

Reading Aloud in Dickens' Novels

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Reading Aloud and Dickens' Victorian England

Reading aloud has a long history. In their introduction to *A History of Reading in the West*, Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier state (1999:40): "In the ancient world, in the Middle Ages and as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the sort of reading implicit in many texts was oralized (as was their actual reading). The 'readers' of those texts were listeners attentive to a reading voice. The text, addressed to the ear as much as to the eye, played on forms and formulas that adapted writing to the demands of oral performance." Though Dickens' nineteenth century is a time period outside those discussed by Cavallo and Chartier, ample evidence shows that reading aloud continued into the Victorian period. For example, the habit of performing a literary text orally in a Victorian family is well documented. In *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Sally Mitchell presents us with a seemingly prototypical family scene (1996:234): "reading aloud was customary during an evening at home. . . . One person sat next to the only good lamp and read from a serialized novel or some other publication that would be interesting to both youngsters and adults."

Reading aloud was also a common phenomenon in the public domain in Victorian England. Dickens, with his publishers Chapman and Hall, successfully distributed literary reading materials to people from different social strata by reducing the price of novels through serialization. In *Victorian Novels in Serial*, Jerry Don Vann gives sole credit to Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* for broadening the Victorian readership (1985:2): it "greatly enlarged the reading audience, who . . . could not manage the price of a published volume but could afford the monthly installments." Serialization and the lower price of reading materials admitted a larger readership. Some of the new readers would have assembled and read a shared copy of the most recent issue in open spaces. Since the literacy level of this crowd was still low before school attendance was made compulsory in 1870 by the Education Act, many people from lower classes would listen to recitals of texts instead of reading print themselves. Dickens' readers who were from such social backgrounds might have read his work in this manner. Jeremy Hawthorn (1985:17) points out that "there have been cases of illiterate people gathering to hear novels read—part of Dickens's audience was of this sort."

Two types of readers were involved in reading scenarios like these: one who read aloud, and one who, though illiterate, was able to read with the ears rather than the eyes. Thus, as

Cavallo and Chartier comment (1999:4), “the text, addressed to the ear as much as to the eye, played on forms and formulas that adapted writing to the demands of oral performance.” Despite Walter Benjamin’s lament in his essay “The Storyteller” that “the reader of a novel . . . is isolated” (1969:100) and Ian Watt’s (1957:200-01) thesis about the relation between the rise of individualism and novel-reading, the readers-aloud and the listener-readers were not reading solitarily and “jealously,” to use Benjamin’s term. Instead, they enjoyed a more communal experience.

Reading Aloud and Dickens’ Writing

The writing style of Dickens’ large body of work was influenced by the Victorian practice of reading aloud, an activity of the period that the writer himself indulged in both privately and publicly. Dickens was aware of the way his works were “orally consumed.” As Alan Shelston (1970:78) notes, he was “conscious that his installments were read, as they appeared, at family gatherings”; Donald Perkins also perceives that “the novels of Dickens are peculiarly fitted to be read aloud Dickens himself ultimately recognized this” (1982:25). In fact, during his farewell reading tour Dickens advertised his forthcoming new story, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, so that the listeners to his readings could “enter upon a new series of readings, in their own homes, at which his assistance would be indispensable” (Dexter 1932:253).

My argument is that in response to the pervasive family and social activity of reading aloud in the Victorian age, Dickens composed his novels in ways that would further encourage and facilitate such practice. The focus of this essay will be Dickens’ representation of characters’ speech. This aspect is especially interesting since it highlights the relation between “fictional dialogue” and “natural speech.” It seems that the more closely the fictional dialogue follows natural speech, the higher the level of orality achieved. Dickens employed explicit markers to simultaneously *elicit* and *assist* the oral reproduction of the distinctive voices of many of his characters—through phonetic spelling, narrative comments, and punctuation, or through a combination of the above. These markers illustrate plainly the writer’s active participation in creating a unique possibility for spoken performance of his characters’ voices. They also show that in the writing process Dickens took into account the “other” reader who read through listening, either due to illiteracy or because of a personal preference for aural reception. Although these markers have been mentioned by critics from a similar perspective,¹ their function in relation to reading aloud has not been systematically recognized and studied.

