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ENGLISH DICTIONARIES AS SOURCES FOR WORK IN ENGLISH HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

An overview of dictionaries of English as primary and secondary sources for the history of the English language, with notes on what can be learned from the study of early dictionaries, and on the development, present state, and possible future of scholarly historical lexicography in English.

1. Introduction

Dictionaries may be primary or secondary sources for the historical study of the English language. This paper will begin by reviewing the kinds of wordlist and dictionary, from the earlier Middle Ages onward, which provide primary evidence for the development of English lexicon, syntax, and to some extent pronunciation. For most of the period before 1800, these works are “our most complete contemporaneous descriptions of English” (McConchie 2012: xiii). The paper will then turn to the tradition of the historical lexicography of English (including some Caribbean varieties which shade into creoles) and Scots, in other words to the dictionaries which provide secondary evidence for the same topics.

2. Dictionaries and wordlists as primary sources

Some of the earliest primary sources for the history of the English language are among the 143 glossaries from Anglo-Saxon England which include at least one Old English equivalent for a Latin word; one of the largest, the so-called Cleopatra I,

has about 5,000 Latin–Old English entries (Healey 1994/2012: 3–4; Franzen 2012a: L, and cf. *ibid.* LVII). These glossaries may be alphabetised by their first letter or their first two letters, or they may be subject-classified. The oldest is of about 700 AD. Most of them are anonymous; all of them are of Latin with English equivalents. They constitute an extremely complex tradition, to the problems of which Franzen (2012a, especially the introduction) offers an invaluable guide rather than a solution.

The lexicography of Old English presents a further, and distinctive, challenge: “While glossaries account for only about 1% of the surviving corpus of Old English, an astonishing 24% [of the whole corpus] is found in ... interlinear glosses to Latin texts”: so, for instance, a single manuscript of Aldhelm’s Latin *Prosa de virginitate* has about 5,500 Old English glosses (Franzen 2012a: XXXVI–XXXVII). These glosses, particularly the so-called continuous glosses which give equivalents for every word in a Latin text, have equally strong affinities with glossaries, for which they may provide the source, and with translations (cf. Franzen 2012b: XVIII for an example of the uncertain relationship between glossing and lexicography).

The tradition of Middle English wordlists and dictionaries is likewise exclusively bilingual or multilingual, and likewise complex. At least lexicographers in Anglo-Saxon England were only concerned with Latin and Old English, whereas their successors worked in a trilingual society, and their wordlists and glosses show the interplay of Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English (Franzen 2012b: xxx–xxxvii). In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there is important lexicographical material in schoolbooks, and in the fifteenth century, major alphabetised Latin–English and English–Latin dictionaries emerge (Franzen 2012b: xli–xliv and xlvii–liv). Franzen 2012b (especially the introduction) offers the best guide to English lexicography from the Norman Conquest to the end of the fifteenth century.

English lexicography flourished in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Rising literacy levels increased the demand for dictionaries and the development of print made it increasingly easy to satisfy that demand; although manuscript wordlists were certainly made throughout the period (many of them are noted in Alston 2009), the major achievements were designed for, and realised in, print. Free-standing sixteenth-century dictionaries were bilingual or specialised; so, with the exception of some spelling-books, were glossaries published as part of larger works. But in the seventeenth century, a tradition of non-specialised dictionaries of hard English words emerged, growing steadily from the 2,498 entries of Cawdrey’s *Table alphabeticall* of 1604 (considerably smaller than Cleopatra I, which had been compiled more than five hundred years earlier) to the 25,698 of Coles 1676, and in the eighteenth century, monolingual dictionaries might register as many as 65,000 words. By far the most studied of these is, of course, Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English language* of 1755 (⁴1773), a rich and quotable source for the history of attitudes to the English language and more generally for the history of English literary culture. Bilingual dictionaries and wordlists nevertheless offer a wider range of historical evidence than monolingual dictionaries throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and into the eighteenth. Not only do they

register vocabulary which is not in the monolingual dictionaries, but they also attend more closely than the monolinguals to phraseology and collocation: of special interest here are the works called phraseologies which guided schoolboys in turning idiomatic English into idiomatic Latin and vice versa (Considine 2012b: 348–51). In the same series as Franzen (2012a and 2012b), if not quite as groundbreaking as her work, are McConchie (2012), Considine (2012a), and McDermott (2012), and between them, these volumes offer a useful overview of three busy centuries of lexicography, and give fairly ample references to earlier work, a selection of which they reprint.

