



**2nd International Workshop on
Social Networks and English Sociohistorical
Linguistics**

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**Towards a social network approach to late medieval London guilds:
Initial hypotheses**

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This paper represents the preliminary stages of a deeper research aiming at applying the concept of “social network”, as promulgated by Lesley Milroy (1987), to the late medieval London guilds. In a previous research, Alexander Bergs (2006) has argued that the transition period between Middle and Modern English was characterised by dramatic social changes and rapid linguistic developments. These innovations, enabled through the open networks of the mobile English population, had in loose-knit London their ideal place for diffusion. However, apart from massive contingents of Northern immigrants, constantly-growing London had hosted several associations of guildsmen since Saxon times. As these companies gathered people living in the same neighbourhood, belonging to the same parish, many times linked by blood ties and, especially, working in the same craft, close-knit or even cluster organisation could be said to prevail inside them. Taking the hypothesis on London guilds’ innovation (Ingrid Tieken-Boon 2000) as my point of departure, I will analyse to what extent London companies facilitated or inhibited linguistic change. In this case, I will study the progressive adoption of English as the official language of record in different companies such as the Mercers, the Grocers or the Brewers. Finally, I will conclude that even though all these craft guilds will eventually abandon Latin and Anglo-Norman as their official languages, the closer and more dense the links in their networks are, the later the ‘changeover point’, as coined by Laura Wright (2002), will happen.

References

Bergs, A. (2006). *Social Networks and Historical Sociolinguistics: Studies in Morphosyntactic Variation in the Paston Letters (1421-1503)*. Berlin and New York : Mouton de Gruyter.

Milroy, L. (1987). *Language and Social Networks*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, I. (2000). 'Social Network Analysis and the History of English'. *European Journal of English Studies* 4.3, 211-216.

Wright, L. (2002). 'Code-intermediate Phenomena in Medieval Mixed-language Business Texts'. *Language Science* 24, 471-489.

Session 1 (9:00-10:30)

Salón del Conde de Valdeparaíso (2nd floor)