

The Yorkshire Dialect Representation in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* by Emily and Charlotte Brontë

Khadidja Layadi - Mouffak

Department of English

Faculty of Foreign Languages

University of Oran2 Mohamed BenAhmed, Algeria

Abstract

The use of dialect is common in literature. Sometimes writers are making use of the language of speech within the language of writing, the standard language. In this paper the researcher will not consider any dialect linguistically inferior to any other. Therefore, the present humble contribution is an attempt to investigate the motivations underlying the tendency for dialect in fiction. Moreover, it tries to explore the crucial position that this reality holds in a sociolinguistic analysis as well as a literary study. It focuses on Emily Brontë and her sister Charlotte who make use of the 'Yorkshire' dialect in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. Indeed, the two sisters have been in contact with different dialects and languages. They manage to reproduce the Yorkshire dialect in their writing. Because of this deviation in literary texts, characters are stigmatized by some readers as having the worst speech due to the differential access to 'educational opportunities.' Yet, what is the function of this technique? This paper tries to consider the writers' intentions in using dialect in novels as well as to depict the meaning of the use of such a variety of languages. The impact of dialect in fiction is investigated in this study. The researcher thinks it will pave the way for further exploration for anyone interested in how far to go in using dialect in writing, without losing the readers.

Keywords: Brontë, Jane Eyre, language, Wuthering Heights, Yorkshire dialect

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Introduction

Nowadays, there is a considerable need for studying a language within its social and cultural contexts, and this leads to people's understanding and appreciating literary language. Moreover, switches from one language to another language or to another variety occur not only in face-to-face interactions but also in any genre and any kind of literature. How words carry definite meanings in any piece of writing may reveal the organization of a whole society. Indeed, this is valid for the present study, which attempts to consider the Brontës and to see how local dialects function in writing and also the reason why they have not been translated into Standard English in the novels. Yet, they have been reproduced in writing as the speakers have said them. The two writers used dialect to show the characters' real identity when speaking the everyday language, the language of speech. In fact Emily Brontë and her sister Charlotte make use of a 'Yorkshire' dialect in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.

Literature review

Indeed, dialect representation of this kind of literature is just a different linguistic variety distinguished from Standard English by features of any part of the linguistic structure: phonology, morphology or syntax, but also semantics. We all agree that a geographic dialectal difference between the Yorkshire dialect and Standard English is smaller than that of slang compared to the language since the former makes use of certain kinds of codes known only by the members of the group. According to Chambers & Trudgill (1988), a dialect is a "substandard, low status, often rustic form of language, generally associated with the peasantry, the working class, or other groups lacking in prestige...

Dialects and accents frequently merge into one another without any discrete break." (p.3) Moreover, dialects "can be regarded as subdivisions of a particular language" (p.3). The two linguists gave some examples like "Parisian dialect of French, the Lancaster dialect of English or the Bavarian dialect of German" (p.3). What we know is that every dialect is rich enough and sufficiently complete for its speakers to carry out their daily activities. It also reflects the socio-cultural organization and environment of its speakers. Besides, "observations of dialect differences are so common that it is perhaps surprising to find that the significant thrust towards studying dialects systematically begins only in the latter half of the nineteenth century." (Chambers, 1988, p.15)

In the past, the fact of mixing dialects was so common and accepted in conversation that the speakers perhaps did not even notice it. More writers emerged and more people moved from one region to another in order to work. Therefore, more contact with other people pushed writers to consider the characters' accents, as well as their different dialects. This phenomenon became more important with the rise of the novel and the tendency towards realistic artistic productions.

Arguably, one may notice that this mixture of different codes and uses among the linguistic choices does not exist only within the Brontës' writing, but also in other writers's works from different cultures; we may mention Walter Scott who claims and praises his own Scottish dialect; Thomas Hardy and his Wessex dialects namely his Dorset local dialect; Mrs Gaskell and her

Lancaster dialect or D.H. Lawrence and his Nottingham dialect. Even Shakespeare has not forgotten to infiltrate his Warwickshire dialect. Most writers have used at least one local dialect in their writing to reflect the different characters' origin, cultural background and social status.

