ON THE ENREGISTERMENT OF
THE NORTHERN DIALECT IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH:
AN EVALUATION ACROSS LITERARY TEXT TYPES

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This paper places literary texts including northern English traits into the context of enregisterment. It investigates the repertoire of forms used in literary representations of the North, laying special emphasis on phonological and spelling traits. For this purpose, I shall undertake a corpus-based analysis of northern forms found in early modern drama and broadside ballads included in the Salamanca Corpus. My aim is to identify the most common traits of these representations, arguing that, although the rationale behind the use of northernisms in drama and ballads is not exact, the recurrent linguistic patterns common to both text types may point to the enregisterment of some features.

Keywords: enregisterment, northern dialect, early modern English, Salamanca corpus

1. Introduction: Enregisterment, or the idea of a dialect

Asif Agha's groundbreaking article "The social life of cultural value" (2003) introduced the notion of *enregisterment* to explore the rise and spread of Received Pronunciation (RP). As clearly shown, from the 1700s onwards the prescriptivist input provided by pronouncing dictionaries, and the overt metalinguistic judgments present in a variety of discourses (newspapers, novels, manuals, etc.) contributed to the circulation of a set of forms that were gradually identified with a supra-local standard and status symbol in Britain. These features, as Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson assert, "have been represented collectively in the public imagination as a stable variety and maintained across time and region via metapragmatic practices that reiterate the value of this variety and its link to social status and correctness" (2006: 80).

As with RP, different repertoires of nonstandard features have been seen as more or less stable varieties, or dialects, associated with specific groups of people from particular places. Needless to say, this association involves linkages of different kinds which vary depending on the speaker, as linguistic forms have no inherent social meaning, and may represent different values for different persons. Nevertheless, some of the links may be shared thanks to practices and discourses that typify speech and contribute to their dissemination, as they help "people show one another how forms and meanings are to be linked" (Johnstone 2011: 657-58). For example, personal narrative, dialect dictionaries, websites, commodities such as T-shirts, comedy sketches or literature provide ample evidence of the public representation of sets of features as stable varieties. By disseminating habits of speech, either of perception, recognition or production, these activities create public awareness of the values indexed by the features represented, as well as collective ideas about varieties, about dialects.

Agha's notion of *enregisterment* refers then to "the processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms" (2003: 231-32). In other words, enregisterment are the mechanisms by which linguistic traits take on sociocultural meaning, this link becoming visible through a series of practices and discourses that put it on display. Accordingly, Beal (2010: 94-95) holds that "speakers/writers may take part in the process of enregisterment via such practices as dialect writing, the compilation of dialect dictionaries and, more recently, websites dealing with issues of dialect and local identity". They implicitly show how linguistic forms are linked to an ideological scheme by which they are evaluated against another variant that makes them become noticeable, indexing social and cultural values (Johnstone 2009: 160).[1]

Literary renditions of dialect have generally been explored on account of the linguistic insights they may give on the language of bygone times, especially when contemporary records are scarce or non-existent. Whilst far from detailed descriptions of the language, research has shown that they provide guidance to further our historical understanding of some traits (García-Bermejo Giner 1994; or Wales 2010). However, little attention has been paid to the information that this kind of texts may give on the enregisterment of dialects, and on how they may contribute to creating and circulating ideas about dialects (Agha 2003; Beal 2009; Johnstone 2009, 2011). In fact, regional writing is a clear conduit by which the correlation between language and sociocultural values, as well as the ideas derived from it, are foregrounded, circulated and consumed.

The focus of this paper is on the enregisterment of the northern dialect, as shown in literary discourse. It investigates the repertoire of features that have contributed to the enregisterment of the dialect, with special reference to phonological and spelling traits. For this purpose, a corpus-based analysis of early modern English (EModE) texts included in the Salamanca Corpus (henceforth SC) will be undertaken, paying attention to broadside ballads and drama. My aim is to identify the most recurrent traits of these representations, arguing that they include a fairly stable set of features which have helped shape our linguistic ideas about the North.

