THE *N*-LESS VERSUS -*N* PAST PARTICIPLE FORMS OF CERTAIN ABLAUT VERBS IN SEVENTEENTH AND EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The majority of publications in the field of ablaut verbs finish their analyses at the turn of the fifteenth century. Only scant mentions are given to strong or irregular verbs in later periods in the history of English, frequently in discussions of a broader scope. It has also to be pointed out that primarily the verbal system of British English is discussed, with American English being largerly neglected.

The aim of the present paper is to fill this void, at least partially, by shedding some light on the rivalry of the -*n* and endingless past participle forms of verbs with vowel gradation for tense in the years 1620-1720 (the century that constitutes a perfect period for the linguistic study of the beginnings of American English) in both American and British varieties of English. Since American English is said to have started to develop independently from 1620's onwards, an attempt will be also made to observe the diverging or converging tendencies which might have arisen in the century during which the transoceanic variety of English was undergoing a gradual split from the language of the mother country.

The current study is corpus-based – two corpora consisting of a collection of parallel texts have been compiled to provide material for comparison.

1. Periodization and early American and British corpora

It is assumed that in the decades following the arrival of William Bradford and the group of separatists in Cape Cod in 1620, American English started to evolve independently – and both the language of the early American Colonies and British English commenced to undergo a process of differentiation triggered by the relatively infrequent contacts between the newly born Colonies and their mother country. Accordingly, it is worthwhile to compare both varieties of English synchronically and observe the converging or diverging trends of develop-

ment occurring among the ablaut verbs in both British English and its new, regional variety.

This paper specifically concentrates on the rivalry of *-n* and suffixless past participle forms of ablaut verbs in seventeenth and early eighteenth century American and British English. For the purpose of the present article the time-span between 1620-1720 has been chosen, since this century constitutes a perfect period for the linguistic study of the beginnings of American English. The reasons for such a choice were described at length in Kytö (1991).

In order to trace the gradual character of the changes taking place among the verbs in question, the period under discussion is further subdivided into three sub-periods (the first half of the earliest century in American history, the middle period with its turning point around 1670, and the first two decades of the eighteenth century) on the basis of a number of external factors presented in Dylewski (2002: 35-38, 2003: 149-150).

As regards the studied corpora, their description and the classification of the selected texts can be found in Dylewski (2003: 150-151, 174-176). In a nutshell, in terms of the corpus of American English, a collection of parallel texts has been compiled to provide material for synchronic comparison from the three abovementioned sub-periods. Two main guidelines were followed in the text selection: the place of production/publication as well as the text type. As for the British corpus, it was tailored as a supplementary collection aiming to parallel the American texts, and thus the selection was also dependent upon two major factors: the date of composition or publication and the purpose of a given text (text type). It should be noted that in the case of the British corpus, the adopted periodization does not reflect the language-external conditions in England, but corresponds to the three sub-periods distinguished in the first century of the development of American English.

2. The choice of verbs under scrutiny

2.1. Introduction

The ablaut class is by no means stagnant in early American and British English and one can distinguish the following tendencies operating among verbs with vowel gradation for tense: loss of the participial suffix *-n*, leveling of consonantal alternants, transfer to the weak conjugation, and, finally the competition of the relic preterite forms in <e> or <i> (*brake, writ*) with the ones in <o> (*broke, wrote*).

For the sake of the following paper the first phenomenon will be dealt with. It has to be noted at this point that certain verbs, especially the ones not commonly used (for instance, *shrive* or *chide*), as well as certain verbal forms, were not attested or were underrepresented in the analyzed sources. Accordingly,

when the amount of data instanced is too scarce to provide further insights into the conjugational pattern of a given verb, the discussion has to be confined to a presentation of attested forms. The verbs included in the subsequent section are ordered alphabetically for the sake of clarity.

It is noteworthy that owing to the dearth of the material available for linguistic scrutiny, the layout of the present corpus is predominantly based on one textual representative for each sub-period. Hence, idiolectal preference, as well as stylistic reasons, may account for the choice or appearance of variant forms. All in all, these factors are taken into account when generalizing the obtained results. It is also possible that a study of a larger corpus would uncover forms not found in the present research. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the employed samples are fairly representative of the forms of the period at issue.