Moreover, one has to consider the speech of many of the heroes of Mark Twain's (2009) novels, especially *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of the Huckleberry Finn* where the local dialect is viewed as an identity. The latter book has been banned over the years from bookstores and libraries for its use of poor language (Taylor, 2004). It also implicitly symbolizes the gap between black and white people during the civil war. The relation of language and cultural identity has been firmly put forward as well as the link between a word and its legal community. Hence, the association of a dialect with a character's awareness of his own self. Furthermore, there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and their shared identity. Speakers have been identified as members of a specific speech community thanks to their accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns (Kramsch, 2000).

Discussion

Concerning our study, dialect refers to the everyday speech of the ordinary people of Haworth in West Yorkshire. "According to the hypothesis advanced by the linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, different languages offer different ways of perceiving and expressing the world around us, thus leading their speakers to conceive of the world in different ways" (as cited in Kramsch, 2000, p.129). Hence, the focus is on differences regarding degrees of the authors' involvement: they wanted their writing to echo the real world and perhaps their purpose was to shed light on their involvement in the survival of the Yorkshire dialect.

The conversations can be translated into Standard English and may become easily understood by any speaker of the English language. Consequently, Mr. Lockwood, a character in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, explains what is meant by 'Wuthering Heights': The name of this removed 'dwelling' denotes a combination of a 'geographical inaccessibility' with 'linguistic unfamiliarity.' The choice of words like: 'tumult,' 'stormy weather,' 'bracing ventilation,' 'north wind' is not fortuitous. And the personification of the thorns with their limbs is added to the harshness of the atmosphere. The verb 'defended' used by the end of the struggle of two inanimate things has a strong connotation. Yet, there is a big difference between them, because one is static whereas the other is dynamic; two forces are facing each other. Heathcliff's dwelling, the hero's in the novel, is described this way:

Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily the architect had the foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones. (Brontë, 2003, p.2)

For Vine (1994), the 'Heights' of the house, itself suggests a kind of extremity, as if the home is located at the limits of the habitable places and as if, in these sublime extremes, the domestic is always about to pass into the 'atmospheric,' and Heathcliff's stable dwelling into an indeterminate 'wuthering'. Vine's definition of a 'wuther' a variant of Scots and dialect English 'whither,' can mean an 'attack, onset, a smart blow or a stroke.' In this sense, the house is always under attack from the outside; it may also mean 'to tremble, shake, quiver' (OED, 1989 as cited in Vine, 1994, p.81). One may wonder how symbolic this statement is, concerning the collapse of the whole atmosphere within the novel.

According to Coote (1986), Heathcliff bestrides the novel, *Wuthering Heights*, and no simple account can do justice to the richness, depth, and variety of his personality. He is as powerful and amoral as the forces of nature with which he is often compared. He is both worldly and profoundly romantic. Love and hatred merge in him and both are extreme. Moreover, his origins are unknown. On this matter, Gérin (1985, p.225) mentioned "the time when the first shiploads of Irish immigrants were landing at Liverpool and dying in the cellars of the warehouses on the quays. Their images, and especially those of the children, were unforgettably depicted in the *Illustrated London News*". She described them as "starving scarecrows with a few rags on them and an animal growth of black hair almost obscuring their features" (p. 226). The relevance of such elements cannot be overlooked in explaining Emily's choice of Liverpool for the scene of Mr. Earnshaw's encounter with 'the gypsy brat Heathcliff.' Following *Wuthering Heights*'s author, Gérin described him "as dark almost as though it came from the devil", "dirty, raged, black-haired." (p.226)

Moreover, he "spoke some gibberish that nobody could understand," as did the children of the famine who knew nothing but Erse. Erse and Irish are the two dialects of the Celtic branch called Gaelic. The former is spoken in the Highlands. They have been introduced by the last group of immigrants to settle in Britain before the coming of the Anglo-Saxons. Gérin (1985) herself wondered whether Heathcliff was not first given a being and a body by Branwell's report of starving immigrants' children in the Liverpool streets? The writer could not find an appropriate translation in the nineteenth century for this kind of language. Therefore no concrete utterance was given in the novel; yet, the author manages to make us feel the strangeness of that language used by those immigrants.

