Salem Witchcraft Papers as Evidence of Early American English

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The purpose of this paper is to introduce and discuss the kind of evidence that the documents of the Salem witchcraft trials can give us of the language written and spoken in New England at the end of the seventeenth century. The most important types of text included in these papers are (1) official documents, (2) witness depositions, and (3) examinations of the accused.

Attention is called to certain linguistic features, such as the use of the auxiliary do, the future auxiliaries shall and will, and the variation between no and not any, as well as to some discourse aspects typical of the courtroom situation.*

Keywords: Salem witchcraft papers, early American English, auxiliaries, negation, courtroom discourse

1. Introduction

1.1. The Salem Story

The American tragedy of Salem witchcraft trials began early in 1692. Young girls, some of them under ten years of age, began to behave in a strange way; to use the technical term current at that time, they were "afflicted." One of the girls was the nine-year-old daughter of the newly appointed minister of Salem Village, the Reverend Samuel Parris. A typical accusation was that the ghost, the "apparition" of the accused tormented the victim. According to a contemporary witness, the Reverend John Hale, the girls claimed they were "bitten and pinched by invisible agents ... Sometimes they were taken dumb, their mouths stopped, their throats choaked, their limbs wracked and

* I am grateful to Professor Masatomo Ukaji for valuable comments on my paper.

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tormented. 1 Only the tormented could see the tormentors; this was called "spectral evidence." The girls named three women as their tormentors, and the examinations began on March 1, 1692. In the course of the next few weeks and months, more and more men and women became involved in the network of accusations. As a result of the examinations and trials, nineteen New England citizens were hanged and one pressed to death. At least five died in prison.

The Salem incident was not the first of its kind. A similar process had taken place in Boston in 1689. Four children belonging to the same Goodwin family began to show strange symptoms, suggesting witchcraft. As a result, a woman was arrested, tried for bewitching and hanged.

The first victim of the Salem trials, Bridget Bishop, was hanged in June 1692, and further executions followed in rapid succession, in July, August and September. In October, in the same year, the voice of common sense finally made itself heard: Governor Phipps prohibited further arrests and ordered that spectral evidence was no longer to be admitted in witchcraft trials. In the following spring the process was practically over, although its aftermath was felt even many years later. In the eighteenth century, the Salem Village was renamed Danvers, and finally, as late as 1957, the State of Massachusetts formally apologised for the events of 1692.

It is not surprising that the Salem story has been a source of inspiration for a number of literary works. The best known of these is no doubt Arthur Miller’s play The Crucible, also known as a film with the same name. Another famous American author intrigued by the Salem events was Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was a descendant of John Hathorne, one of the Salem magistrates, and was said to have been painfully conscious of his ancestor’s role in the trials.

1 Quoted from John Hale’s early 18th century “A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft” by Trask (1997 [1992]: 142). Trask’s book gives a vivid and accurate account of the first weeks of the Salem events. Another important recent study is Rosenthal (1993). The long Introduction in Boyer and Nissenbaum’s (1977) edition gives a good general picture of the course of events. For other important historical studies and documentary material, see References.
1.2. The Salem Documents as Evidence of Early American English

The rich documentation of the Salem witchcraft proceedings offers a unique treasury for the study of early American English. There are some 850 items varying from formal and formulaic documents to records of the statements and utterances of illiterate people and even non-native speakers of English. In my paper I will introduce the kind of evidence that this corpus of documents can give us on late seventeenth century American English. An international project team, consisting of American, Finnish and Swedish scholars, is, at present, transcribing and editing all the extant documents, some of them not previously published. The documents will be published in book form, with historical and linguistic introductions, and also as a computerised corpus.

The new edition of the Salem documents is not the first published version of this valuable collection of late 17th century American English texts. In 1977 Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum published an edition of most of the relevant documents. It is obvious, however, that the level of editorial accuracy of their edition, intended for historians rather than linguists, is not sufficient for linguistic analysis, although the language is not modernised. Another problem in their edition is that it is not based on original manuscripts but on transcripts made in the 1930s.

The linguistic value of the Salem documents is obvious. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played an important role in the development of the English language. In these centuries Middle English structural and dialectal variability and complexity gradually gave way to

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2 The following scholars participate in the project: Bernard Rosenthal (Director of the project; Binghamton University, State University of New York), Gretchen Adams (Texas Tech University), Margo Burns (University of New Hampshire), Peter Grund (Uppsala University), Risto Hiltunen (University of Turku), Leena Kahlas-Tarkka (University of Helsinki), Merja Kytö (Uppsala University), Sara Lilja (Uppsala University), Matti Peikola (University of Turku), Benjamin Ray (University of Virginia), Matti Rissanen (University of Helsinki), Richard Trask (Danvers Archival Center, Peabody Institute Library).

3 For copyright reasons, the availability of the electronic version for extensive scholarly distribution is, however, uncertain.

4 Note also Woodward's (1864, 1865) early edition.
more standardised forms of English, and the structure of the language became more or less established, with a lot of simplification of morphology. Some of the most dramatic developments in these centuries were, in addition to the regularisation of spelling, the establishment of the auxiliary do in questions and negations, the development of the be + -ing form, ye and later you as the second person singular pronoun, restrictions in the structure of the noun phrase, regularisation in the use of modal auxiliaries, including the intriguing question of shall and will as future auxiliaries, etc.

The Salem papers give evidence of the English language at the end of the seventeenth century when the period of rapid and radical changes had come to an end and the written standard was largely established. Furthermore, these documents give us valuable information on the early development of a new colonial variety of English. The development of language in general is full of paradoxes, opposite and clashing forces, and that is especially true of regional varieties, such as American English. Colonial lag retards the development; at the same time, new contacts, new environment, and new forms of administration tend to accelerate it.

The Salem papers also consist of a rich variety of writings from the sociolinguistic point of view. The carefully recorded utterances range from the speech of an illiterate slave girl, with a very poor knowledge of English, to relatively highly educated native speakers of American English. The people whose words are written down include men and women, the poor and the well-to-do, the articulate and the sullen. Most of them were born in America or came there when they were very young; they represent the first generation of what could be defined as genuine American English speakers. The Salem papers give, indeed, variegated evidence of the formative years of a new regional variety of English.

