Dialect and non-standard language in the new edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*

Dr. Philip Durkin
Principal Etymologist
Oxford English Dictionary
philip.durkin@oup.com

Berlin, 03/09/09

1. Revising the *OED*

The first edition of the OED was published between 1884 and 1928

- A first supplement was added in 1933
- Between 1972 and 1986 a new four-volume supplement was added
- All of this material was brought together in one sequence in *OED2* in 1989
  - but the bulk of the text remained unchanged from the late 1800s or early 1900s.

Now the whole of the *OED* is being revised for the first time, including: pronunciations, form history, etymology, labelling, definitions; with antedatings, interdatings, and postdatings of the quotation evidence, and updating of bibliographical references.

On the new edition see prefatory material at www.oed.com, and also Simpson (2004), Simpson et al. (2004), and further references given there. Specifically on etymology in the new edition see Durkin (1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2006, 2009).

2. What type of English is the *OED* attempting to describe?

- All varieties, regional or social, technical or non-technical, wherever in the world they are found

But with a very important proviso on the types of evidence used:

- For Old English, Middle English, and early modern English, we will generally use whatever evidence is available – although where possible we will avoid unpublished MSS (to aid verifiability)
- For later modern English (after approximately 1750), the OED is primarily a dictionary of published written English, which makes it primarily a dictionary of the standard variety (in all of its different local varieties, specialist registers, stylistic levels, etc.)

Thus the policy really remains the same, but the different nature of the evidence, in the era of greater standardization, gives a very different result.

3. What is included in and excluded from *OED*'s post-1750 coverage?

OED's reading embraces newspapers, fiction, etc. from as many different world varieties of English as possible. But many varieties are poorly represented in published, written sources.

- This does not only apply to regional variation: no one would deny that the language of e-mail or SMS messages shows many interesting features, and is a rewarding area for linguistic study, but it is largely outside the *OED*'s terms of reference.
- On this area see e.g. Crystal (2001, 2008), Baron (2003). On the *OED*'s approach see Simpson (2003).
- Occasionally an archived web page may be used, e.g. if it antedates information from printed sources.
- If citing a more ephemeral web page is unavoidable, we will keep our own archive copy.

4. How is regional variation covered by *OED*?

4.1 Labelling

OED3 uses a general label *regional* to cover all types of regional variation, Traditional Dialect as well as modern rural or urban varieties. (On the term Traditional Dialect see Wells (1982), Trudgill (1999).)

4.2 What are the major sources of data?

- There is writing in "dialect", both for dialect speakers and for non-dialect speakers. (On the important differences between these two types see Trudgill 2002.)
- Most of our data comes from secondary material, such as glossaries, fieldworker reports, etc.

Crucially, all of this material uses a modified form of the orthography of modern standard English

4.3 Dialogue between *OED* and specialist dialect dictionaries

- The *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898-1905) emerged as a response to decisions made during editing the first edition of the *OED*, but it was available to be used for many of the later fascicles of the *OED* itself. Today it remains an invaluable resource.
- *OED* does not include everything from *EDD*, but it can use it as support even for those things it does not include. (The same is true of the *Scottish National Dictionary*, the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, etc.)

4.4 An extended example: the word *poke*

- See the end of this handout for the full *OED3* entry.

This word is known to most speakers of modern English only as part of the idiom *a pig in a poke* 'something bought or accepted without prior inspection'. See the end of this handout for the full entry from the new edition of the *OED* (*OED3*).

The etymology from the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* is very short:

> **poke** .. bag, small sack (now dialectal except in 'to buy a pig in a poke'). 13th century. - Old Northern French *poque*, *poke* (compare Anglo-Latin *poca*), variant of (Old)French *poche* (compare POUCH).

Three sets of forms are recorded in *OED3*:

α. ME pook, ME-16 (17 *Irish English* (*Wexford*)) pooke, ME- poke, 15 poeck, 15-16 (18 *Irish English* (*Wexford*)) poake, 16 poak, 19- polk (*U.S. regional*); *Eng. regional* (*chiefly north.*) 17- poak, 17- poake, 18- pooak, 18- pook, 18- pwoak, 18- pwok, 18- pwoke; *Sc.* pre-17 poike, pre-17 poilk, pre-17 pook, pre-17 pooke, pre-17 poolke, pre-17 poyk, pre-17 poyke, pre-17 17- poke, pre-17 18 poak, pre-17 18 poik, 18 puock (*south.*), 18- pyock (*north-east.*), 18- pyoke (*north-east.*), 19- peock (*north-east.*); *N.E.D.* (1907) also records a form 18 puok (*regional*).

