2.1 Introduction

The present chapter is devoted to the stability paradox, that is, the apparent mismatch between the degree to which English society changes between 1700 and 1900 and the amount of language change that LModE undergoes. While there is general agreement that a great deal of sociocultural change takes place between 1700 and 1900, several linguists point to the comparative lack of structural change in LModE, especially compared with the preceding Middle and Early Modern English periods (see Sections 2.3–2.4). This lack of correlation may seem unremarkable at first glance, as historical linguistics to some extent has a tradition of regarding a language as a self-contained entity or system that undergoes change more or less independently of what its speakers do (Lass 1980: 120). To understand why the lack of correlation between sociocultural and linguistic change is in fact problematic from the perspective of linguistic theory, it is necessary to consider insights gained from research on social networks.

I discuss the general connection made in social-network theory between sociocultural and linguistic change in Section 2.2. Then follow brief surveys of sociocultural (2.3) and linguistic (2.4) change in England between 1700 and 1900. Finally, Section 2.5 synthesizes the conclusions reached in the chapter and discusses why predictions from the perspective of social-network theory appear not to be borne out by empirical linguistic data as regards Late Modern English.

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1 I will use sociocultural change as a convenient shorthand for changes in society, culture, technology, politics, legislation, and so on that may be hypothesized to have an impact on communicative patterns in the population examined.
2.2 The Connection between Sociocultural and Linguistic Change: The Social-Network Perspective

The inclusion of social networks as an important factor in linguistic variation and change owes a great deal to James and Lesley Milroy’s pioneering work on language use in Belfast (e.g. Milroy 1987; Milroy 1992a). Social networks may be more or less close-knit. Close-knit networks are dense (most members have some relationship with one another) and multiplex (contact between members involves several social domains, e.g. the workplace, the neighbourhood, and kinship), and ties between speakers are typically strong; the strength of a network tie is influenced by factors such as duration, periodicity, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services (Milroy 1992a: 178; Conde-Silvestre 2012: 333). Members of close-knit networks tend to resist linguistic innovation and maintain conservative forms because they exert pressure on one another to maintain the linguistic status quo. In contrast, loose-knit networks, whose members are characteristically linked through weak ties, facilitate the propagation of innovations (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 355; Conde-Silvestre 2012: 333–4).

Weak network ties can also function as bridges along which linguistic innovations can diffuse between groups (Milroy 1992a: 178–83). If speaker A in network 1 has a weak tie to speaker B in network 2, an innovation – linguistic or otherwise – can spread from network 1 to network 2 via the bridge between speakers A and B. The first user of an innovation in a network (here, speaker B in network 2) is typically a marginal member of that network as well as of other networks, which enhances speaker B’s ability to form multiple weak ties (Conde-Silvestre 2012: 334) and means that they have little to lose in terms of network status (Bergs 2005: 29). If the innovation is to spread successfully through network 2, it then has to be adopted by at least one central member of that network (an early adopter), who acts as a model for other network members (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 365–7). Central members of the network may have a vested interest in spotting and adopting new trends in order to be regarded as trendsetters (Bergs 2005: 29). Once the new feature has been adopted by one or several core members of the network, it can spread quickly out towards the periphery again, where marginal members who adopt it can spread it to yet other networks via weak-tie bridges (Conde-Silvestre 2012: 334).

Historical linguistic research on social networks faces the difficulty that several of the parameters used to classify network ties, such as intimacy and density, are frequently difficult to recover from the available data. Nonetheless, scholars have shown that the social-network model can be
used to explain variation and change in the past. Such research can be divided into what Milroy and Milroy (1985: 370–80) refer to as *micro-level* and *macro-level* studies. Micro-level studies aim at reconstructing one or several historical social networks in order to shed light on language use within that network. For instance, Bergs (2005) examines the language of the Paston Letters from the perspective of what is known about the letter writers’ lives in terms of network parameters; Sairio (2009) considers the use of several linguistic features of eighteenth-century English in letters by members of the so-called Bluestocking network. In macro-level studies, which I focus on below, an attempt is instead made to correlate what is known or can be inferred about the strength of network ties in entire populations of varying sizes with known facts about the development of the language(s) used by the relevant speakers.

The underlying assumption behind macro-level studies is that “linguistic change is slow to the extent that the relevant populations are well established and bound by strong ties, whereas it is rapid to the extent that weak ties exist in populations” (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 375). Social conditions where weak ties are likely to be numerous include “[c]ases of conquest and colonization”, “the peaceful in-migration of populations who speak other languages or dialects”, and “sustained commercial and cultural contact” (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 379–80). However, it is not a requirement that speakers linked by weak ties speak different varieties; for instance, it is claimed that middle-class networks in present-day British society feature a great many weak ties. Trudgill (2020) suggests that the rate of language change that can be expected in a community is affected by the parameters of contact vs. isolation and social stability vs. instability. These perspectives are potentially compatible if it is assumed that the relative prevalence of weak ties is proportional to the amount of contact and instability in a community, which seems broadly reasonable.

Milroy and Milroy (1985: 375–80) use the hypothesized correlation between the strength of ties and the speed of change to explain the historical conservatism and dearth of linguistic variation in Icelandic compared with English. They argue that the geographical isolation of Iceland cannot explain all of the differences found, as greater differences between varieties of Icelandic should then have developed, given that communication between settlements was severely restricted for more than half of the year. Instead, there was little diversification of the variety

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2 Both approaches make use of the uniformitarian principle: it is assumed that the linguistic effects of strong and weak network ties were the same in the past as they are now.
combined with a great deal of linguistic conservatism, which indicates that ties between settlements were strong; this is shown to be a likely scenario given the lack of institutional power on the island. England, by contrast, is shown to have had a greater prevalence of weak ties, owing to factors such as the settlement of speakers of Old Norse during the Old English period, strong institutions after the Norman Conquest, and the prominence of London. This difference is argued to account for English displaying more rapid change and more dialectal diversification than Icelandic.

The same macro-perspective can be applied to different historical stages of the same language or variety (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 375), which are then contrasted with one another with regard to the prevalence of language change and weak ties. Lass (1997: 304) points out that “[l]anguages may vary all the time, but they change in bursts”; in this framework, the language or variety is expected to undergo more rapid change during periods characterized by a comparatively large number of weak ties. In addition to the contexts mentioned above, Milroy and Milroy (1985: 370, 380) note that speakers in the middle of the social hierarchy are likely to contract a large number of weak ties in Western societies and that industrialization features social and geographical mobility, which correlates with the dissolution of close-knit networks.

2.3 Sociocultural Change and Weak Ties in Late Modern England

2.3.1 Democratization and Demographics

Shortly before the beginning of the LModE period, one of the outcomes of the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689 was the Bill of Rights 1689, which entailed a rejection of absolutism and the hereditary right to the throne, and denied the monarch the right to, for instance, raise taxes without parliamentary consent (Langford 1992: 353–5; Beal 2004: 2). Six years later, the Licensing Act lapsed and was not renewed by Parliament, which increased the freedom of the press (Fries 2015: 56). However, while the Bill of Rights contributed to spreading political power to more people (though it deprived Catholics of political rights), the already propertied classes were the main beneficiaries. The right to vote, based on a system of counties and boroughs, remained heavily restricted, extending to only around 10 per cent of the adult male population in England and Wales as late as 1831.

The Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884 gradually increased the number of voters: while only one man in five could vote after the Reform Act 1832,
roughly 60 per cent of the adult male population of England had the vote around the end of the nineteenth century (Lee 1976: 183; Harrison 2018: 147, 172). Women, however, did not benefit from the reforms. Nevertheless, to the extent that the Reform Acts increased communication between different socio-economic sectors of the enlarged electorate, more lines of communication should have opened up between different strata of Late Modern English society in the form of weak links. Joyce (1991: 173) notes that non-standard dialect was “frequently used in the street literature of Victorian political elections”, which may be indicative of an increased need to appeal to the recently enfranchised. Such developments are also highly relevant to the process of colloquialization (see Section 4.3.1 and Chapters 5–6).

