

# The Purpose of Dialect in Charles Dickens's Novel *Great Expectations*

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## Abstract

In this study, I was interested in finding out what purpose dialects serve in Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*. I used Susan Ferguson's notions on ficto-linguistics and Peter Stockwell's ideas on invented language to create the theoretical background for my study. The analysis focused on three characters of the novel, namely Joe Gargery, Abel Magwitch, and Pip. I examined what role dialect – in the case of Pip, the lack of one – plays in the character construction of these three characters. Additionally I analysed the dialects in relation to the major themes of the novel.

The findings of this study suggest, that Dicken's used dialect to both individualise characters and to bind them to a certain groups, which can mostly be defined by social status. The dialects also help make the themes of social mobility, gentility, social injustice, and expectations in relation to reality more tangible.

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# 1. Introduction

Writing English in dialect has long roots in English literary history. In the times of Old English, all writing was in dialect because there simply was not a standardized version of English in which to write. After written English was standardised, writing in dialect (or non-standard English) became commonly used as a tool for characterization in literature. Writers from Chaucer to Shakespeare used dialect as an easy way of creating comical characters. During the Victorian era, the traditional convention was to use dialect for characters that were somehow comical or even morally deprived. The Victorians defined two “rules” concerning writing dialect in literature that were at the time widely accepted: (1) inaccuracy in dialect writing is to be understood and accepted, and (2) sometimes writers could elevate characters of especially virtuous nature simply by having them speak in Standard English (Ferguson, 1998). Victorian writers, such as Charles Dickens, would have been aware of these conventions, however, they did not always write according to them.

Charles Dickens, the world-renowned Victorian novelist, is known for the dialect usage in his novels. Although praised for his incredibly varying dialogue writing, Dickens has been criticized for misrepresenting English regional dialects, the use of which G. L. Brook describes as “rather sketchy” (1970, p. 117). Norman Page (1973) describes Dickens’s dialect writing to be almost reporter-like in accuracy in several points of his book *Speech in the English Novel*, but then calls his rendering of dialect “frankly selective and at times casual” (p. 62). It is certainly true that – just as Brook argues – Dickens’s command on the actual regional dialects of England is not nearly as impeccable as his command on London English, and – just as Page suggests – his dialect rendering is often inconsistent, but in this study my aim is not to examine the actual rendering of Dickens's character's speech. Instead, my aim is to find out if the dialects Dickens uses in *Great Expectations* serve any specific purpose, and if they are appropriate for the characters in the context of the fictional world of the novel. As such, I am not interested in the literary dialects’ relationship with real dialects. Additionally, I try to explain how the dialects of characters can be closely connected to the main themes of the novel and actually make them more tangible.

To achieve this I attempted to analyse the dialect usage in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* by answering the following questions: How does Dickens use dialect to construct characters? And what role does dialect play in shedding light on the major themes of the novel? In my analysis (section 5), I examine the dialects of three of the novel's characters, Joe Gargery, Abel Magwitch, and Pip in order to answer these questions. In Pip’s case, I discuss the main character's *lack of*

dialect and offer some explanations for Dickens's choice. I analysed the data relying on the theoretical approach of ficto-linguistics (a concept coined by Susan Ferguson in *Drawing Fictional Lines: Dialect and Narrative in The Victorian Novel* in 1998). The concept will be explained in the theory section of my thesis. Furthermore, I will relate Peter Stockwell's notions on invented language (Stockwell, 2006) to ficto-linguistics. The method I used in this study could perhaps be called critical literary analysis, though I did not follow any specific guidelines. As such, my thesis is based mainly on my own thoughts and analysis on the matter, though I do reference other researchers, mainly to prove my study's validity and credibility. I explain my method in section 5 of my thesis.

The reason I chose to study dialect in *Great Expectations* is simple: I wanted to study dialect usage in literature, since I have been interested in the matter for quite some time. I chose to study *Great Expectations* (from now on sometimes referred to as GE) specifically because it happens to be one of my favourite pieces of literature. I also wanted to study something that is not contemporary for my first research, as I feel I would have to have a bit more experience to, for example, delve into the representation of AAVE (African American Vernacular English) in contemporary literature (though I do refer to research relating to the matter in this paper). Fortunately, I could not find studies that focused on GE specifically (most focussed on *Bleak House*, *David Copperfield*, and *Little Dorrit*), so my study is worthwhile in the sense that the focus on GE hopefully led to a more thorough analysis. Furthermore, not many studies have chosen the theory behind the research to be ficto-linguistic so I was interested in utilizing the theory in my research.

In the next section I discuss what literary dialect is, mostly basing my thoughts on the notions Norman Page makes in *Speech in the English Novel* (1973). Additionally, I look into Dickens's backstory and his relationship with dialects and dialect writing.