2.2. Discussion

BEAR-group (*bear, swear, tear, wear*)

Since these verbs display morphologically and phonologically similar characteristics, it is safe to analyze them collectively. The breakdown figures for the past participle forms of the simplex *bear* and its compounds are set out in Table 1.

Table 1. The past participle (*for*)*born*(*e*) vs. *bore* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH				BRITISH ENGLISH			
		-*n*	-Ø	Total		-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	born	2	bore 1	16	born	7	bore 1	23
	borne	13			borne	13		
					forborne	1		
					unborn	1		
II	born	25		33	born	10		16
	borne	5			forborn	2		
	forborn	1			overborn	2		
	forborne	2			overborne	1		
					unborn	1		
III	born	18		18	born	6	bore 9	19
					borne	3		
					forborne	1		
TOTAL		66	1	67		48	10	58

*/empty cells represent the lack of a given form in the indicated period

According to the rule positing that *-n* is rarely lost in the monosyllabic past participle forms and stems ending in historical /r/, not much fluctuation is expected to be met among the past participle forms of *bear, swear,* and *tear.* In terms of the participial forms of the first verb mentioned, this claim holds true for the

seventeenth century American English, where only one endingless form was attested. However, considerable vacillation is recorded among the past participials of *bear* in British English in the last sub-period under analysis. The substantial number of the *n*-less past participle form *bore* that were attested (9 instances) is attributed to the idiolect of Celia Fiennes, who preferred this form over the past participial *borne* (2 instances) in the examined sample of her travel accounts. Both forms instanced are illustrated by the following citations:

1) ...and the Lord Major and Lady Majoress has their traines *bore* up to Guild Hall and after dinner return without it.

        (*The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, 1947: 287)

2) The new Lady Majoress richly habitted has her traine *borne* up, and introduced by one of the officers;...

        (*The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, 1947: 286)

An isolated endingless form *swore* emerged in the second sub-period in the English corpus, whereas none was spotted in its American counterpart. The scantily represented verb *tear* does not present any variation in its principal parts in the British materials, in American English, however, one instance of the past participle *tore* was found in the second period under discussion. Only the past participle forms *worn(e)* were retrieved from both Colonial and British corpora. The sporadic instances (participials *bore* and *tore*) indicate the infrequent vacillation in the past participle forms (-*n* vs. -*ø* forms) in the period under study.

BEGET

As in the case of American English, only the regular forms (*beget-begot-begotten*) were attested in the British corpus.

BID

As for the verb *bid*, the inventory of past participle forms attested in both corpora is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The past participle (*un*)*bidden* vs. *bid* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-*ø*	Total	-*n*	-*ø*	Total
I		bidd 1	1	bidden 1		1
II	bidden 1		1	unbidden 1		1
III					bid 3	3
TOTAL	1	1	2	2	3	5

The dispersal of the isolated past participle forms through the century makes it impossible to asses the degree of rivalry of (*un*)*bidden* and the *n*-less participle *bid* in both British and American English. The situation seems parallel in both analyzed corpora, where scattered forms emerged in isolation throughout the whole century. Nonetheless, on the basis of those examples, it might be stated that both forms were present in both varieties of English under study.

BITE-group (*bite, chide, hide*)

Owing to the fact that very few instances of these verbs were recorded in the collection of the analyzed writings, not much can be said about their situation in the century under study. The scattered forms of *bite* and *hide* are given in the following table. No occurrences of *chide* were instanced in both corpora.

Table 3. The past participle *bitten/hidden* vs. *bit(t)/hid* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-*ø*	Total	-*n*	-*ø*	Total
I	bitten 2	bit 1	3	hidden 1	hid 1	2
II	bitten 2	bitt 1 hid 4	7	hidden 1		1
III	hidden 1		1			
TOTAL	5	6	11	2	1	3

The rare instances of the past participle forms *hidden/bitten* and *hid/bit(t)* suggest that both variants must have been in usage in the century under study. Absence of either *hidden* or *hid* in the last sub-period of British English is a corpus artifact.

BREAK

The past participle forms of *break* are subject to fluctuation, as shown in Table 4, where the results obtained in both varieties of English are grouped. The figures are calculated into normalized frequencies (per 1,000 words).