The LModE period was characterized by population growth; for instance, between 1780 and 1851, the population of England rose from 7.1 to 16.9 million (Harvie 1992: 425). However, the increase was not evenly distributed. The rural population went down in many counties (see Matthew 1992: 475 for the period 1841–1911), and the number of male rural labourers in England and Wales decreased by 40 per cent from 1861 to 1901 (Matthew 1992: 479). Meanwhile, the urban population rose dramatically. Between 1750 and 1800, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Sheffield, and Sunderland were all among the twenty fastest growing cities in Europe (de Vries 1984: 140). In addition, London continued to grow significantly, reaching a population of 4.5 million in 1911 (outside England, Belfast, Dundee, Glasgow, and Limerick were also among the top twenty, and Dublin, like London, grew considerably). However, towards the end of the LModE period, the bulk of the growth took place in towns surrounding the original centres of the Industrial Revolution, often leading to several urban centres together forming one non-rural area (Matthew 1992: 474), for example Greater London (7.3 million in 1911) and Merseyside (1.2 million).

The massive urbanization described above constituted a dramatic change in population patterns: in the mid-nineteenth century, people living in urban areas accounted for more than 50 per cent of the population of Britain, making that country unique in the world (Beal 2004: 6), and by the beginning of the twentieth century, around 80 per cent of the population of England and Wales resided in urban areas (Harvie 1992: 474). The

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3 The Reform Act 1832 explicitly excluded women from the right to vote; before then, a small number of women had been able to vote based on property ownership.
urbanization was paralleled – and in large part caused – by a shift from agriculture to industry, with “the enclosure of common land, the mechanisation of agriculture and the Industrial Revolution” (Beal 2010a: 2) promoting both developments. Agriculture accounted for 53 per cent of male employment in 1760 but only for 29 per cent in 1840, while industry rose from 24 per cent to 47 per cent in the same period (Whyte 2000: 154). However, most of the individual transitions from rural agriculture to urban industry were short distance; with the main exception of London, urban England came to comprise a mosaic of regional economies, with extensive short-distance migration within – but limited migration between – regions (Joyce 1991: 156, 171; Whyte 2000: 140). As I discuss in Section 3.5.1, these conditions stimulated the formation of urban dialects that contained a mixture of features already present in the varieties used in the countryside surrounding urban centres.

The difference between pre-industrial and post-industrial England should not be exaggerated. As Bergs (2005: 47–8, 55) notes, there was early commercialization in the fourteenth century and a great degree of short-range geographical mobility in England from the fifteenth century on; the shift from a mainly rural, agricultural, and feudal society to an urban, industrial, and class-based one can potentially be traced back to 1500. Moreover, people who were members of a generally close-knit village community may still have been loosely affiliated with it. Nevertheless, the industrialization and urbanization of England, together with the increased social and geographical mobility of the population, must have entailed the dissolution of close-knit networks as well as the simultaneous and subsequent formation of new – strong as well as weak – network ties on a different scale (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 354, 366, 370). The new networks formed in the cities are also likely to have been less dense and multiplex on average than the rural ones (Bergs 2005: 58), though especially in working-class communities, close-knit networks are also a feature of urban life (Milroy 1992a: 218). Thus, the overall effect of the industrial transformation and gradual democratization of England on network structure must have been in the direction of weak ties. This emerging picture becomes even clearer when a social-class perspective is added.

2.3.2 A Socio-Economic Perspective on Late Modern England

Much of the eighteenth century was characterized by material growth, but the uneven distribution of wealth, the failure of taxation to redistribute that wealth, and the low wages resulting from population growth and
mechanization meant that the extremities on the social continuum never-
theless moved further apart (Langford 1992: 380, 382). However, the
Industrial Revolution and the shift from land to money as the basis for
the economy increased social mobility in England and made it easier to
Somewhat different criteria were now used to define social positions; both
wealth and education became important parameters, and a speaker’s mem-
bership of the gentry no longer depended solely on their position in the
to the capital frequently remarked on how “[m]iddle-class, even lower-class
Londoners aped the fashions, manners, and opinions of polite society”
(Langford 1992: 388), which testifies to the relatively porous class boundar-
ies in England compared with much of continental Europe. Although
social separation between classes was often commented on, contacts were
common between members of different socio-economic groups owing to
regular interaction between (i) the upper and middle classes and
(ii) domestic servants and tradespeople (Vartianen et al. 2017: 138).
Occupational figures for the LModE period still indicate a comparatively
stable society – 90 per cent of sons of labourers ended up doing manual
work themselves – but the proportion of working-class sons reaching the
lower middle classes also increased by 76 per cent between the periods

Moreover, the middle classes themselves were about to undergo dra-
matic change. Until the mid-nineteenth century, they constituted “a fairly
small and reasonably easily identified group: the professions, business men,
bankers, large shopkeepers, and the like” (Matthew 1992: 487). But the last
fifty years of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the lower
middle class, with the creation of a large number of clerical, bureaucratic,
and service jobs in trade as well as a rapidly expanding civil service
(Matthew 1992: 487–8; Beal 2004: 5). The expansion of the middle classes
is of great importance to a model that draws on social-network theory; as
suggested by Milroy (1992a: 213–15), socially mobile groups in the middle

4 Much of the available information is based on male occupations, but women’s networks are equally
important to trace, not least because, as Labov (2001: 292–3) notes, women are frequently leaders in
linguistic change from below. Working-class women were most likely to work, but employment
options for urban working-class women were limited. Domestic service was desirable because it
offered opportunities for advancement to cook, housekeeper, lady’s maid, and so on; other options
included sweatshops, laundries, factories, home-assembly work, and cleaning, all of which were
poorly paid and involved long hours (Rubenhold 2019: 31–2, 339–40). Nevertheless, some of these
occupations would have enabled unmarried women to establish weak network links with fellow
workers.
of the hierarchy with a relatively secure financial status are comparatively open to linguistic innovation owing to weak community-based ties. These ties also feature less solidarity than do the multiplex links that characterize upper-class and working-class networks (Bergs 2005: 35). Crucially, the type of innovation such groups are open to tends to conform to the legitimized linguistic code, and, as Beal (2004: 93–4) notes, the linguistic insecurity of the middle classes created a demand for guides to prescribed usage (see Section 3.5.2).

Some urban workers’ standard of living gradually began to improve in the second half of the LModE period. Real wages increased by 100 per cent between 1860 and 1914 (Matthew 1992: 481), and towards 1900, a good many working-class speakers could enjoy both some leisure time and a small economic surplus. Nevertheless, many urban workers remained in a state of relative poverty and financial insecurity. This insecurity in turn fostered functional solidarity in the form of close-knit groups that supplied “security and mutual support” (Milroy 1992a: 213). Unlike most middle-class networks that formed during the same period, working-class close-knit groups could be expected to resist external pressure to change. But as I argue in Section 3.5.1, the formation of those networks in itself entailed considerable language change.

2.3.3 Communication

One of the most important areas of change in England during the LModE period is intimately connected to language. Owing to scientific, technological, and sociocultural developments, various new modes of travel and communication became available; in addition, some modes that had existed before came within the reach of more speakers than previously.

To begin with, several developments contributed to making travelling easier in the LModE period. First, the 1730s witnessed the rise of a turnpike system on a national scale, which made it possible to raise money for the maintenance of roads locally with tolls as security. The higher quality of turnpike roads reduced the time it took to travel from London to Manchester from more than three days to just over twenty-four hours.

5 The same phenomenon is “reflected at the institutional level” in trade unions (Milroy 1992a: 218); as Matthew (1992: 482–3) notes, trade union activity grew markedly in the late nineteenth century. Trade-union actions made frequent use of dialect features (Joyce 1991: 173), thus demonstrating the link between unions and the close-knit networks of their members, which contributed to imbuing dialect features with covert prestige while signalling linguistic divergence from, for instance, employers.
between 1720 and 1780 (Langford 1992: 374–5). Later in the eighteenth century, transport was greatly aided by the linking of England’s important rivers by means of canals (Harvie 1992: 429–30), and the expansion of the railway network, which proceeded at an astonishing pace in the 1830s and 1840s (Beal 2004: 7–8), “created for the first time a nationally integrated economy” (Matthew 1992: 474). Affordable railway tickets became an important means of transport, especially for people from the lower echelons of society (Beal 2004: 8). These and other improvements in travelling made it easier to transport both goods (according to financial transactions) and people. Transport by sea route was also improved; coastal shipping of passengers and cargo continued to be important (Beal 2004: 7–8), and “sailing ships became so sophisticated that they remained competitive with steam until the 1880s” (Harvie 1992: 429). Most ties formed and/or maintained through such communication would have been weak; speakers are less likely to be able to maintain strong personal ties across long distances, and ties involving business and trade tend to be weak (Milroy 1997: 315).

