



A Community of Practice in the Mercers of the City of London: Catching the Third Sociolinguistic Wave with a Multilingual Medieval Guild

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ABSTRACT

This article tests the applicability of the community-of-practice framework to the process of vernacularisation of the earliest extant account book written by the Mercers' guild of London between 1347–1348 and 1463–1464. Its records have been informative of the satisfactory applicability of social constructs from the two early sociolinguistic waves, such as time and age and social networks, to related multilingual phenomena, such as codemixing and language maintenance and shift. My analysis shows that the replacement of Latin and French by English as the main language for the different sections of that earliest extant account book began, developed, and ended when the administration of the Mercers' guild of London was being controlled and recorded –at least partially– by warden-bookkeepers connected through regular and strong contact with each other. Furthermore, their use of the English vernacular was influenced by the previous and simultaneous contact with other records in the same vernacular.

KEYWORDS

The Mercers' guild of London; Financial accounts; The Middle Ages; Community of practice; Third-wave Sociolinguistics; English; French; Latin; Vernacularisation; Multilingualism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Middle English period is considered to be one of the best represented objects of study in historical sociolinguistics and multilingualism and, consequently, researchers working on the

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role of extralinguistic factors in the interplay among Latin, French, and English in medieval England have been credited with contributing enormously to the combination of both subfields of study (Pahta, Skaffari, & Wright, 2018: 3–6; Russi, 2016: 2; Schendl, 2012, 2018: 39; Schendl & Wright, 2011: 1–4). Recent studies of historical multilingual practices from several guilds of medieval London can be added to the long list of contributions. The phenomena of codemixing and language maintenance and shift between Latin or French and English in guilds' records have been regarded as dependent linguistic variables against independent social variables and constructs from two of the three waves of sociolinguistic variation study (Conde Silvestre, 2016). Whereas first-wave sociolinguistics has investigated time, class, sex, and age from a macrosocial perspective, second-wave sociolinguistics has approached social networks from a more microsocial perspective (Eckert, 2012).

Real-time analyses have shown gradual and orderly processes from the exclusive use of Latin and French to the adoption of English –through codemixing between Latin or French and English– in the medieval financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London and the Grocers' guild of London (Alcolado Carnicero, 2019, 2023; Miller, 2002; Wright, 2002: 475–479, 2012: 109–110). As Figure 1 evinces, years with financial accounts written only in Latin or French occurred chiefly before the 1400s in the two guilds, years with financial accounts in a mixture of Latin, French, and English occurred notably from the 1400s in the two guilds and, finally, years with financial accounts mainly in English occurred mostly between the 1420s and the 1440s in the Grocers' guild of London and in the Mercers' guild of London after the 1440s.

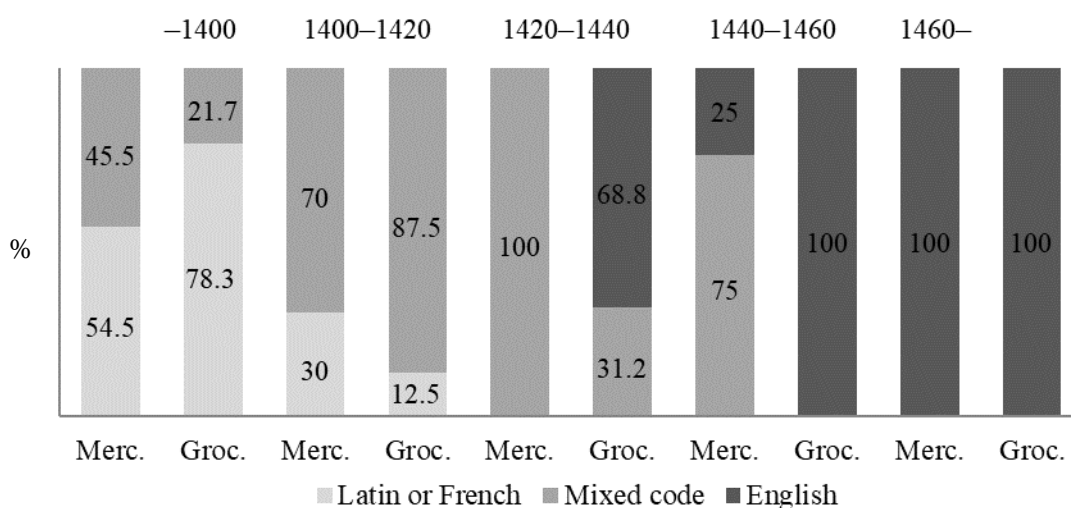


Figure 1. Evolution of the main languages in the extant annual financial accounts of the two first guilds of London.

Relevant differences are noticed in the two guilds diachronically. Despite Figure 1 not illustrating it, an overlooked stage of Latin or French codemixing in financial accounts in English has been recently revealed in my analysis of the Grocers' guild of London during the period 1424–1463 (Alcolado Carnicero, 2023). Its non-inclusion in my other analyses of the Mercers' guild of London between 1449–1450 and 1463–1464 has been partly due to the contrasting and misleading conceptions in the literature regarding the phenomenon of language shift in guilds' records (Alcolado Carnicero, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2019). Furthermore, the two guilds introduced and used the new multilingual practices at different moments. Class –or status– and sex –or gender– seemed unable to adequately explain guild members' language behaviour in the Mercers' guild of London. Unlike the second-ranked Grocers' guild of London, the theory that upper-social ranks lead language variation and change does not account for linguistic conservativeness by the first-ranked Mercers' guild of London. Having also uninfluential and female members in its ranks might have been the reason –at least hitherto discussed– behind that lack of linguistic progressiveness (Wright, 2018: 351–352).

The evolution of the three versions in the Mercers' guild of London correlated with the date of birth –and age– of many warden-bookkeepers in each generation. As detailed in Table 1, most warden-bookkeepers born before 1375 –the first and second generations– and mainly in office before 1400 maintained Latin or French; the majority of warden-bookkeepers born between 1375 and 1425 –the third and fourth generations– and mostly in office between 1400 and 1450 mixed Latin, French, and English; most warden-bookkeepers born after 1425 –the fifth generation– and predominantly in office from 1450 shifted to English.

Table 1. Use of the main languages of financial accounting by medieval warden-bookkeepers of the Mercers' guild of London (adapted from Alcolado Carnicero, 2013: 380).

	Generation 1 –1350		Generation 2 1350–1375		Generation 3 1375–1400		Generation 4 1400–1425		Generation 5 1425–	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Latin or French	13	81.2	48.5	88.2	10	29.4	7	19.5	0	0
Mixed code	3	18.8	6.5	11.8	23.5	69.1	16.5	45.8	1	12.5
English	0	0	0	0	0.5	1.5	12.5	34.7	7	87.5

Social networks are another variable whose explanatory power has been assessed satisfactorily regarding multilingual phenomena among the three languages in medieval records by guilds of London (Alcolado Carnicero, 2017, 2021). Guild members in contact with English as the main language of record outside their own guild's network usually acted as bridges of language variation and change. They became aware of that innovative use of English through sporadic and superficial connections and later transmitted it to the scriptoria of the Mercers' guild of London, the Grocers' guild of London, and the Brewers' guild of London.