The value as primary sources of more recent dictionaries is in some ways less than those from the period before 1800: the more text of every sort which is preserved, the less likely it is that a dictionary will be an important witness to a word or syntactic feature. So, for instance, the most important kind of evidence which OED1 provides when its editorial matter is seen as a primary source is probably its notations of pronunciation. These were printed in a phonetic alphabet devised by James Murray (see MacMahon 2000), which is consistent enough to have been successfully transposed to IPA for OED2 in 1989, and they are reported in the ongoing OED3 when they differ from, or are more restricted than, present-day pronunciation, as s.vv. *pacificatory*, *pageantry*, and *pah*. OED1 does also give some information on usage and register as perceived by its editors (see Mugglestone 2000b), and even when this is mistaken or odd – as in Murray’s association of the intensifier *bloody* with ‘the lowest classes’ or of a particular sense of *fault* with ‘lady teachers ... marking school exercises’ – it is evidence for the history of attitudes to the language, and is sometimes, as in both these cases, quoted in OED3. Likewise, the usage notes in a number of twentieth-century dictionaries are already of historical interest: the commentary on *nigger* in dictionaries made in the United States is an obvious example.

Since the end of the eighteenth century, a vigorous stream of synchronic dialect lexicography, usually drawing at least in part on oral usage, has recorded English regional vocabulary in the British Isles and elsewhere. Much of that which was undertaken before the end of the nineteenth century is synthesised, and indeed supplemented, in the *English dialect dictionary* (EDD) edited by Joseph Wright. Some scholarly regional lexicography shades into historical lexicography: for instance, the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (Cassidy, LePage 1967), the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (Story et al. 1982), and the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE) all present undated evidence from professionally conducted field-work side by side with dated evidence from historical printed and archival sources. Likewise Jamieson (1808–25), although fundamentally a historical dictionary, is also a primary source for words of which Jamieson had personal knowledge (see Rennie 2012: 141–3, 231). Even the least professional dialect wordlists often reflect long acquaintance, if not intimacy, with regional vocabulary. Slang lexicography, surveyed by Coleman (2004–2010), which goes back to sixteenth-century wordlists of thieves’ cant, and has proliferated since the end of the seventeenth century, is likewise a major primary source for the words it registers. An important recent instance is

the online *Urban dictionary* (UrbanD), to which over seven million definitions were added by users between 1999 and September 2013, with only the most nominal editorial control.

2.1. The use of dictionaries as primary sources

Lexicographical texts which register English are invariably primary sources for the social and cultural history of the English language. The choice of source and target language, the kind of words which are registered, the definitions of words of cultural importance, the choice of source texts and quotations, are all eloquent. So are format, typography, and price, and so are the signs of the use of dictionaries by individual readers which are evident from the inspection of surviving copies. Every book tells a story, and if the book is a dictionary which registers English, it tells a story about the use of the English language. What does an unglamorous eighteenth-century dictionary, John Entick's *New spelling dictionary* (1765; editions to 1834) tell us about the social history of English? One set of answers can be inferred from its word count, its title-page reference to "young People, Artificers, Tradesmen and Foreigners", and other internal features; another can be inferred from its publishing history (for an interesting episode in which, see Rodriguez-Álvarez, Rodriguez-Gil 2006/2012); a third can be inferred from a surviving copy of the Dublin edition of 1782, which was read until its covers came off, continued to be read so that its outer pages were rubbed and soiled, and was then taken to a cobbler or saddler – not a craftsman used to handling books – to have a coarsely sewn patchwork leather cover put on it for further use (Brown, Considine 2012: 76). For the owners of that copy of Entick, who were clearly so poor that they could not replace a cheap dictionary on the point of falling apart, literacy was important, and the dictionary was a valued part of their lives as literate people.

