.[3]

More specifically: occurrences followed by a subordinate clause introduced by a subordinator were categorised as S, as in (11):

(11) **Harke** how the organist most sweetely plaies his Psalmes upon the tone-divided kayes (1640)

The occurrences marked as O are followed either by a subordinate clause with no subordinator or by a direct object, as in (12) and (13) respectively:

(12) [...] **hark** I hear a noise, sure there are more shout within (1670)
(13) [...] **Harke** the poore gentleman, he beginnes his fit (1640)

The occurrences followed by a relative subordinate clause introduced by a relative pronoun, typically *what*, were also counted in this category, as in (14):

(14) [...] of this apostle, **harke** what S. Paule sayth (1580)

The label P instead stands for parenthetical and/or absolute usage, and it mainly contains occurrences in which the lexical forms are severed from the context through punctuation, or in which the imperative is used in absolute terms as an insert as in (15), (see also OED, *hark*, 2b):

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3 The letters chosen to represent the four categories were selected arbitrarily, and they do not necessarily correspond to the first letter of the category (ex. P for Absolute usage).

(15) But codrus, **harke**, the world expects to see thy bastard heire rotte there in misery (1590)

Finally, I labelled as V the occurrences followed by a personal pronoun (16), a noun (17), or an NP with a modifier (18). The label V stands for vocative, and it refers to the function of the NPs that occur after the verb. These NPs typically describe the addressee of the imperative form, as the following examples illustrate. This category emerged from observation of the data, which showed a consistent usage of the imperative form not only in combination with a pronoun, but also with other nominal elements that refer to the addressee of the utterance:

(16) **Harke** ye frechmen ye are but yuell men of warr (1520)
(17) **Harke** brother, ha(r)ke, me thinkes i he(a)re on(e) call (1600)
(18) **Harke** my wench, wilt leaue these rusticke fellowes &; stay with me? (1600)

Some of the results displayed multiple configurations of the verb form, such as (19)

(19) **Harke** whore, harke: harke how i do beleeue (1580)

These occurrences were labelled individually according to the syntactic context in which each appeared. For instance, the first *harke* in (19) was labelled as V, the second as P, the third as S.

The second stage of the research involved the study of the different forms of the newly developed item *harkee* and its spelling variants. These were retrieved with the same wildcard h*rk*, to chart the different forms in which the phonologically reduced form *harkee* was encoded during the first stage of its development.

4. *Results*

A preliminary step in the investigation of the differences between the spelling variants of the imperative form of the verb *hark(en)* was the representation of their frequencies across time. These are mapped in Fig. 1, which was created using the ggplot2 package on R.

4.1 *Distinct Forms of the Verb*

The four different forms of the verb display significant variation in spelling. The couple of *heark/hark* is doubled with other two alternative forms that present a final <e> in the initial stages of the Early Modern period. The four forms have different distribution over time, as Fig. 1 shows.
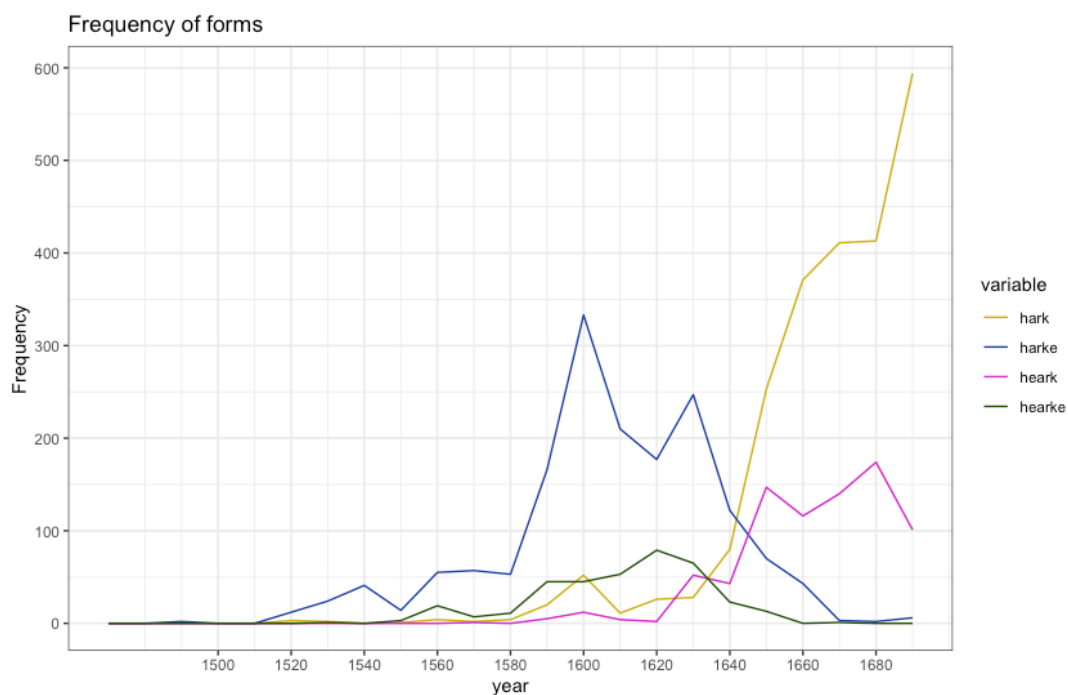

Fig. 1. Frequency of forms over time.

Fig. 1 shows the different distribution over time of the spelling variants. The first form of the verb that appeared more frequently is the variant *harke* in the first decades of the 16th century. It raised in frequency until 1600, when it started to decline until it virtually disappeared in ca. 1670. The variant *hearke* instead appeared more consistently around 1550, and its frequency peaked in 1620, but it never became as frequent as *harke*. The two spelling variants with no final <e> (*hark, heark*) developed in the 17th century, and both became more frequent than their respective variants with final <e> between 1630 and 1650. Particularly, the variant *hark* became the most frequent after 1650, and the occurrences with this spelling rise dramatically towards the end of the century, especially if compared to the other variants. The data analysed are consistent