The applicability of social variables and constructs from the third wave of sociolinguistic variation study has not been explored regarding the multilingual practices by the guilds of medieval London. Related research on lay professional scribes keeping administrative records in English manors during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has used the community of practice at the group level with promising results (Ingham, 2018). Whereas the maintenance of French as the main language may have served those same scribes to identify themselves as members of an elite group, English codemixing in toponyms may have served them to display their membership in the local community simultaneously.

This article aims to test the applicability of the community-of-practice framework to multilingualism in the earliest extant financial accounts written by the Mercers' guild of London from 1347–1348 to 1463–1464. Nonetheless, I leave out the intertwined combination of Latin, French, and English in different constituents and delve into the process whereby English was brought back into use as the main language of record to the detriment of Latin and French before its standardisation. Then, I analyse what Cobarrubias (1982: 66) termed “vernacularisation”. The vernacularisation of written texts in medieval England has long been a popular research area among historical sociolinguists interested in diverse social domains, such as medicine, science, law, or administration (Dodd, 2019; Pahta & Taavitsainen, 2004; Stenroos, 2020). My work tries to extend that line of research to business writing, thereby complementing recent historical sociolinguistic studies about language mixing and standardisation –or supralocal spread (Wright, 2020b)– in the same social domain (Conde Silvestre, 2021; Wright, 2020a).

This article is divided into four main sections. First, a brief theoretical framework has been provided regarding the applicability of social variables and constructs from the three sociolinguistic waves to the other multilingual phenomena of codemixing and language maintenance and shift among Latin, French, and English in medieval records by guilds of London. The aim of this article has also been set. Second, how the social construct of the guild can be related to the community-of-practice framework is explained. One of the modern editions of the earliest extant account book by the Mercers' guild of London is also presented as the linguistic and social source, the process of vernacularisation as the linguistic variable and its realisations, and references to connections as evidence of professional interaction among key informants. Third, the use of English as the main language of sections is contextualised in the annual financial accounts from 1347–1348 to 1463–1464. The possible impact of the regular and strong contact among the administrators of the Mercers' guild of London on that vernacularisation is also discussed. Fourth, the article concludes with a summary of the findings regarding the conception of the Mercers' guild of London from the community-of-practice standpoint. Some promising avenues for future study in this area are also highlighted.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

After first-wave and second-wave sociolinguists viewed language variation and change as quantitative outcomes of the impact of social variables and constructs on language users' performance, third-wave sociolinguists changed the paradigm by qualitatively analysing language users' agency and performativity in the expression and identification of their sociolinguistic variables within social constructs (Eckert, 2018: 123–192). The social construct of the community of practice has always been a central element in third-wave sociolinguistics (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464). The community-of-practice framework, emerging from the field of anthropology (Wenger, 1998: 72–85), is articulated around three dimensions of any association of people who come together: (i) a mutual engagement, (ii) a joint enterprise, and (iii) a shared repertoire.

The community-of-practice framework has also been key to third-wave historical sociolinguists (Conde Silvestre, 2016: 47–49; Kopaczyk & Jucker, 2013). Communities of practice have been realised historically by corporations in ancient Rome or –particularly interesting for this article– guilds in Europe during the Middle Ages (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002: 5, 139). The social construct of the guild has been defined in similar terms as an association of people engaging in the same activities, wishing to pursue shared purposes, and creating benefits for fellow members and society (Ogilvie, 2019: 4). Additionally, guilds' offshoots in the form of trading companies during the Early Modern English period have even been viewed as promising realisations of multilingual communities of practice (Kaislaniemi, 2017). Implicit stylistic norms may have been in force in the English East India Company's trading post in Japan regarding the restricted use of codemixing and borrowing when writing correspondence to England. Therefore, some guilds of medieval London may emerge as suitable case studies to reconstruct multilingual communities of practice. As the premier guild of the city, the Mercers' guild of London amply fulfils the criteria for the three dimensions in the community-of-practice framework.

The Mercers' guild of London was recorded for the first time as a community of mercers –*communitatem de merceria*– in 1304 (Sutton, 1998). Although there is no reference to any well-established community of mercers acting in a corporate fashion around London before the fourteenth century, other references detail how some groups of mercers engaged mutually in a wide variety of activities from the beginning of the thirteenth century, such as living each other around the area of Cheapside (Keene & Harding, 1987), flocking together and worshipping their patron Saint Thomas Becket in the same Hospital and Church of Saint Thomas of Acre on which the Mercers' guild of London would build its main hall later (Keene, 1991), or meeting regularly at the tavern of “The Tumbling Bear” for the literary gatherings of the fraternity of the Puy of London (Sutton, 1995).

Working alongside with each other on the trade of any merchandise –except weighty and bulky commodities and victuals– was broadly the joint enterprise pursued by all members of the Mercers’ guild of London during the Middle English period. The guild members’ profiles and statuses encompassed the marginalised pedlars, dealing with hawked piece-goods and small wares carried on their backs, and the independent shop-holders who bought stock at provincial fairs for the workshops run by their wives and sold the goods manufactured by their children and apprentices in their stalls and shops. Nevertheless, the formalised hierarchical system favoured the affluent elite of liveried merchants that focused on the import and export of luxury commodities and exerted their growing authority in office (Sutton, 2005: 201–202).

The trading practices carried out by the Mercers’ guild of London during the Middle English period took place in a complex multilingual environment that required shared repertoires –at least in the written sphere– for effective administration (Sutton, 2009). Growing bureaucratisation required four members to become wardens of the Mercers’ guild of London on Midsummer Day every year, take charge of governance, and leave written evidence of their service. The warden-bookkeepers of the Mercers’ guild of London could write rough drafts of their accounts, first, entirely in Latin or French; second, in a mixture of Latin, French, and English; or third, entirely in English during their one-year stints in the office of wardenship. Later, the scribes of the Mercers’ guild of London in charge of making fair copies of those provisional accounts reproduced the original language without modifications.

The linguistic and social information necessary for a historical sociolinguistic study of the process of vernacularisation –in English– of the Mercers’ guild of London is available thanks to the account book kept between 1347–1348 and 1463–1464, which has survived the ravages of time, man, and nature. Although the accounts between 1348–1349 and 1389–1390 are missing, the extant accounts between 1390–1391 and 1463–1464 cover seventy-four years of the key multilingual period uninterruptedly. The Mercers’ guild of London holds the original book in its main hall, but its availability has long been restricted. Thus, I resorted to *The Medieval Account Books of the Mercers of London: An Edition and Translation* (Jefferson, 2009), which also contains the second modern edition –as well as the first translation into Present-Day English (cf. Creaton, 1976)– of that earliest extant account book amounting to approximately 100,000 words and forming the basis for this study.

On the one hand, the linguistic value of that source is high, as the original interplay of languages –typical of the Middle English period– has been retained. The earliest extant book became the locus for language contact among Latin, French, and English in accounts authored by the guild members because of their internal distribution within the Mercers’ guild of London (Wright, 1994: 108–109). That sense of confidentiality seemed to have facilitated the emergence of the English vernacular in less constrained records, which provide

sociolinguists with the best data for coherent accounts and analyses in the form of essential structures of the linguistic system (Labov, 1972: 208). The scribes of the Mercers' guild of London, who produced those internal accounts for the book in their final form, used to arrange the written evidence in a list of sixteen sections replicated almost entirely over the years.