An alternative to travelling for the purposes of communication is to send a message. Although the telephone and the electric telegraph were both introduced in the nineteenth century, the most important mode of communication for maintaining social ties in this fashion during the LModE period was the letter. Letters can be used to maintain ties of any strength, but it is arguably more difficult to duplicate some characteristics of strong ties, such as frequent communication, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services, through letters than through face-to-face conversation.

Besides a functional delivery service, which was increasingly provided by the expanded railway system mentioned above (Vincent 1989: 48), successful communication via private letters requires literacy and the financial means to pay for postage. Technically, the literacy involved need not be on the part of either sender or recipient (letters can be dictated and read out loud), but in most cases communication by letter presupposes literate interactants. It is thus highly relevant that literacy increased drastically during the LModE period. Vartianen et al. (2017: 137) cite literacy figures of around 10 per cent for men and 1 per cent for women in 1500; the figures for 1800 are 60 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively. Porter’s (1912: 147) data for England and Wales indicate that male literacy in England and Wales increased from 67 to 97 per cent between 1841 and 1900, while female literacy rose even more dramatically, from 51 to 97 per cent. In addition to the gender bias apparent

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6 Most of the increase predates the Elementary Education Act 1870, which made basic education generally available. Altick (1957: 171–2) notes that, while the act did not speed up the spread of
from the figures, literacy was socially stratified. The acquisition of reading and writing ability was one of the most important prerequisites for social advancement (Vartianen et al. 2017: 137); in addition, Joyce (1991: 158) argues that, for a child, becoming literate could mean rejecting the home linguistic community. It thus seems clear that, in addition to making the maintenance of weak ties via letter-writing possible, literacy potentially contributed to the establishment of weak ties by upwardly mobile speakers and, perhaps, to the disruption of strong ties with members of the speaker’s childhood network. Importantly, the spread of literacy also drastically enlarged the working-class target group for printed matter, leading to popularization (see Section 4.3.1).

As regards the means to send letters, improved standards of living for large parts of the English population constitute an important factor. However, of arguably even greater importance is the 1840 introduction of the Penny Post. Before this reform, postage depended on the distance between sender and receiver, and was more expensive in general: the minimum rate was four pence and the average rate six pence (Vincent 1989: 33–4). Moreover, it was paid by the recipient of the letter (Mugglestone 2006: 276), which made it impossible to anticipate the expense. By introducing uniform, cheap postage paid by the sender, the Penny Post helped to increase the number of items sent from 75–76 million in 1839 via 347 million in 1849 to 3,500 million by 1914 (Vincent 1989: 33; Mugglestone 2006: 276), though much of the increase consisted of corporate correspondence (Vincent 1989: 38). Moreover, the middle classes used the Penny Post more extensively than the working classes (Vincent 1989: 38–41); the halfpenny postcard (introduced in 1870) may have been more instrumental in connecting working-class speakers through writing (Vincent 1989: 51), especially as composition did not become part of the literacy, it did ensure that the increase would continue, as literacy was extended even to the very poor. Literacy was typically higher in towns than in the countryside, and especially high in London (Schneider 2002: 40). Also, figures for England and Wales should not be generalized to other parts of the English-speaking world; for instance, literacy was more widespread in Australia and North America than in England, given the emphasis on education in those regions (Kytö 1991: 24–6; Fritz 2007: 15–16). In contrast, there was concern both in England and elsewhere that the spread of literacy to the lower orders might lead to social unrest (Bailey 1996: 28–30; Williams 2010: 79; Smitterberg 2012a: 954; Auer 2014: 158). Figures are often estimates based on signature literacy, which most likely overestimates the number of proficient writers and underestimates that of readers (see Smitterberg 2012a: 953–5 for more detailed discussion). There was a 3:2 or 2:1 gap between reading and writing in the early nineteenth century, but that gap gradually closed after 1850 (Vincent 1989: 10).

7 Literacy seems to have been a necessary but not sufficient criterion in this regard. Vincent (1989: 130–2) notes that speakers with working-class backgrounds who reached the lower middle class were more likely to be literate than those who remained part of the working classes; at the same time, new, working-class occupations also arose that incorporated literate speakers but did not offer social advancement, such as post-office workers.
school curriculum until 1871, and even then many children left school without being able to compose coherent texts (Vincent 1989: 89–90). These caveats notwithstanding, the Penny Post was of immense importance in making the production of writing on a regular basis relevant to large numbers of people.

The private letter and the postcard were of course not the only genres that benefitted from societal changes. As a result of a large number of interconnected factors – for example the abolition of paper duties, improved indoor lighting, expanded literacy, increased affluence, and more leisure time – publishing in general, including newspapers (see Section 4.5.2), grew dramatically during the LModE period. While around 100 annual titles, excluding newspapers, were published in the 1750s, the figure rose to 370 in the 1790s, exceeded 500 in the 1820s, and continued to increase; it had passed 6,000 by 1900 (Williams 1978: 42).

2.4 Language Change in Late Modern English

Until relatively recently, LModE was a comparatively neglected field within English historical linguistics. However, LModE studies have been transformed by the increased interest shown in the field since the eve of the millennium (for discussion of the reasons behind this change, see Kytö and Smitherberg 2020b: 1–6). The landmark publication of Romaine (1998a) meant that LModE received the same amount of scholarly attention in the Cambridge History of the English Language series as Old, Middle, and Early Modern English. In 2001, the first conference devoted to LModE was organized in Edinburgh, followed by conferences in Vigo (2004), Leiden (2007), Sheffield (2010), Bergamo (2013), and Uppsala (2017); shortly before I finalized this manuscript, the seventh conference in the series, in Ragusa Ibla, was postponed until 2022 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. These conferences have yielded a large number of collections of studies (Dossena and Jones 2003; Pérez-Guerra et al. 2007; Tieken-Boon van Ostade and van der Wurff 2009; Beal et al. 2012; Dossena 2015; Kytö and Smitherberg 2020a). Increasing academic attention was followed by more space being devoted to LModE in undergraduate and graduate curricula, which created a need for specialized textbooks such as Beal (2004) and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2009). Each of the two centuries

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8 The period covered by Romaine (1998a), 1776–1997, is not identical with the typical delimitation of LModE (c.1700–1900), but the coverage is similar enough for the volume to count as a milestone in LModE studies.
traditionally thought to make up the LModE period has also been the subject of separate attention (Bailey 1996; Görlach 1999, 2001; Kytö et al. 2006a; Hickey 2010a; Nevalainen et al. 2018).

Indeed, so much scholarship has been published on LModE in the past twenty-five years that the subject is nowadays too well researched for any concise discussion of language change during this period to aim at comprehensive coverage. I will therefore focus on a number of key trends. Precedence has generally been given to recent sources and to scholarly overviews, in which references to more specific studies can be found. I devote more attention to grammar than to lexis and pronunciation, since the case studies in this book concern changes in grammar.

One of the main reasons why the LModE period was under-researched for a long time was the commonly held assumption that little happened to the English language between 1700 and 1900. More specifically, the underlying structure of English was frequently taken to have undergone few changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Romaine (1998b: 1) downplays the significance of post-1776 changes in grammar, phonology, and morphology compared with the preceding centuries; Hickey (2010b: xvii) makes a similar claim for eighteenth-century English as a whole; and Bergs (2005: 53), who suggests that English has changed according to a “punctuated equilibrium” model, considers the pace of change to have been slowing down since the beginning of the Early Modern English period (see also Nevalainen et al. 2020b: 8–9). Denison (2003: 67–8) points out that, according to such accounts, change in the history of the language so far actually forms an S-curve, with rapid change in Middle and Early Modern English contrasting with relative stability in Old English and LModE. However, as Denison recognizes, such logic is problematic, as Old English did not come into being out of nowhere; nor are we presumably nearing the end of the English language at present. Biber and Gray (2016: 30–2) suggest that grammatical change since c.1700 has mainly concerned the frequency and functions of features rather than the emergence of new categories and that academic writing has been an important locus of this type of change, particularly as regards an increase in phrasal complexity (see Section 4.3.2).