2. Literary representations of the North in EModE

The EModE period witnessed the production and circulation of an important number of works in which regional Englishes were represented. They echo contemporary concerns for a unified linguistic model that were tightly linked to a growing sense of dialect awareness in that a specific variety was identified with a form of linguistic and social prestige (Blank 1996: 14). The borders delineating linguistic, cultural and social oppositions were clearly outlined in the literary discourse. Some writers projected regional voices within the literary works, especially dramatic, sometimes highlighting a juxtaposition of speech forms that invited to an opposition of characterological types. Literary representations of regional Englishes were mostly identified with northern and south-western varieties. They were generally depicted as subordinate dialects in opposition to London English, thereby constructing an ideological scheme by which they and their values were contrasted. However, these two varieties were not treated alike. Whilst the South-West was often seen with disdain, and personified by country bumpkins, the North was rendered as an old, uncorrupted, remote and plain dialect embodied in the persona of a simple, frank, honest northerner that was portrayed as attractive and appealing too.[2]

There are a great many EModE examples in which northern traits are used for literary purposes. Significantly, the use of northernisms in the literary discourse is genre-constrained. Although this has been studied elsewhere (see Ruano-García 2010:

75-97), it is worth briefly summarising herein the differences between EModE drama and broadside ballads in this respect.

Firstly, most of the plays containing northern forms were produced by non-northern speakers, whilst northern ballads are mostly anonymous and a reflection of the longstanding oral literary tradition of the northern and border counties that has been maintained up to modern times (see Wales 2004: 25-30). They are examples of contemporary cheap print products which were massively circulated during EModE, being sometimes transformed as they moved from one area to another, and as they were copied down and eventually printed.

In line with the above said, EModE dramatic examples of northern speech were often represented in London for a non-northern audience, while broadsides were widely distributed, appealing both rural and town targets, and people from different social classes (Schwegler 1980: 435). The fact that plays were usually performed before a non-northern audience leads us to consider that the northernisms documented may have been salient enough to be recognised from the outside as prominent and be associated with a particular type of persona; that is, with a set of non-linguistic characteristics such as social class or region. Furthermore, their use in literary products mostly consumed by London spectators hints that they might have been familiar not only to northerners, since the literary effect behind many of them would have been otherwise hard to attain. Similarly, the widespread distribution of ballads, both in terms of space and social class, suggests that the repertoire of northern forms attested might have been known both to northern and non-northern speakers alike.

Thirdly, although both types of document are speech-purposed texts, dialect traits are used with different aims. On the one hand, EModE drama employed northernisms mainly in dialogues, to typify both the language and the dialect character; they were consciously introduced into the text with characterisation purposes. On the other hand, the use of northernisms is not restricted to dialogues in broadsides, and they were on occasion employed as geographical indicators which contextualised the recitation of events and endowed them with veracity. Additionally, it seems that northern forms were not deliberately introduced into the ballads for recreation purposes, especially since many of them are relics of the oral context in which these documents originated.

Aside from these differences, drama and broadside ballads show similarities regarding the northern data they contain. In both text types, semiphonetic spellings suggestive of northern sounds, and lexicalisms characteristic of the North/Scotland are preponderant over morphological and syntactic features. In what follows, my analysis will concentrate on phonological and spellings forms, as an examination of the lexical patterns has already been made (see Ruano-García 2010: 293-314).

3. The enregisterment of northern forms in EModE: A brief analysis

3.1. Primary data

The analysis of early documents in which northern English was rendered, performed and circulated may prove useful to give insights into the forms that have commonly been identified as northern. A quantitative investigation of the most recurrent features in the texts selected may provide data about the linguistic repertoire that was differentiable in EModE as characteristically northern. My selection of data has been made according to different criteria. As indicated, I have considered cases of drama and ballads. Secondly, I have concentrated on examples of literary dialects (see Shorrocks 1996: 386). Thirdly, I have been mostly concerned with dramatic texts

written by non-northern authors.[3] In sum, my primary data consist of 34 dramatic texts (654,089 words) and 77 ballads (49,785 words) which amount to 703,874 words in total.

3.2. Survey of data

A careful analysis of the data indicates that the representations of the North are built upon a set of forms. Tables 1 and 2 include the top types found in the documents considered, which I have classified into lexical sets according to the ME origin of the forms attested.

Lexical set	Types	Tokens	Incidence per 10,000 w
ME /a:/ (<OE /A:/)	48	213	42.7
ME /k/	4	118	23.7
ME /o:/	15	75	15
ME /a(:)+l/	11	51	10.2
ME /i:/	5	19	3.8
ME /u:/	9	17	3.4

Table 1: Top dialect forms found in broadside ballads (≥ 15 tokens)

Lexical set	Types	Tokens	Incidence per 10,000 w
ME /a:/ (<OE /A:/)	46	350	5.35
ME /u:/	65	248	3.79
ME /o:/	20	242	3.69
ME /a(:)+l/	20	202	3.08
ME /i:/	49	184	2.81
ME /a+nasal/	18	157	2.4
ME /k/	9	93	1.42
ME /s/	8	87	1.33
ME /ai/	14	46	0.7
ME /hw/	8	23	0.35