As Table 2 displays, charge and discharge statements –typical of bookkeeping in medieval England– formed the basis for the earliest written evidence of the Mercers' guild of London as a corporate body. An opening with four full names and two dates headed the annual records in which the new warden-bookkeepers entrusted with the guild's management for a year had to render an account of the monies collected and the disbursements made on its behalf during their term in office (Oldroyd & Dobie, 2009: 99–101). Although the remaining balance and the ceremony of appointment to offices were used to close the annual accounts, two more sections on late transactions and legal records could be added at the end.

Table 2. Layout and titles –in Present-Day English– of sections in the earliest extant account book by the Mercers' guild of London.

Year opening	
Ready money	Charge
Debtors and debts	
Admissions and issues of apprentices	
Rents, receipts, profits, or increases	
Fines and fees	
Gifts, legacies, or bequests	
Salaries	Discharge
Alms payments	
Quitrents	
Repairs or vacancies in properties	
Extrinsic expenditure	
Total of sums and net balance	
Elections	
(Miscellaneous entries)	
(Court minutes)	

From the linguistic viewpoint, this article focuses on the variation and change to English in the choice of the main language for the sixteen sections in the annual accounts of the earliest extant book by the Mercers' guild of London. The process of vernacularisation is the dependent linguistic variable under study. The different realisations of that process are included in those sections whose main language was English, as the majority of words were of Germanic origin or Latin and French loanwords in Middle English.

Extract 1, which contains the last section –a miscellaneous entry with a list of debtors– written almost entirely in English in the financial accounts of 1463–1464 by the Mercers' guild of London, is included below simply to illustrate similar realisations of the process of vernacularisation under study.¹

(1) Dettours:

First, William Redeknape of olde – xxiii s. iiii d.

Item, Thomas Belyeter – vi s. viii d.

Item, Hugh Wiche, John Lambart & Peir felashippe, late custoses – xxxvii s. ix d.

Item, John Peyntour for his fredome – x li.

Item, William Cantelowe, John Reyneken & Peir felashippe, late custoses – xiii li. ix s. viii d.

Item, William Tyler for his entre in to Pe lyverey – xiii s. iiii d.

Item, William Boton in lyke wise – xiii s. iiii d.

Item, Richaert Box, D^e bedille – xxxix s. v d.

Item, D^e felashippe by yende Pe see for Peir patent – xlvii li. x s.

~~Resseyved Item, Geoffrey Feldyng for ii^e apprentices – vi li. xiii s. iiii d. par hende~~

Item, William Pountfrete for his entre in to D^e lyverey – vi s. viii d.

~~Resseyved Item, Thomas Muschampe for D^e trompettes – xl s. par hende~~

Summa – lxxviii li. ii d. (Jefferson, 2009: 990)

Considering Extract 2, the elections of 1347–1348 for 1348–1349 in the financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London are displayed here to showcase sections unaffected by the process of vernacularisation and falling outside this study. In this case, the section consists mostly of words of Latin or French origin which had not been incorporated –yet– into Middle English, according to the most comprehensive dictionary of the form of English used during the period 1100–1500: *The Middle English Dictionary* (McSparran, 2000–2018).

(2) Anno xxii^{do} Regis E. tercii

A quele ordinaunce fait, furent esluz pur l'an avenyr pur le dit mister reuler en la manere avaunt dite :

William de Tudenham

Symond de Worsted

William de la Panetrie

Adam Fraunceys (Jefferson, 2009: 48)

On the other hand, the social value of the accounts is immense, as recurring relationships and intense interactions have also been kept among guild members. The notions of recurrence and intensity are crucial, as they draw a dividing line between the social-network theory and the community-of-practice framework (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999: 179–180). Whereas the former considers infrequent and slight contact among the informants, the latter considers regular and strong contact only. Therefore, this study is interested only in professional connections attested more than once –irrespective of the languages in which the information was originally written– among the mercers serving the office of wardenship and keeping sections of the financial accounts mostly in English.

From the social viewpoint, this article focuses on the six categories of connections that the warden-bookkeepers could establish throughout their professional lives and were contained in the annual accounts of the earliest extant book by the Mercers' guild of London. Extracts 3 to 11 illustrate the ways the different types of relationships among warden-bookkeepers were recorded in the financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London.

When it comes to Extracts 3 and 4, the admissions and issues of apprentices in part of 1391–1392 and 1397–1398, respectively, in the Mercers' guild of London reveal connections by apprenticeship and illustrate the interval of –at least– seven years of regular and strong contact per se between two mercers (Scott, 1912: 180–181).²

(3) *Recepcio denariorum de introitu apprenticiorum mercerie anno quinto decimo Regis Ricardi Secundi per Johannem Organ, videlicet: [...]*

Thoma Appelby

Johanne Cholsey

Johanne Freman

Thoma Lydyard

Johanne Melchebourne } *apprenticiis Roberti Haryngeye – xviii s.*

Thoma Berwyk

Bartholomeo Denys

Ricardo Twyford

Thoma Gartoun (Jefferson, 2009: 66, 68)

(4) *L'issu d'apprentice :*

Item, receu de Thomas Gartoun qe fuist l'apprentice Robert Harengye de l'issue d'appnticialté – ii s. (Jefferson, 2009: 128)

Like in 1390–1391 for 1391–1392 in Extract 5, the elections within the Mercers' guild of London, which used to be held and recorded –almost annually– on Midsummer Day, signal contact by appointment among four outgoing and four incoming warden-bookkeepers.

(5) *Item, a mesme l'assemblee les gardeyns avantditz eslirent iiii personnes de la mercerie gardeyns pur l'an ensuyant, c'est assavoir Johan Loveye eslit Johan Organ, Johan Wodecock eslit William Shiryngam, Thomas Neuentoun eslit Johan Sybile, Johan Leengge eslit Laurence Andrewe, et par comune assent de la dite mercerie ount delivré a chescun d'eux – lxvi s. viii d. (Jefferson, 2009: 64)*

Regarding Extract 6, the year openings of 1403–1404, in this case, in the financial accounts of the Mercers' guild of London denote connections by wardenship among the four warden-bookkeepers serving office together during a whole year.

(6) *C'est l'acompt Johan Shadeworth, Thomas Aleyn, Alein Everard, et Thomas Hawe, mestres de la mistier del mercerie, faite l'endemain del feste Seint Johan le Baptistre, l'an du regne le Roi Henry le quarte puis le conquete quinte, pur l'an devant passee en le quel ils estoient gardeins del mistier suisdite. (Jefferson, 2009: 170)*

As Extracts 7 and 8 show, the elections and year openings of 1403–1404 for 1404–1405 and 1404–1405, respectively, in the financial accounts of the Mercers' guild of London also reveal contact by succession between the outgoing and incoming warden-bookkeepers in the same position –first, second, third, or fourth– in the ranking order, as the latter used to take over the duties of the former –especially from 1441–1442 (Jefferson, 2009: 38–41)– even without a direct appointment between them.