## 2. Background

In this study, when I talk about *dialect* I usually mean written *literary dialect*, which is the written form of spoken dialect, but clearly also a separate concept, as to my understanding the concept literary dialect falls into the category of *invented language*. I will discuss this in more detail in section 4 of this paper. It is also important to note that I make no apparent distinction between dialect and idiolect in this study, mainly due to the two terms being so intertwined and not that easily distinguishable. I do, however, discuss individualisation through dialect, and in these instances it can be argued that the word dialect could easily be swapped to idiolect. Nevertheless, I will not further discuss the two terms, as the scope of this thesis would only allow me to scratch the surface of the matter.

### 2.1 Literary dialect: Dickens as a dialect writer

Norman Page discusses speech in novels and literary speech's relation to speech in the real world in *Speech in the English Novel* (1973). Any novelist, Dickens included, is creating an illusion of realness by imitating real-life, and as Page suggests, the way in which speech is presented carries a distinct part in that endeavour. By making the characters' dialects distinguishable from each other – or, in fact, by making the characters speak in the same dialect – the novelist is creating an illusion of real people.

Real speech acts are nothing like the dialogue that can be found in novels. In actual conversation, people make mistakes and corrections, stumble with words, stutter, mumble, pause, use filler words, and so forth. If a novelist was to attempt to incorporate all this into dialogue, the end-result would most likely be un-readable or at the very least not a pleasant read. The illusion of real-life speech the novelist is trying to create would suffer from the reader's discomfort in trying to parse through sentences. The novelist thus walks a fine line between wanting to mirror the real world and producing intelligible text. Page (1973) notes that real-life speech is much more wasteful and disorganized than any written speech most of the time (p. 10). Usually, a novelist's primary concern is not whether or not a character's dialect is realistic, but rather whether or not the reader enjoys the reading experience and can be sucked into the fictional world the novelist has created. This is not to say that novelists do not draw inspiration from real dialects, on the contrary. Nevertheless, concentrating on whether or not a character's speak is "realistic" is often quite futile.

Furthermore, it is common for literary dialect to actually be just a phonetic version of Standard English (SE) (Page, 1973, p. 54). Written SE does not signify, for instance, pronoun weak forms even though they are used in spoken SE. However, in literature, these weak forms are often what separates dialectal dialogue from SE dialogue. Page (1973) notes that this is a "long-established tradition" (p. 54) in English dialect writing. Charles Dickens is certainly not an exception in this matter, and his dialect using characters often have this trait.

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England, in 1812. He wrote twenty novels in his life time, all of which contain a rich variety of characters some of whom speak in dialect. He can be described as a genius when it comes to characterisation, largely due to his talent in differentiating the voices of the characters. From a young age Dickens was exposed to different dialects and non-standard low-class English, as his father was sent to debtor's prison and he went to work in a factory. Dickens also worked as a short-hand writer and journalist for a long time, and Page (1973) argues that this contributed to Dickens's talent as dialogue writer (p. 134). Page also describes Dickens to have had "a marked natural aptitude" "in representing the spoken language" (p. 134).

One dialect Dickens was obviously a master in portraying is literary Cockney. It is good to note that Cockney has a long literary history and it has developed their own conventions and traditions. Literary dialects, such as Cockney, have often become almost completely separated from their counterparts in the real world (Page, 1973, p. 52). But it was not only Cockney that Dickens wrote, far from it. In fact, in GE only a handful of characters speak this dialect that was used mostly by the lower-class Londoners. Brooks (1970) reports that Dickens was fascinated and amused by "substandard speech" and often used socially marked language in his letters (p. 94). Consequently, the inconsistencies – and in fact inaccuracies – in Dickens's regional dialects are certainly not caused by a lack of interest.

In GE, Dickens is able to differentiate the characters in a multitude of different ways. As I mentioned in the introduction, Dickens's dialect usage has been broadly studied and discussed. On the one hand, critics praise him to be one of the greatest dialect writers of the Victorian era, and on the other some deem him to be inconsistent and not representative of the actual dialects of England.

### 3. Materials

In this section I will introduce my primary source, which is Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* (Penguin Books, 1980, edited by Angus Calder). I will summarize the plot briefly, and discuss the main themes of the novel. *Great Expectations* is one of Charles Dickens's later works, which can be seen in the more refined use of language, including dialect. Previous studies on Dickens's use of dialect usually focus mainly on his other works, like *Little Dorrit*, *Bleak House*, and *David Copperfield*, often leaving GE without much attention.