However, it may be unhelpful to attempt to determine the extent and pace of change in LModE as a whole, since different subcomponents of the language may undergo bursts of change at different times (Lass 1997: 304).

Dixon (1997: 4, 67) suggests that human language as a whole has been in a state of “punctuation”, that is, characterized by quick-paced change, during the last few centuries.
I shall therefore devote separate subsections to LModE lexis, pronunciation, and grammar below. As mentioned above, grammar will be treated in more detail than the other two fields, as the empirical studies in Chapters 5–8 focus on changes in grammar.

2.4.1 Lexis

Additions to the vocabulary of a language are arguably not structural in the same way as, for instance, changes in its phoneme inventory or verbal syntax. However, as English lexis has been shown to have undergone important changes during the LModE period, I will discuss some features of LModE lexical innovation in this section.

Speakers of English in the LModE period were exposed to new experiences in fields including “[t]echnological and scientific inventions, trade, exploration and colonization” (Beal 2004: 14). This impact might be expected to entail a great deal of lexical innovation, as new words from open word classes are needed to identify and describe new referents, processes, and so on. By way of brief illustration, words first attested in 1850 and still current according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) include the following, only some of which may be familiar to most language users: abalone, campsite, ceramic, dhyana, diethyl, embarcadero, enzyme (“[t]he leavened bread with which the Eucharist is administered in the Greek Church”; the chemical sense is first attested in 1881), and jarool.

A quantitative way of charting this type of lexical innovation is to use the “first-cited date” in the OED as a rough guide to when a word entered the (written) language. The results of such a search are given in Figure 2.1, which charts the number of first-cited entries per twenty-year period.

Beal (2004: 14) and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2009: 54) provide data that are comparable to those in Figure 2.1; Beal bases her figure on Finkenstaedt et al. (1970) and provides results per decade, while Tieken-Boon van Ostade uses the OED, but considers the first year in each decade only. These minor differences notwithstanding, the three graphs show quite similar developments until c.1840: a fairly stable level of moderate lexical innovation until the late eighteenth century, followed by a rise that

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10 My account thus leaves important fields such as semantics and pragmatics largely unaccounted for. These fields are of course also relevant to language change; for instance, results presented in Nevalainen and Tissari (2010) and Taavitsainen and Jucker (2010) indicate that the expression of politeness has undergone change between 1700 and the present day. However, most previous research on the pace of change in English has concerned either phonological and grammatical structure or lexis.
becomes increasingly steep. For the period after 1840, my data suggest fairly stable figures of between 16,000 and 18,000 new lexemes per twenty years; in Beal’s figure, the line turns down again after 1840, and there are few new lexemes recorded for especially the last decade of the nineteenth century; conversely, Tieken-Boon van Ostade’s results indicate that the rate of innovation continues to increase at least until 1890, after which time there is a sudden drop. Görlach (2001: 146) presents figures for a far longer period (the late fourteenth to the early twentieth century) based on several dictionaries; these data indicate that there have been two main “peaks” in lexical innovation; namely, the time from the late sixteenth century to c.1700, and most of the nineteenth century. The eighteenth century, in contrast, forms a “trough” between these two peaks, and the number of new words goes down drastically around 1900.

As regards what can account for these differences across time, Beal (2004: 16) notes that the relative lack of lexical innovation apparent from her late-nineteenth-century data is most likely due to the nature of the data set. The Chronological English Dictionary relies for first attestations on the first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, whose coverage becomes notably less extensive in the twentieth century. As regards the lower levels of lexical innovation until c.1780, it is likely that several causes are involved. Beal (2004: 17) and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2009: 53) note that the 1700s follow a period when English was taking over functions that had previously been filled by Latin; there was thus a need to expand the lexicon with words that would enable English to serve such purposes. At the turn of the eighteenth century, this expansion had largely been completed, which...
may help to explain why lexical expansion slowed down. Beal also suggests that linguistic conservatism may have retarded the pace of innovation during the 1700s.

There are also explanations that are connected to the *OED* as a source of data. To begin with, not all words attested in the dictionary were necessarily ever in current use, which may inflate figures (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2009: 54–5). Moreover, Görlach (2001: 145) suggests that the *OED*’s coverage of eighteenth-century texts is less comprehensive than for the preceding period, and Mair (2006a: 226–7) shows that the nineteenth century is better documented in the *OED* than are the preceding and following centuries. Brewer (2007) provides an in-depth study of the *OED*’s eighteenth-century coverage and concludes that “it would seem likely that scanty representation of this period is due to the lexicographers (and in some cases, perhaps, the limitations on the material available to them)” (Brewer 2007: 123). She suggests that “consciously or unconsciously, the first-edition editors of the *OED* felt, when shaping the entry for a word, that eighteenth-century quotations were less interesting or important than those from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth centuries” and that this is due to “their attitudes to the period”. If the 1700s received comparatively scant treatment, this is likely to affect the number of words that are first cited in that century. As Brewer (2007: 129–132) notes, the third edition of the *OED* is a clear improvement in this regard, though some bias remains.

The rapid growth of the English vocabulary raises the question of what the sources of the new words were. Beal (2004: 25–7) has analysed the 350 words first recorded in 1835 according to the *Chronological English Dictionary*. Taken together, Latin and Greek account for 61 per cent of those 350 words (French makes up an additional 17 per cent).11 (As I will argue in Section 3.3, it is doubtful whether loanwords should be counted as innovations.) In fact, as Görlach (1999: 115) and Beal (2004: 22–4) note, some contemporaries expressed concern about the large number of neologisms based on Latin and Greek, many of which were connected with science and technology, in terms that sometimes echo the Inkhorn Controversy of the Early Modern English period (see, for instance, Rissanen 1975; Nevalainen 1999: 359). There were fears that the lower classes, who had not had access to a classical education, would be excluded from discourse that relied on such words. Fairman’s (2006: 77–80) analysis

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11 However, several loans considered French by the dictionary originally stem from classical languages, which leads to potential over-representation of French as a source of new words (Görlach 1999: 111).
of early-nineteenth-century letters by minimally schooled and partly schooled writers indicates that such fears were justified. While Latinate words made up 64 per cent of content words in extensively schooled people’s letters, the corresponding figure for the minimally schooled and partly schooled group is 25 per cent. In addition, minimally schooled writers often had difficulty spelling words with unstressed first syllables (Fairman 2006: 75–6), presumably because such a word-stress pattern was unfamiliar to writers with a largely Germanic vocabulary; strategies include omitting or detaching the first syllable (e.g. Grement for agreement; a prentice for apprentice). The existence of such a “lexical bar” problematizes the issue of what it means to say that a word has been attested in English. As Nevalainen (1999: 342) notes, “[o]nly part of the new vocabulary in any language will find its way into the common core, which is shared by the written and spoken medium alike, by all registers, and by all social and regional varieties”. An OED attestation may not be sufficient to justify counting a word as part of the “English” vocabulary if a large proportion of speakers did not use that lexeme and were unfamiliar with its Standard English representation in writing.

To sum up, it is difficult to reach safe conclusions concerning the eighteenth century. The 1800s, however, were characterized by a remarkable amount of lexical innovation, a significant part of which remained unknown to a sizeable proportion of the English population.

2.4.2 Pronunciation

This selective survey of changes in pronunciation focusses on the inventory, distribution, and (to a lesser extent) realization of phonemes, as the phoneme is a unit of obvious structural significance in a language; for changes in stress, intonation, rhythm, voice quality, and so on, see MacMahon (1998: 492–520). The scope is chiefly restricted to the development of speakers from south-eastern England.

As indicated at the beginning of Section 2.4, there were few changes to the inventory of phonemes in LModE. Strang (1970: 78–9) argues that, since c.1770, changes in pronunciation have mainly been due “not, as in the past, to evolution of the system, but to what, in a very broad sense, we may call the interplay of different varieties, and to the complex analogical relationship between different parts of the language”. Beal (2004: 125–6), however, suggests that the impression of a difference between LModE and earlier periods in what types of change take place may be created by the
relative richness of the LModE database, which makes systemic changes more difficult to observe.

