

Is English a Variety or Standard in Literature?

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ملخص الدراسة بالعربية :

أوضحت إشكالية الخطاب بين العامي و الفصيح ومدى استعماله في الأدب من أكثر اهتمامات العصر، خاصة أمام اضطراب الروائي إلى استعمال بعض التراكيب اللهجية في سرده أو في حوار له لضرورات توظيفية أو فنية. و يأتي هذا البحث محاولة لاستطلاع أهم المراحل التاريخية التي شهدت استعمال اللهجة جنبا إلى جنب مع الفصحى في الأدب البريطاني، و استرجاع أهم الأسباب العلمية البحتة التي رسخت اللهجة كإم له أسسه ومعطياته العلمية والفصحى باعتبارها أصلا، فيما يخص الإنجليزية، منحدرة من لهجة إقليمية سادت في ضواحي لندن بحكمها أهم مركز للجامعات و أماكن الكتابة والطبع. ولا تزال جهود الباحثين متواصلة في توضيح العلاقة الجدلية بين الأدب واللسانيات باعتبار الأول مؤنقا تاريخيا للثاني.

و لعل الهدف الذي يصبو إليه هذا المقال هو توضيح فكرة أن اللغة الإنجليزية — سواء أكانت لهجية أم فصيح — وسيلة لغوية هامة تمكنا من إيصال الرسالة الأدبية إلى المجتمع بشكله الشفهي و المكتوب.

This study aims at clarifying the dilemma any author is put in when he writes in a literary context , for not only does he convey a message but also he faces

a public of different readers in terms of culture and language.

How can he make his works easily read and , at the same time, satisfy his quench for an adaptable literary language to art's requirements.

If language is a means of communication , how can he succeed that by using a literary language, mainly selected to write than to speak. If so, how can

he communicate in his language the intermediate -if not the weak readers and the half instructed -if not the illiterate ones.

From another part, the author introduces -when he writes fiction- some characters in the novel who can be of very low level. So, is it authentic to make them master the language during their dialogue with each other in the novel? are really the characters the voice -spoken and written- of the writer, or is he obliged to introduce some dialectal forms to represent those cultural beliefs and norms a special big part of the society belongs to. These Questions need clarification and for that sake comes the following comment.

This study is an attempt to clarify the relationship between the dialect and the standard and which of them is more appropriate to the literary context. There is a dilemma in which the writer- whether novelist, dramatist or poet- is put in about the language he should successfully uses to address the public. The latter is made of different people of diverse levels of education in various areas. Shall he cope with them in using their language or preserve his and neglect them? How to gain a large reading audience and -at the same time- save the aesthetic artistic level of style any good literature requires? What language to use in literature to convey a message to readers and alternatively preserve the beauty of art?

To clarify all these ideas, we should first begin by giving the meaning of the word "dialect" as a variety in itself or as compared to the standard. It is agreed that the dialect is a speech variation which differs according to the geographical area, the time of the era and the community which uses it. Thus, it is a regional speech which derives from a dominant language but of different characteristics: phonetic, lexical and sometimes morpho-syntactic¹. The dialect shares the same systems of the standard language but differs with it in terms of the cultural and social status². Peter Trudgill rather refers the term dialect to "differences between kinds of language which are differences of vocabulary, and grammar as well as pronunciation"³.

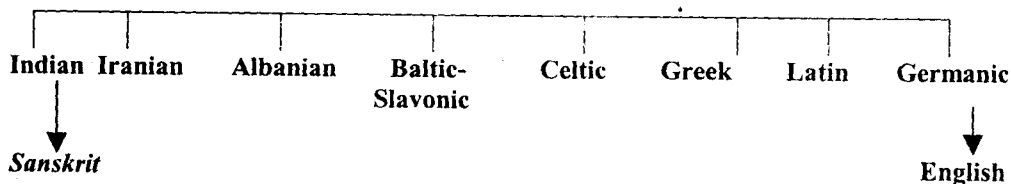
It is true that the dialect has some characteristics in common with the language, but the latter is larger in terms of scope and more prestigious in terms of status. However the dialect can develop from a regional speech of a particular community to an official language of the country -as happens to the modern German which is originally a Germanic speech imposed on the whole Germany, thank to the translation of the bible by Luther⁴.

