



THE ENREGISTERMENT OF THE KAILYARDIST PATHOS: A DEBATE ON LINGUISTIC AUTHENTICITY AND NATIONHOOD IN THE LITERATURE OF MODERN SCOTLAND

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This note focuses on the case of Scots as an enregistered variety, in Asif Agha's (2003) terms, and the processes whereby it is represented in literature, the cultural meanings indexicalised in the variety and the Kailyardist movement as an important precursor for the establishment of the variety in literature. Throughout the note various aspects of non-standard language in literature are reviewed and several examples of Scots in kailyardist, revivalist and postmodernist works are commented upon. Considering Scots as the voice of the Scottish nation and a vehicle for political and sociocultural manifestation, this note serves to understand why authentic renderings, in opposition to less elaborate representations, are essential to preserve the indexicalised meanings of the variety. The note concludes with a brief observation of modern-day stereotypes of Scots easily findable in television and the notion of Scottishness as a continuum.

Keywords: scots; enregisterment; authenticity; kailyardism

1. Introduction: Non-standard Language and Enregisterment

Linguistic communication has marked human interaction throughout history in multifarious ways. Splayed into many levels, language appears to have been a powerful carrier of meaning, symbolism and ideology because of its flexible and unique features varying among communities. The sociological impact of language has evolved at the same pace, giving way to the creation of markers and stereotypes associated with a given way of expression depending on the community. Due to this, linguistic choices have been understood as entailing social meaning as a result of their association with different strata of society. Such cultural portrayals in language made their way into literature as a means of constructing fictional characters and signal their origin to specific social groups. This helped to create an image of the attributes and peculiarities of speakers outside the area of literary production, whilst also stimulate the fixation of clichés that were congealed in language. Consequently, the way one character or another expresses themselves in terms of pronunciation or lexis has an impinge on the reader and their conceptualisation of language in relation to that character.

There are several scholarly works that address this issue throughout history. In 1981, Norman F. Blake discusses this question in his *Non-standard Language in English Literature*. This book may serve as a stepping stone to navigate the ample field of linguistic characterisation through literature, since it does a review of non-standard use of language from Chaucer to more recent expressions such as the Victorians and the contemporary era. Speaking of *The Canterbury Tales* (1476), Blake explains that “people from different walks of life band together to form a travelling party to Canterbury” (33), and that by giving them a specific regional voice, their origins would be clear to the average reader. That is to say, the way Chaucer depicted each character by introducing specific traits that could be considered alien or extravagant to the average London-area reader is exemplary in that it helps to understand how language became a token of identity without people considering it strictly so until it was used in that fashion. Such tendency persisted in later centuries. This is obvious in Early Modern theatre, where Shakespeare, among other

playwrights, appears to have resorted to non-standard language to refer to the lowly or rural origins of a given set of characters that would contrast with other nobler ones. Blake corroborates this idea in his *Shakespeare's Non-standard English: A Dictionary of his Informal Language* (2003).

This literary sketch of other people's voices and linguistic perspectives became more apparent during the nineteenth century for a series of reasons that are made clear in many other studies, such as Görlach (1991), Shorrocks (1996) and Beal (2009), amongst others. They explain how the spread and awareness of different varieties of English in this century was prompted by the advancement in transport as well as the perfection or invention of the telegraph and the telephone, accordingly. At the same time, the cheapening of the print industry assisted the distribution of literary representations of regional speech. This naturally contributed to raising awareness of the situation of English in different counties and cities of the United Kingdom, and as with any other butterfly effect, the more different and foreign somebody's English was, the more it was used and represented in literature, generating more and more representations of the original linguistic features in the course of time.

In 2003, Asif Agha coined the term *enregisterment* to handle this literary trend, describing it as “processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms” (231). It would be noteworthy to relate this notion to Silverstein's (1976) three orders of indexicality. According to Silverstein, one could consider indexes (or “pure” indexes) “features of speech which...signal some particular value of one or more contextual variables” (Beal & Cooper 2015, 29). Therefore, enregistered varieties would have reached the third order of indexicality where “forms which have been linked with a certain social category [not only are noticed by outsiders and vernacular speakers, but] become the subject of overt comment.” (35). In light of Agha's and Silverstein's frameworks, dialectal studies within the field of diachronic linguistics have recently focused their attention on those varieties of English which showed distinctive traits with indexicalised social meanings.

