

CLOG DANCING: AN ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

CHRIS METHERELL

The description of dance forms in regional terms is a common and well-accepted practice. It is assumed that it is possible to compartmentalise dances into regional pigeon holes and, coupled with this, is a feeling that this is a valuable and useful thing to do.

In 1907 C. J. Sharp published his first book of morris dances.¹ In this publication he makes no differentiation between dances from different villages although he does mention the names of the villages concerned. The same is true of his second volume published in 1909.² By the time of the third volume in 1910, however, the seeds of regionalism had been sown and we read:

...dances...are less homogeneous and far more varied than those we have already published

...six distinct and separate traditions³

and finally and perhaps most importantly:

Our experience proves that each village where morris dancing survives has its own tradition, its own dances and its own special methods of performances, all of which reflect no doubt the peculiar temperament and artistic sense of the community. ⁴

There are two assumptions implicit in this paragraph. Firstly, that some form of regional differentiation exists and secondly, that there is a social explanation of these differences.

By 1911 in his first book of sword dances,⁵ Sharp had moved one stage further. Now he had come to the conclusion not only that dances from individual villages were unique to those locations but that it was possible to recognise broader groupings of similarity over a wider area:

the long-sword Yorkshire dances differ very markedly from those gathered in the more northern counties. ⁶

Others recognised the elegance of such a suggestion but were also able to pinpoint a crucial limitation, for in 1915, in the first broad survey of English traditional dance, Mary Neal wrote:

Each village has its own steps and its own evolution. But it would take a whole volume to describe each step done by each "side" of dancers...

For practical purposes one has to decide on the most typical step one has seen and adopt it for those to whom one is responsible for teaching the dances. ⁷

It is not the purpose of this paper to argue the pros and cons of the subdivision of morris dances, but it would seem that there is an assumption here that, in that type of dance, a number of people agree tacitly or subconsciously to adopt the same dance format, although they may differ slightly in personal characteristics which they use within their adopted framework and therefore a regional label is, to that extent, not inappropriate. Whether or not this is true, it has certainly become accepted by many if not most dancers in recent years.

All this has rubbed off on to the more recent study of clog and step dancing. It has become an unquestioned truth that if one speaks of "Westmorland clog", or "Northumberland and Durham", or "Lancashire" that everyone immediately understands what one is talking about. Many dancers find differences between steps found in different areas and latch on to these as supposed regional markers. I remember well how I formulated the idea early in my clog dancing career that dancers from the North East performed shuffles with a foot turning motion whilst those from Lancashire invariably used straight shuffles. The revived Lancashire and Cheshire Clog Competition organisers have adopted as one of the competition rules⁸ that the heels may not be placed on the ground during the performance, although, as far as I am aware, there is no evidence to demonstrate that this was a characteristic of Lancashire dancing - rather the reverse in fact.

The intention of this paper is to try to throw some light on a topic which is heavily obscured by the preconceptions of dancers and researchers alike.

Research Method

A. Collation of Data

For the purpose of this paper, I have restricted my observations to the North East of England and the Lake District.⁹

Reasons:

1. Ease of availability of data.
2. Data body comparatively large.
3. Data homogeneous - aggregated by relatively few collectors.
4. Relative ease of access to dancers.
5. Novelty of analysis requires reduction to simplistic method at this stage.

Drawbacks:

1. In 3 above, it is difficult to overcome any basic assumptions made by collectors which may slant the data in a particular way. Often the assumptions revolve around the collector's concept of regionality and are thus insurmountable.
2. Results may be inapplicable to other areas.

B. Outline of Data Format

1. All steps have been translated into Newcastle Notation to facilitate comparison of steps.¹⁰ It is assumed that the reader is thoroughly familiar with this system of notation. For the unenlightened however, a brief resumé of the system is contained in Appendix I.
2. Where, through lack of sufficient data, or because of uncertainty in the collector's notes,¹¹ it has not been possible to translate a step completely, that step has been included insofar as it has been possible to translate it. For example, the information available is often insufficient to allow the modifier column to be supplied for a step with complete certainty, although the timing and movement columns are available (see Appendix I for an explanation of these terms). In this type of case, the step has been omitted from the analysis of modifiers but included in the analysis of movements.

