

Gastvortrag

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“As nearly as I could manage it, the tales are given in the very words of the narrators. I have hardly attempted to reproduce dialect”:

The use and avoidance of dialect in 19th-century English folklore collections

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Alle Interessierten sind herzlich willkommen!

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Folklore can provide a particularly interesting perspective on the use – and avoidance – of dialect and non-standard varieties. Popular culture par excellence and deliberately collected from the least educated classes (Lang 1884, 11), mostly at a time – in the 19th century – when they still spoke dialect, folklore could be expected a priori to be a particularly favourable domain for dialect. Yet, while there are some notable folklore collections in dialect such as Marie Clotilde Balfour's and Mabel Peacock's legends and folktales from Lincolnshire (Balfour 1891a, c, b; Peacock 1886), published 19th-century English folktale collections were often predominantly or exclusively in standard English. The folklorist and Sheffield dialectologist Sidney Oldhall Addy's statement in the introduction to his collection of tales from Yorkshire and the North Midlands – "[a]s nearly as I could manage it, the tales are given in the very words of the narrators. I have hardly attempted to reproduce dialect" (Addy 1895, ix) – encapsulates this fundamental paradox concerning the language of 19th-century English folktale collections. Despite a concern for authenticity, the original language or dialect of folklore was often not preserved.

This talk explores the use and avoidance of dialect in a self-compiled corpus of 14 English folklore publications from 1839 to 1898, including collections from different regions (e.g. Lancashire, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Suffolk, Devon) and national anthologies, altogether containing over 500 narratives. First, the different patterns of dialect use and avoidance are summarised, which range from the exclusive use of standard English to texts wholly in dialect, with various degrees of mixing of standard and dialect in between. The relatively common use of dialect in dialogue but standard in narrative (Baring-Gould 1877; Blakeborough 1898; Bowker 1883) is comparable to the phenomenon of *literary dialect* (Shorrocks 1996, 386; Beal 2006; Hodson 2017); it is argued that certain collectors and editors are likely to have been influenced by *literary dialect* – and literary models more generally – when rewriting folk and fairy tales. Moreover, various factors – commercial, practical, methodological, literary and ideological – are discussed, which may have impinged on the use or avoidance of dialect, examining debates on language and folklore collection methodology in contemporary meta- and paratexts, including introductions to and reviews of collections as well as other folklore publications. Finally, the talk zooms in on mini case studies.

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