β. ME poc, ME pok, ME puc, 15 pokke, 15-16 pocke, 15- pock, 19- pok (*Canad. regional*); *Sc.* pre-17 pocke, pre-17 17- pock, pre-17 (19- *Shetland*) pok; *N.E.D.* (1907) also records a form ME pokke.

γ. *Sc.* pre-17 polk, pre-17 18 pouk, 18 powk.

The α forms show the expected normal development:

Middle English *poke* /pokə/ > *pōke* /p :kə/ (by Open Syllable Lengthening)
> *pōke* /p :k/ (with loss of the final -*e*, which remains in spelling)
> early modern English /po:k/ (with vowel raising as a result of the Great Vowel Shift)
> modern English *poke* /pə k/

The β forms appear to show failure of Open Syllable Lengthening (on this phenomenon in Scots compare Macafee (2002) §6.6.1). The γ forms reflect a further sound change in Scots which caused diphthongization before a velar plosive (see Macafee (2002) §6.21).

In addition to the divergence in word form, there is also considerable divergence in word meaning:

1. a. A bag, now esp. a paper bag; a small sack; (*Sc.*) †a beggar's bundle (*obs.*). Also: a bagful. Now *regional* exc[ept] in *pig in a poke* (see PIG n.[1] Phrases 4). *c*1300

Formerly used as a measure of quantity, varying according to the quality and nature of the commodity.

Pokes seem to have been used particularly for the conveyance of raw wool.

b. Originally: † a small bag or pouch worn on the person (*obs.*). Later: a pocket in a person's clothing (now *rare*). *a*1616

c. *N. Amer. Criminals' slang*. A purse, a wallet; a pocketbook. 1859

d. *slang*. A roll of banknotes; money; a supply or stash of money. 1926

2. † **a.** The funnel-shaped opening of a fish-trap. *Obs.* *a*1325 - *c*1350

b. Chiefly *Sc.* A bag-shaped fishing net, a purse-net. Cf. *poke-net* n. at Compounds. 1579

3. A long full sleeve. Cf. *poke sleeve* n. at Compounds. Now *hist.* 1402

4. The stomach, esp. of a fish; (also) the swim bladder of a fish. Now *regional*. *c*1450

5. † **a.** More fully *Bavarian poke*. A goitre. *Obs.* 1621 - 1819

b. *Sc.* and *Eng. regional* (*north.*). An oedematous swelling on the neck of a sheep, caused by infection with liver flukes (fascioliasis); the disease fascioliasis. Now *rare*. 1793

6. *N. Amer*. Chiefly *Whaling*. A bag or bladder filled with air, used as a buoy or float. Now *hist*. 1883

Material included by *EDD* but not by *OED*, because its drafting criteria are not satisfied:

Compounds: *poke-band*, *poke-brass*, *poke-cart*, *poke-day*, *poke-mitten*, *poke-needle*, *poke-piece*, *poke-purse*, *poke-rent*, *poke-sack*, *poke-end*, *poke-blown*, *poke-brussen*, and (at *pock* n.[1]) *pock-staff*.

Phrases: *more poke than pudding*, *the poke's as good as the sack*, *to get the poke*, *to give the poke*, *to open one's poke and sell one's wares*, *to tie up the poke before it is full*, *to throw the poke off one's own shoulders on to another's back*, and (at *pock* n.[1]) *a knight of the pock*, *the pock and the string*, *to loose* or *lowse the pock*, *to open the pock*, *to take the pock*.

Senses: 'the bag of a bagpipe', 'a cover used for wrapping section warps in', 'the salted stomach of a calf from which rennet is made', 'a finger-stall'.

Complementary documentation: *OED* has a quotation from 1764 from *Museum Rusticum* (Anon. 1764-66; a source written in standard-English describing rural industries), which describes the carrying of hops in pokes to the oast-house for drying. *EDD* has the following gloss of specific use in Kent, from one of its informants: "Ken. A bag for putting green hops into, immediately on picking them (A.E.C.)".

5. The nature of our evidence for regional English, *c*1750 – present day

In the 18th and 19th centuries, our evidence mostly attempts to render regional features through modifications of standard English orthography.

- Material of this sort can be reflected relatively easily in *OED*.

For the 20th century (and 21st), some evidence is in the primary form of sound recordings, with or without IPA or other transcriptions.