Furthermore, the Salem documents offer an excellent source for students of different genres of writing and various discourse strategies. They give evidence of dialogue and narration, colloquial register and extreme types of officialese, persuasion and argumentation, aggression and defensiveness.

The Salem papers include a special asset, not very common in the textual evidence obtainable from past centuries, namely two or even more contemporary reports of the same event or discourse situation, recorded by different scribes. A comparison of variant texts of this
kind offers the scholar more than one angle to study the discourse of the past: how two or three persons experienced and recorded the same event and the same utterances.

2. Types of Documents

2.1. Introductory

From the point of view of linguistic variation, we can easily distinguish at least three kinds of documents in the Salem papers:

2. Depositions of witnesses, mostly against but also in defence of the accused. Formal but less formulaic. Narrative and descriptive elements. Direct or indirect speech.
3. Examinations. Direct or indirect dialogue.

This list is not exhaustive; there are other types of documents, such as moving appeals by the accused to the authorities, letters, etc., but these three groups are the most prominent and give a fair cross section of the general character of the Salem papers. All in all, the Salem papers include more than 400 depositions, some 80 examinations and close to 400 other documents.6

2.2. Official Documents

The warrants in examples (1) and (2) are typical of the formal and formulaic style of the official documents included in the Salem papers.7

(1) Salem feb the 29th 1691/2

Whereas Mrs Joseph Hutcheson Thomas Putnam Edward Putnam and Thomas Preston Yeomen of Salem Village in ye

5 Warrant: a writ issued ordering a public official to perform some action; indictment: official charge made to a person; summons: an official order to appear in court; mittimus: a writ used when a record is sent from one court to another; recognisance: an obligation entered into before a court (i.e. note that somebody has appeared at court). Cf. Boyer and Nissenbaum (1977: 41–42).
6 I am grateful to Dr. Matti Peikola for this information.
7 The page references of the text extracts are to Boyer and Nissenbaum’s edition, but, where possible, I have re-edited the extracts from the original sources. The words and passages to which the reader’s particular attention is called are marked with boldface, which does not occur in the original document.
County of Essex personally appeared before vs, and made Complaints on Behalfe of their Majesties against Sarah Good the wife of William Good of Salem Village abovesd, for Suspition of Witchcraft by her Committed, and thereby much Injury donne. to Eliz Parris, Abigail Williams Anna Putnam and Elizabeth Hubert all of Salem village aforesd Sundry times within this two moneths and Lately. also don, at Salem village Contrary to ye peace of our Souern Ld and Lady Wm & mary King & Queen of Engld &c—You are therefore in their Majesties names hereby required to apprehend & bring before vs the Said Sarah Good, to Morrow aboute ten of ye clock in ye forenoon at ye house of Lt Nathaniell Ingersalls in Salem Village. or as soon as may be then & there to be Examined Relateing to ye abovesd premises and hereof you are not to faile at your peril Dated Salem. feb~ 29th 1691/2

(Warrant v. Sarah Good, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 355)

(2) To the Marshall Generall or his Lawfull Deputie

Whereas Complaints hath bin made by Cap't Jonathan Walcott and Thomas putnam of Salem Village vpon the 30th of Aprill Last past in behalf of their Majesties against phillip English of Salem Merchant for high Suspition of Divers acts of Witchcraft donne or Committed by him vpon the Bodys of Ann putnam Marcy Lewis Susannah Sheldon &c of Salem village or farmes and whereas Warrant hath benne for some tyme since granted out for the apprehending of the said phillip English to bring him vpon Examinati<on> and he not appeareing or found since in ye County of Essex

You are therefore in their Majesties names hereby required to apprehend the sd phillip English of Salem Merch. and him Convey vnto Salem in ye County of Essex and deliver him into the Custody of the Marshall of ye County of Essex or some Lawfull Authority there, that he may be Examined Relating to ye abovesd premises Either by such as shall be appointed thereunto or to the Majestrates in ye place and hereof you are not to faile Dated Boston May 6t 1692

(Warrant for Arrest of Phillip English, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 314)
under (1) and (2). The warrant begins with a long subordinate clause introduced by the rather vague subordinator *whereas*, which could best be translated as 'in view of the fact that' (cf. OED s.v. *whereas* 2). Then follows the main clause, signalled by the adverb *therefore*. Despite its seeming complexity, this sentence was no doubt perfectly clear and unambiguous to the person it was addressed to, who was, at least to a certain extent, accustomed to formulaic legalese and to the discourse structure of official documents. The warrant begins with the justification for the arrest, with references to the King and Queen of England, William and Mary, formulaic and of little importance to the actual message. After that follows the instruction: the name of the person to be brought to court, with the time and place clearly indicated.

It is easy to see that the structure of (1) and (2) is identical. The introductory part in (2) is somewhat longer because there are two circumstances introduced by *whereas*, and the instruction part is somewhat more detailed, but the phrase linking the two parts beginning with *You are therefore* ... is the same.

A formulaic pattern can be found in other types of official documents as well, as can be seen in (3) and (4).

(3) **The Jurors for our Sovereigne Lord and Lady the King and Queen: presents That** Sarah Good wife of William Good of Salem Villiage in the County of Essex Husbandman the Second Day of May in the forth year of the Reigne of our Sovereigne Lord and Lady William and Mary by the Grace of God of England Scottland France & Ireland King and Queen Defenders of the faith &c: and Divers other Dayes and times as well before as after, certaine Detestable arts called Witchcrafts and Sorceries, Wickedly & felloniously, hath used Practised, & Exersised at and within the Township of Salem in the County of Essex aforesaid in upon and against one Sarah Vibber wife of John Vibber of Salem aforesaid Husband man, by which said wicked Arts: she the said Sarah Vibber, the said Second Day of May in the fourth year abovsaid and divers other Dayes and times as well before as after was and is Tortured Afflicted Pined Consumed wasted and Tormented,—and also for Sundry other Acts of witchcraft by said Sarah Good committed and done before and since that time ag¹: the Peace of our Sovereigne Lord &
Lady the King & Queen, their Crowne and Dignity and ag't the forme of the Statute in that case made and Provided:

(Indictment v. Sarah Good, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 365)

(4) The Jurorors for our sovereigne Lord & Lady the King & Queen Presents That John Jaxon Sen'. of Rowley in ye County of Essex on ye Twenty Seuenth day of August 1692 And divers other Dayes and Times as well before as after Certaine De-testable Arts called Witchcrafts & sorceries wickedly Mal-lishiously & ffleloniously hath vset and Exercised at & in the Towne of Salem in the County of Essex aforesd vpon and against One Mary Warren of Salem Singlewoman By which Wicked Arts the said Mary Warren the Day & year aforesd and Divers other Dayes and Times as well before as after was & is Tortured Afflicted Tormented Consumed Pined & wasted against the Peace of our sovereigne Lord & Lady the King and Queen their Crowne and Dignity and the Lawes in that Case made and Provided.