3. A further filter has been applied in that only steps which fit the following criteria have been utilised:
 - a) Steps must be eight bars long. This effectively means that dancers performing in a "free" mode, not conforming to a set repeatable pattern have been excluded. In the North East this has meant that two informants have been omitted.¹² In the Lakes, there is no information available on any "freestyle" clog dancing.
 - b) Steps must be in 4/4 time. Although steps in other rhythms are commonly found, at this stage these have been ignored.¹³
4. The last two bars of each step have been ignored. It is commonplace, but by no means universal, that the last two bars of an eight bar step are used as a "shuffle off" or "finish". There may be a relationship between the finish and the step which precedes it and this may be a useful tool when considering regionality. This is, however, not considered here.

C. Available Data

1. The North East

Informants used:

Ivy Sands, Kit Haggerty, Doreen Kerr, Viona Marhoff, John Surtees, Lily Farrell, Sam Bell, Mary Jamieson.¹⁴

Steps from the above have been collected from the dancers concerned by the Instep Research Team to a uniform standard of accuracy using Newcastle Notation as the recording method. This is by no means a complete list of those dancers from whom steps have been collected. However, those dancers providing five or less steps have been omitted.

2. The Lake District

Informants used:

Norman Robinson, Fred Clifton, Tom Barnes, Diddy Dixon, Cissie Wilson, Bruce Milburn, Harold Edgar, Mrs Storey.¹⁵

Here again, dancers with a repertoire of less than five steps have been omitted.

Here, none of the dancers, with the exception of Bruce Milburn, were visited by members of the team, and the data used is from the collection of the late Tom Flett.¹⁶ In one case this has been augmented from information provided to Flett by Daniel Howison. Here, there is clearly a problem. The collector clearly made assumptions both in his field notes and written up notes regarding the choreographic similarities between dancers which require careful scrutiny before the data may be used. As stated above, where it has proved impossible to translate the data into a form consistent with that available for the North East, that data has been rigorously excluded. To do otherwise would mean that the analysis would revolve around already biased data and the result would be worthless.

D. The proposed model

We may conveniently divide any performance of any step into a number of "factors". It is not at this stage necessary to define these further than by saying that a factor is any measurement which may be taken in respect of that step. Examples might be the duration in seconds of the step as performed by the informant, the total number of beats made with the feet, or the number of times the dancer has his or her weight equally on both feet.

Those whose mathematics stops short of simple set theory are referred to Appendix II, where a simple, if inexhaustive, explanation of the symbols used will be found.

If a performance (Perf) is the sum total of n factors (f):
Then:

$$\text{Perf} = [f_1, f_2, f_3, \dots, f_n]$$

Now assuming a regional input to each step:

$$[\text{Factors exhibiting regional variation}] = R$$

and thus:

$$R = [f_a, f_b, f_c, \dots, f_x]$$

Or, R is the collection of factors, taken from Perf, which exhibit regional variation. These are labelled a to x.

Clearly where $C =$ (all other non-regional factors)

$$\text{Perf} = R \cup C$$

Also if:

[factors exhibiting solely personal variation] = P

and thus:

$$P = [f_{\alpha}, f_{\beta}, f_{\lambda} \dots \dots \dots f_{\Omega}]$$

Or, P is the collection of factors taken from Perf which exhibit personal variation. These are labelled α to Ω .

And:

[all other non-personal factors] = $C1$

then:

$$\text{Perf} = P \cup C1$$

Clearly from our definitions:

$$P \cap R = \emptyset$$

and thus we may combine giving:

$$\text{Perf} = R \cup P \cup C2$$

If regionalism does not exist then clearly:

$$R = \emptyset$$

and:

$$\text{Perf} = P \cup C1$$

It is quite clear that this model is simplistic in the extreme but should form a starting point upon which to base further refinements.

