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Lancashire is not a large county, but the variety of its geographical features allied to the early history of its settlement and its later key position in the Industrial Revolution, have made for a vernacular of great individuality and, despite increasing suburbanisation, of notable continuity.

Many of the principal isoglosses separating Northern from Midlands speech cut right across Lancashire, with the result that at least six main dialectal areas can be distinguished. These are, very briefly:

- 1) North Lancashire, a mountainous region, centred on Lancaster.
- 2) The Fylde, devoted to dairy farming, extends as far as the Ribble estuary, south of which is.
- 3) Central Lancashire, an agricultural area, bounded on the east by.
- 4) East Lancashire, containing the mill towns of Rochdale, Bury and Oldham, and flanked by the independent metropolitan areas.
- 5) Merseyside.
- 6) Manchester (1).

My purpose in this paper is not to describe the dialectal features of each area, which would be impractical, but rather to concentrate on the phonological characteristics of central rural Lancashire, a North Midlands dialect, in comparison with that of north Lancashire, which is purely Northern. Both are compared with Standard English. The outstanding features of these areas are found to include both archaic forms ousted elsewhere by Standard, and forms peculiar to this North Midlands locality, and which represent a different evolution of an original Old English form.

First of all, some common features. As one of the (geographically) northern counties, Lancashire shares with approximately half of England certain phonological characteristics which distinguish this area from the southern counties in general. In order of importance, these are:

- 1) The absence of the short centralised vowel /ʌ/ as in RP «butter», «cut», «some» which in the northern dialects retains the traditional rounded quality of ME short u, [bʊt ə].
- 2) The unlengthened and unretracted a (ME a) before certain voiceless fricatives —/s, f, θ /— as in «laugh», «grass» and «bath» as against RP long, fronted /a:/. Note that the main difference between north and south here is one of length; the SE has /a:/, while other southern areas have a more fronted vowel /a:/ or ae:/, which is also heard in most of the United States. A similar contrast occurs in words of French origin such as «dance», «class».
- 3) The postvocalic clear /l/ of the northern counties is separated from the southern velar /l/ by an isogloss running across the country from approximately Hereford to the Wash.

Although the isoglosses for the first two of these variations do not coincide exactly, they are considered to be the main phonological dividers between northern and southern England. As Martyn Wakelin points out, a systemic variation such as the lack of a phoneme,

or a distributional variation such as the use of a short /a/ before fricatives, are more important than the third type of variation, which is merely a realisational difference... (2).

Within the northern area in general, the most important dialectal division is that between the Northern dialect proper and that of the North Midlands. In many cases the bunch of isoglosses separating the two cuts right across Lancashire.

The western boundary between these dialects has always been notoriously difficult to establish. Whereas on the eastern side of the country the river Humber has from earliest times been a stable point of separation between the Northumbrian and Mercian dialects, every linguistic geographer has established the western boundary at a different point, ranging from the Mersey to the river Lune. The reasons for this are partly geographical and partly political. Dialect borrowings usually spread along routes of migration and easy communication, whereas dialect differences are apt to be caused by obstacles such as mountains, rivers and swamps and even more, it is now generally believed, by political boundaries (3).

Lancashire's rivers—the Ribble, the Lune and the Wyre—have, unlike the Humber, never been unsurmountable language barriers, except perhaps at their widest point: thus, the mouth of the Wyre cuts off the Fleetwood dialect from that of Pilling, just as the Mersey estuary separates Lancashire from Cheshire. Political factors have been more decisive.

Lancashire and Cheshire were among the last areas in England to be settled by the Germanic tribes, who penetrated from the east and south. Lancashire became a province of the kingdom of Northumbria about 660, but for long both counties were disputed territory between Northumbria and Mercia, and shortly after this date central and southern Lancashire came under Mercian domination. Thus it follows, first, that for a long time the political boundary was unsettled and therefore constituted only a slight linguistic impediment; and second, that the northern boundary of Mercian speech, of which present-day N Midlands is the western inheritor, may have been as far south as the Ribble. In general, however, the boundary lay about the latitude of the Wyre or the Lune (the latter favoured by Kolb), or occasionally even further north, just above Lancaster (4). The difficulty of establishing a boundary even when using isoglosses is demonstrated by the fact that no two words seem to show an identical development of the diphthong in the words «ground» and «pound» (5). The isogloss which separates the northern retention of ME /u/ from southern and standard /au/ (representing lengthening and diphthongisation) is slightly different for these two very similar words. If other words such as «sound» or «found» were mapped, even less coincidence would probably be discovered. In the last 70 years or so, according to some scholars, the northern area has been reduced, as a result of penetration of N Midlands pronunciation, giving rise to a mixed dialect in the border area.

