

THE LANGUAGE IN MARY ROWLANDSON'S 1682 CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE

MARÍA F. GARCÍA-BERMEJO GINER
University of Salamanca

Published in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1682, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson* soon became a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic. Mary White Rowlandson Talcott (c1637-1711) was taken to America by her Somerset-born parents in 1639 and spent her life there. Together with letters, diaries, sermons, poems and travel accounts her narrative is one of the first instances we have of Colonial American English. The aim of this paper is a description of the language in this captivity narrative. Written about sixty years after the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers to the New World, it already shows traces of what would become American English. This paper is part of a larger project to study the language in early Captivity Narratives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Captivity narratives became a very popular genre ever since the publication in London in 1591 of Job *Hortop's* *The Travailes of an Englishman*, the story of a sailor under Sir John Hawkins who was captured by the Indians north of the Panuco River and taken to Mexico as a prisoner in 1567.¹ This is apparently the first story of the Indian captivity of an Englishman. Since then, hundreds were published and literally almost read to pieces on both sides of the Atlantic.² For the most part captivity narratives have attracted the attention of historians and literary critics and have also been recently studied because of their interest for gender studies. In many cases these narratives were written down by the captives themselves, or dictated to others by those who were illiterate. The expression “told in their

1. Cambridge, Mass. had the first printing press of North America, established in 1639.

2. Libraries housing noteworthy collections: American Antiquarian Society, American Philosophical Society, Boston Public Library, Brown University Library, Harvard University Library, Huntington Library, Kansas University Library, Library Company of Philadelphia, Library of Congress, Newberry Library, Rochester University Library, Rosenbach Museum, Texas University Library, Yale University Library, Univ. of California at Berkeley University Library, Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania.

own words” appears in the title of many of them. Captivity narratives, because of their emotional content, may, at times, be closer to speech than other kinds of texts. They are a rich source of information about how the captives dealt with a different culture, a different world, and about what life was like for those living in the North American colonies. Those published in the 17th and 18th centuries can tell us much about how the English language taken to North America evolved into what would become American English. They form a rich corpus for the study of Colonial American English.

Already in 1740 we find a reference in the *Georgia Colonial Records* to “The American Dialect”, and the term American English actually appeared in print for the first time in 1782. Americanisms became a source of complaint for British people as early as 1735.³ Evidently, the settlers were faced with a new environment, a different way of life, an alien native culture. The process of their acculturation in the New World must be reflected in their language. Unfortunately most of the texts that have come down to us only record a “formal”, literary, written sort of language. It is very difficult to know what their speech ways were like. We have very few documents that actually may contain speech, like the Salem Witchcraft Trials Records. Letters written by the immigrants are also of interest. However, the earliest ones are very scarce and were written by the few who were actually literate and therefore the most cultivated.

This paper is part of a larger project to compile a corpus of early captivity narratives which will then be linguistically analysed. It will allow for more information to be gathered about Colonial American English. My aim is to present just a sample of what such an analysis may yield. In many cases valuable information exists about the life and geographical origins of captivity narrative writers which allows us to reconstruct their linguistic biography. In the case in point, is it possible to find any traces of the south western British dialect that was Mrs Rowlandson’s mother tongue? A few selected lexical items of the language in her captivity narrative will be studied in an attempt at gleaning information about how the English spoken in the American continent began to differ from that used in England. For instance, what kind of Indian vocabulary found its way into the English language? Given that the audience for which the narrative was written was American and English, what techniques, if any, did Mrs Rowlandson use to make these new words understood?

Analysing syntactical and morphological variation within a bigger corpus will, of course, be of interest. For instance, present in Mrs Rowlandson’s narrative are the following items, to name but a few, that are deserving of an in depth study: Reflexive verbs, different ways of expressing possession, the genitive versus the of-construction, the use of the tenses, conditional clauses, the subjunctive, variation in the use of prepositions, the absence of the definite article in expressions that now require it, auxiliary do for negatives or lack thereof, the

3. See Kytö 1991: 6-26 for a good introduction to the subject of the study of Early American English. Mrs Rowlandson’s narrative forms part of the corpus used by her for her study of modal auxiliaries in Early American English.

use of yet, etc., etc. Samples of some of these items can be seen in Table 1. These are all questions that should be addressed. However, given the space constraints, they are beyond the scope of this paper. Meaningful conclusions about these aspects can only be reached through their study in a bigger corpus.