Besides, the dialect is a regional variation characterized by a set of rules and norms each of which should be given an importance because "very few nowadays speak what can properly be termed dialect. The distinction being that the term 'dialect' covers much more than the term 'accent'- a dialect has not only its own characteristics: pronunciation but also, to a greater or less extent, its own grammar and its own vocabulary"⁵

This is as far as the word dialect is concerned, what about English? Is it a standard variety? If so since when was that? Has not been a dialect for a long time before? Has it witnessed any standardization? So what is English in the past and what is it today, and what has literature been clothed in language during the different shifts of in evolution of English?

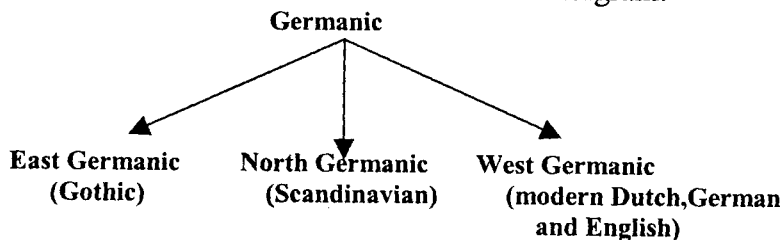
Firstable, English is part of the Indo-European languages which are made of nine main languages⁶ –as showed in the following diagram:

Indo-European Languages



-Diagram (1)-

The germanic language in its turn is composed of three branches among which English is a member –as showed in the second diagram.



-Diagram (2)-

So English is a member of the germanic language deriving from the indo-european languages ,and since it were the language of the Great Britain –which comprises England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland- it could not escape the fact of being different dialects through time in diverse areas- as mentioned in diagram : 3.

Old English Dialects



-Diagram(3)-

These dialects have some characteristics and are distributed in different areas of the United Kingdom – as mentioned in the first table-

The name of the dialect	The geographical area	Other characteristics
Northumbrian	North of Humber and south east of Scotland	Also called Northernmost
Mercian	Further in the south of England	Also called Midland dialect
Kentish	The south-east of Kent and Surrey	The dialect of the jutish area
West Saxon	South of the Thames from Sussex to Devon	The principal written variety before the conquest by 10th c.

-Table(1):The Main Old English Dialects-

These dialects can have other sub-dialects like the Anglian or the east and west Midland- as in the second table.

The dialect	The characteristics
Anglian	Made of Northumbrian and the Mercian
West Midland	Derives from the Mercian in the west
East Midland	Derives from the Mercian in the east

-Table(2): Sub-Dialects of Old English-

Only the west saxon dialect –among all these- could preserve as the written form of English and was adequately used in literature but “for entirely non-linguistic reasons that the west saxon became the premier dialect of old English”⁷

Henceforward, the west saxon could serve as a means of communication with the prestige and purpose of the standard language for a long time, and this is mainly referred to the migration of the saxons who populated the British Isles in the 5th and the 6th century a.d. because “the history of the country caused this west-saxon to become by the tenth century the accepted language for most vernacular literary purposes”⁸

Nevertheless, the other dialects were not at all neglected but used by some literary writers as well, for not only in West Saxon had literature been written but also all the other dialects were used⁹-as clarified in the third table.

The Dialect	The literary work
Southern dialect	The Owl and the nightingale
Kentish	Remorse of conscience

West Midland	Brut by Layamon
East Midland	The Lay of Havelock the Dane

- table (3): Written Literary Works in Dialects-

Till the fourteen century, we could find some adoptions of dialectal forms in the standard English especially " Joe Gower and Chaucer who wrote basically in the dialect of London and adopt Kentish forms"¹⁰

It is assumed that since G. Chaucer, the english people could know a suitable English for literature without any marginalization to those varieties often needed in daily life " the workaday English of daily interactions was always adequate, and the literary language had been vital at least since the time of Chaucer (who died in 1400)"¹¹

This is why, greater importance starts to be given to more and more suitable form for literature especially for writing. Thus, regional dialects of English "virtually ceased to be written after the 15th century except an example of William Berne's poems of rural life in the dorset dialect (1844)"¹², and a standard variety convenient to fulfil special needs and functions in writing, different from them in speaking, has been sought: "whereas local varieties serve local needs, particularly in speech, a standard variety must serve supra-local needs, particularly in writing"¹³

But the standard variety of English, as many standards, may require a whole system of communication adequate to writing . Consequently, some steps begin to be undergone to change English from a regional to a wider variety carrying out the functions of a standard. Researchers depend on three aspects to standardize English:

- 1- Selection of a variety to be standardized.
- 2- Elaboration of its functions and features.
- 3- Codification.(Haugen, 1966).¹⁴

Of course it is no more the west saxon variety of the tenth century which can fulfil the needs of a standard, nor was Chaucer's 15th century language enough suitable for that. But because London is of a special prestige in being the center of the universities and the central of the press in the 16th century , its variety was selected to be standardized for "in the case of English the dialect used in and around London and the university towns of oxford and Cambridge emerged around 1500 as the variety that would be standardized : its selection was less a conscious choice than a historical accident. The royal court and the printing presses were in London and the great centers of learning were not far away"¹⁵. This variety selected was of the south Midland dialect of the merchant class which basically settled in london¹⁶.

However, researchers –among them literary men–were not satisfied by this new variety of standard English corrupted by many latin and french words

,empty of a wide range of vocabulary, insufficient for a high style of literature. Till Dryden's era (1631/1700) English was described by him as totally imperfect; as he disapproved of those "who corrupt English idiom by mixing it too much with French"¹⁷. Johnson, from his part, found English "copious without order and energetick without rules"¹⁸.

Till the 18th century, English was still not stable, unsettled and full of borrowings. Addison suggested an academy to protect English from any corruption -as wrote in the Spectator (1711): "I have often wished, that certain men might be set apart, as superintendants of our language, to hinder any words of a foreign coin from passing us; and in particular to prohibit any french phrases from becoming current in its kingdom"¹⁹ (Bond, 1965).

By the late of 17th century, the dictionary of french academy was published and the english see an equal one -for their language- as urgently required. Some writers -like Defoe in 1697- recommend a society whose work "shou'd be to encourage polite learning, to polish and refine the english tongue"²⁰. From another part, Swift complains to

the Lord of G.B. in 1712 that "our language is extremely imperfect"²¹

In spite of all these complains, the british could not institute their academy but could-instead- succeed to make the dictionary of the english language in 1755 which they found better than an academy - thank to the codifier Samuel Johnson who "reflects the sense of many 18th grammarians"²². Following Johnson's dictionary, the committee succeeds to complete the Oxford English Dictionary which "is based on more than five million excerpts from english literature"²³

So the period in the eighteenth century in Britain witnessed a "linguistic consciousness, when grammatical and rhetorical treatises multiplied and the first general dictionaries of English appeared"²⁴. It was a rich period which witnessed the development of the literary criticism, the appearance of many successful writers from the middle class who become professional - like Defoe the son of a butcher and Richardson who was himself a printer, Latin was totally neglected and replaced by the vernacular discourse, new words were borrowed and literature was always present to brave all the upheavels of change in English; From Shakespeare's plays in the renaissance and the poetry of Donne and Milton to the prose of the 18th century- presented by novelists like Defoe in Robinson Crusoe, Fielding in Tom Jones, Sterne in Tristram Shandy, and Richardson in Pamela.

It is thought that "the needs of the communication have an influence on the structure of the message"²⁵. Middle class writers wrote the concerns of middle class readers in the 18th century, but with the romantic movement in the early decades of 19th some romantists tend to use oral norms back to English in order to touch the great majority of the public who is not always educated, as

wrote W. Wordsworth in 1802 in the preface of *Lyrical Ballads*: "the principle object in these poems was to choose incidents ..from common life , and to relate or describe them, thoughtout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men"²⁶. This is why, the literary style of the the 19th century was more and more accessible for the reading audience – as the middle class grew more literate and the amount of illiteracy decreased.

As it is perceivable, literature has always been a rich document for the linguistic history for "there is rich material for the history of the english language in writers like Skelton , Nashe and Benjamin"²⁷. This evidently makes the relationship of literature with language a dialectical one and as F.W. Bateson has argued: " Literature is a part of the general history of language and is completely dependent on it"²⁸. These writers are more aware of the use of language with all its levels and systems even in the literary space in which the author's language "is made of a juxtaposition of elements which belong to a common language, regional language, literary language of the time"²⁹.

For this reason, writers- literary ones- highlight the use of the standard without neglecting the variety a person or another or he, himself, belongs to for the sake of being realistic and true , even in writing fiction : "the speech of a fictional character is often judged to be realistic if we feel that, it is an 'accurate' reflection of the usage of the class or region to which he or she is supposed to belong or a conversation within a novel can 'ring true' if we feel that at a deeper level it mirrors the patterns of spoken discourse"³⁰.