In her paper "The Idea of a dialect: dialect, literature and the 'enregisterment' of urban dialect in 19th century England", Beal (2011) mentions two different ways to study dialect in literature, i.e., two approaches to analyze non-standard English in literary texts. The first one is the dialectological, which uses literary texts as evidence of the spoken language, and it considers the sense provided by the use of the dialect as non-standard English. Probably, this may be applied to the Brontës' writing as a shred of evidence for the dialect, which is often a historical fact. The other approach is stylistic, which puts the stress on how realistic the effectiveness of the vernacular or non-standard language in a particular text and context is. Its function has been considered within the literary work as a whole. To render it better, a definition of the term 'enregisterment' has been given. According to Agha (2003, as cited in www. 2011) it is

The recognition of the relationship between specific linguistic features and absolute cultural values. These values are tied to people through notions that link language use to beliefs about 'authentic' local identity and the uniqueness of the dialect; the speaker's local authenticity is, in part, based on the use of enregistered features...speakers rely on enregistered features to perform this identity for locals as well as outsiders. (p.242)

Hence this way of thinking specifically about the cultural values gets attached to the linguistic features and how, why, and when they get connected. Moreover, the representation of dialect in literature involves the use of pertinent linguistic elements, which makes us think about dialect in writing. This dialect is a regional or social variety of a language distinguished from the standard language used by the writer. One may wonder how non-standard language in fiction can be taken as a reliable source for sociolinguistic analysis. Consequently, any example of direct speech can be analyzed and commented on. For instance, when Mr. Lockwood asked Joseph to open the door, but he refused because the master was not there. He produces this piece of speech: "Whet are ye for? 't' maister's dahn i fowld. Go rahndby th' end ut' laith, if yah went spake tull him.' They's nobbut t' missis; and shoo'll nut oppen'tan ye mak yer flaysome dins till neeght." (Brontë, 1983, p.8)

This harsh language serves to individualize Joseph and to reveal his social status. Although Heathcliff's behavior and vengeful destruction reflect the Moors of the Yorkshire, the winds, lightning and thunder, Joseph, a character in *Wuthering Heights*, is the best representative figure concerning the Yorkshire dialect. Moreover, Emily Brontë's aim was to stress that kind of symbiosis which exists between Joseph's speech and the stormy heaths, His whole conversations, dialogues, speeches to himself are like the following:

"Na -ay!yah muh goa back whear yah coom frough." (Joseph)
("No! You may go back to where you came from.") (Brontë, 2003, p.222)

"I shall have my supper in another room ... have you no place you call a parlour?" (Lockwood)
"Parlour!" he echoed, sneeringly, "parlour! Nay, we've noa parlours. If yah dunnut loike wer company, they's maister's; un' if yah dunnut loike maister, they's us. (Joseph)
(No, we've no parlour! If you don't like our company, there's master's; and if you don't like master there's us! (Brontë, 2003, p.134)

Furthermore, the use of dialect in literature, code-switching and borrowing, can serve as a reliable source for linguistic research. The Brontës are aware about an authentic usage of idioms and varieties, not necessarily in the faithful transcription of phonology, morphology, and syntax, but rather in the realistic representation of language about the characters who use them when these writers want to illustrate a particular state of reality that can never be faithfully translated in Standard English. They also add in their writing the description of gestures and facial expressions because they both play an essential part in linguistic communication.

If someone thinks that these novels 'use bad language' he has just to hear what Trudgill (1975) answers; he asserts that:

Judgments which appear to be about style are in fact judgments based on social and cultural values, and have much more to do with the social structure of our community than with writing. What happens is that, in any society, different groups of people are evaluated in different ways. (p. 28)

He adds that some groups or speech communities cannot have the same prestige and status. Thus dialects and accents associated with those who have more influence ‘tend to be more favorably evaluated than other varieties.’ A dialect associated with high-prestige social groups is viewed as ‘good’ and ‘attractive’. Once more, “judgments about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ languages are therefore based on social connotations of dialects and accents rather than anything inherent in the linguistic varieties themselves. We may conclude that speakers are more important than speech in the evaluation of language.

