EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

Complutense Journal of English Studies
ISSN-e: 2386-3935

ARTÍCULOS

"Then she spotted me accent an' said te me, de ye come from the north?": Analysing the representation of a rural South Derry accent in Frances Molloy's *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985)

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https//dx.doi.org/10.5209/cjes.104280 Recibido: 17/10/25 • Aceptado: 13/06/26

Abstract: This paper explores the representation of a rural South Derry accent in Frances Molloy's *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985), ultimately contributing to broader debates on the representation of dialect in fiction. Combining close qualitative analysis with quantitative, corpus-based methods, this study specifically examines which pronunciation features index a rural South Derry identity, the linguistic authenticity of these features, and the consistency of their portrayal throughout the narrative. Findings reveal that fourteen dialectal pronunciation features which are attested in the South Derry are rendered consistently in the novel through non-standard respellings, which suggests a fairly authentic representation. Beyond documenting these features, the article argues that Molloy's representation reflects a linguistically hybrid landscape shaped in part by Ulster Scots influence, and that her creative adaptation of both conventional and innovative respelling strategies contributes to the construction of a distinctive narrative voice. By linking micro-level stylistic choices to macro-level questions, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about the functions and effects of dialect representation in literature. More precisely, it demonstrates that relatively authentic and internally consistent representations can index regional identity and construct the protagonist's ethnic and individual identity, thereby highlighting the role of literary dialect in mediating authenticity, voice and sociolinguistic meaning.
Keywords: representation; South Derry; pronunciation; authenticity; consistency

EN "Entonces reconoció mi acento y me preguntó: ¿Vienes del norte?": La representación del acento rural del sur de Derry en *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985) de Frances Molloy

Resumen: Este artículo analiza la representación del acento rural del sur de Derry en la novela *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985) de Frances Molloy con el objetivo de contribuir a debates más amplios sobre la representación de dialectos en ficción. Combinando un análisis cualitativo detallado con métodos cuantitativos basados en corpus, este estudio examina qué rasgos de pronunciación indexan una identidad rural del sur de Derry, la autenticidad lingüística de dichos rasgos y la consistencia con la que se retratan a lo largo de la narrativa. Los resultados muestran que un total de catorce rasgos de pronunciación, todos ellos documentados en el sur de Derry, se representan de manera sistemática en la novela a través de grafías no estándar, lo que sugiere una representación bastante auténtica. Además de documentar estos rasgos, el artículo propone que la representación dialectal de Molloy refleja un panorama lingüístico híbrido, marcado en parte por la influencia del Ulster-Scots, y que su adaptación creativa de respellings tanto convencionales como innovadores contribuye a la creación de una voz narrativa distintiva. Al conectar elecciones estilísticas de detalle (nivel micro) con cuestiones sociolingüísticas más generales (nivel macro), este estudio enriquece los debates actuales sobre las funciones y los efectos de la representación dialectal en la literatura y demuestra que representaciones relativamente auténticas y consistentes internamente pueden proyectar la identidad regional, étnica e individual de los personajes. Esto pone de relieve el papel del dialecto literario como mediador de la autenticidad, la voz narrativa y el significado sociolingüístico.
Palabras clave: representación; sur de Derry; pronunciación; autenticidad; consistencia

Irish English and Ulster-Scots-influenced features. 4.1.3. Molloy's respellings: Authenticity and stereotyping. 4.2. Corpus-based analysis: Frequency and distribution of Molloy's respellings. 5. Conclusion.

How to cite: Díaz-Sierra, S. (2026). "Then she spotted me accent an' said te me, de ye come from the north?": Analysing the representation of a rural South Derry accent in Frances Molloy's *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985), en *Complutense Journal of English Studies* 34, e104280. https//dx.doi.org/10.5209/cjes.104280

1. Introduction

No Mate for the Magpie was written in 1895 by Frances Molloy, the pseudonym used by Northern Irish novelist Ann McGill. The novel, which is set in times of the Northern Irish Troubles, narrates the adventures, or rather misadventures, of its first-person narrator Ann McGlone, a Catholic girl from a working-class family in rural Derry. Molloy deals with thorny issues such as the abuse of power in the Catholic church, sectarianism in Northern Ireland and violence against women with satirical humour. Her criticism of social injustices together with the way she constructs her protagonist has led O'Connor (2008) and Jeffers (2017) to consider *No Mate for the Magpie* a picaresque novel. The literary critic claims that Ann McGlone embodies the character type of the *pícaro*, a social misfit that defies the norms of the society they live in.

Despite being relatively unknown today, which is probably due to the fact that Molloy died at a young age and this was her only novel, the book is interesting to analyse from a linguistic point of view since, unlike most of Northern Irish prose, it is written in dialect. The dialect portrayed in the novel is that spoken in rural South Derry and, more particularly, in Dungiven, Molloy's hometown. Dungiven is located in Harris' (1984) Mid-Ulster dialect area, an English-speaking area. However, it is very close to North Antrim, a region where Ulster Scots is spoken. Ulster Scots is a West Germanic variety derived from Scots, the dialect spoken by the Scottish people who settled in the north of Ireland in the 17th century. The proximity of Dungiven to an Ulster Scots area results in an Ulster-Scots influenced dialect, an influence that, as this study will later show, is captured in Molloy's portrayal of the Dungiven dialect in the novel.