(Indictment v. John Jackson, Sr., Boyer and Nissenbaum, 468)

The indictments in (3) and (4) have the same structure and use similar wordings. There is only one long sentence, this time beginning with a main clause. A clear break divides both indictments into two parts; it could even be analysed as a sentence break, depending on how we define the syntactic role of which in by which said wicked arts. The first part defines the accused and the alleged crime, i.e. witchcraft; the second part names the victim.

The documents quoted above are also illustrative of the archaic language and style of the officialese, intended to emphasise the dignity and authority of the wielders of power. This is not only indicated by the use of formulaic expressions but also by word order, which is far from natural and probably goes back to French or Latin models. The most obvious characteristic is the clause-final position of the verb (both finite and non-finite) and the pre-verbal position of the pronominal object or agent, as in and him Convey in the second paragraph of (2), or Witchcraft by her committed in the first paragraph of (1).

The type of text exemplified in (1)–(4) above is of minor interest in our study and survey of the earliest American English. It is worth noticing, however, that many people, including non-professional scribes, were on special occasions exposed to the language of official-
dom, and it may have influenced people's ideas of language and style, although these documents did not normally touch the lives of ordinary people.

2.3. Depositions

The documents consisting of the depositions of the witnesses in the Salem papers are more variable and, consequently, more interesting than the documents discussed above. They were written down by a scribe, who gave these documents a somewhat formal character; they were, after all, part of the official documentation of the court case in question. But the style and contents of the depositions are often very far from dry and formulaic officialese. They are based on the oral narratives of the witnesses and often describe shocking and seemingly supernatural events. In many cases the scribe lets the witness's own voice echo through the text. The deposition can be recorded either in direct speech narration or in indirect speech introduced by clauses of the type, "this deponent saith that ...." These two types of narration are often mixed; the scribe beginning with the formal third-person/indirect speech style easily slips into first-person narration. In this way, the depositions give us information on expressions and structures typical of early spoken American English.8

A conspicuous feature in the Salem depositions is the great variety in their formality. Example (5) represents the most formal end of the scale.

(5) The deposition of Sarah Gadge ye wife of Thomas Gadge aged about 40 years this deponent testifieth & saith that about two years & an halfe agone; Sarah Good Came to her house & would have come into ye house, but sd Sarah Gadge told her she should not come in for she was afraid she had been with them that had ye Smallpox: & with that she fell to mutring & scolding extreamly & soe: told sd Gadge if she would not let her in she should give her somthing; & she answered she would not have any thing to doe with her & the next morning after to sd Deponents best remembrance

8 See also Table 1 and the notes on the possibility of reconstructing the spoken language of the past, below.
one of sd Gadges Cowes Died in A Sudden, terible & strange, unusuall maner soe ye some of ye neighbors & said Deponent did think it to be done by witchcraft & farther saith not

(Sarah Gadge v. Sarah Good, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 369)

The deposition begins in a formulaic way, this deponent testifieth and saith, indirect speech is used consistently, and the end is, once again, formulaic & farther saith not. Note also the frequent use of the anaphoric deictic marker sd ‘said,’ typical of officialese, and the use of the word deponent referring to Sarah Gadge and her husband. Also the list of semi-synonymous adjectives Sudden, terible & strange, unusuall is typical of the language of law.

More important than these formal features is, however, the efficient, fluent and matter-of-fact narrative technique of the deposition. Sarah Gadge’s meeting with Sarah Good and its harmful results are told clearly and with good syntax; the sentence structure is simple but satisfyingly varied.

The deposition quoted in (6) differs considerably from the previous one.

(6) The Testimony of John porter, who Testifieth & sayth that Goodwife Biber somtime liuing amongst us I did observe her to be a woman of An unruly turbulent spirit; And shee would often fall into strange fitts; when shee was crost of her humor: Likewise Lidia porter Testifieth, that Goodwife Bibber And her Husband would often quarrel & in their quarrels shee would call him, very bad names, And would have strange fitts when shee was crost, And a woman of an unruly turbulent spirit, And double tongued

(John Porter and Lydia Porter v. Sarah Bibber, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 79)

In this deposition, first-person narration varies with indirect reporting. The scribe obviously tries to catch the essential facts in the two witnesses’ statements, but his mastery of structure is not very good, and he is at a disadvantage in not having as clear and logically advancing story to record as was the case in (5). The end of the deposition is somewhat incoherent; the record is rounded off with an unexpected colloquial expression and Double-tongued, perhaps emphatically uttered by Lidia Porter. But despite, or thanks to, the lack of scribal sophistication, this deposition takes us quite close to the spoken expression of
the witnesses, ordinary Salem people.

The deposition quoted in (7), John Westgate’s testimony against Mary Parker, gives us an even better view of the colourful life in late 17th-century Salem.