1	They would knock me in head
	They knockt him on head
	One was knockt on the head
2	Masters wigwam
	Captain Beers his fight
	King Philips wives sister
	great Laces sewed at the tail of it
	having nothing to revive the body, or cheer the spirits of her
3	He askt me , When I washt me?
	I gathered me some sticks for my comfort
4	My eldest Sister being yet in the house
	went to a farm house that was yet standing
5	I knew not
	I durst not
	the Lord suffered not this wretch to do me any hurt
	I saw them not

Table 1

2. MRS ROWLANDSON'S NARRATIVE.

Mary Rowlandson's narrative was written only sixty years after the foundation of the Massachusetts Bay colony. There is apparently no reasonable doubt that Mrs Rowlandson is the author of the narrative. The text was probably edited by her first husband, Joseph Rowlandson, and by the Puritan minister Increase Mather, who wrote its *Preface*, and took care of its publication. Reverend John Woodbridge Jr., who succeeded Joseph Rowlandson to the Ministry in Wethersfield, Connecticut, and his brother, Rev. Benjamin Woodbridge, were also involved in the editing of Rev. Rowlandson's last sermon, published with Mrs Rowlandson's narrative. It may well be that all or some of them revised or edited the text. Nevertheless it is generally thought that she is the sole author even if as Derounian-Stodola 1998:5 says "it seems almost certain that it was mediated to some extent".

The original ms of the narrative has not come down to us. It seems likely that the first edition, published in Boston, was based on the ms. (see Derounian-Stodola 1988:243). Unfortunately only 8 pages of this edition have survived.

The other three editions published in 1682, two in Cambridge, Mass. and one in London, were probably based on the Boston edition. As Derounian-Stodola 1988 shows, the type-setter of the second edition was probably an Indian, James the Printer or James Printer, who was actually involved in Mrs Rowlandson's ransom negotiations. He was apparently responsible for the misspellings and word omissions that the collation of the two extant editions published in Boston in 1682 show. A comparison of these two editions with the London edition shows spelling regularizations such as *knock'd* for *knockt*, *strip'd* for *stript*, *would* for *woold*, etc. There are also word omissions such as "Some of them told me, he [her husband] was dead, and they had killed him: some said he was Married again, and that the Governour wished him to Marry; and told him he should have his choice, and that all perswaded I was dead", which is changed to "and that all perswaded him I was dead" in the London 1682 edition. Neal 1997:60 n105 is of the opinion that "...there are good reasons to doubt that Printer was any less competent a speller than most literate colonists...the preface is noticeably free of such errors. Although Printer worked from the Boston text of the narrative, there is no evidence that that edition had a preface, so the one part that he may have composed from scratch was that with the fewest errors."

In my analysis I have collated the second 1682 edition (Van Der Beets 1973), published in Cambridge, Mass., and the fourth 1682 edition, published in London (Derounian-Stodola 1998)

3. MRS ROWLANDSON'S LINGUISTIC BIOGRAPHY.

In 1639 John and Joan White emigrated to Massachusetts from their hometown in Somerset, South Petherton. They had been married twelve years earlier in the parish of Drayton, a few miles north of South Petherton. They both belonged to Somerset families of this area in the south west of the county. They took with them their five children, the youngest of which was Mary White Rowlandson Talcott (c 1637-1711). She must have been about two years old at the time. John White became a landowner first in Wenham and then in Lancaster, Massachusetts. Nine years after his arrival in the New World he returned to England to settle some family affairs and he remained there at least until 1650. He also brought some money for a Tristram Dalliber in Stoke on Abbot, Dorset, whose brother had emigrated to Marblehead, New England.⁴

