

# A Synchronic Study of the Phonological Variants within the GOAT Lexical Set in the Dialect of Nineteenth-Century Lancashire

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**Abstract.** Literary-dialect works are useful tools for dialect study as they are characterized by the presence of deviant spellings based on semi-phonetic spellings of Standard English. This paper analyzes these spellings and their sounds within the GOAT lexical set in the dialect of nineteenth-century Lancashire, according to the classification that Wells (1982) provides for RP [əʊ]. For this purpose, we examined nineteen literary-dialect works. In this endeavor, the deviant spellings related to that RP diphthong were gathered and attributed to their realizations in the dialect. This paper discusses the coexistence of the different sounds related to RP [əʊ] considering historical and sociolinguistic reasons.

**Keywords:** Lancashire dialect; literary dialect; GOAT lexical set; deviant spellings; dialect pronunciations.

## 1. Introduction

Regional literature is considered a valuable source for dialect study (Sullivan, 1980, p. 21; Sánchez García, 2003; Ruano-García, 2007, p. 111; García-Bermejo Giner, 2010, p. 31). Dialect representation in literature is classified into two distinct approaches: dialect literature and literary dialect. The first type refers to those works that are wholly written in Standard English. As a result, dialect literature is mainly addressed to those readers who are familiar with the vernacular variety represented. Alternatively, literary-dialect works are principally composed in Standard English except the characters' dialogues, which are marked with the dialect as a means to stereotype their speech and to denote their low social status. One of the most remarkable characteristics of this type of representation is the presence of readable deviant spellings based on semi-phonetic spellings of Standard English; as a result, readers who are not familiar with the dialect represented would not find the reading cumbersome. As literary-dialect writers were not linguists or dialect experts, they were not thoroughly rigorous in dialect depiction as that was not their principal concern.

On the other hand, some scholars believe that literary-dialect works are useful tools for dialect study (Ruano-García, 2007, p. 111; Beal, 2011, p. 204). This is because literary-dialect works attempt at representing the pronunciations that were once typical in a determined regional variety. Thence, a meticulous analysis of the vernacular variety represented can provide scholars with a relevant insight into the linguistic features of a particular regional dialect. On the grounds of the significance of literary-dialect works for dialect study, this paper relies on them to examine the Lancashire vernacular variety.

This paper is framed within the synchronic study of the Lancashire dialect during the nineteenth century. Despite previous studies on this dialect (Ruano-García, 2007; Barras, 2015), the phonological aspects of this vernacular variety still remain unexplored, since research has mainly focused on the general linguistic phenomena of northern dialects or common dialect features of the Lancashire dialect. This paper attempts to broaden the scope of previous research by examining the different pronunciations that might have been in use in the dialect.

As a complete analysis of the Lancashire dialect would be beyond the scope of this study, this paper aims at examining the deviant spellings represented in nineteen different literary-dialect works and their possible conveyed sounds related to the GOAT lexical set, according to the classification that Wells (1982) provides for words related to the RP diphthong [əʊ]. This paper will also attempt to set out and explain the reasons for the different pronunciations and the coexistence of sounds within the same lexical set.

On addressing the synchronic research on the Lancashire dialect via the examination of several literary-dialect texts, two distinct issues arise. On the one hand, the works explored may show that the deviant spellings convey old realizations. This means archaic phonological forms that are likely to be found in dialect representation in literature. These old or archaic realizations were probably vanishing during the nineteenth century due to the influence and pressure of Standard English. As a result of this influence, there may simultaneously appear old or archaic sounds and novel forms. On the other hand, as literary-dialect authors were not completely rigorous in dialect depiction, they probably turned to stereotyped pronunciations as a means to denote the locality's vernacular of the characters represented in their works. These two factors may trigger the emergence of various dialect pronunciations for the GOAT lexical set.

This paper will discuss the possible coexistence of sounds by considering historical, dialectal and sociolinguistic reasons in order to tackle the two aforementioned issues. This procedure may help discern and ascertain those stereotype sounds illustrated in the literary-dialect texts and those probable pronunciations; the latter refer to the representation of real realizations, both archaic and novel forms, which were probably in use among Lancashire speakers during the nineteenth century.

## 2. Methodology

In order to study the sounds and spellings related to the GOAT lexical set, a corpus comprising nineteen literary-dialect works was compiled. The following table shows the different writers and their corresponding works selected to carry out the present research. As table 1 illustrates, nineteen different nineteenth-century literary-dialect texts written by five authors were selected.

