Language, Ideology and Enregisterment in 20th-century Derbyshire

Paula Schintu, University of Salamanca

Defined by Agha in 2003 as the "processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms" (231), enregisterment has become an increasingly popular approach to the study of the mechanisms whereby linguistic varieties acquire and index sociocultural meaning. This link between language and ideology allows the distinction of different linguistic repertoires and makes them stable and unique, which leads to their legitimation and preservation. Enregisterment has been widely discussed in the works of Johnstone et al. (2006) and Johnstone (2013), to name some of them. They explore the enregisterment of Pittsburghese by looking at non-standard discourse displayed in modern sources such as spoken interviews or the Internet. Little attention, however, has been paid to the study of this process in historical contexts. Among the very few exceptions are Beal (2009), Ruano-García (2012), Cooper (2013), and Beal & Cooper (2015). All of them analyse dialect via the examination of regional literature, highlighting its value in the study of historical enregisterment; not only does it provide relevant information about dialects' most salient linguistic traits, but also affords researchers "a glimpse into the social value of language features in historical periods" (Beal & Cooper 2015: 52).

In view of the above said, this paper takes a preliminary approach to the enregisterment of 20th-century Derbyshire dialect drawing upon the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data retrieved from a selection of instances of dialect writing. Despite the fact that this variety ought to be of particular interest since it was spoken in a transition area between the North of England and the West Midlands, these dialectal works have not been discussed in depth, the variety they portray remaining, thus, almost completely unexplored (García-Bermejo Giner 1991, 1993 being the most remarkable exception). Thus, this study aims at (1) identifying the main linguistic and sociolinguistic features associated with the variety, as well as (2) determining the role that instances of dialect writing in the period played in the enregisterment of such linguistic forms and the values they index. I argue that discernible patterns of linguistic forms in the depiction of the dialect emerge from the analysis and that these index specific socio-cultural features. In fact, a variety of non-standard spellings such as <aa> for RP /aʊ/ (e.g. aat 'out') coexist in this region with others suggesting northern phonological features (Ihalainen 1995), e.g. lack of FOOT/STRUT split (summat 'something') or /aɪ/ monophthongisation (Ah, Aa 'I'; neet 'night'), which would point to a hybrid nature of the Derbyshire speech. Moreover, it will be claimed that the production and circulation of literary representations of dialect contributed to share the linkages between the variety and the values and identities associated with it, prompting its enregisterment as a relatively stable and homogeneous dialect.

References

Agha, Asif. "The Social Life of Cultural Value." Language & Communication 23 (2003): 231–273.

Beal, Joan C. "Enregisterment, Commodification, and Historical Context: 'Geordie' versus 'Sheffieldish'." American Speech 84.2 (2009): 138-156.

Beal, Joan C, and Paul Cooper. The Enregisterment of Northern English. Researching Northern English. Ed. R. Hickey. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2015. 25-50.

Cooper, Paul. Enregisterment in Historical Contexts: A Framework. Diss. University of Sheffield, 2013.

García-Bermejo Giner, Ma Fuencisla. Morphosyntactical Variation in Nineteenth-Century Derbyshire. Actas XV Congreso AEDEAN. Eds. F.J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez et al. Logroño, 1993. 305-318.

---. Personal Pronouns in Derbyshire as Reflected in Sheridan Le Fanu's Uncle Silas. Studia Patriciae Shaw Oblata. Eds. S. G. Fernández-Corugedo et al. Oviedo, 1991. 225-239.

Ihalainen, Ossi. The Dialects of England since 1776. The Cambridge History of the English Language: English in Britain and Overseas: Origins and Development. Ed. R. Burchfield. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. 197-274.

Johnstone, Barbara. Speaking Pittsburghese: The Story of a Dialect. Oxford: Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics, 2013.

Johnstone, Barbara, Jennifer Andrus, and Andrew E. Danielson. "Mobility, Indexicality, and the Enregisterment of 'Pittsburghese'." Journal of English Linguistics 34.77 (2006): 77-104.

Ruano-García, Javier. On the Enregisterment of the Northern Dialect in Early Modern English: An Evaluation across Literary Text Types. At a Time of Crisis: English and American Studies in Spain. Eds. S. Martín, M. Moyer, E. Pladevall and S. Tubau. Barcelona: AEDEAN, 2012. 376- 383.