

The problem of dialect which so troubled Caxton in the fifteenth century was still an issue when George Puttenham published his *The Arte of English Poesie* in 1589. Puttenham's purpose is to advise poets which dialect to write in.

But after a speach is fully fashioned to the common vnderstanding, & accepted by consent of a whole countrey & natiō, it is called a language, & receaueth none allowed alteration, but by extraordinary occasions by little & little, as it were insensibly bringing in of many corruptiōs that creepe along with the time: This part in our maker or Poet must be heedly looked vnto, that it be naturall, pure, and the most vsuall of all his countrey: and for the same purpose rather that which is spoken in the kings Court, or in the good townes and Cities within the land, then in the marches and frontiers, or in port townes, where straungers haunt for traffike sake; or yet in Vniuersities where Schollers vse much pecuifh affectation of words out of the primatiue languages, or finally, in any vplandish village or corner of a Realme, where is no resort but of poore rusticall or vnciuill people: neither shall he follow the speach of a craftes man or carter, or other of the inferiour sort, though he be inhabitant or bred in the best towne and Citie in this Realme, for such persons doe abuse good speeches by strange accents or ill shapen foundes, and false ortographic. But he shall follow generally the better brought vp sort, such as the Greekes call [*charientes*] men ciuill and graciously behaoured and bred. Our maker therefore at these dayes shall not follow *Piers plowman* nor *Gower* nor *Lydgate* nor yet *Chaucer*, for their language is now out of vse with vs: neither shall he take the termes of Northern-men, such as they vse in dayly talke, whether they be noble men or gentlemen, or of their best clarkes all is a matter: nor in effect any speach vsed beyond the riuer of Trent, though no man can deny but that theirs is the purcr English Saxon at this day, yet it is not so Courtly nor so currant as our Southerne English is, no more is the far Westerne mā's speach: ye shall therefore take the vsuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles, and not much aboue. I say not this but that in euery shyre of England there be gentlemen and others that speake but specially write as good Southerne as we of Middlesex or Surrey do; but not the common people of euery shire, to whom the gentlemen, and also their learned clarkes do for the most part condescend, but herein we are already ruled by th'English Dictionaries and other bookes written by learned men, and therefore it needeth none other direction in that behalfe.

Exercise

Describe the assumptions about language which are evident in the text. Comment particularly on (a) his use of the word *corruptions*, (b) his reference to a language which is *naturall, pure and the most vsuall*, (c) his references to *the inferiour sort* of men and women, (d) the attitude implied in *any speach used beyond the riuer of Trent*.

This is not to say that dialect could not be used to brilliant effect in literature. We have already seen Chaucer's use of the Northern dialect in *The Reeve's Tale*, and William Shakespeare's *Henry V* has another famous example.

Enter Gower.

Gower. Captain *Fluellen*, you must come presently to the Mines; the Duke of Gloucester would speak with you.

Fln. To the Mines? Tell you the Duke, it is not so good to come to the Mines: for look you, the Mines are not according to the Disciplines of War; the Conventities of it is not sufficient: for look you, th' athversary, you may discuss unto the Duke, look you, is digt himself four yards under the Countermines: by *Chesbus*, I think a will plow up all, if there is noc better directions.

Gower. The Duke of *Gloucester*, to whom the Order of the Siege is given, is altogether directed by an Irish man, a very valiant Gentleman, I'faith.

Welch. It is Captain *Makmorrice*, is it not?

Gower. I think it be.

Welch. By *Chesbus* he is an Ass, as in the World, I will verifie as much in his Beard: he ha's no more directions in the true disciplines of the Wars, look you, of the *Roman* disciplines, than is a Puppy-dog.

Enter Makmorrice, and Captain Jamy.

Gower. Here a comes, and the *Scots* Captain, Captain *Jamy*, with him.

Welch. Captain *Jamy* is a marvellous valorous Gentleman, that is certain, and of great expedition and knowledge in th'aunchiant Wars, upon my particular knowledge of his directions; by *Chesbus* he will maintain his Argument as well as any Militaric man in the World, in the Disciplines of the pristine Wars of the *Romans*.

Scot. I say godday, Captain *Fluellen*.

Welch. Godden to your Worship, good Captain *Jamy*.

Gower. How now, Captain *Makmorrice*, have you quit the Mines? have the Pioners given o're?

Irish. By Christ, Law, tis ill done: the Work ish give over, the Trompet sound the Retreat. By my Hand I swear, and my father's Soul, The Work ish ill done: it ish give over: I would have blowed up the Town, so Christ save me, law, in an hour. O tis ill done, tis ill done: by my Hand tis ill done.