Mary Rowlandson's youth was thus spent in a household of Somerset English speaking parents who had friends who had also migrated from the south west of England and through the years kept in touch with their home country. Over sixty per cent of the Massachusetts Bay settlers came from the eastern part of England. However, the south-western part of the country was the source of a secondary centre of migration. These people from Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset eventually settled in Connecticut, Maine and Nantucket (Fisher 1989: 31-42). This

4. About Mary Rowlandson's biographical data see Derounian-Stodola and Greene 1990, and Derounian Stodola 1998: 3-6.

pattern of migration coincides with what we know about Mary Rowlandson. She lived in Lancaster, MA, with her parents first, and later with her husband and children. After her ordeal, she moved to Wetherfield, Connecticut, where she married a second time, a first generation American, of Essex descent. She remained there till her death in 1711.

4. SAMPLE ANALYSIS, LEXICAL ITEMS.

For my sample analysis of a few lexical items I have selected the Indian words in the text, some English words used to describe different objects, plants, food, etc in the New World, and also some English words that have now become obsolete, for the most part, in British English but have remained in American English. Only in one case has it been possible to trace a word, now obsolete in standard British English and in American English, to a south western English origin: *crickled*. It appears in the sentence "Some picked up ears of wheat that were crickled down." Its meaning, "trampled down and entangled, wheat and chaff mixed with the straw," is not recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* at all.⁵ The meaning recorded by DARE in 1906 is probably a corruption for *crippled*. Halliwell defines this word as "to bend, to stoop." EDD records *crickle* as "to tangle" applied to ropes, laid corn" which seems to be closest to Mrs Rowlandson's use. This word was used in the late nineteenth century in Devon.

One other word deserves to be mentioned as a possible representative of south western English, *hirtleberry*. It has become *whortleberry* in Standard British English. OED's first citation dates from 1460. It is the fruit of the *Vaccinium Myrtillus*. Mrs Rowlandson probably applied it to the American *Gaylussacia* that would eventually be called *huckleberry*. EDD recorded *hurtleberry* in Somerset and Devon where it was considered a "posh" term.

Words such as *hartichoke*, *flap*, *bier*, *mess*, *pillowbeer*, *ridding*, *swam* or *tarry* already existed in British English. As can be seen more clearly in Tables 2 and 3, some of them were adapted to describe a different reality, a new plant, like *hartichoke*, or a strange kind of landscape, like *swamp*, or another sort of garment, like *flap*.

Hartichoke: DAE Jerusalem artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*) native in Canada and the Mississippi valley. 1st. citation 1649. OED 2 Jerusalem Artichoke: a Species of Sunflower (*Helianthus tuberosus*), a native of tropical America, cultivated in Europe, having edible tuberous roots, somewhat

5. Hereinafter OED. The *Dictionary of American Regional English* will be referred to from now on as DARE. The *Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles* will appear as DAE. EDD will stand for The *English Dialect Dictionary*. Halliwell will refer to James Orchard Halliwell's *Dictionary of Archaic words*. SEDDG is Upton's *A Survey of English Dialects: The Dictionary and the Grammar*. RH is *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*.

resembling the Artichoke proper in flavour. The name ... is considered to be a corruption of the Italian Girasole Articiocco, or Sunflower Artichoke, under which name it is said to have been distributed from the Farnese garden at Rome, soon after its introduction to Europe in 1617.

Indian Corn: The native grain as opposed to that brought from England, for sometime distinguished as English corn.

Flap: “Phillips Maid came in with the Child in her arms, and asked me to give her a piece of my Apron, to make a flap for it”. DAE A breech cloth or similar garment worn by an American Indian. 1st citation 1701. OED No similar meaning recorded. It appears as “Any thing that hangs broad and loose, fastened only by one side” and “A pendant portion of a garment, hat or cap. Hence applied to the garment or hat itself (slang)”.

Ground-nut: *Apios Tuberosa*.