(7) Jno Wesgate aged about forty years This deponent Testifieth that about Eight years since he being att the house of m° Sam° Beadle In the company of Jno Parker and severall others, the wife of said Jno Parker came into the company and scolded att and called her husband all to nought whereupon I the said deponent tooke her husbands part telling of her itt was an vnbeseeing thing for her to come after him to the tavern and raile after thatt rate wth thatt she came up to me and called me rogue and bid me mind my owne busines and told me I had better have said nothing Sometimes afterwards I ye sd deponent going ffrom the house of m° Dan° King, w° I came over against Jno Robinsons house I heard a great noyce coming ffrom towards mr Babage his house then there apeared a black hogg running towards me wth open mouth as though he would have devoured me att thatt Instant time I the said deponent ffell downe vpon my hipp and my knife runn into my hipp up to the haft wn I came home my knife was in my sheath wn I drew itt out of the sheath and then imediatly the sheath fell all to peaces, and further this deponant Testifieth thatt after he gott up from his fall his stockin and shoe was full of blood and thatt he was forct to craule along by the fence all the way home and the hogg followed all the way home him and never left him tell he came home, and haueing a stout dog then with mee, the dog run then away from him Leapeing ouer the fence and Cryeing much, which at other tymes vsed to Wory any hog well or Sufficiently which hog I then apprehended was Either y° Diuell or some Euell thing not a Reall hog, and did then Really Judge or determine in my mind that it was Either Goody parker or by her meenes, & procureing fearing y° she is a Witch,

(John Westgate v. Mary Parker, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 632–633)

The formality features are present: this deponent testifyeth, I the said deponent, etc. But the scribe minimises the formulaic beginning and
omits the closing formula completely. The witness's account of the bad-tempered Goodwife Parker, *I the said deponent tooke her husbands part ... she came up to me and called me rogue and bid me mind my owne busines*, is most vivid, and the speech of Mrs Parker, although presented in indirect speech, rings true to life. John Westgate's story of his homecoming is dramatically told, and occasional jumps from direct to indirect speech and back do not make it less enjoyable.

2.4. Examinations

Both from the point of view of language and history, the most exciting items of the Salem papers are the examinations of the women and men accused of witchcraft. Here, too, there are several ways in which the dialogues between the examiner and the accused have been recorded, from summarising reports via indirect accounts to lively direct-speech reproductions of questions and answers. In these dialogues, to an even greater extent than in the depositions, the reader gets an impression of lifelike reproduction of utterances.

It must be kept in mind, of course, that written records do not give an accurate reproduction of the turns of spoken dialogue or a faithful representation of spoken language. But these records are nevertheless valuable in our attempt to reproduce the typical patterns and expressions of the spoken language of the past. Corpus-based variationist studies most often rely on comparisons between different genres or types of text. If this comparison shows a systematic preference—or avoidance—of some words or structures, and there are no other reasons explaining this tendency, we can assume that it is caused by the type of text, including its relationship to spoken language. In this way it is possible to create hypotheses of the patterns typical of the spoken expression of the past.

This comparative method can be illustrated by the simple formula in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Defining variant expressions typical of the spoken language of the past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic feature X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text A (speech-based)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text B (non-speech-based)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If text A is closer to spoken language (e.g., a record of a dialogue) than B (e.g., an official document or an essay) and the variant form N is significantly more common than M in A, while M is significantly more common than N in B, we can assume that the variant form N is more typical of spoken language of the period than the variant form M.\(^9\)

Relative closeness to spoken language is not the only important and interesting feature in the Salem examinations. As mentioned above, the people examined represent different social categories and levels of education. The following samples are selected both in order to show the kind of information obtainable of the spoken patterns of late 17th century American English and to illustrate how sociolinguistic factors may affect the discourse.

Example (8) is the record of the examination of Candy, a negro woman (cf. also Rissanen (1997: 188)).

(8) Q. Candy! are you a witch? A. Candy no witch in her country. Candy’s mother no witch. Candy no witch, Barbados. This country, mistress give Candy witch. Q. Did your mistress make you a witch in this country? A. Yes, in this country mistress give Candy witch. Q. What did your mistress do to make you a witch? A. Mistress bring book and pen and ink, make Candy write in it. Q. What did you write in it?—She took a pen and ink and upon a book or paper made a mark. ...

(Examination of Candy, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 179)

Candy had come from Barbados with her mistress, Margaret Hawkes. The scribe recording this examination obviously made an attempt to give an accurate impression of Candy’s defective English and to reproduce the dialogue as faithfully as possible, although he was certainly not able to give a verbatim transcription of it.

Most of the typical pidgin features can be traced here: the absence of the markers of tense and person in the verbs, and the lack of the

\(^9\) This formula is of course very much simplified as it is possible that the quantitative differences of occurrence are due to other extralinguistic factors than the relationship of the texts to spoken language, but it may illustrate the basic way of argumentation in variationist diachronic study.
copula, articles and prepositions. Candy's use of the verb give, obviously meaning 'make' is interesting. She may have tried to indicate that her mistress really gave her some kind of doll or talisman, and in this way made her a witch. On the other hand, if that had been the case she would have responded differently to the judge's question, *What did your mistress do to make you a witch?*, answering something like, "She give me doll." It would be interesting to find out whether there is any African language in which the verbs "to give" and "to make somebody something" would be synonymous.\(^{10}\)

Examples (9a–c) are extracts of three versions of the examination of Tituba, the mysterious slave of unknown origin and one of the key figures in the Salem drama. She was the servant of the Reverend Samuel Parris and she was claimed to have supernatural powers.

The record of Tituba's examination is particularly interesting as it exists in no less than four versions. One of them is just a summary of the examination, but parts of the other three are quoted below.

\begin{quote}
(9) a. What the Indyen woman saith

they haue don noe harme to them hur shee saith she doth nott know how the deuell works—**Who is it that hurts them the deuell frot I know.** there is fowre frott that hurts the children 2 of the women are Garner Osburn and gamer Good and they say itt is shee one of the child women is a tall and short women and they would haue hur goe to with them to boston and she oned that shee did itt att furst butt butt she was sorry for itt: itt was the apearance of a man that came to hur and told hur that she must hurt the Children

and she said that 4 times shaps of a hodg or a dodge and bid hur sarue him she said that shee could nott then she said he would hurt hur she all soe said that shee seed a yalow eatt burd that said unto hur sarue me

(Examination of Tituba [Scribe: Joseph Putnam], Boyer and Nissenbaum, 361)
\end{quote}

\(^{10}\) I am grateful to Prof. Vanda Polese of the University of Naples for insightful comments on this passage in private conversation.
b. The Examination of Titibe

(H) Titibe what sp evil spirit have you familiarity with (T) none (H) why do you hurt these children, (T) I doe not hurt them (H) who is it then the de (T) the devil for ought I ken know (H) did you never see the devil, (T) the devil came to me and bid me serve him (H) who have you seen (T) 4 women and sometimes hurt the children, (H) who were they? (T) goode Osburn and Sarah good and I doe not know who the other were Sarah good and osburn would have me hurt the children but I would not.