Keeping this in mind, the British Isles provide an ample field of study to identify those varieties that could have been perceived differently and acquired meanings different from the standard that rose in the London area. So far, the Northern dialect has gained considerable scholarly attention given that it is often represented and circulated through a relatively stable set of linguistic features, as Beal (2009), Cooper (2013), Ruano-García (2012) and Beal and Cooper (2015), amongst others, show. Other varieties of English in the British Isles remain, however, vaguely examined. In this context, the Scots dialect is another interesting example to explore enregisterment in light of its literary representation.

2. Scotland and Kailyardism: the Enregisterment of the Scottish Pathos

The history of Scots provides evidence of its uniqueness as a variety. Wolfgang Unger (2013) traces the origins of Scots “to the Northumbrian dialects”, stating that the Scots were mainly of Gaelic ancestry (11). Whilst he does not offer a definite description of Scots, Unger acknowledges the existence of two types of Scots: broad and Scottish, the former being heavier and more distant to Standard English than the latter. This contrast is connected to a notion of identity where Scottish features become a dissimilar indicator to detach the Scots-speaking public from England. Robert Lawson (2014) suggests that “issues of identity, culture, and heritage [are] important reasons for using Scots” (9), a statement that is closely related with Even-Zohar’s (2000) conception of *energy* as a force spiralling from the cultural power of a particular society. Whereas Even-Zohar speaks of a kind of survival of the fittest in terms of lore and culture when different communities clash, Scots appears to be employed by the Scottish nation as a means of delimiting the power of the neighbouring English culture.

Coming back to literature, this is strongly reflected in Victorian publications for the reasons stated above: cheaper production, ample readership, better means of communication and overall awareness of different types of English in written form. In addition, one must remember the growing tendency to reflect such differences in fiction. At the end of the nineteenth century, a new

literary school was born with the establishment of kailyardism. Andrew Nash (2007) states that 1895 is the year when this term was firstly used to refer to a trend in Scottish literature characterised by a sentimentalist, nostalgia-infused retrospection into rural Scotland, its ways of life and mundane events. Gillian Shepherd (1988) is more precise in her formulation of kailyardism, for she specifies that kailyardist novels are characterised by “an omniscient narrator, an episodic format, a rural setting, an imprecise chronology” (310). Kailyardist authors were scarce but notorious: J. M. Barrie, S. R. Crockett and Ian Maclaren became the pillars kailyardism rested upon. Their novels are freighted with authentic examples of Scots in terms of lexis, syntax and morphology, reason why passages from Barrie's and Maclaren's works, authors whose backgrounds are useful in this study as shown later on, will be used as illustration of the Scottish voice. Whilst guidelines on the pronunciation of Scots words present in the novels are not provided in advance, the apparently outlandish writing of most of the dialogues is engineered to contrast with Standard English. These sentimentalist reminiscences of Scottish parochial life peppered with samples of Scots are also designed to draw a line between a common identity as the British nation (mostly influenced by England, primarily favouring Standard English) and a unique, Scottish-only manifestation of cultural values.

Enregisterment and kailyardism become intertwined because of the above. Kailyardist authors created characters that spoke with what one could consider authentic Scots in that it was used to take the reader to an era where, if Scots themselves, would be compelled to feel homesick. For those non-Scots readers, however, the effect would only be one of strangeness and difficulty in reading, much like when one is confronted with an exotic civilisation. The discrepancy with Standard English is all the more visual in the following examples. Reading Ian Maclaren's *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1894), excerpts like the following are illustrative of the Scottish voice:

“Think o' you and me, Hillocks, veesitin' the schule and sittin' wi' bukes in oor hands watchin' the Inspector. Keep's a', it's eneuch to mak' the auld Dominie turn in his grave. Twa meenisters cam' in his time, and Domsie put Geordie Hoo or some ither gleg laddie, that

was makin' for college, thro' his facin's, and maybe some bit lassie brocht her copybuke.” (Maclaren, 10)

Whilst English by birth, minister Ian Maclaren was able to capture the Scottish voice thanks in part to a lifetime of clerical servitude for the Free Church of Scotland. His representation of the variety greatly coincides with that of Scots-born J. M. Barrie in *A Window in Thrums* (1889):

