

## Preserving Regional English Dialects in Poetry

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### Abstract

This study examined how regional English dialects are used and represented in three selected poems: *"To a Mouse"* by Robert Burns, *"The Shepherd's Calendar (April)"* by John Clare, and *"The North Ship"* by Philip Larkin. This research focuses on how dialects reflect social and cultural identities and how they contribute to the authenticity of each poem. Using content analysis, this study identified explicit and implicit dialect features in poetry, including vocabulary, pronunciation patterns, tone, and atmosphere. The findings suggest that Burns and Clare use clear dialect markers that represent the voices of rural communities and the working class, while Larkin expresses regional identities more subtly through imagery and mood rather than linguistic forms. The use of dialects not only creates authenticity but also amplifies emotional resonance, preserves cultural values, and adds musicality to poetic expression. This study highlights the role of dialects as a meaningful linguistic feature in literature and suggests the importance of incorporating dialect-based texts in language learning to increase cultural awareness.

**Keywords:** *dialects, poetry, cultural identity, regional English, literary analysis*

### Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti bagaimana dialek bahasa Inggris regional digunakan dan diwakili dalam tiga puisi pilihan: *"To a Mouse"* oleh Robert Burns, *"The Shepherd's Calendar (April)"* oleh John Clare, dan *"The North Ship"* oleh Philip Larkin. Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana dialek mencerminkan identitas sosial dan budaya dan bagaimana hal itu berkontribusi pada keaslian setiap puisi. Dengan menggunakan analisis konten, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi fitur dialek eksplisit dan implisit dalam puisi, termasuk kosakata, pola pengucapan, nada, dan suasana. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Burns dan Clare menggunakan penanda dialek yang jelas yang mewakili suara komunitas pedesaan dan kelas pekerja, sementara Larkin mengekspresikan identitas regional secara lebih halus melalui citra dan suasana hati daripada bentuk linguistik. Penggunaan dialek tidak hanya menciptakan keaslian tetapi juga memperkuat resonansi emosional, melestarikan nilai-nilai budaya, dan menambah musikalitas pada ekspresi puisi. Studi ini menyoroti peran dialek sebagai fitur linguistik yang bermakna dalam sastra dan menyarankan pentingnya memasukkan teks berbasis dialek dalam pembelajaran bahasa untuk meningkatkan kesadaran budaya.

**Kata kunci:** *dialek, puisi, identitas budaya, bahasa Inggris daerah, analisis sastra*

## Introduction

Scientifically, *the term "dialect"* refers to a variety of languages that include differences in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.<sup>1</sup> Trudgill explained that in many important ways, one dialect can be so different from another, that some people may be surprised that it is still called a dialect. Meyerhoff (2006) defines dialect as a variation of language influenced by a particular speaker, region, or social group.<sup>2</sup> Kurniawan, Zahiyah, Anjani, and Maharani (2025) added that pronunciation differences often occur due to regional origin and social status. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015:38) emphasize that dialect is a subordinate form of a language; for example, Texas English and Swiss German are considered dialects of English and German, respectively. Learning dialects is important because it can comprehensively reflect the social, cultural, and geographic identities of the speaking community.

Research on dialects has made an important contribution to understanding the relationship between language variation and the learning process. A study by Ibraheem, Mohammed, and Anber (2025) explored how the *dialects "Gilit" and "Qiltu"* affect students' understanding of the English language spoken by people from different cultural backgrounds and dialects in Anbar Province, Iraq. The results of the study show that dialect differences between students can affect their ability to understand spoken material in a foreign language. A classic study by William Labov found that since World War II, the use of non-prevocal /r/, has increased among upper-middle-class speakers in New York. These findings suggest that how people pronounce /r/ may reflect social status and prestige perceptions.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Andreassen and Kjelaas (2025) studied how VET teachers' dialect usage affects the participation of newly arrived students. Their findings highlight not only linguistic challenges, but also pedagogical and ideological issues in multilingual education in Norway.<sup>4</sup> Previous studies have mainly focused on the impact of dialects on English comprehension and communication issues in education, as well as the use of dialects by teachers in multilingual classrooms and the social dimension of dialect use rather than from a student's perspective. Instead, this research focuses on the analysis of regional English dialects through poetry as a form of illustration and linguistic expression. Therefore, this research is considered new because it combines literature and language preservation, which has not been a major focus in previous research. Based on that, this study raises the following questions: (1) How does the use of dialects in poetry affect social and cultural identity? (2) Does the use of dialects in poetry