In *Aspects of the Novel* (1993), E. M. Forster likens people in a novel to “actors,” which is an appropriate term to describe Dickens’ characters. Stage performance usually involves actors speaking, and like actors on stage, “Dickens’s characters are found to exist very largely through their speech” (Allott 1959:210). There is direct biographical evidence that Dickens designed his works to be performed and heard. For instance, he often mimicked the speech of his characters while writing. This was observed by his daughter Mamie Dickens, who reported (Ackroyd

¹ E.g., Quirk (1959), Page (1988), Chapman (1984), Fowler (1989), and Gerson (1967).

2002:561, emphasis added):

One of these mornings, I was lying on the sofa endeavoring to keep perfectly quiet, while my father wrote busily and rapidly at his desk, when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to a mirror which hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few moments, and then went again to the mirror. The facial pantomime was resumed, and then turning toward, but evidently not seeing me, *he began talking rapidly in a low voice.*

Allen Grant (1984:51) believes that Mamie Dickens' description reveals "the idea of energetic impersonation" as the inspirational process by which Dickens created his characters. The author also claimed that he could hear the voices of his fictional beings: "Dickens once declared to me that every word said by his characters was distinctly *heard* by him" (Lewes 1872:66). Roger Fowler, commenting on the conversation of Stephen and Rachel in *Hard Times*, says that "Dickens has—in *writing* of course—deliberately constructed a very *oral* model of language for these two humble characters . . ." (1989:86-87, author's emphasis). These remarks underscore the interrelatedness of hearing, writing, and oral reproduction in the course of Dickens' literary composition.

Phonetic Spellings

Dickens occasionally demonstrated through phonetic spellings how some characters speak in dialects in the novels. Although the main characters in his work are often given a standard London dialect, there are a few exceptions such as Stephen Blackpool from *Hard Times* and Sam Weller from *Pickwick Papers* who speak in Lancashire and Cockney English respectively, as indicated by phonetic and deviant spellings. Chapman believes that "the conventions of spelling within the language are used to produce a written sign which can then be read aloud with reasonable approximation to its original sound" (1984:38). By the same token, deviant spelling tends to have the function of representing nonstandard pronunciation for reading aloud.

For example, to represent East Anglian English, a dialect spoken by some characters in *David Copperfield*, Dickens "relie[d] for his effect upon the rendering of pronunciation through variant spellings, concentrating on the broad vowel-sounds: weel (will), loove (love), etc." (Page 1988:64). East London Cockney is another dialect Dickens put into his characters' mouths. David Crystal (2004:497) contends in *The Stories of English* that "the omission of *g* and *h*, and the substitution of *w* for *v*" contribute to the construction of Cockney English in *The Pickwick Papers*. Cockney-speaking readers-aloud would probably feel at home with Dickens' representation of the dialect and perhaps even improvise in places to achieve a more authentic rendition. Yet other readers who are unfamiliar with Cockney would try to adjust their own pronunciation and imitate the dialect as suggested by the phonetic spellings. This strategy would also be useful for readers in construing other dialects and foreign speeches in the novels, such as

Yorkshire in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Lancashire in *Hard Times*, French in *Little Dorrit* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, and American English in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

Four Narrative Comments

Dickens provided different types of narrative comments that assist the reader-aloud in orally performing the characters' peculiar speech styles. These narrative comments pertain to various speech aspects such as the pronunciation of some word sounds and the pragmatic use of the English language; but comments on syntax, speed, and quality of speech can also be found in conjunction with punctuation, as will be shown below. When reading aloud, the reader receives these comments as hints or even "stage directions," to use Randolph Quirk's phrasing, about how to dramatize the characters' utterances.