Table 2: Top dialect forms found in drama (≥ 15 tokens)

Clearly, both drama and ballads contain a repertoire of forms that are quite consistently used in the texts selected. The higher number of texts, and of words, representative of drama account for the attestation of a most varied set of dialect features, whilst that of broadsides is more restricted. However, as graph 1 shows, the corpus evidence indicates that the top dialect features common to both text types show higher distribution in ballads, with ME /u:/ forms being slightly more frequent in drama. The reasons behind the use of northernisms in each type of document might explain why ballads generally include dialectalisms on a more frequent basis.
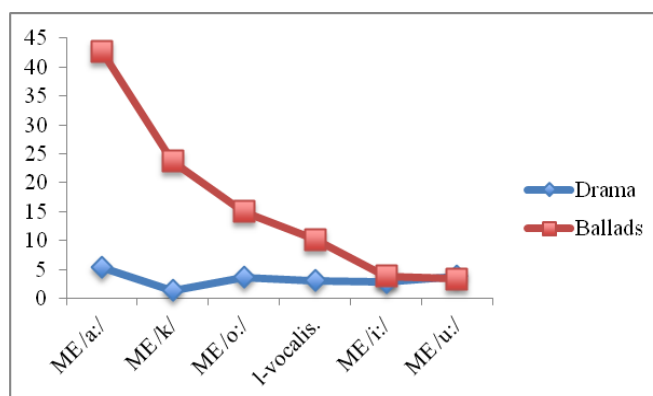

Figure 1: Top dialect forms common to both text types: normalised frequencies

In spite of the above said, both text types indicate that forms showing the northern development of ME /a:/ are by far the most frequent in the corpus. They, along with those of a lower incidence, such as words showing the development of ME /o:/, ME /u:/, or of ME /k/, constitute a fairly consistent set of features, which brings the data in line with modern evidence pointing to some of them as characteristic of traditional northern English varieties. For example, Trudgill (1990: 19-37) enumerates some pronunciation traits that broadly distinguish the North from the South. Amongst others, he includes forms with ME /i:/ (*right*, *light*, *night*), ME /u:/ (*house*, *out*, *cow*) and ME /a:/ (*home*, *bone*, *stone*), which are realised as [i:], [u:], [I@], respectively, against /aI/, /au/, **/@u/** in the South. Similarly, Wakelin (1991: 88) names some features which "broadly mark off northern from southern England". He refers to words with ME /u:/ (*cow*, *down*, *house*), ME /o:/ (*fool*, *goose*, *spoon*) or ME /a:/ (*bone*, *road*, *stone*), these being broadly realised in the North as [u:], [I@], [I@], respectively, against /au/, /u:/, **/@u/** in the South.

Alongside the modern evidence which points to the salience of these features, it is worth stressing that some of them were taken as examples in metalinguistic practices of the period. For instance, Alexander Gil's celebrated *Logonomia Anglica* (1619: 15-16) refers to words with ME /a:/ (*beath* 'both'), ME /o:/ (*gud kuk* 'good cook') or ME /i:/ (*faier* 'fire') as distinct of northern speech. Similarly, Simon Daines remarked in *Orthoepia Anglicana* (1640) on the northern development of ME /i:/ (see Dobson 1968). Clearly, non-literary testimonies reinforce the linguistic ideas that EModE ballads and plays circulated about the dialect by means of the set of forms documented.

Whilst these linguistic forms provide the basis for the literary articulation of the North, it is worth briefly mentioning that they were sometimes represented variably in spelling. As indicated, semiphonetic sequences are used to reproduce the northern sounds, and these are used quite consistently but for a few cases. Taking the words with ME /a:/, tables 3 and 4 show that different sequences are documented in the corpus, both in ballads and drama.

Spelling in SC	PdE spelling	RP sound	Tokens (NF)	Some examples
<ea>	<o>, <or>	/Q/, /u:/, **/@u/**, /O:/	56 (11.2)	*cleathes, gean, leard, meare, weame*
<a>	<o>	/V/, /u:/	44 (8.8)	*an, twa, ya*
<a +(C+e)>	<o>, <or>	/V/, /Q/, /O:/, **/@u/**	31 (6.2)	*ane, gane, mare, stane*
<e+(C+e)>	<o>, <or>	/V/, /O:/, **/@u/**	31 (6.2)	*ene, ence, mere, stenes*
<ai> / <ay>	<o>, <or>	/V/, /O:/	28 (5.6)	*laird, maist, naithing, tway*

Table 3: Forms with ME /a:/: a sample from ballads

Clearly, <ea> outstands with the highest number of tokens and frequency in the corpus. As can be seen, both text types rely on a similar series of spelling patterns to reproduce the northern development of ME /a:/, which concurs with García-Bermejo Giner's (2008) study of the development of OE /A:/ in the North. In line with this, words with ME /u:/ or ME /i:/ show variability in the representation, which points to different realisations of the forms reproduced in writing.