What factors are to be tested? It is superficially easy to look at a series of steps and pick out large units which seem to be unique to a particular region or dancer; for example, it seems that the "swivelling crunch" is only found in the Lake District and that "shuffle toe-heel" is common only in the North East. In the past, this general type of statement has been the basis of any discussion of regionality. It is easy to pick out unique movement groups, but do these truly represent pointers to a regional style? Is there in fact some other force at work? It is the intention of this paper to look at the trends which may underlie such larger groupings of movement. To do this, I intend to look at very small parts of steps prior to building these into bigger blocks as the technique of analysis becomes more refined and the picture clearer with regard to the way in which the factors involved interact.

Initially, steps which on a percent as befits w

If f is a region then

$$f \notin P$$

then:

$$f \in C1$$

since:

$$C1 = R$$

then:

$$f \in R$$

ie:

$$f \in R$$

or:

$$f \in C2$$

Thus f may

E. The Test Us

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Initially, therefore, I have chosen as factors those parts of steps which are attributable to particular movements or modifiers on a percentage basis. The method used is simple in the extreme as befits what may be regarded as a pilot study.

If f is a factor which does not vary significantly within a region then because:

$$f \notin P$$

then:

$$f \in C1$$

since:

$$C1 = R \cup C2$$

then:

$$f \in R \cup C2$$

ie:

$$f \in R$$

or:

$$f \in C2 \text{ (as } R \cap C2 = \emptyset)$$

Thus f may be a regional factor or a constant factor.

E. The Test Used

The statistic to be tested is the percentage of a step attributable to a particular movement or modifier. For example, in a particular step, 52% of the beats may be produced by shuffles, and 24% by hops. In the same step, 80% of the movements might take place in position A and with foot rotation /. 3% might be in an aerial position (*) and so on. (These terms are explained in Appendix 1).

The test used is a simple slippage test of which the best known is perhaps the Mann Whitney U test. Where the wish is to test the hypothesis that two samples come from the same population, although this test is not particularly powerful, it has the benefit of simplicity and, in this type of pilot study, this is of considerable advantage.

If sample sizes are n_1 and n_2 , pool the samples and rank according to the magnitude, assigning ranks from 1 to $n_1 + n_2$.

Then:

$$U = n_1 n_2 + \frac{n_1(n_1 + 1) - R_1}{2}$$

Where R_1 is the sum of ranks occupied by the first sample of size n and $E(U)$ the expected value of U :

$$E(U) = \frac{n_1 n_2}{2}$$

and where $\text{Var}(U)$ is the variance:

$$\text{Var}(U) = \frac{n_1 n_2 (n_1 + n_2 + 1)}{12}$$

The standardised score:

$$T = \frac{U - E(U)}{\text{Var}(U)}$$

is approximately normally distributed under the null hypothesis if n_1 and n_2 are large and good approximations are available for small values of n_1 and n_2 .

F. The Result in the North East

The list of factors showing non-significant within-region variation is surprisingly small:

STEP, TAP, SHUFFLE, HOP, A POSITION, BEATS.¹⁷

It is of note that only one foot position is included, whereas the four most common movements are all found in this list. The BEATS factor is the total number of beats found in each step.

A number of observations may be made at this point in the analysis.

1. There is a high incidence of zero cell occupancy apparent in this set of steps. This means that a very high percentage of each step is composed of a relatively small number of rather common movements, and there is a much larger number of rather rarer movements which, although they may be common within and thus characteristic of a particular step, do not have a sufficient frequency to be of use in this type of analysis as the test used does not function well in this situation. This is a particularly fascinating

problem as the rarer movements tend to be those which have been picked out in the past as regional pointers, although they are confined to a small number of steps.

2. There is a high variation in foot position and angle. This would suggest a line of attack analysing differences between dancers or groups of dancers. It is, for instance, interesting to note that in the North East there were significant differences between each pair of dancers where most other foot positions were concerned, with the exception of Ivy Sands and Kit Haggerty. This, however, requires a rather more elaborate model than that at present under discussion.