Although written in dialect, the novel was a widely acclaimed success in Ireland, Britain and even in the United States where, as stated by Jeffers, a reviewer for the American daily newspaper *Newsday* pointed out "the dialect looks daunting but reads smoothly" (2017, 66). Moreover, unlike many writers who have traditionally used dialect for comedic effect (Blake 1981), Molloy's dialect portrayal transcends humour. Proof of this is Molloy's husband's statement that "[s]he used dialect not to indicate any comical oddity in the people she was writing about, but rather as an aid to write about people and events which she felt were ignored" (Brady 1998, 14). *No Mate for the Magpie* is more of a social and political satire which invites readers to laugh while making them aware of social injustices and absurdities of life in the north of Ireland.

Molloy's use of dialect has been briefly discussed by some reviewers and scholars (Jeffers 2017; Kirk 1997; McGuire 2007), but there is, to the best of my knowledge, no systematic study of her fictional representation of the South Derry dialect to date. This paper aims to provide a detailed analysis of the pronunciation features represented in *No Mate for the Magpie* through the use of respellings. Specifically, it addresses three research questions: (1) Which pronunciation features are employed in the novel to index a rural South Derry identity?, (2) To what extent can these features be considered linguistically authentic when compared with documented varieties of (Northern) Irish English and Ulster Scots? and (3) How consistently are these features represented throughout the text?

2. Representing dialects in literature

Portrayals of non-standard dialects in literature have been traditionally assessed in terms of authenticity, that is, the degree to which a representation resembles a given real-world dialect (Amador-Moreno and McCafferty 2011; Cohen Minnick 2007; Ives 1971). Nevertheless, more recently some researchers have come to challenge the concept of authenticity and to argue that evaluating the linguistic accuracy of literary portrayals of dialect may be inappropriate and irrelevant (Hodson 2014; Leigh 2011; Pickles 2018). Hodson, while not dismissing the authenticity approach, points out that written language cannot fully replicate the authenticity of natural speech (2014, 219). On the other hand, Leigh and Pickles adopting a literary criticism approach claim that authenticity is not an inherent feature of the dialect portrayal and highlight that the reader plays an important role in conferring authenticity to the representation.

The difficulty of faithfully representing dialects in literature has led scholars and, more specifically, traditional dialectologists, to reject literary portrayals as reliable linguistic data. This lack of interest has likely been reinforced by widespread negative attitudes towards fictional representations of dialects, which are often criticised for their inconsistency and reliance on stereotypes. Hodson observes that many of these portrayals rely on stereotypes, which she describes as "the inaccurate rendering of a particular dialect based upon a small number of linguistic features" (2014, 115). Blake also shares this negative view on the literary portrayal of dialect and refers to it as a *hodge-podge*, a term which underscores its perceived lack of authenticity and coherence (1981, 59). Moreover, Preston adds that non-standard spellings, regardless of accuracy, often trigger negative reader judgements (1985, 329).

Although literary dialects, like all forms of fictional language, can never be a precise linguistic representation, they are fundamentally rooted in natural speech. Amador-Moreno (2010) emphasizes this inseparable connection, arguing that "whatever the precise characteristics of this representation of spoken language, verbal interaction in fiction can only be understood and interpreted in relation to the same rules of discourse that govern everyday interaction" (2010, 531). verbal interaction in fiction is interpreted through the same

discourse rules that govern everyday interaction. This link is further reinforced by the way language is processed. Focusing on language perception, Jaffe and Walton (2000, 562) stress that lay people perceive variation in written language much as they do variation in speech. Because some writers strive to create as realist a portrayal as possible, realism has been identified as one of the three primary functions of fictional language and remains a significant area of exploration, and one which this article examines in depth.

In addition to realism, scholars distinguish two other central functions: humour and characterisation (Bednarek 2017; Ives 1971; Kozloff 2000; Planchenault 2017). The former draws on a long tradition of using dialect for comic effect, often relying on portrayals that cast dialect-speaking characters as foolish, inferior, or lower class. In contrast, the characterisation function focuses on the way fictional dialects help shape a character's identity, background, and personality by establishing links between specific linguistic variants and the social meanings they carry. The following analysis explores these links by identifying the features used by Molloy, thereby revealing which linguistic markers were likely perceived by the author as characteristic of a rural South Derry identity in the 1980s.

3. Methodology

This study combines qualitative and quantitative methods. As part of the qualitative analysis, the novel was first examined through a close reading, which served to identify fourteen dialectal pronunciation features represented in the text. The careful reading of the novel also revealed the presence of the three types of respellings identified by Preston, namely allegro speech, eye dialect and dialect respellings (1985, 328). Allegro speech respellings represent features of casual, connected speech and can be seen in forms like *outa*, *inte, would of been* and *do'no* in the novel. Eye dialect entails the alteration of standard spellings to represent a standard pronunciation more accurately. Some examples of eye dialect respellings used by Molloy are *polisman*, *forgiv'* and *weemen*. In her definition of eye dialect Hodson points out that it "gives the impression of being dialectal when the reader looks at it, but [...] does not convey information about the pronunciation when the reader sounds it out" (2014, 95). Similarly, neither do allegro speech forms provide information about dialectal pronunciations. It is only dialect respellings that suggest regional or social accents and that is the reason why this paper will be concerned with the analysis of this type of modified spellings.

