

REGIONAL DIALECTS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY JEST-BOOKS*

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Regional dialects and colloquialisms began to be used for characterisation purposes in English literature in the late fourteenth-century. Writers, like John Skelton or John Lydgate, followed in this tradition started by Geoffrey Chaucer and the Master of Wakefield. They selected non-standard or colloquial forms to spice the speeches of low-class characters. These traits were often archaisms taken from other writers rather than a true representation of actual colloquial speech. Regional and non standard features became more frequent in the sixteenth century, in drama, poetry and prose, and especially in jest books.

These collections of short comic stories were so popular that they were often read to pieces and not many of the early ones have come down to us. An additional problem is that modern scholarly editions are scarce and hard to come by. The aim of this paper is a description of the existing literature on sixteenth century jest books and an analysis of the regional markers used in them.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the late fourteenth century we find the first instances of the use of a dialect different from the one in the main body of a work for characterisation purposes. Geoffrey Chaucer, in “The Reeve’s Tale,” and the Master of Wakefield, in *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, initiate a tradition for the representation of regional varieties in English Literature that continues to the present. Dialect traits are not found again with this intent in literary works in the fifteenth century. Writers like John Lydgate (1370-1449) or John Skelton (1460-1529) select forms that are archaic, or colloquial at times, rather than

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truly dialectal.¹ Nevertheless, the growing prestige of London English was making people aware of regional differences, of the existence of a “better” form of English. William Caxton (c. 1422-1491) already expresses in the Prefaces to some of his translations his worry about the variety of English writers should use. In the sixteenth century, regional varieties of English begin to be used more frequently in verse, in drama and in prose. Dialect lexis and morphology and attempts at the orthographic representation of regional phonology are to be found in broadside ballads, in plays, in the fiction of writers such as Thomas Deloney,² and in jest-books. The aim of this paper is a description and critical linguistic assessment of the dialect passages contained in the earlier jest-books.

As Blake (1981: 55) points out they are “important during the sixteenth century in the developing attitude to non-standard language.” Jest-books would become more and more popular in the following centuries, not only in England but also in the United States.³ Characters were increasingly marked with regional features, with varying degrees of accuracy.

The data which can be gleaned from the early instances of dialect representation in jest-books allow us a glimpse of Early Modern English regional varieties. They come from a time in which direct or indirect information about dialects is scarce. They sometimes predate not only the comments of orthoepists on the subject but also the literary dialects in drama or prose (the first instances of which we find only at the turn of the century). They are interesting from a socio-linguistic and pragmatic point of view. Within limits, they are also a good source for perceptual dialectology—they show what people’s general idea of dialect areas was. My analysis and description will show that there is less literary dialect in this genre than some scholars have previously suggested. Nevertheless, what little there is constitutes an important source for Early Modern English dialectology, and stems from a period when the representation of regional dialects was perhaps not so stereotyped as later.

¹See Blake (1981: 39-54) for a detailed description of the representation of colloquial forms in these authors. On Chaucer’s use of dialect in “The Reeve’s Tale” see Tolkien (1934), Crow (1938), Blake (1979, 1981: 29-33), and de la Cruz (1999). Cawley (1958) treats the southernisms in *The Second Shepherds’ Play*.

²On his use of dialect, see García-Bermejo Giner (1998). I have studied the earliest attempts at representing northern and Scottish features in sixteenth century plays in García-Bermejo Giner (1999a, 1999b).

³About jest-books in North America, see Weiss (1943), Zall (1980) and Secor (1986, 1993).

2. SIXTEENTH-CENTURY JEST-BOOKS

Jest-books are collections of short comic tales, often with a moral attached at the end. They are written in prose, for the most part, although there are also individual jests in verse. We find the origins of English jest-books in the Latin medieval *exempla*⁴ and in Poggio's fifteenth century *facetiae*⁵ which were so popular in England. They are also related in content and structure to the French *fabliaux*.⁶ Collections of Spanish⁷ and Italian⁸ tales also inspired some of the English jests. Many of those in the sixteenth century collections that have come down to us can be traced back to these sources.⁹ In some cases, they are a direct translation from a French¹⁰ or German¹¹ work. Jest-books have been frequently adapted in their settings and characters for an English audience. On other occasions, the original Italian, Spanish, French or German scenario has been kept. Some of the English jests, however, may well have their origin in oral tradition, as the characters, settings and stories seem to be wholly English.