(7) Et fait a savoir *qe* a mesme cel feste de Seint Johan le Baptistre devant escript, en une congregacioun faite des bons gentz del mistier en la sale de Seint Thomas d'Acres, choiserent les ditz mestres gardeins *pur* l'an avenyr, vidz. Johan Shadeworth eslit Robert Domenyk, Thomas Aleyn eslit Laurence Hamptoun, Aleyn Everard eslit William Waldern *et* Thomas Hawe eslit Raulyn Middeltoun, as queux ils ont delivrez l'argent *qe* remeint en *leur* mains, come piert desuis en l'acompte, ové les xii s. donez en encrees net – Cxxvi li. x s. (Jefferson, 2009: 178)

(8) L'acompte de William Walderne, Robert Domenyk, Rauf Myddeltoun, *et* Laurence Hamptoun, mestres de la mercerye, faite al feste de Seint Johan le Baptistre l'an du regne le Roy Henry le *quarte* puis le conqueste sysme *pur* l'an proschein devant passee en quele les avantditz William, Robert, Rauf, *et* Laurence furent gardeyns del dite mistere. (Jefferson, 2009: 182)

As Extract 9 displays, the section on total of sums and net balance of 1454–1455, in this case, indicates contact while auditing among the four guild members conducting the annual official inspection of the financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London and also with those warden-bookkeepers rendering account and the succeeding warden-bookkeepers, as the latter used to receive the net balance and the audited accounts for their perusal (Jefferson, 2009: 222).

(9) *Summa totalis* de lur [John Olney, Robert Baron, Robert Skrayngham, *et* John Shipton] discharge – xi li. xvi s. vi d. ob.

Ensy rest due a la mercerie – xv li. iii s. x d. ob.

Geffrey Boleyn

Faite *par* lez auditours { Rauff Verney

John Lytelton *et*

Rauff Marche

Deliveré a William Cantelowe *et* sez *companyes* gardeins [John Sturgeon, John Reynekyne, *et* William Redeknappe], come apiert en *proschain* foile ensuant, le rest *suisdit* – xv li. iii s. x d.

Ensy quyte

Item, deliveré a eux ii obbigacions de William Pikeryng, mercier, chescon de v li. (Jefferson, 2009: 758, 764, 774)

The rest of the sections in the annual financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London could imply connections by collaboration among warden-bookkeepers in further

business partnerships or even personal matters, as Extracts 10 and 11 in 1442–1443 and 1422–1423, respectively, illustrate.

(10) Foreyns expensis: [...]

Item, païé a lez collectours del mesme argent pur boier, Johan Roo *et* Johan Penne – ii d. (Jefferson, 2009: 574)

(11) Done de Richard Whytyngton:

Item, resçu de Johan Covyngtre, Johan Carpenter, *et* Johan Grove, lez executours de Richard Whytyngtoun – xiii li. vi s. viii d. (Jefferson, 2009: 342)

Therefore, there are enough linguistic and social data to attempt an analysis of the impact on the process of vernacularisation from Latin and French to English by regular and strong connections among those guild members acting as warden-bookkeepers and using English as the main language for the different sections of medieval financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London through the lens of the community-of-practice framework.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following Ehrsam Voigts's (1996) chronology of vernacularisation between 1375 and 1475 in late medieval England, the earliest extant account book by the Mercers' guild of London covers the 74% of that period. Nonetheless, the focus is placed on the intervening period – between 1423–1424 and 1458–1459, as uncovered later– with a highly noticeable use of English at the expense of Latin and French as the main language of the different sections in the annual financial accounts by members of the Mercers' guild of London serving the office of wardenship and keeping those same records.

As Extracts 12 and 13 exemplify, a detailed fine written almost entirely in English that outnumbers two shorter lists of fines and fees in French represents the earliest main use of English in a section of the financial accounts of 1423–1424 by the four warden-bookkeepers administering the Mercers' guild of London during that same year.

(12) Un Fyne :

Be it knowyn that at a congregacion of the godemen of the mercerie the vi day of Juny, *etc.*, amonges othir thynges there mevyd Thomas Chalton, on of the sayd compayne, and desirid to have in servys John Swan, the wyche had ben apprentice wyth John Notebroun, capper, and servyd hym of apprenticialite and made freman as the maner is, and the sayd Thomas willid that the sayd John shuld ocupie for hym in theocupacion of beyng and sellyng as wel of mercerie as othir marchandize, and for as mochel as the sayd Chalton wolde nat take it upon hym for to ressayve hym into his *service* of mercerie wythout licence, because of certeyn ordinance mad be the same compayne touchyng suche materis, therefore he prayd alle the felauschipe that it liked hem that the sayd John myth ben amittid and licencid for to be as on of

the crafte, payeng a *certen* money to the almesse of the craft resonably. Wherupon the said compayne ordeyned John Admond, William Prentys, Thomas Osborn, at that beyng maisteris, wyth vi personis of the same felauschip, that is for to saye John Abbot, Everard Flete, William Milreth, Johan Wascheborne, Johan Faunteroy, and William Cavindische, therefore to make a taxe for the said mater as hem thynkyt resonable, and herupon the said *persones* awardid that the said Johan Swan schulde dwelle with the sayd Chalton, and for to serve hym as his maistir the terme of .v. ȝere, takynge resonable for his salare as they may acorde, and for to paie to the box of the saide compayne .v. li., makynge his othe to the craft as the usage is of othere that be of the craft, and at the ende of .v. ȝere for to rejoysshe al maner liberteis of the *mercerie* as frely and as duely as though he had servyd his apprentishod in the same craft etc. – paié – v li.

Fynes *et* forfaitz :

De Johan Langham pur un fyne – iii s. iiii d.

De Symkyn Bartlot pur un fyne – xx d.

De Johan Wascheborne pur ii fynez – iiii s. iiii d.

De William Barkere pur un fyne – iiii s.

De Johan Somerey – xii d.

De Thomas Middilton – xii d.

De Johan Abbot – xii d.

De William Brugge – xii d.

– xvii s. iiii d.

Forfaites :

De Thomas Gille – xii d.

De Robert Archebold – xii d.

De Thomas Middilmore – ii s.

De Adam Foster – xii d.

De William Maltby – vi d.

De Richard Lovelas – v d.

De Johan Chirche – vi d.

De William Cantelowe – vi d.

De Johan Hertwelle – vi d.

– vii s. v d. (Jefferson, 2009: 348, 350)

(13) C'est l'acompte de Thomas Fauconer, Johan Admond, Thomas Osbarne, *et* William Prentys, faite al feste de Seint Johan Baptistre l'an secunde del regne le Roy Henry vi^e puis le conquest d'Engleterre pur l'an *prochein* devant passé, en quele ils estoyent gardeins del mistiere del *mercerie*. (Jefferson, 2009: 346)

A similar –but later– use of English occurred in the financial accounts of 1427–1428 by John Whatley, Robert Large, Thomas Bataille, and John Pidmell (Jefferson, 2009: 382). Apart from two headings, five entries, and three lists entirely in French, thirty-five entries of guild members being fined for infringing different ordinances or charged for getting different services were written mostly in English (Jefferson, 2009: 384, 386, 388, 390, 392).