Table 4. The past participle *broken* vs. *broke* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	21 (0.1050)	5 (0.0250)	26	9 (0.0508)	4 (0.0226)	13
II	30 (0.1875)	9 (0.0562)	39	8 (0.0501)	6 (0.0375)	14
III	7 (0.0447)	3 (0.0191)	10	10 (0.0679)	8 (0.0543)	18
TOTAL	58 (0.1123)	17 (0.0329)	75	27 (0.0558)	18 (0.0372)	45

As can be seen from the table, in both varieties of English, the *n*-less variant form existed alongside the more prevalent form *broken* in the century under investigation. However, the ratio of the *n*-participials to the *n*-less ones in British English is more level than in the language of the Colonies.

CHOOSE

The breakdown figures for the verb *choose* are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The past participle *chosen* vs. *chose/choes* in early American and Britsh writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	chosen 48		48	chosen 5		5
II	chosen 46	chose 2	48	chosen 7		11
				chos'n 4		
III	chosen 118	choes 13	137	chosen 19		19
	choosen 5					
	choesen 1					
TOTAL	218	15	233	35	0	35

The explanation of the past participle *chose* is dual: on the one hand it may appear as a result of the influence of the preterite, on the other – it could have developed from the Old English past participle *coren* "by the carrying-over of the *s* from other parts of the verb and the common loss of final *n*" (Alexander 1929: 310).

If one assumes the first scenario as possible, it is legitimate to state that the -*n* loss in the past participle affected this verb as well. Corpus data show that the rate of the *n*-less participial is relatively low in comparison to, for instance, the past participle form *broke*. Nevertheless, an increase in the number of the endingless participles is visible throughout the century under discussion. Corpus data for the first sub-period do not show any occurrences of the past participle *chose* (but it could be a corpus artifact), however, from the second one an increase of the number of the *n*-less form *chose* is discernible.

EAT

As for the verb *eat* the instances of the suffixless participle *eate* and the *n*-form *eaten* obtained from both corpora are set out in the table below:

Table 6. The past participle *eaten* vs. *eat* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	eaten 5	eate 1	6	eaten 5		5
II	eaten 3	eat 1	5	eaten 4	eate 1	5
		eatt 1				
III	eaten 12	eat 2	16	eaten 4		4
		eate 2				
TOTAL	20	7	27	13	1	14

In terms of the past participle forms found in the British corpus, the absence of the *n*-less participial in, at least, the first sub-period may be a corpus artifact. Judging on the basis of raw figures shown in the table above, the isolated occurrence of the suffixless participle *eate*, as compared to thirteen instances of *eaten* found in the British materials, one can come to the conclusion that the *n*-less past participle did not witness as much popularity in British English as in its American offshoot where the fluctuation of alternate forms appears more frequently.

FORBID

The breakdown figures for the next verb where the fluctuation between *n*- and *n*-less participials takes place, namely *forbid*, are set out in Table 7.

Table 7. The past participle *forbidden* vs. *forbid* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	forbidden 3	forbid 1	4	forbidden 2		2
II	forbidden 3		3	forbidden 2 forbidd'n 1	forbid 1	4
III	forbidden 1		1	forbidden 3	forbid 2	5
TOTAL	7	1	8	8	3	11

In terms of the American corpus, the data retrieved from the corpus point to the rare appearance of suffixless participial form *forbid* (cf. example (3)).

3) ...they tould them Mr. Allerton that they had *forbid* him before for bringing any such on their accounte.

(*Bradford's history of Plymouth Plantation,*
1606-1646, 1964 [1908]: 267)

As argued by Jespersen (1942: 68), the *n*-less variant forms were common until the eighteenth century. With regard to early American writings, the obtained figures prove that the *n*-less forms did not witness popularity in the language of the early American Colonies.

In terms of the past participle forms found in the British writings, the endingless participle *forbid* occurred by the side of *forbidden* in the last sub-periods. Its absence in the first sub-period is possibly a corpus artifact.

Owing to the scarce number of examples found in both corpora, no conclusions can be drawn concerning the diachronic changes of the verb *forbid* in either variety of English under discussion.

FORGET

As expected, the past participle forms of *forget* would be subjected to considerable fluctuation. As far as the vacillation among the past participle is concerned, the results obtained in both corpora are drawn together in the subsequent table.