Once the dialectal pronunciation features had been identified, following Ives' qualitative procedure for the analysis of literary dialect (1971), I verified whether they had been recorded in the existing scholarly literature on Irish English and, more particularly, on Northern Irish English. This included reviewing not only dialectological and sociolinguistic studies such as Corrigan (2010) or Hickey (2007), but also research on portrayals of varieties of Irish English in literary and telecinematic fiction (McCafferty 2009; Sullivan 1980; Walshe 2009). Apart from the scholarly literature, it was also useful to have a look at some literary works containing representation of Irish English including Frances Molloy's posthumous work *Women are the Scourge of the Earth* (1998). Moreover, due to the influence of Ulster Scots on the South Derry rural dialect depicted in the novel analysed, checking Robinson's Ulster Scots *Glossary* (2012) and Herbison et al.'s *Spelling and Pronunciation Guide* (2012) was sometimes necessary.

For the quantitative analysis of the dialectal features represented in the novel, corpus linguistics has been used since there is extensive literature on the benefits of applying a corpus-based methodology to the analysis of literary texts (Mahlberg 2013; McEnery and Hardie 2012; O'Keeffe and McCarthy 2022). One of the main advantages is that corpus linguistics allows researchers to carry out empirical and more systematic analyses of texts. While corpus linguistics is most useful for the analysis of large numbers of texts, it is also beneficial for in-depth exploration of smaller datasets, as is the case of this paper's one-novel corpus. Using corpus linguistics tools for the analysis of a novel allows for a more systematic, objective and reliable study, making it easier to quantify occurrences of features, identify patterns and determine the dispersion of features.

What is more relevant for this paper, some scholars have shown how corpus-linguistics tools can be useful for the study of fictional representations of dialect in literature (Amador-Moreno 2012; Amador-Moreno and O'Keeffe 2018; Amador-Moreno and Terrazas-Calero 2017; Cohen Minnick 2001). As Amador-Moreno points out, these tools can provide interesting information about which linguistic features are perceived as characteristic of a specific dialect by the writer of the analysed text (2012, 21). Thus, by investigating the portrayal of a South Derry rural dialect in *No Mate for the Magpie,* this study will contribute to the description of this variety as it was perceived by Frances Molloy in the 1980s.

The corpus software used to analyse the novel, which contains 73053 words, was *AntConc* (Anthony 2023). Before searching the corpus, the fourteen phonological features identified were manually annotated to facilitate frequency counts since most features were represented in more than one word. A feature such as the raising of Wells' (1982) DRESS vowel can be found in the respellings *divil*, *niver*, *foriver* and *nixt*. This requires the grouping of all these respellings to avoid having to count them one at a time. Annotation was particularly necessary for those non-standard spellings which could be confused with the standard spellings of some words. The best example of this is the author's respelling of the first-person singular pronoun *I* as *a*, a respelling that has the same form as the English indefinite article. Other examples of problematic respellings are *tap* for *top*, *mine* for *mind*, *be* for *by* and *way* for *with*. Even though the meaning of the word can be easily deduced from the context, annotating the non-standard spellings makes it possible to filter standard spellings out automatically.

The annotation system consists of tags that indicate the specific feature that is being annotated and that are placed right after the feature. The tag, which is inserted between a greater-than and a less-than sign, is made up of a few initials that summarise the name of the feature. For some phonological features, Wells'

lexical sets were used as part of the tag (1982, xviii-xix). Thus, the tag for the realisation of the open back rounded vowel /ɒ/ as [ɑ] in words like *off* and *stop* (spelled as *aff* and *stap* in the novel) was <LOTU>, where LOT refers to the lexical set to which *off* and *stop* belong and U stands for unrounding.

The corpus tools used for the quantitative analysis of the phonological features were the KWIC (Keywords in Context), plot and collocate tools. The AntConc KWIC tool provides concordance lines for a search item and orders the occurrences according to similarity of patterns and their frequency. Thus, when searching for the respelling *be* for *by*, the first six occurrences displayed are part of the phrase *be the en'* (*by the end*). Concordance lines help researchers see how a particular item combines with other words and form patterns. The plot tool proved useful in showing the distribution of respellings throughout the novel. This facilitated assessing the consistency with which pronunciation features were portrayed in the novel. Finally, the collocate tool was mainly used to analyse the most common collocates of the possessive pronoun *me*.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Pronunciation features portrayed in *No Mate for the Magpie*

After reading Molloy's *No Mate for the Magpie* paying special attention to the respellings used by the author, fourteen dialectal features were identified. Nine of those features involve vowel sounds and the remaining five affect the pronunciation of consonants. The former are unraising of Middle English (henceforth ME) long e, LOT unrounding, retention of ME long i, diphthongisation of long o, fronting of unstressed final /ou/, DRESS raising, KIT lowering, PRICE monophthongisation in *I* and realisation of *with* as [wei]. As for consonantal variation, the five features represented in the novel are the loss of final /d/ after /l/ and /n/, post-sonorant devoicing, loss of final /f/ and /v/ in reflexive pronouns and interdentalisation of /t/ in *–ture.* Table 1 shows the respellings used for each of the fourteen dialectal features as well as their corresponding standard spellings and the varieties where the features occur in real-life speech. Most of these dialectal features are found in general Irish English so I will start by discussing those and then move on to Northern Irish English and Ulster-Scots-influenced features.