“It's no very silvendy his comin' ower the brae by himsel,” said Jess, adding in a bitter tone of conviction, “but he'll gang in to no hoose as lang as he's so weel dressed. Na, he would think it boastfu.” (Barrie, 178)

A range of diverse linguistic aspects seem to concur, such as:

1. Aitken's Scottish Vowel Length Rule¹: (a phenomenon which signals difference in vowel length between Standard Scottish English and Received Pronunciation): e.g. *lang* “long”)
2. Substitution of short /ɪ/ for long /i/ (*veesitin* ‘visiting’, *meenisters* ‘ministers’);
3. /u:/ instead of /ʊ/ (as in *hoose*, ‘house’).
4. Rich Scots lexis (*gleg* ‘quick, nimble’, *silvendy* ‘trustworthy, adequate’)

Although Scots in kailyardist works could be so fixed regarding the selection of features as to be considered “synthetic” (Lawson 2014), there seems to be a national consensus whereby most authentic literary depictions of Scots build on the same set of features. Over two hundred years before kailyardism, Robert Burns's poems were none the different in terms of linguistic traits:

The Robin cam to the wren 's nest
 And keekit in and keekit in,
 O weel 's me on your auld pow,
 Wad ye be in, wad ye be in.

One can speak, then, of coinciding components or nuclear constituents which work as tokens of identification in literature. In other words, by employing those sets of linguistic features, the

¹ Giegerich (1992) describes the rule in simple terms: “tense vowels are either long or short, depending on their context, while lax vowels are invariably short” (229).

writer is creating a recognisable and unique frame of interaction wherein their readership can entertain a feeling of nationhood and belonging powered by the selection of such features.

3. Scots in Revivalist and Postmodern Literature: a Political Vindication and the Perils of Unauthentic Renderings

Written Scots suffered from disinterest in the shadow of more prominent varieties of English and the overwhelming nearness of Standard English during the first stages of the twentieth century. Some authors attempted a revival of Scots values (national pride, pathos, nostalgia for a rural Scotland) with poems resembling those of Burns. Hugh McDiarmid was a relevant initiator of this rebirth. A summary glance at his poetry should be enough to notice the similarities with the excerpts above:

The auld mune shak 's her gowden feathers,
 Their stary talk 's a when o 'blethers,
 Nane for thee a thochtie sparin '
 Earth, thou bonnie broukit bairn!

Poetry was later replaced by narrative as regards the use of Scots as a vindication of the culture of a nation different from England. Although nowadays he appears to have become more fashionable due to political instability, Irvine Welsh stands out as a sort of champion when it comes to displaying Scotland through the voices of the working-class with no linguistic embellishments. *Skagboys* (2012) is a fine repository of examples such as this:

“Ah say nowt, but ah dinnae want tae ken that minger 's tale. Oan the bus, ah sit beside Dad and a couple ay his auld mates fae the Govan yards.” (Welsh, chap. 1)

Whilst in Welsh the representation is easier to follow, presumably for the sake of non-Scots readers, it performs accurately. One finds some of the features that were the norm less than two hundred years before, still infused with a message: whereas kailyardism was less about politics and more concerned with one's childhood and fondest memories in rural Scotland, Welsh's work becomes a vehicle to convey social and political values.

Kino Iwazumi (2001) responds to the issue of nationhood in saying that “Scottish nationhood was constructed through the interaction of various narratives, each representing a particular notion of Scottishness” (1). It would be reasonable to add that Scottishness and the Scottish fight for cultural and political independence is visible in this perseverance in declaring themselves an individual nation by producing pieces of literature where Scots is used. In other terms, Scots and the Scots variety have entered a feedback loop where political and cultural ideas have strengthened the employment of Scots whilst language has served Scots to find something unique in their culture, a weapon to battle with.