MacMahon’s (1998: 403–4) account suggests that the vowel phonemes present in late-eighteenth-century London speech are also part of present-day Received Pronunciation (though several phonemes were realized differently, and their distribution may have shifted). The main difference in vowel inventory is the appearance of the /ɜ:/ monophthong (in the NURSE set) and the centering diphthongs /ɪə/, /eə/, and /ʊə/ (in the NEAR, SQUARE, and CURE sets). The phonemicization of these sounds depends on the loss of non-prevocalic /r/, which had taken place in some varieties of eighteenth-century English (Beal 2004: 154), in combination with compensatory lengthening. The emergence of /ɜ:/ is also dependent on the merger of the reflexes of Middle English /ɪ/, /e/, and /ʊ/ before /r/ (as in fir, fern, and fur), which went to completion in most varieties during the LModE period (for details, see MacMahon 1998: 415–18).

The most important shift in the distribution of phonemes probably concerns vowels in what Wells (1982: 133–5) calls the lexical set BATH, which comprises words such as bath, dance, and sad. Members of this set originally had the same /æ/ as do members of the TRAP set (e.g. trap, cancel, and sad), but gradually underwent lengthening, lowering, and/or backing in certain phonetic environments, resulting in the BATH/TRAP split, where the BATH set has /æ/ and the TRAP set /ə/ in Present-Day Received Pronunciation (see Beal 2004: 138–41 for details). There is little evidence for the split before 1700 (Jones 2012: 829), making this largely a LModE process. Despite initial stigmatization, the new vowel in the BATH set eventually became part of Received Pronunciation. A similar lengthening of the vowels in words like off from /ɒ/ to /ɔː/ was reversed; Beal (2004: 141–2) suggests that the use of /ɔː/ by both the upper and the lower echelons of English society may have made the middle classes avoid the long vowel so that they would not be mistaken for working-class speakers.

12 However, there is some doubt about the phonemic status of /ə/ in relation to /ʌ/; see MacMahon (1998: 410–11) and Hickey (2010c: 5).
13 The emergence and subsequent disappearance of /ɔə/ is treated in MacMahon (1998: 414–15). In Section 2.4.2, I make use of Wells’s (1982: 127–68) standard lexical sets and use small capitals for the keywords of such sets.
14 Lengthening could take place as early as 1700 before some consonants and consonant groups, including /θ/ (bath), preconsonantal /l/, /s/, and /n/ (art, past, dance), and /l/, /lm/, and /lv/ (half, calm, calve) (Beal 2004: 139). In many environments, for example before final /s/, the split is incomplete and the distribution of /æ/ and /ə/ partly dependent on lexis (e.g. last with /æ/ vs. pass with /ə/). In such contexts, the split constitutes “the ossification of a half-completed sound change” (Wells 1982: 233).
Two other changes in the pronunciation of vowels may be mentioned. The vowels in the face and goat sets diphthongized and are usually represented as /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ rather than /eː/ and /oː/ in descriptions of Present-Day Received Pronunciation (Beal 2004: 136–8). In various accents in England, the unstressed final vowel in words such as happy has been variable between the kit set and the fleece set (so-called happy-tensing) since at least the eighteenth century (Beal 2004: 152).

No new consonant phonemes emerged during the LModE period, but there are differences regarding the distribution of existing phonemes. Arguably the biggest change is the loss of non-prevocalic /r/ in many accents in England (see Beal 2004: 153–7). Although non-rhotic pronunciations were stigmatized for much of the LModE period, they gradually gained ground, and eventually became part of Received Pronunciation. In addition to the phonicization of the centring diphthongs and /ɜː/, this change also resulted in the introduction of so-called intrusive /r/, as in Russia and China /ˈrʌʃən/; such pronunciations were proscribed during the LModE period and beyond but still appear to have become increasingly common after being first noted in the second half of the eighteenth century (Beal 2004: 156).

The distribution of the phoneme /h/ carried powerful social connotations (see Mugglestone 2003: 95–128 for a detailed account). Prescriptive comments stigmatized /h/-less pronunciations of some words with initial <h>, such as head, and also /h/-insertion in words like orange, resulting in a horange rather than an orange (Beal 2010b: 33). The situation was made more complex by the fact that initial <h> was traditionally silent in many French loans, and there was some variation between /h/-less and /h/-ful pronunciations of words such as hospital and humour (MacMahon 1998: 477–8). It also seems that /h/-ful pronunciations were recommended in some words that had previously been /h/-less (Beal 2004: 159); for instance, Walker (1791: xiii) indicates that humour and humble lack /h/. While /h/-dropping has never become part of Received Pronunciation, simplifying the initial cluster /hw/ to /w/ – or, alternatively, merging /ʍ/ and /w/ as /w/ – in words in <wh> like whales (making it a homophone of Wales) gradually became acceptable towards the end of the LModE period (Beal 2004: 158).

Another consonant that was increasingly dropped in LModE is /j/ between a consonant and /uː/, so-called yod-dropping. A /j/ used to occur in clusters where it is not used today, such as /glj/ in glue and /trj/ in rude (MacMahon 1998: 470–1). In stressed syllables after /r/, yod-dropping appears to have been spreading in late-eighteenth-century
English (Beal 2004: 148). After initial /s/ and /l/ (e.g. suit and lewd) yod-loss is later, and /j/ is still preserved after the alveolar consonants /t/, /d/, and /n/ in Received Pronunciation (e.g. tune, due, news). However, even in this set there has been variation in England; Beal (2004: 149) provides adverse eighteenth-century reactions to London pronunciations of dew and new without /j/.

The ending -ing has had two pronunciations in LModE: /ɪŋ/ and /ɪŋ/. While /ɪŋ/ appears to have been recommended throughout the period, /ɪn/ was widespread in working-class and upper-class speech. As was the case for /ɒ/ vs. /ɔː/ in off and so on, it seems that the middle classes seized upon /ɪŋ/ as the safer option to avoid being perceived as vulgar (Beal 2004: 160–1). The standard spelling with <ng> also indicated /ɪŋ/, which may have been an additional factor (Beal 2004: 161).

To sum up, with the exception of the emergence of several new vowel phonemes in accents that became non-rhotic, the LModE period may appear to witness few changes to the overall phonological system. In addition, many of the changes undergone in south-eastern varieties have not necessarily taken place in other accents. However, as I will argue in Chapter 3, there is a risk of underestimating the change that did take place if we underplay the importance of the individual speaker’s role.

2.4.3 Grammar

This brief survey will demonstrate that there was a good deal of grammatical change in LModE. However, apart from a few constructions and patterns which appear to be genuine innovations or which disappear from the language, the period seems mainly to be characterized by shifting frequencies of patterns that were already grammatical by 1700.

The verb phrase is arguably the site of the most radical changes English has gone through since 1700. Rissanen (1999a: 210) argues that “the Present-Day English verbal system” develops in particular between 1600 and 1800, and the verb phrase also witnesses two systemic additions to English grammar during the LModE period (Aarts et al. 2012: 870). The progressive passive, as in The house is being built, was first attested in the second half of the 1700s, but became established in English during the nineteenth century, despite being an overtly stigmatized feature for decades (see Anderwald 2014a, 2016: 189–217). This innovation meant

As Pratt and Denison (2000: 418–19) and others have noted, the near-simultaneous appearances of the progressive passive and the progressive of the verb be (e.g. He was being friendly) are most likely
that all pairs of English modal, perfect, progressive, and passive auxiliaries could be combined in a verb phrase (Denison 1998: 150), which increased the symmetry of the verbal group.\footnote{Before the availability of the progressive passive, what Visser (1963–1973: §§1,872–81) refers to as a passival form, that is, a progressive that was active in form but passive in meaning (e.g. The house is building), was sometimes used instead. The second addition is the get-passive, as in She got fired from her last job. While isolated examples from Early Modern English can be found (Aarts et al. 2012: 871; see also Fleisher 2006: 227 for a discussion of the origin of this construction), the get-passive becomes more firmly established during the LModE period and in twentieth-century English (Schwarz 2019), as the general frequency of get-constructions rises (Hundt 2001: 77). The development of both the progressive passive and the get-passive has been connected to grammaticalization (Denison 1998: 155; Hundt 2001; Schwarz 2019).}