One instance in the novels is the ‘double negation’ in the dialect used in literature. It serves to inform the reader and to signal the character’s regional and social background. And the example of Chaucer has been given to stress that this fact has existed in nearly all English dialects. In the Brontës’ writing, dialect is, of course, restricted to dialogue. Undoubtedly, characters in novels do not speak like authors. Their speech reveals more sincerity about the Victorian class system personified through them. Yet, the real meaning may differ from what they say when we just consider John’s Christianity, one of the most sincere kind, compared, for example, to Mr. Brocklehurst and Elisa Reed, who profess to be followers of Christ but are both hypocritical in their different personal ways. Brocklehurst’s religion is “all bombast and show.” (Holker, 1986, p.91)

Following Carr’s (1978) view, a dialect is viewed as a regional or a social variety of a language distinguished by pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary, i.e., especially a variety of speech different from the standard literary language. It has also to be different from the speech pattern of the culture in which it exists: cockney is a dialect of English, belonging to a specific geographical localities or social classes. This is the case of Emily and Charlotte Brontë’s use of the Yorkshire dialect in their novels which seems a helpful tool used to make their characters express themselves at ease. When choosing a particular dialect for a character and not translating it into standard English, the authors are really telling the reader more about that character’s background without directly stating anything. As Carr (1978) asserts,

It is a subconscious detail that readers sometimes rarely noticed if they are caught up in the book. Moreover the understanding of a particular dialect requires that the reader understands the stereotypes based upon a mixture of personal experience and a conventional set of structures taken from other authors’ literary representations of dialect. (p. 32)

Carr (1978) mentions the use of dialect in children’s books. For him, the function is to suggest the geographical background, social class, educational level, and intelligence of literary characters. If

people and especially young readers do not themselves speak a non-standard dialect, they will develop negative attitudes about the characters who use non-standard dialects. Then, these attitudes will be intensified. These negative attitudes are partially due to the literary use of ‘eye dialect,’ where the author misspells words to convey variant speech patterns. To children, spelling errors reflect low intelligence or undesirability in characters. Dialect divides people into classes. A good example could be when Nelly, the nurse in *Wuthering Heights*, hums a first Danish-Scots ballad above the sleeping orphan, Hareton:

It was far in the night, and the bairnies grat,
The mither beneath the mools heard that. (Brontë, 2000, p.76).
(Bairnies grat: children wept; mither: mother; mools: mounds of earth over graves.)

The writer used the original words of the song to give to the situation more strength. With the help of just three terms: ‘night, children wept, and graves’ but expressed in that Scottish dialect, she succeeded in reinforcing this very sad image. The use of dialect in *Jane Eyre* is more a question of lament than that of harshness since Jane’s morality has been affected. The Yorkshire dialect appears in songs and in some characters’ speeches.

Hence, social meaning transmitted with the help of the Brontës’ style, switching or other sociolinguistic device is due to the sociolinguistic choices that are able to inform the reader about the speaker’s social and regional origin as well as the nature of the social situation and the shifts in the topic of the conversation. Concerning *Jane Eyre*, these shifts are from Standard English to local dialect, then to French and sometimes to other languages, whereas in *Wuthering Heights*, the primary switch is from Standard English to the Yorkshire dialect. In fact Joseph, the local servant is using his own rude dialect which reflects all the harsh manners of his rural Yorkshire. However, in *Jane Eyre* the countrywoman servant, Hannah is less rude and rural in her thick dialect; one vivid example could be this dialogue, denoting “her natural suspicion of strangers” (Holker, 1983, p.84). She had this conversation when Jane arrived to St. John’s house at the door of Marsh End:

Hannah: “did you ever go a-begging afore you came here?”
Jane: “you are mistaken in supposing me a beggar. I am no beggar.”
Hannah: “I dunnut understand that: you’ve like no house, nor no brass, I guess?”
(By brass she means money, and we notice the double negation.)
Jane: “I inquired, as she brought out a basket of fruit.”
Hannah: “Mak’em into pies.”
Jane: “Give them to me and I’ll pick them.”
Hannah: “Nay; I dunnut want ye to do nought.”
”Ye’ve not been used to servant’s wark. Happen ye’ve been a dressmaker.”