in showing that *hark* is the preferred spelling for this verb in the second half of the 17th century. The dropping of final <e> is a phenomenon that consistently occurs in the first half of the 17th century, as the graphs in Figg. 2-3 show.
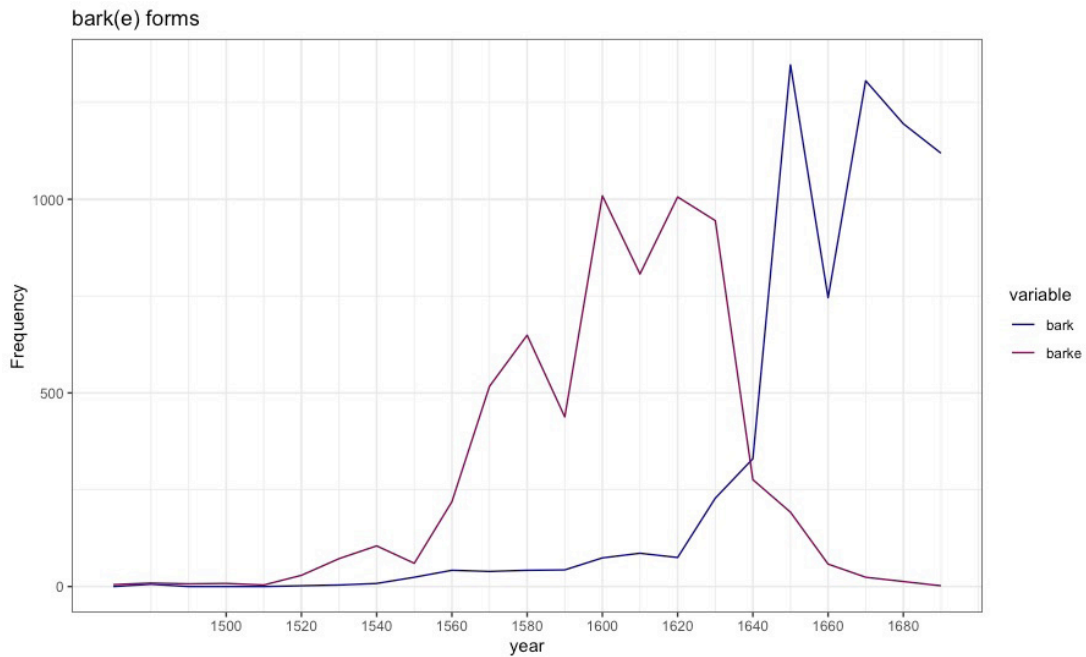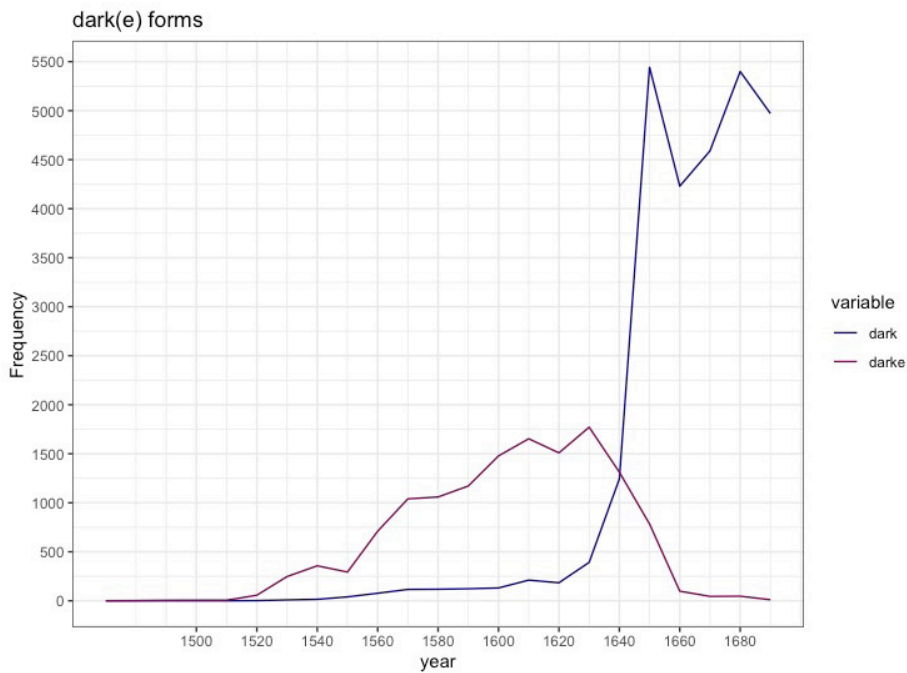

Fig. 2. *Bark(e)* forms.

Fig. 3. *Dark(e)* forms.

The graphs in Figg. 2-3 show the Frequency over time of two couples of alternative forms of *bark* and *dark*. In both cases, the variant with final <e> dropped becomes dominant after 1640, in keeping with the dropping of final <e> in the couple *harke/hark* and *hearke/heark* (Fig. 1).

The figures of the distribution of the couple hark/heark however change completely if we take into consideration the infinitive form of the verb. Fig. 4 reports the Frequency values of the two alternative forms in EEBO. The two alternative forms hearken and harken show different trends of frequency, thus suggesting that the spelling variant with the digraph <ea> is the preferred form in the infinitive mood, while the form hark is the preferred form in the imperative mood (see Fig. 1). The OED notes that:

the spelling harken, which agrees with that of HARK, v., and is at once more regular and of earlier standing, is the accepted one in American Dictionaries, and is preferred by some good English writers; but in current English use it is much less frequent than hearken. The preference for the latter spelling is probably due to association with HEAR, v., supported by the analogy of heart and hearth. (OED, *hearken*, v.)

The data retrieved from EEBO show how this tendency started in EME. The spelling *harken* appears some 40 years earlier than the alternative *hearken*, as reported by the OED.
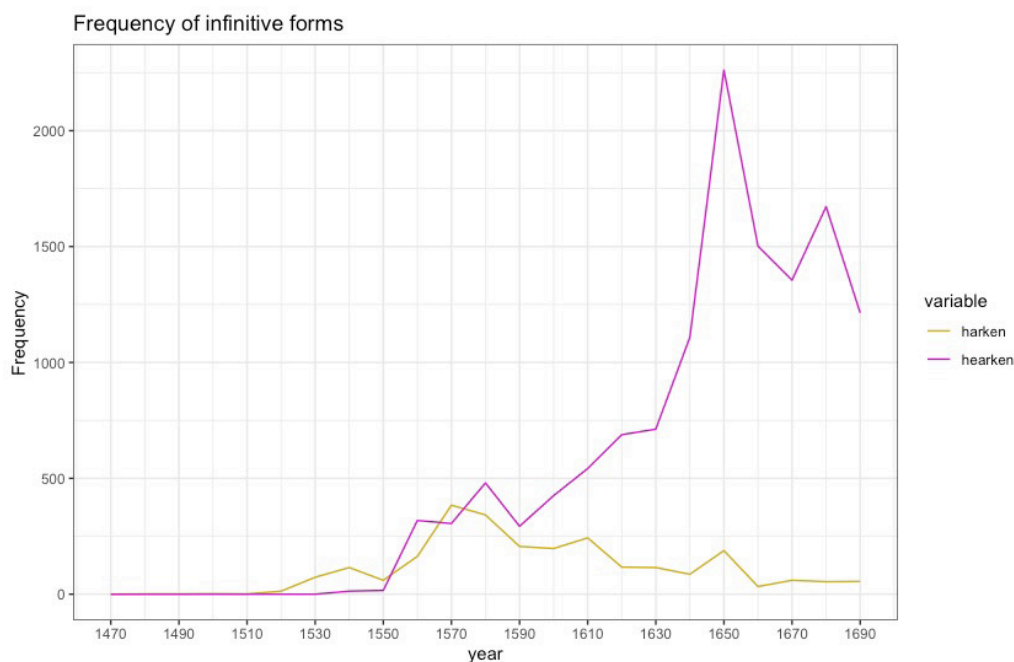