G. The Result in the Lake District

Here the list is rather similar:

SHUFFLE, HOP, DROP HEEL, A POSITION, BEATS.

The list is strikingly similar to the position found in the North East but:

1. A much higher percentage of each step is made up of the above units than in the North East.
2. The stricture regarding zero cell occupancy applies but it is noteworthy that SHUFFLE falls within this group.
3. That the analysis is highly susceptible to choice of informant, thus it only takes the omission of a particular dancer from the analysis to change the picture considerably.

Leaving aside for the moment what to do with the rest of the factors, which using our current model we must place in P, we can now utilise those factors which are constant within regions to compare region with region in order to allocate these factors to R or C2.

By looking at the two lists it becomes apparent that HOP, SHUFFLE and A POSITION are found in both lists and are thus candidates for R or C2. If we now apply the same test comparing region with region we come to the following result:

hop \in C2

and:

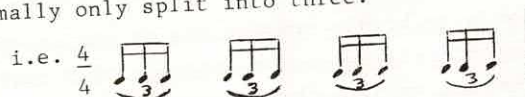
$$[A \text{ pos, shuffle}] \in R$$

In fact we find that the use of A POSITION is significantly higher in the Lakes than in the North East. SHUFFLES are significantly more common in the North East than in the Lakes. It seems possible that these two facts are interlinked as, by nature the SHUFFLE is normally performed in foot positions other than A POSITION.

Looking at the number of beats within each step we find that the number of beats used in the Lakes is greater than that used in the North East. This seems particularly surprising as steps from the North East have a reputation for complexity and it is thus natural to assume that cojoined to this complexity are a large number of beats. A simple explanation for this is available. In duple time, as recorded in the Lakes, each of the four strong beats in a bar may be split up into four:



In the triple time used in the North East, each strong beat is normally only split into three:



As yet no information is available concerning the degree to which each step is split up in these manners, nor which movements typically occur on which beats.

H. Summary

So far we have isolated a small number of factors which may be useful in distinguishing between regions. We are, however, left with an intriguing set of factors which are constant within one region but not within the other under test. These clearly do not fit within the model we have set up and thus it now becomes necessary to elaborate our model to fit the real world more accurately.

I. The New Set

If we look back at our lists we see that the factors we are talking about are STEP, DROP HEEL and TAP. Looking at STEP more closely, it will be recalled that this factor is constant within the North East but not within the Lakes. It will be further recalled that this latter situation is remedied by omitting those steps collected from H. Edgar from the analysis. We may hypothesise that there must be a reason for this and it would seem useful to ask what Edgar has that the others don't. The obvious answer (and there may of course be others - I merely put this forward as a model to be tested) is that all the other dancers from the Lakes who have been subjected to analysis have been taught by a member of the Robinson family, whereas Edgar was taught by the Howson brothers.

We have so far assumed that all the sets within our model are disjoint. i.e.

$$P \cap R = \emptyset \quad P \cap C = \emptyset \quad \text{and} \quad R \cap C = \emptyset$$

What about factors which are constant in one area and not in the other? Here we have:

Area 1

$$f \in R \cup C$$

Area 2

$$f \in P$$

Clearly these are not compatible and we have a situation where the sets R, C and P are not disjoint and there is an intersect between them.

Where factors vary within regions but show significant differences between regions then the sets are no longer disjoint. If f is one of these factors then we must modify our model to fit this situation better:

say R_1 such that

$$f \in R_1$$

but

$$f \notin R, f \notin P, f \notin C$$

i.e.

$$\text{Perf} = R \cup R_1 \cup P \cup C$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} R \cap R_1 &= \emptyset & R \cap P &= \emptyset \\ P \cap R_1 &= \emptyset & P \cap C_1 &= \emptyset \end{aligned}$$