⁴These collections reached England first in Latin and they were commonly used in sermons. Many would be translated into English, such as the famous *Gesta Romanorum*. Wynkyn de Worde printed the first version in English in 1510, although several manuscript vernacular translations had appeared earlier. On the first translations of this work see Heritage (1879).

⁵Caxton included twelve of these *facetiae* at the end of his translation of *Fables of Esope* (1484), although only nine are really by Poggio. In this same work he printed the translation, not from the original, of some of the tales in the twelfth century *Disciplina Clericalis* by the Spanish Petrus Alphonsus.

⁶They are short, bawdy stories written in verse, usually in octosyllabic couplets. General studies about the influence of the *fabliaux* in English literature are those by Goddall (1982) and Hines (1993).

⁷For instance a translation of *Floresta Española* by Melchior de Santa Cruz de Dueñas constitutes in part the 1595 *Wits, Fits and Fancies*. Chapman (1960) traces one of the tales in *Mery Tales, Wittie Questions and Quicke Answeres* (1567) to the Spanish *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554).

⁸Although Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1349-1351) was not translated into English until 1620, many of its tales had been included by William Painter in his *Palace of Pleasure* (1566). Boccaccio's influence in English literature can be traced back to Chaucer and is evident in jest-books

⁹On the sources of jest-books see Stiefel (1908), Schulz (1912), Wilson (1938-39) and Kahrl (1966). Some of the editions mentioned in the Primary Sources section of this paper also trace the origins of individual jests.

¹⁰For instance Thomas Deloney's translation of the Tales of Bonaventure Des Périers as *The Mirrour of Mirth and Pleasant Conceits* (1583-1592).

¹¹For instance, the English jest-biography *Howlegas* (1510) is a translation from the German *Eulenspiegel*. Herford (1886) studies the reappearance of the legends of German jest characters in England, such as Eulenspiegel, Markolf, the Parson of Kalenberg or Friar Rush. Beecher (1995) edited *Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolphus*.

Jest-books became so popular after their appearance in the late fifteenth-century that they were literally read to pieces. Collections mentioned in the Stationers' Registers such as *Pleasant Tales of the Life of Richard Woolner* (1567-68) or *Mother Redcap Her Last Will and Testament, Containing Sundry Conceited and Pleasant Tales Furnished with Much Variety to Move Delight* (1595) have vanished without a trace. As a result, the sixteenth-century jests that have come down to us are very few in number. Sometimes, only a unique copy has survived. In other cases, the first edition has been lost and we only have a second edition, also printed in the sixteenth century. Such is the case of *Tales and Quicke Answeres* (ca. 1535), the second edition of which appeared in 1567, under the title *Mery Tales, Wittie Questions and Quicke Answeres, very pleasant to be Readdde*.¹² Sometimes, although we know of their publication in the sixteenth century, we only have editions printed in the following century. Instances of this are *Scoggins Jestes* (ca. 1570), the earliest extant edition of which was printed in 1613, or *The Sack-Full of Newes* (1557), of which the earliest extant edition was printed in 1673.

For my analysis I have selected the following jests, all extant in sixteenth century editions:

A C. Mery Talys (1526)¹³ [HMT]

*The Cobler of Caunterburie*¹⁴ (1590) [CC]

Mery Tales, Wittie Questions and Quicke Answeres, very pleasant to be Readdde (1567)¹⁵ [MTWQ]

*Merie Tales of the mad men of Gotam. Gathered to gether by A.B. of Phisike Doctour. Imprinted at London in Fletstret, beneath thf [sic] Conduit, at the signe of S. Iohn Euangelist, by Thomas Colwell*¹⁶ (ca. 1565) [MMG]

¹²In this second edition of *Tales, and Quicke answeres* (ca. 1535), twenty-six more tales were added.

¹³Fragments of two copies of the first edition are kept in the British Museum. One of them was edited by Synger (1814). Hazlitt (1864) edited it again. A perfect copy of HMT (1526) is in the library of the University of Göttingen. It was used by Oesterley for his 1866 edition. All references in this paper are to this edition. It differs from Synger and Hazlitt's editions in the order of the tales, some of which are incomplete or altogether missing. For a physical description of this edition see Avis (1977).