Fig. 4. Infinitive forms in EEBO.

4.2 *Hearke*

The spelling *hearke* is the less frequent form in EEBO. Fig. 5 illustrates the frequency of the four different syntactic configurations retrieved.
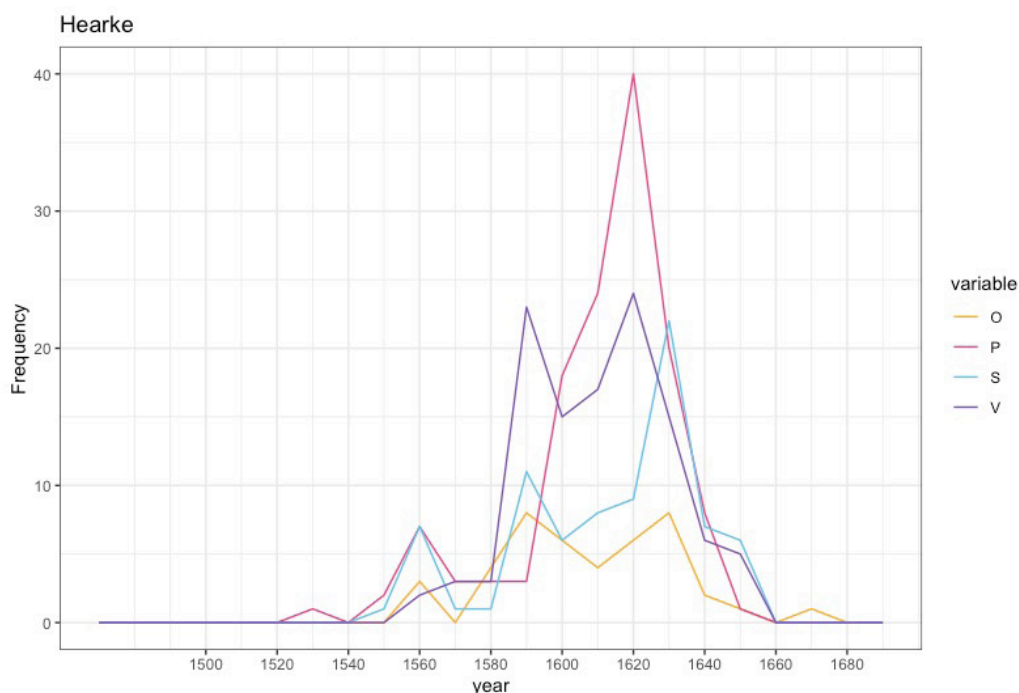

Fig. 5. *Hearke*.

This form is most frequently found in the corpus in the time span 1580-1650. The highest usage is in absolute position (P), followed by the vocative construction. Towards the end of the 16ᵗʰ century (1580-1600) this form was more frequently used in vocative construction than in absolute position. The occurrences in the P and V categories are typical of oral registers of language. Theatrical texts represent one of the privileged registers for the study of spoken interaction in diachrony (Culpeper and Kytö 2010). This is mirrored in the two peaks of 1620 of the collocations in P and V, which are largely due to the appearance in the corpus of Shakespeare's first folio. The O and S conditions are infrequent, although occurrences followed by a subordinate clause peak in 1630s. Examples (20-3) illustrate the different usages.

(20) **Hearke** what Ecclesiastes saith in the xxix chapter, and Iesus Christ in the Gospell likewise (1591, O)
(21) **Hearke**, who lyes i' th' second chamber? (1623, P)
(22) **Hearke** how he blowes his death. (1597, S)
(23) **Hearke** boy, what noise is that? (1623, V)

Fig. 5 displays the different frequency values of the distinct syntactic environments, and suggests that the four conditions, albeit with different frequencies, were all available at the same time for the form *hearke*.
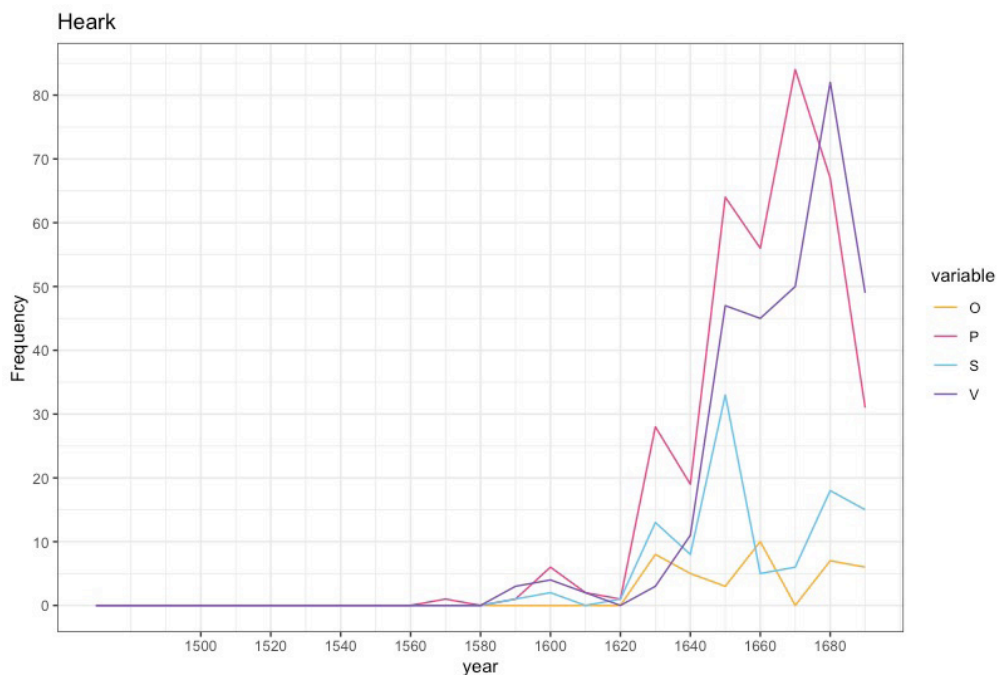
4.3 *Heark*

Fig. 6. *Heark*.