As primary sources, dictionaries, wordlists, and glosses may provide the only record, or the earliest, of rare, informal, or regional lexical items. This is true of English as it is of other languages: for instance, the *Lexicon* of Hesychius of Alexandria "is the only source for a large number of rare words ... (particularly dialect forms)" in ancient Greek (Dickey 2007: 88). So, for instance, we only know that Old English had a cognate of German *Eichhorn* 'squirrel' because *ācweorna* and related forms are found in Old English glossaries (Healey 1994/2012: 9).¹ We appear to have no record of *philanthropist* before Bailey in 1730, or of *pre-edit* before W2 in 1934. The making of bilingual dictionaries often leads to careful thinking about the resources of the language, and this is one reason why Cotgrave (1611) is OED's earliest authority for well over a thousand entries. Likewise, the seventeenth-century Latin phraseologies are very rich sources for English

¹ The word *aquerne* 'squirrel fur' does occur in the early Middle English "Poema morale" – but without the Old English glossarial evidence, this might be taken to be a loanword, as the names of traded goods such as furs often are.

multi-word constructions (see Considine 2012b: 350). Not only do lexicographers like to provide rare words, but they like to explain them: whereas the sense of a very rare word can be difficult to infer from its context in other texts, it is likely to be provided in the definition of a monolingual lexicographical text or the translation-equivalent of a bilingual one.

This last point leads to an obvious problem: lexicographers explain words, but their explanations can be wrong. So, for instance, Latin *napta* ‘naphtha, an inflammable mineral oil’ is glossed *tynder* in more than one Old English source (noted Sweet 1897: v1). Because early glossators and lexicographers were naturally interested in explaining difficult words, whether in a classical or foreign language or in English, their vocabulary tends to be recondite. There is, indeed, always the possibility that a word or phrase which appears in a dictionary represents the lexicographer’s own invention. He or she may be moved to devise an equivalent for a difficult foreign word, or to show off the derivational potential of English. The modesty of the eleventh-century glossarist Ælfric of Eynsham, who admitted s.v. *cypressus* ‘cypress’ simply that ‘næfð nænne engliscne naman’ (‘it has no English name’) is perhaps exceptional (example from Healey 1994/2012: 6). A number of the headwords in Cockeram (1623), for instance, may be the lexicographer’s own coinages (see Nagy 1999/2012, and Considine 2012a: 499, entry “dictionaries: authenticity of words in”). But one should not be too quick to denounce a word which appears to have made its first appearance in a dictionary as a coinage. The word *chimaerialness*, registered in Bailey (1730) and attested from this single source in the OED1 entry for *chimerical*, not yet revised in OED3, is not to be found by searching in the 33 million pages of *Eighteenth-century collections online* (ECCO) – but two examples of *chimericalness* do turn up in late-seventeenth-century texts available through *Early English books online* (EEBO), so Bailey need not be supposed to have invented it. Nor is it *prima facie* obvious why the coinage of a word as a headword in a dictionary or glossary is different in kind from its coinage in a translation or any other text. The *Oxford English dictionary* sometimes treats words which only ever appear in dictionaries as a special case: for instance, *nixious* and *nixuriate* (both from Cockeram 1623) are flagged with a superscript zero after the label *Obs. rare* (see Burchfield 1973: 7–9). But its policy is inconsistent: there are equally ill-attested words such as *noctilucy* which are not marked thus, and others again (in particular, headwords from dialect glossaries) which are excluded altogether. The problem of authenticity is summed up in the case of UrbanD. Many of its definitions are for nonce-coinages, or give comical pretended senses for existing words or names. So it is never to be trusted as evidence for the currency of a lexical item or sense – but there is no denying that it does document a large sample of the emerging slang of the early twenty-first century. Whether it will be archived in such a form as to be accessible to lexicographers a century after its creation remains to be seen; Peckham (2005) is inevitably only a very limited sample.

This leads to a final set of problems (or, more positively, of research opportunities), relating to the editions in which dictionaries are available for use as

primary sources. Many Old English glosses and glossaries “remain unedited or inadequately edited” (Franzen 2012a: LXVII), including some of the more important. The same is true of Middle English lexicographical works (Franzen 2012b: LIV–LVI). The major early modern dictionaries are available in printed facsimiles (particularly in the Scolar Press series *English linguistics 1500–1800*, but some of them also in the Georg Olms series *Anglistica & Americana*, and in non-series facsimiles, including modern on-demand reprints from digital sources) and in digitised page images on EEBO and ECCO and elsewhere. 180 early modern dictionaries and wordlists (a total of 596,195 entries), including some which were not printed in their own period, can be searched with the database *Lexicons of Early Modern English* (LEME), of which a basic version is freely available, with extra features accessible to subscribers.² But no early modern dictionary of any importance is available in a modern edition which traces its development – for instance, Cawdrey (1604) runs to 2,498 entries, and the fourth and final edition of the same dictionary, Cawdrey (1617), to 3,264 – and its sources. Johnson (1755/1996), published on CD-ROM, made it possible to compare the two major editions of Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English language*, though the time may come when it is no longer compatible with new computer hardware or operating systems. Some nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dictionaries such as Jamieson (1808–25) and Webster (1828) are searchable online, through interfaces varying in sophistication: the best make full-text searches available, and provide ready access to page images in DjVu or a similar format.

