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THE DEFINITE ARTICLE IN LIVING YORKSHIRE DIALECT

BY W. E. JONES

This paper¹ summarises the results of my recent investigation into the phonetics of the definite article in Yorkshire dialect speech. The investigation had two objects: to show on a map the areas in which the various types of definite article are heard nowadays, and to attempt to analyse phonetically as fully as possible all the observed variations of each type. The field-work was done between August 1949 and May 1950; sixty places were visited,² and the speech of elderly natives phonetically transcribed.

Although A. J. Ellis in his survey of the country's dialects (*On Early English Pronunciation* V, London 1889) did not write a separate chapter on or give any results concerning the definite article, he made it clear in his Introductory Matter (p 10*) that the careful recording by the field-worker of the forms of the definite article was in his opinion most important. From his illustrative material — comparative specimens (op cit 7*) and dialect tests (8*-16*) — it is possible to extract a good deal of information about the article in Yorkshire, and by plotting the results on a map (see Map A below) to show the area in which each of the types of article is found.

Ellis's material permits us to talk of three basic types of definite article in Yorkshire, viz:—

Type 1. The article appears as [t] or some modification of it before nouns beginning with a consonant or a vowel.

¹ It is based on a dissertation which I presented in 1950 for the degree of M.A. of the University of Leeds. This dissertation, entitled 'An Investigation into the Phonetics of the Definite Article in Yorkshire', is in the possession of the Department of English Language and Medieval Literature, University of Leeds. It is a pleasure to acknowledge here that I have made full use of the help and suggestions readily given to me by Professor H. Orton and Mr. P. A. D. MacCarthy, both of the University of Leeds.

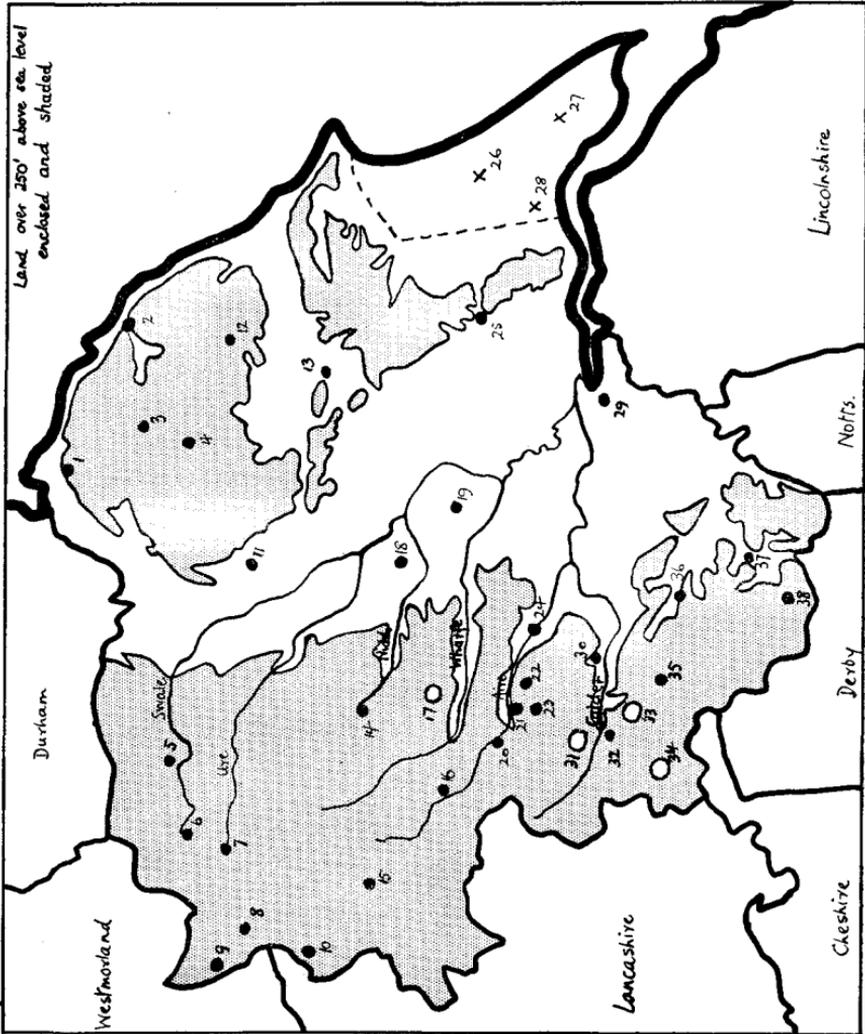
² On a motor-cycle which was very kindly placed at my disposal by the University of Leeds.