¹⁴The Bodleian Library owns a copy of the first 1590 edition and there exists another in private hands. See Creigh (1987: 3-4) for a detailed description of later editions. He collates the first edition with those of 1608 and 1614 (in the British Library and in the Yale University Library, respectively).

¹⁵The Harvard College Library owns a 1567 copy of this collection. See Kahrl (1965: x, n.4). This second edition was reprinted by Hazlitt (1864. II).

¹⁶Kahrl's 1965 edition is based on the earliest extant copy, printed sometime between 1556 and 1566, probably ca. 1565, and owned by the Harvard College Library. Kahrl (1965: xvii-xxi)

*The Wydow Edyth: Twelve mery gestys of one called Edyth, the lyeing wydow whyche still lyueth. Emprynted at London at the sygne of the mere-mayde at Pollis gate next to chepesyde by J. Rastall. 23 March, MDXXV. [1525]*¹⁷ [WE]

*Merie Tales Newly Imprinted and Made by Master Skelton Poet Laureat (1567)*¹⁸ [MS]

*Tarltons Newes Ovt of Pvratorie (1590)*¹⁹ [TN]

*A verie merie Historie, of the Milner of Abington (1575)*²⁰ [MA]

I have excluded from the corpus those jests or collections of jests which have only reached us in seventeenth century copies, as there is no way of knowing the later printers' possible alterations of the sixteenth century editions.²¹ Not in the corpus either are the following tales, as I have been unable to find modern editions:

*Wits, Fits, and Fancies; or, a generall and serious collection of the sententious speeches, answers, jests, and behaviours of all sortes of estates, from the throane to the cottage.... (1595)*²² attributed to Anthony Copley, *A merry jest of an old fool with a young wife (1530?)*, *A merry jest of the friar and the boy (ca. 1545)*, *Here Begynneth a Merry Jest of a Shrewde and Curste Wyfe*,

lists the eight known editions printed before c1690. Hazlitt's 1864 edition is based on a 1630 edition. This collection is generally ascribed to Andrew Borde (ca. 1490-1549).

¹⁷Hazlitt (1864) mentions three copies of this 1525 edition. However, he used for his edition a 1573 copy in the Bodleian which he cites as *XII Mery Jestes of the Wyddow Edyth Imprinted at London in Fletelane by Richarde Ihones, 1573*. In the footnotes he includes variants appearing in the 1525 edition. The Folger library also owns a copy of the 1573 edition.

¹⁸Only one copy exists, kept at the Huntington Library. Zall (1963) uses it for his edition. He states that it shows very few discrepancies with the Dyce (1843) or Hazlitt (1864) editions.

¹⁹A copy of the first edition is held by the British Library. The Huntington Library and the Bodleian Library own a copy each of the second, ca. 1600 edition. Several copies of the third, 1630 edition, survive, kept by the Bodleian Library, the British Library and Trinity College Library (Cambridge). Four other incomplete copies are owned by the Bodleian, the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Harvard University Library. Creigh and Belfield (1987) is based on the first edition. They discuss the sources of the tales and the possible authorship of the collection.

²⁰The first edition we know of was published in 1532, but the earliest extant edition appeared in 1575. The British Library owns a copy under the title *A ryght pleasaunt and merye Historie, of the Mylner of Abyngton, with his Wife, and his fayre Daughter: and of two poore scholes of Cambridge*.

²¹We find an instance of this in the two earliest extant editions of Thomas of Reading. The northern dialect passages in the 1623 edition are slightly different from those in the 1612 edition. See further on it García-Bermejo Giner (1998: 10 n.19).

²²The British Library owns two copies of a 1614 edition. Wilson (1938: 130) explains that this collection escaped the notice of Schulz (1912).

Lapped in Morrelles Skin, for her Good Behaviour (1550),²³ and *A Merry Dialogue, Declaringe the Propertyes of Shrowde Shrews, and Honest Wyues* (1557).

