

## Provincial Newspapers as Vehicles for Dialect Spread and Enregisterment: Insights from Nineteenth Century Devonshire Dialect

### Periódicos provinciales como vehículos de difusión dialectal y *enregisterment*: Percepciones de Devonshire durante el siglo XIX

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**Abstract:** This paper takes provincial newspapers as the basis for a discussion on dialect spread and enregisterment during the nineteenth century. It departs from the premise that, during this era of nationwide diaspora and industrial advancement, periodicals served as the main means of entertainment and identity expression. For this purpose, it takes two letters submitted by R. Giles to the *North Devon Journal* in 1885, where his use of the Devonshire dialect is available for analysis. It aims to explore the most remarkable dialectal features documented in his submissions in an attempt to justify my claim that provincial press could have contributed to an early process of Enregisterment in dialects.

**Keywords:** Provincial-newspapers; Devonshire dialect; nineteenth century; enregisterment.

**Summary:** Introduction. The Varied and Short-lived Life of Nineteenth Century Periodicals. On the enregisterment of English. Devonshire Speech during the Nineteenth Century: An Overview. R. Giles: "The Gude Old Times in Welcombe" (September 1885) and "Lucy Passmore, The Wite Witch" (December 1885). Linguistic Data and Methodology. Coincidental Features. Conclusive Remarks and Deductions.

**Resumen:** Este artículo toma los periódicos provinciales como base para debatir la difusión dialectal y *enregisterment* durante el siglo XIX. Parte de la premisa de que durante esta era de diáspora nacional y avance industrial, los periódicos sirvieron como el medio principal de entretenimiento y expresión identitaria. Para este propósito, se utilizan dos cartas enviadas por

R. Giles al *North Devon Journal* en 1885, donde su uso del dialecto de Devonshire está disponible para análisis. El propósito sería explorar las características dialectales más remarcables documentadas en sus aportaciones en un intento de justificar mi idea de que la prensa provincial hubiera contribuido a un proceso temprano de *enregisterment* dialectal.

**Palabras clave:** Periódicos-provinciales; dialecto de Devonshire; siglo XIX; *enregisterment*.

**Sumario:** Introducción. La variada y corta vida de los periódicos del siglo XIX. Sobre el *enregisterment* en inglés. El habla de Devonshire durante el siglo XIX: un vistazo general, R. Giles: “The Gude Old Times in Welcombe” (septiembre de 1885) y “Lucy Passmore, The Wite Witch” (diciembre de 1885). Datos lingüísticos y metodología. Características coincidentes. Conclusiones y deducciones.

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## INTRODUCTION

The speech of Britain shows a history of varied intermingling and transformation. English has become a linguistic collage comprising many diverse forms because of the parallel development of its varieties throughout history. Whilst Britain lacked a standardised version of English as such until the eighteenth century, commentary on the subject is hardly dismissible. The type of English spoken in the capital had always posed a contrast with the speech of the layman and communities that fared away from the metropolis. Differences of speech became the subject of discussion as well as a literary device, as reported by Norman Blake. At least from the Early Modern English period, and especially during the nineteenth century (see Hodson), various forms of English developed (e.g., the Northern variety in areas like Lancashire or Yorkshire) into (socio)linguistic and literary strategies whereby writers recreated nonstandard language and its socio-cultural associations. The impact that such representations had on readers established the grounds for commentary on the cultural associations linked to language and its itemisation as a tool for autochthonal affiliation. Indeed, literary recreations of dialects have gained considerable scholarly interest in the past few years on account of the insight they may provide into such socio-cultural associations, which have been explored within the framework of *enregisterment* (e.g., Agha, “The Social Life”). Whilst most research has looked into the linguistic evidence present in novels and drama (e.g., Cooper, *Enregisterment*; Ruano-García, “Aw’m Lancashire”; Schintu), newspapers (only addressed in Paulsen), and more specifically, provincial newspapers, have gone largely unnoticed despite having an equal potential for the dissemination of dialect. Identity and idiosyncratic devices (such

as specific language belonging to the area) were indeed present in these publications: they were the printed voice of communities that found in their local newspaper a means to vindicate their relevance and presence in the national milieu. Customs, traditions, local businesses, festivities and religious flairs peppered the contents of these newspapers and manifested their distinctiveness over metropolitan discourses. This cultural insulation was furthered by readers who contributed with their own writings to influx vitality into a communicative medium they saw as belonging to them. This process engendered some questions: what were the traits that defined one community? How distinctive and representative of ancient ways of life were those traits? And, above all, were they worth fighting for? Among such features, language established a kind of individuality that no material means (clothing, festivities) could achieve.

This paper discusses the impact of dialect writing in the provincial press as another medium of dialect recording, spread and enregisterment. It argues that the availability of newspapers to local readers helped them acquire a new understanding of their own dialect and its relevance in the national scene. For this purpose, two letters sent by R. Giles to the *North Devon Journal* (now *Devon Live*) in 1885 will be considered to explore the role of newspaper publications in the enregisterment of the Devonshire dialect. This paper undertakes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data to identify the most recurrent dialect traits documented in Giles's letters, which will be linked to the values associated with the dialect in the context of these publications. Likewise, they will be compared to the dialect features recorded in contemporary and later works like Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (EDD) and Ihalainen to evaluate the authenticity of Giles' dialect and his potential contribution to the enregisterment of Devonshire speech as an identity device.