Clearly we may go on adding sets of this nature ad infinitum and it may be better to adopt a rather more elegant course:

e.g. we may define R as:

$$R_1 \subset P \quad \text{and} \quad R_1 \subset R$$

such that

$$P \cap R = R_1$$

If for the moment we adopt the latter course we may conveniently consider another complication at the same time. We may postulate a set of factors which are not purely personal but which are inherited from other dancers i.e. those factors which are passed down from dancer to dancer through the process of teaching. It has been suggested that this is a very important area for consideration. Within the statistical information currently to hand the distribution of STEP within the Lakeland area may be given as a possible example. This factor is found to be constant within those steps originating from the Robinson family but not over the region as a whole. If we call the set of passed-on or familial factors F then for a dancer now:

$$F \subset P$$

If the time dimension is added, then, if F_1 relates to factors passed on to this dancer's instructor, then:

$$F_1 \cup F = P \quad \text{and} \quad F_1 \cap F = \emptyset$$

and we may rewrite our model for any particular dancer:

$$\text{Perf} = R \cup R_1 \cup F \cup F_1 \cup C$$

Obviously, at any given point in time the factors within these sets may be different, and where all the dancers in a particular area are taught by one dancer, all those factors which would in our original model be placed in R must now be placed in F.

Thus:

$$R = \emptyset$$

Where F is the
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the same time

It should be
ed:

$$P = F_1 \cup F$$

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$$nF_2 \rightarrow 0$$

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J. Conclusion

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NOTES

1. C. J. Sharp at
2. C. J. Sharp at
3. C. J. Sharp at
p.9.
4. The Morris Book
5. C. J. Sharp, 1
6. Ibid., p.9.
7. Frank Kidson
University Press
8. Lancashire and
1982.

Where F is large, R will be small. Clearly we may allocate factors to F by comparing dancers known to have been taught by the same teachers.

It should be noted that where a long line of dancers is concerned:

$$P = F_1 \cup F_2 \cup F_3 \cup F_4 \dots F_n$$

but with each generation:

$$nF_2 \rightarrow 0$$

and obviously where x is high F_x becomes of decreasing importance.

This is clearly an area of great importance to the researcher looking for regional factors as it would seem that F and R are interdependent, and what at first sight seems a true regional factor may only appear so because of a familial relationship.

J. Conclusion

All this paper has tried to do is to scratch the surface of a complex problem using extremely simplistic methods, but to show that here is an area worth investigation and to put forward some ideas as to a possible model to be tested by more rigorous means.

NOTES

1. C. J. Sharp and H. C. MacIlwaine, The Morris Book, 1 (London: Novello, 1907).
2. C. J. Sharp and H. C. MacIlwaine, The Morris Book, 2 (London: Novello, 1909).
3. C. J. Sharp and H. C. MacIlwaine, The Morris Book, 3 (London: Novello, 1910), p.9.
4. The Morris Book, 3, p.10.
5. C. J. Sharp, The Sword Dances of Northern England, 1 (London: Novello, 1911).
6. *Ibid.*, p.9.
7. Frank Kidson and Mary Neal, English Folk-Song and Dance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), p.127.
8. Lancashire and Cheshire Clog Competitions, Fylde, Clog Competitions Brochure 1982.