Table 2

Some other words, in Table 3, became obsolete both in Standard British and American English, like *bier*, a portable cradle of basket work, or *pillow beer* for *pillowcase*, although they have continued to be used in British dialects. A few terms are no longer in use in Standard British English and have become Americanisms, like *mess* or *tarry*. Some others, like *ruff* or *riding* are not recorded with the same meaning in British and American English. In some cases it has been possible to antedate the first citations in OED or DAE.

Bier: <Bere, beare> “carried a great Indian upon a bier”. OED Obs. Framework for carrying, a portable cradle of basket work.

Mess: “we had a mess of wheat for our supper”: DAE: A quantity of food, as beans, potatoes, corn, sufficient for one or more persons at a single occasion“.

1st citation 1697. OED: A quantity (of meat, fruit, etc.) sufficient to make a dish. Now dial. and US. EDD: sb 1. A dish of food, a sufficient quantity for a meal. w. Yks., Chs, nw Der., Bdf. sb. 3 a meal, a dinner, an allowance of food. Sc, Fif, Bdf. sb. 5 A number, a large quantity: Yks., Rut., Lin., Nhp., Bdf, Hnt., Nrf, w. Som. “There will be a mess of tatties this year”.

Pillowbeer: DAE Pillowbere = Pillowcase. Obs. 1st citation 1638. OED Arch. 1st citation 1386 Chaucer. Pillowcase 1st citation a 1745 Swift. EDD Pillow-bere Sc., Irel., n Yks, Chs, Der., Lin., Shr., e An, Ken, Sus, Som, Cor. It was becoming obsolete. Amer. GREEN Virginia Folk Sp. (1899)

Ruff or Ridding: “he also gave me a piece of the Ruff or Ridding of the small Guts”. OED. Rough sb 6 The rough, disagreeable part, side or aspect of any thing, that which is harsh or unpleasant. 16b obs. Sc. Raw, uncooked. 18b London slang coarse or stale food. Roughage dial. and US [f. Rough +-age] The

less useful or refuse part (of crops). Ridding OED sb 3 Clearings, refuse. rare. 1598 citation as “the riddings of the gardens”. EDD sb 11 Refuse, remains, n Yks. SEDDG ridding n. Scraps left after rendering lard. SEDIII.12.10 Nb, Du

Swamp x4 Swamps x1 OED First recorded as a term peculiar to the N. American colony of Virginia, yet probably in local use before in England. A tract of low laying ground in which water collects; a piece of wet, spongy ground; a marsh or bog. Originally and in early use in the N. American colonies, where it denoted a tract of rich soil having a growth of trees and other vegetation, but too moist for cultivation. EDD Obs. A low hollow place in any part of a field. 1691 Ray. e. Cy., s. Cy. “we came that day to a great Swamp, by the side of which we took up our lodging that night. When I came to the brow of the hil, that looked toward the Swamp, I thought we had been come to a great Indian Town”, “The Swamp by which we lay, was, as it were, a deep Dungeon, and an exceeding high and steep hill before it.” “they bade me go, and away I went: but quickly lost my self, travelling over Hills and through Swamps”, “Then we came to a great Swamp, through which we travelled, up to the knees in mud and water”. Mrs Rolandson’s use of this word as seen in the examples seems to be closer to the English sense of the word, and to the quality of a “low...place” in John Ray’s definition of the word in East Anglia and the southern counties.

Tarry: DAE To remain in place; to linger; to stay a while. OED Now chiefly literary in Great Britain, still colloquial in the USA. “I would have tarried that night with her, but they that owned her would not suffer it”, “but I had nothing to relieve him; but bid him go into the Wigwams as he went along, and see if he could get any thing among them. Which he did, and it seems tarried: a little too long; for his Master was angry with him, and beat him, and then sold him.”

Table 3

Most of the Indian vocabulary, in Table 4, which belongs to the Narragansett dialect spoken by the Indians who captured Mrs Rowlandson, has remained in both American and British English. Words such as *papoos*, *squaw* or *wigwam* are still commonly used. In most cases the acquaintances and relatives for whom Mrs Rowlandson originally wrote her narrative were familiar with them. The higher their frequency index in the text, the more likely it is that they had become common in the vocabulary of the settlers. It is likely that the English audience for whom this narrative also became a best-seller had heard them before. See, for instance, an indication of this in the 1675 citation in *The London Gazetteer* for *sagamore*.