Another important change in the verb phrase is the gradual disappearance of be as perfect auxiliary with intransitive verbs, as in I am arrived in Bath (e.g. Rydén and Brorström 1987; Kytö 1997; McCafferty 2014; Anderwald 2014b, 2016: 131–55; McFadden 2017; Calvo Cortés 2020). The shift from be to have in this context had begun before 1700, but the bulk of the change is located in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Rydén and Brorström 1987: 232–3). There was also some residual change concerning auxiliary do. The use of do-support had not been completely regularized yet by 1700; interrogative and negated contexts that require do in Present-Day English could still occur without it (e.g. Know you the answer? and I know not the answer), and there was occasional use of non-emphatic do in affirmative clauses (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1987: 123). The verb phrase has also been the focus of many studies considering quantitative shifts in the frequencies of features. The increase in the frequency of the progressive in general has been well documented (e.g. Hundt 2004; Smitterberg 2005; Kranich 2010; Anderwald 2016: 161; Reuter 2017: 145–98); the phrasal verb, as in give up, also increased in frequency in LModE (Smitterberg 2008; Rodríguez-Puente 2019).\footnote{Both connected, as both involve the sequence be being. In an intricate account, Warner (1997) argues that being was re-analysed as a non-auxiliary in the LModE period, which made both progressive passives and progressives of be possible, as be was subcategorized for taking non-auxiliary complements. In contrast, as Denison (1998: 204–5) notes, the near-disappearance of the “double -ing” construction, as in Being reading the paper, I missed the train, during the LModE period made the paradigm less symmetrical.}\footnote{Other types of multi-word verbs have also undergone changes. Phrasal-prepositional verbs such as put up with have increased in frequency (Denison 1998: 223). Many constructions with so-called light verbs, where the added material carries most of the semantic weight of the verb phrase (e.g.}
of these features are associated with colloquialization (but cf. Thim 2012 regarding the historical informality of phrasal verbs). As I will discuss further in Chapter 4, the net result of such changes is that “oral” and “literate” genres move further apart linguistically during the LModE period, which makes the genre parameter increasingly important in the study of morpho-syntactic change between 1700 and 1900.

The use of the subjunctive declined over the LModE period. In nominal clauses, the mandative subjunctive (e.g. *They demanded that he leave the room*) was gradually replaced mainly by *should* + infinitive constructions, though this trend was reversed in the twentieth century, with American English leading the way (e.g. Övergaard 1995; Denison 1998: 263–4; Kjellmer 2009: 247; Leech et al. 2009: 52–61). In adverbial clauses, the subjunctive declined more slowly in LModE (see Schlüter 2009: 281 for conditional clauses); however, this trend has not been reversed, and the indicative rather than constructions with modal auxiliaries took over from the subjunctive (Grund and Walker 2006: 103–4).

The distribution of forms used to express the semantic fields of modality and futurity has undergone several changes since 1700, only a few of which can be mentioned here. *May* has lost ground; for instance, *might* has largely lost the permission-in-the-past sense, as in *The porter might not speak to him* (Denison 1998: 165), where it has been replaced by a paraphrase such as *was not allowed to* or by *could*. In many contexts, *can* has also replaced *may* regarding the expression of permission and possibility, as in *Can I go now?* or *What else can it be?* (Denison 1998: 166). *Must* has largely lost its past-tense uses (Denison 1998: 176). For the expression of futurity, the prescriptive rule that *shall* should be used in the first person and *will* in the second and third persons (see Rissanen 1999a: 211–12 for a discussion of how the distribution originated) was increasingly abandoned, with *will* taking over from *shall* in first-person contexts (Denison 1998: 167–8). The *be going to* construction also gained ground during the LModE period (Denison 1998: 188). In the field of obligation, *have got* ‘be obliged’ (e.g. *This has got to be true*) developed after 1600 but did not become common until the nineteenth century (Visser 1963–1973: §§2,011, 2,142). *Used to* ‘was/were in the habit of’ used to occur in the present tense as well, as in *We...*
use to carve a rose on the flat side of the lute, but this usage appears to have died out during LModE (Denison 1998: 175). Variation between uncontracted and not-contracted combinations of operator + not (e.g. will not vs. won’t) is addressed in Chapter 5.

The LModE period witnesses considerable variation in the form of preterites and past participles. As Lass (1999: 167) notes, there were two main types of variation: some verbs could be either strong or weak, and many strong verbs displayed a great deal of variation in their vowel-grade patterns (and several still do so in non-standard varieties). Several verbs, for example catch and teach, had alternative, regular preterites and past participles as late as the eighteenth century; for several verbs such as smell and burn, irregular forms in -t spread between 1600 and 1800, with subsequent partial regularization (Hundt 2009: 24–7). Mondorf (2012: 844) refers to LModE as “a time of immense variability with rapid morphological change” in past-participle morphology. While there was little variation in the forms of past participles after 1800, preterite forms continued to exhibit formal fluctuation into the nineteenth century (Anderwald 2016: 62–130).

One of the areas where considerable change has taken place is in verb complementation; only a selection of references will be given here. A long-term change in English from finite to non-finite complementation was underway in LModE (Aarts et al. 2012: 878; Denison 1998: 256–7; Cuyckens et al. 2014: 202–3). When that-clauses were used as objects, clauses without an overt subordinator (e.g. He thought Ø the captain was present) became less frequent during the LModE period, possibly owing to prescriptive pressure (Rissanen 1999a: 284). In contrast, that has been lost in several compound (preposition + that) conjunctions, such as besides that and for that; the decrease began in the seventeenth century but continued into LModE (Denison 1998: 294; Rissanen 1999a: 303).

Non-finite complementation is itself an area where a great deal of change took place between 1700 and 1900 (Mair 2006a: 215): -ing clauses gradually replaced to-infinitive clauses in many contexts (Strang 1970: 100; Fanego 2007, 2010; Mondorf 2012: 851–3) as part of the so-called Great Complement Shift (Rohdenburg 2006: 143); there have also been changes in adjective complementation (see, for instance, Rudanko 2006 on accustomed). Sometimes the interplay between these clause types is intricate; for instance, Mair (2006a) demonstrates that, after remember, -ing clauses took over from to-infinitive clauses – and possibly also from finite complementation – in retrospective contexts (e.g. I remembered repairing the engine vs. I remembered to have repaired the engine vs. I remembered that
I had repaired the engine). Other factors that have been argued to influence complementation patterns include the main-clause verb, the Complexity Principle—that is, the tendency to prefer more explicit patterns in cognitively complex contexts—and horror aequi, that is, the avoidance of repeated forms such as two successive -ing forms (see, for instance, Rohdenburg 2003 and Vosberg 2003 for discussion of the latter two factors). In some cases, for example look forward to and contribute to, reanalysis of to from an infinitive marker to a preposition, with a resulting change from infinitive to -ing form afterwards, has taken place (Denison 1998: 265–6).

There are also other aspects of variation and change associated with LModE -ing forms. The -ing form can be clearly nominal (e.g. the buying of my house) as well as clearly verbal (e.g. I cannot avoid hating him) in both LModE and Present-Day English. However, hybrid forms, which exhibit both nominal and verbal characteristics (e.g. the gaining her affections, which combines a definite article with a direct object), were more frequent at least in eighteenth-century English than they are today (Aarts et al. 2012: 879). Many gerundial -ing clauses with subjects allow two types of subject heads: objective vs. (dependent) possessive pronouns (We look forward to them/their spending New Year here) and common-case vs. genitive nouns (We look forward to Sue/Sue’s spending New Year here). Preference has increasingly shifted to objective and common-case forms, with nouns and indefinite pronouns being the most advanced types of head in the change (Dekeyser 1975: 180–3; Lyne 2011: 298).18

As regards pronoun usage, the LModE period witnessed increased regulation—at least in the standard language—of usage current in Early Modern English as well (Beal 2004: 69–71, 75–7). Thou forms in the second person singular “continued to be used in increasingly restricted contexts” (Beal 2004: 70; see Walker 2007 for a detailed account of the variation up to 1760); similarly, by the eighteenth century ye was “relegated . . . to special registers” (Lass 1999: 154). Owing perhaps to the lack of number distinctions in the second person (apart from the reflexive paradigm) after thou forms were no longer in use, alternative strategies developed but did not make the transition to written standard usage, for example you was in the singular or alternative plural forms such as yous or