MAP A

Yorkshire on a scale of 12 miles to 1" showing information about the Definite Article in Yorkshire Dialects given by A.T. Ellis in Volume I of 'An Early English Pronunciation'.

- Type 1 article recorded
- Type 2 article recorded
- X Type 3 article recorded

--- Railway line, full to Bridlington.



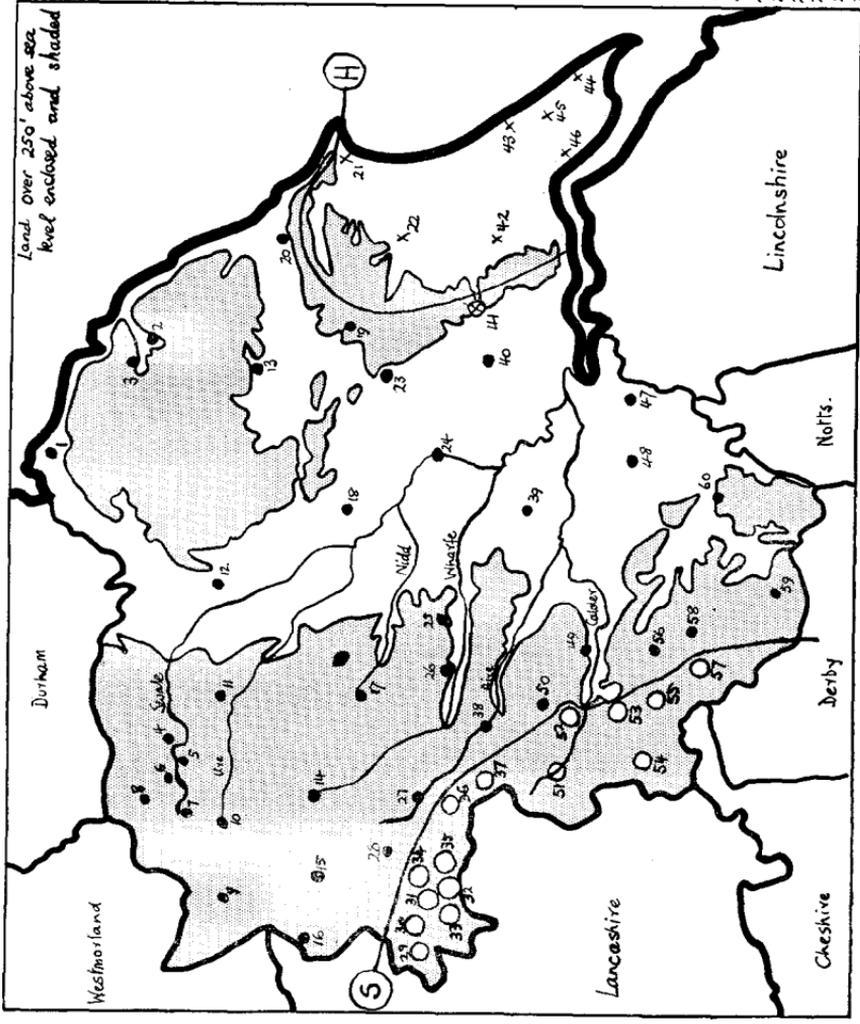
- 1 Skelton, in Cleveland
- 2 Wistow and NE Coast
- 3 Bandy, in Cleveland
- 4 South Cleveland
- 5 Hurst near Richmond
- 6 Mable, Southdale
- 7 Howes, Newbydale
- 8 Port
- 9 Seabrook
- 10 Burton, in Longdale
- 11 North Mid. Yorkshire
- 12 Wistow, Pickering and Malton
- 13 Newby, Malton
- 14 Lower Niddsdale
- 15 Giggleswick, near Settle
- 16 Skipton
- 17 Lonsdale, in Lancashire
- 18 Mid. Yorkshire
- 19 South Ainst.
- 20 Keyley
- 21 Windyhill, near Southford
- 22 Calverley, near Southford
- 23 Bradford
- 24 Leeds
- 25 Market Weighton
- 26 Fotherness
- 27 East Fotherness
- 28 Dalton, near Hull
- 29 Gole and St. Marthes
- 30 Dewsbury
- 31 Halifax
- 32 Elland
- 33 Huddersfield
- 34 Marsden
- 35 Upper Cumberworth
- 36 Barnsley
- 37 Rotherham
- 38 Sheffield