Spelling in SC	PdE spelling	RP sound	Tokens (NF)	Some examples
<ea>	<o>, <oe>, <or>	/V/, /Q/, /u:/, /@u/, /O:/	82 (1.2)	*beane, beath, eane, gea, meare, twea*
<e(+C+e)>	<o>, <or>	/V/, /u:/, /@u/, /O:/	82 (1.2)	*ene, beth, clethes, hely, mere, ne, se, whe*
<a>	<o>, <or>	/V/, /u:/, /@u/,	74 (1.1)	*ans, awn, bath, hally, twa, wa, wham*
<a+(C)+e>	<o>, <oe>, <or>	/u:/, /@u/	51 (0.7)	*alane, bane, drave, hame, nase, sae, thase, waes, whae*
<ee+r+e>	<o>, <or>	/V/, /O:/	5 (0.07)	*meere, neene*

Table 4: Forms with ME /a:/: a sample from drama

4. Discussion and concluding remarks

In light of the quantitative analysis of the data, it appears that EModE ballads and plays show enregisterment of some linguistic features. They provide a discursive articulation of the North and the dialect, showing how the representation of specific northern forms is indexical of certain sociocultural values. Although the linkages may have been variable, these literary documents provide ample ground in which some of them are foregrounded. In fact, thanks to corpus methodology, it has been shown that, despite some differences owing to the type of text, a specific set of forms is fairly consistently used in both ballads and drama, being tightly connected with the type of persona they describe. As such, the northerner, embodying a set of non-linguistic characteristics such as frankness, simplicity and plain speech, is linked to a particular form of expression which includes specific realisations of ME /a:/ or ME /u:/ that are represented by means of specific spellings. EModE broadside ballads and drama make therefore links between language, social categories and place by collective representations in which the dialect is displayed and circulated as a relatively stable variety, as well as a linguistic and sociocultural construct. It could be argued that the massive distribution of ballads during the period, and their wide social appeal, both in oral and printed form, might have acted as conduit of diffusion by which northern forms were scattered across the country, being in this way brought in contact with non-northern speakers, and creating a collective linguistic idea about the dialect itself. In line with this, and by way of hypothesis, it could be surmised that the set of forms attested in ballads might have had some kind of bearing upon the dramatic renditions of the North, as most playwrights were non-northern speakers.

In sum, the EModE literary text types considered show enregisterment of the northern dialect. Although literary documents are not synonymous with linguistic realism, their highlighting specific traits suggests both that they were socially and linguistically recognised as a differentiable register of forms, and that these artefacts show people's understanding and experiencing associations between place and language. The recurrent linguistic patterns detected should not thus be understood as poor testimonies to a formulaic or even invented dialect, as they hide ideas about and attitudes towards the language. There is hope that further analysis into this kind of discourse will open new windows into why and how people understood and perceived language in bygone times, key aspects in the study of language variation and change. As Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson (2006: 99) put it: "sociolinguists interested in understanding patterns of variation and change in the speech community need to pay

attention not just to people's talk but to the metapragmatic activities in which they create and circulate ideas about how they talk".

Notes

1. One key aspect in this language-ideological approach of enregisterment is that of the orders of indexicality proposed by Silverstein (1976), which refers to the various levels at which linguistic forms are imbued with social meaning. His taxonomy comprises three different orders that, according to Beal (2010: 94), "relate to ascending levels of awareness within and beyond the speech community". It has been argued that these levels show correspondence with Labov's concepts of *indicators*, *markers* and *stereotypes* (see Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006: 82-83).

2. There are many examples, both in drama and ballads, that testify to how northern English was depicted with these characteristics, and personified in this type of character. Restrictions of space in the present paper have prevented me from providing illustrative examples. See Blake (1981: 80-107), Blank (1996: 69-125).

3. The corpus likewise includes plays written by authors who were of northern descent, i.e. John Lacy (1615-1681) who was born in Doncaster (Yorkshire). However, they did not make thorough reproductions of northern speech, nor their plays were written entirely in northern English.

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