We shall now go on to consider some of the outstanding vocalic features of the central and northern areas; features which underlie the speech of the oldest inhabitants in agricultural districts, as mapped by the Linguistic Atlas of England and corroborated by personal observation (6).

A) REFLEXES OF ME SHORT VOWELS

1. ME a + n: A characteristic feature south of the Lune, and indeed of all the NW Midlands, is the retention of the rounding of OE short a before a nasal. Thus in words like «any», «man», «land», Lancashire pronounces—and writes in dialect poetry—«ony», «mon», «lond». This rounding does not occur in words of French origin, which entered the language later, and so the dialect speaker will distinguish between «climbing up th» «bonk» (Old Norse + banki = 'slope) and «going to th» «bank» (Fr. banque' or its Italian source «banca») to draw out his «brass». Similarly, he may use the short o in «ont» (hand, OE) but it will always be a short a in «aunt» (AngloFr «aunte»).

2. ME a + ng, o + ng. Also a Midlands feature, and centred mainly on Lancashire, is the raising of the vowel in Standard «wrong» to «wrung», whereas in the whole of the Northern dialect, including the northernmost tip of Lancashire, the unrounded «wrang» persists. (ON wrangr).

3. ME i + h. Lancashire shares with parts of Yorkshire a long, fairly close monophthong [i:] in such words as Standard «night», «light», «right» (pronounced in this N Midland belt as [ni:t li:t ri:t]). This is the only area to retain a monophthong in these words, for the rest of the country shows a diversity of diphthongs, from Kentish [ɔi] to Northumberland [ɛi]. Standard /ai/, centring on London, probably derives from the diphthong in an E Midland belt.

4. ME ir + cons. In one word at least, viz. Standard «bird», Lancashire stands out as being the only area in England to retain the unmetathesised form of OE «brid». In dialect writing «brid» is often used as a term of affection, as in Laycock's poem to his child:

«Th'art welcome little bonny brid...»

or Edwin Waugh to his future wife:

... My nest is snug an' sweet,
Aw'll go an' fotch my brid (6).

Other isoglosses which the division between Northern and N Midlands dialects in Lancashire include the following.

5. ME short o + l + cons. In words such as «colt», both Standard and the Northern dialect have /o u/, while the southern half has the non-Standard phoneme /ɛ u/. Loss of /e/ in «old» has resulted in a folk-etymology form in the street-name toad Lane for T'Ocod Lane.

6. This same curious diphthong is also found in Lancashire and Cheshire as the reflex of ME short u + l + cons. as in «shoulder». (The area is more restricted than with «colt»). Post-vocalic /l/ is *always* vocalised in Lancashire, and to some extent in adjoining areas both north and south.

A much smaller enclave in the mining and textile district of the county is the only area in England to raise ME isolative short o to /u/. Peter Wright testifies to hearing of «dugs» and «frugs» for «dogs» and «frogs» (7).

B) REFLEXES OF ME LONG VOWELS

1. ME isolative long a has given in the N Midlands a long close monophthong /e:/, which is no longer a phoneme in Standard English; the Northern dialect has a variety of centring diphthongs /iə/, /ea/, /ia/ and the southern dialects have closing diphthongs. Thus, most of Lancashire says «spade», «naked», «grave» with /e:/ as against Standard /ei/.

2. ME long open e (derived from OE ea) has been shortened in southern and Standard «dead», «deaf», but diphthongises throughout the N Midlands to [iə]. In the word «flea» (OE fleah), Lancashire is alone in retaining the curious reflex «flek», which supposes a shortening of the diphthong and the replacing of the velar fricative by a plosive.

Equally characteristic of south and central Lancashire is the long monophthong with r-colouring which arises from this same vowel when followed by /r/. Thus, instead of the Standard diphthongal glide /iə/ in e.g. «mare», «dare», «pear», Lancashire has the close central monophthong [ə:] while the rest of the North and the é Midlands have the more open variety [ɛ:] but without a glide. As this result has also arisen from OE long a + r as in Standard /h ɛ ə /,

Lancashire [hə:] the list of homophones in this dialect is even longer than in Standard: e.g. «fir», «fur», «fair» and «fare» are all pronounced alike.

In «break» and «great» a very small enclave in south Lancashire and Yorkshire preserves what should have been the normal evolution to /i:/, while southern dialects and Standard have the anomalous /ɛ i/. The smallness of the mapped area retaining the original sound suggests that this is now giving way before pressure from Standard. I distinctly recall elderly speakers in my youth saying «You'll bri:k it».

3. ME long i. The reflex of ME long i as in «died», «flies» (the Standard form having undergone the influence of the Great Vowel Shift), had a northern variant in eh, eg which has evolved to [i:]. Only a small pocket in S Lancashire retains this northern form. Also losing ground is the archaic -n plural in «een» (eyes), the normal form in dialect poetry of the 19c and still holding out in the northern part of the county.