Extracts 14 and 15 illustrate a section –with one court minute– written almost entirely in English in the financial accounts of 1429–1430 by another group of four warden-bookkeepers.

(14) It is to remembre that in a courte holden at Seint Thomas of Acres the even of *Seint Mark anno viii^o Henrici viⁱⁱ* was founde and notabely *preved* þat John Berby, somtyme þ^e *apprentys* of Thomas Fauconer, ayenst good ordinaunce hathe redene and bene in the countre at Coventre, Northhamptone and other places moo, with *divers* wares of mercerye in fardell & horspakkes, for the whiche offence and trespace he hathe forfeite & lost .x. li. But for as mekil as the said John Berby hathe trewly knowlaged þ^e forsaid *trespace* be hym done in forme as above it is declared, and þerupon he hathe lowly *submitte* hym unto the rewle and governaunce of the wardeyns & worthi compaignye, seyng the lowly submyssione of the seid John have *pardoned* hym the forsaid .x. li. into xx s., the whiche he hathe trewly paied as it shewithe be þ^e acompte of the seid wardeyns he afore.

And moreovere the said John Berby is sworne on a book that he ne schal no more fro þis forthe offende ne *trespace* in th seid forme up peyne to paie .x. li. withoute any redempcion. (Jefferson, 2009: 426)

(15) C'est la compte de Henry Frowyk, William Hales, Johan Bostone, et William Dautre, fait al feste de Seint Johan Baptist l'ane viii^{me} del regne le Roy Henry vi^{me} après le conquete d'Engleterre pur l'ane *proscheine* devaunt passé en quel ils estoient gardeins de le *mistier* del mercerie come piert après. (Jefferson, 2009: 410)

Despite the rising use of English in the Mercers' guild of London during the 1420s, it took eighteen years until a new highly noticeable use of English occurred in its financial accounts. The long lists of fines and fees in the period 1447–1448, including a large share of 319 English words at the expense of 171 Latin or French words, illustrate a renewed use of English by Geoffrey Fielding, John Sturgeon, Ralph Verney, and John Penne (Jefferson, 2009: 634, 638, 640, 642).

The process of vernacularisation of the different sections in the annual financial accounts was much more abrupt during the late 1440s –and the 1450s– than from the early 1420s. Extracts 16 and 17 detail that the only sections that were written exclusively in Latin or French by the end of 1448–1449 were the year opening and the ready money received by the four incoming warden-bookkeepers for that same year.

(16) C'est l'acompt de Henry Frowyk, Thomas Steell, John Kirkeby, et John Lok, gardeins del mestier de le mercery, pour un an entier passé a la Nativitee de Saint John Baptist l'an du Roy Henry sisme puis la conquest xxvii. (Jefferson, 2009: 648)

(17) Receiptz :

En primes, ils sont chargés en argent seke a eux *deliveré per* Geffrey Feldyng, John Sturgeon, Rauf Verney, et John Penne, qui furent gardeins de la dit mestier de mercery en l'an *prochein* devant, c'est assavoir le xxvi^e an du Roy, come appiert en la pee de loure *acompt* – Cxxviii li. ix s. (Jefferson, 2009: 648)

Nevertheless, the fiscal year opening of 1449–1450, in this case, and the section on ready money were written almost entirely in English like the rest of the sections during the following fiscal year, as displayed in Extracts 18 and 19.

(18) This is the acounte made by William Cantlow, John Haroo, Thomas Muschamp, and Robert Halom, wardeynes of the felaschipe of the mercery fro the fest of Saint John Baptist in the yere of oure lord God M^l CCCC^o xlix unto the said fest nexte folowyng than beyng the zere of oure lord God M^l CCCC^o L, and in the zere of Kyng Henry the sixt after the conquest xxviiiⁱⁱ. (Jefferson, 2009: 660)

(19) First we charge us the same day wyth the rest of a counte of Henry Frowyk, Thomas Style, John Kyrchy, and John Locke in redy mony – C lxxvii li. x s. (Jefferson, 2009: 660)

Latin and French were also absent from the financial accounts of 1450–1451 and in 1451–1452 with Hugh Wyche, Thomas Dunton, John Stockton, and William Ground; John Middleton II, John Roo, Richard Needham, and Thomas Ryke, respectively in office (Jefferson, 2009: 692, 706). However, the process of vernacularisation was not complete, as French –but not Latin– was brought back into use as the main language for all sections in the annual financial accounts by the Mercers’ guild of London in 1452–1453 (Jefferson, 2009: 720). The vernacularisation came to a halt until the section on court minutes –with a special appointment– was written almost entirely in English in the financial accounts of 1457–1458 by another group of four warden-bookkeepers, as shown in Extract 20.

(20) *Memorandum* that Thomas Tikhill, mercier, was chosen be þ^e hole felashippe in a courte hold þe xxviii^{ti} day of Juyn *anno* xxxvi^o *Henrici* vi^{ti} to have & ocupie þoffice of weyng of sylke aftir þe deth & in þ^e place of William Towland (whom God assoile), and aftir admytted by Geffrey Boleyn, þan beyng Meir of London, & his bretheren aldirmen, and toke his ooth *perteyneng* to þoffice. Wherupon John Middelton, Thomas Steelle, Richaert Nedam, & John Warde, þan beyng *wardeins*, delivered to þ^e said Thomas Tikhill *divers þinges perteyneng* to þe said felashippe & necessarie to þe same office as hit shewith aftir:
 First, ii skoles of laton with ropes & hokes and þ^e beme closed in lether
 Item, viii^{le} *divers weightes* of laton covered in lethir for to wey rawe silke aftir xxi unces for þe lb. That is to say, viii lb., iiiii lb., ii lb., i lb., di. lb., *quarteron*, di. *quarteron*, & i unce.
 Item, viii^{le} *divers weightes* of leed covered in lethir for to wey Paris sylke aftir xvi unces for þ^e lb, that is to say, viii lb., iiiii lb., ii lb., i lb., di. lb., *quarteron*, di. *quarteron*, & i unce.
 Item, a bag of lether for þ^e skoles & *weightes* (Jefferson, 2009: 1008, 1010)

Only one year later and after a six-year hiatus, English was brought back into use as the main language for all sections in the annual financial accounts by Ralph Verney, John Burton, John Stockton, and John Marshall, the four warden-bookkeepers in 1458–1459 (Jefferson, 2009: 840). Unlike in 1451–1452, the process of vernacularisation was then

complete. Latin and French played no role at all as main languages of financial record in the annual accounts of the Mercers' guild of London from 1459–1460 onwards (Jefferson, 2009: 876, 906, 928, 952, 978).³

As evinced in Extracts 12 to 20, the vernacularisation affected ten annual financial accounts at the beginning of the process in 1423–1424 and before its completion in 1458–1459. One section was kept mostly in English in 1423–1424, 1427–1428, 1429–1430, 1447–1448, and 1457–1458; all sections –except two– were written mostly in English in 1448–1449; all sections were written predominantly in English in 1449–1450, 1450–1451, 1451–1452, and 1458–1459. Any of the sixteen sections listed in Table 2 were written mainly in English, while thirty-four warden-bookkeepers administered the Mercers' guild of London – at least once– throughout those ten years.