...  

(H) and why then doe you hurt them) (T) they say hurt children or we will doe worse to you (H) what have you seen [Speaker: Tituba] an man come to me and say serve me (H) what service (T) hurt the children and last night there was an appearance that said K Kill the children and if I would no go on hurtang the children they woud doe worse to me

(Scribe: Ezekiel Cheever, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 747)

c. Tittuba ye Ind~ Woem~ Exam~ March. 1. 1691/2  Q. why doe you hurt these poor Children? Whatt harme have thay done unto you? A. thay doe noe harme to mee I noe hurt ym at all. Q. why have you done itt? A. I have done nothing; I Can't tell when ye Devill works  Q. what, doth ye Devill tell you that he hurts ym? A. noe he tells me nothing. Q. doe you never see Something appeare in Some shape? A. noe never See any thing.  Q. whatt ffamillarity have you wth ye devill, or wth is itt if you Converse wth all? tell ye truth, whoe itt is yf hurts yf? A. the Devil for ought I know. Q. wth appearanc or how doth he appeare when he hurts them, wth shape or what is he like that hurts yf A. like a man, I think Yesterday I being in ye Lentoe Chamber I saw a thing like a man, that tould me Searve him & I tould him noe I would nott doe Such thing.

(Examination of Tituba [Scribe: Jonathan Corvin], Boyer and Nissenbaum, 750)

Second Examination. March. 2 1691/2 [In prison]
Q. What Covenant did you make with that man that came to you? What did he tell you? A. he Tell me he god, & I must believe him & Serve him Six year & he would give me many fine things. Q. how long ago was this? A. about Six weeks & a little more, Friday night before Abigail was ill. Q. what did he say you must do more? did he say you must write any thing? did he offer you any paper? A. yes, the Next time he Come to me & showed me some fine things, Some thing like Creatures, a little bird something like green & white. ...

(The Examination of Tituba [Scribe: Jonathan Corwin], Boyer and Nissenbaum, 753)

The extract in (9a), recorded by Joseph Putnam, gives the impression of being the most immediate one, consisting of hasty notes on the spot. Putnam does not quote Tituba verbatim; he just writes down the essential contents of her replies. He has no time to record the questions except at a few points, Who is it that hurts them? As to echoes of Tituba's own voice in Putnam's notes, the most interesting expression is for I know.

The second version of Tituba's examination was written down by Ezekiel Cheever, a fairly competent scribe, who recorded a large number of examinations. Cheever's records are probably clean copies, based on drafts and notes written on the spot, and he no doubt improved the quality of the dialogue. However, his version is by no means uninteresting. He interprets Putnam's for I know as for ought I know. Two conclusions can be drawn from Tituba's for. Firstly, the phrase for ought I know was obviously common and completely grammaticalised in spoken Massachusetts English of the late 17th century. Secondly, Tituba must have been fairly fluent in English as she uses this idiomatic grammaticalised expression.

Cheever's version might suggest that Tituba's English was almost native-like and even fairly sophisticated. The only doubtful expression in the extract quoted is the use of no in if I would no go on hurting the children, but that could even be regarded as a slip of the scribal pen. For this reason the third version of Tituba's examination is important and interesting. It was produced by Jonathan Corwin, one of the magistrates examining the accused.

Corwin's version gives a different impression of Tituba's English. Her answer to the initial question is, I noe hurt them at all. This can
hardly be the scribe’s invention. Tituba’s negatives were obviously
idiosyncratic, and Corwin made an attempt to convey this to his readers
who were to decide on Tituba’s guilt or innocence.

A few lines later, Corwin’s version of *frot* is the same as Cheever’s:
*for ought I know*. Why do all the three versions regard this particular
phrase as so important? Perhaps the scribes wanted to stress the point
that Tituba did not offhandedly associate herself with the Devil: the
hesitant “for ought I know” distances her from the Devil’s doings.

Despite the faulty formation of the negation, the first part of Cor-
win’s version of Tituba’s examination gives an impression of a woman
whose English is simple but fairly good. But the second examination,
the next day in prison, gives a somewhat different impression. In this
discourse situation the examiner certainly had more time to concentrate
on writing down what he heard. In this record we read, *he Tell me he
god, & I must beleive him & Serve him Six yeares & he would give me
many fine things. ... yes, the Next time he Come to me & showed me
some fine things, Some thing like Creatures, a little bird something like
green & white*. This is probably the truest representation of Tituba’s
level of English: understandable and even efficient, but clearly not her
mother tongue.

The extracts in (10) and (11) are taken from the examinations of two
women representing different social backgrounds, Sarah Good and
Martha Corey.

(10) (H) Sarah Good what evil spirit have you familiarity with
(SG) none (H) have you made no contract withe the devil,
(g) good answerd no (H) why doe you hurt these children
(g) I doe not hurt them I *scorn it*. (H) who doe you imploy
then to doe it (g) I imploy no body, (H) what creature doe
you imploy then, (g) no creature but I am falsely accused
(H) why did you go away muttering from mr Paris his house
(g) I did not mutter but I thanked him for what he gave my
child (H) have you made no contract with the devil (g) no ...
(H) Sarah good doe you not see now what you have done
why doe you not tell us the truth. why doe you thus torment
these poor children. (g) I doe not torment them, H ?? who
doe you imploy then (g) I imploy no body I *scorn it* (H) how
came they thus tormented, (g) what doe I know you bring
others here and now you charge me with it (H) why who
was it (g) I doe not know but it was some you brought into
the meeting house with you (H) wee brought you into to the meeting house (g) but you brought in two more (H) who was it then that tormented the children (g) it was osburn (H) what is it that you say when you goe mattering [=muttering] away from persons houses (g) if I must tell I will tell (H) doe tell us then (g) if I must tell I will tell, it is the commandments I may say my commandments I hope (H) what commandment is it (g) if I must tell you I will tell. it is a psalm (H) what psalm (g) after a long time shee muttered over some part of a psalm (H) who doe you serve (g) I serve god (H) what god doe you serve (g) the god that made heaven and earth (Examination of Sarah Good, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 356–357)

(11) Mr Hathorne. You are now in the hands of Authority tell me now why you hurt these persons

Martha Kory. I do not. who doth?