## 1. THE VARIED AND SHORT-LIVED LIFE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY PERIODICALS

Claridge (590) dates 1670 as the year when the term “newspaper” was coined. During the seventeenth century, a series of primitive formats that barely resembled the Berliner and tabloid publications known today were published. The *London Gazette* ruled the stage along *The Current Intelligence* for a period of thirty years until 1695. Udo Fries comprehensively follows the evolution of periodicals from this point onwards, drawing a chronological line that led to current newspapers. The

glorious period enjoyed by the *London Gazette* (previously known as *Oxford Gazette*, as the publication was moved to Oxford during the Great Plague years) was terminated by the inception of tri-weeklies such as *The Post Boy* and *The Post Man*. Fries indicates that the dawn of the eighteenth century caused a newspaper enthusiasm which provoked the genesis of several other publications, among which we can find *The Evening Post*, *The Daily Advertiser* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, as well as an increase in the number of weekly, bi-weekly and tri-weekly offerings encouraged by the Licensing Act of 1695. The tri-weekly design allegedly found better reception (Black 13) and held sway for many years. However, the 1700s would prove difficult in view of increased competitiveness, since several names started to crowd coffee shops and gentlemen clubs alike. A few names to be recalled during this time would include *The St. James's Evening Post*, *The Whitehall Evening Post*, later renamed *Whitehall Evening Post* or *London Intelligencer*, or the *St. James's Post*.

The increase in the number of publications was provoked by the growth in readership that took place during the nineteenth century. Palmer indicates that daily Britain was inscribed in the pages of periodicals as a sort of entertainment device. Marriages, obituaries, job offers, Royal affairs or local concerns were pressed into the pages of newspapers across the country. Whilst publications whose heritage is maintained today, such as *The Daily Telegraph* or *The Guardian*, smaller titles emerged to fulfil the needs of certain sectors of society. Stephanie Olsen discusses that the periodical press at this time was varied in matter, since it informed, entertained, and shaped their readers' opinion, which seems to have led to the diversification of the readership in terms of men, women, or children. Olsen offers a few names in the male panorama: *Kaleidoscope: Or, Literary and Scientific Mirror*, the *Scots Observer* or the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Women enjoyed the advantages and pleasure of periodicals as well. Kathryn Ledbetter refers to titles such as *Ladies' Pocket Magazine*, *World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons* and *La Belle Assemblée*, mostly weekly publications in the magazine range that tried to collect female archetypes in vogue in the years prior to the coronation of Queen Victoria.

The ample range of options offered by publishing houses and editors often reflected a social choice and showed the stratification of a layered society. London-based periodicals were focused on parliament affairs and conservative-leaning ideals, economics, and foreign policies, as well as highly literate articles for the expensively educated.

In the countryside, provincial newspapers attempted to superimpose the relevance of its county, parish or town in contrast to the metropolis. Most of these provincial publications faced a quick demise or were purchased by massively wealthy companies in the twentieth century. Clarke and Black both refer to the *Norwich Post* as the first provincial newspaper, suggesting the *Worcester Postman* as presumptively previous.

In Devon, Exeter became a periodical press workhouse and the county's main producer. Titles existing during the early eighteenth century included *Sam Farley's Exeter Post-man*, *Exeter Mercury or Weekly Intelligence*, *Plymouth Weekly Journal or General Post*, *Brice's Weekly Journal* and *Farley's Exeter Journal*. Some newspapers evolved and were renamed, as is the case with the *Exeter Mercury or West Country Advertiser* (1765), which underwent several retitling processes, becoming the *Exeter Evening-Post or the Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, and by the first half of the nineteenth century the *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Dorset, Wilts and Gloucester Advertiser*.

Fries questions whether examples from the provincial press should be considered in corpora compiled to analyse the language of newspapers, as he himself concedes that a language "different from that of London newspapers" (61) could be whittled from those publications. However short-lived and transitory, Andrew Hobbs evidences that most publications "from 1830 to the 1890s . . . were published outside of London," preoccupied with local matters and identities. Their less metropolitan apparel made them, in Hobbs' words, more "national" than the average London newspaper due to their less synthetic feel and closer approach to the average Briton. Hobbs points out that, although the life expectancy of the provincial press was less than a year, their celebration of the ordinary and local was much enjoyed by the native readership. These newspapers were configured around advertisements and "non-news content [such as] poetry, history, geography, biography, jokes, maps, gossip 'London letters' . . . reviews of books and magazines" (226), where local language played a key role in the configuration of the readers' identities and their sense of belonging. In this regard, the provincial press relied on dialect as a means of self-reflexive celebration as linguistically different individuals, which could point to the enregisterment of some dialect features.

## 2. ON THE ENREGISTERMENT OF ENGLISH

*Enregisterment* refers to the “processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms” (Agha, “The Social Life” 231), meaning that some linguistic forms become “socially recognised as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users” (Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment” 38). In the wake of Agha’s groundbreaking framework, Hernández-Campoy explains that enregisterment “accounts for how meaning gets attached to linguistic forms and how these indexicalised forms metapragmatically circulate and reproduce in social interaction, permeating discourse” (50). Agha’s notion of enregisterment is critically grounded in Silverstein’s three orders of indexicality, which some scholars such as Johnstone et al. have linked to Labov’s concepts of *indicators, markers and stereotypes*. Johnstone (“Enregisterment”) defines indexicality as “a sign . . . related to its meaning by virtue of co-occurring with what it is taken to mean” (633). Thus, Silverstein’s first order of indexicality refers to the association between a linguistic form, or sign, in a community and a social category, as perceived by an outsider like a linguist. At the second order, members of that community are aware of such correlation. The third order shows that the linguistic forms associated with a particular type of speaker, or community, are the object of overt commentary and representation in various forms, such as literature or memorabilia (see Beal, “Enregisterment” on the commodification of dialect). This ideological approach to the study of variation is inscribed within the so-called third wave of sociolinguistics (Eckert), which “locates ideology in language itself, in the construction of meaning, with potentially important consequences for linguistic theory more generally” (Eckert 98).