18 Personal pronouns also show case variation between subject and object forms in other contexts: in responses (e.g. Not he/him!), after words that can be analysed as prepositions or conjunctions, especially than and as (e.g. as intelligent as he/she), and as subject complements (e.g. It’s I/me). The object form has generally gained ground through LModE (Denison 1998: 107–8).
you all (Beal 2004: 70–1). The use of relative markers also underwent regulatory changes. Although the frequency of relative which with human antecedents dropped during the 1600s (Ball 1996: 246), it could still be found among educated writers in the early eighteenth century, and survived longer in non-standard usage and in restrictive clauses (Austin 1985: 18–20). The relative marker that was increasingly relegated to restrictive clauses and non-human antecedents in Early Modern English, and this trend also continued into LModE (Ball 1996: 249); the tendency to use who was especially strong in subject function (Denison 1998: 278). Johansson (2006: 180) argues that the relative marker that was largely restricted to specific syntactic contexts in written nineteenth-century English; Hundt et al. (2012a) show that which was increasingly preferred over that in restrictive clauses in LModE scientific discourse, though the trend was reversed in twentieth-century American English. Whom has been losing ground to who as a relative marker as well as an interrogative pronoun (Denison 1998: 246–7). Dekeyser (1975: 190–202) shows that, at least in interrogative contexts, objective who is quite frequent in informal nineteenth-century writing. In relative clauses as well as other contexts, prepositions can be stranded (e.g. the book that I was talking about) or pied-piped (e.g. the book about which I was talking), the latter variant being more formal and prescribed; this too is a field where there is variation in LModE (see Yáñez-Bouza 2014). Regional dialects exhibited greater variation in the range of relative markers, such as at in the north, as in the Midlands, and what in the south-east (Wagner 2012: 929–30).

There were a few developments in the adjective phrase. Lass (1999: 157) argues that the present-day system for the distribution of inflectional (-er/-est) and periphrastic (more/most) comparison was largely in place by 1750. Contrary to the general trend from synthetic to analytic usage in English, however, the proportion of inflectional comparison increased within the framework of this system during the LModE period (see, for instance, Kytö and Romaine 2006). Mondorf (2009: 117–69; 2012: 863–6) argues that a division of labour has been established in diachrony whereby more is favoured in cognitively demanding environments. Double comparison (e.g. more finer) became stigmatized in the eighteenth century and is rare in written nineteenth-century English (Kytö and Romaine 2006: 196). The present-day restrictions on adjectives as noun-phrase heads were not fully in place by 1700; adjectives could also appear as heads of noun phrases without the definite article into the eighteenth century (Rissanen 1999a: 192–3, 200, 204).
As regards the noun phrase, the use of increasingly brief modifiers to encode complexity is one of the main topics of the present study and is addressed in detail as densification in Section 4.3.2 and Chapters 7–8. But other changes in this phrase type also took place. Occasional plurals in -\(n\) still occurred in the eighteenth century (e.g. housen), as did zero plurals with “[p]otential collectives or mass-like nouns” such as brick (Lass 1999: 141). The use of one as an anaphoric pronoun in noun phrases underwent some expansion between 1700 and 1900 (Denison 1998: 102–3), with patterns such as those ones becoming possible. In some partitive noun phrases, concord has shifted; for instance, a plural verb after a majority/number of + plural noun became more likely during the LModE period, indicating a possible reanalysis of the structure of the phrase so that a . . . of functions as a complex determiner and the following plural noun as the head (Denison 1998: 121; Smitterberg 2006: 263–7). In the determiner slot, the combination of demonstrative and possessive determiners (e.g. this my friend) was still possible in the eighteenth century (Denison 1998: 114–15).

There have been few developments in clause elements since 1700, but even here some change has taken place. The indirect object has become somewhat more restricted in occurrence. Denison (1998: 217–18) provides several examples of verbs that would not be constructed as ditransitive today, for example nothing introduces you a heroine like soft musick and repeat her some of your own Verses. Pronominal direct objects preceding indirect objects (e.g. I gave it him) seem to have been less marked in LModE than in present-day Standard English (Denison 1998: 239). Reflexive structures also decreased in terms of the number of verbs that are constructed reflexively as well as the number of tokens. American English has been ahead of British English in this process, parts of which took place after the LModE period (Rohdenburg 2009: 180). Other alternatives to reflexives include particles (e.g. brace oneself > brace up) and way constructions (e.g. wind itself > wind its way) (Mondorf 2012: 848–50).

Given that changes in the incidence of linguistic features are often dependent on genre, cross-genre studies of LModE have become a prominent area of research. The importance of a genre perspective on LModE was highlighted in Biber and Finegan’s (1997) factor-score analysis,

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19 Although the matter concerns orthography rather than noun-phrase syntax, it should be mentioned that there was fluctuation during part of the LModE period as regards the use of an apostrophe to mark case. In the genitive singular, the apostrophe was regular around 1700, but the use of the apostrophe to signal the genitive plural was settled later (cf. Strang 1970: 109–10; Salmon 1999: 48).
which indicated that linguistic genre differentiation has increased since the seventeenth century. The oral–literate continuum they discuss has been replicated in other factor-score analyses (e.g. Geisler 2002), and in studies of particular linguistic features (e.g. Smitterberg 2008). The distinction between oral and literate styles of course conflates a large number of motives – conscious and subconscious – on the part of writers, editors, publishers, and other stakeholders in written language production. Two such motives are popularization and economy (Biber and Gray 2012). The case studies of colloquialization and densification in the present volume uncover what can be seen as the linguistic effects of these motives (and of other causes, including stylistic trends and sociocultural developments such as language users’ access to education and the printed medium).

The grammar of individual LModE genres has also been the subject of scholarly interest. I will restrict attention to three genres here, all of which are important for my own research in this book. Letters are important owing to their comparatively informal production circumstances, which makes their language potentially speech-like even though it is neither speech-based nor speech-purposed (Culpeper and Kytö 2010: 18). Letters are also a useful basis for research within historical sociolinguistics because their language is affected by the relationship between writer and addressee (Görlich 1999: 149); see, for instance, several of the studies in Dossena and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2008) and in Auer et al. (2015). To the extent that letter writers can be identified and related to one another, their social networks may also be used to shed light on the spread of linguistic features (see, for instance, Pratt and Denison 2000 for suggestions regarding the progressive passive). Especially important for the present study is the window that private letters open on gender differences in LModE syntax, as letters by women have survived in comparatively large numbers.

At the other end of the oral–literate spectrum is academic writing, a category that subsumes a large number of genres and subgenres. This category is important for two main reasons. First, it has been the site of considerable linguistic innovation during and after the LModE period:

20 Like journals and diaries, letters were also written by working-class speakers, and many of those texts have been preserved and are available to us (Mugglestone 2006: 295–6). Such documents help researchers to avoid the bias in favour of Standard English in terms of the available evidence, and can also lead to new research questions (see, for instance, Auer and Laitinen 2014). Although the letters examined in this book were written primarily by well-educated speakers, I will show in Chapter 6 that the survival of an earlier, less sentence-based style of text organization in some private letters affects the results regarding the syntactic units co-ordinated by and.
increasing phrasal complexity has resulted in a discourse style that seems to be unprecedented in the history of English (Atkinson 1999: 143–4; Biber and Gray 2012: 315). Moreover, the heterogeneity of academic English has increasingly been recognized. As shown by Biber and Gray (2016: 157–66), academic writing displays increasing syntactic divergence over time. Some of these disciplines have become the subject of separate study, for example Moskowich and Crespo (2012) for astronomy, Moskowich et al. (2019) for history writing, and Taavitsainen and Hiltunen (2019) for medical texts. As the case studies of nominal premodifiers and participle clauses demonstrate, this diversification is clearly noticeable in my data, where Science and History exhibit different trajectories.