- Representing this can involve some novel stylistic solutions for *OED*:

> *OED3*, *mushroom* n. and adj., "Forms" section, extract (α forms, showing final <n>):
>
> α lME musseroun, lME-16 muscheron, 15 mousheroun, 15 musheron, 15 mussheron, 16 mucheron, 16-17 mushroon; *Eng. regional* (*south.*) 18 musharune, 18- mesheroon, 18- misheroon, 18- musheroon, 18- musherroon, 18- mushroon, 19- mashroon, 19- musherooin; *U.S. regional* 18 musheron, 18- mushroon, 19- moosharoon, 19- musharoon, 19- musheroon; also *Irish English* 18- masheroon, 19- musharoon, 19- musheroon, 19- musherroon, 19- mushroom.
>
> *OED3*, *mushroom* n. and adj., etymology section, extract:

Surv. Eng. Dial. records α forms across a broad swathe of southern England: from Cornwall, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Berkshire, Surrey, Sussex, Kent, and Essex.

6. What of the unpublished writings of 'naïve' non-professional writers?

- Such writers do not have access to the full repertory of orthographic forms of standard English.
- When they diverge from the spelling conventions of standard English this does not necessarily reflect a conscious decision.
- Such a writer may have been a speaker of a spoken variety which showed a lot of interesting features, but there is not necessarily a clear mapping between these and her/his orthography.
- We may be able to localize the writer, but this does not mean that we can localize all of her/his spellings to this locality.
- The usefulness of such sources to linguists is not in any doubt. (See for example Lass 1987.) What is less certain is how such data can be used within the framework of a historical dictionary.

7. Treatment of material from before 1750

- 1500-1750 is the crucial period in the standardization of written, published English, but a good deal of spelling variation remains until the very end of this period. In unpublished, unprinted material the variation is even greater. Until the end of the eighteenth century, eccentric spelling in unpublished writing was largely unstigmatized:

  > Correct spelling has, at least since the eighteenth century, assumed great sociolinguistic importance, but there is considerable evidence that the stigmatisation of spelling mistakes is a new development. True enough, if uneducated speakers like the undertaker Henry Machyn spelt according to their lower-class pronunciation, the spelling would be stigmatised too…Puttenham must have had people like him in mind when warning against 'ill shapen sounds and false ortographie'. However, Queen Elizabeth's spelling *righmes* [for *rhymes*]..indicates that rather unpredictable spellings were found in educated writers; and letters and diaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are still full of them - and they were often used by female writers. Many people must have thought that to spell correctly was the secretary's job, and not necessarily a badge of liberal education. This attitude changed only in the eighteenth century when many of the educated became obsessed with orthography. (Görlach (1999) 487)

- Some types of unpublished writing, particularly by less socially elevated writers, can be particularly revealing about variation in early modern English.

- However, we have to be very careful in attaching labels to such features. "Standard" and "nonstandard" are for the most part unhelpful labels in this period, and variation between print and non-print sources shows at most a cline.
- We now have some important tools for investigating spelling variation in this period. E*arly English Books Online* (*EEBO*) currently provides 11,500 texts in searchable form online (although this is only around 10% of the surviving printed material from this period).

An example of the English of poorly educated, low-status writers in this period, unmediated by a printer: Extract from the records of the churchwardens of Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire from 1664 (text taken from Cusack 1998 84-5):

> That I Iohn Manning of the p*ar*ish hath ereckted And bilded Won seat vpon his own Cost And Charg for his wife and famely or Aney wothr persons As him shall Plase ther Being and having The Anchent Rite And Titell to that seat This seate standing And gooying to the Pillow that stand Neare vnto Peorch deoare vpon the Lift hand As wee doe Com in and Soe Recheth from that Pillow {to the} vant

- *ereckted* 'erected' is not otherwise found as late as the 17th century. *lift* 'left' is extremely rare in the 17th century, and this is a valuable further example.
- The forms *gooying* 'going', *peorch* 'porch', *deoare* 'door', and *pillow* 'pillar' are not attested elsewhere, and are interesting phonologically. But whether they reflect any regionally restricted phonological variation is much less clear.
- If *plase* is 'please' it is an interesting form. ('place' seems ruled out by syntax, but this passage seems mangled).
- *vant* 'font' is not attested elsewhere. It seems to show the voicing of an initial fricative we would expect in a south-western text.
- *wothr* 'other' is not otherwise found in 17th-century sources. *wother* is a distinctively south-western form in modern use, and Middle English and 16th-century evidence tentatively suggests it was distinctively south-western in this period also.
    - Thus we appear to have two features which we could confidently label as south-western, on the basis of comparison with other sources.
    - There are several other interesting additions to the historical record, but it would be rash to assume that they are distinctively south-western.
- We will normally include all early modern evidence available to us in the dictionary, because we normally cannot separate individual, idiolectal variation from more widespread variation.