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<sup>1</sup> M. Taufiq Hidayat Pabbajah, Kaharuddin, and St. Fauziah, "Dialectological Studies on Variations of Lahjah Arabiyah: Revealing Linguistic and Cultural Diversity," *Al-Fakkaar: Arabic Language Education Journal* 5, no. 2 (2024): 56–70, <https://e-jurnal.unisda.ac.id/index.php/ALF/article/view/6959/3209>.

<sup>2</sup> Social Scope and Sociolinguistic Language, "Analysis of the Use of Arabic Variations of Fusha and 'Amiyah in the Sociolinguistic Scope," *Al-Fathin: Journal of Arabic Language and Literature* 7, no. 2 (2024): 45–57, <https://e-jurnal.unisda.ac.id/index.php/ALF/article/view/6959/3209>.

<sup>3</sup> Heni Mawarni, "Analysis of the Function and Old Meaning (Traditional Poetry) of the People of Sumbawa Regency, West Nusa Tenggara," *CENDEKIA: Journal of Science* 2, no. 2 (2022): 133–42, <https://doi.org/10.51878/cendekia.v2i2.1153>.

<sup>4</sup> Bayu Ardi Isnanto, "The Application of the Jigsaw Method in Learning to Write Poetry Texts in Class X Students in Semester II of Smk Nasyrul Ulum Gegesik for the 2022/2023 Academic Year," *Secondsteproperty* 2, no. 2 (2023): 119–21, <https://transpublika.co.id/ojs/index.php/JRPP/article/view/566/443>.

strengthen or weaken students' perception of the authenticity of the work?

### Research Methods

This study uses a content analysis method to examine the use of dialects in three poems that originate from different periods and cultural backgrounds, namely Robert Burns's "For the Rat" (1785), John Clare's "Shepherd's Calendar (April)" (1827), and Philip Larkin's "Northern Ship" (1945). The three poems were chosen purposively because they contain strong dialectal elements, which serve not only as linguistic devices, but also as markers of social, geographical, and cultural identity. Through content analysis, this study explores how the dialects in each poem shape the nuances of locality and reflect the life experiences of poets in their respective environments. In Robert Burns' poems, the Scots dialect used is not just a style of language, but an authentic medium that expresses the poet's closeness to the Scottish working-class people, as well as giving it a distinctive emotional colour. Meanwhile, John Clare displays a rural English dialect that depicts agrarian life and the perspective of rural people in the 19th century.

The choice of words, sentence structure, and local idioms Clare uses confirm her deep attachment to the community and rural landscape in which she grew up. In contrast to the two, Philip Larkin in "*The Northern Ship*" uses a more subtle and selective dialectic form. Larkin draws on linguistic variations to assert the shift in post-war regional identity and shows a longing for traditional values that are beginning to fade. The dialect in his poem is a tool to show the tension between modernity and nostalgia, while at the same time giving an additional layer of meaning to the melancholy atmosphere that he wants to build. Overall, this study reveals that the use of dialects in the three poems not only strengthens the authenticity of the work, but also reflects the social and cultural realities of each poet's time. Thus, dialects serve as a bridge that connects the text of poetry with the historical context, local identity, and daily life of the people represented in it.

### Results and Discussion

#### A. Definition of Dialect

Dialects are variations of different languages based on speakers, specific regions, or specific social groups. It is a form of language that has regional or social features in its vocabulary and/or grammar, along with pronunciation differences (Holmes & Wilson, 2022: 672). According to Boga (2020), one common way to define a dialect is to look broadly at it as a subclass of languages: "One of the common ways of definition is that dialects, broadly speaking, are subclasses of languages."<sup>5</sup>More specifically, the term dialect refers to a type of language that differs in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Trudgill, 2000:5). If many Americans today say "*The way is still long*," while the British always say "*The way is still long*," it is because some parts of the United States inherited the *form of "way"* from Northern Ireland. And obviously, the story doesn't end there. We need to realize that there is no area on the east coast of America that is inhabited exclusively by people from only one particular region of the British Isles. The important point is that no matter where English was brought to North America, in the early years of settlement, there was always a large mix of dialects.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Yunidar Nur, "Mutual Understanding Between Kaili Language Dialects in Palu Valley," *Journal of Language and Literature* 94118, no. 3 (2010), <https://ejournal.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/humbud/article/view/621/pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Nur.