The graph in Fig. 6 shows the distribution across different syntactic configurations of the form *heark* in EEBO. This form becomes more frequent in the 17th century, but some early occurrences in parenthetic position may be retrieved in the last decades of the 16th century (24):

(24) [...] but here commeth his lackie, ho lack **heark**, where is erostato? (1570)

EEBO displays some occurrences for *heark* even in the decade 1560, but at a closer look these are instances of *hearken* that have been spelled with a blank space between the root and the infinitive suffix, as in (25):

(25) [...] but lo, they wil not beleue me, nor **heark** en vnto my voyce (1561)

These occurrences were discarded from further analysis.

   The absolute usage rises in frequency almost immediately: it is the most frequent usage of the form *heark* until 1670s, when instead the vocative collocations become the most frequent syntactic pattern in which *heark* is found. After 1680s, this pattern slowly decreases, while the coalesced forms start increasing (see next section). Occurrences followed by a direct object are infrequent, in keeping with the occurrences of the other spelling variants, while 1630s sees the peak of subordinate clauses introduced by a subordinator. However, occurrences in S condition never become the most frequent across the corpus. Examples (26-9) illustrate the four conditions with *heark*.

(26) Servants listen, **heark** there's some body coming. (1664, O)
(27) **Heark! Heark!** The trouble of the day draws neere. (1635, P)
(28) Let me suck out those billows in thy belly, **Heark** how they rore and rumble in the streets (1653, S)
(29) **Heark** ye, ye Curris, keep off from snapping at my heels [...] (1681, V)

The two configurations P and V are the most frequent in the corpus, and they appear at the same time as alternative syntactic patterns such as S and O. This is consistent with the previous form, in which final <e> dropped in the first year of the 17th century.

4.4 *Harke*

Fig. 7 illustrates the distribution of the syntactic configurations of the form *harke*. In keeping with the other forms, the configurations P and V are the most frequent in the 17th century, while S and O are infrequent. Between 1520-1560, *harke* is mainly followed by subordinate clauses, which may be introduced either by a subordinator (condition S), or by nothing (condition O). The subordinators that are frequently found in this environment are *unto,* and *to* (30-1).

(30) Stande in feare of god, **harke** to the prophecie of the Prophete Hiermy (1540, S)
(31) **Harke** unto me good sister, I say that we shuld lament theyr death (1540, S)
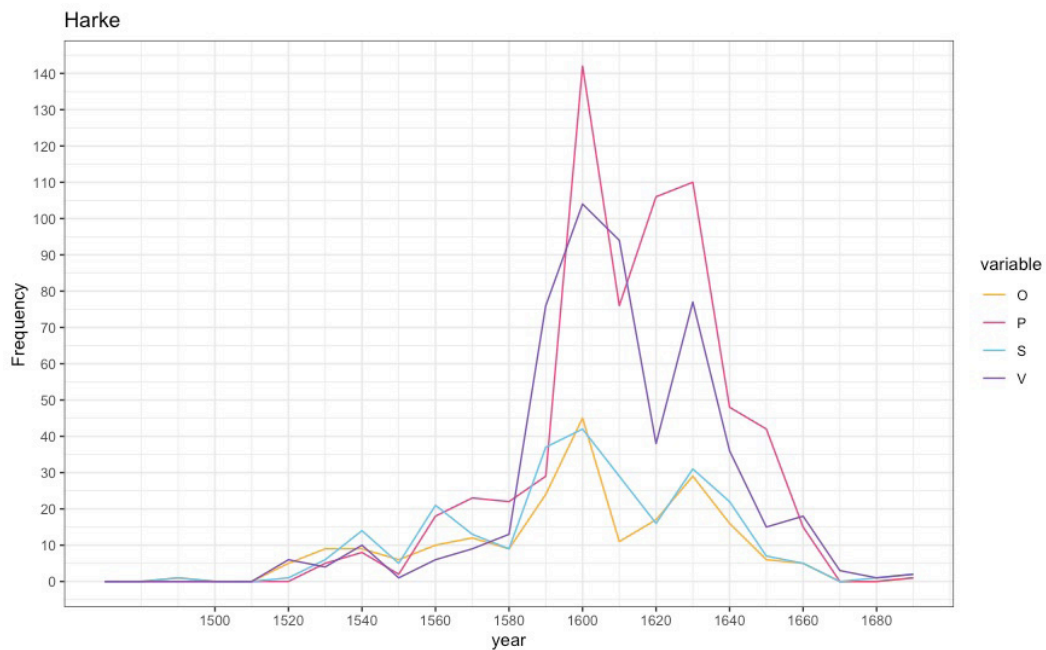

Fig. 7. *Harke*.

In the period 1520-1550 the O configuration is the most frequent, while in the period 1530-1560 the S configuration is the most frequent. This trend resonates with Brinton's observations on the historical development of the syntactic behaviour of these forms, but the figures are so low that they cannot be interpreted as providing support for Brinton's model.

The highest concentration of occurrences is found between 1580-1660. Among these, the most frequent are in either P (32) or V (33) syntactic configuration:

(32) **Harke**, I will tell thee all: whisper in priuate. (1607)
(33) **Harke** you sir, looke what I did promise you Ile Ile performe (1590)

The occurrence in (33) reports one of the first examples of the pragmatic meaning of the form, in which the imperative verb *harke* is found in collocation with the second person pronoun and the term *sir*. It does not literally refer to *harken*, rather, it is used metaphorically to mean 'keep attention'. Furthermore, this occurrence also displays a pragmatic usage of the form *looke*.

4.5 *Hark*

Fig. 8 shows the syntactic configurations of the form *hark*. This form develops toward the end of the 16th century, but it becomes predominant in the 17th century. The two syntactic environments in which this form is mainly used are P and V, in keeping with the frequency of the other forms. The absolute usage is the most frequent. Although it appears later than the other forms, this is the form that reaches the highest number of occurrences, as shown in Figg. 8 and 1. In 1680s, this form reaches almost 600 occurrences. Examples (34-7) show its usage across the four syntactic conditions in 1680s.