From a community-of-practice standpoint, it is interesting to trace regular and strong contact among the warden-bookkeepers in the office during the first –early– and second –late– phases of the process of vernacularisation of the Mercers' guild of London. First, the administration of the Mercers' guild of London in 1423–1424 was the first time that Thomas Falconer, John Edmond, Thomas Osborne, and William Prentice worked together. The four warden-bookkeepers soon collaborated on a parallel project, as they copied out the ordinances and oaths of 1407–1408 in English as the original main language (Jefferson, 2009: 210, 212, 214). Therefore, the infrequent and slight connections by wardenship at the beginning became more regular because of strong contact through collaboration all over the year. Furthermore, John Edmond, Thomas Osborne, and William Prentice were entrusted with another special task just before the end of their one-year stints in the office of wardenship. As Extract 12 has signalled, the Mercers' guild of London appointed three warden-bookkeepers in office –except Thomas Falconer– and six other guild members to levy a fine over the inappropriate apprenticeship enrolment of John Swan with Thomas Charlton. It is interesting to suggest a possible connection between –at least– one of those ordinances mostly in English –*that non apprentice be accepte until he be presentid to the maisteris*– and the main language –also English– of the text on the levied fine, as the two records dealt with the same problem (Jefferson, 2009: 212).

Except for John Pidmell, the administration of the Mercers' guild of London during 1427–1428 was not the first time that John Whatley, Robert Large, and Thomas Bataille came into contact professionally. John Whatley was one of the warden-bookkeepers of 1419–1420 that audited the accounts by Robert Large and three more warden-bookkeepers in 1420–1421 and submitted the results to Thomas Bataille and three other warden-bookkeepers at the beginning of 1421–1422 (Jefferson, 2009: 222, 322, 330). In turn, Robert Large was one of the warden-bookkeepers of 1420–1421 that audited the accounts by Thomas Bataille and three more warden-bookkeepers in 1421–1422 (Jefferson, 2009: 332, 338). In addition,

Thomas Bataille had also paid more than £4 for inspecting and correcting East Thames weirs on his behalf, John Whatley's, and four other guild members in 1421–1422 (Jefferson, 2009: 336). Therefore, the previous connections while auditing –mainly– and through collaboration became even more regular and stronger among the three warden-bookkeepers because of the connections by wardenship at the beginning of 1427–1428. As Extract 21 illustrates, it is also interesting to find John Whatley among the four warden-bookkeepers in office when the ordinances and oaths of 1407–1408 were written originally in English.

(21) The ordinaunces byneth the wreten were ordeyned in the tyme of John Wodecock, John Middelton, John Whatele, and John Eton, the ix^o yere of the regne of Kyng Henri the iiiiith. (Jefferson, 2009: 210)

The same main language –English– of most fines and fees in 1427–1428 and the ordinances and oaths of 1407–1408 points to the influence of John Whatley, as he had also become particularly concerned with levying fines over ordinance infringements after his appointment –together with seven other guild members– by the Mercers' guild of London to solve cases of inappropriate apprenticeship enrolment between 1401–1402 and 1403–1404 (Jefferson, 2009: 178, 180).

Like John Whatley, Robert Large, and Thomas Bataille in 1427–1428, Henry Frowick and William Hales –but not John Boston and William Dawtre– had come into contact professionally before administering the Mercers' guild of London as warden-bookkeepers in 1429–1430, as Extract 15 has evinced. Henry Frowick was one of the warden-bookkeepers of 1421–1422 that audited the accounts by William Hales and three more warden-bookkeepers in 1422–1423 (Jefferson, 2009: 342, 346). In addition, William Hales had succeeded Henry Frowick as third warden-bookkeeper at the beginning of that last year (Jefferson, 2009: 338, 340). Therefore, the previous connections while auditing and by succession became even more regular and stronger between those two warden-bookkeepers because of the connections by wardenship at the beginning of 1429–1430. Extract 14 has shown a court minute mostly in English about the inappropriate behaviour of one of the apprentices of Thomas Falconer. There may have been a possible influence between the English vernacular of that court minute in 1429–1430 and the previous role of William Hales as one of the four warden-bookkeepers of 1422–1423 who audited the accounts of 1423–1424, including the first section and –perhaps– the copy of the ordinances and oaths of 1407–1408 written mostly in English by Thomas Falconer himself, John Edmond, Thomas Osborne, and William Prentice (Jefferson, 2009: 352, 354).

According to the hitherto obtained results, nine out of twelve warden-bookkeepers in the office during the process of vernacularisation in the annual financial accounts of the 1420s were connected through regular and strong contact with –at least– one of the other

fellow warden-bookkeepers. Contact with English as the main language of record has been important in understanding the co-optation mechanisms of those nine warden-bookkeepers. On the one hand, two warden-bookkeepers –John Whatley and William Hales– had contact with records in English before serving the office of wardenship and keeping sections of the financial accounts during the study period. On the other hand, Thomas Falconer, John Edmond, Thomas Osborne, William Prentice, Robert Large, Thomas Bataille, and Henry Frowick –the seven other warden-bookkeepers– were in contact with records in English while serving the office of wardenship and keeping sections of the financial accounts during the study period.

Second, Henry Frowick was the only warden-bookkeeper serving the office of wardenship and keeping sections of the financial accounts mostly in English during the 1420s and the 1440s. As Extract 16 has revealed, Henry Frowick served the office of wardenship in 1448–1449, together with Thomas Steel, John Kirkby, and John Lock. Except for John Kirkby and John Lock, it was not the first time that Henry Frowick and Thomas Steel worked together as warden-bookkeepers in the administration of the Mercers' guild of London during the period 1448–1449. Extract 22 shows that the two guild members shared the office of wardenship in 1441–1442. Accordingly, prior connections by wardenship became regular and strong because of similar connections at the beginning of 1448–1449.

(22) Anno xx^{mo}:

C'este l'acmpt de Henry Frowyk, alderman, Johan Sturgeon, William Thornhille, et Thomas Stele, gardeins de la mistier del *mercerie*, per un an entier passé devant le fest del Nativitee Seint Johan le Baptistre l'an du reigne le Roy Henry sisme puis le conquest xx^{me}. (Jefferson, 2009: 550)

Additionally, it is relevant to indicate that profound language variation and change in the written sphere of the administration of the Mercers' guild of London occurred in the 1440s because of the inheritance of Richard Whittington's estate after his last executor's death. John Mortham –John Carpenter's rent collector– handed over the estate to the Mercers' guild of London in 1441–1442. Extract 23 indicates that he also submitted a list of inherited rental properties almost entirely in English. Therefore, Henry Frowick and Thomas Steel –the first and fourth warden-bookkeepers, respectively– must have had contact with that same record in 1441–1442, hence its possible influence on their use of English as the main language of almost all sections in 1448–1449.