Welch. Captaine *Makmorrice*, I beseech you now, will you vouchafe me, look you, a few disputations with you, as partly touching or concerning the disciplines of the War, the *Roman* Wars, in the way of Argument, look you, and friendly communication: partly to satishe my Opinion, and partly for the satisfaction, look you, of my Mind, as touching the direction of the Military discipline, that is the Point.

Scot. It sall be vary god, gud feich, gud Captens bath, and I sall quit you with gud leve, as I may pick occasion: that sal I marry.

Irish. It is no time to discourse, so Christ save me: The day is hot, and the Weather, and the Wars, and the King, and the Duke: it is not time to discourse, the Town is beseech'd: and the Trumpet calls us to the Breach, and we talk, and by Christ do nothing, 'tis shame for us all: so God sa'me 'tis shame to stand still, it is shame by my hand: and there is Throats to be cut, and Works to be done, and there ish nothing done, so Christ sa'me law.

Scot. By the Mes, ere theise eyes of mine take themselves to slomber, ayle de god service, or Ile ligge i'th' grund for it; ay, or go to death: and Ile pay'e as valorously as I may, that sal I surely do, the breff and the long; marry, I wad full fain heard some question 'tween you tway.

Exercise

The names of the captains in the comic dialogue above, Gower, Fluellen, Mackmorrice, and Iamy, give them away as an Englishman, a Welshman, an Irishman, and a Scotsman. Discuss some of the dialect features which Shakespeare attempts to represent.

Richard Verstegan, in his *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (1605), discusses the existence of dialects:

This is a thing that easely may happen in so spatious a tounge as this, it beeing spoken in so many different countries and regions, when wee see that in some seueral partes of *England* it self, both the names of things and pronouciations of woords are somewhat different, and that among the countrey people that neuer borrow any woords out of Latin or French, and of this different pronouciation one example in steed of may shal suffise, as this: for pronouciing accordig as one would say at *London*, *I would eat more cheese yf I had it* / the northern man saith, *Ay sud eat mare cheese gin ay badet* / and the western man saith: *Chud eat more cheese an chad it*. Lo heer three different pronouciations in our own countrey in one thing, & heerof many the lyke examples might be alleaged.

More dialect features are to be found in a passage from Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

Glou. Now good Sir, what are you?
Edg. A most poor man, made tame to fortunes blows
Who, by the Art of known, and feeling forrows,
Am pregnant to good pittie. Give me your hand,
I'll lead you to some bidding.
Glou. Hearty thanks:
The bounty, and the benison of Heaven
To boot, and boot.

Enter Steward.

Srew. A proclaim'd prize: most happy:
That eyeless head of thine, was first fram'd flesh
To raise my fortunes. Thou old, unhappy traitor,
Briefly thy self remember: the Sword is out
That must destroy thee.
Glou. Now let thy friendly hand
Put strength enough to't.
Srew. Wherefore, bold Peasant,
Dart thou support a publish'd traitor? hence,
Lest that th' infection of his fortune take
Like hold on thee. Let go his Arm.
Edg. Chill not let go Zir,
Without vurther caution.
Srew. Let go, Slave, or thou dy'st.
Edg. Good Gentleman go your gate, and let poor volk
pass: and 'chud ha' been zwagged out of my life, 'twould
ha' been so long as 'tis, by a vortnight. Nay, come not
near th' old man: keep out che vor'ye, or ice try whither
your Costard, or my Ballow be the harder; chill be plain
wjt you.
Srew. Out Dunghil.
Edg. Child pick your teeth Zir: come, no matter vor
your foyns.
Srew. Slave thou hast slain me: villain, take my purse;
If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body,
And give the Letters which thou find'st about me,
To *Edmund* Earl of *Glouster*: see him out
Upon the English party. Oh untimey death, death.
Edg. I know thee well. A serviceable Villain,
As deteous to the vices of thy Mistress,
As badness would desire.
Glou. What, is he dead?
Edg. Sit you down Father: rest you.

Exercise

Edgar, the Duke of Gloucester's son, banished by King Lear, disguises himself as a madman – a Tom of Bedlam. At one point, defending his blinded father, his speech becomes clearly dialectal. In the above passage, Gloucester does not recognise his son and cannot see him. The Steward believes Edgar to be a beggar. Which of Richard Verstegan's examples does Edgar's speech resemble? The scene of the play is set in Kent. The words *ice try* stand for *I sal try*. *Sal* for *shall* and *gate* for *way* are both northern forms. Is Shakespeare accurately reproducing a regional dialect? Another significant feature of the passage above is the changing use of the second person pronouns *thou/thee/thine* and *ye/you/your*. Is there any system to the appearance of these forms? Is it the same as it would be in Middle English?