People from different parts of England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (most of Wales and Southern Ireland at the time did not speak English) gathered in the same community while bringing their own *regional dialects*. The dialects that were separated hundreds of miles in their homeland suddenly mixed and used side by side every day. So, one of the reasons why American English became what it is today is because of this mixture of dialects.<sup>7</sup> And the reason why different dialects are popping up in different places along the east coast of the United States is because a mix of different English dialects is coming together in different areas. One thing that may happen quite quickly after the first settlement in America is a process called *dialect leveling*, which we talked about earlier. This mixed dialect situation may not last more than a generation or two, and eventually, people in each particular place will eliminate the differences from their native dialects and start speaking one common dialect.

### C. Dialect Characteristics

According to Khalilia, Bella, Freihat, Darma, & Giunchiglia (2023), dialects often have a unique vocabulary to express certain concepts, especially in family relationships, that are not found in other dialects. For example, in the Algerian Arabic dialect, there is a word "*maazoozi*" which means "*younger brother*", but this word has no direct equivalent in the Gulf Arabic dialect. This shows that many concepts in one dialect do not have the exact meaning in another dialect or language, which often leads to errors in translation, whether made by people or machines. In addition, dialects also have their own way of classifying family relationships. Some even distinguish between brothers who have the same father, the same mother, full siblings, or siblings who are breastfed by the same mother. These differences reflect the values and social structure of the people who use this dialect.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, different social structures such as matriarchal and patriarchal societies also affect the details of kinship terms. For example, patriarchal societies tend to have a richer set of terms for male relatives. In addition to social factors, history also plays an important role in shaping dialect vocabulary. Some dialects show influence from foreign languages due to colonialism or cultural interaction for example, Egyptian dialects have many words influenced by the Ottoman Turks. Even so, some dialects still have similarities in kinship vocabulary. However, the level of similarity is relatively low. Studies of Arabic dialects show that the average overlap in kinship vocabulary between dialects is only about 47.1%, which indicates a fairly high level of variation between them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Pradipta Nurhuda, Zainal Rafli, and Siti Ansoriyah, "Comparison of the Javanese Lexicon of the Malang Dialect and the Javanese Language of the Blitar Dialect," *Bastrindo Journal: A Study of Indonesian Language and Literature Education* 2, no. 2007 (n.d.): 125–37.

<sup>8</sup> Characteristics and, Uniqueness of Dialect, and City Society, "National Seminar on Indonesian Language and Literature," *Samasta Proceedings*, 2021, <https://jurnal.umj.ac.id/index.php/SAMASTA/article/view/554> – 560.

<sup>9</sup> Abdul Kamaruddin et al., "The Value of Character Education in the Expression of the Kaili Language of the Rai Dialect," *Machinery: Journal of Literary Studies* 11 (2022): 399–409, [https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/116627377/1999-libre.pdf?1720355571=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DNilai\\_Pendidikan\\_Karakter\\_dalam\\_Ungkapan.pdf&Expires=1764497600&Signature=Y~dYNbfWnMGNXhFVHpPvpeoJLd0z8c0tGtbjgRXWDF-rrJYdI3dPqG7NIJmIkZpSL3UwKc13NeTfQoTYHbbxTnD0kLGAZvXxfHaKAZNsGUqrQODAHjRNEOMo35tq4N~2KgIl121Ffs2hNfISjV2To2lCPusYolFSwdZAIswHjS~TLDII3ImxaLgVYv6SoxNvYxt84aWeYZlGGjubgVqa0aipdn65H9sPqjoz3LONtSP~e0eDm7pnC4QWxvrLjwf3OFMBIWUPt-](https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/116627377/1999-libre.pdf?1720355571=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DNilai_Pendidikan_Karakter_dalam_Ungkapan.pdf&Expires=1764497600&Signature=Y~dYNbfWnMGNXhFVHpPvpeoJLd0z8c0tGtbjgRXWDF-rrJYdI3dPqG7NIJmIkZpSL3UwKc13NeTfQoTYHbbxTnD0kLGAZvXxfHaKAZNsGUqrQODAHjRNEOMo35tq4N~2KgIl121Ffs2hNfISjV2To2lCPusYolFSwdZAIswHjS~TLDII3ImxaLgVYv6SoxNvYxt84aWeYZlGGjubgVqa0aipdn65H9sPqjoz3LONtSP~e0eDm7pnC4QWxvrLjwf3OFMBIWUPt-)