The third category singled out for discussion here is newspaper English. Like academic English, this is an umbrella term covering a large number of text categories with different functions and linguistic characteristics, such as editorials, reportage, and advertisements. Newspaper English is important not least because of the mutual influence between newspapers and society in the 1800s: while societal developments such as telegraph networks, rising literacy rates and incomes, and the repeal of taxes gave newspapers new opportunities to spread news and opinions to an ever-widening circle of readers, the newspaper also took up an increasingly central position in nineteenth-century society: the ideas printed in newspapers – and the issue of who had (and should have) access to those ideas – took on new significance (see Section 4.5.2). Partly in response to developments in society, the language of newspapers also changed and diversified. In addition, the narrative conventions of newspaper English influenced contemporary novelists (see Rubery 2009), which shows that conventions from one genre can spread to another. Interestingly, newspaper English is potentially subject to colloquialization as well as densification (Biber and Gray 2012: 326), as both popular appeal and economy of expression became necessary for success. But not all newspapers followed the same trajectory; as I show in Chapters 7–8, the Poor Man’s Guardian, which had a largely working-class readership, did not participate in the change towards denser modes of expression.

Given that LModE underwent codification from the mid-eighteenth century on (see Section 3.5.2), studies that combine an examination of contemporary normative statements and descriptive analyses of syntax have provided important insights into the role of prescription in language change. Dekeyser’s (1975) early study was followed by analyses such as Oldireva Gustafsson (2002) and Anderwald (2016). Research has also focussed on the normative grammars, on the usage guides themselves,
and on their authors and readers (e.g. Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011, 2014b, 2017). The extent to which LModE grammarians were descriptive or prescriptive has been discussed by several authors, for example Beal (2004: 89–123), Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2011), and Anderwald (2016: 237–45). In Chapter 5 and Section 6.3.2, I consider the development of two linguistic features that were stigmatized in normative sources, and demonstrate that proscription affected their genre distribution.

One of the key aspects of the perspective on language and language change outlined in Chapter 3 is the importance of the idiolectal level. Since the idiolect is the only place where a complete version of any language is stored, we need an idiolectal window on language variation and change that can complement the picture of a communal language such as LModE. There has been scholarly interest in individual speakers’ usage for some time, as witnessed by studies like Phillipps (1970, 1978) and Clark (1975); more recent additions to this line of research include Mahlberg (2013), who combines a corpus-linguistic and an idiolectal approach, and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2014a). However, as I argue in Chapter 4, most LModE idiolects that can be studied in this way belonged to comparatively privileged speakers, and results based on those idiolects of course cannot be generalized to LModE as a whole.

Corpora cannot provide linguists with access to more than a minuscule part of a historical language user’s idiolect. In addition to the unavoidable absence of a great deal of their spoken production, most corpora cover a few genres only, and a language user is often represented in only one of those genres. In practice, comments on idiolects are thus often based on patterns in individual texts. What we can say is typically that, in comparison with other language users whose texts have been preserved for a particular genre, a given language user is conservative, advanced, or idiosyncratic in some other regard. Generalizations to their entire idiolect are frequently impossible. When I comment on idiolectal patterns in Chapters 5–9, this limitation should be borne in mind.

2.5 Discussion

Macro-level comparisons of sociocultural and linguistic change are necessarily approximations. Data on urbanization, literacy, employment, and so on can give us only a rough guide to real-life network structures (see Conde-Silvestre 2012: 335 for difficulties on the micro level in this regard). Similarly, the relative wealth of linguistic data we have access to for LModE notwithstanding, we remain far removed from actual speakers who were
exposed – and who contributed – to the linguistic reality of England between 1700 and 1900. Nevertheless, as Milroy and Milroy (1985) have demonstrated, the overall link between weak ties and rapid language change is strong enough for a macro-level attempt at correlation to be made.

The picture that emerges raises more questions than it answers, however. On the one hand, the sociocultural developments outlined in Section 2.3 clearly indicate that the trend has been towards more weak ties between speakers. The LModE period should thus on the whole be conducive to widespread language change, compared with several previous periods in the history of the language. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the linguistic areas investigated in Section 2.4 paint a picture of such pervasive change.

It is true that, at least in the nineteenth century, there appears to have been considerable lexical innovation; as Dossena (2012: 888) points out, sociocultural changes have considerable influence on this aspect of LModE. However, lexical innovation does not alter the structure of the language as clearly as changes in phonology or grammar. (In Section 3.3, I argue that borrowing, which accounts for most of this expansion of the lexicon, is perhaps best regarded as a special case of propagation rather than innovation and thus compatible with weak network ties.) The phonology of LModE does not seem to have gone through major restructuring along the lines of, say, the diphthongization of vowel + glide sequences in Middle English or the Great Vowel Shift. While a number of centring diphthongs – and /ɜː/ – were phonemicized, this involved little actual phonetic shift, and of course affected only speakers who became non-rhotic; no consonant phonemes developed or disappeared in the accent that turned into Received Pronunciation, although the distribution of several consonants shifted. Similarly, with the exception of a few developments in the verb phrase, there were few changes in LModE grammar that added new possible structures to the language. Even with allowance for the fact that gauging the extent of language change in this way is a very difficult and approximate operation, it seems clear that, in terms of macro-level patterns, there is less radical change in the structure of LModE than we would expect from a social-network perspective.

I refer to this apparent lack of correlation between the amount of change in the two fields examined – network ties and LModE – as the stability paradox: LModE appears to be structurally stable when it should exhibit
structural change. There are three potential explanations for this discrepancy between network structure and linguistic structure:

1. The positive correlation hypothesized between weak ties and language change is in fact not warranted, either for language in general or for LModE in particular.
2. The LModE period is in fact not characterized by weak ties compared with previous periods in the history of the language.
3. LModE is in fact not characterized by relative linguistic stability compared with previous periods.

More than one of (1)–(3) may of course be true simultaneously.

As regards (1), the overall correlation between social-network structure and language change on the micro level has been attested for twentieth-century English in several studies (see, for instance, Milroy 1992a). The validity of extending these findings to macro-level connections between (i) the distribution of different types of tie and (ii) the incidence of language change is admittedly more difficult to demonstrate empirically, but it is based on extrapolation from attested instances of stability and change, and there seems to be no strong reason to assume that what holds at the micro level should not hold at the macro level as well. As regards accepting the correlation in general but suggesting that LModE should somehow be an exception to it, doing so would refute the uniformitarian principle. Unless independent evidence can show that such special allowance for LModE is warranted, I suggest that we be careful about claiming “exceptional” status for particular language states. There seems to be little reason to abandon the uniformitarian principle in this particular case; rather, we should rely on it more for LModE than for other periods, given the recency of the period studied and the wealth of data available. I am therefore going to provisionally reject (1); however, as I argue in Chapter 3, correlations hold mainly between weak ties and the propagation of changes (as opposed to linguistic innovations).

The next option is to question the connection between the sociocultural changes in England during the course of the LModE period and concomitant weakening of social ties. As I noted in Section 2.3, it is of course true that pre-industrial networks were not uniformly characterized by strong ties (see, for instance, Bergs 2005: 47–8). Similarly, the working-class ties that were forged in the urban areas of industrial England would have had to become strong after some time had passed in order to act as norm-enforcing mechanisms in Present-Day English. However, several aspects of sociocultural change during the LModE period are difficult to dispute:
the urbanization process would in itself have broken strong ties and established new ones that were – at least initially – weak; the development and growth of the middle classes would have added to the number of existent weak ties; increased contact between socio-economic groups in a more densely populated urban setting would have established weak ties along which innovations could be transmitted; and improved communication via travelling as well as sending messages – primarily letters – would have facilitated the establishment and maintenance of predominantly weak ties at a distance. Overall, then, despite likely exceptions to the general pattern, there seems to be no reason to doubt the overall effect of these events on the distribution of strong and weak ties. Option (2) thus seems unlikely.

This leaves only (3), which may seem the least likely option, to be considered. There have been numerous studies demonstrating the relative lack of structural change in LModE. The period is certainly characterized by a great deal of linguistic variation with factors such as genre, medium, and class (Görlach 1999: 71), but changes to the structural system of English do appear to have been rarer and less radical during the period 1700–1900 than before.

Nevertheless, in Chapter 3, I shall argue that option (3) is in fact the (most) correct option that can resolve the stability paradox. My argument will essentially be theoretical, though I will draw extensively on previous research. I will attempt to demonstrate that looking at the communal language as the entity that undergoes change gives us the wrong image of LModE (and, by extension, of any temporally bounded variety of a language seen as an entity). Instead, I will suggest that, from a speaker-based perspective on language change, the period 1700–1900 is indeed characterized by the kinds of widespread changes that we would expect from a time period where weak ties become more numerous.