That being said, one must return to how the employment of non-standard language in literature, especially since the nineteenth century, evolved through time to understand why unauthentic representations (in this case of Scots) could damage the progress and message carried by the variety of a given community. Buendgens-Kosten (2014) defines authenticity as “related to notions of ‘realness’ or ‘trueness to origin’...characterizing a quality of the language used in them” (457). If one links this to what Marková (1997) declares when exemplifying language misuse in Orwell’s *1984* (1948): “It is generally accepted by social scientists that it is through language that people express their self and identity” (266), one assumes that by providing unauthentic renderings of Scots (either unknowingly or out of deference towards the readership), authors of such pieces are inevitably damaging the sociocultural and idiosyncratic energy upheld by kailyardist (Barrie, Maclaren, Beaton), revivalist (MacDiarmid, Grassic Gibbon) and postmodernist (Welsh, Gray, Donovan) authors. Comparing the excerpts above with the following, one should be able to identify it as meagre and faint:

“Ye ’d be better off no ’speakin’ lass.” Bhaltair replied. “We ’ll be ridin’ through tha moors and mountains tae get tae Clan McColl, so save yer breath.”

This passage is taken from Lydia Kendall’s *Highlander’s Love in Captivity* (2018), where language is used to portray a character mostly related to a romantic stereotype. Although the author adds a glossary of Scottish lexis at the beginning of the novel, one can notice the important differences between Welsh’s

representation and Kendall's. In Kendall's case language appears to be more irregular and commercially-driven, since it does not serve a political or sentimental cause as in the examples provided earlier. Rather, language is engineered in a purely mechanical way to spark a series of archetypes in the mind of the reader. It is because of this that unauthentic representations of Scots could endanger its quality and sociocultural values.

There are several instances in the television and film industry (such as Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* or *The Simpsons*' Groundskeeper Willie) where Scots as a variety composed of very definite traits distinguishable from Standard English is poorly illustrated in comparison with more authentic depictions. In this sense, Bucholtz (2003) proposes the term "authenticity effects" to describe the core of what can be defined as "authentic", indicating that "authentication is instantiated through the assertion of one's own or another's identity as genuine or credible" (408). Bucholtz also identifies a difference "between a performed identity and an assumed target reality." (409). This is fairly obvious in the cases stated above (Gibson's *Braveheart* and *The Simpsons*) in contrast with *Trainspotting* or its cinematic adaptation. Whereas the former two set Scots as a goal rather than a symbolic rendering of indexicalised linguistic forms, the latter achieves a higher level of authenticity because of its authenticity effects, i.e. more elaborate and relatable linguistic forms (such as the ones offered by Welsh and the kailyardists: Aitkin's rule, richer Scots lexis) with a heavier indexical weight. Bucholtz's differentiation between a performed identity and an assumed target reality could be the reason why it would be fair to assume that Scots has undergone a "branched" process of enregisterment. On the one hand, kailyardism and later Scottish productions have helped standardise a fixed pattern for writing in Scots; on the other, however, stereotypical features have been dissected and repeated to extenuation to catalogue a given character as Scottish (a target reality). In this sense, misrepresentation of the variety could therefore adversely impact on its sociopolitical side if the commercial, or unnatural portrayal, overcomes or takes over those indexicalised linguistic forms vernacular speakers are more familiar with, since it would only insist on a fictitious "notion of Scottishness", as Iwazumi puts it, distantly related to actuality.

4. Conclusions

Briefly, one must take into account all the facts provided so far to realise that whilst Scots can be considered enregistered, in Asif Agha's terms, such status comes with downsides. Non-standard language has been widely employed as a means of signalling someone's origin briefly and without use of further description. The case of Scots has not received as much attention as that of the Northern varieties, but this note has sought to demonstrate its value in linguistic terms as well as to bring attention to the problematics of inaccurate or unauthentic representations. The kailyardist fashion of the late nineteenth century solidified what the poetry of Burns along with other contemporary authors instigated, and the result of their poignant and pathos-filled works can be regarded as valuable evidence of the enregistered state of the variety. If one were to consider Scottishness as a continuum, this would be directed towards the concretion of one single image composed, in a kaleidoscopic fashion, of many unique pictures, where unauthentic representations would be but distracting reflections blotting out momentarily its real colours.

In sum, non-standard varieties are in need of further studies that may help disentangle the linguistic intricacies they are composed of and their historical context, lest they fall into oblivion. This is nowadays more feasible due to the availability of resources such as the *Salamanca Corpus*, which enables us to study usually disregarded varieties by collecting literary pieces from the period 1500-1950 where their prime linguistic characteristics are documented. It is now in the hands of future research to make proper use of these works to bring forth the importance of dialectal varieties and their cultural weight.

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