(34) **Hark** what the prophet saith, habak (1680, O)
(35) But **hark**; what noise is that? (1683, P)
(36) **Hark** how the angry furies howl! (1685, S)
(37) **Hark** ye sir, a word; how dare you talk of love (1682, V)

The four examples reported show the different usages in the same decade, at a time when this form became more frequent, and the first coalesced forms of the pragmatic marker *harkee* started to appear. The syntactic configurations for the form *hark* suggest that the four syntactic environments are present at the same time, albeit with different frequencies. In the case of the form *hark*, the two configurations S and O are particularly infrequent.
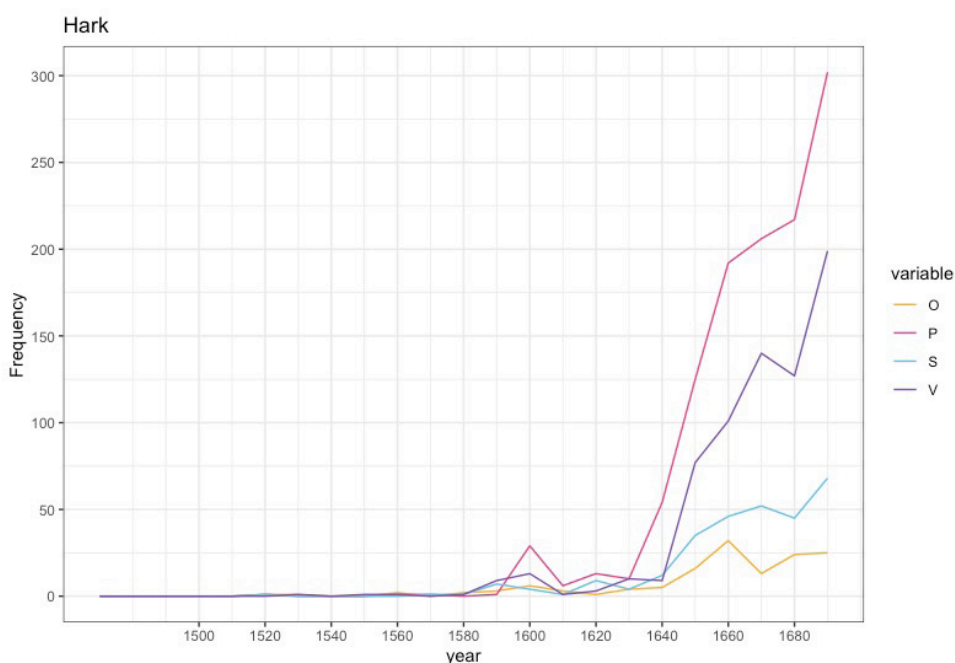

Fig. 8. *Hark*.

4.6 *Interim Discussion of Different Forms*

The detailed study of the syntactic configurations of the different variants suggests that the four alternative forms behave similarly to each other. The two most frequent configurations are those labelled as P and V, in keeping with the imperative mood of the forms. The loss of the final <e> is consistent between the two forms and with other forms in EME. The data retrieved suggest that the different syntactic patterns were available at the same time across the four spelling variants. These data do not support the development of different syntactic environments from a matrix clause described by Brinton (2001; 2008). It must be noted however that the development of distinct syntactic configurations may have happened outside of the period under observation. As a matter of fact, the form *harke* is found in V and P as early as 1520s, thus seemingly having developed this possibility at an earlier stage during the Middle English period, as already showed for other pragmatic markers such as *look* (Brinton 2001).

4.7 *Harkee*

The pragmatic marker *harkee/hearkee* appears in its coalesced form at the end of the 17th century (see Fig. 10). It is a phonologically reduced form of the sequence {*hark/heark*} + {*ye/ you/ thee*}, and it emerges from a constellation of different spelling sequences, most of which are extremely infrequent and represent isolated, idiosyncratic cases. Fig. 9 reports all the possible forms in EEBO that emerged between 1660s and 1690s.

The most frequent form in EEBO is *harkee*, followed by *hark'e, hearkee, hark'ee, harkey,* and *harki*. The alternation between the two roots *hark/heark* is still present, but the variant *hark* is more frequent in the imperative form, and it represents the form that survives in Late Modern English.

The most frequent forms coexist with a vast number of other alternatives, some of which have less than 10 occurrences. These are heark'ee, harkye, hearkey, hark'ye, harke'e, heark'e, hark-ye, hark'y', hark-you, heark'ye, heark'y, heark'ey, hearky', hark'ey. These forms have been discarded from further analyses, considering their low frequencies. Fig. 10 reports the different forms of the pragmatic marker with more than 10 overall occurrences and their development through time.
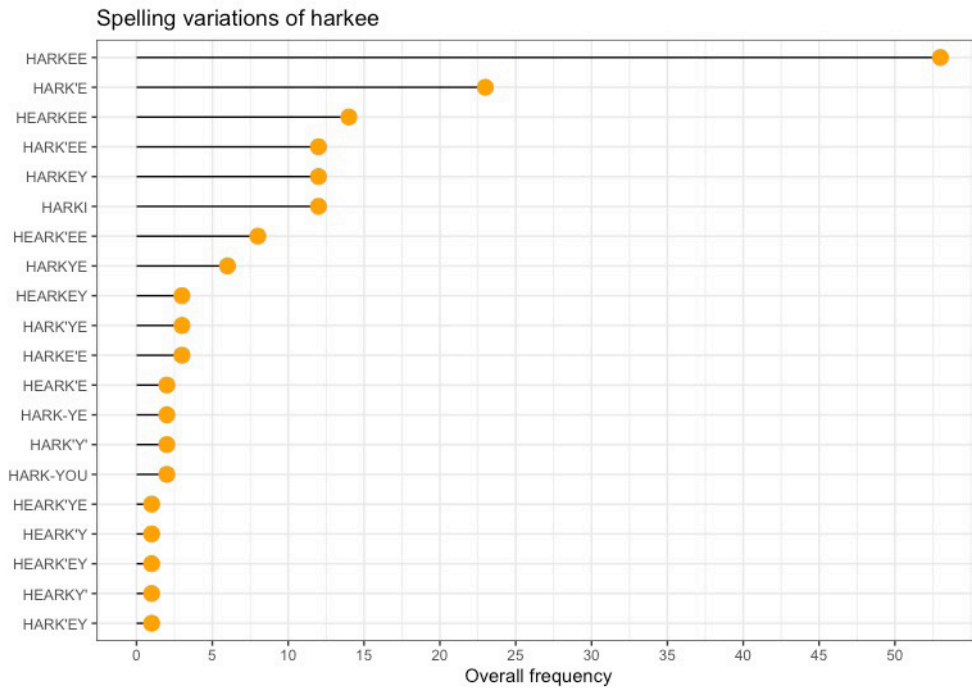
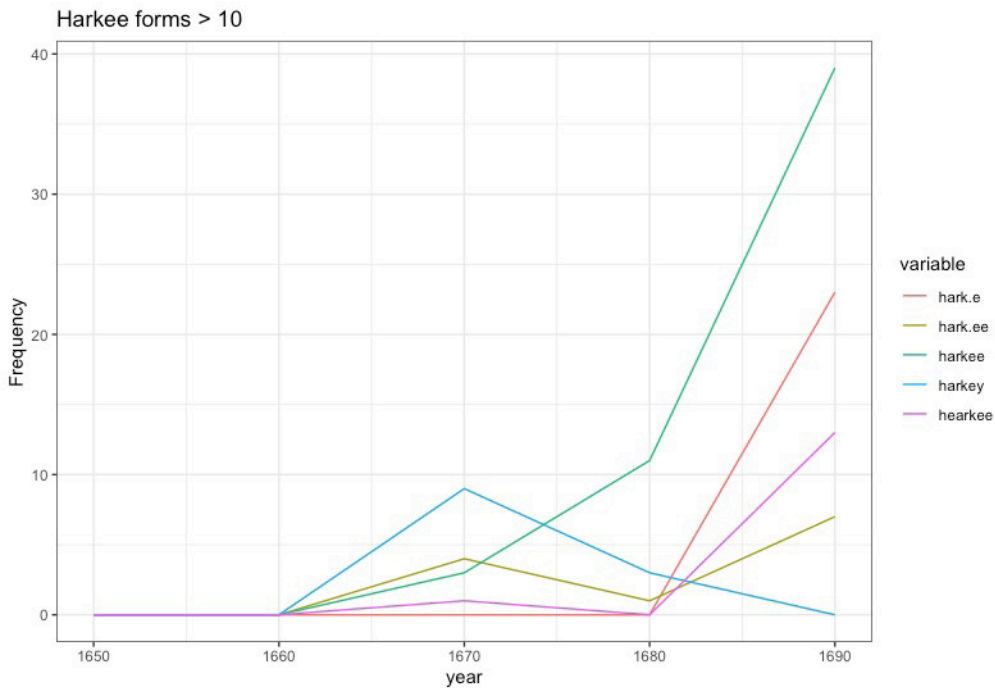Fig. 9. Spelling variations of *harkee*.