8. The example of John Clare

- From north-east Northamptonshire, lived 1793-1864.

- Of very humble, rural origin. Had little formal education.
- His spellings are unusual for the early 19th century, especially by comparison with published material of this date.
- In his lifetime, editions of his work often showed a high degree of 'correction' of spellings.
- Modern scholarly editions (especially those of Eric Robinson and his collaborators) are based more closely on his manuscripts, and reflect his own spellings.

8.1 There are some interesting lexical items in Clare:

pooty 'the banded or grove snail' is a very frequent word in Clare's works. Northamptonshire dialect sources list it, but attribute it to Clare. Presumably it can be classified as a Northamptonshire word, but it would reassuring to have some evidence of use entirely independent of Clare.

8.2 What tools do we have for examining Clare's spellings?

- The record of the *OED*, and of the *English Dialect Dictionary*
- A very large proportion of 18th-century published writings are searchable on *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (*ECCO*).

8.3 Some typical examples of Clare's spellings, taken from the prose piece *The Farmer and the Vicar* (text from Robinson and Powell (2004) 438-444):

A first sample of Clare's spelling:

> therefor he always called Horace a fool and his latin nonsense because he coud not read it

Some typical spelling types found in Clare:

- out skirts *outskirts*; nick name *nickname*; a foot *afoot*; over ruled *overruled*; now adays *nowadays*
- tryed *tried*; dyed *died*
- woud *would*; coud *could*; shoud *should*
- calld *call'd*, *called*; joind *join'd, joined*
- heres *here's*; vicars *vicar's* (but once *farmer's*); girles *girl's*

Some more isolated examples:
Christmass *Christmas*; cobler *cobbler*; existance *existence*; oppulent *opulent*; appologize *apologize*; appology *apology*; oppertunity *opportunity*; begining *beginning*; defficiency *deficiency*; ommitted *omitted*; pregudice *prejudice*; surcumstance *circumstance*; conserns *concerns*; counsils *counsels*

- These spellings are all unusual in Clare's period, but many can be found in the 18th century, especially in less formal writings such as letters, diaries, etc. Many can also be found today on the internet and in other writing not mediated through publishers.
- A very few forms in the text are more unusual:

his first wish had been to learn them all to be good Dairey wives by sending them to milk and do the kitchen work and make the cheese and butter themselves but his wife told the Vicar it was nothing but a mizardly turn to save the wages of servants

he was always punctual in having the old bowl of frumitory at sheep shearing ready in time for the shepherds suppers

he was somtimes disposed to be merry and woud ramp with the servant wenches in hay time about the Cocks and rarely missed kissing them beneath the missletoe at christmass which he considered as a nessesary preface to good luck thro the year for like his old neeghbour he was a stickler for old customs

there was the ‘Whole duty of man’ too which he prized as being a heir long to the family

a fragment of an old book on Cookery with ‘Hamlet a tradegy by Will Shakspear Esqr’ but these belonged to the Wife and the last to his daughters

- *mizardly* ‘ungenerous’ shows a derivative of *misard*, a variant of *miser* ‘ungenerous person’. *misard* was in general use in the 16th and 17th centuries, but is restricted to regional varieties later. *mizardly* is not recorded elsewhere, but *misertly* is recorded from Northern Ireland in *EDD*.
- The spelling *frumitory* is not found in *OED* or *ECCO*, but *OED* does record *fu(r)metry* for the 18th and 19th centuries, and *frumentary* for the 18th century.
- *ramp* ‘romp’ is listed in *EDD* as being “In *gen*. dial. use in Sc. Eng. and Amer.”
- *heir long* shows an interesting folk-etymological alteration of *heirloom* ‘something passed down in a family’
- *tradegy* ‘tragedy’ is not found in *OED*, but *ECCO* has other examples, and the metathesis is unsurprising.

9 Some conclusions

For the material before 1700 (and perhaps a little later) we normally have insufficient data to label forms as ‘non-standard’ simply because we have no evidence for them from printed sources.

- Availability of more searchable texts on *EEBO* or elsewhere may change this.
- So might greater availability of non-print sources in electronic form.