Sometimes the narrative comments appear after the actual speech; in such cases the comments are subsidiary in nature since very often the punctuation in the dialogue already suggests the manner of speech delivery. As Frank Smith suggests, "in fluent reading the eye is always ahead of the words the brain is actually working on, checking for possible obstacles to a particular understanding" (1978:84). This means that even comments that follow the speech can help the reader-aloud to notice how the text should be orally reproduced.

Comments on Word Sounds

In the novels Dickens provided narrative observations regarding his characters' articulation of some word sounds, thus facilitating the reading of the speech for a listening audience. For example, in both *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*, Dickens commented on how the characters pronounce the [s] in their speech.

In *David Copperfield*, David introduced a servant in Steerforth's house, Littimer: "He had . . . a soft voice of speaking, with a peculiar habit of whispering the letter s so distinctly, that he seemed to use it oftener than any other man" (*DC*, 21:307).² Again in *Hard Times*, Dickens observed how Mr. Sleary, the circus proprietor, pronounces the [s] sound. Dickens paid close attention to his lisp; the lisp, according to Chapman (1984:115), seems to be "something of an affectation at one time in England but is more often an involuntary imperfection." It also produces a humorous effect. Here is a sample of Sleary's speech (*HT*, I. 6:40, emphases added):

² In this narrative comment, Dickens used the word "letter" as a synonym for "word-sound" or "phoneme." David Abercrombie explains that ". . . *letter* has, in the past, frequently been used in a sense similar to the modern term *speech-sound*" (1965:77). Before the twentieth century, it was commonplace for people to use the word "letter" to refer to both an element from the alphabet and the sound produced, despite the occasional lack of precision this practice would lead to. We can assume that when Dickens talked about "the letter S," he was indeed referring to the speech sound [s]. Actually, in the short story "The Boarding House" from *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens also explicitly linked "the letter S" with whispering: "'S-s-s' whispered the mischief-maker" (*SB*, 301). Citations from the novels are made by abbreviation, and refer to Dickens 1994, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, and 2004.

[1] 'Thquire!' said Mr. Sleary, who was troubled with asthma, and *whose breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter s*, 'Your *thervant!* *Thith ith* a bad *piethe* of *bithnith*, *thith ith*. You've heard of my Clown and *hith* dog being *thuppothed* to have *morrithed*?'

For the purpose of multiple emphases, Dickens not only explicitly noted that "[Sleary's] breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter s," but he also transformed every <s> (the [s] and [z] sounds) in his speech to <th> ([θ] and [ð] sounds). As a result, a combination of narrative comment and variant spelling helps suggest the distinctive voice of the character. All [s], [z], [θ], and [ð] are fricatives, but [θ] and [ð] seem to be easier for Sleary to pronounce because they require a less specific positioning of the tongue. While it is possible to explain Sleary's speech economically through narrative comment (or "telling"), Dickens' effort to change all the instances of <s> to <th> (or "showing") demonstrates unequivocally his intention of forcing the reader to imitate Sleary's way of spitting out the [θ] and [ð] sounds. Whereas in *David Copperfield* the reader is informed about Littimer's special treatment of the [s] sound without being required to mimic his pronunciation, in Sleary's speech quoted from *Hard Times* above, the reader faces the considerable challenge of forsaking some usual pronunciations and being forced to adopt the character's style when reading aloud.

Comments on Characters' Use of Language that Suits the Situation

Sometimes Dickens described his characters' use of language to suit the situation. In *Dombey and Son*, Mrs. Mac Stinger said, ". . . don't know that I lost money by that man, and by his guzzlings and his muzzlings," and the narrator comments as follows: "Mrs. Mac Stinger used the last word for the joint sake of alliteration and aggravation, rather than for the expression of any idea" (*DS*, 39:604). This comment stresses the pragmatic motivation of Mrs. Mac Stinger's word choice and explains how she used similar-sounding words to express her annoyance. Interestingly, however, the two words "guzzlings" and "muzzlings" do not alliterate—they rhyme. Dickens' comment is thus ironic and further indicates Mrs. Mac Stinger's arbitrary use of the language when she was agitated.