(23) The rentale made by John Mortham, rentegaderer: groos of dyvers soyles of certeyn lyvelood *graunted* & goven by Richaert Whitengton (whom God assoile) to þ^e custoses & felaship of þ^e mistere of þ^e *mercerie* of þ^e Cite of London for þ^e sustentacion of a colage of

certain prestis, clerkis & pore folk, by hym foundid at Pater Noster cherche in þ^e Ryolle in þ^e said Citee, for þ^e hole yeer at Cristemas *anno xx Henrici viⁱⁱ* the tyme of John Carpenter, oon of þe executours of þ^e said Richaert, þan havynge charge & governaunce of þe same:

The Rentale

Baynardescastelle – xviii li. xiii s. iiiii d.

Milkestrete – x li. xiii s. iiiii d.

S. Laurence Jury – xxxiiii li. xvii s.

Bassingeshawe – xxii li. xvi s. viii d.

Colmanstrete – xxii li. xvi s. viii d.

Bisshopgate *extra* – xliiii s. iiiii d.

Tourehille – xi li. viii s. iiiii d.

S. Donstons þest – xiiii li. x s.

Bridgestrete – viii li.

The Ryolle – Cxvi s. viii d.

Budge Rowe – xxiiii li. xii s.

Totalis – Clxxv li. vii s. iiiii d. (Jefferson, 2009: 578)

As Extract 22 has also illustrated, John Sturgeon and William Thornhill were the second and third warden-bookkeepers in 1441–1442, respectively. Unlike William Thornhill, John Sturgeon served the office of wardenship once again in 1447–1448 when the use of English as the main language of a section of fines and fees occurred once again in the financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London after the eighteen-year hiatus. As Extract 17 has reflected, John Sturgeon shared the office of wardenship with Geoffrey Fielding, Ralph Verney, and John Penne in 1447–1448. Except for Ralph Verney and John Penne, the administration of the Mercers' guild of London was not the first time that Geoffrey Fielding and John Sturgeon interacted. Geoffrey Fielding succeeded John Sturgeon as second warden-bookkeeper at the beginning of 1442–1443 (Jefferson, 2009: 550, 560). Moreover, the Mercers' guild of London paid for the wine and bread of a gathering among Geoffrey Fielding, John Sturgeon, and six other guild members at the tavern of "The Bull's Head" in 1442–1443 (Jefferson, 2009: 572). Therefore, the connections by succession and collaboration became much more common between the two warden-bookkeepers because of the connections by wardenship at the beginning of 1447–1448. Like John Sturgeon in 1441–1442 with John Mortham's first rental mostly in English, Geoffrey Fielding in 1442–1443 had also been in contact with records in English. As Extract 24 implies, John Mortham's handover of Richard Whittington's estate may have had a possible impact once more on warden-bookkeepers, as an account entirely in English was submitted to those running the guild in 1442–1443; one of whom was Geoffrey Fielding.

(24) Thacompte of þe said John Mortham for a yeer at Cristemas *anno xxi Henrici viⁱⁱ* made to John Olney, Geffrey Feldyng, Geffrey Boleyn & John Burton, þan custoses of þ^e mercerie & conservatours of þe said lyvelod. (Jefferson, 2009: 578)

The influence of English as the main language of record about the administration of Richard Whittington's inherited estate seemed to have been still latent on the financial accounts right after 1448–1449 by more warden-bookkeepers connected through regular and strong contact. As reflected in Extract 18, William Cantelow, John Harrow, Thomas Muschamp, and Robert Hallam were in office when all sections of the financial accounts of 1449–1450 were written almost entirely in English. Even though it was the first time that the group of four warden-bookkeepers worked together in the administration of the Mercers' guild of London in 1449–1450, they soon had to handle another common project, as they engaged in collecting all rental property records from 1441–1442 and created a separate book from 1449–1450 (Jefferson, 2009: 686). Interestingly enough, a possible connection between the English vernacular of that rental property record book and all financial accounts in English for their year in office may be detected, as the warden-bookkeepers followed the tradition of keeping records in English. Furthermore, William Cantelow, John Harrow, and Thomas Muschamp were entrusted with another special task just before the end of their one-year stints in the office of wardenship. With the exception of Robert Hallam, the Mercers' guild of London appointed three of the four warden-bookkeepers in office –as well as four other guild members– to preserve good relations with the Fishmongers' guild of London after a dispute over money collected for convoys sailing with ships carrying merchandise (Jefferson, 2009: 678). Therefore, the infrequent connections by wardenship at the beginning became more regular and stronger due to an intense relationship after collaborating throughout the year.

As all sections in the annual financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London were written mostly in English in 1449–1450, the guild members serving the office of wardenship and keeping the sections of the financial accounts of 1450–1451 were in immediate contact with English as the main language of record –at least– through connections by succession with their predecessors. The same happened to the guild members serving the office of wardenship and keeping the sections of the financial accounts of 1451–1452. Hugh Wyche and Thomas Dunton, on the one hand, and John Stockton and William Ground, on the other hand, had come into contact professionally before administering the Mercers' guild of London in 1450–1451 as warden-bookkeepers. Whereas Thomas Dunton had succeeded Hugh Wyche as second warden-bookkeeper at the beginning of 1439–1440 (Jefferson, 2009: 522, 532), John Stockton and William Ground had hired a ship –together with two other guild members– in 1448–1449 (Jefferson, 2009: 658). Therefore, the connections by succession and collaboration became regular and strong between those two pairs of warden-bookkeepers since their connections by wardenship occurred at the beginning of 1439–1440. Interestingly, however, the administration of the Mercers' guild of London in 1451–1452 was the first time that John Middleton II, John Roo, Richard Needham, and Thomas Ryke worked together.

Furthermore, by the time their one-year stints in the office of wardenship began, the four warden-bookkeepers seemed to have been entrusted with a series of obligatory bonds issued by the Mercers' guild of London and pending for several years. Still, they paid the lenders back at the end of 1451–1452 (Jefferson, 2009: 714). Accordingly, further contact by collaboration throughout the year transformed weak connections by wardenship into closer ties among those four warden-bookkeepers.

The next time English was used as the main language in a section of the financial accounts of 1457–1458, John Middleton II and Richard Needham were serving the office of wardenship and keeping records again as the first and third warden-bookkeepers, as it occurred in 1451–1452. Thus, prior contact by wardenship between this pair of guild members became even more regular and stronger due to similar contact at the beginning of 1457–1458. Additionally, Thomas Steel and John Ward as the other pair of warden-bookkeepers in office during that year came into professional contact with John Middleton II and Richard Needham upon the administration of the Mercers' guild of London in 1457–1458. Nonetheless, four days after beginning their one-year stints in the office of wardenship, they collaborated on the special task of handing over all tools necessary for the post to Thomas Tickhill, newly appointed silk weigher, as indicated in Extract 20. Consequently, weak connections by wardenship between this other pair of guild members soon became regular and strong due to further connections by collaboration at the beginning of –and throughout (Jefferson, 2009: 824)– the year.

Aside from Thomas Steel's abovementioned contact with English in 1448–1449, there might have been another possible influence between the main language –English– of that court minute in 1457–1458 and the role of John Ward as the guild member serving the office of renter-wardenship and keeping the rental property record book simultaneously in 1457–1458, as it had been kept mostly in English from 1441–1442 (Jefferson, 2009: 832, 864).