Nux x1 “This morning I asked my master whither he would sell me to my Husband; he answered me Nux, which did much rejoyce my spirit” Not in any of the English or American English dictionaries checked.

Papoos x9, papooses x2. OED Algonquin word: In Narragansett papoos.

<p>A North American Indian young child. 1st citation 1634. All citations from American texts.</p>
<p>Powaw n x1, vb x1 “They got the company together to powaw”. “and the Powaw that kneeled upon the Deer-skin came home (I may say, without abuse) as black as the Devil”. DAE Narragansett. 2. A noisy conjuring or ceremonial rite hold or performed by Indians; a council or ceremony of Indians. 1st citation 1647. OED A ceremony of North American Indians, especially one where magic was practised and feasting and dancing indulged on: also, a council of Indians or conference with them. 1st citation 1663. Transf. Applied to any meeting compared to an Indian conference... chiefly US. As a vb. Transf. To confer, discuss, deliberate, talk.</p>
<p>Sagamore x1, Saggamore x1, saggamores x3. “Quanopin, who was a Saggamore and married Kig Phillips sister...”, the Council of the Saggamores”, “When the letter was come, the Saggamores met to consult”. DAE An Indian Chief or leader. Originally, among the Algonquian Indians, a lesser chief and the head of one of tribes in a confederation presided over by a sachem. At times, however, sagamore has been considered synonymous with sachem. 1st citation 1613. OED Penobscot= Sachem. 1st. citation 1675. London Gazetteer: “King Philip, the Indian Sagamore of those parts...”</p>
<p>Samp: “he took a dish, and gave me one spoonfull of Samp, and bid me take as much of the Broth as I would. Then I put some of the hot water to the Samp, and drank it up” DAE Coarse meal of Indian Corn, or a kind of porridge made from this. 1st citation 1643. OED US. Narragansett saump, lit. softened by water, applied subst. to “every kind of spoon meat, bouillon, or porridge”... Coarsely-ground Indian Corn; also some kind of porridge made from it. RH North Eastern US.</p>
<p>Sannup x2 “to make a shirt for her sannup”, “and she called her Sannup and would have had him gone...”. OED Narragansett. A married male member of the community; the husband of a squaw. 1st citation 1630. DAE An Indian brave who is married. Now Hist. 1st citation 1628.</p>
<p>Squaw x24, squaws x5. OED Narragansett. A North American Indian woman or wife. 1st citation 1634.</p>
<p>Wampum: “her work was to make Girdles of Wampom and Beads”, “he had Girdles of Wampom upon his head and shoulders. She had a Kersey Coat, and covered with Girdles of Wampom from the Loins upward”. DAE Short for wampumpeagh, now hist. Narragansett. Shell beads used by the Indians as ornaments and serving as a medium of exchange in early colonial trade. 1st citation 1627. OED [Adopted (in 16-17thc.) from the northerly dialects of the Algonkin language]. At the time of the earliest colonisation these were spoken in the East of the continent from Nova Scotia to Virginia.</p>
<p>Wigwam x30, Wigwams x10</p>

Table 4

In one case, *powaw*, the Indian word has continued to evolve semantically and now means also, "to confer, discuss, deliberate". Mrs Rowlandson's use of the word as a name is infrequent.

The word *nux*, "yes", is not recorded in any of the dictionaries I have checked. We have no way of knowing whether it was well known among the English settlers of this part of the North American continent. Nevertheless, Mrs Rowlandson makes its meaning clear from the context in which it appears. This is a well known stylistic technique used in the representation of a different dialect in literature.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The historical study of the beginnings of American English has only begun to take place in earnest in recent years, thanks, basically, to the efforts of some of the compilers of the Helsinki corpus. A detailed, in-depth syntactical, morphological and lexical analysis of a corpus of early captivity narratives, following empirical and quantitative methods, would help us to reconstruct how American English came into being.

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