<b>John Ackworth</b> (1854-1917)	<b>Benjamin Brierley</b> (1825-1896)	<b>Isabella Banks</b> (1821-1897)	<b>James Marshall Mather</b> (1851-1916)	<b>William Bury Westall</b> (1834-1903)
Beckside Lights (1897)	Gooin' to Cyprus (1850)	The Manchester Man (1876)	Lancashire Idylls (1895)	The Old Factory: A Lancashire Story (1881)
The Scowcroft Critics (1898)	The Layrock of Langley-Side: A Lancashire Story (1864)	Caleb Booth's Clerk: A Lancashire Story (1882)	The Sign of the Wooden Shoon (1896)	Ralph Norbreck's Trust (1885)
The Minder (1900)	Ab-Oth'-Yate at the Isle of Man (1869)	The Watchmaker's Daughter (1882)	By Roaring Loom (1898)	Birch Dene: A Novel (1889)
The Mangle House (1902)	The Three Buckleys: A Local Farce in One Act (1870)	Forbidden to Marry (1883)		
The Partners (1907)				

Table 1. Selected nineteenth-century writers and literary-dialect works for the corpus.

The majority of the novels studied were obtained from The Salamanca Corpus: Digital Archive of English Dialects.<sup>1</sup> The works *The Manchester Man*, *The Watchmaker's Daughter* and *Forbidden to Marry* were retrieved from the Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free and Borrowable Books.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the novel *By Roaring Loom* was collected from the resource *Minor Victorian Poets and Authors*.<sup>3</sup> The selection of the five writers was based on whether they were born in the county of Lancashire or found in the dialect their vehicle of communication in literature, as is the case of John Ackworth and James Marshall Mather.

The literary-dialect texts were chosen when they contained the representation of the Lancashire dialect. This is because some of the writers' novels are entirely composed in Standard English without any trace of dialect depiction.

As the dialect is merely employed to mark the discourse of the different characters portrayed in the literary works, this study principally focuses on their dialogues. As noted, literary-dialect works are a significant source to obtain linguistic information of a particular regional variety at a specific time. In this regard, García-Bermejo Giner (1999, p. 252) affirms that a comparison between

<sup>1</sup> The Salamanca Corpus is a free-access digital corpus comprising valuable documents representative of literary dialects and dialect literature. It is available at <http://www.thesalamancacorpus.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> This is a free-access digital repository containing a large number of documents, books, movies, etc. It is available at <https://archive.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Minor Victorian Poets and Authors* is a digital collection of texts composed in poetry and prose, the majority of which written in the Lancashire dialect. It is available at <https://minorvictorianwriters.org.uk/>.

the standard and the non-standard orthography is of great value when researchers attempt to approach a phonological study via literary-dialect texts.

In order to carry out this research, the different deviant spellings were taken as primary sources to relate them to the RP diphthong [əʊ]. Subsequently, these orthographical conventions were attributed to their possible sounds in the Lancashire dialect. After connecting the spellings with their corresponding pronunciations, this paper attempts at explaining the reasons for the different sounds that diverge from RP [əʊ].

### 3. Non-standard spellings and corresponding dialect sounds related to RP [əʊ]

This section tackles the analysis of the deviant spellings <ooa>, <oo>, <o + consonant + consonant>, <ow> and <oi>/<oy>, which relate to the standard English orthography <o + consonant + e>, <oa>, <oe>, <ou> and to RP diphthong [əʊ].

According to Wells (1982, p. 146), all words related to the GOAT lexical set derive from Middle English [ɔ:]. This monophthongal sound was later raised into [o:] by the Great Vowel Shift sound change and subsequently into the diphthongs [ɔʊ] and [əʊ].

The following table illustrates the different non-standard spellings and the terms containing them.<sup>4</sup> As the table shows, the number of words employed for each spelling varies substantively. Each of this table's rows comprise the total number of terms our corpus accounts for.