Table 1. Pronunciation features represented in No Mate for the Magpie.

FEATURE	RESPELLINGS	STANDARD SPELLINGS	FOUND IN
Unraised long e	*Lave, ate, tay, aisey, pase, dasent, lavin'(s)*	*Leave, eat, tea, easy, peace, decent, leaving(s)*	Irish English (north and south)
Long i retention	*me, be*	*My, by*	Irish English (north and south)
Final-o-fronting	*Folly, swally, pilla*	*Follow, swallow, pillow*	Irish English (north and south)
Diphthongisation of long o	*Houl, toul, oul, ouler, houlin', coul*	*Hold, told, old, older, holding, cold*	Irish English (north and south)
LOT unrounding	*Aff, saft, drap, tap, stap, laft*	*Off, soft, drop, top, stop, loft*	Irish English (north and south)
DRESS raising	*Divil, foriver, niver, hir, nixt*	*Devil, forever, never, her, next*	Southern Irish English and Ulster Scots
Post-sonorant devoicing	*Reverent, kilt*	*Reverent, killed*	Irish English
Loss of final /d/ after /n/	*In: kine, mine, behine* *In: an', han', gran', en', aroun'*	*Kind, mind, behind* *And, hand, grand, around*	Irish English (north and south)
KIT lowering	*hes*	*his*	Northern Irish English and Ulster Scots
PRICE monophthongisation in *I*	*a*	*I*	Ulster Scots
Pronunciation of with as [wei]	*way*	*with*	Ulster Scots
Loss of final /d/ after /l/	*Houl, toul, oul, ouler, houlin', coul*	*Hold, told, old, older, holding, cold*	Northern Irish English and Ulster Scots
Loss of final /f/ and /v/ in reflexive pronouns	*yersel',himsel' hirsel', mesel', oursel's, themsel's*	*Yourself, himself, myself, ourselves, themselves*	Ulster Scots
Interdental realisation of *-ture*	*creathure*	*creature*	Ulster Scots

4.1.1. Irish English features

One of the respellings that is frequently found in the novel can be seen in words like *lave* and *tay* where the standard *ea* spelling has been substituted by *a* and *ay*. These respellings suggest a pronunciation with unraised ME long e, a feature that can be found in vernaculars in the north and south of Ireland (Hickey 2007, 293).

There is a long tradition of representing the unraising of ME long e in literature written in Irish English. Some of the authors who have portrayed this feature are William Carleton (McCafferty 2009), Marina Carr (Lynch 2006), Maria Edgeworth (Hickey 2007, 302) and Seán O'Casey.

Another Irish English feature portrayed in *No Mate for the Magpie* is the retention of ME long i in the words *my* and *by* which are respelled as *me* and *be*. Even though ME long i became a diphthong in the 18th century (Bliss 1979, 207; Hickey 2007, 304), the historical pronunciation has survived in *my, by* and in derivatives of these words (e.g. *meself, Begorrah*). Moreover, as pointed out by Walshe, the monophthongal realisation of the possessive determiner is "so entrenched" that it is said to be lexicalised (2009, 230). This pronunciation of *my* has been widely used as a marker of Irish identity in literary as well as telecinematic fiction (Walshe 2020, 250).

Other respellings that deserve attention are *folly*, *swally*, *pilla* and *widda*, all of which are representative of final-o-fronting, a historical feature of Irish English that has been documented in early literary writings (Hickey 2007, 302). Walshe notices that the pronunciation of the final /əʊ/ varies depending on the type of word. While a realisation with [ə] is common in nouns (as in *pilla* and *widda*), adjectives and verbs, the unstressed vowel [i] only occurs in verbs like *follow*, *swallow* and *borrow* (Walshe 2009, 228). Molloy's use of *–ow* respellings conforms to this pattern which has also been attested in Taniguchi (1972).

A further vocalic feature documented both in southern and northern varieties of Irish English that can be found in the novel is the diphthongisation of ME long o to /aʊ/ in words ending in *–old.* This development is not restricted to Ireland but a respelling with *ou* (e.g. *oul*, *toul*, *houl*) seems characteristic of Irish English. Examples of these respellings have been documented by McCafferty (2009, 84) and Taniguchi (1972). In addition to depicting long o diphthongisation, the modified spellings of *oul*, *toul* and *houl* also represent a consonantal feature that is the loss of final /d/ after /l/. However, this feature is characteristic of Northern Irish English and hence is discussed below.