MAP B

Yorkshire on a scale of 12 miles to 1" showing the results of research carried out in 1950 into the Definite Article in Yorkshire.

- Type 1 article recorded
- Type 2 article recorded
- X Type 3 article recorded
- ⊗ Mixture of Types 1 and 2 recorded

- 1 Horwike, near Saltburn
- 2 Grosmont, near Wharfedale
- 3 Epton, near Wharfedale
- 4 Kesh, Swaledale
- 5 Low Arms, Swaledale
- 6 Gunningwade, Swaledale
- 7 Muker, Swaledale
- 8 Longkirkwate
- 9 Garsdale
- 10 Arawe, Swaledale
- 11 Leyburn
- 12 Northcliffe
- 13 Pketering
- 14 Kettlewell, Swaledale
- 15 Horton, Swaledale
- 16 Barden, Swaledale
- 17 Greenway, near Pateley, Swaledale
- 18 Hildesley, near Embsay, Swaledale
- 19 Atharham, Swaledale
- 20 Manton, near Pateley, Swaledale
- 21 Flamborough
- 22 Rippledale
- 23 Leavening, near Malton
- 24 York
- 25 North Ripton, near Harrogate
- 26 Barnley, near Otley
- 27 Gargrave, near Shipton
- 28 Long Ripton, near Settle
- 29 Dunmow Bridge
- 30 Slaithwaite
- 31 Harrold, near Girdlestone
- 32 Girdlestone, near Claxton
- 33 West Bradford
- 34 Ballon, near Shipton
- 35 Gossom, near Shipton
- 36 Earsby, near Gossom
- 37 Cowling, near Kettlewell
- 38 Kettlewell
- 39 Dunsford, near Elmet
- 40 Evington
- 41 Market Weighton
- 42 Beverley
- 43 Huddersfield
- 44 Ishterence
- 45 Ross
- 46 Haden, near Airedale
- 47 Thorne
- 48 Moss, near Jorncroft
- 49 Dewsbury
- 50 Bailly, near Bradford
- 51 Hadden Bridge
- 52 Archer
- 53 Flockwood, near Huddersfield
- 54 Thackley
- 55 Huddersfield
- 56 Dewsbury
- 57 Bradford Bridge
- 58 Ransome
- 59 Rippledale
- 60 Gossom, near Jorncroft



Land over 250' above sea level enclosed and shaded

Lincolnshire

Notts.

Derby

Cheshire

Lancashire

Durham

Westmorland

(S)

(H)

Type 2. The article appears as [t] or some modification of it before nouns beginning with a consonant, and as [θ] or some modification of it before nouns beginning with a vowel.

Type 3. The article does not appear at all.

Reference to Map A will show that the areas are fairly well defined. Type 1 is found in the great central plain, and in the North East and North West of the county; Type 2 in a strip of the county where it borders on Lancashire; and Type 3 in the South-East peninsula, usually referred to as Holderness.