3. Dictionaries as secondary sources

We now turn to the historical dictionaries and wordlists which have been compiled in the course of the historical study of the language. The first of these were wordlists of Old English, Middle English, and Middle Scots, compiled from the sixteenth century onwards, and joined in the seventeenth century by etymological dictionaries. These early works are now of interest only as primary sources: for instance, 173 entries in the first substantial wordlist of Old English, the “Vocabularium saxonicum” compiled before 1567 by Laurence Nowell, cite forms from the Lancashire dialect of Nowell’s own day (Marckwardt 1947). Jamieson (1808) is much more sophisticated than its predecessors, because its entries are illustrated by chronologically ordered quotations, starting with the earliest which Jamieson could find and continuing to his own day (see Rennie 2012: 120–3), but it has been superseded as an account of the history of the lexicon of Scots.

Turning to dictionaries which are still current, it can be said with some confidence that of all the languages in the world, English is the best served by historical dictionaries (for an overview of them, see Thim 2011). At their centre is the *Oxford English dictionary*, the publication history of which is complex. It was planned from

² Counts from the database’s “Introduction” page, February 2013.

the late 1850s onwards, and appeared in fascicles from 1884 onwards.³ The first editor, James Murray, was joined in 1888 by Henry Bradley, in 1901 by William Craigie, and in 1914 by Charles Onions.⁴ Its title was originally *A new English dictionary on historical principles*, but it was advertised by its publisher as “The Oxford English dictionary” as early as 1888 (*The Academy*, June 23). The last fascicle, *Wise–Wyzen*, was issued in April 1928 (*XYZ* had appeared in 1921), completing ten volumes; some of these were physically unwieldy, and purchasers of the original fascicles might have them bound in a set of as many as twenty physical books. The first edition was reissued in twelve volumes, with a general introduction, a bibliography, and a supplement edited by Craigie and Onions, in 1933 (Brewer 2007: 1–64). Thereafter, the dictionary did not have an active editor until 1956, when Robert Burchfield was appointed to edit a supplement of new words and senses; this appeared in four volumes between 1972 and 1986 (Brewer 2007: 152–212). It was meant to replace the 1933 supplement, most – though not all – of which it incorporated (Ogilvie 2013: 181–6).⁵ A second edition, published in twenty volumes in 1989 under the supervision of John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, integrated the first edition (with very minor revisions), Burchfield’s supplement, and 5,000 new entries in a single chronological sequence. An electronic text underlay the printed version, and was published on CD-ROM in 1992. The most recent print publication of new OED material took place in 1993 and 1997, when three octavo volumes presenting a total of just under ten thousand new entries were published as the OED *additions series*. The electronic text became the basis of a true, comprehensively revised third edition, published online in quarterly instalments from 2000 onwards, with John Simpson as its chief editor (Brewer 2007: 213–257). These instalments began at the start of the range *M*, and continued to the end of *R* before turning back to *A*: the range *Aa–aevum* was published in December 2011, and included the hundred thousandth revised entry to have been published in the third edition. New entries have also been added, and old ones revised, out of alphabetical sequence, so although as of December 2012 all entries in the ranges *M–Rz* and *Aa–Always* had been fully revised, many others had been fully revised as well, and others again had been affected by global revisions such as the reverification of historical quotations for textual and bibliographical accuracy.⁶

The *Oxford English dictionary* is the basis of the *Historical thesaurus of the Oxford English dictionary* (2009), which is in effect a subject-ordered index to the dictionary,

³ The number varied: Rulon-Miller Books (St Paul, Minnesota) offered a complete set comprising 51 fascicles for sale in 2013, calling it “likely a late (?last) issue of the fascicles” and noting that “we have handled other sets containing 126, 112, 100, and 67 fascicles, and surely there are a number of other combinations”. A useful overview which identifies and dates 125 fascicles is McMorris (2000).

⁴ Biographical details of OED personnel in the period up to 1933 are at Gilliver (2000); names of staff since 1989 are at public.oed.com/the-oed-today/staff-of-the-oxford-english-dictionary/.