Another character in the same novel, Mr. Bunsby, might be considered to be a sharper language user. Captain Cuttle said "'no more. There he lays, all his days—' 'Mr. Busby, who had a musical ear, suddenly bellowed, 'In the Bays of Biscay, O!'" (*DS*, 39:600). Having "a musical ear," Mr. Busby discerned the rhymes "lays" and "days" in Cuttle's speech and picked up on the rhyming pattern in his "Bays" and "Biscay." Dickens created a comical character whose choice of words is pragmatically driven.

Examples in this section tell the reader-aloud little about how the speech should be produced, but nevertheless supply information about the speech habits of the characters and reveal Dickens's attentiveness to spoken linguistic features such as alliteration and rhyme.

Punctuation as a Sign of Language Awareness

Typography invites us to see how Dickens conveyed orality through print. For example, italicizing key words in characters' speech to suggest emphasis or significant increase in volume is common in Dickens' fiction. This section focuses on punctuation, an element of typography, and studies the speech patterns it signals.

Punctuation has long been regarded as an aid for reading aloud. In *The Stuff of Literature: Physical Aspects of the Texts and Their Relation to Literary Meaning*, Edward A. Levenston points out that "Renaissance punctuation was . . . basically rhetorical, a guide to reading aloud" (1992:66). The significance of punctuation for spoken performance continued to the Victorian era. For example, Levenston investigates the punctuation in one passage from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and remarks (70): "It seems designed to be read aloud, with appropriately long pauses between the sentences to add to the suspense. And even if the Brontë sisters never gave public readings of the novels; both Charles Dickens and Mark Twain did just that." Dickens' careful use of punctuation is well acknowledged. As Malcolm Parkes notes, "Charles Dickens when correcting proofs . . . paid meticulous attention to punctuation" (1992:5). Philip Gaskell observes that "many authors, especially since the mid nineteenth century, have cared about the details of their punctuation and have bothered to correct it. Dickens was one" (1972:342). In a letter he wrote to Miss Burdett Coutts dated 30 March 1853, Dickens complained about printers who changed the punctuation of a letter sent to him: "the printers have taken into their wise heads to punctuate elaborately—thereby destroying [the letter's] simplicity" (1853-55, vol. 7:53). The editors of the letter comment in a corresponding footnote that "the letter [that Dickens wrote to Miss Burdett Coutts] has very little punctuation." It seems that Dickens took punctuation seriously even in his personal letters.

In the novels, physical markers such as punctuation and typography for representing spoken utterances were important because Dickens "knew that his works were read aloud in the family circle and must be effective as sound, it was through the page as seen that he must make his main impact" (Quirk 1959:17). The effects of punctuation on reading aloud have been often observed by critics. For example, John Schad (1992) points out how a semi-colon in a passage from *The Old Curiosity Shop* allows breathing time for the reader who reads aloud. When describing Dickens' writing of *Oliver Twist*, Peter Ackroyd observes (2002 [1990]:243) that "[Dickens] gave his words a punctuation which suggests a more rhetorical or declamatory style; it is almost as if he had revised it so that it could be more easily read aloud." However, Ackroyd did not provide direct examples, or cite critical comments, to support his assertion.

Although a distinction needs to be made between narrative comments and the expressive aspects of punctuation, they often converge and are closely allied. In addition to providing narrative comments to guide the reader in reproducing the characters' speech, in a substantial body of his works Dickens also manipulated and sometimes even subverted conventional punctuation, a visual and written phenomenon, to mark and re-create the speech idiosyncrasies of many of his characters and to encourage a vivid spoken performance. The punctuation complements, consolidates, and elaborates the narrative comments.