#### 3.1 Plot

*Great Expectations* is comprised of multiple subplots which all develop almost simultaneously. This is indicative of Dickens's genius as a novelist, but unfortunately it makes summarizing the plot a challenge. The novel tells the story of an orphan named Pip, who lives with his sister and her husband Joe Gargery in the rural marshlands of Kent, England. The story is narrated by Pip as an old man looking back on his life. In the beginning of the novel, young Pip runs into a convict on the run and ends up doing him a favour. The convict gets arrested again and deported to Australia, and life continues as usual. Then one day, Pip is invited to visit Miss Havisham. The old lady was left at the altar during her youth and the incident caused her to become deranged and bitter, an indication of which is that she has only worn her wedding gown since that day. She lives in a huge decaying house with her adopted daughter Estella whom she raises to become cold at heart as a revenge on all men. At the house Pip meets this beautiful but cold-hearted girl and realises for the first time his lacking manners and education. Pip continues to visit Miss Havisham and Estella regularly, until one day he is told that he does not have to come anymore. Pip goes on to become Joe's apprentice in the blacksmith's forge.

Several years later, Pip is informed that he has got an anonymous benefactor who is paying for him to go to London and become a gentleman. One condition for the arrangement is that Pip is not to know the identity of his benefactor until the person reveals themselves to him. Pip is convinced that the benefactor is Ms. Havisham, and assumes that she intends him to marry Estella after he has learned the manners of the upper-class. Pip leaves his home behind and goes to London, where he begins his life as a gentleman.



The benefactor finally reveals their identity when Pip is twenty-three. To Pip's surprise and despair it is not Ms. Havisham to whom he owes his fortune, but the convict whom Pip helped as a young boy – Abel Magwitch. Pip's dreams of marrying Estella – whom he loves despite her cruelty – crumble. Pip's life turns into a mission of trying to get Magwitch safely out of the country, as the man is on the run once again and would face the gallows if caught. In the end Magwitch gets caught when Pip and his good friend Herbert try to smuggle him to safety via Thames. The old convict, who has become a dear friend to Pip at this point, eventually dies of the injuries he sustained during the capture.

Estella marries another man, and as Pip goes to visit the home forge he finds out that Joe had married Biddy who is a childhood friend of Pip's (whom he thought he could marry if he could not have Estella). Pip becomes a respectable bachelor businessman in Herbert's company and becomes a man of his own worth. At the end of the novel, Pip finds out Estella is single again and they get together and "live happily ever after".

The themes that shine through in *Great Expectations* and connect to the dialect usage in the novel are: social class and social mobility; expectations in contrast to reality; and gentility. The first theme that I discuss in this thesis is the theme of gentility, namely the duality of the term that GE presents. In the beginning of the novel, young Pip is quite content in his fate of becoming apprenticed to Joe and living a simple life on the marshes of Kent. However, his ambitions change when he comes into contact with higher society through Miss Havisham and Estella. His new ambition is to become a gentleman and through his benefactor his dreams become reality. In London, Pip finds out that being a gentleman is for the most part superficial, as gentility is applied to people of low morals as long as they have money. Dickens seems to argue that real gentility is of moral quality, and Joe, the illiterate blacksmith from the countryside, becomes the moral beacon of the novel, and as such he can be described as a true gentleman. I will further discuss the theme of gentility in relation to Joe in sections 6.1 and 7 of my thesis.

The theme of expectations in contrast to reality, on the other hand, is obviously one of the themes that is most prominent in GE, as the title of the novel itself mentions expectations. Pip assumes that his benefactor is Miss Havisham, but in the end his fortunes came from Magwitch, who was assumed to be a criminal rotten to the core. I discuss the expectations pertaining to Magwitch's character in relation to his dialect in sections 6.2 and 7 of my thesis. Expectations and misconceptions are what drives the plot forward, and as such it is interesting how closely the dialects of characters connect to these two concepts in GE.

Victorian England was a society based on a class system. Dickens commented on the conditions in which the lower-classes lived and worked in many of his novels. He certainly sympathised with the poor and the unfortunate, and it can be argued that his personal history as the son of a father heavily in debt clearly influenced his narratives. GE depicts a wide range of different social classes from criminals to nobility. Pip's journey from a poor orphan blacksmith's adopted son to a gentleman clearly brings out the themes of class society as well as that of social climb. This theme of social mobility is even emphasised in dialect, especially Pip's lack of one in contrast to his family. I discuss the connection later on in my thesis in the section 6.3 in which I analyse Pip.

### 3.2 Dialect Data

For this study, I chose to inspect the dialects of only three characters: Joe Gargery (illiterate blacksmith, Pip's "surrogate father" and friend), Abel Magwitch (Pip's convict benefactor), and Pip (the main character). My motivation for only studying these three characters' dialect was primarily the fact that the scope of my Bachelor's thesis simply would not allow an in-depth study of more characters. In fact, choosing only one character's idiolect might have provided a sufficient amount of data to study for this thesis, however choosing three seemed right. I will discuss why Pip, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, speaks in Standard English through-out the novel, despite being raised by Mr- and Mrs. Joe Gargery, who both speak in dialect. The dialects – or the lack of one – of these three characters play a part in constructing some of the main themes of the novel, as I discussed in section 3.1 and further elaborate in sections 6 and 7 of my thesis.

In the next section (section 4) I present the theoretical background of my thesis.