Modern scholarly editions of sixteenth century jest-books are scarce. Singer (1814-16) edited HMT and MTWQ. Hazlitt (1864) remains the fullest edition. It gathers together HMT, MMG, WE, MTWQ and other seventeenth century collections. MS can be read in Dyce (1843) and Hazlitt (1864). MMG was reprinted in Karhl (1965). Oesterley's 1866 edition of HMT was reprinted in Ashley (1970). Creig and Belfield (1987) re-edited TN and CC. Zall's collection (1963) is unfortunately presented in modernised spelling. Wardroper (1970) and Thomson (1977), also in modernised spelling, only contain fragments of some tales. Fortunately, some jests are now available in electronic format, as HMT or MA in the Chadwyck-Healey 1997 *Early English Prose Fiction Full-Text Database*. However, linguists should be aware when using this electronic edition of HMT that it does not follow the original text fully. Tildes are used throughout in the original to indicate the presence of <m> or <n> immediately after a vowel or diphthong. These tildes have been altogether omitted so that *cõ* = *com* becomes simply *co*. Linguists using this electronic version could thus be led to believe them instances of a general loss of nasals! HMT is also included in the *Helsinki Corpus*.

3. THE LITERATURE ON SIXTEENTH-CENTURY JEST-BOOKS

Jest-books have been studied from a literary point of view for the most part. As indicated earlier, scholars have frequently been concerned with tracing their sources and origins. Besides the works already cited, mention must be made of Kahrl (1966) in this respect. Attention has been paid also to the presence of certain jests in later works and authors.²⁴ Schulz (1912) and Wilson (1938) remain the standard jest-books bibliographies. Unfortunately, no attempt

²³The British library owns copies of them. A 1580 copy of *Here begynneth a merry ieste of a shrowde and curste wyfe...* is kept by the Folger Library.

²⁴For instance, on certain jests in Shakespeare, see Chapman (1960), Magister (1981). Patzold (1971) compares one of Deloney's novels and the seventeenth-century *Pindar of Wakefield*. Weinmann (1970) focuses on Nash. Wittreich (1973) locates a jest in Milton. Friedman (1955) studies their influence in Goldsmith. Graves (1923) treats Jonson in the jest-books.

has been made since then at compiling a bibliography which would include possible collections or individual items found in the past sixty years or include references to modern editions. General descriptive studies of jest-books can be found in Ferrara (1960), Schlauch (1963, 1966), Salzman (1985: 202-4) and Shaw (1986). Chandler (1907) discusses jest-books from the point of view of the picaresque novel. Douce (1807) and Doran (1858) describe the fools' tricks and jests. Hazlitt (1887, 1890) deals with the evolution of the jest. Wright (1865) studies the personal element in jest-books.

Little attention has been paid to the language in jest-books. HMT is part of the *Helsinki Corpus* and, therefore, on occasion it has been part of smaller corpora for the study of certain Early Modern English grammatical points, for instance, in Taavisainen's description of interjections in Early Modern English (1995). As far as regional traits are concerned, Schlauch (1966: 409 n.35) states: "The use of dialect in the jest-book has still to be investigated. It has both linguistic and literary significance." She describes the northern dialect features in MS 2. Twenty years earlier, in an obscure publication, Hughes (1924: 30-31) had described the Welsh characters in HMT, MS and MTWQ. He also provided a list of the main characteristics of Welshmen's stage English (Hughes 1924: 33-34) which include some of the traits present in jest-books. Blake (1981: 55-57) also mentions some of the northern forms in MS2 and the Welsh devoicing of voiced plosives in HMT. He locates the use of *ich* for *I* as a South-Western or simply rustic feature in MS 12 and in MTWQ 96. Barber (1997: 14-15) quotes MMG18 and fully describes and explains the Scottish features in it. Görlach (1991: 21) quotes the same tale as an example of "the breakdown in oral communication that could occur between Englishmen and Scots." He quotes it again in Görlach (1999: 508-9) with the same purpose. It is the earliest example he provides of dialect in literary texts in the Early Modern Period. This very same tale is found yet again in Blank (1996: 130), together with HMT 48, as examples of "the difficulty... of conducting business with people whose language is not current in England." To the best of my knowledge, these are the only attempts at examining the regional markers in jest-books. There has not only been little analysis of the genre, in terms of specific linguistic features, but no comprehensive examination of the relevant extant texts has ever been attempted.