Table 8. The past participle *forgotten* vs. *forgot(t)* in early American and British writings

| sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	5 (0.025)	6 (0.03)	11	5 (0.0282)	3 (0.0169)	8
II	5 (0.0312)	2 (0.0125)	7	6 (0.0375)	3 (0.0187)	9
III	8 (0.0511)	3 (0.0191)	11	7 (0.0475)	4 (0.0271)	11
TOTAL	18 (0.0348)	11 (0.0213)	29	18 (0.0372)	10 (0.0206)	28

The overall figures for the distribution of the -*n* vs. endingless forms point out to the fact that generally in both varieties of English the *n*-less past participial existed by the side of the prevalent form *forgotten* throughout the century in question.

GET

The -*n* loss in the past participle is discernible in the whole century under discussion, since *got* is the preponderant form in every sub-period scrutinized. The figures for both varieties of English are set out in Table 9 which shows the distribution of forms in both corpora. The subsequent diagram illustrates the issue in question:

Table 9. The past participle *gotten* vs. *got* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	5 (0.0250)	14 (0.0700)	19	7 (0.0395)	20 (0.1130)	27
II	1 (0.0062)	15 (0.0937)	16	8 (0.0501)	20 (0.1253)	28
III	3 (0.0191)	28 (0.1790)	31	1 (0.0067)	18 (0.1222)	19
TOTAL	9 (0.0174)	57 (0.1103)	66	16 (0.0330)	58 (0.1199)	74

Figure 1. The past participle *gotten* vs. *got* in early American and British English
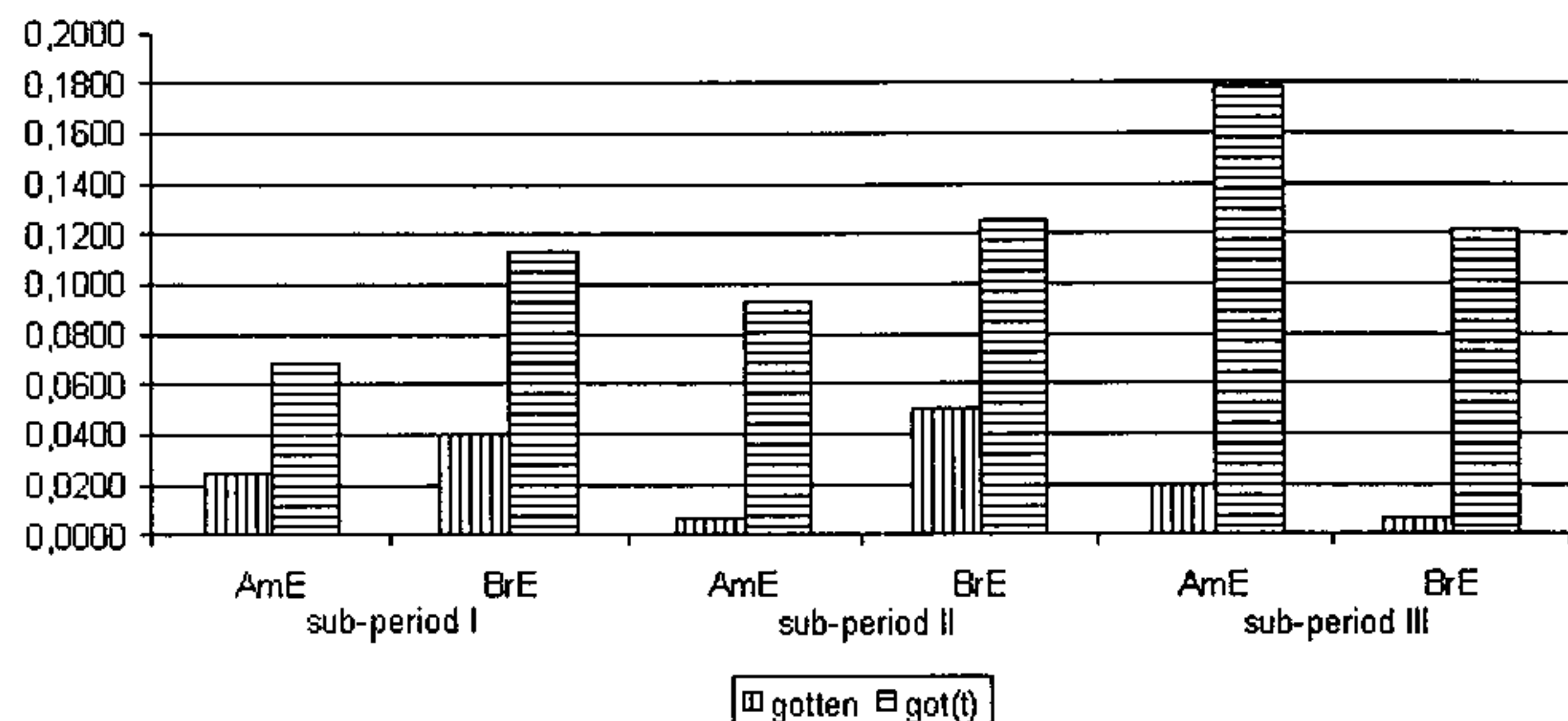
The figures for both varieties of English point to an apparent prevalence of the *n*-less forms in the century under study. Contrary to the present-day tendency to use the *-en* variant in the American variety of English, it is British English which retains more frequently the past participle *gotten* in the course of the seventeenth century. In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, in both varieties of English, the ousting of the past participle *gotten* by the *n*-less form *got* is even more noticeable.