For the more recent past, the evidence of ‘naïve’ witnesses must be approached with caution.

- We certainly must not treat spellings from such sources as equivalent to spellings from dialect glossaries, or dialect literature in a modified form of standard orthography.

References

Baron, Naomi S. 2003. “Why email looks like speech: proofreading, pedagogy and public face”, in *New Language Media* ed. by Jean Aitchison and Diana M. Lewis. London: Routledge. 85-94.

Crystal, David 2001. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: C.U.P.

Crystal, David 2008. *txtng*. Oxford: O.U.P.

Cusack, Bridget 1998. *Everday English 1500-1700: A Reader.* Edinburgh: E.U.P.

Durkin, Philip 1999. “Root and branch: revising the etymological component of the *OED*”, in *Transactions of the Philological Society* 97: 1-49.

Durkin, Philip 2002a. “‘Mixed’ etymologies of Middle English items in OED3: some questions of methodology and policy”, in *Dictionaries* 23 142-155.

Durkin, Philip 2002b. “Changing documentation in the third edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: sixteenth-century vocabulary as a test case”, in Fanego et al. (2002) 65-81.

Durkin, Philip 2004. “Loanword etymologies in the third edition of the *OED*: some questions of classification” in Christian Kay, Carole Hough, and Irené Wotherspoon (eds.) *New Perspectives on English Historical Linguistics. Volume II: Lexis and Transmission* Amsterdam: Benjamins 79-90.

Durkin, Philip 2006. “Loanword etymologies in the third edition of the *OED*: the benefits of a consistent methodology for the scholarly user” in Ritt, Nikolaus, Schendl, Herbert, Dalton-Puffer, Christiane, and Kastovsky, Dieter (eds.) *Medieval English and its Heritage* Frankfurt am Main: Lang 61-75.

Durkin, Philip 2009. *The Oxford Guide to Etymology*. Oxford: O.U.P.

Durkin, Philip forthcoming. “The *English Dialect Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*: a continuing relationship between two dictionaries”, in volume on English dialect lexicography ed. by Manfred Markus.

Durkin, Philip forthcoming. “Assessing non-standard writing in lexicography”, in *Varieties in Writing* ed. Raymond Hickey.

Early English Books Online: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home

Eighteenth-Century Collections Online: http://www.gale.cengage.com/DigitalCollections/products/ecco/index.htm

The English Dialect Dictionary, 1898-1905. Ed. Joseph A. Wright. Oxford: O.U.P.

Görlach, Manfred 1999. “Regional and social variation”, in Roger Lass (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the English Language. Vol. III: 1476-1776* Cambridge: C.U.P. 459-538.

Lass, Roger 1987. “How reliable is Goldswain? On the credibility of an early South African English source”, in *African Studies* 46 155-62.

Macafee, Caroline 2002. “A History of Scots to 1700” in *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* vol. XII xix.

The Oxford English Dictionary, 1884-1928. Ed. Sir James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, Sir William A. Craigie and Charles T. Onions. *Supplement and Bibliography* 1933. *Supplement*, 1972-1986; ed. Robert W. Burchfield. 2nd. ed., 1989; ed. John A. Simpson and Edmund S. C. Weiner. *Additions Series*, 1993-7; ed. John A. Simpson, Edmund S. C. Weiner and Michael Proffitt. 3rd. ed. (in progress) *OED Online*, March 2000-, ed. John A. Simpson, www.oed.com [= *OED*]

Robinson, Eric and Powell, David 2004. *John Clare: Major Works*. revised ed. Oxford: O.U.P.

Simpson, John 2003. “Reliable authority: tabloids, film, email and speech as sources for dictionaries”, in *New Language Media* ed. by Jean Aitchison and Diana M. Lewis. London: Routledge. 187-192.

Simpson, John 2004. “The *OED* and collaborative research into the history of English”, in *Anglia* 122 185-208.

John Simpson, Edmund Weiner, and Philip Durkin, 2004. “The Oxford English Dictionary Today”, in Transactions of the Philological Society 102 335-374.

Trudgill, Peter 1999. *The Dialects of England*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

Trudgill, Peter 2002. “Dedialectalisation and Norfolk dialect orthography”, in Irma Taavitsainen, Gunnel Melchers, and Päivi Pahta (eds.) *Writing in Nonstandard English* Amsterdam: Benjamins 323-329.

Wells, John C. 1982. *Accents of English. Volume 1: Introduction*. Cambridge: C.U.P.