9. That is, the counties of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and Co. Durham on the one hand, and Cumbria on the other.
10. See C. Hays, J. Jarman, A. Metherell, C. Metherell, A. Smith and E. Wilson, Newcastle Notation (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Newcastle Series, 1981).
11. In all cases original notes have been consulted where the collector has not been the author.
12. Mr Flanighan of Amble-by-the-Sea, Northumberland and Mrs A. Angus, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
13. In particular, this has resulted in the omission of many steps in 3/4 rhythm found in the North East.
14. A. Metherell and C. Metherell, Mrs Ivy Sands Double Hornpipe (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Newcastle Series, 1981) and Mrs Ivy Sands: The Exhibition Steps (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Newcastle Series, 1982); unpublished information from the author's collection. J. Jarman, 'Kit Haggerty', Instep, 1 (1981), Newcastle-upon-Tyne. No information as yet published, from Stanley, Co. Durham. J. Jarman and A. Smith, Mrs Viona Marhoff: The Single and Double Hornpipes (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Newcastle Series, 1982); unpublished information in the author's collection. J. Jarman and C. Metherell, The Clog Steps of Mr John Surtees (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Newcastle Series, 1982). Details of Miss Farrell's steps from information in the author's collection. B. Callaghan, A-M. Hulme and P. Clifton, Sammy Bell: Northumbrian Champion Clog Dancer (16 mm colour film, optical sound, 25 mins) Garland Films for Reading Step and Traditional Dance Group, 1981. Mary Jamieson is the daughter of Johnson Ellwood; unpublished information in the author's collection.
15. J. F. and T. M. Flett, Traditional Step Dancing in Lakeland (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1979).
16. Collection in the possession of Mrs J. F. Flett; volumes marked Trad 1, Trad 2, and Trad 3 and Notebooks 1-5.
17. These and all similar terms in capitals are standard Newcastle Notation movements and are fully explained in Appendix 1.

APPENDIX

This appendix
Notation system
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Glossary of

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Shuffle
Spring

Step
Tap
Drop Beat

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motion, the

APPENDIX 1

This appendix provides a brief description of the bare bones of the Newcastle Notation system for the notation of clog steps. It must be stressed that this is a resumé and is in no way definitive.

The system uses four columns: Time Count, Left Foot Movement, Right Foot Movement and Modifier.

The time count provides the metronome for the system. It varies with the time signature like a piece of music. A distinction is made between double and triple time. Thus where each crochet of a bar is divided into four these are labelled "1 an e", where each note is divided into three, "1 and a".

The movements are labels for describing what each foot does on a particular beat and the modifier column gives the position in which each step performs that movement. These positions are variously lettered A through H, provision being made for positions to the rear of the supporting foot. In the modifier column, left and right feet are separated by a colon. Thus for example, standing with the feet together would be A:A. The system makes the assumption that the feet are naturally slightly turned out. Accents placed above the modifiers denote extra turn. Thus, \acute{A} denotes foot turned out, \grave{A} denotes a straight foot and \tilde{A} denotes foot turned in. For example:

classical ballet 5th position	$\tilde{A}:XC$
"pigeon toed"	$\acute{A}:A$
rear 5th position	$\tilde{A}:RXC$

Glossary of movement labels contained in the text:

Hop	A spring off and on to the weight-bearing foot.
Shuffle	Two taps, one away from and one towards the body.
Spring	The weight is transferred from one foot to the other with an upward propulsion, such that both feet are in the air at the same time.
Step	A transfer of weight from one foot to the other.
Tap	A beat where the foot is immediately lifted.
Drop Heel	Whilst standing on the toe, the heel is lowered to the ground, ending on a flat foot.

An * in the modifier column denotes that the next movement involves a turning motion, the direction of turn being defined by use of the turn of foot accents.

APPENDIX 2

Members of a set are placed within square brackets thus []. For example:

if: $A = [\text{set of whole numbers from 1 to 9}]$
then $A = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]$

The symbol \in is used to denote membership of a set.

e.g. $9 \in A$
and: $5 \in A$
but: $26 \notin A$

A subset is part of a larger set which has been separated out.

Thus if: $B = [7, 8, 9]$
then B is a subset of A , or ACB

The symbol \cup (verbalised "cup") is used to denote the union of two sets.

Thus if: $C = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]$
Then $A = B \cup C$

The symbol \cap (verbalised "cap") is used to denote those members of two sets which are common to both.

Thus if: $D = [5, 6, 7, 8, 9]$
and $E = C \cap D$
then: $E = [5, 6]$
i.e. E is the intersect between B and C .

Where a set has no members and is thus empty we denote this by the symbol \emptyset .

Thus if: $F = B \cap C$
then: $F = \emptyset$

as there are no members of B and C which are common to both sets. We speak of sets which do not intersect as "disjoint". The subset E would be termed an "intersect".