Pray give me leave to goe to prayer

This request was made sundry times

We do not send for you to go to prayer But tell me why you hurt these?
I am an innocent person: I never had to do with Witchcraft since I was born. I am a Gospel Woman
Do not you see these complain of you The Lord open the eyes of the Magistrates & Ministers: the Lord show his power to discover the guilty.

... Well tell us wt you know of this matter

Why I am a Gosple-woman, & do you think I can have to do with witchcraft too

... What did he say to you.

We must not beleive all that these distracted children say

... Severall prove it
Ye are all against me & I cannot help it
Do not you beleive there are Witches in the Countrey
I do not know that there is any
Do not you know that Tituba Confessed it
I did not hear her speak

(Examination of Martha Corey, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 248)

Sarah Good was one of the three women examined on the first day of court sessions, March 1, 1692. She is described as an old woman but, at the same time, pregnant and a mother of a daughter four or five years old. All sources agree that she was a woman with little learning, and was unsociable and strange in her behaviour.

Sarah Good does not enter into any kind of real dialogue with Hathorne. Her answers are as simple as possible, and the only active comment she makes is when she implies that Sarah Osborne is a witch, not herself. She also makes hostile comments: I scorn it, I may say my commandments I hope, and, if I must tell I will tell.

Not much is known about the education or social background of Martha Corey, except that she was an important and active member of the Church, “a Gospel woman,” as she calls herself. Compared to Sarah Good, she gives the impression of being intelligent and articulate. She asks permission to go to prayer—this is of course denied. She prays for the court: The Lord open the eyes of the Magistrates & Ministers: the Lord show his power to discover the guilty. This kind of pious wish certainly does not improve her situation. Although her answers are fairly brief, she presents good counter-arguments and tries to question the validity of the accusations of the girls: We must not beleive all that these distracted children say ... Ye are all against me & I cannot help it.

Martha Corey was, however, rather passive and defensive in comparison to some other Salem people examined for witchcraft. In (12) and (13), extracts of the examinations of George Jacobs, Sr., and Susannah Martin are quoted.

(12) Here are them that accuse you of acts of witchcraft
Well, let us hear who are they, & what are they.
Abigail Williams—
Jacobs laught
Because I am falsely accused—Your worships all of you do
you think this is true?
Nay, what do you think?
I never did it.
who did it?
Don't ask me.
Why should we not ask you? Sarah Churchwell accuseth you, there she is.
I am as innocent as the child born to night, I have lived. 33. yeares here in Salem.
What then?
If you can prove that I am guilty, I will lye under it. Sarah Churchwell said last night I was afflicted at Deacon Ingersolls, & Mary Walcot said it was a man with 2 staves, it was my Master. Pray do not accuse me, I am as clear as your Worships; you must do right judgment—

You tax me for a Wizard, you may as well tax me for a Buzard I have done no harm.

... Please your worship it is untrue, I never showed the book, I am as silly about these things, as the child born last night.
(Examination of George Jacobs, Sr., Boyer and Nissenbaum, 474-475)

(13) As soon as she came in many had fits.
Do you know this Woman
Abig: Williams saith it is Goody Martin she hath hurt me often. Others by fits were hindered from speaking.

... The examinant laught.
What do you laugh at it?
Well I may at such folly.

... What do you say to this?
I have no hand in Witchcraft.
What did you do? Did not you give your consent?
No, never in my life.
What ails this people?
I do not know.
But w't do you think?
I do not desire to spend my judgment upon it.
Do not you think they are Bewitcht?
No. I do not think they are
Tell me your thoughts about them.
Why my thoughts are my own, when they are in, but when they are out they are anothers.
You said their Master—who do you think is their Master?
If they be dealing in the black art, you may know as well as I.
...
Do you believe these do not say true?
They may lye for ought I know
...
Pray God discover you, if you be guilty.
Amen. Amen. A false tongue will never make a guilty person.
You have been a long time coming to the Court today, you can come fast enough in the night. said Mercy Lewes.
No, sweet heart, said the Examinant.
And then Mercy Lewes, & all, or many of the rest, were afflicted
...
What is the reason these cannot come near you
I cannot tell. It may be the Devil bears me more malice than an other.
Do not you see how God evidently discovers you?
No, not a bit for that.
All the congregation think so.
Let them think w't they will.
(Examination of Susannah Martin, Boyer and Nissenbaum, 550-555)

Jacobs is not educated—he says he cannot read—but he is active, articulate and has a good sense of humour. His laughter is interpreted as contempt of the Court and, consequently, as an additional proof of guilt; it is carefully recorded by the scribe. You can almost hear Jacobs’s voice when he asks the members of the Court, Your worship, all of you, do you think this is true? His colloquial and somewhat impertinent, Don’t ask me is also worth noting, not least because the use of the contracted form indicates that in late 17th-century spoken American English the use of do in negations was established and grammaticalised.
Unlike Good and Corey, Jacobs takes the initiative. *I have lived 33 years here in Salem*, he says, and when the judge, obviously puzzled, asks, *What then?* he indicates, using another colloquial idiom, that he is fully prepared to take the responsibility for whatever he has done, *I will lye under it*, but not for anything he has not done. Immediately after that he points out that the evidence for his guilt is ridiculously contradictory and illogical: one girl says one thing, another girl says another thing. A little later there is a witty word play, *wizard/buzzard*, which shows that he is not intimidated into silence or admission of guilt. His final statement emphasises his innocence, *I am as silly about these things as the child born last night*, the adjective silly meaning ‘ignorant.’