John Middleton II, Thomas Steel, Richard Needham, and John Ward were succeeded as warden-bookkeepers of the Mercers' guild of London at the beginning of 1458–1459 by Ralph Verney, John Burton, John Stockton, and John Marshall, respectively. The latter were in office when English was brought back into use as the main language for all sections in the annual financial accounts permanently. Consequently, the process of vernacularisation was complete. Unlike John Stockton and John Marshall, the administration of the Mercers' guild of London in 1458–1459 was not the first time that Ralph Verney and John Burton had interacted professionally with those fellow warden-bookkeepers. Ralph Verney succeeded John Burton as the second warden-bookkeeper at the beginning of 1453–1454 (Jefferson, 2009: 720, 736). Consequently, connections by wardenship at the beginning of 1458–1459 solidified previous connections by succession and strengthened ties between the two warden-bookkeepers. Furthermore, the use of English as the main language of record was not unknown to them. As shown in Extract 24, John Burton was one of the warden-bookkeepers

that received the rental account entirely in English by John Mortham in 1442–1443. Regarding Ralph Verney, he was in office when the book containing the acts of court from 1453–1454 began to be kept –almost– entirely in English by the Mercers’ guild of London (Lyell & Watney, 1936). Therefore, a correlation could be identified between the use of English in those two previous records and their readoption thereof as the main language for all sections in the annual financial accounts of 1458–1459 by the Mercers’ guild of London.

As for the rest of the findings, nineteen out of twenty-three warden-bookkeepers in office during the process of vernacularisation in the annual financial accounts of the 1440s and the 1450s were connected through regular and strong contact with –at least– one of the other fellow warden-bookkeepers. On the one hand, nine warden-bookkeepers –Geoffrey Fielding, John Sturgeon, Henry Frowick, Thomas Steel, John Middleton II, Richard Needham, John Ward, Ralph Verney, and John Burton– had also been in contact with records in English –at least once– before serving the office and keeping accounts during the years under study. On the other hand, the ten other warden-bookkeepers –William Cantelow, John Harrow, Thomas Muschamp, Robert Hallam, Hugh Wyche, Thomas Dunton, John Stockton, William Ground, John Roo, and Thomas Ryke– were in contact with records in English –at least once– while serving office and keeping accounts during the years under study. Moreover, Ralph Verney, Thomas Steel, John Stockton, John Middleton II, and Richard Needham appeared twice in office during the late process of vernacularisation in the 1440s and the 1450s, like Henry Frowick in the 1420s and the 1440s.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has explored the applicability of the community-of-practice framework to the vernacularisation of a set of multilingual records. It has investigated the social variables and social constructs from the third –and latest– wave of sociolinguistic variation study and the process of vernacularisation from Latin and French to English during the Middle English period. More specifically, the financial accounts kept by the Mercers’ guild of London between 1347–1348 and 1463–1464 –but especially from 1390–1391 onwards– have been scrutinised in search of sections written in English as the main language of record and attestations of contact among mercers serving the office of wardenship and keeping those sections of financial accounts. The focus has been placed on those sections with a greater proportion of English words in the ten annual financial accounts affected by the process of vernacularisation, on the one hand, and on the regular and strong connections among the thirty-four warden-bookkeepers in the office at those moments, on the other hand.

First, the vernacularisation process has been divided into two phases. Only one section was written in English as the main language of record in three annual financial accounts of the 1420s and two annual financial accounts of the 1440s and the 1450s. The five financial

accounts with all –or nearly all– sections in English as the main language of record were written only in the 1440s and the 1450s. Consequently, a gradual –but delayed– evolution has been noticed in replacing Latin and French with English as the main language of financial accounting within the Mercers’ guild of London.

Second, twenty-seven in thirty-four warden-bookkeepers in office during the two phases of the process of vernacularisation of the annual financial accounts by the Mercers’ guild of London were connected through regular and strong contact with –at least– one of the other fellow warden-bookkeepers. Whereas the seven warden-bookkeepers connected through infrequent and minimal contact always occupied the –less powerful– third and fourth positions in the ranking order, all warden-bookkeepers occupying the –more powerful– first and second positions in the ranking order were connected through regular and strong contact during the study period. In addition, further contact with English as the main language of record was essential for those twenty-seven warden-bookkeepers. On the one hand, eleven in twenty-seven warden-bookkeepers had been –at least once– in contact with records in English before serving the office of wardenship and keeping sections of the financial accounts. On the other hand, sixteen in twenty-seven warden-bookkeepers were in contact with records in English while serving the office of wardenship and keeping sections of the financial accounts. Thus, a multilingual community of practice with two layers has been identified within the Mercers’ guild of London during the Middle English period. The warden-bookkeepers of both layers engaged mutually through regular and strong connections in the joint enterprise of serving the office of wardenship and keeping the annual financial accounts diligently with the shared repertoire of English as the alternative main language of record.

As the confidentiality of its affairs was such an important issue within the Mercers’ guild of London (Parker, 1980: 132), there did not seem to have been a stronger gesture of legitimacy for a liveried mercer than being one of the four warden-bookkeepers administering all information during a whole year and –in many cases– for several times. The rising use of an uncommon form of written communication required additional knowledge for comprehensive wardenship and diligent bookkeeping. Professional interaction among warden-bookkeepers was indispensable for knowledge building within medieval guilds, as their members were used to learning from each other through observation and imitation (De Munck, 2020; Rathnappulige, Daniel, & Rice, 2010: 3–5). However, regular and strong contact seemed to have always been necessary for effective knowledge transmission and adoption regarding replacing Latin and French with English. Those twenty-seven warden-bookkeepers appearing in the office more than once did not always exhibit progressive language behaviour, as they also kept sections of the annual financial accounts in Latin or French as the main languages of record. Confidence in fellow warden-bookkeepers may have led to an eagerness for the transmission of sections written in the vernacular by warden-

bookkeepers in previous contact with English as the main language of record and the adoption of sections written in the vernacular by warden-bookkeepers in simultaneous contact with English as the main language of record. Therefore, learning seemed to have happened not only under specific circumstances but also at different moments and rates, hence the main distinction between the two layers of this community of practice within the Mercers' guild of London.

The Mercers' guild of London –the premier guild of England's capital city– has been chosen as the object of study to which the community-of-practice framework has been applied. My findings suggest that the community-of-practice framework could emerge as a useful sociolinguistic tool to account for the interplay among Latin, French, and English in the whole extant set of multilingual records by the medieval guilds of London. Very promising results of first-wave and second-wave replication studies in other contemporary guilds offer good opportunities for further research.

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NOTES

¹Crossed-out sentences have been rendered visually as they are found in the original text.

²Even if the analysis will not showcase connections by apprenticeship among the warden-bookkeepers in the office during the years under study, the category has been included as another example of common attestations of contact in the financial accounts by the Mercers' guild of London.

³Even though the period 1459–1464 is beyond the scope of this study, conclusions drawn here may encourage a future application of the community-of-practice approach to the role of frequent and close contact among warden-bookkeepers in the permanent adoption of English as the main language of record after the second phase of vernacularisation, as opposed to the temporary adoption of the vernacular in 1449–1452 before the comeback of French for six fiscal years during 1452–1458.

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