Research on enregisterment has covered salient varieties of English all over the globe, including historical dialects. Barbara Johnstone’s groundbreaking work on Pittsburghese (*Speaking Pittsburghese*) resulted in a relevant academic growth in enregisterment studies due to her insightful analysis. Enregisterment has also been explored in the US by Picone as well as in Ireland by Amador-Moreno and McCafferty. Historical varieties of Northern English in the UK have been vastly investigated by Beal (“Enregisterment,” “Dialect as Heritage”), Cooper (*Enregisterment*, “It takes a Yorkshireman,” “Enregisterment”), Beal and Cooper and Ruano-García (“On the Enregisterment,” “Aw’m Lancashire”)

in the Late Modern English period, which is also the focus of Schintu, who examines the enregisterment of the Derbyshire dialect. This time period witnessed prolific amounts of nonstandard literature and data available for analysis. Ruano-García observes that dialect writing in the Late Modern English period is a fertile ground given the “linguistic insight it may give on the language of bygone times, especially when contemporary records are scarce or unavailable” (“On the Enregisterment” 188). Paul Cooper (“Deregisterment”) advances the notion of *deregisterment* (previously introduced by Williams 2012) to refer to enregistered forms such as the northern *gan* “to go” and *mun* “must,” which have fallen into disuse and, therefore, lost their enregistered status in Yorkshire whilst still being enregistered northern forms in general.

In this regard, Devonshire seems to have escaped enregisterment analysis so far, despite its ancestral complex form. The linguistic background of the area would prove excellent for dialectal studies, both in literature and the press. The following section will try to draw a concise picture of Late Modern Devonshire speech based on contemporary and modern accounts of the dialect as a domain of distinct speech salience and indexicality.

### 3. DEVONSHIRE SPEECH DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW

Devonshire has traditionally been labelled as one of the prominent counties belonging to the West Country, along with Cornwall and Somerset. The West Country itself, charted apart from the kingdoms that occupied the British territory in the centuries after Roman conquest, remained a stronghold of Cornish, a Celtic language in the same regard as Breton, Gaelic and Manx, until as late as 1777, when the last native speaker, Dorothy Pentreath, passed away (see Hoskins, *Old Devon, Devon and its People*). Although the West Country is now totally English-speaking, its linguistic ancestry is attestable in the divergence of features that contrast with other forms across the country. The counties belonging to the West Country consensually include Cornwall, Somerset, Devon and Dorset, with Gloucestershire and Wiltshire as an extension, although opinions vary. Geographically, however, they are commonly integrated into the Southwest peninsula. This perspective is endorsed by Payne, whose history of the West Country describes five counties, among which Wiltshire is found, and Wagner (“English Dialects”), who adds

“Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Worcestershire, and Herefordshire, which create a transition zone” (417). Joseph Wright (*The English Dialect Grammar*) lists Wiltshire within the same group as other core West Country counties.<sup>1</sup> A poll conducted in 2018 by YouGov showed that only 28% of participants considered Wiltshire as part of the West Country, whilst Gloucestershire closely followed with barely the 27%. It is worth noting that the four core dialects share a set of features, differing slightly in certain linguistic aspects such as universal -s (e.g. *They takes it*) and the realisation of ME /a/ as [a] or [æ] in Somerset (e.g. *dance*) (Wakelin). Table 1 shows the main characteristics of West Country, or rather Southwestern, dialects as recorded by Ihalainen from Late Modern sources. Such features are widely shared and acknowledged, as well as corroborated by other scholars such as Trudgill, Görlach (*English in Nineteenth Century England*) and Wagner (“Late Modern English”), among others.

Table 1. Southwestern dialect features collected by Ihalainen

Features	Examples
periphrastic <i>do</i>	<i>They da peel them</i>
universal - <i>th</i>	<i>He go’th, Folks go’th</i>
universal - <i>s</i>	<i>They makes them, Farmers makes them</i>
plural <i>am</i>	<i>They’m nice</i>
pronoun exchange	<i>Her told I</i>
<i>Ich</i> ‘I’	<i>Ich say</i>
prolictic ‘ <i>ch</i> ‘I’	<i>Cham, chall</i>
second person singular verb	<i>Thee dost know</i>
uninflected <i>do, have</i>	<i>He don’t know, it have happened</i>
otiose <i>of</i>	<i>Whot’s er a-düing ov?</i>
voicing of initial fricatives	<i>zay, vinger, zhilling</i>
retention of ME <i>ai</i>	<i>day [dai]</i>
<i>r</i> for <i>gh</i>	<i>fought</i> pronounced [fort]

<sup>1</sup> “Southern including Wil. Dor. n. & e.Som., most of Glo., sw.Dev., and small portions of w. Brks. and w. Hmp” (Wright, *The English Dialect Grammar* 5).



Ihalainen suggests that the features listed above were well-established dialect characteristics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Less frequent yet equally distinctive forms such as the rounding before nasals (e.g., *hond* ‘hand’), uninflected *be* usage (e.g., *They be fine*), dropping of /w/ in words like *woman*, the realisation of *thr-* as *dr-* (e.g. *dree* ‘three’), among others, could be listed as well. Devon exhibits many of these features.

In *The Peasant Speech of Devon*, Sarah Hewett dictates that Devon speech “is undoubtedly the purest remains of the Anglo-Saxon tongue extant in England at the present time” (vii). She offers some correlations between the Devonshire speech and Anglo-Saxon equivalents, such as *dring* vs *Pringan*, *cussen* vs *cursen*, as a means of proving their closeness. In her description of pronunciation forms, she reproduces some fine examples where non-standard spellings evoke dialect sounds:

A tuppeny<sup>2</sup> loave tü veed tha Pope,  
A pound ov cheese tü chuck ‘n,  
A pint ov beer tü make ‘n drunk,  
An’ a vaggot ov vuzz tü burn ‘n  
Wurrah! wurrah! wurrah! (15)

We can see a pattern to stress certain peculiarities such as the voicing of initial consonants (as in *veed* ‘feed’), or <ü> in several instances of the preposition *tü* “to,” which, as she explains, “takes the sound of the modified German ‘ü’” (1). Another sample of the dialect can be found in “A Conversation Overheard in a Boot-shop in a North Devon Town”:

Mrs Docker. “Good-morning, Mrs. Bell. What can I show you to-day?”  
Mrs. Bell. “My veet be za bad, düee zee if yü’ve a-got ort’ll dü vur me.”  
Mrs Docker. “Yes, these boots are strong.”  
Mrs. Bell. “Well, ‘ess, theys’ll dü jist thoft they wut a-mide vur me.”  
Mrs Docker. “Will you carry them?”  
Mrs. Bell. “Ess, plaize. I be out’s cüke now, an’ I likes it; they be zick güde lyvers.” (18)

The gist of the exchange between the boot-shop owner Mrs. Docker and the customer Mrs. Bell is easily grasped, yet it is the representation that

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<sup>2</sup> Standard: “Leave a twopenny for the Pope, a pound of cheese to chuck in, a pint of beer to make him drunk, and a faggot of sticks to burn him. Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!”

deserves attention here. Again, features like the voicing of initial fricatives (e.g., *veet* ‘feet,’ *za* ‘so’) and <ü> instead of <o(o)> in cases such as *dii* ‘do’ and *güde* ‘good,’ along with uninflected *be* and *r* for *gh* (*ort*, ‘ought’), are noted. The recurrent employment of such features goes some way to indicating that Hewett relied on certain conventions to reproduce the dialect. This is directly inherited from the prolific tradition of dialect writing that took place during the nineteenth century. Hodson summarises the state of dialect writing during this period, addressing the realist literary trend as the initiator of dialect representation. She reasons that “dialect literature written by local authors and aimed at local audiences became increasingly popular, thanks to increased urbanisation, greater literacy and cheaper printing costs” (1, 2). In Devon, this fact is further substantiated by other textual testimonies like some translations of the Bible. Henry Baird’s *Tha Gauspil Accaurdin to Zin Matthee* (*The Gospel of St. Matthew*), commissioned by linguist Louis-Lucien Bonaparte, serves as example:

Tha buk uv tha jinerashin uv Jayzis Christ, tha zin  
a David, tha zin a Abrim.  
Abrim begot Izie; an Izic begot Jakib; an Jakib  
Begot Judis an ez brithers (1)

The voicing of initial fricatives is clearly the most distinctive trait, whilst there are spelling variants (such as *Jayzis* ‘Jesus’ or *brithers* ‘brothers’) that imply phonological changes (diphthongisation of ME /i:/ and raising and fronting of ME /u/). This evidence confirms that Devon was a linguistically distinct variety during the nineteenth century, and people’s awareness of such distinctiveness leads to believe that the dialect had gone through Silverstein’s three indexical orders. Hewett’s book is proof of the establishment of the “speech of Devonshire peasants” as unique and recognisable both within and beyond Devonshire. The same can be said about provincial periodicals as their pages incorporated samples of the Devon vernacular, in a way advocating its validity and uniqueness. Since periodicals represented an elevated and formal means of communication available to many, as well as proof of a community’s political and geographical legitimacy, dialectal usage within their pages implied a vindication of its rightful employment and lineage. The following section addresses R. Giles’s dialect contributions to the *North Devon Journal* to

demonstrate that periodicals were powerful devices of dialectal broadcasting.

**4. R. GILES: “THE GUDE OLD TIMES IN WELCOMBE” (SEPTEMBER 1885) AND “LUCY PASSMORE, THE WITE WITCH” (DECEMBER 1885)**

Hewett’s compendium of Devonshire speech also provides an account of the beliefs and traditions pertaining to the area. She lists several superstitions, including remedies for snakebites, warts, fits and the whooping-cough, among others. She also describes how one could, according to Devonshire folklore, detect a thief as well as a description of weather rhymes and harvest protocols. White witches, however, are also part of this mythology; Hewett indicates that it was believed people in a favourable social and economic position were ready to “engage the services of the white witch” (viii). In writing no fewer than twenty-seven letters to the *North Devon Journal*, R. Giles appears to have contributed to this fashion of recounting Devonshire and its superstitions, however otherworldly, for outsiders. R. Giles was probably the name taken by an anonymous contributor whose identity can only be ventured,<sup>3</sup> speculated and, at best, attached to some other author of prominent prestige at the time. Whilst he presumably wrote from Welcombe (North Devon), R. Giles was a common name at the time, and therefore it could designate anybody as specifically as the American sobriquets John and Jane Doe. Local registers from parishes confirm this, as the results provided by the National Archive show 6,169 matches for “R. Giles” in the whole British territory between 1837 and 2007. His references to the area and customs point at his having been a native or local, presumably a parson, teacher or some other educated member of society, considering his reading/writing skills and the fluid usage of dialect in his writings. Further research is advised to delve deeper into this question, and for practical purposes R. Giles will be considered a real name rather than a moniker. His productive period in the press spans from 1885 to December 1887, when he submitted a farewell rhyming letter, mentioning “Welcom(b)e” for the last time. The topics touched upon are varied in form and style, ranging from reviews, answers to other correspondence contributors, political views on parliamentary decisions and descriptions of country life and events in Welcombe. Most of his production is presented in non-standard writing

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<sup>3</sup> Allegedly male, since 1887 publications are signed Roger instead of R.

(with the vast majority beginning with the polite formulation *Zur* ‘sir’). Only a few exceptions were submitted employing Standard English, such as the one titled “Indulgence” appearing on the issue published on February 3, 1887, or another one on the 10th, titled “Welcombe Theology.”

This paper will examine two of his letters, “The Gude Old Times in Welcombe” and “Lucy Passmore, the Wite Witch,” dated 10 September 1885 and 23 December 1885 respectively, to identify dialect traits. They are examples of fictional letters, which can be taken as examples of dialect literature given that they are essentially written in dialect and are aimed at local audiences (see Shorrocks).<sup>4</sup>

5. LINGUISTIC DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data considered for analysis in this paper is presented in table 2, where title, date of publication and word count are visible.