Deviant spellings	Words represented with the deviant spelling
<ooa>	<b>Alooan</b> ('alone'), <b>booan</b> ('bone'), <b>booath</b> ('boath'), <b>clooas</b> ('clothes'), <b>looad</b> ('load'), <b>ooath</b> ('oath'), <b>rooad</b> ('road'), <b>stooan</b> ('stone')
<oo>	<b>Goo</b> ('go'), <b>goin</b> ('going'), <b>thoose</b> ('those'), <b>smook</b> ('smoke')
<o + consonant + consonant>	<b>Brokken</b> ('broken'), <b>oppen</b> ('open'), <b>oppened</b> ('opened'), <b>oppens</b> ('opens'), <b>oppenin</b> ('opening'), <b>spokken</b> ('spoken')

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<sup>4</sup> The table contains the overall number of words found for the GOAT lexical set.

Deviant spellings	Words represented with the deviant spelling
<ow>	<b>Bowd</b> ('bold'), <b>cowd</b> ('cold'), <b>cowt</b> ('colt'), <b>gowd</b> ('gold'), <b>gowden</b> ('golden'), <b>howd</b> ('hold'), <b>owd</b> ('old'), <b>owder</b> ('older'), <b>rowl</b> ('role'), <b>sowl</b> ('soul'), <b>towd/t<sup>5</sup></b> ('told')
<oi>/<oy>	<b>Hoile / hoyle</b> ('hole'), <b>coile</b> ('coal'), pig- <b>hoile</b> ('pig-hole'), fire- <b>hoile</b> ('fire-hole'), <b>coil-pit</b> ('coalpit')

Table 2. Deviant spellings and their representation in words, according to the corpus.

### 3.1. Deviant spellings <ooa> and <oo>

These two deviant orthographical conventions are exemplified in the corpus as:

- (1) "Naa, then, thee let me alooan" ('Now, then, let me alone') (The Scowcroft Critics [Ackworth, 1898, p. 192, emphasis added]).
- (2) "I con do no good if I goo eaut" ('I can do no good if I go out') (The Three Buckleys: A Local Farce in One Act [Brierley, 1870, p. 13, emphasis added]).
- (3) "Jabe, wot wur it as yo' put upo' my fayther's stooan?" ('Jabe, what was it as you put upon my father's stone?') (The Manchester Man [Banks, 1876, p. 234, emphasis added]).

The literary spelling <ooa> seems to be more frequently represented than <oo> in the works studied. However, they are not exceptionally recurrent in our corpus, since both add up to twelve words.

The digraph <ooa> is regarded as a late Modern English innovation, which can be found in the counties of Yorkshire and Lancashire (García-Bermejo Giner et al., 2015, p. 149). Both <ooa> and <oo> would be phonetically related. Gimson (1980, p. 120) considers that <ooa> would suggest the diphthong [ʊə] as he connects <oo> with [u:] and <a> with [ə]; Clark (2004, p. 150) and Sánchez García (2003, p. 398) relate <oo> to the long back monophthong [u:].

The diphthongal sound [ʊə] and the monophthong [u:] are likely to have derived from Middle English [ɔ:]. Lass (1976, p. 89) points out that in Lancashire Old English [ɑ:] in words such as stone, rounded into [ɔ:] and Wakelin (1977, p. 89) asserts that [ʊə] and [u:] are reflexes of that Middle English back vowel. Wakelin (1977, p. 89) also explains that reflexes of Middle English [ɔ:] show that the outcome of the Great Vowel Shift [o:] raised to a position normally held by the [o:] type reflexes, particularly [u:], and that they may be characterized by an off-glide. Therefore, Wakelin's insight may explain the two pronunciations that the spellings <ooa> and <oo> convey.

### 3.2. Deviant spelling <o + consonant + consonant>

The spelling <o + consonant + consonant> is sampled in our corpus as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> This word is spelt with both final *t* and *d* (*towd* and *towt*) to mark the past simple and past participle.

- (4) “Tha’s brokken thi muther’s hert” (‘You’ve broken your mother’s heart’) (The Scowcroft Critics [Ackworth, 1898, p. 321, emphasis added]).
- (5) “Isn’t it toime thaa oppened thi maath?” (‘Isn’t it time you opened your mouth?’) (Beckside Lights [Ackworth, 1897, p. 101, emphasis added]).
- (6) “Hoo’s noather nice-favort nor nice-spokken” (‘She’s neither nice-favoured nor nice-spoken’) (The Mangle House [Ackworth, 1902, p. 91, emphasis added]).