Punctuation Used to Represent Broken Speech

Dickens exploited the dash to represent broken speech. The dash, if not placed at the end of a clause or a sentence, usually disrupts the smooth flow of an utterance. In the following, a large number of dashes is used, two of them even splitting words that are not normally segmented (“impress-ively” and “thank-less”) (*LD*, II. 5:500, emphasis added):

[2] ‘I—ha—I most devoutly hope so, Amy. I sent for you, in order that I might say—hum—impress-ively say, in the presence of Mrs. General, to whom we are all so much indebted for obligingly being present among us, on—ha—on this or any other occasion,’ Mrs. General shut her eyes, ‘that I—ha hum—am not pleased with you. You make Mrs. General’s a thank-less task. You—ha—embarrass me very much. You have always (as I have informed Mrs. General) been my favorite child; I have always made you a—hum—a friend and companion; in return, I beg—I—ha—I do beg, that you accommodate yourself better to—hum—circumstances, and dutifully do what becomes your—your station.’

Mr. Dorrit was even a little more fragmentary than usual; being excited on the subject, and anxious to make himself particularly emphatic.

Dashes in this case are found mainly before and after “ha” and “hum,” accentuating Mr. Dorrit’s stammering speech pattern. The post-speech narrative comment, “Mr. Dorrit was even a little more fragmentary than usual,” acts as an explanatory note on the eccentric syntax of the speech. The reader who recites this speech aloud is entrusted to enact Mr. Dorrit’s fashion of speaking.

Dashes can perform a large variety of functions. For example, Park Honan (1969:13), commenting on Robert Browning’s use of the dash in his first published work, *Pauline* (1833), observes that “Browning uses the dash for every imaginable purpose in *Pauline*; it welds together fragments and sentences, substitutes for at least four of the common stops, and indicates ellipsis” (1969:13). Despite the myriad possible suggestions of the dash, Dickens’ reader knows how to react to it and formulate speech accordingly when reading aloud, owing to the specific narrative comments Dickens provided.

Here I would also like to compare Mr. Dorrit’s speech to a speech in Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) that Levenston discusses: “—a mote—or sand—or something—I know not what, has got into this eye of mine—do look into it—it is not in the white—.” Levenston explains this speech as follows: “Sterne is well aware that in unplanned speech we sometimes begin structures that never become properly integrated in the syntax of the full utterance. Naturally he uses the dash to indicate such anacolutha and recycled syntax when transcribing speech” (1992:73). In Mr. Dorrit’s broken speech, there are false starts or self-corrections as well: “I—ha—I most . . . ,” “I might say—hum—impress-ively say,” “on—ha—on this or any other occasion,” “make you a—hum—a friend and companion,” “I beg—I—ha—I do beg,” and “becomes your—your situation.” Repeating previously uttered words or making amendments in speech are usual phenomena of live speech, which is characterized by immediacy and spontaneity. Dickens used the dashes in Mr. Dorrit’s speech to evoke these features.

Of the entire cast of Dickensian characters, the notorious Mr. Jingle from *Pickwick Papers* produced the most broken speech. And, perhaps fittingly, he has received much attention from critics. Earle Davis says Jingle has “a rapid-fire, staccato habit of speech” (1940:231). Hobsbaum writes in a similar vein that “[Jingle] has a remarkable style of speech: proceeding in jerks, apparently by free association” (1972:32). Monroe Engel considers Jingle’s speech to be “shorthand-of-the-mind” (1959:85), and David Parker thinks it is “telegraphic” (2002:98). In her article on “Fragmentation in *The Pickwick Papers*” (1992), Anny Sadrin uses Jingle’s speech as an example of broken English and linguistic fragmentation.

The broken, jerky, and “staccato” speech of Jingle, I argue, is conveyed to the reader-aloud through the profusion of dashes. As Quirk puts it, “the recurrent dash” indicates “the inarticulate jerkiness of Mr. Jingle” (1959:16). On his first appearance in front of the Pickwickian gang, Jingle spoke in this way (*PP*, 2:24, emphasis added):

[3] ‘Come along, then, Here, No. 924, take your fare, and take yourself off—respectable gentlemen,—know him well—none of your nonsense—this way, Sir—where’s your friends?—all a mistake, I see—never mind—accidents will happen—best regulated families—never say die—down upon your luck—pull him up—put that in his pipe—like the flavour—damned rascals.’ *And with a lengthened string of similar broken sentences, delivered with extraordinary volubility*, the stranger led the way to the travellers’ waiting room

