The fellows mad, I neither understand his words, nor his *Sence*: On Dialect Lexis in Three Literary Renderings of Seventeenth-Century Lancashire Speech

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Abstract

This paper addresses the need to retrieve lexical information from a period which has been hitherto poorly assessed. It concentrates on a close examination of dialect words scattered in three samples of Lancashire literary dialect: *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), by Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome; *The Two Lancashire Lovers* (1640), by Richard Brathwaite; and *The Lancashire Witches* (1682), by Thomas Shadwell. Its aims are twofold: first, to evaluate, in the light of Present-day English and Early Modern lexicographical evidence, which words are genuine to Lancashire and which are also natural to other adjacent counties. Second, it demonstrates that, although nowadays assigned to regional dialects, some words were not used as such at the time. In so doing, a contribution will be made to outlining a lexical map of regionalisms in Early Modern English.

1. Introduction

Not much information has come down to us from the Early Modern period (EModE) in terms of regional variation. What little attention has been paid is focused on phonology, orthography and morphosyntax. Lexis remains basically an untrodden field of research open to ambiguity and complex conjecture.

Any attempt to sketch an insight into the lexical panorama of English regional dialects at this time is a notoriously rewarding and challenging endeavour, inasmuch as it means to offer a diachronic framework for any modern treatise on dialect vocabulary such as Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898-1905) (*EDD*) or Upton *et al.*'s *Survey of English Dialects: the Dictionary and the Grammar* (1994) (*SED*).

Among the few sources which yield lexical information from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we may mention:

(1)   Glossaries devoted to regional lexis: Ray (1674, 1691)
(2)   Dictionaries which mark some of their lemmas as regional: Skinner (1671) or Coles (1676)
(3)   Stigmatized dialect words included in grammars
(4)   Non-standard vocabulary found in the definitions of entries in monolingual and bilingual dictionaries
(5)   Explanatory glosses to obscure and dialect words appended to literary works: Speght (1602), Meriton (1685) or Stuart (1686)
(6)   Non-literary texts: diaries, inventories, etc.
(7)   Words used in literary portrayals of dialect

EModE literary dialects resort to several strategies in order to render the linguistic habits of regional speakers with truthfulness. Dialect words are used alongside deviant spellings intended to suggest dialect pronunciations and morphosyntactical markers as pointers to regional and social variation. The evaluation of the lexical variable in linguistic terms is but controversial, owing mainly to "the vagaries of the naming process" (Upton, 1993: 520). Furthermore, the inclusion of many lexical samples in depictions of dialect responds to the need of strengthening the provincial idiolect of a speaker by means of non-standard terms of the time, or even broad northern or southern regional words which outline a vague overview of different varieties. Lexical data must be, then, carefully considered. The scattered evidence lent by contemporary lexicographical sources, the textual occurrence of specific words in our period, and their linguistic comparison with present-day reality help us decide on the status of the vocabulary used: whether a word was actually regional or evidenced a colloquial distribution, if it has been regarded as such in the course of time, or whether it is localized to a specific county or belongs to the common core of general regionalisms. Inaccurate or stereotypical as it apparently might be, the lexical information supplied by literary renderings of dialect is truly valuable as it also casts considerable light on the attitudes to provincial speech by users of the standard dialect of the time, namely dramatists, poets or fiction writers.

As is true of the neighbouring Yorkshire, Lancashire has received a fairly amount of linguistic attention and is the site of a copious vernacular literary tradition which dates back to the seventeenth century.[1] It is traditionally contended that Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome's comedy *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), Richard Brathwait's fictional piece *The Two Lancashire Lovers* (1640), and Thomas Shadwell's comedy *The Lancashire Witches* (1682), here under study, are the first renditions of 'Lancashire' dialect with a literary aim.[2]

Both comedies, which ran into several editions in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, make a jocular adaptation of a contemporary social event set at Pendle-Hill, in the northeast of Lancashire: four women went on trial in London for alleged witchcraft. *LL*, which was not re-edited until 1998, addresses the difficult love-story between Doriclea and her tutor Philocles at the ancient town of Gaunt.[3] Not much is known about the linguistic ascendancy of their authors so as to assess precisely whether their reproductions of Lancashire speech are faithful or based on northern and North-Midland linguistic clichés. Only Shadwell did apparently keep strong links with the south-eastern city of Chadderton, in the new metropolitan borough of Oldham (Blake, 1981: 105). Brathwait was born at Burneshead, near Kendal, Westmoreland. Heywood came from Lincolnshire. Hardly anything has been discovered about Brome's origins. His good command of northern linguistic features in other plays, such as *The Northern Lasse* (1632), might probably point to some kind of biographical connection with the North.