HELP

Only in the American English corpus was the form displaying /o/-vocalism found. The past participle form *holp* is an example of the clipped variant of the historical participial *holpen*. This form appears in the subsequent citation:

4) Mar. 15, even. Was *holp* affectionately to argue in prayer the promise of being heard because asking in Christ's name.
    (*Diary of Samuel Sewall 1674-1729*, 1972, 1: 45-46)

RIDE

The inventory for the past participle forms of the verb to *ride* is offered in the subsequent table:

Table 10. The past participle *rid(d)en* vs. *rid(d)(e)* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH				BRITISH ENGLISH			
		-*n*		-Ø	Total		-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	ridden	1			1	ridden	1		1
II	ridden	3	rid	2	8	ridden	1		1
	riden	2	ride	1					
III	ridden	2	ridd	2	4				
TOTAL		8		5	13		2	0	2

It is only in American English where the suffixless past participle forms were found.

The existence of the participial form *rid(d)* finds a two-fold explanation: it can be either leveled in accordance with the past tense form,[1] or emerge as a consequence of the *-n* loss in *ridden*.

SPEAK

The coexisting past participle forms *spoken* and *spoke* are recorded in both Colonial and British writings. However, the distribution of both variants is not even, and, surprisingly, the occurrences of the endingless past participle form *spoke* are somewhat marginalized in American English. The pooled figures are set out in Table 11.

Table 11. The past participle *spoken* vs. *spoke* in early American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	24 (0.12)	2 (0.01)	26	16 (0.0904)	7 (0.0395)	23
II	29 (0.1812)	1 (0.0062)	30	17 (0.1065)	5 (0.0313)	22
III	14 (0.0895)	2 (0.0127)	16	5 (0.0339)	2 (0.0135)	7
TOTAL	67 (0.1297)	5 (0.0096)	72	38 (0.0785)	14 (0.0289)	52

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[1] The preterite *rid(d)*, quite consistently used in the whole century under discussion (especially in American English), appears to have developed from the Old English preterite plural *ridon*. The corpus data for the preterite *rid(d)* supports the thesis put forth by Price (1910: 16) that the variant had never become as common as *rode*, possibly due to a wish to keep it distinct from *rid* meaning "to get rid of".

TREAD

On the whole, this verb is poorly represented in both corpora. In American English writings one *n*-less participial *trod* (spotted in the sub-period 1700-1720) was attested as given in the following example:

5) ...there is really but a few Steps between Us; We shall soon have *Trod* them.

(*The Saltonstall Papers, 1607-1815*, 1972: 313)

The same situation is attested in the British corpus, where next to the past participle *trodden* one participial form *trod* was found. Jespersen (1942: 60) reports that in Early Modern English a less usual participial *trod* existed beside the more common form *trodden*.

As stated above, the verb *tread* is generally underrepresented in the both collections of writings. However, on the basis of the endingless past participle *trod* and the participle *trodden*, one may conclude that both forms existed in both American and British English in the period at issue. The diachronic changes in the use of both variant forms cannot be discussed owing to the scant examples instanced.

WRITE

The vacillation in the usage of the *n*- and *n*-less past participle forms noted in early American English also manifests itself in British English of the period. The distribution of both participials in the language of the Colonies and the mother country is shown in Table 12.