George Fox (1624-1691) was the son of a Leicestershire weaver who experienced a religious conversion and became a preacher, and eventually a founder of the Society of Friends, or Quakers. At this time, failure to conform to the doctrines and practice of the Church meant civil penalties, and he was gaoled (jailed) many times. During a long stay in a Worcester gaol, he dictated his experiences to his son-in-law (and fellow prisoner). The following text is a reproduction of a letter to Justice Bennett, who first coined the term 'Quakers' in 1650.

The Journal of George Fox (1650)

...thou wast the first man in the nation that gave the people the name quaker And Called them quakers, when thou Examinst George in thy house att Derby (which they had never the name before) now A Justice to wrong name people, what may the brutish people doe, if such A one A Justice of peace gives names to men, but thou art Lifted upp proud and haughty and soe turnest Against the Just one given upp to misname the saints, and to make lyes for others to beelieve.

The grammar and lack of punctuation are typical for a letter for this time, as we have seen. What is remarkable is Fox's insistence on using *thou* to a Justice of the Peace. In 1660, he published a pamphlet on the subject. He believed that the use of *thou* to address one person was a mark of equality between people, whereas it had long been used to mark social superiority or inferiority.

George Fox, *A Battle-Door for Teachers* (1660)

For all you Doctors, Teachers, Schollars, and School-masters, that teach people in your Hebrew, Greek, Latine, and English Grammars, Plural and Singular; that is, *Thou* to one, and *You* to many, and when they learn it, they must not practice it: what good doth your teaching do them? for he is a Novice, and an Ideot, and a fool called by *You*, that practises it; Plural, *You* to many; and Singular, *Thou* to one.

Exercise

Fox's is full of accounts of violent attacks on Fox and his followers for their faith and preaching. The extract on the next page is typical and makes a useful indicator of one variety of written style in the seventeenth century. Compare it to the 'aureate', or rhetorical, style in the extracts taken from *A Speech of Mr John Milton for the Liberty of Vnlicenc'd Printing, to the Parliament of England, printed in the Yeare 1644*, known as *Areopagitica* (after the *Areopagus*, the highest civil court in Ancient Athens).

The Journal of George Fox, 1652 (iv)

... then we went away to Balby about a mile off: & the rude people layde waite & stoned us doune the lane but blessed be ye Lorde wee did not receive much hurte: & then ye next first day (= *Fox's term for Sunday*) I went to Tickill & there ye friends (= *members of the Society of Friends*) of y^r side gathered togeather & there was a meetinge (= *Quaker term for a religious service*).

And I went out of ye meetinge to ye steeplehouse & ye preist & most of ye heads of ye parish was gott uppe Into ye chancell & soe I went uppe to y^m & when I began to speake they fell upon mee & ye Clarke uppe with his bible as I was speakeing & hitt mee in ye face y^r my face gusht out with bloode y^r I bleade exceedingly in ye steeplehouse & soe ye people cryed letts have him out of ye Church as they caled it: & when they had mee out they exceedingly beate mee & threw me doune & threw mee over a hedge: & after dragged mee through a house Into ye street stoneinge & beateinge mee: & they gott my hatt from mee which I never gott againe.

Soe when I was gott upon my leggs I declared to y^m ye worde of life & showed to y^m ye frutes of there teachers & howe they dishonored Christianity.

And soe after a while I gott Into ye meetinge againe amongst freinds & ye preist & people comeinge by ye house I went foorth with freinds Into ye Yarde & there I spoake to ye preist & people: & the preist scoffed at us & caled us Quakers: but ye Lords power was soe over y^m all: & ye worde of life was declared in soe much power & dreade to y^m y^r ye preist fell a tremblinge himselve y^r one saide unto him looke howe ye preist trembles & shakes hee is turned a Quaker alsoe.

John Milton's *Areopagitica* (i)

be assur'd, Lords and Commons, there can no greater testimony appear, then when your prudent spirit acknowledges and obeyes the voice of reason from what quarter soever it be heard speaking; and renders ye as willing to repeal any Act of your own setting forth, as any set forth by your Predecessors.