Fig. 10. Forms of *harkee* >10.

The most frequent form is *harkee* since 1680s. The first set of occurrences of the new forms may be retrieved after 1660s, but as Fig. 10 shows, the only form that reaches more than 10 occurrences in one single decade is *harkee* in 1680. The second most productive form is *hark'e*, which reaches more than 10 occurrences in 1690. The form *hearkee* presents the alternative spelling with the digraph <ea>. The form *hark'ee* seems rising towards the end of the century, but it still is extremely infrequent. The interesting aspect of this form is the presence of the apostrophe, which testifies to the omission of the letter *y* of the personal pronoun *ye*.

The proliferation of different forms concentrated in less than 20 years shows that the standardized form arises from a constellation of variants with different spelling, which have coexisted for several years. It must be noted that the forms retrieved and discussed are only limited to those that emerge from EEBO, and do not take into consideration regional or dialectal versions, which may add further forms to this complicated picture emerging from EEBO.

Duly, the occurrences in the V construction of the two roots *hark* and *heark* may convey the same meaning as that of the pragmatic marker, as the following examples illustrate:

(38) [...] but **hark** you, gentlemen, there's an ill-tasting dose to be swallowed first; there's a covenant to be taken. (1692)
(39) [...] but, **hark** ye friend, are the women as tame and civil as they were before i left the town? (1696)
(40) **Heark** you, honest soldiers, pray do me the favour to wash these rascals in the canal, and there's a guinea for your trouble (1696)
(41) [...] why, **heark** ye, fubbs, prithee how came thy name to be alter'd? (1691)
(42) [...] **harkee**, goodman swabber, say but half so much again, and i'll call the constable, and lay burglary to your charge (1696)
(43) [...] but **hearkee**, brother: i have orders to take up every one that i find in this house, officers only excepted

As the examples show, the occurrences of the imperative form *hark* in the vocative construction should be considered as part of the constellation of alternative spellings in which the form *harkee* emerges as the most frequent. Among the occurrences retrieved in EEBO, one of them clearly illustrates an intermediate stage of grammaticalisation, in which the coalesced form of the pragmatic marker has not emerged, but it is followed by the personal pronoun subject *you* (44):

(44) [...] but **hark** y'you will be discreet and secret in this business now [...] (1670)

The example in (44) illustrates a medial stage in the spelling and the incipient stage of grammaticalisation, in which the pronoun *ye* is coalescing with the verb, but it is not completely agglutinated. This form however is not perceived as a subject any longer, to the extent that the pronoun *you* is used as the subject of the subordinate clause following the imperative form *hark*.

If we include the imperative forms of the verb hark/heark in the vocative construction among the possibilities of the different spelling variants of the pragmatic marker during the grammaticalisation process, what are the lexical items that most frequently enter the vocative construction?

Figg. 11 and 12 illustrate the frequency and the variety of the lexical items found in the Vocative construction in the 17th century for both forms of the verb.
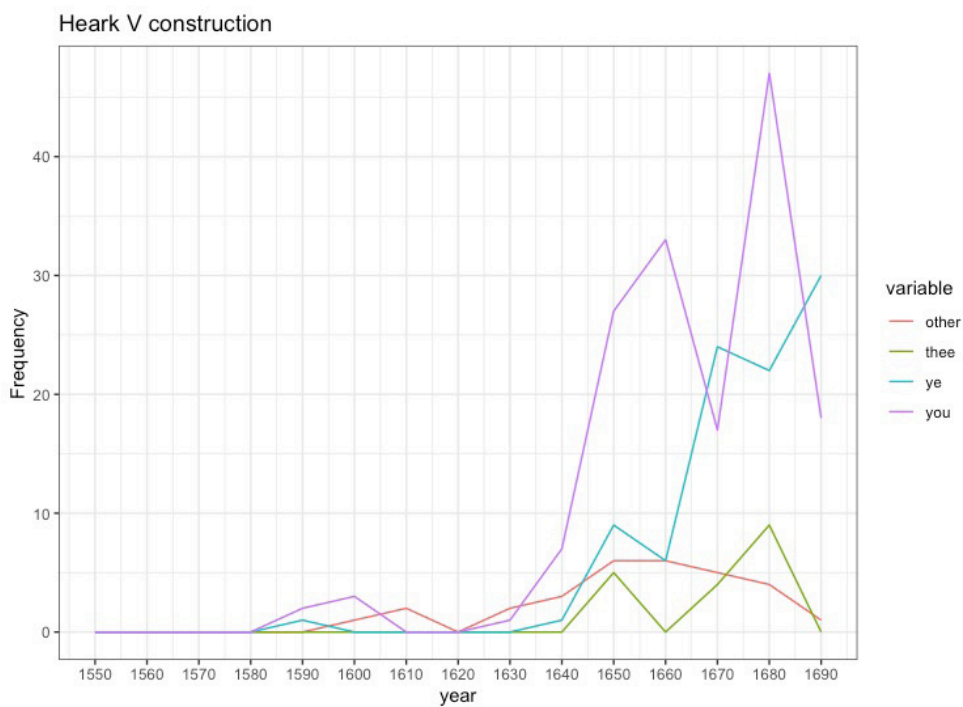