Table 12. The past participle *written* vs. *writ* in American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	25 (0.125)	1 0 (0.05)	35	11 (0.0621)	11 (0.0621)	22
II	25 (0.1562)	4 (0.025)	29	18 (0.1127)	10 (0.0626)	28
III	34 (0.2173)	3 (0.0191)	37	17 (0.1154)	16 (0.1086)	33
TOTAL	84 (0.1625)	17 (0.0329)	101	46 (0.0951)	37 (0.0764)	83

As can be seen in the table given above, in both varieties of English both the *n*-form and the *n*-less forms are present. However, as in the case of the past participials *broken-broke*, *spoken-spoke*, the ratio of the *n*-forms to the *n*-less ones in the mother language is more leveled than in the language of the Colonies.

WEAVE

In terms of the verb *weave*, two suffixless participle forms *wove* were only attested in the American corpus. As postulated by Jespersen (1942: 64), this form survived until modern times in trade terminology, for instance in a "*wove* paper" or "hard *wove* fabric".

3. Conclusions

In terms of the endingless past participle forms, the present précis of the results obtained for both the Colonial and Mainland varieties of English concentrates on the groups of verbs which are susceptible to have the suffixless participial alternants, namely the ones in stems ending in historical /r/ (*bore-born*, *tore-torn*) and verbs in obstruent-final roots (*chose-chosen*, *eat-eaten*, *forget-forgotten*).

Isolated instances of the *n*-less past participial variant forms of the group of verbs embracing *bear*, *swear*, *tear*, and *wear* are recorded in both varieties of English obtained (11 occurrences in British, 2 in American English), which points to their peripheral use aside the predominant *n*-forms (111 instances in the British, 158 in the American variety of English). The relatively high ratio of *n*-less forms in the language of the mother country amounting to 9% as compared to 1.3% in the Colonial language, is ascribed to the idiolectal preference of Celia Fiennes.

The next category, including verbs in obstruent-final stems, is further subdivided into two sub-classes displaying divergent degrees of the *n*-loss susceptibility. Sub-class one covers verbs in fricative-final stems, the past participials of which rarely appear devoid of the -*n* suffix. This claim proves true for the verbs representative of this class obtained form the British materials, which do not exhibit any fluctuation of their past participle forms. The situation appears more varied in American English, where by the side of the prevailing forms retaining their past participle suffix, *n*-less alternants rarely appear (*wove*, *chose*).

A more variable scenario is presented by the representatives of the second sub-class at issue which stems end in a plosive. The following past participle alternant forms are taken into consideration: *eaten-eat*, *bidden-bid*(*d*), *bitten-bit*, *broken-broke*, *forbidden-forbid*, *gotten-got*, *hidden-hid*, *spoken-spoke*, *riden-rid*, *written-writ*(*e*). As for American English, the isolated instances of the suffixless forms *hold*, *holp*, and *trod*, are included in the current summation. The past participle *smitten* sharing the morphological properties with other verbs of this class, but unmatched in the corpus data with an *n*-less alternant form, is also counted. The pooled figures attained in both corpora analyzed are given in Table 13 and shown in the subsequent Figure 2:

Table 13. The past participle -*n* vs. -ø endings in American and British writings

sub-period:	AMERICAN ENGLISH			BRITISH ENGLISH		
	-*n*	-Ø	Total	-*n*	-Ø	Total
I	105 (0.525)	41 (0.2050)	146	84 (0.4748)	48 (0.2713)	132
II	101 (0.6312)	44 (0.2750)	150	87 (0.5451)	48 (0.3007)	135
III	90 (0.5754)	50 (0.3196)	140	65 (0.4415)	52 (0.3532)	117
TOTAL	301 (0.5828)	135 (0.2614)	436	236 (0.4879)	148 (0.3059)	384