## 4. Theory

In this section I will provide the theoretical background to my research, and explain the main concepts pertaining to it.

Writing in dialect is a problematic practice for a multitude of reasons. The problems include among others the problem of the difficulty of accurate orthography. A written form of in any given dialect can only be an approximation of the actual sounds that the speaker of a dialect actually produces (Ferguson, 1998). As Norman Page also notes in his book *Speech in the English Novel* (1973): "[...] the twenty-six letters of our alphabet, however ingeniously combined and supplemented by other graphological indications, can scarcely begin to represent the infinite variety and subtlety of speech" (p. 9).

Writing in dialect is not only difficult: it can also cause controversy, a good example of which is Katheryn Stockett's novel *The Help* (published in 2009). This critically acclaimed novel, and its 2011 movie adaption, drew both positive and negative reviews, specifically regarding the use of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). Critics accused Stockett of stereotyping and misrepresenting the speech of the African-American community. Ruzich and Blake study Stockett's dialect use in their article *Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing: Dialect, Race, and Identity in Stockett's Novel The Help*. They argue that the dialect usage in *The Help* is not consistent, and that Stockett's tendency to use several varieties of AAVE mashed together "perhaps prolong sociolinguistic stereotyping" (Ruzich & Blake, 2015). Ruzich and Blake thus argue that literary works have their weight in the real world, and they certainly are not the first ones to claim so. Sue Edney ponders the question in her article *Recent Studies in Victorian English Literary Dialect and its linguistic Connections* (2011).

Edney (2011) sums up the problem in studying literary dialect thus: "Socio-linguistics [...] generally looks at the evidence provided by the stories rather than story-creation, while the dialects themselves can be ignored by the literary scholar who is more interested in critical analysis of nationally accessible writing". She points out that researchers often fail to incorporate both the literary and linguistic aspects in their study, and do not take into account the artistry of the novelist. She proposes the answer to the problem of combining the two traditions of analysing dialect in fiction to be *ficto-linguistics* – a term coined by Susan Ferguson. Ferguson's *ficto-linguistics* provides the theoretical background for this study.

Susan Ferguson (1998) defined ficto-linguistics to “mean the systems of language that appear in novels and both deviate from accepted or expected socio-linguistic patterns and indicate identifiable alternative patterns congruent to other aspects of the fictional world”. She argues that when studying fiction, it is pointless to place much weight on whether or not the dialects are accurately representative of real existing dialects, as the “characters do not speak in isolation” of the fiction. In other words: all the utterances the characters of a work of fiction make happen within the narration and often even interact with the narrator’s voice. Ferguson coined the term ‘ficto-linguistics’ to tie together and try to solve the “twin problems of the *literary* dialect and socio-linguistic representation in fiction” (Edney, 2011). What all this means is that when studying dialect in literature (and our focus is on the novel, not the real world), what is important is not whether or not the dialect is ‘accurate’, but rather if the dialects are consistent and ‘realistic’ within the context of the fictional world, and whether or not the dialect-usage serves a specific purpose in the novel. Not to say literary dialect has no linguistic value in the real world, on the contrary, literary dialect has for example provided linguistics insight especially into the forms of English not used anymore. However, in this study I have largely ignored that aspect of literary dialect analysis. As stated before, I am not interested in the dialects’ relation to the real world.

There is certain flexibility in literary dialect (Ferguson, 1998), which writers have exploited in creating fictional worlds. As such, another way of looking at dialects in fiction is to look at them as *invented language* (Stockwell, 2006). All dialect in literature is merely literary dialect and thus cannot be analysed as “real” dialect. The purposes of dialect in literature are multiple, the most prevalent and important of which is its usage in presenting and developing characters, but it can also describe a setting or atmosphere, present social discussion, or further the plot (Page, 1973, p. 51). As all fiction happens within a fictional world, the language of any given novel is in fact not ‘real language’, but rather something that the writer has created – a fictional language. The world within a novel is not the real world, even if the writer is writing in a realistic style, and thus, as Stockwell points out, the London in Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* is not the real London (Stockwell, 2006) nor is the one in *Great Expectations*. Given that the world itself is fiction, it would not be wise to assume that the dialects in this fictional world must be accurate representations of those of the real world. This is why analysing dialect in fiction can be focused on the internal invented world of the novel.

Nevertheless, it would also be naïve to assume that the events and places and speech patterns of the real world did not have any effect on the fictional ones, which is why abandoning real world socio-linguistics completely is not wise either (Ferguson, 1998). Novelist like Dickens who aim for a

somewhat realistic effect in their writings, imitate the dialects of the real world partly to achieve “linguistic credibility” (Edney, 2011). This imitation leads to fiction being connected to the real world and its social constructs. Fiction can thus uphold stereotypes, which means that trying to write in accents or dialects can be problematic. However, this study is based on the theory of ficto-linguistics, mostly because it is not relating to contemporary English society, but rather that of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As such, it is not of much interest to focus on the sociolinguistic phenomena (such as stereotyping) the novel might have had in the real world. Instead the focus is on what the effect of using dialect is on the projected world. A character’s speech both ties them into a group (social or geographical) and individualizes them in the reader’s imagination. What I am interested in is the internal world of the novel, not the real one.