Table 2. Title, date of publication and word count of both texts

Title	Publication	Word Count
“The Gude Old Times in Welcombe”	10 September 1885	1,420
“Lucy Passmore, the Wite Witch”	23 December 1885	2,480

This paper takes a quantitative and qualitative approach, whereby word lists generated by AntConc 4.1.4, a software employed for corpus analysis, are examined to quantify the number of non-standard items and tokens present in both texts. Following standard practice, non-standard phonological features have been classified in accordance with Wells’ lexical sets and their Middle English (ME) vowel, providing examples of respellings which suggest dialect sounds, as well as examples of dialect morphology. This selection has considered nineteenth century and modern descriptions of the dialect, including Weymouth, Hewett, the *EDD*,

<sup>4</sup> Shorrocks introduces the term “dialect literature” (386) to refer to fiction produced wholly or partly in dialect with a native reader as target. Giles’s fictional letters present dialect on a provincial medium with local readers in its scope, thus qualifying as dialect literature.

Ihalainen and Görlach (*English in Nineteenth Century England*), comparing the data they provided with the one offered by Giles.

### 5.1 Text 1 – “The Gude Old Times in Welcombe”

This fictional letter represents a portrait of bucolic affairs in Welcombe as homage to the ancient yet perishing lifeway of nineteenth century Britain. Giles’ composition exposes the role of the parson in little communities such as Welcombe, illustrating the illiteracy of average countryside men and women. To exemplify this, the letter narrates the comic misunderstanding between the local parson, reading a letter sent by a woman’s son working abroad, and the woman herself. When recounting the son’s frustration at being constantly attacked by mosquitoes at night in Brazil, the woman understands there is some mischievous Miss Kittie who romantically harasses her son, thus leading her to believe her son is a rather successful lover. Giles’s letter closes with a recollection of images described by the author as a means of conveying a feeling of homesickness. He mentions the view from a local cliff and how there seems to be nothing comparable to it. At the end of the letter, Giles uses a short poem as closure, reinstating this sentiment:

This is my own my native land,  
no spot so dear to me,  
No city with its hoards of wealth,  
Has half such charms as thee.  
The rugged hills and grassy slopes,  
Where oft I’ve romped and played,  
Remind me of companions dear,  
Now sleeping in the shade.

Interestingly, this is the only piece of text provided entirely in standard English in the whole letter. Whether this was engineered to contrast with the dialect, as if to snap from the nostalgic reverie, it cannot be said with certainty, but it could be safely assumed to be the case.

#### 5.1.1 Results and discussion

Table 3 shows the repertoire of dialect features documented in this text.

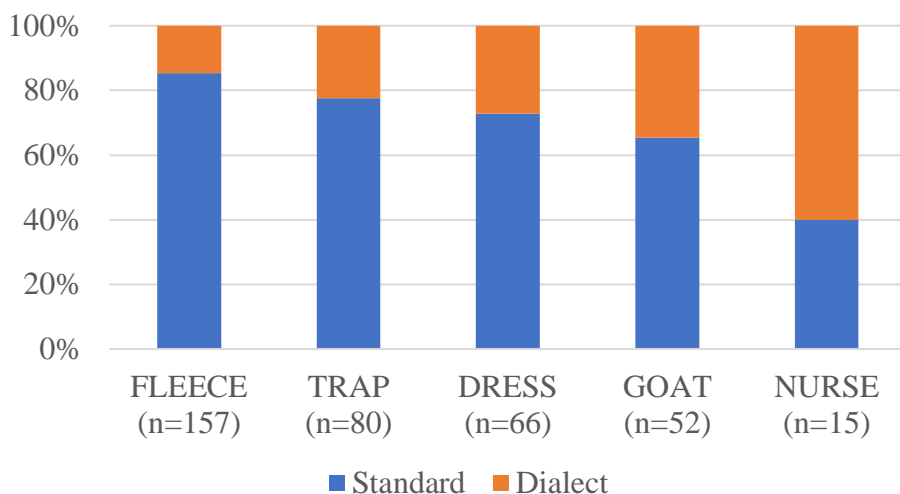
Table 3. Repertoire of Devonshire features: Text 1, including normalised frequencies

Features and examples		Types	Tokens	NF / 1,000
Voicing of initial fricatives	<i>veet</i> ‘feet,’ <i>vind</i> ‘find’	22	66	46.4
FLEECE	<i>bayches</i> ‘beaches,’	13	23	16.1
ME /ɛ:, ɛ: + j, e:/	<i>betwayn</i> ‘between’			
LOT	<i>wis</i> ‘was,’ <i>vrum</i> ‘from’	3	20	14
ME /o, a/				
TRAP	<i>thits</i> ‘that’s,’ <i>hid</i> ‘had’	5	18	12.6
ME /a/				
GOAT	<i>foom</i> ‘foam,’ <i>auver</i>	11	18	12.6
ME /ɔ:/	‘over’			
DRESS	<i>splindid</i> ‘splendid,’ <i>niver</i>	10	18	12.6
ME /ɛ, ɛ:, a/	‘never’			
STRUT	<i>rinnin</i> ‘running,’ <i>jist</i>	8	14	9.8
ME /u, u:, o:/	‘just’			
NURSE	<i>larn</i> ‘learn’	3	13	9.1
ME /ɛ:+r/	<i>zur</i> ‘sir’			
SQUARE	<i>thares</i> ‘theirs’	1	12	8.4
ME /ei+r/				
Weak verb treatment	<i>zeed</i> ‘seen,’ <i>gived</i> ‘gave’	4	10	7
FORCE	<i>hosses</i> ‘horses,’ <i>turment</i>	4	9	6.3
ME /ɔ:, o, o+r/	‘torment’			
Personal pronoun	<i>Min</i> ‘them’	1	7	4.9
KIT	<i>rayflectors</i> ‘reflectors,’	5	5	3.5
ME /i/	<i>sperrits</i> ‘spirits’			
PALM	<i>passon</i> ‘parson’	1	5	3.5
ME /ar/				
THOUGHT	<i>watter</i> ‘water,’ <i>draeback</i>	3	3	2.1
ME /a, aw/	‘drawback’			
GOOSE	<i>tew</i> ‘too’	1	3	2.1
ME /o:/				
FOOT	<i>wid</i> ‘would’	1	2	1.4
ME /u/				
BATH	<i>laest</i> ‘last’	1	2	1.4
ME /ar/				

Voicing of initial fricatives is the most frequent feature, followed by FLEECE (*bayches* ‘beaches’), which seems to perform as the most prominent lexical set, closely followed by LOT (*vrum* ‘from’), GOAT (*foom* ‘foam’) and DRESS (*niver* ‘never’). Although the normalised frequencies cast comparable results, Giles does not seem to follow a rigid set of conventions, but rather his dialect employment fluctuates as an average speaker’s would in a normal conversation.