4. THE SETTINGS AND THE CHARACTERS IN THE TALES

Despite the scarcity of dialect markers in most of the tales, the jests are often located very precisely from a geographical point of view. Many take place in London, and frequently there is an exact indication of the area, street or landmark. The surrounding towns, villages and nearby counties are also the scenario of many tales. This is a clear indicator of how London and the Court were becoming very well known throughout the country. As can be seen in Table 1 the area where many of the tales take place broadly coincides with that in which, in 1589, in *The Art of English Poesie*, George Puttenham considered the “best” English to be spoken: “the Court, and... London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles, and not much about.”

London Sites	Other English Towns	Other Counties Or Regions
*White Friars	*Stony Stratford, Bucks	*Middlessex
*Lombard’s Street	\$Windsor, Brks	*Essex
*Cornhill	*@Oxford	\$Surrey
*@Charing Cross	*Botley, Bck, Hmp, Ox?	*Northamptonshire
*Gray Friars	+Romney, Knt	&Nottingham
*\$Holborn Bridge	+Gravesend, Knt	&Leicester
*Fleet Street	+\$Canterbury, Knt	*Warwickshire
*Knightsbridge	\$Sevenoaks, Knt	#Cheshire
*Saint John’s	\$Rochester, Knt	*TheNorthCountry
*St. Paul’s	\$Otford, Knt	*Wales
*St. Lawrence’s	+Cambridge	
\$Chelsea x2	@Abington, Cam.	
*\$@Westminster	+Cherryhington, Cam.	
+Billingsgate	+Trumpington, Cam.	
*Brentford	*\$Colebrook, Dev	
*\$Barnett	\$Exeter, Dev.	
\$Wandsworth	\$Bury St. Edmunds,Sf.	
\$Kew	\$Horringer, Sf.	
\$Stratford	\$Brandon, Sf.	
\$Barking	\$Bradfield, Sf.	
\$Fullham	\$Theford, Nf	
\$Southwark	# Walsingham, Nf.	
\$St. Mary Cray	@Norwich, Nf.	
\$Foots Cray	@Dis, Nf.	
\$Croydon	\$St. Albans, Hert.	
\$Eltham	+Wickham, Hamp.?	
\$Whetstone	\$Tooting, Sr	
@Uxbridge	\$Battersea, Sr	
%Hoxton	\$Colne, Ess.	
*\$St. Thomas of Akres	\$Hatfield, Ess.	
%Bridewell	&Loughborough, Lei.	
*&\$Kingston-upon-Thames	*Stratford-Upon-Avon, Wa	

The South-Western dialect is represented only in two of the tales in the corpus, MS 12 and MTWQ 96. In the first, a cobbler of the parish of Dis, Suffolk, uses the southern form of the first person singular pronoun *ich* three times, and the standard *I*, fifteen. Proclitic *ich*, in *chadde*, appears in a sentence used by a “homely,” “blunt” fellow, whose geographical origin is not stated. The southern counties, eastern and western are the scenario of many of the tales, as can be seen in Table 1. However, the characters’ speeches are only indicative of colloquial English.

As regards the Scottish characters in the corpus, there are two. The one in MMG 18, as has already been mentioned, is used to signal the linguistic confusion that could arise between the Scots and the English. The one in HMT 61 is not linguistically marked. He is an example “that he y^t is subget to another ought to forsake his owne wyll & folow his wyll &cōmaūdement y^t so hath subieccyon ouer hym, lest it torne to his gretter hurt and damage.”

5. REGIONAL MARKERS

The lack of a written standard during the sixteenth century implies that one should be cautious when attempting the analysis of spellings that apparently suggest a dialect pronunciation. Also, traits that are nowadays definitely dialectal were far more widely used in the sixteenth century, and therefore cannot necessarily be considered a conscious effort at suggesting a regional variety. For instance in HMT 30 a Welshman says “Master curat, set the tone agaynst the tother.” We could think that the writer has selected the trait *t = the* as a linguistic marker. However, a couple of tales later, HMT 32, a “Gentle Woman” uses the very same expression “mary, quod she, then set the tone agaynst the tother.” The realisation of the definite article as [t] in *tone* < ME *ðat* one and *tother* < OE *ðæt* *oðer* is now a widespread Northernism occurring as well in part of the Midlands and in the south west of the country (See Barry 1972: 178-79 & Map 5). In the sixteenth century it was far more widespread and existed also in the literary language.