Susannah Martin was an elderly woman, in her sixties, and not much is known about her background. But her consistency and wittiness are admirable, in an extremely dangerous and hostile situation. Her examination begins with laughter just as Jacobs’s. And when asked why she laughed, she is even more outspoken than Jacobs: *Well I may at such folly.* Her emphatic and idiomatic *never in my life a couple of lines later is worth noting and so are her fairly sophisticated expressions, I do not desire to spend my judgment upon it and my thoughts are my own, when they are in, but when they are out they are anothers*, when she refuses to give her opinion on the girls and their torments. Unlike Good and Corey, she openly declares her opinion that the girls are lying and just pretending to be afflicted, *they may lie, for ought I know*, and that they are themselves guilty of black magic.

Susannah Martin cannot be intimidated any more than George Jacobs: *Amen Amen. A false tongue will never make a guilty person*, she answers to the judge’s hypocritical exhortation to prayer. Her answer, *No, sweetheart*, to Mercy Lewis, is bitingly ironical, and the end of the examination shows her firmness and courage.

3. Notes on Discourse

A few notes can be made on the discoursal aspects of the Salem papers, with reference to the examinations quoted above.11 Rules and

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11 For more detailed discussions of the discourse in the Salem papers, see Hiltunen (1996), Archer (2002), and Kahlas-Tarkka and Rissanen (forthcoming).
practices of everyday discoursal politeness were of course of little use in a witchcraft examination situation. The basic pattern in these situations seems simple enough and could be defined in the following way:

— If the accused was a witch, (s)he was sentenced to death.
— If the accused was possessed by the Devil or just “a witch’s tool,” (s)he was not responsible for his/her activities and was not sentenced to death.
[— If the accused was innocent, (s)he was acquitted.]

The last alternative only played a secondary role in the Salem examinations, although it did exist. Those who argued that they had nothing to do with witchcraft, however convincingly they did it, had a much smaller chance of avoiding the gallows than those who admitted they may have had some connection with witchcraft but did not intend any harm to anybody and were not responsible for what they were doing.

This pattern led to a simple code of successful defence strategies:

— Be cooperative. Provide the court with details, particularly such as may involve other people.
— Do not argue with the examiner.
— Admit what you are accused of, but deny hurting other people intentionally.
— Emphasise the role of other people or the Devil in your “acts of witchcraft.”

Cooperativeness was the overwhelmingly important discourse principle. Also, the accused should carefully avoid threatening the face of the examiner. And it was, indeed, important that the accused claimed to be just an unwilling tool of “real witches” or the Devil himself.

In contrast, unsuccessful efforts of defence consisted of lack of cooperativeness, that is a blunt denial of involvement in witchcraft, emphasising the defendant’s impeccable, pious and morally faultless life in the past, questioning the validity of the evidence, and doubting the intelligence and wisdom of the court.

On the basis of this simple discourse pattern it is easy to see why Candy and Tituba saved their lives while Sarah Good, Martha Corey,
George Jacobs and Susannah Martin were executed. Candy and Tituba are cooperative and admit their involvement in witchcraft, but they consistently emphasise that they were just tools of "real" witches who compelled them to practise witchcraft. The other four whose examinations are quoted above commit one or more of the fatal errors listed as unsuccesful defence strategies.

4. Observations on Language

4.1. Introductory

The question of what kind of concrete systematic evidence the Salem documents can give us of the structure of early American English is of course of major interest. As the Salem Witchcraft Papers Corpus is not yet completed, only some preliminary observations can be presented in the following. The quantitative results are derived from my private corpus based on Boyer and Nissenbaum’s edition.12

It is obvious that the complexity of sentence structure varies a lot in different types of documents. Perhaps the most relevant observation here is the relatively simple but expressive and efficient way in which even less educated people are able to structure their narrative and argumentative presentations. It is also worth noting that legalese or officialese played a part in the written tradition of early American texts. It may have had a standardising effect, although its long complicated structures were not imitated at other levels of writing.

4.2. The Auxiliary Do

The establishment of the auxiliary do in questions and negations is a central topic in the syntactic study of sixteenth and seventeenth century English.13 The use of do in negations seems well established, although it is easy to find instances in which it is not used. In the examinations, there are 33 instances in which do-periphrasis is not used in contexts in

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12 This corpus consists of c. 32,000 words of letters and indictments, c. 86,000 words of depositions and c. 36,000 words of examinations.
which Present-day English would use it, as against 134 instances of the use of *do*. The proportionate figure of absence may look rather high, but it is worth pointing out that 23 instances occur with the verb *know* (example 14) and three with imperatives (15).

(14) I know nothing of it. I am innocent to a Witch. I know not what a Witch is (Examination of Bridget Bishop, Boyer and Nissenbaum 84)

(15) Charge him not unless it be he. (Examination of Nehemiah Abbott, Jr., Boyer and Nissenbaum 49)

In questions, the auxiliary *do* seems to be used even more regularly than in negations. Of the more than 500 questions indicated with a question mark in Boyer and Nissenbaum’s edition, there are only ten in which *do* is not used in contexts in which Present-day English would use it. Of these, four appear with the verb *say* (16) and six in the idiomatic expression *come ... about, come ... to pass* (17)–(18):

(16) What say you, are you guilty of witchcraft, of which you are suspected, or not? (Examination of Nehemiah Abbot, Boyer and Nissenbaum 49)

(17) It is said you were afflicted, how came that about? (Examination of Deliverance Hobbs, Boyer & Nissenbaum 420)

(18) You were a little while agoe an Afflicted person, now you are an Afflicter: How comes this to pass? (Examination of Mary Warren, Boyer and Nissenbaum 793)

*Do* is still conspicuously common in affirmative statements of the type “He did see Sarah Good” as against “He saw Sarah Good.” By this time, in British English, *do* had become uncommon in these contexts in written texts (see e.g. Rissanen (1991; 1999: 242–3); Nurmi (1999), passim). But in American English, this use of *do* seems to remain common much later (Rissanen (1985)). The Salem material confirms this. While in later 17th century British English the maximum frequency of clauses with *do* in affirmative statements is less than 30 occurrences per 10,000 words in most text genres (Rissanen (1991: 325), Table 1), the frequency rises to 51 occurrences per 10,000 words

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14 This method does not of course select all the questions in the material, as the use of the punctuation marks is erratic, but it gives a fair sample.
(442 occurrences in a corpus of c. 86,000 words) in the Salem depositions. The conventions of legal language are no doubt partly responsible for the high ratio; many of the instances are frequently repeated set phrases, such as *did (...) torture* (22 instances), *did (...) afflict* (27 instances), and *did (...) own* (8 instances) (examples 19–21):