Labov’s work (1978) has demonstrated that extreme dialect variations can result from immediate social differentiation without the introduction of the other languages, i.e., without mixture. Situations are likely to be different in the conversation since the topic of talk and the purpose are no limited. In addition, the relationship of the interlocutors vis-à-vis each other is not stable;

language cannot be the same in all interactions throughout the novel, where the characters are but fictional. Yet, the story is only the reflection of the real world improved by the power of the writers' imagination.

Conclusion

The Brontës manage to give enough freedom to their characters to use the form of language typical to their daily life to reflect the identity and the linguistic habits of each one. Furthermore, the researcher thinks that the poet or the novelist is the exceptional individual who may be historically 'representative in one crucial sense of the term.' Arguably, he is the only one who knows what he feels and what his intentions are because the majority of realities cannot be mirrored, interpreted, and voiced in the same way as their author does. On this matter, the researcher is aware that in some specific cases the use of Dialectal Arabic may destroy Classical Arabic; one can mention the great Egyptian novelist, Naguib Mahfouz who uses Standard Arabic even in dialogues. (Abid,2008)

Yet, the Brontës' writing is characterized by the extraordinary 'coherence' and power with which it gives shape to a historically determined view of the world held by a particular social group: the group of nineteenth-century working class and middle - class in a specific place in the North of England. Strickland (1983) used the term 'coherence' when he mentioned the great works of literature, Racine's *Phaedra* or Malraux's *La Condition Humaine*. Thus, the Brontës' writing reveals precisely the structures of the religious, economic, social, and cultural life of this part of the world during that time.

About the Author :

Khadidja Layadi-Mouffak, associate professor at the University of Oran 2, received her Doctorate (Es-Sciences) in Sociolinguistics. She has been teaching Literatures, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Language and Literature, Didactics, Discourse Analysis, to Licence, Master, and Doctorate students. She is a member of LOAPL Labo. Her research interests are related to the above fields. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8785-302X>

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Appendix A

Here are some utterances produced in the Yorkshire dialect by the characters in *Jane Eyre*. (The researcher has selected some translations into standard English from Holker, 1983, pp.97-104)

- [1] Mun: must
- [2] Happen three miles: maybe three miles
- [3] Varry like: but give ower studying: very likely: but do stop studying now
- [4] Childer: children
- [5] Fand: found
- [6] Wormich i' your way: was very much like you
- [7] Bras: money
- [8] Dunnut: don't
- [9] Mucky: like dirty
- [10] Kirstened: christened
- [11] 'ing and holm': two North Country words meaning stretches of land in, or alongside, water; or a meadow, particular meadow near a river which is liable to flooding.
- [12] 'that caps the globe': 'that is the giddy limit' or 'that beats everything'
- [13] She's noanfaal: she's no fool; sometimes it means not ugly
- [14] Beck: a Northern word for a brook, particularly one that has a stony bed
- [15] Happennor: perhaps....than
- [16] Noan: not

- [17] Threaped: quarreled
- [18] Unlikely: inconvenient

Appendix B

Then in *Wuthering Heights*:

(The researcher has chosen some translations into Standard English from Coote, 1986 pp.79-81)

- [1] Allwildered like: looking bewildered
- [2] An: if
- [3] Aw daht: I'm afraid
- [4] Bahn: going
- [5] Baht: without
- [6] Bairn: child
- [7] Banning: swearing
- [8] Beck: stream
- [9] Bespeak: ask for
- [10] Blubbering: crying
- [11] Bout: without
- [12] Brass: money
- [13] Brown study: deep thought
- [14] Brusts: bursts
- [15] Cambric: linen
- [16] Chit: girl
- [17] Chuck: dear
- [18] Cipher: a nondescript person
- [19] Clothes-pres: wardrobe
- [20] Clown: peasant
- [21] Conned: learned
- [22] Coxcomb: fool
- [23] Devastate the moors: a shooting party
- [24] Dree: joyle
- [25] Fahl: foul
- [26] Fellies: fellows
- [27] Fit: feet
- [28] Flaysome: terrifying
- [29] Flitting: moving
- [30] Frame: go quickly
- [31] Frame: invent
- [32] Galloway: small horse
- [33] Ganging: going
- [34] Gaumless: stupid
- [35] Gentle: well born
- [36] Ghoul: a grave-robbing spirit
- [37] Glees: songs
- [38] Grat: wept
- [39] Hahs: house