The respellings *tap*, *stap* and *aff* suggest an unrounding of the LOT vowel to [ɑ], a feature which was brought to Ireland by 17th-century English settlers (Maguire 2020, 110). While LOT unrounding occurs in both Southern and Northern Irish English, it is also recorded as a characteristically northern pronunciation occurring both in cities like Belfast (Harris 1984; Milroy 1981), and Londonderry (McCafferty 1999, 248) as well as in more rural Mid-Ulster areas such as south-west Tyrone (Maguire 2020, 102). Moreover, Hickey lists this feature as typical of Older Scots and conservative Ulster Scots (2007, 104). In fact, the Ulster Scots spellings of words like *off*, *soft* and *drop* are *aff*, *saft* and *drap* (Robinson 2012). Despite being an Irish English feature, the unrounding of the LOT vowel seems to have been mainly represented in literature written by authors from the north of Ireland like William Carleton (McCafferty 2009, 83) and Frances Molloy.

The raising of /e/ to [ɪ] has been described by Bliss as "[o]ne of the most well-known features of Hiberno English" (1979, 203) and, as would be expected, has been documented in many portrayals of Irish English (Dolan 1984; Lynch 2006; McCafferty 2009; Taniguchi 1972; Walshe 2009). This is what has led Hickey to consider DRESS raising a historical feature of Irish English (2007, 304-305). Although this feature has been widely used in fictional portrayals, including the works of the northern writer William Carleton, in natural speech the raising of the DRESS vowel is recorded as a Southern Irish English feature distinctive of the rural areas of the south-west and mid-west of Ireland (2004, 34). Wells also reports the occurrence of this feature in Scots which makes sense given that the Scots, and Ulster Scots, forms of words like *never* and *next* are *niver* and *nixt* (1982, 404).

The two consonantal features that can be found across Ireland and are portrayed in Molloy's novel are post-sonorant devoicing and final-d dropping after /n/, both of which have been classified by Hickey as historical features of Irish English (2007, 306). The difference between them has to do with the fact that the former seems to be a rural feature and the latter an urban feature typical of the east coast of Ireland. As regards the loss of final /d/ in *–nd* words, while it has been mainly attested in the word *and,* which is also found in spoken English (McCafferty 2009, 79; Walshe 2012, 281), this feature has been shown to occur in words like *find* (Bliss 1979, 249) and in *pound* and *round* (Hickey 2007, 303) in literary texts representing an Irish English variety. Furthermore, what is more interesting for this study is that final-d deletion has been recorded as characteristic of Mid-Ulster English (Maguire 2020, 88) and as "categorical/near categorical in other more rural and socially conservative varieties" (Corrigan 2010, 45).

4.1.2. Northern Irish English and Ulster-Scots-influenced features

KIT lowering, which is only represented in the word *his*, is a distinctively Northern Irish English feature (Adams 1948; Corrigan 2010) and one that most likely resulted from the influence of Scots (Maguire 2020, 105). The pronunciation suggested by the respelling *hes* is probably something close to [ɛ̈], the allophone recorded by Corrigan as characteristic of the Mid-Ulster English variety (2010, 34).

The monophthongal realisation of PRICE is lexically bound and restricted to the first-person singular pronoun *I*. It is an Ulster Scots feature and, according to Fenton, its realisation varies depending on whether the pronoun I is unstressed or stressed: "[u]nstressed, its pronunciation ranges from a short *a* to a quite neutral sound. Stressed, it is a broad *ah* in some districts" (2000, xii). The modified spelling used by Molloy is the Ulster Scots form of the first-person pronoun *A*.

Another Ulster Scots pronunciation portrayed by Molloy in the novel is the realisation of the preposition *with* as [we:], as suggested by her respelling *way*. This spelling is innovative inasmuch as the two documented Ulster Scots forms of the preposition *with* are *wae* (Fenton 2000, 226) and *wi* (Robinson 2012, 34), with the latter being more common nowadays in both Ulster Scots and Scots.

As has been briefly mentioned above, the loss of /d/ in words ending in the cluster *–ld* is a Northern Irish English feature occurring in Mid-Ulster English (Corrigan 2010: 45). The origin of d-dropping before /l/ seems to be "the English and Scots inputs ... in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries" (Maguire 2020: 87). Proof of the Scots influence can be found in the Ulster Scots forms *oul* and *houl* for *old* and *hold*. These forms differ from the respellings *ould* and *hould* which have been traditionally used in literary representations of Irish English (Taniguchi 1972; Walshe 2012).

A similar consonantal feature portrayed in *No Mate for the Magpie* is the deletion of final /f/ and /v/ in reflexive pronouns. It could be argued that the loss of /f/ and /v/ are instances of cluster reduction and therefore characteristic of allegro speech. However, the fact that Herbison et al. (2012, 5-6) list the dropping of /v/ as an Ulster Scots feature occurring in medial and final positions makes it likely that the portrayal of this feature in Molloy's novel results from the influence of Ulster Scots in the dialect spoken in her hometown.