As observed in Table 2, this literary convention is scarcely represented, since our corpus merely records six occurrences (of which four are forms of *open* (‘open’) and three types of words. According to Jones (1989, p. 30) and Sánchez García (2003, p. 369), the spelling <o + consonant + consonant> is a traditional orthographical convention, which, as claimed by the first scholar, would convey a monophthongal pronunciation, since the duplication of the consonant after the vowel involves vowel shortening (Jones 1989, p.30). This means that the terms recorded with this non-standard spelling would be pronounced with the monophthong [ɒ] in the Lancashire dialect.

Hoad (1986) and Sánchez García (2003, p. 369) indicate that the terms *broken*, *open* and *spoken* contained the Old English sound [ɒ]. In Standard English, this short vowel would have changed into [ɔ:] during the Middle English period due to Open Syllable Lengthening, and then into [o:] because of the Great Vowel Shift sound change, and finally into the diphthongs [ɔʊ] and [əʊ]. However, these phonological processes did not take place in the Lancashire dialect, since the suffix *-en* in these words (see Table 2) hindered the Open Syllable Lengthening sound change (Wright, 1898-1905).

### 3.3. Deviant spelling <ow>

As seen in Table 2, the non-standard spelling <ow> affects the standard orthography <ol + consonant> and it is evidenced in several words. As a complete insight into each term would be beyond the scope of this paper, this study focuses on the terms *bowd* (‘bold’), *cowd* (‘cold’), *cowt* (‘colt’), *gowd* (‘gold’), *howd* (‘hold’), *owd* (‘old’) and *towd* (‘told’). The following samples illustrate the use of the last three terms in the corpus:

- (7) “Howd thi tung, and talk abaat summat else nor angels” (‘Hold your tongue, and talk about something else than angels’) (The Sign of the Wooden Shoon [Mather, 1896, p. 59, emphasis added]).
- (8) “A’d rayther tell th’ owd chap than him” (‘I’d rather tell the old boy than him’) (Caleb Booth’s Clerk: A Lancashire Story [Banks, 1882, p. 156, emphasis added]).
- (9) “He said you towd him to come at four o’clock” (‘He said you told him to come at four o’clock’) (The Old Factory: A Lancashire Story [Westall, 1881, p. 105, emphasis added]).

All terms presented in this category show the absence of the consonant <l> in the spelling, which may suggest the absence of its phonological realization in the Lancashire dialect. Wright (1898-1905) argues that these terms can be pronounced with the diphthongs [aʊ] or [oʊ] in the dialect.

The omission of [l] in the Lancashire dialect is, as reported by Ihalainen (1994, p. 213), the result of the so-called l-vocalization. This phonological process is considered an enregistered trait in the depiction of northern variants, as exemplified in *auld*, *ould* and *owd* for “old” (García-Bermejo Giner et al., 2015, p. 137). This means that this linguistic trait is a socially recognized form within northern dialects.

### 3.4. Deviant spelling <oi>/<oy>

The deviant spelling <oi>/<oy> is uniquely represented in two distinct words and three related forms (see Table 2). The following instances exemplify the use of words containing <oi>/<oy> in the corpus:

- (10) “Th’ ends kept breaking that fast as I fair thought it wor snowing i’ th’ hoile”  
 (“The ends kept breaking that fast as I fair thought it was snowing in the hole”  
 (The Old Factory: A Lancashire Story [Westall, 1881, p. 20, emphasis added]).
- (11) “if thaa talks to me like that, Harry, aw’ll pitch thee daan i’ th’ fire-hoile” (‘if  
 you talk to me like that, Harry, I’ll pick you down in the fire-hole’) (By Roaring  
 Loom [Mather, 1898, p. 49, emphasis added]).

The non-standard grapheme <oi>/<oy> is associated with the diphthong [ɔɪ]. Sánchez García (2003, p. 411) attributes the spelling to that diphthongal sound in words related to RP [əʊ] and exemplifies it in the word “hoil”. Wright (1898-1905) records the diphthong [ɔɪ] for “hole” but with [h] dropping in northern, southern, south-eastern and Lancashire. Regarding the term “coal”, Wright includes the same diphthong in the areas of middle, middle-southern, and southern Lancashire.

The words “coal” and “hole” are documented by Hoad (1986) with the Old English monophthong [ɔ]. However, the reasons for the dialect diphthong [ɔɪ] seem to be uncertain. The unique explanation for this dialect sound is provided by Wells (1982, p. 208) but only for those sounds deriving from the RP diphthong [aɪ].