This is why, D. Crystal points out that the author's standard procedure in literature is to "incorporate into a work snatches or even extended extractions from the non-literary variety of English"³¹.

Many of the writers of victorianism and modernism succeed to be regional in writing the standard novel, especially Charles Dickens and D.H. Lawrence and Joyce, for they succeed to use dialects in a literary context, and serve all those modern dialects to be written down in a novel or a poem: "the speech of the Gamekeeper in *Lady Chatterley's lover*, or that of many of the characters of Dickens or of the regional novelists such as Joyce, indicates this point abundantly"³².

D.H. Lawrence -as well, succeeds to anticipate the researches of sociolinguists by half a century for we find "a continuum of marking practices where some characters (usually men) speak broad dialect, others standard English, and others who use a kind of general vernacular (characterized in part by such conventionalized forms as- in 'for the verbal suffix – ing')"³³.

British artists were aware that the only means to convey the literary message to the society is through an extended show of its culture, which is an important element of language because "culture is a complex entity including

knowledge, norms, values, beliefs, language, art and customs, as well as habits and skills learned by individuals as members of a given novel"³⁴.

This awareness of the use of dialect, next to the standard, in a literary context springs from the great concern researchers give to their dialect in purely scientific way which gives birth to a new science called 'Dialectology', especially after the publication of Jules Gilliéron's first linguistic atlas. Many dialectal studies begin to appear in England thank to many famous dialectologists, which only through their researches Dialectology was rooted as an objective science of dialect in England -as showed in table n° 4.

The author	The dialectological research	The year
John Ray	Collection of words not generally used	1674
Francis Grose	Provincial glossary	1787
Jameson	Etymological dictionary of the scottish language	1808-25
William Skeat	Foundation of the english dialect society	1873
Joseph Wright	English dialect dictionary	1898/1905

-table 4 : Chronological Evolution of Dialectology-

This great importance to Dialectology leads Skeat to comment in 1911 that "Certainly no other country can give so good an account (as England) of its dialects"³⁵

English - whether a variety or a standard- is a useful means to carry out different functions for both spoken and written, especially if we want to write literature in communicating with society.

¹ Dictionnaire de didactique des langues, R. Galisson /D. Coste, Hachette, 1976, p148.

² Dictionnaire de linguistique, Jean Dubois et autres, librairie Larousse, p149.

³ Introducing Language and Society, Peter Trudgill, Penguin Books, 1992, p5.

⁴ Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des sciences de langage, édition du seuil, 1972, p80

⁵ Languages of Britain, Glanvill Price, Great Britain, 1984, p182.

⁶ The English Language, W.F.Bolton and David Crystal, penguin books, 1993, p227, in The Early History of English, W.F.Bolton.

⁷ Ibid, p230

⁸ Languages of Britain, p174

⁹ Ibid, p175.

- ¹⁰ Ibid., p175
- ¹¹ English in its social context, Tim William Marchanand Charles T. Scott, new york , oxford university press, 1992,p118,in Style and Standardization in England:1700-1900,Edward Finegan.
- ¹² Languages of Britain, p182.
- ¹³ English in its SocialContext, p118.
- ¹⁴ Ibid,p118.
- ¹⁵ Ibid,p118.
- ¹⁶ TheEnglish Language, p312 : The Social Context of English :A Socio linguistic Approach to the language and Literature, Dick Leith
- ¹⁷ English in its Social Context,p120
- ¹⁸ Ibid,p119.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, p120.
- ²⁰ Ibid, p 121
- ²¹ Ibid,p 121
- ²² Ibid, p 121.
- ²³ Ibid,p 123
- ²⁴ Ibid,p 105.
- ²⁵ Linguistique et poétique, Daniel Delon et Jaques Filliolet, collection langue et langage, librairie larousse, 1973,p 197.
- ²⁶ English in its Social contexts,p 116.
- ²⁷ Theory of Literature, René Wellek and Austin Warren, Penguin Books, 1970,p 176
- ²⁸ Ibid, p 174
- ²⁹ Linguistique et poétique ,p 27
- ³⁰ The English Language , p 320
- ³¹ Ibid,p 211.
- ³² Ibid ,p 203/4
- ³³ Ibid, p 320
- ³⁴ Bilinguality and Bilingualism, Josiane F. Hamers and Michel H.A.Blanc, cambridge university press, 2000,p 198.
- ³⁵ Languages of Britain p 183