The last feature to be discussed is that indicated by the respelling *creathure* where the *th* probably suggests a realisation with an interdental fricative. This realisation has been recorded in Ulster Scots and said to occur in *–ture* words such as *picture* and *nature* (Herbison et al. 2012, 42) and, more generally, when the consonant is followed by vowel+/r/ (Fenton 2000, xi). The respelling *creathure* differs from the most frequent respellings of this word in literary representations of Irish English which are *cratur* (Hickey 2007, 314) and *craythur*. These two more traditional spellings indicate a pronunciation with unraised long e, a realisation that Molloy's spelling does not represent in the word *creature*.

Through a blend of (Northern) Irish English and Ulster-Scots-influenced features, Molloy provides a linguistically accurate representation of rural Derry while simultaneously challenging Northern Ireland's long-standing Catholic-Protestant divide. This blend serves to construct the character of Anne McGlone. Born into a mixed family with a Catholic mother and a Protestant father, McGlone's childhood is defined by the tensions of a hybrid identity and her subsequent struggles with both the Catholic Church and the Protestant community result in a character who ultimately aligns with neither group. This sense of displacement is encapsulated in the title *No Mate for the Magpie*. As Jeffers (2017) suggests, "the magpie is a black-and-white bird, and so, is neither wholly one color, nor one 'identity': neither Protestant nor Catholic" (68). Furthermore, O'Connor (2008) argues that the reference to the magpie likely highlights the novel's "speckled tongue" (69), denoting a linguistically varied and mixed form of speech. Ultimately, Anne McGlone's mixed dialect serves as a key tool for characterization which reinforces her status as a social misfit who exists on the periphery of a polarised society. Molloy's inclusion of Ulster-Scots features distinguishes her literary dialect from that of William Carleton, who excluded Scottish features from his work (McCafferty 2009, 67). Whereas Carleton's writing was shaped by a Catholic identity, Molloy uses linguistic and cultural hybridity to represent the complex social and linguistic landscape of Northern Ireland and to underscore the inherent absurdity of its rigid ethnic divisions.

4.1.3. Molloy's respellings: Authenticity and stereotyping

Most of the respellings used by Frances Molloy can be divided into two main groups: respellings traditionally used in literary portrayals of Irish English and Ulster-Scots-influenced respellings. The first group comprises the respellings employed to portray five features, namely unraised long e, long i retention, diphthongisation of ME long o, final-o-fronting and post-sonorant devoicing. All these features are referred to as historical features by Hickey because they have been attested in texts dating from the 17th century onwards (2007, 301). Moreover, all except for the retention of ME long i are still found in Irish English today, which justifies Molloy's inclusion of them in her novel.

There are two other historical features which are halfway between the two groups of respellings. Those are DRESS raising and the dropping of /d/ in words ending in *–nd.* The problem with the raising of /e/ is that the traditional literary Irish English respellings are the same as the Ulster Scots words and therefore it is difficult to know whether Molloy was following the Irish literary tradition or the Ulster Scots influence. In the case of /d/ deletion after /n/, the problem is slightly different. The author uses two types of respellings to represent this feature. On the one hand, she spells words ending in *–ind* as *–ine*, the Ulster Scots spelling. On the other hand, words where the *–nd* ending is preceded by a vowel other than *i* such as *and*, *hand* and *around* are spelled as *an'*, *han'* and *aroun'.* The respellings consisting of *n* + apostrophe are frequently found in literary portrayals of Irish English, though not exclusive to this variety.

Table 2 shows the respellings which seem to illustrate the influence of Ulster Scots. Many of Molloy's respellings have the same form as the Ulster Scots equivalents of the English words but this does not necessarily mean that she was using the Ulster Scots forms. It is likely that some of these respellings such as *aff*, *tap* and *stap* result from the author's attempt to represent LOT unrounding rather than from an interest in employing Ulster Scots respellings. There does not seem to be a better way to represent the unrounding of the LOT vowel than substituting *o* for *a.* Other respellings, however, diverge slightly from the Ulster Scots forms and provide evidence of Molloy's willingness to produce her own respellings. A useful example is the respelling *way* for the preposition *with*. While Ulster Scots orthography employs *wae* or *wi'*, Molloy opts for the spelling *way*. Although *ae* is a familiar and productive digraph in (Ulster) Scots, two possible motivations for avoiding *wae* may be an attempt to distinguish her dialect from Ulster Scots since what she is trying to represent is not that language but rather a variety of English influenced by Scots and Molloy's search for a more transparent phonographic representation of the intended pronunciation. The alternative form *wi'* might also have been available, but its avoidance likely reflects its weaker association with a vowel quality approximating [e:]. In this sense, Molloy's choices seem to

balance the use of recognizable dialectal features with a spelling strategy that enhances interpretability for readers without specialist knowledge of Scots orthography.

Another difference between Ulster Scots forms and Molloy's respellings can be seen in the reflexive pronouns where she adds an apostrophe to signal the dropping of final /f/ and /v/ that is not used in Ulster Scots (*yersel'* versus *yersel*). The reason why she writes an apostrophe in the pronouns is not easy to explain, especially if one takes into account that she does not use apostrophes for final /d/ dropping after /l/ as in *oul* and after /aɪn/ as in *find*. One possible explanation is that pronouns are function words and this type of words are usually unstressed and produced very fast so that the loss of final sounds is commonplace. Apart from reflexive pronouns, Molloy also adds apostrophes to indicate the dropping of final consonants in *–ing* endings and in the conjunction *and*. The adding of apostrophes probably serves to endow the text with informality which fits the spontaneity and vividness of her storytelling.