Fig. 11. *Heark* V construction.

Fig. 11 shows the frequency of the different lexical items that collocate with the vocative construction of the form *heark*. The most frequent collocation is with

the pronoun *you*, followed by *ye*. The pronoun *thee* is infrequent, and the least frequent group consists of nominal items such *sir, boy,* or personal names, as in (45):

(45) **Heark** Petruchio, shee says shee'll see you hang'd first (1698)

Fig. 12 illustrates the frequency of the lexical items that enter the vocative construction with the form *hark*. This form is most frequently found with *you*, followed by *ye*. The collocation with other forms (46) is more frequent for *hark* than it is for *heark,* while the collocations with *thee* are less frequent.

(46) **Hark** Arnoldus! Don't you hear the bells? (1694)

The two preferred items that enter the construction are *ye* and *you*, in keeping with other pragmatic markers such as *lookee*. However, for more than 40 years the preferred form of the personal pronoun was *you*, thus confirming the theoretical model proposed by Brinton (2001; 2008), which characterises the emergence of the pragmatic marker *harkee* as a phonologically reduced form of the sequence *hark you*.
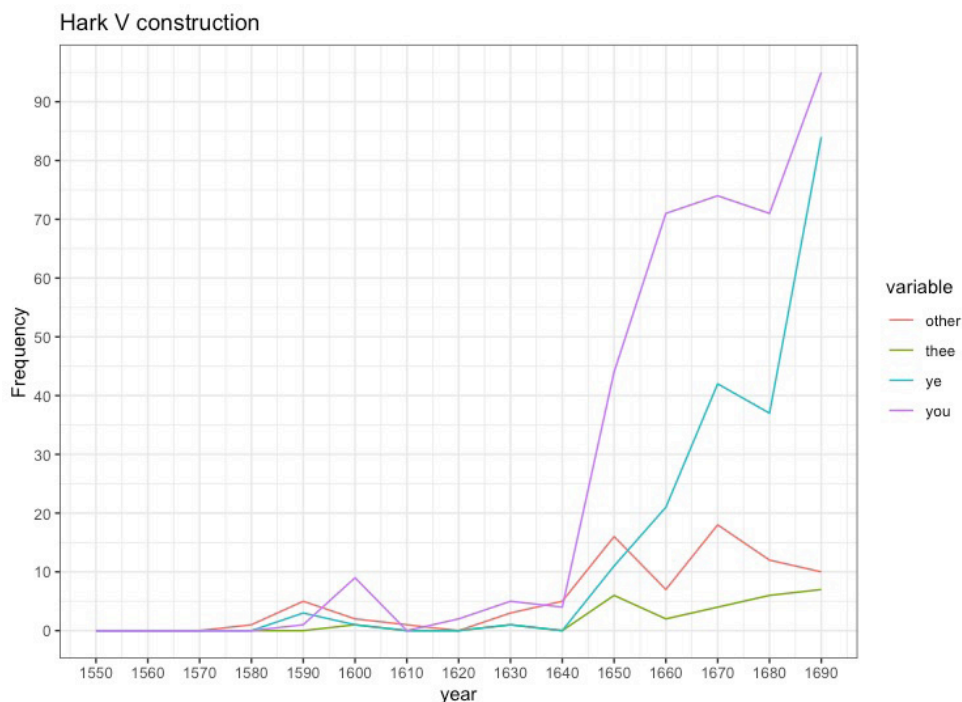

Fig. 12. *Hark* V construction.

Finally, a comparison between the array of possible forms identified is offered in Fig. 13. This graph illustrates the coexistence of the different forms identified at the end of the 17th century.
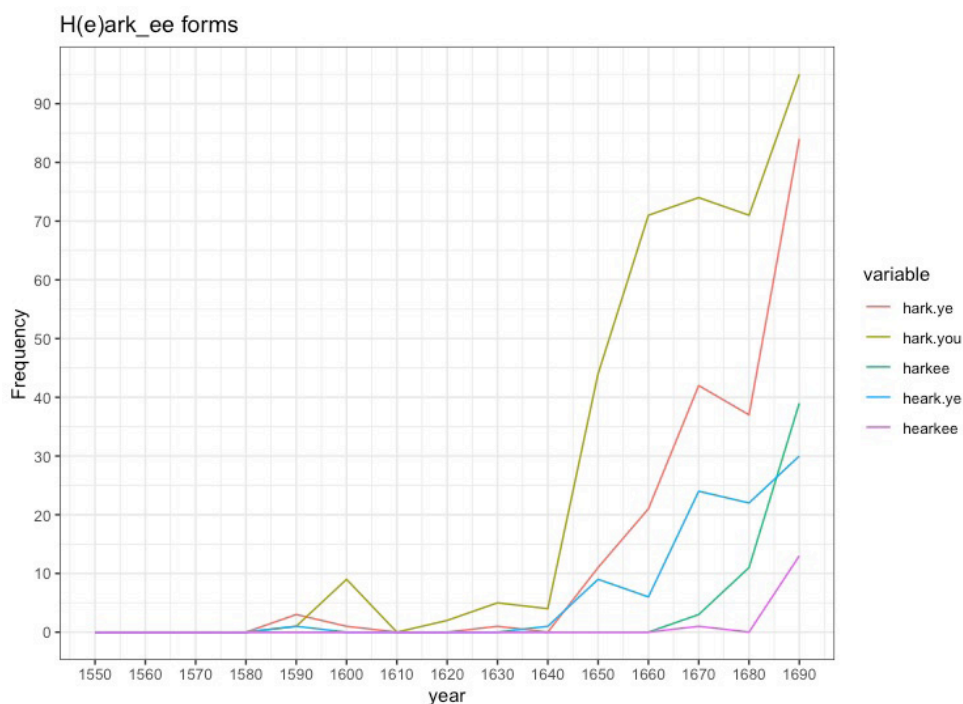

Fig. 13. *H(e)ark_ee* forms.