## 4. Analysis of the coexistence of sounds related to the GOAT lexical set

The study of words related to the RP diphthong [əʊ] or the GOAT lexical set has revealed different spellings, <ooa>, <oo>, <o + consonant + consonant>, <ow> and <oi>/<oy>, which correspond to the dialect sounds [ʊə], [u:], [ɒ], [aʊ] and [ɔɪ], respectively. Therefore, this paper yielded the coexistence of five different sounds for the same lexical set. By taking into account the number of words containing a particular deviant spelling (see Table 2), the frequency of a sound can be observed. This means, the higher the number of words containing a particular orthographical convention, the more frequent or usual the conveyed sound was during the nineteenth century in Lancashire.

As Table 2 shows, the sounds [ʊə] and [u:], which share an identical linguistic origin, are represented by <ooa> (eight words) and <oo> (four words), respectively. This may involve that [ʊə] was more frequent than the long sound. The pronunciation [u:] may have been recessive during the nineteenth century due to the limited number of instances attested in the corpus. The monophthong



[ɒ] is barely recorded in the corpus, as it is only evidenced in *brokken*, *oppen* and *spokken*, and the forms *oppens* and *opened*. This scant frequency would illustrate the unusual and regressive character of this monophthongal realization in the nineteenth-century Lancashire dialect. The fact that [ʊə], [u:] and [ɒ] are direct outcomes of regular diachronic sound changes would mean that they were probable and real sounds that were probably used among Lancashire speakers but were vanishing during the nineteenth century, as suggested by the scant data the corpus provides.

Table 2 shows that the diphthong [aʊ] with the absence of [l] is represented in twelve terms in total. The omission of the liquid consonant, which is an enregistered trait in the depiction of northern dialects, would serve for characterization purposes in order to mark and stereotype the characters' speech.

The diphthong [ɔɪ], which is the least represented sound in the corpus with only two words containing its corresponding spelling <oi>/<oy>, would at first suggest the unusual characteristic of this sound in the Lancashire dialect. This view is reinforced by the fact that merely two writers, John Ackworth and James Marshall Mather, employ the two words containing this sound. The diphthong [ɔɪ], which is historically unexplained, is according to Blake (1965, as cited in Sánchez García, 2003, p. 316) and Braber and Flynn (2015, p. 383) a vulgar realization typically assigned to the speech of working-class and rural speakers. The uncertain historical origins and the stereotyped quality of the diphthong [ɔɪ] would involve the atypical or unusual form of this realization. As a consequence, this diphthong was not a probable pronunciation of Lancashire speakers in the nineteenth century.

The coexistence of [ʊə], [u:], [ɒ], [aʊ] and [ɔɪ] is concerned with two distinct aspects. The first one alludes to the historical outcomes [ʊə], [u:] and [ɒ]. They were probably used for marking the usual pronunciations of words such as “bone”, “open” or “those” among Lancashire speakers but were in regression in the nineteenth century. The second aspect deals with characterization purposes. The diphthongs [aʊ] and [ɔɪ] in words such as “hold” and “hole”, respectively, are stereotypical pronunciations to denote the characters' low status.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper's main aim was the analysis of sounds and spellings related to the RP diphthong [əʊ] in the Lancashire dialect during the nineteenth century. The study has revealed five deviant spellings, i.e., <ooa>, <oo>, <o + consonant + consonant>, <ow> and <oi>/<oy> and, as a result, a coexistence of different pronunciations [ʊə], [u:], [ɒ], [aʊ] and [ɔɪ], respectively, for the GOAT lexical set.

The concurrence of sounds within the GOAT lexical set is not arbitrary, but it is based on historical reasons and characterization purposes. The first concept refers to the realizations [ʊə], [u:] and [ɒ], which were probable sounds in the county of Lancashire, since they are the result of a series of regular sound changes that diverged from Standard English. However, the scant number of words containing these sounds, especially the two monophthongs, would imply the regressive property of these pronunciations. The second concept alludes to the stereotypical character of the diphthongs [aʊ] and [ɔɪ] as a means to denote both



the geographical location and the low social status of the characters represented in the literary-dialect texts. This entails that literary-dialect writers linked the speech of working-class characters with those pronunciations that were considered vulgar or representative of a specific area.

Although this paper solely covered sounds and spellings related to the GOAT lexical set, this research expects to shed some light on the pronunciations that were once in use in the county of Lancashire during the nineteenth century. It is hoped that further research is carried out in order to increase the knowledge and understanding of this vernacular variety.

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