David Crystal listens carefully to the dialects in *Henry V*.

THE ACCENTS OF THE VALIANT

Illustration Belle Mellor

> The surprising fact about the three Celtic captains – Jamy, Macmorris and Fluellen – is that they use no dialect vocabulary at all.

One of the best-known features of *Henry V* is the way it is said to represent regional dialects – the English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh of Captains Gower, Jamy, Macmorris, and Fluellen. But when we examine the dialect features carefully, we are in for a surprise.

A spoken dialect is a combination of three features: a local pronunciation (or accent), a local grammar, and a local vocabulary. An accent is there all the time; we can't say anything without it. Regional grammar is something we hear at intervals, such as the non-standard form of a verb (I goes, we digged). But it is the vocabulary that we usually think of in relation to regional dialect. There are huge dialect dictionaries, such as Joseph Wright's six-volume masterpiece compiled at the end of the 19th century; and many parts of the country have a booklet, often humorous, telling visitors about the local words. The most successful feature of the 2005 BBC Voices project was its Word Map, with 620,000 words submitted from all around the UK. (You can see it still at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices>.) When it comes to dialects, words, words, words are the thing.

So, if a regional dialect is going to appear in literature, we would expect it to show regular markers of accent and some distinctive grammar, but lots of dialect words. And the surprising fact about the three Celtic captains is that they use no dialect vocabulary at all.

There's a complete list of all their dialect features in the last three sections of *Shakespeare's Words* (or see www.shakespeareswords.com under Topics). All three have distinctive accents. Shakespeare plainly knew the Welsh accent well, for Fluellen has 29 words with substitute sounds – /b/ becoming /p/, as in *prave* and *peseech*; /d/ becoming /t/ in *digt* and *offert*; /v/ becoming /f/ in *aggriefed* and *falorous*, and so on. Jamy has far fewer features – just 17, by my count – such as *feith* for *faith*, *grund* for *ground*, and *sal* for *shall*. And Macmorris has a mere seven, such as *ish* for *is* and *trompet* for *trumpet*.

The spellings shouldn't be taken at face value. Some are stock literary forms, used to show that someone has a regional accent without implying anything about what kind of accent it is: for example, both Jamy and Macmorris say *Chrish* for *Christ*; both Fluellen and Macmorris say *sall* for *shall*. This was common 16th-century theatrical practice.

Only Fluellen uses distinctive local grammar, though the features sound more like exaggerations than a reflection of dialect realities. His main Welshism is *look you* – but that was as much a literary stereotype then as it is now. (I've lived in Wales for years, and have never heard it in everyday speech.) Nor is there any linguistic reason why a Welsh speaker of English should use so many false plurals (*concavities, one reckonings, a little variations*), mix up parts of speech (*will avouchment, my live, a little intoxicates*), or break concord (*the situations... is both alike, the concavities of it is not sufficient*) in the way Fluellen does. This is more Dogberry than dialect. Fluellen speaks English very well indeed, so the elementary learner errors we see in *was have possession of the pridge, he is not... any hurt, speak fewer*, and *the French is gone off* are really out of linguistic character - though functional enough in their dramatic effect, of course. My point is that this is stage dialect, not real dialect.

But the real surprise comes in the complete absence of dialect words. We might have expected Shakespeare, with his penchant for word-creation, to have introduced some local lexical colour, much of which would probably have appeared as first recorded usages in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. But when we examine these usages (what I've called Williamisms in this series) in *Henry V*, we find nothing at all of regional interest.

There are actually 43 Williamisms in the play, and I list them in the panel. Note the role of the upper-class characters, who

account for the majority: indeed, 16 appear in just two scenes, 1.2 and 5.2, where political debate is taking place. These are intellectual Williamisms. Some of the others are certainly there by lexicographical chance: no-one would seriously suggest that Shakespeare was the first to use *leap-frog* or *kecksy*. On the other hand, *umbered* and *nook-shotten* are among those displaying the gleam of a poetic imagination. The most unexpected item, to my mind, is *dawn* – a new usage at the end of the 16th century (previously the everyday word was *dawning*).

When we look at the Williamisms from the lower-class characters, there is nothing of regional significance. Fluellen's *bubukle* is a Dogberryish blend of *bubo* and *carbuncle*. His *pibble-pabble* is Feste's *bibble-babble* in an accent. Indeed, the entire vocabulary of the Celtic captains could have been used by any Englishman, and most of the grammar too. When it comes to theatrical effect, it seems to have been accent, rather than dialect, that Shakespeare found to have the greater dramatic potential.

David Crystal is Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor, and the author with Ben Crystal of *Shakespeare's Words* (and its accompanying website www.shakespeareswords.com) and of *Think on My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language*.

Chorus: *abutting, deep-mouthed, self-glorious, sternage, umbered, war-worn*

Henry: *brimfulness, casted* (adj), *coursing* (adj), *dawn, enschedule, intertissued, irreconciled, leap-frog, observingly, portage, uncurbed, untempering, war-proof, well-hallowed*
Exeter: *congree, crushed* (adj), *well-foughten*
Canterbury: *defunction, exhibiter, out of work, sumless, unhidden*

French king: *cursorary* [editor's reading]
Burgundy: *cheerer, congreet, kecksy*
Britaine: *nook-shotten*
Constable: *sonance, spirit* (verb)

Fluellen: *bubukle, pibble-pabble*
Gower: *predeceased*
Pistol: *bawcock, fer, moy*
Nym: *betting, solus*