Table 2. Comparison between respellings used by Molloy and Ulster Scots forms.

WORDS	MOLLOY'S RESPELLINGS	ULSTER SCOTS FORMS
Old, hold, told, cold	*Oul, houl, toul, coul*	*Oul, houl, toul, coul*
Kind, mind	*Kine, mine*	*Kine, mine*
Devil, never, her, next	*Divil, niver, hir, nixt*	*Divil, niver, hir, nixt*
I	*A*	*A*
Yourself, yourselves himself,	*Yersel', yersel's, himsel',*	*Yersel, yersels, hissel,*
With	*Way*	*Wae, wi*
Off, top, stop	*Aff, tap, stap*	*Aff, tap, stap*

The way that Molloy uses respellings provides evidence of how she managed to create what seems to be a fairly authentic portrayal of the English variety spoken in Dungiven and one that is distinct from both traditional representations of Irish English in writing and Ulster Scots. Although she uses some respellings which are frequently found in literary portrayals of Irish English such as *divil* for *devil* and *tay* for *tea,* their use seems to be justified. *Divil* is representative of DRESS raising, a feature characteristic not only of Irish English, but also of Ulster Scots. Thus, the occurrence of the raising in Dungiven, which is close to the Ulster-Scots-speaking area of North Antrim, seems highly likely. As for *tay,* the unraising of ME long e has been recorded as existing in rural areas of the north, as has been explained previously. Furthermore, what is more important is that Molloy keeps away from spellings like *cratur/craythur* and *ould* which have become stereotyped through their repetitive use in literary, and also telecinematic, Irish English. The authenticity of Molloy's representation of the Dungiven dialect can be also seen in the way she avoids respelling *gold* as *goul*. Even though *gold* has the same spelling as *old* and *hold*, the diphthongisation to /aʊ/ and the loss of final /d/ does not occur in this word (Walshe 2017, 208).

4.2. Corpus-based analysis: Frequency and distribution of Molloy's respellings

As shown in Table 3 below, the four most frequently represented features in *No Mate for the Magpie* are the deletion of /d/ in words ending in *–nd,* the monophthongal realisation of the first-person pronoun *I*, the retention of ME long i and the raising of the DRESS vowel. The high frequency of final /d/ dropping is due to the occurrence of this feature in the conjunction *and*, an extremely common word which is respelled 2475 times in the novel. The second and third most frequent features, despite being lexically bound to the words *I* and *my*, occur throughout the novel, which makes sense given that Molloy uses a first-person narrator. With regard to DRESS raising, its greater lexical incidence contributes to its high frequency. A lower lexical incidence together with occurrence in not-so-common words such as *creature* characterises the three least frequently portrayed features which are post-sonorant devoicing, final-o-fronting and interdentalrealisation of *–ture.*

The AntConc plot tool proved useful in providing the dispersion value which indicates how widely spread each of the features are over the novel. As can be seen in Table 3, most of the features have a dispersion value higher than 0.8. This means that Molloy uses the respellings consistently throughout the novel. The least dispersed feature is post-sonorant devoicing and the reason for this is not a lack of consistency, but the fact that the word where devoicing mostly occurs, namely *Reverend*, appears in chapters 4 and 5 when the narrator recounts her experience as a nun in a convent and is only used twice afterwards.

In addition to the frequency and dispersion of the non-standard spellings, Table 3 also displays the number of times standard spellings are used. For most features standard spellings are scarcely used when compared to respellings and, most importantly, most of them are used in songs or to represent the speech of characters different from the narrator. The characters for whom Molloy uses standard spellings are nuns and a priest. All these characters are older than the narrator, hold authoritative positions and, hence, are expected to speak more standard English. Nevertheless, their speech still shows many dialectal features such as long i retention in *my*, monophthongisation of *I* and DRESS raising. Some of the standard spellings are shown in the speech of the narrator when talking to older characters although she does not usually make changes to her speech in more formal contexts.

Table 3. Features ordered by raw frequency of respellings.

FEATURE	RAW FREQUENCY OF RESPELLINGS	DISPERSION VALUE*	RAW FREQUENCY OF STANDARD SPELLINGS
Loss of final /d/ after /n/	2797	0.954	56
PRICE monophthongisation in *I*	1816	0.859	14
Long i retention	1191	0.909	98
DRESS raising	1155	0.916	10
With as *way*	478	0.931	14
Diphthongisation of long o	413	0.899	6
Loss of final /d/ after /l/	413	0.908	6
KIT lowering	303	0.831	10
LOT unrounding	222	0.928	5
Loss of final /f/ and /v/ in reflexive pronouns	172	0.873	6
Unraised long e	128	0.808	14
Post-sonorant devoicing	29	0.472	1
Final-o-fronting	17	0.688	5
Interdental realisation of *-ture*	3	0.491	2

*Dispersion values range from 0 (mininum value) to 1 (maximum value). The highest the value the more dispersed the feature is.

