

Internet signals end of an era for Yorkshire dialect

By Ian Herbert, Sunday, 4 July 2007

¹ There was a time when every self-respecting Yorkshireman knew that an attercop was hard to find in blashy – but not any more, according to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which commissioned research on the fast disappearing dialect of God's own county.

² The results of the research form an exhibition that has opened in the Dales Countryside Museum, in Hawes, Wensleydale, West Yorkshire. The project, which included college students recording conversations with men and women aged 18 and over, revealed that words commonly used in the Dales just two generations ago were now a mystery to many young people. Attercop, which, incidentally, translates as spider, and blashy, which means wet weather, have evidently long gone.

³ 'Unfortunately, the Yorkshire dialect is a bit sparse – the day could not be far off when we all use the same words wherever we come from,' said Jo Cremins, the co-ordinator of the £20,000 project. Miss Cremins, who lectures in English at Craven College, in Skipton, West Yorkshire, added: 'We asked people, for example, what

they called a baby, or what word they used for tired. Many just gave us a peculiar look and said 'We call a baby a baby.' Fewer people are coming back with dialect words. People do still recognise dialect words, even if they don't use them themselves. They remember their parents or grandparents saying them, but that is transient because the next generation won't have heard them at all and the words will be lost.'

⁴ Miss Cremins, who was born in Yorkshire, believes there are two main reasons for the words vanishing from Yorkshire vocabularies – and the prime culprit is new media. 'There is a worry now with the Internet, texting and the media that things are becoming diluted and watered down,' she said. 'An international language is coming in, the sort of thing everybody speaks and can understand.'

⁵ 'Words which were specific to individual communities are being lost because these communities are not as isolated as they once were. I don't think people stop using them because they are embarrassed by the possibility of not being

understood – although there was a time when children were corrected and made to use the standard English word – but perhaps it's a desire to fit in, picking up what is used on the television and not wanting to stand out.'

'An international language is coming in'

⁶ She also blamed changes in the Dales way of life. 'There's a whole farming vocabulary which has disappeared with mechanisation. Words which began life as farming terms and then got taken up into the general language have passed out of use. We have to work really hard to preserve this, but it is difficult as language is changing all the time.'

⁷ Recordings made by students of conversations using the vanishing words form part of the exhibition. 'Listeners can hear them in context and perhaps understand better what the words mean,' Miss Cremins said. 'It's good that we can make them available for people to ➡'

English in Mind Second edition

Level 4 Unit 9

Article

THE  INDEPENDENT

➡ hear still, but whether they are used or not is a very different thing; usage is going.'

⁸ However, while the words might be vanishing, the distinctive accent Yorkshire people used to speak them is safe. 'While some regional accents are derided, some people told us they put their accent on even more whenever they are away from Yorkshire,' Miss Cremins said. 'It is something to be proud of.'

⁹ Arnold Kellett, of the Yorkshire Dialect Society, also believes dialect has been replaced by 'local speech', which retains the accent

and intonation of dialect but hardly any of the vocabulary. 'Speakers of real, authentic dialect are an endangered species. Education – or lack of it, social and geographical mobility, electronic globalisation, the mediafication of language, the growth of rap and "Estuary English" have taken their toll on traditional "Broad Yorkshire,"' he said.

Disappearing words

* Just as the South Yorkshire floods struck, blashy, a word for wet weather, disappeared.

* Tykes are not prone to shows of flashiness which might explain why fufflement (showy clothes) has vanished.

* The word yocken describes an activity relished for many a year before the word disappeared: to eat or drink with enjoyment.

* It is surprising that a county allegedly famous for penny-pinching should not take this activity seriously but addle – to earn – has also gone. ■