Fig. 1 shows the relation between standard and dialect forms according to their lexical sets in this letter.

Fig. 1. Standard vs dialect forms in “The Gude Old Times in Welcombe”



This chart demonstrates the standard-dialect fluctuation in the text works on a saliency basis. Spelling variants indicating phonological change are more acute in the NURSE lexical set, with TRAP, DRESS, GOAT and ultimately FLEECE progressively less salient as localised Devonshire traits.

The morphological aspects in “The Gude Old Times in Welcombe” offer little data, probably due to its brevity. The overall presence of strong verbs given a weak treatment aligns conveniently with what is known of nineteenth century Devonshire speech, whilst personal pronouns work as a functional dialectal feature even if less profusely; there seems to be no

instances of pronoun exchange.<sup>5</sup> This is mostly explained by the letter structure: not being a narrative filled with indirect accounts and dialogue, it seems less probable that the author felt inclined to employ pronoun exchange, yet personal pronouns still find their way into the letter, as in “*zo the passon wid bring min auver*” (my emphasis).<sup>6</sup>

The lexical repertoire in this text cannot be verified by the EDD as Devonian, therefore including them here would be misleading. Many of the lexical forms found throughout the body of the text appear to be spelling variants of Standard English vocabulary.

On balance, this letter contains a fair amount of dialectal material which is contrived to perform a series of authenticating effects (see Bucholtz) to appeal to a given set of readers from within the area of publication. A celebration of uniqueness, his use of non-standard spellings to point at forms typically recognised in Devon and close vicinities indicates that, by the end of the century, there were enregistered Devonshire forms in the area, easily captured in writing and identifiable by local readers.

## 5.2 Text 2 – “Lucy Passmore, The Wite Witch”

In contrast with the nostalgic tones expressed in the previous letter, this one opens with a few lines regarding the fulfilment of a promise to write again about the odd customs and traditions that were recently carried out in Welcombe and thereabouts at the time. On this occasion, he dedicates the letter mostly to a description of the white and kind witch Lucy Passmore, her place of residence and business occupation, how she passed away and was replaced by cheap imitations. At the beginning, Giles describes her as follows:

Tu Lucy ivery boddy thet was in innny trubble wud resort; in fact, hur was the oracle vow awl misterys. Wither ov witchin or love squabbels or innnythig lost, the vokes wud traipse away vrom miles an miles arown, tu kunsult hur; an hur wud rayd the planets for mun.

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<sup>5</sup> This feature is marked by Ihalainen and Wagner (“English Dialects”) as representative of the dialect.

<sup>6</sup> Standard equivalent: “so the parson would bring him over.”



The letter includes a comic passage where Lucy argues with the local parson about her practices. Whilst the parson insists that Lucy’s influence on the town folk is negative and, in some cases, evil enabling (prompting people to steal), the confrontation ends when Lucy discloses the dishonesty of the parson himself. Apparently, the parson’s sermons were bought from another parson and delivered to his congregation as original creations. From then on, the parson sees no reason to bother Lucy and she resumes her business to the end of her days. The letter concludes with a poetic farewell, where Giles promises to go back to the folklore topic, mentioning “pixys, hobgoblins, an reckers” and hopes people will not be too judicial of “the hignorant times thit be past.”

5.2.1 Results and discussion

Table 4 displays the dialect features used in this text.

Table 4. Repertoire of Devonshire features: Text 2 (N= 2,480 words), including normalised frequencies				
Features and examples		Types	Tokens	NF / 1,000
Voicing of initial fricatives	<i>zeed</i> ‘seen,’ <i>Zinday</i> ‘Sunday’	21	110	44.3
NURSE	<i>hur</i> ‘her,’ <i>sarmins</i> ‘sermons,’ <i>ware</i> ‘were,’	9	79	31.8
ME /er, ɛ:+r, ir/	<i>zur</i> ‘sir’			
GOAT	<i>auver</i> ‘over,’ <i>awlmot</i> ‘almost,’ <i>doant</i> ‘don’t’	11	35	14.1
ME /ɔ:, ɔu/	<i>inny</i> ‘any,’ <i>ivery</i> ‘every’	13	32	12.9
DRESS				
ME /ɛ/				
Personal pronouns	<i>en</i> ‘him,’ <i>hess</i> ‘us’	4	32	12.9
FLEECE	<i>betwayn</i> ‘between,’	17	30	12.09
ME /ɛ:, e:/	<i>layst</i> ‘east,’ <i>rayd</i> ‘read’			
KIT	<i>way</i> ‘with,’ <i>wey</i> ‘with’	2	18	7.2
ME /i/				
TRAP	<i>thet</i> ‘that,’ <i>zot</i> ‘sat’	2	16	6.4
ME /a/				
STRUT	<i>sitch</i> ‘such’	2	12	4.8
ME /u/				
LOT	<i>acrass</i> ‘across,’ <i>dizen</i> ‘dozen’	5	9	3.6
ME /o/				