The kind of regional traits displayed in these pieces is similar. *LW* and *LWTD* rely on dialectalisms far more profusely than *LL*. Indeed, Brathwait resorts only to a handful of linguistic nuances

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[1] Fox (2000: 71) comments on the existence of several unprinted dialect-poetry specimens transcribed round the second half of the seventeenth century. He refers to 'A Lancashire Tale' and to 'A Yorkshire Dialogue' other than Meriton's (1683, 1685). The MS also contains another piece which opens 'Robin an's Gonny, they went to the Town' (Folger Library MS, V.a. 308).

[2] The 1634 comedy will be referred to as *LW*, Brathwaite's piece as *LL*, and Shadwell's as *LWTD*.

[3] The first electronic available facsimiles of these works have been used for this paper. The reproduction of the first editions of *LW* and *LL*, and the second edition of *LWTD* have been thus considered.

suggestive of a boorish tone in Camillus' brief speech. On the other hand, the comedies exhibit an abundance of regionalisms which make way for a full linguistic characterization of Lawrence and Parnell in *LW*, and Clod, Thomas Shacklehead, Thomas O George, Young Hartford, Mal Spenser and a Clown in *LWTD*. Nonetheless, lexical items used for this purpose are not all proper to Lancashire as illustrated in the ensuing discussion.

Twenty-one items have been selected for analysis on the basis of the following criteria: (1) content words whose distribution was rather restricted to northern regional speech during the seventeenth century and are nowadays chiefly northern according to modern data; and (2) content words of apparently more widespread use at the time, namely non-standard, which are present-day instances of dialect lexis.[4] Their status as EModE dialectal words will be estimated in terms of their occurrence in the light of the evidence provided by these texts and other dialect renderings which have not been hitherto examined or documented.[5]

2. EModE northern words which are nowadays also marked as such.[6]

Nineteen lexical samples are arranged in this first group. First, we find *boggle*, *doubler*, *lowne*, *lymmer* and *testril* in *LW*. The definition provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) as regards the transitive use of *boggle*, "To cause to hesitate, to scare", coincides with the meaning intended in *LW*:

(1)   If I skim not their skimingtons … ma that warplin BOGGLE me a week lonker (IV, i)

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[4] No instances of dialect grammatical words or archaic vocabulary have been considered, for they are beyond the scope of this paper.

[5] The supporting textual evidence mentioned all through the paper is an integral part of my doctoral thesis. These and other texts belong to the ongoing *Salamanca Corpus*.

[6] If not otherwise indicated, each word is only documented once in our texts. English counties will be referred to using conventional *EDD* abbreviations.

As a matter of fact, Skinner (1671) and Coles (1676) confirm this sense. *OED* documents it only in *Flagellum or O. Cromvell* (1662) where it is not curiously marked as dialectal. Nonetheless, *boggle*, as a noun, "goblin, (...) spectre" (*OED*, s.v.), is said to belong to Scottish literary tradition since 1500 and to northern English dialects. *EDD* also collects evidence for this verb in Sc., northern and some Midland counties such as Chs., Lin., and Nhp.

Typically northern as it is, *doubler* was also apparently common to seventeenth-century southern speech in the light of Ray's (1691: 22) definition: "*A Doubler*, a Platter, so called also in the South". *EDD* documents it for the first time in Best's *Rural Economy* (1641) as proper to Yks. Neither *OED* nor *EDD* record our example. Furthermore, *OED* supplies scarce dialectal evidence for this word, Ray's (1691) and Robinson's *Whitby Glossary* (1855) being the only two references mentioned.