Certain spellings in the tales sometimes seem to give us some insights about features that are nowadays frequent in regional speech albeit socially stigmatised but which back in the sixteenth century seemed to be more commonly accepted. Whilst superficially there might appear to be so-called “h-

dropping” and “hypercorrect-h”, not only in the dialogues but also in the narrative sections of the tales, we have to be wary because of the instability of the aspirate in word initial position. As Barber (1997: 126) points out “Some words have EModE spellings with initial *h-*, despite the fact that there was no /h/ in the pronunciation, and never had been. These were ME loans from French, in which initial [h] had been lost before the loan was made... Pronunciations with /h/ are due to the influence of spelling, and are not common before the nineteenth century.” Of the words in Table 2 *hore*, *harlot* and *homycyd* would fit in this group. Dobson (1968: §426) states that “In stressed syllables the dropping of [h] is essentially a mark of vulgar or dialectal speech, and what evidence there is in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries relates exclusively to such speech.” However Milroy (1983: 48) disagrees with Dobson,²⁶ and also with Wyld (1956: 294-96). Considering the evidence in the *Diary of Henry Machyn*. and the puns on series like *air*, *heir*, *hair*, in contemporary plays, Milroy (1983: 48) thinks that in the sixteenth-century “/h/-lessness was much less overtly stigmatised than it is today.” Jest-books are not among Wyld’s, Dobson’s or Milroy’s primary sources. The inverted spellings in examples two and three of Table 2, which may also be an indication of the loss of [h], could be taken to be an attempt at representing vulgar or dialectal speech even if they are the only “non-standard” traits in the speeches of a horseman and a chandler respectively. Nevertheless, many of the other instances of “h-dropping” appear in the narrative sections of the tales, where no attempt is being made at representing vulgar or dialectal English.

- 1.- HMT 3 an hore (whore), an harlot
- 2.- HMT 13 an horseman, he hys ready to go to heaven
- 3.- HMT 26 I wyll see who hys there
- 4.- HMT the valew of an half penny, an homycyd
- 5.- HMT 51 an hye voice
- 6.- HMT 54 shewed hym what an holy and goodly prayer it was
- 7.- HMT 74 an halfpenny
- 8.- HMT 80 an holy man
- 9.- HMT 82 an hog
- 10.- HMT 84 a mile and an half
- 11.- HMT 98 a pasty of an hart, an hole
- 12.- MMG 18 an house, an head

Table 2 H-dropping and Hypercorrect-h

Regional markers appear in the speeches of Welsh, Scottish and Northern characters, apart from the single Southern / South-Western trait mentioned

²⁶He does mention some h-less variants of words such as *whoredom* and *whore* in Everardt, the short-hand writer, and Cocker, and of *height* in Brown. They all published their works in the seventeenth century. Wyld (1956: 295) mentions *ede* “head”, *alff* “half”, *alpeny* “halfpenny” in Machyn’s Diary.

earlier. Basically they coincide with the features allotted to these regional groups in contemporary drama and fiction. Those found in HMT date back to around seventy years before they are found in other literary texts. So few sixteenth century jest-books have come down to us that one can only guess at the real frequency of use of such traits. At any rate, they seem to be a good indicator of which were the linguistic traits commonly associated with people coming from those parts of the country. The phonological, morphological and lexical features selected by writers truly correspond to real traits existing at the time in the varieties represented.

As can be seen in Table 3, Welsh characters are linguistically marked by the use of universal *her* and the devoicing of voiced plosives. Universal *her*, or the use of *her* for any other subject, object or possessive pronoun, became a standard way to indicate the Welsh origin of a character in later English literature.²⁷ *OED*'s first citation of this trait is precisely from HMT. It probably originated in the confusion between Welsh *hi* (she) and English *he* (and also because there are only two genders in Welsh).

Devoicing of Voiced Plosives	Universal her	Lexis
Cottys plut HMT 31	her <his> nayle HMT 31, 92	vp Janken MTWQ 15
Cottes blut HMT 61, 92	her <his> nayll HMT 61	cause bobbe HMT 78 ≤ toasted cheese≤
	make her <you> fat<fetch> it HMT 61	
	yf her <it> be not ynough HMT 92	
	for her <it> hath a good fyre HMT 92	
	under her HMT 92	

Table 3 Linguistic markers given to Welsh Characters

The devoicing of voiced plosives also became an archetypal trait to signal the Welshness of a character. As Thomas (1984: 184) states, it is an attempt at “reflecting the way in which an ear attuned to the relatively weakly aspirated voiced plosives of RP interprets the corresponding sounds in Welsh English.” (See further Jones 1919: 56-57 and 68-69).