Two points need comment: the results shown for the Washburn River area, and Ellis's sources for his material relating to Holderness. It will be noticed that well inside the Type 1 region there is a small area where Type 2 is recorded. This is the Washburn River area (Map A, No 17). The material for this district was given by C. C. Robinson, one of Ellis's chief helpers, and Ellis printed the information given by such a reliable field-worker in spite of his own doubts about its correctness (op cit 497). For information about Holderness, Ellis went to the *Holderness Glossary* of F. Ross, R. Stead and T. Holderness (English Dialect Society, London 1877). These glossarists insisted that the article did not appear (ibid 5); see also John Nicholson, who gives the same information in his *Folk Speech of East Yorkshire* (London 1889), 47.

The results of my recent transcriptions of Yorkshire dialect speech are plotted on Map B, which shows the same general picture of the three areas as does Map A. Each of the types is confined to a well-defined area; and my recordings show that Types 1 and 2 are heard with many variations, which are analysed in some detail in this paper.

Type 1 is recorded in the central plain, the North East, and the North West. This area may be called the Central Area. It coincides in general with the Type-1 area of Ellis, except that the Washburn River area is now recorded as having a Type-1 article; that is to say, it fits in with its surroundings. This differs from the results of Robinson's field-work. Whether the new result is due to a change that has taken place during

the past sixty years or so, the 'outcrop' area becoming gradually assimilated to the area around it; or whether the material printed by Ellis (with reservations) did not in fact represent the general usage in the area at the time, but only a minority usage, it is not possible to decide. In any case much more field-work in the area will be necessary before the firm statements of Robinson can be discarded altogether.

Type 2 is heard in what we may call the South-West Area. The border between this and the Central Area runs North and East of Slaidburn (30), Bolton-by-Bowland (34), Gisburn (35), Earby (36), Cowling (37), Hebden Bridge (51), Halifax (52), Huddersfield (53), Holmfirth (55), and Dunford Bridge (57); and South and West of Long Preston (28), Gargrave (27), Keighley (38), Shelf (50), Denby (56), Penistone (58), and Sheffield (59). (A tentative boundary-line is drawn as Line S on Map B. Contour maps show nothing that bears any relation to this border, and I am not able at the moment to offer any opinion about the reason for its lying where it does.) It has been known for some time that a type of definite article different from that heard in most of the county is heard in the Huddersfield district — see for instance A. Easter's *Glossary of the Dialect of Almondbury and Huddersfield* (English Dialect Society, London 1883), 134 — but apart from the information which it is possible to extract from Ellis's work, as far as I know no writer on dialect has attempted to define the extent of the area in which this type is heard. For more recent comment, see W. E. Haigh's *The Dialect of the Huddersfield District* (London 1928), 128, and J. A. Sheard, 'Some Recent Research in West Riding Dialects' in the *Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society* VII, Part XLV (1946), 25.³ Until a survey of the definite article in Lancashire is available it is not possible to discuss how far this type in Yorkshire is the result of Lancashire influence.

³ Easter states that the article is (t') or (th) indiscriminately. He also thinks it occasionally falls out altogether, but will not commit himself. Haigh writes: 'Both forms [t', th'] are used indifferently in this dialect before consonants, but before vowels (th') is usual.' Sheard writes: '... at present [1946] the Halifax-Huddersfield area is the boundary in the East of the [θ] form, and places further East have the "suspended t".'

Type 3, in which there is no definite article at all, is found in Holderness. My recordings confirm very definitely the statements of the glossarists of this area, to which I have already referred. Ellis drew as the boundary of this area the railway-line route from Hull to Bridlington (shown on Map A; and see op cit 501), but it seems more reasonable to take as the boundary for this dialectal feature the curve of the high ground of the Wolds. This is shown as Line H on Map B. The thesis that the Wolds form the boundary between the Central Area and Holderness is supported by the fact that at Market Weighton (Map B, No 41), where there is a break in the line of the Wolds, both Type 1 and Type 2 are heard. (See also Ellis's material for Sutton, near Hull — Map A, No 28; op cit 522-3 — where it is possible another such 'corridor' may exist.)