In the next section I explain how I acquired my data and how I analysed it.

## 5. Method

What I did for this study, was I read *Great Expectations* through while simultaneously taking notes on the dialect usage. After I had done that, I decided which characters I would be focusing on, namely Joe Gargery, Magwitch, and Pip. Then I attempted to figure out how these three characters use dialect and whether or not the usage is consistent and what purpose if any the dialect serves. In the data I present in this study I have bolded the non-standard orthography and underlined non-standard grammar. My analysis is obviously quite subjective, as I am analysing the reactions the dialect evoke in me as a reader. However, I attempt to connect my notions with those of previously done research. My analysis relies heavily on Susan Ferguson’s notions on ficto-linguistics and Stockwell’s notions on invented language.

## 6. Analysis

Page (1973) observes that "persuasive effect of colloquialism may be revealed, on analysis, to depend upon a limited and selective observance of the features of actual speech" (p. 4). Dickens represents dialect through selected distinctive features, which provides the reader with an approximate sound system upon which they build an imagined voice for specific characters. The intention is not to be as accurate as possible, but rather to create an impression of a person's speech. Consequently, it can be said that any literary dialect is invented language, and thus only analysable in the context of the fictional universe of the novel. When characters have distinctive voices – achieved through having the characters speak in dialect and by creating individual idiolects for each character – it is easier to establish differences between characters. Writing in dialect is thus an important tool for bringing variety into the cast of a novel.

In this section I present my analysis on the speech of three characters: Joe Gargery in section 6.1, Abel Magwitch in section 6.2, and finally in section 6.3, I focus on Pip, the protagonist of GE. I explain how the dialects and themes are closely connected, as finding the connections is crucial to any research done from the perspective of ficto-linguistics. The examples were taken from the Penguin Books 1980 edition of Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* I introduced in section 3 of my thesis. As stated in the previous section, I have bolded words that have non-standard spellings and underlined the non-standard grammar in the data examples.

### 6.1 Joe Gargery

In this section I present examples of the data I collected on Joe Gargery's dialect and begin analysing the ways in which dialect works in his character. The discussion on my analysis then continues in the Discussion section of my thesis.

Joe Gargery is a kind-hearted and hard-working man, who sees the good in everyone from his abusive wife to escaped convicts. He is one of the characters in GE who can be characterised as a thoroughly "good" character. He also happens to be one of the dialect speakers. As an illiterate country blacksmith, Joe understandably has a distinct way of speaking that can be clearly observed in the examples in this section. He is described as a simple but hard-working man with a heart of gold, and I argue that applying ficto-linguistic theory Joe's dialect usage can be linked to the themes of social class and gentility. Joe is one of the most morally upright figures in the whole novel and,

as such, a true gentleman. He does not have the money to achieve the tittle through social climbing, as Pip does. Pip is ashamed of Joe, as the older man is obviously uneducated and poor judging by his manners and speech: "I was heartily glad when Herbert left us for the city" (p. 244). Here Pip recollects his shame in having his good friend witness the bumbling manners of his surrogate father. Pip wants to rise in society and being associated with Joe does not help his cause. He is also ashamed of being ashamed of his surrogate father and dear friend. In the end, Pip realises that Joe's worth is not defined by his status, but rather by his good heart. The reader is also being encouraged to disapprove of Pip's attitude towards Joe, as the story is narrated by Pip, who is already aware that Joe is an admirable human being. Rather than Pip's superficial gentleman status, Joe's true genteelness is not dependant of money.

Joe's dialect stands out the most when Joe is surrounded by SE speakers or when he is distressed, for example when Joe is in London visiting Pip in chapter 27:

A ghost-seeing effect in Joe's own countenance informed me that Herbert had entered the room. So, I presented Joe to Herbert, who held out his hand; but Joe backed from it, and held on by the bird's-nest.

"Your servant, Sir," said Joe, "which I hope as you and Pip" - here his eye fell on the Avenger, who was putting some toast on table, and so plainly denoted an intention to make that young gentleman one of the family, that I frowned it down and confused him more - "I **meantersay**, you two gentlemen - which I hope as you get your **elths** in this close spot? For the present may be a **werry** good inn, according to London opinions," said Joe, confidentially, "and I believe its character do stand **i**; but I wouldn't keep a pig in it myself - not in the case that I wished him to fatten wholesome and to eat with a **meller** flavour on him." (p. 243)

In this passage Joe is feeling uncomfortable in an unfamiliar environment. He does not know how to react to Pip, who has – at least superficially – become a gentleman, and thus refers to his surrogate son as "sir". Along with Pip's narration the dialect, which is achieved through selected variant spellings and non-standard grammar, serves to make the social class gap between Pip and Joe tangible.