In his narrative comment, Dickens seemed to be providing contrastive opinions regarding Jingle’s speech: “broken” and “voluble” are not close synonyms. Given the typographical evidence, I believe Jingle’s speech is more broken than voluble. The combination of a dash with another punctuation mark such as a comma (“respectable gentlemen,—”) or a question mark (“where’s your friends?—”) signals pauses of different duration. It is not typical for fluent speech to be interrupted by frequent pauses. This difference may underline the reality that the punctuation in the speech is more suggestive than Dickens’ own comments. Though narrative comments are absent on other occasions when Jingle speaks, the punctuation pattern already illuminates his manner of utterance. In every case, the reader-aloud is asked to imitate Jingle’s non-fluent style, pausing and hesitating before every dash.

Dickens also used a combination of dashes and capitalization to depict a broken speech style by including strong emphasis on some capitalized words. The following is a speech delivered by Mr. Micawber in *David Copperfield* (*DC*, 49:717, emphasis added):

[4] ‘I’ll put my hand in no man’s hand,’ said Mr. Micawber, *gasping, puffing, and sobbing*, to that degree that he was like a man fighting with cold water, ‘until I have—blown to fragments—the—a—detestable—serpent—HEEP! I’ll partake of no one’s hospitality, until I have—a—moved Mount Vesuvius—to eruption—on—a—the abandoned rascal—HEEP! Refreshment—a—underneath this roof—particularly punch—would—a—choak me—unless—I had—previously—choaked the eyes—out of the head—a—of—interminable cheat, and liar—HEEP! I—a—I’ll know nobody—and—a—say nothing—and—a—live

nowhere—until I have crushed—to—a—undiscoverable atoms—the—transcendent and immortal hypocrite and perjurer—HEEP!’

I really had some fear of Mr. Micawber’s dying on the spot. The manner in which he struggled through these inarticulate sentences, and, *whenever he found himself getting near the name of Heep, fought his way on to it, dashed at it in a fainting state*, and brought it out with a vehemence little less than marvellous, was frightful.

Mr. Micawber’s speech appears to be more fragmentary than any other characters’ speech under discussion so far. Whereas Mr. Dorrit and Jingle used broken speech in most circumstances, Mr. Micawber’s language faltered only when he was talking about Heep, “the transcendent and immortal hypocrite and perjurer.” Dickens represented Mr. Micawber’s agitated speech with various typographical techniques, thus making it easy for the one who is performing the speech for an audience. Every “Heep” in the speech is preceded by a dash that aptly signifies how Micawber dashes at the name. Note also that “Heep” is always capitalized, which suggests that the name should be uttered with additional force or loudness.

Punctuation Used to Represent Non-stoppable Speech

A relatively low level of punctuation in a speech represents a non-stoppable speech pattern. Described by Fred Kaplan as “nonstop loquaciousness” (1981:91), Flora’s speech in *Little Dorrit* is often punctuation-less. Raymond Chapman also considers Flora as the exemplar of “breathless, disorganized speech, marked by incomplete sentences and anacolutha” (1994:148). The following is an example of Flora’s outbursts. It is a long speech, but the quotation in its entirety affords an excellent illustration of her style (*LD*, I.35:438).

[5] ‘I declare,’ she sobbed, ‘I never was so cut up since your mama and my papa not Doyce and Clennam for this once but give the precious little thing a cup of tea and make her put it to her lips at least pray Arthur do, not even Mr. F’s last illness for that was of another kind and gout is not a child’s affection though very painful for all parties and Mr. F a martyr with his leg upon a rest and the wine trade in itself inflammatory for they will do it more or less among themselves and who can wonder, it seems like a dream I am sure to think of nothing at all this morning and now Mines of money is it really, but you must you know my darling love because you never will be strong enough to tell him all about it upon teaspoons, mightn’t it be even best to try the directions of my own medical man for though the flavour is anything but agreeable still I force myself to do it as a prescription and find the benefit, you’d rather not why no my dear I’d rather not but still I do it as a duty, many will congratulate you some in earnest and some not and many will congratulate you with all their hearts but none more so I do assure you than from the bottom of my own I do myself though sensible of blundering and being stupid, and will be judged by Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once so good bye darling and God bless you and may you be very happy and excuse the liberty, vowing that the dress shall never be finished by anybody else but shall be laid by for a keepsake just as it is

and called Little Dorrit though why that strangest of denominations at any time I never did myself and now I never shall!