If ye be thus resolv'd, as it were injury to thinke ye were not, I know not what should withhold me from presenting ye with a fit instance wherein to shew both that love of truth which ye eminently professe, and that uprightnesse of your judgement which is not wont to be partiall to your selves; by judging over again that Order which ye have ordain'd to regulate Printing. *That no Book, pamphlet, or paper shall be henceforth Printed, unless the same be first approv'd and licens'd by such, or at least one of such as shall be thereto appointed.*

I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how Bookes demean themselves, as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors: For Bookes are not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule was whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous Dragons teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet on the other hand, unlesse warinesse be us'd, as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book; who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods Image; but hee who destroys a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the Earth; but a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and creatur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life.

John Milton's *Areopagitica* (ii)

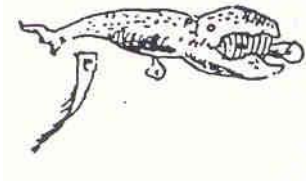
For as in a body, when the blood is fresh, the spirits pure and vigorous, not only to vital, but to rationally faculties, and those in the acuteft, and perfect operations of wit and fittlety, it argues in what good plight and constitution the body is, so when the cheerfulness of the people is so sprightly up, as that it has, not only wherewith to guard well its own freedom and safety, but to spare, and to bestow upon the solidest and sublimest points of controversy, and new invention, it betoken's us not degenerated, not drooping to a fatal decay, but casting off the old and wrinkl'd skin of corruption to outlive these pangs and wax young again, entering the glorious waies of Truth and prosperous vertue destin'd to become great honourable in these latter ages. Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks : Methinks I see her as an Eagle muing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzl'd eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unfealing her long abused sight at the fountain it felt of heav'nly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amaz'd at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.

Literary style in the late seventeenth century became increasingly less rhetorical, as an interest in careful observation was encouraged by the growth of the natural sciences. In 1662, the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge, usually called just The Royal Society, was founded under the patronage of Charles II, who had been restored to the throne in 1660. Its founder was John Evelyn, a sample of whose diary is given below. In the second passage, Thomas Sprat, Secretary of the Royal Society in 1667, discusses the prose style being developed for scientific papers.

John Evelyn's diary for 2 and 3 June 1658

2 An extraordinary storme of haile & raine, cold season as winter, wind northerly neere 6 moneths. 3 large *Whale* taken, twixt my Land butting on ye *Thames* & *Greenwich*, which drew an infinite Concourse to see it, by water, horse, Coach on foote from *Lon'd*, & all parts: It appeared first below *Greenwich* at low-water, for at high water, it would have destroyed all ye boates: but lying now in shallow water, incompass'd wth boates, after a long Conflict it was killed with the harping yrons, & struck in ye head, out of which spouted blood and water, by two tunnells like Smoake from a chimney: & after an horrid grone it ran quite on shore & died: The length was 58 foote: 16 in height, black skin'd like Coach-leather, very small eyes, great taile, small finns & but 2: a piked (= *pointed*) snout, & a mouth so wide & divers men might have stood upright in it: No teeth at all, but scujed the slime onely as thro a grate made of y^t bone w^{ch} we call *Whale bone*: The throate yet so narrow, as woud

downwards, from ye upper jaw, & was hairy towards the Ends, & bottome withinside: all of its prodigious, but in nothing more wonderfull then that an Animal of so greate a bulk, should be nourished onely by slime, thrù those grates:



- a) The bones making ye grate.
- b) The Tongue, c. ye finn. d ye Eye:
- e) one of ye bones making the grate (a) f ye Tunnells thrù which shutting ye mouth, the water is forced upward, at least 30 foote, like a black thick mist. &c:

Thomas Sprat's *The History of The Royal Society*, 1667

And, in few words, I dare say; that of all the Studies of men, nothing may be sooner obtain'd, than this vicious abundance of *Phrase*, this trick of *Metaphors*, this volubility of *Tongue*, which makes so great a noise in the World.

They have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution, the only Remedy, that can be found for this *extravagance*: and that has been, a constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*. They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars.