4. ME long open o. In such words as «loaf», representing the reflex of ME long o derived from OE long a (hlāf), there is great divergence. South Lancashire shows an undiphthongised [ɔ:]; the Northern form [iə] (from a surviving long ā) has receded beyond the Lancashire border, while the N Midlands form still survives and seems to reflect a persistent maintenance of /u:/ finally succumbing to a diphthongal glide: [uə] no glide is heard in «whoum» (St. «home») where a prometic [ω] is a Midlands feature.

A different sound altogether appears in those words in which the o was originally short. So for Standard «coal» the North has [ku ɛ l], central Lancashire and parts of Yorkshire [ɔ il]. This sound is preserved in numerous place-names such as Hoyle House (OE, ON hōl «hole»).

5. ME long close o :- It is well known that the Great Vowel Shift shows the constant tendency of English vowels, to become more raised and fronted. The N Midlands dialect has carried this tendency a step further (as already seen in the Lancashire versions of «dog», «coal», «home»); in such words as Standard «goose», «moon» and «school» parts of the county retain a long fronted vowel [y:], with of course loss of final /l/ in «school», «pool», etc.

6. ME long u :- Diphthongisation of a long u /u:/ is what we find in the Standard pronunciation of «cow», «house». In Lancashire and adjacent areas the diphthong is believed to have arisen early enough to be levelled again, for here we have a long monophthong [a:]. The North retains an undiphthongised [u:].

ME DIPHTHONGS

Most interesting is the Lancashire development of ME oi as in «boil» (OF boillir). Coastal Lancashire shares with two other Midland enclaves the form [ail], while the stranger [ɛ il] is found in only one central area. These sounds were recorded in 1889 by Ellis, in 1905 in Joseph Wright's English Dialect Dictionary and again in 1952 by Rohrer. They may well represent a levelling of ME oi with old long i (this is Orton's belief) but their history remains rather a mystery.

If the abundance of isoglosses concentrating in a certain area is to be taken as indicative of individuality, then Lancashire is surely one of the most individual dialectal regions in England today. It is true that urbanisation in the north, as elsewhere, has been followed by the gradual suburban sprawl from large towns to the surrounding villages; linguistically, the result is a mixed, rather than an unmixed local community (8). Nevertheless, the inherited character of the dialects of rural Lancashire is still extremely marked (9). Successive generations of speakers spend their whole lives in the same area, and even though most are bilingual, speaking a perhaps modified version of Standard English as well as their own dialect, there are still many who conserve what Orton (10) describes as «the traditional vernacular, genuine and old». This may be because speaking in the dialect, in Lancashire as in Yorkshire, carries a special emotional status, as is testified by the activities of the dialect societies of these counties, and the fact that dialect poetry and song flourish today.

NOTAS

(1) Apart from the separation of these two urban dialects, the areas (1) to (4) correspond roughly to those mapped by A. J. Ellis: *On Early English Pronunciation. Part. V: The Existing Phonology of English Dialects*, pub. by EETS, 1889. His dialect divisions were respectively 31, 23, 22 and 21. It is strange that he did not record the existence of Liverpool «scouse», which must have already been well established at that date.

(2) Wakelin, Martyn, F.: *English Dialects: an Introduction*. London, 1977, ch 5.

(3) cf. Bloomfield, L.: *Language*. New York, 1935. «The important lines of dialect division run close to political lines. Apparently, local government and religion, and especially the custom of intermarriage within the political unit, lead to a relative uniformity of speech... Important social boundaries will in time attract isogloss lines».

(4) cf. E. Kolb: «Skandinavisches in den nordenglischen Dialekten». *Anglia* lxxxiii (1965), 153: «Die Hum-

ber-Lune Line ist die älteste und stärkste Sprachcheide in England».

(5) Rohrer, F.: «The Border between the Northern and North Midland Dialects in Yorkshire». *Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society*, viii, 1 (1950), 29-37.

(6) Laycock, S.: *The Collected Writings*. Oldham (1900, 1907). Waugh, E.: *Collected Works*, vols. 10-11. Manchester (1881-89, 1872-93).

(7) Wright, P.: *Lancashire Dialect*. Dalesman Publishing Co. (1976), p. 51.

(8) Strang, B.: *A History of English*. London (1970), p. 105.

(9) One result of the *Survey of English Dialects* is that two local Lancashire dialects, those of Pilling and Harwood, have been chosen for inclusion in the projected *Atlas Linguarum Europae*, under the general direction of Prof. A. Weijnen of Amsterdam.

(10) Orton, H.: «An English Dialect Survey: Linguistic Atlas of England». *Orbis* ix (1960), 332.