It is convenient to discuss the phonetic analysis of the various kinds of definite article under four headings: (I) the article in the Central and South-West Areas when it appears before a noun beginning with a consonant; (II) the article in the Central Area before a noun beginning with a vowel; (III) the article in the South-West Area before a noun beginning with a vowel; (IV) the article in Holderness. Under each heading the article will be considered (A) when it occurs initially in a breath-group, and (B) when it occurs medially in a breath-group.

I. CENTRAL AND SOUTH-WEST AREAS: THE ARTICLE FOLLOWED BY A CONSONANT.

A. *Initially*. The presence of a definite article initially in a breath-group, before a noun beginning with a consonant, is not (in my opinion) aurally detectable with any certainty. The difference between the dialect pronunciations of 'the brooks are full' and 'brooks are full' probably lies in the presence of a glottal closure before the [b] in the first sentence. This might cause some difference in the amount of breath force used in the explosion of the [b]; but I believe that, in general, listeners rely on the context to tell them whether or not an article is present. For any dependable information, some

instrumental means of examination will be necessary; such a technique is mentioned below. The problem is one that must therefore be shelved for the present.

B. *Medially*. (a) When the following consonant is a plosive, the definite article is perceptible aurally as a suspension of breath (and therefore voice). It is this suspension that led Ellis to describe the article in these areas as a *suspended t* (op cit 317), since very often the approach to the suspension is a clearly heard [t]-closure. (The use of the word *suspension* in descriptions of this kind of article is not without dangers, for it is possible for suspension to occur in a breath-group not containing the article, as in the RS pronunciations [hætpin] 'hatpin', [topdog] 'top dog', [blækkæt] 'black cat', and so on.)⁴

In addition, it seems to me highly probable that a glottal closure is made along with the oral closure. I have come to this opinion after examining myself as I pronounce phrases containing the article in my own native dialect.⁵ It is not possible of course to detect this closure aurally, since it takes place in conjunction with an oral closure; some instrumental method is needed. Neither feeling the throat with the fingers, nor laryngoscopy,⁶ nor electromyography⁷ are of use; possibly the only solution lies in the use of a Cine-X-ray technique like the one recently developed in the U.S.A.⁸ There is no such equipment yet available (1950) in England, and so there is no immediate possibility of having the problem clarified. In my transcriptions, however, I put in the symbol for the glottal closure ([ʔ]) where I think it occurs during definite-article suspension.

⁴ I have, however, used the term 'suspension' throughout this paper with reference to the characteristic 'suspension of breath'. It is at best a makeshift term; but I do not feel qualified to suggest any other until I can add instrumental investigation to my own observations. The absence of such investigation, which has so far been impossible, makes this paper incomplete as a discussion of the whole problem.

⁵ Of the Doncaster area (North Midland). It is perhaps worth mention that in all the relevant literature, including dialect poetry, word lists, studies of particular dialects, and so on, I have seen only one reference to this glottalisation apart from a note of my own in *Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society* VIII, Part XLIX (1949). This is the reference made by J. R. Firth in his 'Sounds and Prosodies', *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1948), 144.

⁶ For a description of this technique, see *Lancet* II (1944), 651.

⁷ See P. Bauwens, 'Electromyography', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.* (1948), 291 f.

⁸ See *Radiology* 51.5, Nov. 1948, and 52.5, May 1949.