There is no full stop in this speech of Flora's, which is in line with Dickens' earlier narrative comment: "Flora, who, whatever she said, never once came to a full stop" (*LD*, I.13:165). It seems that by "full stop" Dickens had more in mind than merely the punctuation component. Perhaps this is an example in which the label merges punctuation with syntactic features.

Eric Partridge points out the pragmatic significance of the full stop: "the period or full stop . . . ends a sentence, i.e. a statement, i.e. the expression of a self-contained or complete thought" Partridge (1999:12). By placing not a single full stop in the whole duration of the speech, Dickens depicts Flora as an overwhelmingly dominant and voluble speaker who speaks quickly (Flora is said to murmur "in rapid snatches" [I.13: 175]) and allows no turn-taking. The absence of full stops in Flora's speech is compensated for by commas that separate complete and distinct clauses that would normally be separated by full stops. I argue that the lack of full stops in Flora's speech guides the one who is reading aloud and confirms that the unusual lack of punctuation is quite deliberate. Flora's way of speaking, in particular the speech under present scrutiny, poses difficulties for the reader-aloud. There are the obvious issues of breathing and speed that have to be taken care of, as well as making sense of the convoluted syntax.

Punctuation Used to Represent Lengthened Speech

Dickens employed the hyphen to lengthen some words in characters' speech. For example, in *Our Mutual Friend*, "M-m-m-m-music." "So insinuating was Mrs. Lamble that she got half a dozen ms into the word before she got it out" (*OMF*, I. 11:139, emphasis added). Also, "away" and "high" from *Dombey and Son* are lengthened to "awa-a-a-ay" and "hi-i-i-igh" (*DS*, 39:604). Dickens described these as "a lengthening-out of the last syllable" and "long syllable again," respectively. "Cheerily" is also lengthened in an earlier occasion in the same novel: "Oh cheer—i—ly" (*DS*, 15:237). This is the final line of a song, and Dickens explained in the narrative that "when it was impossible to sustain the concluding note any longer, the skipper bellowed forth a terrific 'ahoy!'" (*DS*, 15:237), which implies that the last word "cheerily" is exceedingly lengthened. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens commented on the prolongation of an interjection: "'Woa-a-a-a-a-a'—dwelling upon the note a long time" (*OCS*, 38:290, emphasis added).

All the above examples of characters' speech consistently present us with an association of narrative comment and punctuation to represent the lengthening of a particular word for the reader who performs the texts for a listening audience. Dickens stretched phonemes by adding hyphens and repeating one or more letters in that word. The technique of repeating a letter many times with the effect of stretching a corresponding phoneme is also used by James Joyce in *Ulysses*. "Frseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeefrong" and "Pfuiiiiiiii" are examples of his phonological strategy (quoted in Wales 1992:108-09). In fact, W. A. Ward (1970:229) believes that "the writer in English most like Dickens is Joyce" because both writers are concerned with "words heard over words seen" (1970:229). In the above examples, Dickens stretched a word partly to

encourage an unusual spoken performance and partly to demonstrate the peculiarities of some eccentric characters, or for the heightening of emotional and intense moments in the narrative. Leading characters in Dickens do not lengthen their words, and even the minor characters speak with lengthened words only when dramatic events occur.