Among these forms *hark you* appears earlier than the others, and it continues to be the most frequent for the rest of the century. The form *hark ye* is less frequent, but it increases in frequency in the last decades of the 17th century. Similarly, the coalesced forms *harkee* and *hearkee* surge in frequency in 1680, and presumably keep growing in Late Modern English, outside of the corpus under scrutiny and beyond the scope of the present paper.

The development of the lines in the graph suggests that the form *harkee* is not the most frequent in the corpus under analysis, however its development as a separate form started in the 1640s. The syntactic environment from which the form *harkee* emerged consists of different forms with idiosyncratic spellings. The data reviewed in this paper show how new forms emerge from a cloud of similar forms, distinguished from each other by spelling. The data

reviewed in this paper suggest that grammaticalisation should not be considered as a linear phenomenon bridging two distinct forms, rather it should be conceptualised as an evolutionary process in which a constellation of different and competing forms appears. Only the 'fittest' and most 'satisfactory' form survives.[4] An accurate discussion of the complex dynamics that shape linguistic change, standardisation, and entrenchment of different linguistic items exceeds the scope of this paper, which is mainly devoted to the investigation of the evolution of a single form. The forces that intervened in the standardisation of *harkee* are not different from the forces that intervene in any linguistic change and emergence of forms, and they may be distinguished in *internal* and *external*. External forces are exerted by grammarians and lexicographers who have the authority to decide and propose the 'correct' form, and in the period under investigation there are some figures who start building up this authority through the publication of grammars and dictionaries (Dons 2004). The internal forces instead may be glimpsed from the data presented in this paper: continuous linguistic exchanges between speakers inevitably lead to a multitude of contexts of usage, some of which recur and become entrenched in the speaker's memory, ultimately becoming part of the linguistic repertoire of a speaking community.

5. *Conclusion*

The present paper has investigated the intricacies of the relationship between grammaticalisation and spelling fluctuation in Early Modern English. The existence of two alternative forms in Present Day English testified by the OED for the verb *hark(en)* has served as a case-study. From a semantic point of view, both forms originally have a perceptual meaning referring to auditory perception, which expands metaphorically to the meaning of the verb *to heed*. This process of semantic expansion predates the appearance of the pragmatic marker displaying two alternative reduced forms *hearkee/harkee*. The two alternative forms of the verb were retrieved in EEBO, and show further spelling vari-

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4 As one of the reviewers noted, the definition of a 'satisfactory' form is ambiguous and needs clarification. I understand this term in reference to the evolutionary metaphor, according to which the most satisfactory form is the one that survives.

ations among the possible forms that may have functioned as matrix clause for the pragmatic marker. I verified the frequency and syntactic behaviour of the four forms through corpus analysis and manual annotation of the data. The results of the analysis suggest an intricate picture and reflect general tendencies in the history of English and in the study of grammaticalisation.

Firstly, the two couples with alternative spellings *hearke/harke* and *heark/hark* show different distribution and frequency. Both forms presenting the digraph <ea> are less frequent than their alternative form with only one <a> in medial position. The picture is reversed for the forms in the infinitive, where the form presenting the digraph <ea> is more frequent since the second half of the 17th century, as testified by the OED. The main difference between the two forms lies in their preference of encoding different moods: the form with the medial digraph is preferred for the indicative/infinitive, while the form with a single <a> is more frequent in the imperative.

Secondly, the two forms presenting final <e> decrease dramatically in the first half of the 17th century, following a cline of extinction that is observed also for other, unrelated forms. This change of paradigm in spelling is interpreted as the result of an external pressure in EME towards a simplification of forms operated by grammarians and linguists (Nevalainen 2006, 31), which is realised by dropping a final, silent <e>. Consequently, the forms without the final <e> arise in frequency, and substitute almost entirely the previous forms. Further research should assess the diffusion and the exact reasons of this phenomenon.

Thirdly, the syntactic configurations in which the forms are used show that they originally were spelling variants of the same verb form. The four forms, albeit with different frequencies, present a similar distribution among four categories of syntactic environment. They are most frequently used in P (absolute position), followed by the Vocative construction, the S condition (subordinate clause), and finally O (direct object and/or zero subordinator). The high frequency of P and V conditions is related to the initial choice of retrieving imperative forms. The low frequency of the other syntactic environments, namely S and O, suggests that the rebracketing of the sequence suggested by Brinton (2001; 2008) had already appeared before EME, as testified also by early occurrences of the verb in the V construction.

The data discussed contribute to the debate on spelling variation in EME. On the one hand, the data demonstrate that the four forms under analysis share similar syntactic behaviour, and that both late forms may be consid-

ered as antecedent of the pragmatic marker. On the other hand, an analysis of the different forms in isolation reveals that the difference between the two alternative forms interfaces with the mood in which the two appear. The data presented in this paper contribute to the debate on grammaticalisation, albeit less extensively. They illustrate how possible forms rise during the process of grammaticalisation of the pragmatic marker under review. Future research will assess to what extent the appearance of new forms correlates with grammaticalisation, and whether this phenomenon is generalisable across word-classes, languages, and historical periods.

The data investigated and the results offered in the paper posit new questions and directions. An attentive and usage-based review of the developmental path of the verb *hark(en)* from its origins in Old English to Present Day English may shed further light on the phenomenon of grammaticalisation, and on the dynamics that drive the emergence of new forms. I interpreted the early appearance of the V construction in the history of *hark(en)* as a sign that the rebracketing of the forms described by Brinton (2001) had already appeared in Middle English. This claim awaits validation by future research.

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Marco Bagli is RtdA at the University of Genoa. His main scientific interest lies in the relationship between language, culture, and cognition, with a specific attention to the domains of perception. Within this field of analysis, he has published several papers and chapters on the conceptualisation of the semantic domain of Taste in English. He was awarded the AIA (Associazione Italiana Anglistica) Junior Book Prize 2022 for his monograph *Tastes We Live By*, edited by Mouton de Gruyter. He has also carried out research on the conceptualisation of heroes during the Covid-19 pandemic (published in RILA, 2021), and on interjections in a diachronic perspective. Recently, he has been working on the transcription and modernisation of Bullokar's *Brief Grammar of English* (1508), as part of the project PRIN 2017XAA3ZF Classical Receptions in Early Modern English Drama.