I have recorded three varieties of this *suspended* article:

- i. Suspension with a [t]-closure. This is very common:
 [in^t_?kuntri]⁹ in the country [unde^t_?blaŋkit] under the blanket
 [tə^t_?duə] to the door [wi^t_?biəs] with the beasts

ii. Suspension with 'anticipatory' closure. Instead of an approach to [t], there is an approach direct to the position required for the consonant following the article. This variation is also very common:

- [wi^k_?ki:] with the key [ontə^p_?pləŋk] onto the plank
 [tə^p_?pigz] to the pigs [ku^p_?bi:f] cut the beef

- iii. Suspension by [ʔ] alone. This is much rarer:
 [a[?]so:ʔgeim] I saw the game

(b) When the consonant is a non-plosive, there may or may not be suspension, and the following variations are to be noted:

- i. Suspension with a [t]-closure. This is very common:

- [wi^t_?juŋis^lsun] with the youngest son
 [i^t_?mo:nin] in the morning [in^t_?ru:m] in the room
 [in^t_?watə] in the water

ii. Suspension with 'anticipatory' closure. This, too, is fairly common:

- [wi^p_?misis] with the missus [ontə^p_?mat] onto the mat
 [ontə^p_?midin] onto the midden

But note that it occurs only when the following consonant is [m]. When it is [n], the approach is to [t] (homorganic), and

⁹ Whenever there appears a plosive over a glottal closure in the following transcriptions, it is to be interpreted as meaning that the oral closure follows the glottal; and when the consonant above the [ʔ] differs from the consonant that immediately follows, it is to be interpreted as meaning that the change of position of the organs of articulation to the position required for such a following consonant takes place (silently) while the glottal closure is held.

such an example as the following might be listed here or in (b, i) above:

[ə^hnek] at the neck

iii. Suspension by [ʔ] alone. This is rare:

[wiʔ^hjunis^hlas] with the youngest lass

iv. Without suspension, [t] affixed to the consonant. This is fairly common:

[wit^hwind] with the wind [int^hleg] in the leg
[int^hwatə] in the water [int^hlaibri] in the library

v. Without suspension, with sustained fricative. Not very common:

[ðats^hstuf] that's the stuff! [snif^hvikə] sniff the vicar

II. CENTRAL AREA: THE ARTICLE FOLLOWED BY A VOWEL.

A. *Initially*. Article heard as [t] or [ʔ], as in:

[^htakslz^hbent] the axle's bent

[^holiz kumin on] the holly's coming on

B. *Medially*.

i. Without suspension, aspirated [t^h] prefixed to vowel. Not very common:

[fet^ht^hosəz] fetch the horses

[wi^ht^hegkup] with the egg-cup

ii. Without suspension, unaspirated [t] prefixed to vowel. This is very common:

[gaðə^htegz] gather the eggs [on^hta:nis] on the harness

[i^hto:kestrə] in the orchestra [so:^hto:d^hman] saw the old man

iii. Without suspension, voiced [d] prefixed to vowel. Quite often heard, especially after *in* and *into*:

[i^hdaftə^hnu:n] in the afternoon [intə^hdedʒ] into the hedge

iv. Suspension, [ʔt] followed by vowel. This is not common:

[onʔ^ttil] on the hill [si:ʔ^ttosəz] see the horses

v. [tʔ] followed by vowel. This is very common:
 [seltʔ^od^lpaint] sell the odd pint [ontʔ^ed] on the head
 [əfuətʔ^aksidənt] before the accident
 [brɪŋtʔ^arə] bring the harrow

vi. [ʔt] followed by vowel. This is rare:
 [baiʔ^ttərinz] buy the herrings

vii. [ʔ] followed by vowel. This, too, is rare:
 [fetʃʔ^uni aut] fetch the honey out
 [i put ʔ^at on] he put the hat on

III. SOUTH-WEST AREA: THE ARTICLE FOLLOWED BY A VOWEL.

A. *Initially.* Article heard as [θ] or [ʔ], as in:
 [ʔθuðəz iz ʔwet] the others is wet
 [ʔansəz ʔjes] the answer's yes

B. *Medially.*

i. Without suspension, [θ] prefixed to vowel. This is quite common:

[puʔ^tbuədʒ i'θoil] put the boards in the (door) hole (i e shut the door)

[i'θelbə] in the elbow

ii. Without suspension, [tθ] prefixed to vowel. This is very common:

[itʔ^hend] in the end [witʔ^hamə] with the hammer

[in ʔ^hfrunt ətʔ^huðə] in front of the other