Punctuation Used to Represent Slurring Speech

That the minimal use of punctuation signifies non-stoppable speech has been proposed above. Another minimalist scenario is the complete lack of spacing between words in a speech. "The absence of word-spacing . . . neatly symbolis[es] the slur," Quirk (1959:16) observes when analyzing David's speech in *David Copperfield*: "Steerforth, you'retheguidingstarofmyexistence" (DC, 24:368). David was under the influence of wine and thus lacked the ability to utter clear speech. Other slurring examples in the chapter include (in their order of appearance): "Neverberrer" (370), "Lorblessmer" (370), "I'mafraidyou'renorwell" (371), "Amigoarawaysoo" (371) and "Goori" (371). Gillian Brown uses "Amigoarawaysoo" to illustrate "slurred diction" and genuine drunkenness under the section "Articulatory setting" (1990:131).

Dickens put words together to create odd compounds and distorted normal spellings of individual words. For example, "Goori" is supposed to be a combination of "Good" and "night," as David revealed in his narrative. However, "Goori" by no means invites an easy association with the words "good" and "night," and formulations such as this may challenge the reader's understanding of the speech. Also, when the narrative advances, David is increasingly affected by alcohol, and the slurring speech becomes yet more demanding for the reader-aloud to comprehend.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sketched the explicit markers that Charles Dickens employed to create a spoken- and performance-oriented style within his characters' speech. This style in various ways presumes and encourages the practice of reading aloud. The explicit markers Dickens provided, which include phonetic spellings, narrative comments, and punctuation, are obvious signs that the speech should not be simply skimmed over, but *orally* and *dramatically performed*. They are also direct hints to anyone who reads the speech aloud for a listening audience. However, at times this spoken- and performance-oriented style poses problems, particularly for self-conscious or unexpressive readers. Consider for example Sleary's heavy, breathy, and frequent <th> sounds and Flora Finching's breathless, non-stoppable, and quick speech. These examples show that the reader-aloud is required not only to imitate voices of characters of different genders, ages, and social classes, but also to adjust to a wide range of idiosyncratic speech styles and features when impersonating the characters.

Studying Dickens' use of language from an oral-aural perspective takes into consideration the sociological and historical characteristics of the period when Dickens' novels

first appeared. According to Terry Eagleton, who is quoting Henri Matisse, “all art bears the imprint of its historical epoch, but . . . great art is that in which this imprint is most deeply marked” (2000:3). Since Dickens was writing at a time when the practice of reading aloud was pervasive, his texts exhibit the imprint of that practice. I believe some texts are more suitable to be orally reproduced than others; and the fact that oral-aural features appear again and again in Dickens’ work reflects the writer’s expectations of having his writings read aloud and listened to.

This attempt to investigate the oral-aural features in Dickens’ novels is also an attempt to foreground the role of the reader and the importance of the reading experience in the study of literary texts. My investigation on orality and auralty presupposes the existence of two different types of readers: the one who reads aloud and the one who, as an audience member, reads through listening. Simon Alderson explains that: “the way readers respond to texts (i.e. the kinds of forms they notice, or imagine they see, and find pleasure and value in) is an important area of enquiry” (2001:28). Reader responses to Dickens’ works are thus “an important area of enquiry” given that he was conscious of how his texts were read by the readers-aloud and the responses of the listener-readers to the auditory aspect of texts.

Apart from identifying a dual agency in reading, this kind of oral-aural analysis also points to a practice of reading that depends not only on what is being read, but also on how the text is read. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes has remarked that “the most classical narrative (a novel by Zola or Balzac or Dickens or Tolstoy) bears within it a sort of diluted tmesis: we do not read everything with the same intensity of reading . . . we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations” (1976:10-11). However, my view is that when someone is reading Dickens’ novels, the concern of being or not being “watched” is less significant than the concern of being or not being heard. Because a person who is reading aloud for an audience needs to be able to recite the text more or less in full, the activity of boldly skipping certain portions of a novel does not seem to be feasible. “Descriptions, explanations, analyses” aside, Dickens’ strategy of offering explicit markers for performing his characters’ conversations seems to encourage a unique “intensity of reading”—even of his non-narratives.

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