Figure 2. The past participle -*n* vs. -ø endings in American and British writings
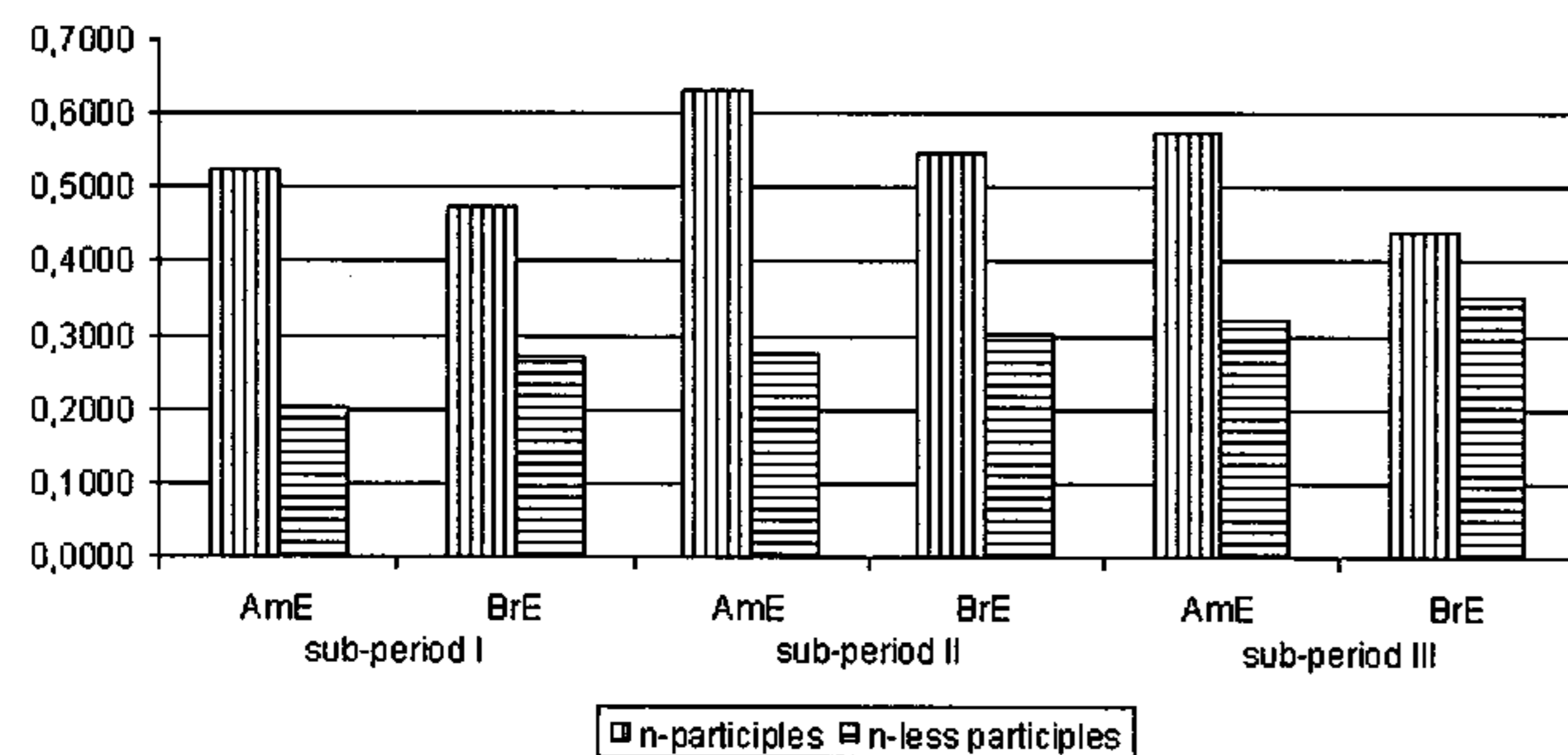
As can be seen in the diagram above, throughout he century in question vacillation in the participials of verbs whose stem ends in a plosive is discernible both in the Mainland and the American variety of English. The *n*-forms are in favor in the whole period scrutinized; however, at the beginning of the eighteenth century the suffixless participials proliferate, especially in British English.

With regards to the explanation of the rivaling -*n* and zero endings, it is tempting to adopt the claim put forward by Eisikovits (1987), who, having analyzed the use of working-class adolescents in Sydney, came to the conclusion that variation in the form of the past participle has a grammatical function. She observed that the standard participle form *broken* was employed in the passive constructions, whereas the endingless participle *broke* occurred in the perfective function.

The corpus data do not present such a clear-cut division of grammatical functions of *broken* and *broke*, or any other verb following the same pattern of -*n* omission. Both forms appear in either function. Accordingly, it has to be concluded that the separation of meanings is not applicable to the situation observed in early American or British English.

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