The adjective *lymmer* is defined by *OED* (s.v. B) as "Knavish, scoundrelly" in Scots and northern dialects. The dictionary gathers EModE textual evidence from Scotland and Jonson's *The Sad Shepherd* (1640). Surprisingly no other seventeenth-century source –Skinner (1671) or Coles (1676)– record the adjectival use of *lymmer* and, not surprisingly, many citations have been ignored by modern ones; for instance, Tatham's *The Rump* (1660), Behn's *The Roundheads* (1682) or Stuart's *A Joco-Serious Discourse* (1686).

Lowne is mentioned by Skinner (1671: Ggg2) as "Homo Stupidus, Bardus, Hebes". Ray (1691: 47) records the same meaning in northern English and Scots. Likewise, modern dictionaries reveal the same distribution, although no mention as regards the dialectal occurrence of this noun in our period is indicated. Not only is it found in *LW*, but also in other renderings of northern speech such as Deloney's *Thomas of Reading* (1600), and Webster's *The Valiant Scot* (1637), among many others.

Testril is localized by *EDD* (s.v. *taistrel* 1) to Sc., Nhb., Dur., Lakel., Yks., Lan. and defined as "A good-for-nothing; a rascal, scoundrel". It is a remarkable fact that *OED* does neither record nor collect this item, which gives an idea of the peripheral status of this noun at the time.

Second, *fastens*, *snever*, *snude,* and *whiskins* are attested in *LL. Fastens* and *snude* are widespread EModE Northernisms, also common

to Lan., in the light of the information provided by Ray (1691). The former seems to be a common word for designating "Shrove-Tuesday" (Ray, 1691: 25) still in current use as indicated by *EDD*, *OED* and Warrack's *Scots Dialect Dictionary* (2002) (*SDD*). Likewise, *OED* (s.v. *snood* 1.a) supplies Scottish and northern textual evidence for *snude* and defines it as "A fillet, band, or ribbon, for confining the hair" used by unmarried women in Scotland and northern England.

Snever and *whiskins* do, on the contrary, suggest a limited distribution. With regard to *snever*, Ray (1674: 43, 1691: 66) and Coles (1676: Ll2) refer to it as "slender" in collocation with *spawt*: *snever-spawt*. However, generally northern as it is marked in the 17th century, the data recorded by *EDD* describe it as genuine only to Yks. and Lan. In parallel, *OED* gathers it twice in the 17th century –Ray (1674, 1691), *LL*–, and once in the next century as proper to Yks. *Whiskins* is also to be found in Ray (1674, 1691) and Coles (1676). Both mark it as characteristic of Chs. in collocation with *Who* (*who-whiskin*): "a whole great drinking pot" (Ray, 1674: 53). *OED* describes it as a common Northernism, whereas *EDD*, more reliably, localizes it to Lan. and Chs.

In contrast to the above-mentioned, Shadwell resorts to a few items which are more geographically restricted to Lan. and other close counties. First, *Buggarts* is said to be a noun in popular use in Lan., Der, Yks. and Chs. since the 17th century (*SED*). The sense provided by Levins (1570: Cij), "A Boggarde, spectrum", is confirmed by modern sources, although our example is not recorded:

(2)   The plecs haunted with BUGGARTS (I)

Capo, "a working horse" (Ray, 1674: 9), is recorded as a headword in Levins (1570), marked as dialectal by Speght (1602), and localized to Chs. by Ray (1674, 1691) and Coles (1676). It is also found in Cooper (1584) and Thomas (1587) as a synonym under the definition of *horse*. As a matter of fact, *EDD* collects evidence from Sc., Lan. and Chs. *OED* corroborates its dialectal status, albeit no geographical indication. In parallel, *clemd*, "hungry, thirsty" (*SED*, s.v. *clammed* 1,2), is quoted by Ray (1674, 1691) as northern. Indeed, OED outlines a close distribution of the adjective from Wm. to Lei., and from Lin. to Her., at the time that *EDD* restricts its occurrence to the evidence gathered from Cum., Wm., Lan., Yks, and some Midland counties. Third, *fow*

(x4), "Turpis, [...] Putridus" (Skinner, 1671: Tt), is collected by Coles (1676) and Ray (1691) as proper to Chs. Likewise, *EDD* gathers documentations from Sc., Lan., Chs. and other Midland counties. With regard to *kibbo*, *OED* confines its usage to obsolescent and dialectal renderings of speech, at the time that *EDD* gives evidence from Lan., Chs. and Shr. In fact, Thomas Otway used it in his depiction of Lan. dialect in *The Cheats of Scapin* (1677), which is highly suggestive of its distribution in Lan. and neighbouring Midland counties. Finally, *pleck* (x2), "a place" (Coles, 1676: Ff2), is reported to be common to Yks., Lan. by Ray (1674, 1691), Coles (1676) and Kennet (1695). Likewise, *EDD* supports the same EModE geographical distribution, although *OED* merely marks it as dialectal.