Joe is consistent, for example, in using the lexical item *betwixt* instead of *between*. This seems to be a word that only the dialect speakers in GE use, as the SE speakers (such as Pip, Mr Jaggers and Estella) use *between*. Another word that becomes associated with Joe is *meantersay*. He is the only character for whom this particular orthography for "meant to say" is used. It becomes almost like a

catchphrase for Joe. These words become an essential part of the character Joe Gargery and give him a distinctive flavour. Page (1973) uses the metaphor of a caricature artist to explain how these verbal mannerisms work to individualise characters: by highlighting and exaggerating the unique features of a person he becomes the more individual (p. 93). Having Joe say “meantersay” constantly, his speech becomes almost instantly recognisable.

Part of the orthography in Joe's distinct voice is caused by his illiterateness: he does not know how the words he is uttering are said and thus Dickens ingeniously makes it apparent in Joe's speech. In the following example from chapter seven of GE Joe discusses his lack of education with Pip.

"My father, Pip, he were given to drink, and when he were overtook with drink, he hammered away at my mother, most **onmerciful**. It were a'most the only hammering he did, indeed, '**xcepting** at myself. And he hammered at me with a **wigour** only to be **equalled** by the **wigour** with which he didn't hammer at his **anwil**. - You're **a-listening** and understanding, Pip?"

"Yes, Joe."

"**Consequence**, my mother and me we ran away from my father, several times; and then my mother she'd go out to work, and she'd say, "Joe," she'd say, "now, please God, you shall have some schooling, child," and she'd put me to school. But my father were that good in his hart that he couldn't **abear** to be without us. So, he'd come with a most **tremenjous** crowd and make such a row at the doors of the houses where we was, that they used to be obligated to have no more to do with us and to give us up to him. And then he took us home and hammered us. Which, you see, Pip," said Joe, pausing in his meditative raking of the fire, and looking at me, "were a drawback on my learning."(pp. 76-78)

This passage is marked with dialect from non-standard grammar to non-standard orthography. His education-background comes apparent not only in his story, but also in the very way he speaks. Page (1973) observes, that traditionally using non-standard grammar in cases such as “we was” as Joe does indicate a character’s “social inferiority” and lack of education (p. 78). Substituting the phoneme /v/ with /w/ – or vice versa – is also similarly marked. Consequently, it can be said that a character’s speech – and their dialect as a part of their distinct voice – not only helps the reader to individualize the characters, but it also offers information about the characters affiliation with certain groups of people (Page, 1973, p. 52). In Joe’s case, his speech is thus socially marked: in his mouth “convict” turns into “conwict” (p. 45), “very” into “werry” (p. 243), “divisions” into



“divisions” (p. 246), “velvet” into “welwet” (p. 98), and “vigour” into “wigour” (p. 76). It is to be noted, however, that the confusion with v and w is also characteristic of the dialects of Kent, where the Gargerys live. Nevertheless, it can be said that these types of social dialect markers bind Joe to a specific class – intellectually as well as financially.

Naturally, the readers will respond to marked speech according to their own real-life experiences – or in fact previous literary experiences – and inevitably connect the characters with certain social groups. Furthermore, the reader might even make a connection between the dialect of a character and a certain *type* of a character: this phenomenon offers a novelist such a delicious opportunity for plot twists. In GE, Dickens has utilized this disconnect between assumption and “reality” most notably in the case of Magwitch.

## 6.2 Abel Magwitch

In this section I will examine the character Abel Magwitch, who grows from being one of the novel’s antagonists into Pip’s benefactor. The first utterances of the novel come from the mouth of this escaped convict. His harsh dialectal speech, marked mostly by extensive usage of apostrophes in letter omissions, is contrasted with young Pip’s Standard English, and works well with Pip’s descriptive narration in bringing forth an image of a hardened, unpleasant criminal.

‘Ha!’ he muttered then, considering. ‘Who **d’ye** live with – **supposin’** you’re kindly let to live, which I **han’t** made up my mind about?’

‘My sister, sir – Mrs Joe Gargery – wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, sir.’

‘Blacksmith, eh?’ said he. And looked down at his leg.

After darkly looking at his leg and me several times, he came closer to my tombstone, took me by both arms, and tilted me back as far as he could hold me; so that his eyes looked most powerfully down into mine, and mine looked most helplessly up into his.

‘Now **lookee** here,’ he said, ‘the question being whether you’re to be let to live. You know what a file is?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And you know what **wittles** is?’

‘Yes, sir.’

After each question he tilted me over a little more, so as to give me a greater sense of helplessness and danger.