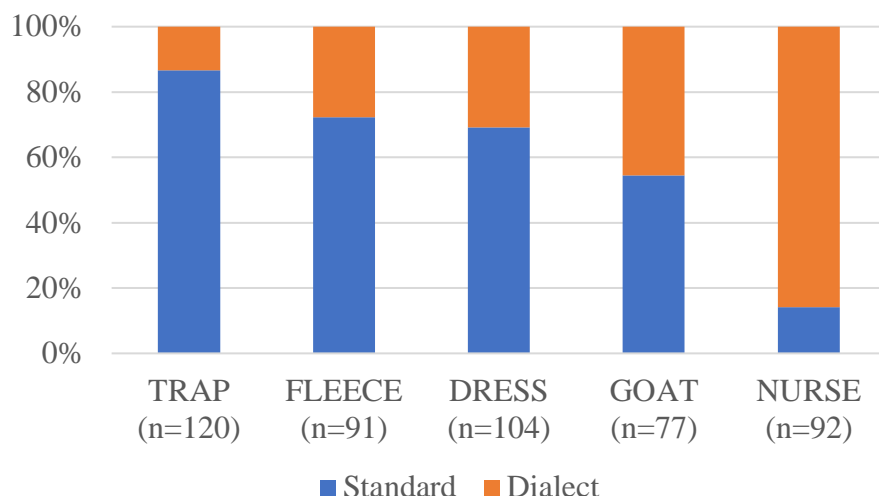
Weak verb treatment	<i>bilded</i> ‘built,’ <i>nawd</i> ‘knew’	3	8	3.2
Reflexive pronoun	<i>mezel</i> ‘myself,’ <i>hissel</i> ‘himself’	4	7	2.8
THOUGHT ME /a/ -th instead of -s	<i>watter</i> ‘water’	1	4	1.6
	<i>contaynth</i> ‘contains,’ <i>gieth</i> ‘gives’	3	3	1.2
PRICE ME /i:/	<i>mezel</i> ‘myself’	1	2	0.8
FORCE ME /o+r/ and /ɔ:+r/	<i>baurn</i> ‘born,’ <i>mare</i> ‘more’	2	2	0.8
SQUARE ME /ε:+r/	<i>thares</i> ‘theirs’	1	2	0.8
GOOSE ME /o:/	<i>tew</i> ‘too’	1	2	0.8
FACE ME /ei/	<i>aytpense</i> ‘eightpence’	1	1	0.4
PALM ME /a/	<i>haff</i> ‘half’	1	1	0.4
Addition of -en	<i>hathen</i> ‘hath’/ ‘has’	1	1	0.4

The most frequent feature here is the voicing of initial fricatives, which Ihalainen points at as one of the most characteristic features belonging to the West Country. The most prominent lexical set appears to be NURSE (e.g., *zur* ‘sir’), followed by GOAT (*auver* ‘over’), DRESS (*inny* ‘any’) and FLEECE (*betwayn* ‘between’). Interestingly, the pattern that occur the most belongs to the latter, since the digraph <ay> is employed almost invariably in all the types documented for this lexical set.

Fig. 2 shows the relation between standard and dialect forms according to their lexical sets.

As with the previous text, this chart shows the standard-dialect fluctuation on terms of saliency. Spelling variants indicating phonological change are more acute in the NURSE lexical set, with FLEECE, DRESS, GOAT and ultimately TRAP progressively less salient as localised Devonshire traits. Contrary to text 1, this chart presents more balanced standard-dialect percentages, with GOAT nearing 50% for both types.

Fig. 2. Standard vs dialect forms in “Lucy Passmore, the Wite Witch”



The morphology and syntax of the West Country has been widely debated, centred mostly on aspects of pronoun exchange, uninflected *be*, otiose *of* and periphrastic *do*, as listed by Ihalainen (see Table 1). Pronoun exchange alone designates a specific geographic area as it has traditionally been ascribed to the Southwestern peninsula (see Wagner, *Gender in English Pronouns* 19, “English Dialects” 157). Indeed, Ihalainen, along with Wagner (“English Dialects”), points at this feature as dialect defining. Although the instances of pronoun exchange are but scarce in this sample, examples such as *Her glinted acrass* “She glinted across” and *Her zed* “She said” show that this was taken by Giles as a characteristic feature of the dialect represented, as Hewett likewise reports that the nominative 3rd person singular is *Her*, whilst the nominative 1st person plural becomes *Us*.

Given the brevity of the letter, some of those characteristic features of the West Country are not attested, yet most of those that *are* present go some way to suggesting that they were indeed associated with Devonshire as well. In this regard, the treatment of strong verbs as weak is commented by Weymouth, whilst demonstrative pronouns such as *thicky* are accounted for by Wagner (“English Dialects”). Although the Southwest prioritises uses such as *-s* or *do* periphrasis as tense and aspect markers (as discussed by Elworthy), Chope affirms that “[Devonians] use the inflection *th* more than . . . [Somerset people] do” (3–4), which could still

point at a certain Devonshire distinctiveness within the West Country, even if the feature is shared by counties outside the Southwest.

As regards to lexis, this letter mixes regional words (e.g. *clibbed* ‘stuck,’ see Table 2) with standard lexis, in some cases slightly respelt (*parrish* ‘parish,’ *peesee* ‘piece’) to create an illusory effect, or *eye dialect*, yet none of them could be certified as Devonian since their area of action is wider and could be come across in texts outside the West Country. For this reason, although a valuable item in literary composition to the effect of visual dialect colouring, we cannot consider it for analytical purposes.

All things considered, Giles’ second letter presents a fair number of phonological and morphological traits, which provides us with a picture of some of the Devonshire traits that may have been in use at the time Giles wrote this text, or at least those that readers of the *North Devon Journal* understood as characteristic of the dialect. The landscape he proposes is nurtured by a mixture of Devonian features that were well-known at the time, wisely whittled in the text with a native public in mind. Given the “localisedness” (Honeybone and Watson 311) of some variants, it would be imprudent to assume it was written for an out-group readership, yet the newspaper as broadcast medium facilitated its nationwide acquisition.