It seems interesting to discuss in detail the feature with the largest number of standard spellings, which is long i retention. As pointed out above, this feature occurs in the words *my* and *by* in the novel and the vast majority of their occurrences are respelled as *me* and *be*. However, 57 instances of the standard spelling *my* and 41 instances of *by* can be found in the novel. Of the 57 examples of *my*, 34 are used by the narrator, 11 are used in songs and the other 12 are shown in the speech of older characters like neighbours, a priest, a landlady, and the narrator's mother, father and brother. Unlike most instances of the respelling *me* in the novel, which are followed by kinship terms (e.g. *ma*, *da*, *brother*, *sister*) or parts of the body (e.g. *head*, *mind*, *arm*, *face*, *eyes*), the 34 standard spellings employed by the narrator are combined with more abstract nouns such as *education*, *turn*, *delight*, *function*, *direction*, *hospitality* and *welfare*, among others. This finding provides useful information about the particularities of the retention of ME long I, which seems to have survived in the possessive pronoun *my* when it is used with kinship terms and parts of the body.

Regarding the 41 instances of *by*, a careful examination of all the examples shows that the standard spelling is used in songs and when preceded by the verbs *go*, *pass* and *walk*. By contrast, the respelling *be* is mainly found in the time adverbs *by the end* and *by the time* or when followed by a gerund (e.g. *be tellin'*). This may suggest that the monophthongal pronunciation of *by* has only been retained in certain contexts and fixed expressions.

5. Conclusion

This paper has thoroughly examined the representation of a rural South Derry accent in Frances Molloy's *No Mate for the Magpie* by addressing key questions concerning the features used to index regional identity, their degree of authenticity and their consistency across the novel. Drawing on a combination of a more traditional, qualitative analysis and corpus-based methods, the study has shown that Molloy systematically employs fourteen pronunciation features, many of which are well attested in Irish English, Northern Irish English and Ulster Scots varieties. She relies on a range of vocalic and consonantal features that are salient in the linguistic landscape of Mid-Ulster, thereby constructing a recognisable regional voice.

In relation to authenticity, the comparison with existing dialectological and sociolinguistic research indicates that these features are largely grounded in real-world usage, supporting the claim that the portrayal can be considered fairly authentic. This does not mean that Molloy's representation is free from some of the traditional, and sometimes stereotyped, respellings used to convey an Irish English accent. She includes the respellings *lave*, *me*, *oul* and *divil*, all of which have become deeply entrenched and are representative of the Stage Irishman (Bartley 1942, 446). However, the motivation behind her use of those respellings most likely has to do with the fact that the pronunciations they attempt to represent could be heard in a place like Dungiven in the 1980s.

At the same time, this study has highlighted that Molloy's orthographic practices are not merely reproductive but also creative. While she draws on established literary conventions and Ulster Scots forms, she also introduced innovative respellings (e.g. *way* instead of *wae* or *wi* for the preposition *with*) that reflect both phonographic considerations and a degree of differentiation from Ulster Scots. Moreover, unlike William Carleton—an author whose literary dialect has been examined more extensively than that of any other Northern Irish writer and who avoids 'the most marked Scottish features of Ulster English' (McCafferty 2009, 67)—she represents several Ulster Scots-influenced features, which suggests a greater willingness to acknowledge the linguistic hybridity present in rural South Derry speech. By embracing these regionally varied linguistic markers, Molloy moves beyond the rigid Catholic-Protestant divide to represent the complex, and often absurd, reality of Northern Ireland's social landscape.

With regard to consistency, the analysis has shown that Molloy deploys the relevant non-standard features with remarkable regularity across the novel. Most features display high dispersion values, indicating that the respellings are not clustered in specific sections but recur throughout the narrative voice. Crucially, while standard spellings occasionally appear, these are largely confined to songs or to the speech of older, more authoritative characters such as nuns or a priest, whose more standard forms are socially motivated. The narrator's own use of standard forms is similarly patterned and contextually meaningful rather than arbitrary. Taken together, these patterns demonstrate that Molloy's dialect representation is not only grounded in authentic features but is internally coherent and systematically applied, contributing to a stable and credible rendering of a rural South Derry voice.

Molloy's approach, which combines broadly authentic features with deliberate stylistic choices—including her incorporation of Ulster-Scots-influenced forms and the innovative respellings that distinguish her literary dialect from that of writers such as Carleton—supports the broader argument, outlined in the introduction, that literary dialect should be understood not only as a reflection of real speech but also as a constructed, interpretative resource shaped by authorial intention. It also connects back to the earlier point that whereas many writers have traditionally used dialect for comic effect, Molloy seems to resist this tendency, reinforcing her husband's view that she employed dialect to give voice to people and experiences she believed had been neglected.

Overall, the findings underscore that authentic dialect representation is a key tool for indexing both a regional South Derry identity and the protagonist's hybrid ethnic positioning, thereby highlighting the role of literary dialect in mediating authenticity and complex sociolinguistic meanings. In doing so, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about literary dialect, while also pointing to the value of combining qualitative and corpus-based approaches in the analysis of fictional language.

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