‘You get me a file.’ He tilted me again. ‘And you get me **wittles**.’ He tilted me again. ‘You bring **‘em** both to me.’ He tilted me again. ‘Or I’ll have your heart and your liver out.’ He tilted me again. (p. 37)

Magwitch’s dialect is distinctly different from that of Joe’s: he seems to use more abbreviations, and his sentences are not nearly as marked with non-standard grammar, though he does, for example, employ the feature of substituting “that” with “as” (shown in the next data example) and “you were” with “you was” (shown in the last data example of section 6.2) just as Joe does. Chapter 42 is almost completely narrated by Magwitch, which makes it an interesting chapter, not only for the fact that in the chapter Pip’s is not the voice in which the world presents itself to the reader, but also because it gives the character Magwitch plenty of time to establish his own distinctive voice. For the purpose of this study it provides loads of data on Magwitch’s dialect to be studied. Magwitch’s dialectal story explains his situation and the unfairness of being convicted more harshly than, Compeyson, his enemy, just because of his background.

“And when it come to character, **warn't** it Compeyson as had been to the school, and **warn't** it his schoolfellows as was in this position and in that, and **warn't** it him as had been **know'd** by witnesses in such clubs and societies, and nowt to his disadvantage? And **warn't** it me as had been tried afore, and as had been **know'd** up hill and down dale in Bridewells and Lock-Ups? And when it come to speech-making, **warn't** it Compeyson as could speak to '**em wi'** his face dropping every now and then into his white **pocket-handkercher** - ah! and **wi'** verses in his speech, too - and **warn't** it me as could only say, 'Gentlemen, this man at my side is a most precious rascal'? And when the verdict come, **warn't** it Compeyson as was recommended to mercy on account of good character and bad company, and giving up all the information he could **agen** me, and **warn't** it me as got never a word but Guilty? (pp. 364-365)

The unfairness of society that favours a gentleman conman over a low-class pick-pocket becomes evident through Magwitch’s story. Magwitch’s “inarticulateness” and harsh are contrasted with Compeyson, whom Magwitch describes as “a smooth one to talk, and was a dab at the ways of gentlefolks” (p. 361). Magwitch seems to be Dickens’s comment on the rotten and corrupt justice system of the time that served those that were superficially gentlemen and spoke in SE.

In addition to the theme of injustice in society, the theme that is strengthened in Magwitch's speech is the "assumptions in contrast to reality" one I presented in section 3.1. The character shows that not everything is as it seems. He is not just a criminal: he is also a kind-hearted man who wants to pay back his debts and better himself. His rough exterior and harsh accent are not what defines him, but instead his sincere wish to see Pip succeed in life becomes his defining quality. In this next data example Pip is visiting Magwitch on his deathbed.

"Dear boy," he said, as I sat down by his bed: "I thought you was late. But I kn<sup>o</sup>wed you couldn't be that."

"It is just the time," said I. "I waited for it at the gate."

"You always waits at the gate; don't you, dear boy?"

"Yes. Not to lose a moment of the time."

"**Thank'ee** dear boy, **thank'ee**. God bless you! You've never deserted me, dear boy."

I pressed his hand in silence, for I could not forget that I had once meant to desert him.

"And what's the best of all," he said, "you've been more comfortable **al<sup>o</sup>nger** me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That's best of all." (p. 469)

In the last conversation between Pip and Magwitch, the old convict's dialect is unchanged from his first utterances, but instead of a cruel criminal the reader is presented with a gentle man who is grateful for Pips loyalty and kindness. "Now, lookee here" has changed into "Thank'ee, dear boy, thank'ee." and the reader sympathizes with Magwitch. This complete change in the way in which the character is perceived is so surprising in part because of the expectations the character's dialect - in co-operation with the narration -- conjured up in readers' minds in the beginning of the novel. Thus, I argue that one purpose of Magwitch's dialect is to strengthen the main plot-twist of the novel.

### 6.3 Pip

Ferguson (1998) notes, that Dickens has been often criticized for having characters who speak in SE even though they logically should speak in dialect. In GE the most noticeable case of this is without

a doubt the story's protagonist and narrator Pip. He speaks in Standard English through-out the whole novel, using only some marked language. In the fictional universe of the novel, Pip would, as the adopted son of a blacksmith and poorly educated young boy, be expected to use dialect at least in the days of his childhood. Dickens could have made Pip's growth as a gentleman even more tangible by slowly decreasing the socially marked language in Pip's dialogues. However, as the narrator is the adult Pip looking back on his life, it is believable that the narration is in SE.

Despite this slight inconsistency in dialect representation, Pip's SE even in childhood can be explained with ficto-linguistics. One could argue, that Pip's speech can be explained through the Victorian convention of having characters of virtue talk in SE despite their "social backgrounds", as Pip is a character who at least strives to be a good person although he sometimes fails. However, Dickens does not seem to apply the Victorian convention to any other character in the novel. In fact, the most prevalent dialect user in GE, Joe, is also the most admirable of the characters. Dickens seems to use dialect as a way of making differences between social classes rather than between morality differences within the fictional communities. Additionally, it seems that the dialect usage follows "fictional lines" (Ferguson, 1998) in the case of Pip.