Elements in the Vocabulary of Modern English: 1700 to the present

As in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the last three hundred years have witnessed an explosion of new words and a heavy adoption of loanwords. A list of examples from different languages and centuries is given below:

1. Loanwords acquired after 1500 and still used

evaluate (19c), *proliferate* (19c), *statistics* (18c)

2. Ways in which new words were formed

Compounding: *blackboard* (19c), *shortfall* (20c), *large-scale* (19c), *spellbound* (18c)

Prefixation: *disconnect* (18c), *subway* (19c), *transatlantic* (18c)

Suffixation: *hyphenate* (19c)

Conversion:

Verbs from nouns: 18c – *badger, guarantee, handcuff, queue, shepherd*; 19c – *blacklist, buttonhole, loot, schedule, signal, wolf*; 20c – *audition, freewheel, package, process, service*

Verbs from adjectives: 18c – *negative*; 19c – *best, tidy*

Nouns from verbs: 18c – *bid, finish, ride*; 19c – *muddle, shampoo, spin*

Back-formation:

Verbs from agent-nouns: 18c – *swindle, edit*; 19c – *burgle, sculpt*

Verbs from object-nouns: 18c – *resurrect*; 19c – *donate*; 20c – *televise*

Verbs from compound nouns or adjectives: 18c – *waterlog*; 19c – *stage-manage*; 20c – *brainwash, sleepwalk*

Shortening: *canter* (18c, from *Canterbury pace*), *gin* (18c from *geneva* < Dutch *genever* ‘spirit flavoured with juniper’; cf. French *genièvre* ‘juniper’), *fan* (19c, from *fanatic*), *van* (19c, from *caravan*), *phone* (20c, from *telephone*)

Blending: *chortle* (19c), *guestimate* (20c), *motel* (20c), *smog* (20c)

Phonetic symbolism: *smash* (18c), *snigger* (18c), *squawk* (19c)

3. New vocabulary formed from classical elements

carcinogenic (20c), *chromosome* (20c), *haemoglobin* (19c), *isotope* (20c)

4. Additions to the vocabulary in the present century

let-down (1933), *liaise* (1902), *limousine* (1902)

leptocaul ‘tree having a thin primary stem and branches’ (1949), *leptosomic* ‘having a physique characterised by leanness and tallness’ (1936), *lichenometry* ‘method of dating surfaces by the size of the lichens growing on them’ (1957), *linomycin* (an antibiotic) (1963)

Loanwords

Latin

18th century: *adjudicate, affiliate, amorphous, antiseptic, aroma, habitat, inertia, minutiae, moribund, nucleus, prospectus, ultimum.*

19th century: agoraphobia, amnesia, amoeba, amorphous, antiseptic, anaesthesia, aquarium, bacterium, bestiary bovine, candelabrum, chiasmus, moratorium, neuralgia, orchid, referendum, sanatorium.

Greek

18th century: aphrodisiac, bathos.

19th century: asteroid, demotic, pylon.

Formations from Latin and Greek elements

18th century: heliography ('description of the sun')

19th century: agnostic, epistemology, gramophone, isobar, megalomania, metronome, monograph, neurasthenia, neuropathology, photograph, phrenology, psychopath, seismometer, tachometer, taxidermist, telepathy.

20th century: econometrics, ergonomics, glottochronology, television, thermodynamics.

French

18th century: amateur, assonance, aubergine, avalanche, banal, barque, bassoon, bonhomie, boudoir, brochure, carafe, caramel, carbon, casserole, début, echelon, élite, etiquette, guillotine, malaise, mentor, nuance, ostensible, outré, predilection, ration, recherché, reconnaissance, terrain.

19th century: acrobate, altruism, ambience, ambulance, analogue, artesian, attaché, aviation, caffeine, calorie, chauvinism, cliché, débâcle, entrepreneur, envisage, escarpement, fincé(e), flamboyant, gourmet, grandiose, mauve, mayonnaise, mirage, monocle, mousse, picaresque, rapprochement, renaissance, silhouette, trousseau.

20th century: chauffeur, collage, discothèque, garage.

Italian

18th century: al fresco, aria, arpeggio, ballerina, bravura, cantata, casino, concerto, diletante, impresario, libretto, obbligato, oratorio, pianoforte, portfolio, soprano, tempo, viola.

19th century: fiasco, graffiti, inferno, intermezzo, mafia, replica, spaghetti, studio, vendetta

20th century: pasta, pizza, tagliatelle

Spanish

18th century: bolero, fandango, flotilla, stevedore

19th century: bonanza, canyon, guerilla, rodeo, stampede

20th century: cafeteria, tango

Dutch or Low German

roster (18c), trek (19c, Afrikaans), apartheid (20c, Afrikaans)

High German

cobalt (18c), quartz (18c), waltz (18c), accordion (19c), marzipan (19c), paraffin (19c), poodle (19c), seminar (19c), angst (20c), blitzkrieg (20c), ersatz (20c), strafe (20c)

Scottish Gaelic

pibroch (18c), whisky (18c)

Indian languages

shampoo (18c), chutney (19c), dinghy (19c)

Japanese

kimono (19c), tycoon (19c)

Russian

samovar (19c), vodka (19c)