Dialects also have weaknesses. According to Walker, speaking the language is generally seen as more prestigious than speaking the dialect. In Chinese, for example, there are various branches of languages such as Chinese, Wu, Min, and Yue that do not understand each other. One of the main challenges is the lack of mutual understanding between dialects, which can make national communication difficult. On the other hand, using dialects in education has several important advantages. Learning becomes more effective and successful when it is done in a variety of languages that students are familiar with—that is, the dialects they use in their daily lives. It helps students understand the material more deeply and meaningfully (Deep Learning). Additionally, using students' native dialects in the classroom supports their social, cognitive, emotional, and language development—both inside and outside of school. Dialects also play a key role in shaping students' cultural identities. When local dialects are included in the learning process, it can help improve their social status in society and prevent them from disappearing. In other words, the use of dialects in education not only enriches students' learning experiences but also reinforces their cultural values and sense of identity.

#### **D. Use of Dialects in Poetry**

The poem *"For the Mouse"* by Robert Burns (1785) prominently displays the Scottish dialect, as seen in the opening line: *"Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie."* These words mean: *"wee"* (small), *"Sleekit"* (cunning or fast), and *"Cowrin"* (shrinking fear). This line introduces the unique voice of the Scottish commoners. Using the local language of the working class, especially the peasants, Burns gave a voice to those who were often left out of standard English literature. The dialect here is not only a form of expression, but also represents culture and resistance to the dominance of formal English, which often symbolizes power and the upper class. Through his choice of words, Burns expresses social and emotional solidarity with ordinary people and even small creatures such as rats, demonstrating empathy and equality. John Clare's *"Shepherd's Calendar (April)"* (1827) also avoided standard English. Rather, it reflects the way people from Northamptonshire live and speak. For example, in the line: *"The shepherd walks in his pasture / The first beautiful cow throw finds,"*<sup>10</sup>

Clare not only depicts nature and the seasons, she also shows the daily life of farmers, using a language close to a rural dialect. Its simple vocabulary and sentence structure reflect the way the locals speak, not the formal language of the city. Through this, Clare preserves and celebrates the culture of the farming community, which was often overlooked by the social changes and industrialisation of the 19th century. In this way, his poems become a kind of cultural archive, a quiet protest in which dialects represent cultural identity and pride. In *"The Northern Ship"* (1945), Philip Larkin unclearly uses the local dialect. However, if we look deeper, he still carries the social and cultural identity of northern England through mood, tone, and symbolism in his poems. Although the language is standard English, Larkin captures the character of the quiet, stubborn, reserved, and thoughtful northerner. One part of the poem reads: *"The third ship sailed northward, / Over the sea, the dark sea, / But no wind came out, / And the*

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GjhLR2IBitkAkVe1AoV3FAKA2F0xCKa0oP90nal7Lg\_\_&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA.

<sup>10</sup> Yulitin Sungkowati, "Social Criticism in Surabaya Dialect of Javanese Poetry," *Journal of Freedom*, 2016, <https://jurnalbebasan.ppjbsip.com/bebasan/index.php/home/article/view/44/38>.