(19) The Deposition of Mercy Lewis aged about 19 years who testifieth and saith that on the 3d April 1692 the Apparishment of Dorrithy good Sarah goods daughter came to me and *did afflict* me urging me to writ in his book. (Mercy Lewis vs. Dorcas Good, Boyer and Nissenbaum 352)

(20) and during the time of his examination Giles Corey *did torment* me a great many times. (Ann Putnam, Jr. vs. Giles Corey, Boyer and Nissenbaum 241)

(21) Sara biber one her oath *did owne* this har testimony before the Jurriars for Inqwest: this. 28: of June 1692 (Sarah Biber vs. Sarah Good, Boyer and Nissenbaum 376)

But the most typical use of *do* in affirmative statements seems to be the clustering use in narrative contexts (cf. Rissanen (1991: 325–326)). *Do* seems to be a discursive device underlining the importance of the narrative, as in (22): 

(22) sd Bishop came in her Red paragon Bodys and the rest of her cloathing yt she then usuallly *did* ware, and I knowing of her well also yt garb she *did* vse to goe in. *did* clearely & plainely know her, and testifieth that as he locked the dore of the house when he went to bed soe he found it after wards wth he *did* Rise; and quickly after they appeared the light was out, and the Curtaines at yt foote of yt bed opened where *I did* see her and presently came and as I And lay upon my Brest or body (Richard Coman vs. Bridget Bishop, Boyer and Nissenbaum 102)

4.3. *No* and *Not Any*

Another interesting feature which seems typical of early American
English—or at least of the Salem papers—is the use of the synthetic negation *no, none*, instead of the analytic *not any*. In the examinations and depositions there are 332 examples of the synthetic type *none, or no+NP, or nobody/-thing* (23)-(24), as against 32 of the analytic one *not+any (+NP or -body/-thing)*, (25):16

(23) What bird was it.
I know no bird.
(Examination of Martha Corey, Boyer and Nissenbaum 252)

(24) Why do you hurt these folks
I hurt no body
(Examination of Mary Black, Boyer and Nissenbaum 113)

(25) I asked hir what itt was about but she would not tell mee saying she had promised nott to Lett any body see itt.
Q. Well, but whoe did you see more?
An. I don’t know any more.
(Examination of Mary Warren, Boyer and Nissenbaum 801)

4.4. *Shall* and *Will*

The question of the future auxiliary has of course particular interest with reference to American English, which does not follow the *shall/will* dichotomy typical of formal Southern British English. Table 2 illustrates the use in the Salem Papers:

Table 2. The distribution of *shall* and *will* as future auxiliaries in some Salem documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1p.sg</th>
<th>2p.sg</th>
<th>3p.sg</th>
<th>1p.pl</th>
<th>2p.pl</th>
<th>3p.pl</th>
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<tr>
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<td>sh wi</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examin.</td>
<td>12 34</td>
<td>1 21</td>
<td>2 34</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>0 2</td>
<td>1 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depos.</td>
<td>7 14</td>
<td>4 5</td>
<td>1 7</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indict.</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>13 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19 48</td>
<td>5 26</td>
<td>16 41</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>0 2</td>
<td>1 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that *will* very clearly prevails both in the examinations and in the depositions, even in the first person. It is worth noting,

16 The history of synthetic and analytic negation is discussed by Tottie (1998).
however, that *shall* is more likely to occur in the first person than in the second or third. In the first person, *will* often indicates intention and *shall* pure future, as in (26).

(26) Are you guilty, or not? Speak the truth. I *will* speak the truth. I have seen sights and been scared. I have been very wicked. I hope I *shall* be better, if God *will* help me.

(Examination of Abigail Hobbs, Boyer & Nissenbaum 405)

Note, too, the use of *will* and *shall* in example (27); *shall* here indicates a threat:

(27) when hir master hath asked hir about these things she sayth thay *will* nott lett hir tell, butt Tell hir if she Tells hir head *shall* be Cutt off.

(Examination of Tituba, Boyer and Nissenbaum 752)

*Shall* in the third person typically occurs in indictments, mostly in formulaic phrases of the type shown by (28). *Will* is not recorded even once in the small corpus available:

(28) & hereof fail not at Your perrill & for so doing this *shall* be your warrant of which you are to make a true returne as the Law derects:

(Warrant for Arrest of Rachel Clenton, Boyer and Nissenbaum 215)

5. Final Remarks

The most important extralinguistic factors which can be regarded as relevant for the variationist approach to the study of language can be grouped under the following headings:

1. Sociolinguistic variability and the influence of social changes and mobility on the development of language, including participant relationship and level of formality.

2. Textual variability, i.e., the interrelation between the topic of text or genre and linguistic expression, including discourse situation and medium.

3. Regional variability and the differentiation and amalgamation of regional varieties, including contact phenomena.

In variationist studies, observations on the influence of these extralinguistic factors, combined with the language-internal trends of change, form the basis of the analysis and interpretation of linguistic change. This is also the starting-point we have set for ourselves in the Research
In the ideal case, in all diachronic studies, attention should be paid to all these factor groups, although, in practice, it is not always possible. Finally, a systematic multi-factor analysis of a large number of linguistic features might result in an integrated synthesis which would decisively increase our knowledge of language and its development.

As I have tried to show above, the Salem witchcraft documents give us rich evidence of the three extralinguistic factor groups mentioned above: sociolinguistic and textual variation in a new regional variety. It is obvious, however, that the study of the roots and early development of American English is still in its initial stages. We are missing a large systematically compiled corpus of seventeenth and eighteenth century American English, consisting of both literary and non-literary material.17

REFERENCES


17 A Corpus of Early American English is under preparation by Professor Merja Kytö of Uppsala University (see Rissanen, Kytö and Palander-Collin (1993: 83–91)). The ARCHER Corpus (see Biber and Finegan (1997: 253–275)) consists of American material from 18th century on.


Woodward, W. Elliot (1864, 1865) Records of Salem Witchcraft, Compiled from
the Original Documents, publ. by the author.

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