Side by side with these regionalisms, *LWTD* also relies on other lexical items that reveal a wider northern usage at the time. First, *lone*, "A lane", is common to northern and some Midland counties as Der. (*SED*, s.v. *loan* 1). Second, *raddle* is defined by *OED* (s.v. *v³*) as "to beat, thrash". Both *EDD* and *OED* localize it to northern areas and Sc., although the evidence supplied from EModE is almost inexistent: *OED* records Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), whereas *raddle* is also to be documented in Otway (1677) and in our text. *Threpe*, "to blame, rebuke, reprove, chide" (Ray, 1674: 49), is recorded in Blount (1656), Skinner (1671), Ray (1674, 1691) or Coles (1676). Nevertheless, only Skinner (1671) and Ray (1674, 1691) mark it as purely northern. *OED* and *EDD* confirm this dialectal status. Similarly, *wood*, "madde, furious, outragious" (Greaves, 1594), is recorded in different sources of the time, although only Speght (1602) refer to it as dialectal. *EDD* shows a widespread northern distribution which extends also to Midland counties like Chs. and Lin. In spite of this, other textual evidence from the period hardly suggests that *wood* would actually enjoy a regional distribution, since Ray (1691, *Postscript*), for example, explains that this is a "known word for mad, and is in the usual metrical translation of the Psalms". Last, *yate* is a well-known northernism which requires no further comment.

3. EModE content words of a wider distribution which are nowadays marked as dialectal

Only two samples of analysis have been included in this second group: *fond* and *losell*, both recorded in *LW*. Their use in dialect passages reasserts the idea that genuine regional dialect words were not the only lexical devices introduced for characterization purposes. Non-standard vocabulary (colloquialisms, etc.) lent aid to reinforcing the dialect linguistic tone of regional speakers. In the light of contemporary lexicographical data, these items are often found as headwords or as synonyms in the definitions of entries, pointing, thus, to a wider usage and, as a consequence, to their being common not only among users of specific counties.

Fond, "Stultus [...] Rusticus" (Skinner, 1671), is documented in Thomas (1587), Florio (1598), Cotgrave (1611), Blount (1656) and Coles (1676) as a synonym for *ineptus*, *folle*, *inept* and *stolid* respectively. Significantly, Meriton (1685: 84) resorts to this common adjective so as to define the regional word *daft*. *OED* refers to it as dialectal, *EDD* records it in Sc., Irl., northern counties, Not., Lin., and e.An., whereas *SED* restricts it to Yks., and Nhb. Likewise, no dialectal mark is provided for *losell* which is to be attested as a headword in Cawdrey (1617), Bullokar (1616) and Skinner (1671), among others, with the meaning given by *EDD* "A lazy rascal" (s.v. 1).

The discussion we have offered in this paper yields remarkable data about EMod Lancashire and northern English lexis. A careful linguistic analysis of lexical items in the light of the information lent by modern and contemporary lexicographical sources sheds illuminating data on the lexical profile of words. Some which have been traditionally assigned to regional dialects were not marked as such, at least in EModE, whereas others which were common regionalisms have been restricted to limited geographical distribution or even archaic usage. Also, it has been proved that the dialect information given by modern treatises is often inaccurate since the textual evidence they rely on is rather scarce. Both *OED* and *EDD* present documentary lacuane which render it complex to estimate the status of some words at this time. Indeed, some of our documentations antedate those quoted as first in EModE by modern sources. In sum, literary dialects help recreate differences among varieties of English at the time in terms of lexis. As a

matter of fact, a thorough evaluation of other literary renditions of dialect would lend aid to outlining a schematic lexical map of Early Modern regional English which has been for so long dismissed.

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