*decks shone coldly.*" This piece depicts the cold, dark sea and the sense of silence, reflecting the harsh and harsh life of the North. Even though he doesn't use spelling or dialect pronunciation, we can still feel the sound of the region through his choice of words and atmosphere. Through these cold and sharp images, Larkin captures not only the post-war geography of the Humber and Yorkshire, but also the spirit and lifestyle of his working-class people. His poetry calmly but powerfully expresses the emotional landscape of Northern England.<sup>11</sup>

### **E. The Function of Using Dialects in Poetry**

While reading "*For the Mouse*" (1785) by Robert Burns, many modern readers may find it a bit difficult at first due to the Scottish dialect, which sounds unfamiliar. But that's where the charm lies. The language is so unique and clear that the poem feels authentic, almost like you can hear his voice and imagine the poet's residence. This is not common. This helps the reader better understand the cultural background and way of life that Burns describes through his poems. Meanwhile, in "*The Shepherd's Calendar (April)*" (1827), John Clare uses a local dialect that may seem unusual or too casual to some younger readers today. But that's what makes the poem feel as honest and real as having a conversation with someone from the countryside in the past. Through this rural colloquial, Clare shows a farm life rarely represented in mainstream poetry. For those who study his work, it is not only about learning the dialect, but also being a window into 19th-century English village life. While it may take some getting used to at first, the use of dialects adds a deeper meaning and sincerity to Clare's message. On the other hand, "*The Northern Ship*" (1945) by Philip Larkin uses standard English, making it generally easier to read. However, even without the direct use of local dialects, the mood of the poem strongly reflects the calm, slightly gloomy, and reflective feeling of Northern England. Larkin doesn't need local words to make his poems feel regional. In fact, through the simplicity of the language, the reader can still feel the strong cultural and emotional background in each line.<sup>12</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This study analyzes the use and meaning of local English dialects in poetry, focusing on three selected poems: "*For the Rats*" by Robert Burns, "*The Shepherd's Calendar (April)*" by John Clare, and "*The Northern Ship*" by Philip Larkin. These findings confirm that dialects play an important role in describing social and cultural identities. Through lexical and syntactic elements with explicit strategies, and through tone and symbolism in a more implicit way, these poems show how dialects can be used to represent the daily lives, values, and identities of regional communities. Burns and Clare directly express working-class voices using clear dialect features, while Larkin subtly conveys regional identity through mood and imagery rather than the use of direct dialect.

In addition, the study found that the use of dialects in poetry reinforces a sense of authenticity and enhances the emotional connection between the reader and the cultural background of the poem. Using local language customs not only helps preserve linguistic

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<sup>11</sup> Nur Faizatul Ulya et al., "Quraysh Dialect in Linguistic Studies: Its Role in the Development of Pre-Islamic Arabic," *Phonology: Journal of English Language and Literature* 3 (2025), <https://journal.aspirasi.or.id/index.php/Fonologi/article/view/1545/1808>.

<sup>12</sup> Mawarni, "Analysis of the Function and Old Meaning (Traditional Poetry) of the People of Sumbawa Regency, West Nusa Tenggara."

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diversity but also challenges the dominance of standard English, giving poetic legitimacy to vernacular expression. Interestingly, the study also found that dialect plays a key role in adding musicality and aesthetic rhythm to poetry, unexpected elements that make the reading experience more engaging through sound patterns and rhythms, as seen in the rhythmic Scottish expressions used by Burns. Finally, dialects in poetry do not diminish literary comprehension or value; rather, it enhances both. It affirms identity, preserves culture, and deepens the poetic experience. These findings suggest that the use of dialects in literature should be encouraged not only as a form of artistic expression, but also as a valuable teaching tool to promote linguistic sensitivity, inclusivity, and cultural awareness in language learning and literary studies.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the use of local dialects in literary works, especially poetry, should be preserved and further integrated into language education. Language teachers and educators can use dialect poetry as a tool to help students build cross-cultural understanding and linguistic identity. In addition, educational institutions should provide a space for students to express themselves using their own dialect in literary activities, in order to strengthen emotional connections and appreciation for linguistic diversity. Researchers can also extend this research by involving students' responses to dialect poems to assess their comprehension, emotional reactions, and learning motivations. Preserving dialects through poetry not only enriches the language, but also reinforces local cultural values in a global context.

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