## 6. COINCIDENTAL FEATURES

To reach a conclusion regarding Giles’s employment of Devonshire dialect, it seems necessary to detail those items from both texts that, together, create a group of coincidental and salient elements. Such a group allows to ascertain which linguistic constituents could be considered “nuclear” in Giles’s writing. The evidence suggests that the dialect forms representative of the GOAT, FLEECE, NURSE, SQUARE, DRESS and TRAP sets were the most characteristic of the dialect in terms of phonology. Respellings of the GOAT diphthong (<au>, <oa>, <aw>, <oo> as in *auver* ‘over,’ *aloan* ‘alone,’ *blaweth* ‘blows,’ *foom* ‘foam’) are commented by Wright (*The English Dialect Grammar*), who concludes that Devonshire presents a development of “old long o . . . like the ö in German *schön*” (17), the close-mid back rounded vowel. The Devonshire realisation of the FLEECE monophthong appears to be regularly represented by <ay> (as in *rayd* ‘read,’ *rayson* ‘reason’), whilst NURSE and SQUARE seem to prefer an overall weakening of their vowel elements, as suggested by *zur* “sir” and *thare* “there.” The DRESS set is mainly defined by the close realisation of /e/ = [i] as all related examples

show <i> instead of <e> (e.g., *splindid* ‘splendid,’ *inny* ‘any’), which is likewise suggested in the case of TRAP words, where we can find *hingin* “hanging” and *thits* “that’s.” The voicing of initial fricatives proves to be a defining characteristic in the representation of the dialect given the overall frequencies of this feature in both texts, as we have seen, with 110 and 66 tokens, respectively. Grammatical features are comparatively less frequent, and possibly salient, than respellings evoking Devonshire sounds, except for pronoun exchange, reflexive pronouns (only documented in text 2) and the treatment of strong verbs as weak. Table 5 conclusively shows the most coincidental features for better visual apprehension:

Table 5. Repertoire of coincidental Devonshire features in text 1 and 2, with their normalised frequencies combined

Features and examples		Items	Tokens	NF/ 1000
Voicing of initial fricatives	<i>zeed</i> ‘seen,’ <i>veet</i> ‘feet’	43	176	45
NURSE	<i>sarmins</i> ‘sermons,’ <i>larn</i>	12	92	23.5
ME /er, ε:+r, ir/	‘learn’			
GOAT	<i>auver</i> ‘over’	22	53	13.5
ME /ɔ:, ɔu/				
FLEECE	<i>bayches</i> ‘beaches’	30	53	13.5
ME /ε:, e:/	<i>betwayn</i> ‘between’			
DRESS	<i>inny</i> ‘any,’ <i>splindid</i>	23	50	12.8
ME /ε, ε:, a/	‘splendid’			
Weak verb treatment	<i>gived</i> ‘gave,’ <i>bilded</i> ‘built’	7	18	4.6

These coincidental traits in Devon indicate the existence of “a set of linguistic features” which “have come to be linked . . . to [a] place and ‘enregistered’ . . . as a dialect” (Johnstone et al. 78). This group of traits is “associated with a personal or social identity” (Johnstone, “Pittsburghese Shirts” 160), and thus represents indexical meanings working at the time of publication, recorded in monographies and falling within Sebba’s so-called *zone of social meaning*.<sup>7</sup> Their employment in a written medium

<sup>7</sup> Sebba explains that variation must “occur only within fairly tight parameters” (33), meaning that for R. Giles’s letters to “aim for a special effect” (Görlach, “Regional and

published with a restricted readership scope (that is, a regional newspaper) indicated a wish to celebrate sociolinguistic aspects particular to Devon, “recognizable sign-values” that are brought into circulation (Agha, *Language and Social Relations* 145) to raise awareness in the reader and disassociate them from the Standard. Whilst the *North Devon Journal* could have been enjoyed by outside readers, R. Giles’s choice to write dialect in a local journal, employing enregistered phonological traits marked by non-standard spellings (Jaffe 500) seems to support the idea that newspapers, especially regional ones, could be used to bring attention to the dialect, characterise its average speaker and eulogise the culture it indexes.

## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND DEDUCTIONS

Nineteenth century periodicals played a fundamental role in the society of the period. They were a main form of entertainment, a lifeway of news broadcasting and an emblem of ideological alliance. In turn, provincial publications became the flagship of a county or parish, bearing news, traditions, festivities and relevant events such as marriages, births and deaths. Sometimes, they could also display a critical piece of literary contribution with outstanding value: dialect literature shaped as a form of original correspondence. Because dialect employment is a self-conscious practice within a media form, it could be considered that dialect literature in provincial newspapers deployed nonstandard language agentively to highlight its value and attachment to a given community. Taking R. Giles as a conscious contributor whose grasp of the local dialect had been honed by years of attentive listening, it can be assumed that he was already aware of the uniqueness of the dialect and decided to employ it as ideological material. Considering that the *North Devon Journal* lacked the spread and reach of bigger newspapers such as *The Times*, the idea that Giles only performs a celebration of Devon speech as a kind of homage gains more weight, but also tells how influential a newspaper could become to deliver an identity message. The letters contributed by Giles analysed in this paper provide insight into his dialectal patterns and redundancy on several lexical sets (e.g., GOAT, NURSE, FLEECE) as well other dialectal features supported by contemporary research. Taken in the company of the

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Social Variation” 134), he must have adhered to recognisable patterns acknowledged by readers as Devon speech.

27 letters published in total, we could assume his contribution to recording the dialect of Devon and highlighting its importance was remarkable.

In sum, this paper has tried to present the reader with some evidence of the role that dialect had in local newspapers and how they acted as a conduit to spread ideas of localness and linguistic idiosyncrasy. Although the examples so far provided are not large enough for generalisation, they suggest that provincial periodicals were a singular device that, like other forms of printed literature, contributed to dialect enregisterment in the nineteenth century.

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