The particle *ap* =son of < Welsh *map* =son would also become a stereotypical way of signalling the Welshness of a character, similar to *Mac* for a Scotsman. *OED*'s first citation only dates from 1647. What is curious here is the fact that in the tale it is spelled with a <v> = <u>. The process of centralization and loss of lip-rounding which affected words with ME short u

²⁷As regards drama, the first Welsh characters whose speeches are linguistically marked appear in the late sixteenth-century, in *Knack to know a Knave* (1592) and in *Sumner's Last Will and Testament* (1592). In poetry, mention should be made of Spenser's September eclogue in *The Shepherdes Calendar* (1579) where he uses a dialect different “from the comen” which appears to be Welsh. See further Hulbert (1942). References to the literature on Welsh characters can be found in García-Bermejo Giner (1999b).

was probably ongoing at the time when MTWQ was written, even if it was not fully attested by an orthoepist till 1640. Nevertheless, there was never any confusion between the new sound and the *a*-type sounds. This could be a perceptual error or simply a typographical mistake on the part of the printers and not a real attempt at representing a dialectal pronunciation.

Cause bobbe = Welsh *caws pobi* “roasted cheese” also appears frequently in later representations of Welsh English (Bartley 1954: 277), making fun on the proverbial Welsh liking for cheese. The anonymous author of HMT translates the expression, implying perhaps that not all his readers would be familiar with it. This is a frequently employed technique in the literary representation of dialect to facilitate readers’ understanding and prevent their skipping of dialect passages. All the more so in this case, when the humour in the jest totally depends on it. This technique is found again in MMG18 when the writer explains the meaning of *Yowle*.

As can be seen in Tables 4 and 5, Northern and Scottish characters share some of their phonological traits: the northern lack of rounding (*sale*, *bare*) or the northern oo-fronting (*gewd*), and perhaps the earlier development of the Great Vowel Shift for ME long *i* in the North (*bay*).²⁸ They also became stereotypical in the linguistic marking of Northern / Scottish characters. At the time, southerners were probably not capable of distinguishing between Northern English and Scottish English and as a result, northern and Scottish characters were often given the same or similar linguistic markers.

Phonological	Morphological	Lexical
<i>bȳes</i> <bones> HMT 99	I is x2 HMT 99	blyth <happy>MTWQ127
<i>sale</i> <soul> HMT 99	ays <I am> MTWQ127	till <to> MS 2
<i>bay</i> <buy> MS 2	Ise <I am, I shall> MS 2	I bus goe MS 2
<i>gewd</i> <good> MS 2		
<i>wrang</i> <wrong> MS 2		

Table 4. Linguistic markers given to Northern Characters

Of the other two spellings suggesting Northern phonological characteristics, *bȳes* deserves special attention as it apparently suggests a typical northern pronunciation which is not recorded till much later, [i̯] or perhaps even [ia] (See further about it García-Bermejo Giner fthc.). One reason why this spelling has been ignored till now may be due to the fact that the tale in which it appears is missing from Hazlitt’s 1864 edition, the most widely accessible one, but incomplete. It has been preserved in the Göttingen copy on which Oesterley (1866) based his edition. *Wrang* is a Northernism that was also used in

²⁸See further García-Bermejo Giner (1998, 1999b) for a full diachronic description of these three features in contemporary drama suggesting a Northern / Scottish accent. They confirm the information provided by Alexander Gill in *Logonomia Anglica* (1619).

Scotland. It is due to the late OE lengthening of a before the group *-ng*. As a result it joined OE long a of other origins and remained as such long a in the north. It was shortened again in ME.²⁹ *OED*'s citations for this variant spelling begin in the fourteenth century and belong to either northern or Scottish texts.³⁰ The Kendal man who uses it in MS2 has been led to believe he might be suffering from "the sweating sickness" and he says "By the misse, Ise wrang, I bus goe till bed." *Wrang* means clearly "sick" in this context. Such a meaning is not recorded in *OED* or *EDD*. The closest meaning is that given by *EDD*, as obsolete, "Hurt, injured" in Abd. and Frf.

