

Stage Yorkshiremen and Yorkshire boors: sociological fractionation and enregisterment in nineteenth century literary dialect

Paul Cooper
University of Liverpool

In this paper I seek to understand discourses surrounding enregistered Yorkshire dialect and identity which appear to demonstrate ideological differences to each other as represented in nineteenth century texts. My data comes from 62 texts which feature direct commentary on Yorkshire dialect in relation to the kinds of social identities most frequently and consistently associated with it. In addition, I consider a corpus comprising 108 texts of Yorkshire dialect writing totalling 106,463 words of both dialect literature and literary dialect (Shorrocks 1996), including dialect poems, ballads, songs, dialogues, as well as the dialect from Yorkshire characters in novels and plays.

My results show emergent discourses in which some literary dialect writers present Yorkshire speakers as boorish and use representations of the dialect enregistered (Agha 2003) as general “Yorkshire”. Other writers, many of whom are from Yorkshire themselves, contest these representations and argue that the dialect used by the former group is inaccurate. Moreover, analysis of the corpus data indicated quantifiable differences in the representations of certain dialect features in dialect writing aimed at local versus wider audiences. This also correlated with a broader range of social identities depicted for Yorkshire speakers in dialect literature than in the literary dialect, observable as variation in the occupations attributed to these speakers in each type of text. I conclude that the recirculation of these discourses is evidence of sociological fractionation (Agha 2007), as we see an “in group” challenging and contesting the views and identities portrayed by an “out group”. At the centre of these discourses, we can consistently observe discussion and use of enregistered Yorkshire dialect, which illustrates the additional ideological complexity of the links between language and identity in the nineteenth century.

References

Agha, Asif. 2003. The social life of cultural value. *Language and Communication* 23: 231-273.

Agha, Asif. 2007. *Language and Social Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shorrocks, Graham 1996. Non-Standard Dialect Literature and Popular Culture. In Juhani Klemola, Merja Kytö and Matti Rissanen (eds). *Speech Past and Present. Studies in English Dialectology in Memory of Ossi Ihalainen*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp. 385-411.