The difference between Estella's and Pip's speech is only apparent in the narration, as Pip recalls calling knaves by their then improper dialect word jack and being laughed at for it (GE, p. 92). This particular locution represents to Pip his low-class status on society, and in part plants the seed of dissatisfaction in his circumstances in his mind. "I was a common labouring-boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way" (p. 94). Here a single dialect word seems to highlight the social difference between Estella and Pip. His love for Estella and urge to become worthy of her are mainly what drives Pip into trying to better himself.

Furthermore, it can be argued that Pip's lack of dialect also makes him eligible for social mobility. Dickens was certainly aware of the importance of speech in the class society of Victorian England, which was reflected in the fictional universe of GE. In a way, having Pip speak in dialect, Dickens makes Pip's rise in society more believable. Joe, with his thick dialectal speech, would not seem to fit into the gentlemen's society of London despite his moral uprightness. As a matter of fact, the first example I used in section 5.1 illustrates this collision of two worlds in the form of speech. Unlike Joe, who is tied by his dialect to a specific social class, Pip has social mobility due to his speech. In other words, the odds were stacked against those who spoke in dialect in the Victorian society – in the real world one, as well as the literary one Dickens created.

## 7. Discussion

In this section I discuss my analysis further. Firstly, my findings appear to be in line with what Page has previously revealed about Dickens's dialect usage: Page (1973) points out, Dicken's aim was not "to delineate living speech" (p. 61). My data shows that the dialects' main purpose is to create voices for the characters that somewhat resonated with the real world instead. Dickens achieves this effect by isolating and emphasizing certain features in the characters' pronunciation and indicating them orthographically often enough to make the presence of a dialect noticeable. After all, it is of interest for a novelist to write in a way that is intelligible even when rendering dialect.

Secondly, I found that the dialects of Joe and Magwitch serve both to individualize their characters and to make some of the novel's themes more tangible. On the other hand, the dialects signify the character's social and geographical background within the fictional universe of GE. Additionally, in Magwitch's case the dialect serves in part to highlight a major plot-twist in the novel. As such, the dialects in GE serve multiple purposes from character construction plot marking. From the ficto-linguistic perspective this study is conducted in, all this makes the dialect usage in GE interesting.

The purpose of Pip's SE, in contrast is not to individualise him, but to make his social mobility more believable, as Dickens and his Victorian audience would have been aware of the importance of language in the class system. England is, even to this day, a society that puts weight onto the dialects of people, which is why people tend to lose their dialects and accents sometimes even intentionally when wanting to move up in society. This tendency would probably have been even more pronounced during the Victorian era.

It is also worth noting that the dialects of the characters remain somewhat unchanged even though the characters change. Now, if we were talking about the real world, this would be unusual. However, as we are looking at fiction and fictional speech and dialects this is understandable and even a wise creative decision from Dickens. The consistency helps the reader differentiate the characters from each other. Thus, in conclusion, it can be said that Dickens uses dialect unrealistically, but nonetheless wisely, as the average reader is certainly not a linguist and would not be bothered by the fact that Magwitch's speech does not change in the years he spends in Australia. The dialect's main purpose seems to be character construction and maintenance, and as such it follows that changing the dialect mid-novel would be counterproductive.

## 8. Conclusion

In this study I set out to analyse the different ways in which Charles Dickens uses dialect in *Great Expectations*, focusing particularly on finding out what purpose the dialects serve in the novel. In my analysis, I focused on three characters (Joe Gargery, Abel Magwitch, and Pip) in detail, while also examining the broader themes of the novel. After analysing the data I discussed the dialect usage in GE further in section 6 of this paper.

The following conclusions I have drawn based on what I previously discussed in this paper: (1) Dickens uses dialect in order both to individualize characters and to connect them into a larger group. These groups tend to be socially marked, and seem to signify Dickens's social justice discourse. (2) The dialect speaking characters speak in dialect consistently throughout the novel, without changing much in order to create linearity in the reading experience. (3) The dialects play a major part in character construction *and* maintenance. (4) The dialects are constructed by non-standard grammar, vocabulary, and variant spellings of SE words, but are not always used in the same way within a character's dialogue. (5) Dickens does not use dialect simply to build comical characters, as was the tradition. Instead, his dialect speakers are complex, not defined by their dialect nor the social class they belong to, but rather their actions and sentiments. (6) The dialects of the three characters are all connected to some of the main themes of the novel, namely those of social mobility, expectations in contrast to reality, gentility, and injustice in Victorian society.

This research is by no means comprehensive, as I only studied three characters in detail. Further research is thus needed in order to reach a full analysis of the dialect in *Great Expectations*. Furthermore, research on literary dialect from the ficto-linguistic perspective is also still in its infancy which increases the appeal of doing further research into the subject.

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