I is for *I am* and *Ise* both for *I am* and *I shall*, as well as *thowse* for *thou shall* are well known Northernisms still found nowadays. Chaucer already used this trait for one of the northern students in "The Reeve's Tale". Soon it would lose its northern connotations and be given to South-Western characters simply to indicate that they were comic and provincial. As regards the lexical items, *till* for *to* indicating place or purpose is common in the north and Scotland since ME times (when it was also occasionally used in the Midlands and south). *OED* provides citations in the sixteenth century from Scottish texts. *Bus*, the contracted form of *behoves*, *behoved*, indicating need or obligation, is recorded by *OED* as northern. There are citations from northern texts between the fourteenth-century and ca. 1500. It is indicated that the past tense is also used for the present in modern Scots (the citations belong to eighteenth and nineteenth-century texts only). Halliwell (1850) also records it, citing instances from ME northern and Scottish texts, and indicating "In use in Skelton's time as a provincialism" and quoting the above mentioned sentence in MS2. *EDD*, however, does not record this variant of the present. *Bood*, also in forms *bit*, *boot*, *boud*, *bud*, *but*, are given as occurring in Scotland and Ireland. Citations appear in brackets at the end of the entry for instances of *bud*, as a contracted form of *behoved* in *The Wars of Alexander* (ca. 1450) and the *York Plays* (ca. 1400). Apparently this verb was no longer in use in the north when Joseph Wright edited *EDD*, nor did he find instances of it among his primary sources. *OED* does not quote these examples in MS2 or MMG18, appearing over sixty years after *OED*'s latest citation and implying that at the time *bus* was still in use in the north and was well known in the south as a Northernism or Scotticism.

The phonological traits in Table 5 all correspond to variants which could also be heard in Northern English. *OED*, however, records the spelling *sew* for

²⁹See further on this northern trait Wakelin (1977: 90-91) or Trudgill (1990: 19ff.)

³⁰*EDD* locates it in Sc., Nhb and Yks. EDG (§ 32) shows variants with "a" in Sc. and in Nhb., Dur., Cum. Wm., Yks., Lan. and in some West Midland and South Westerb Counties. Upton (1994: 248-49) gives [æ] for Yks and Lan. However, Rydland (1982: §7.10.1b) locates it in Cum. and in Rydland (1998) it is also located in parts of Nhb.

sow in between the fifteenth and seventeenth-centuries only as a north dialect variant, whereas it gives *sou* for Scotland in the sixteenth. This coincides basically with the information provided by *EDD*, where such a spelling is recorded for Yks, although this county and Scotland share the same pronunciation [su:]. *CSD* does not record *sew* as a Scottish spelling.

Phonological	Morphological	Lexical
bare <boar>	thowse	anenst
gewd <good>		Yowle <Yule>
meke, mek <make>		gryces <piglets>
syk <such>		kenst <know>
sew <sow>		gar <cause>
		greet <cry>
		mokyl <great>
		thowse bus have
		whe, interj.

Table 5. Linguistic markers given to Scottish Characters MMG 18

The Scottish lexical items all correspond to words in use at the time in Scottish English and in Northern English. As a matter of fact, *gryces*, *ken* and *greet* appear in *OED* in citations from contemporary texts in which they are not specifically meant as Scotticisms or Northernisms. They appear in the tale considered as an example of “the breakdown in oral communication that could occur between Englishmen and Scots” (Görlach 1991: 21). Perhaps the “breakdown in oral communication” was not as big as the tale seems to imply.

CONCLUSIONS

The regional markers selected by literary authors in these sixteenth century texts, the comments on people coming from regions other than the vicinity of London, provide us with information about the linguistic situation in the Early Modern period. I believe the gathering of a bigger corpus of early jest-books would yield interesting data about the dialectology of Early Modern English. An updated bibliography of jest-books should be gathered, including the isolated jests that have come to light in recent years. They should all be made available to scholars in a modern, reliable edition.

The use of dialect in jest-books is not as frequent as it is commonly believed. Nevertheless, as can be seen from my analysis and description, the data provided are accurate, they complement and fill in gaps in the scarce evidence provided by contemporary orthoepists.

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