⁵ When the first copies of Ogilvie (2013) were published in 2012, there was considerable media interest in this point; OED issued a statement meant to correct any misunderstandings, online at public.oed.com/history-of-the-oed/foreign-words-in-the-oxford-english-dictionary/.

⁶ For a survey of updates, see public.oed.com/the-oed-today/recent-updates-to-the-oed/.

registering 800,000 lexical items in 235,000 entry categories. These categories ultimately fall under three highest-level headings, “the external world”, “the mind”, and “society”. A user can work down from these headings to find, for example, that “society” includes “religion”, which includes “church government”, which includes “clergyman”, which includes “clerical superior”, which includes “pope”, which includes a list of 21 adjectives with their dates of first attestation, from the fourteenth-century *papal* to the seventeenth-century *pontificious* and *papizing*, by way of the sixteenth-century *antichristian*, included on the strength of a quotation of 1585, “The head of the church Antichristian, is the Pope.” The number of early modern forms in this list, and the absence of new forms after the seventeenth century, are both striking. The *Historical thesaurus* can also be searched by keyword, to find the six categories of which *antichristian* is a member, and since it is linked to OED, the search can begin from an OED entry. Its online version is being updated to keep it abreast of OED updates; to put that another way, its printed version, although very convenient for some kinds of consultation, is already out of date in some respects. It incorporates material from the older *Thesaurus of Old English*, which naturally “remains the thesaurus of choice” for work on Old English (Thim 2011: 87), and is available online.

OED’s etymologies were always good, and those in the revised sections of the dictionary are outstanding (Durkin 1999 discusses some of the principles underlying the revision, and Durkin 2009 is rich in case studies drawn from OED). Other etymological dictionaries sometimes supplement unrevised OED entries. The one really original contribution to the etymological lexicography of English in the last century has been the *Analytic dictionary of English etymology* of Anatoly Liberman, of which only two volumes are available at present: a 359-page presentation of fifty-five specimen entries, and a 949-page bibliography (Liberman 2008, 2010). Liberman’s work is “analytic” because its entries, like those of the etymological dictionaries of a number of languages other than English, discuss most or all of the previous scholarly etymological treatments of the word in question with explicit references to those treatments; this is not done in OED or in any other etymological dictionary of English.

All the historical dictionaries of English are in one way or another affiliated with or inspired by OED. A first group of them originated in a proposal of Craigie’s, made in 1919, for a set of so-called “period” dictionaries which would supplement OED’s coverage of the earlier stages of the language: these would cover Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, and Middle Scots. In 1925, Craigie suggested a fifth, to cover American English. The results of this proposal have been far-reaching, as is shown by Adams (2009). A *dictionary of Old English* (DOE), based on a three-million-word corpus which gathers all the surviving Old English texts, has appeared in microfiche fascicles since 1986; at the time of writing these have reached G, and the range A–G is also available online to subscribers. For the rest of the alphabet, the venerable Bosworth and Toller (1882–1972) is still the most comprehensive treatment; the fully superseded range A–*Firgen* was in fact by far its weakest part (see Bankert 2003, esp. 304).

OED online entries link, where possible, to DOE entries, though the latter are only accessible to subscribers to DOE. The *Middle English dictionary* (MED) was released in printed fascicles, and is now freely available online as part of a *Middle English compendium* (MEC) which includes a hyperlinked bibliography for the dictionary and a corpus of texts (but the dictionary itself was not based on a corpus). OED3 entries link to MED entries, though not vice versa: it is possible to go from OED3's *aquerne* 'squirrel' to MED's *oc-querne* 'squirrel fur' to learn more about the single non-glossarial occurrence of the word in Middle English, but the reader of MED cannot go from *oc-querne* to an OED3 entry to find out where the word occurs outside Middle English. The project for an Early Modern English dictionary was abandoned; for its history, and an account of what the project achieved, see Adams (2010). Middle Scots to 1700 was covered in the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish tongue* (DOST), and more recent Scots, in so far as it is distinct from the English of England, in the *Scottish national dictionary* (SND): these are searchable together online in the freely available *Dictionary of the Scots language* (DSL), and they were the basis for the convenient *Concise Scots dictionary* (CSD; cf. Scott 2010). American English was covered first in the *Dictionary of American English* (DAE), which registered usages attested before 1900 which had a greater currency in the United States than elsewhere, and then in the *Dictionary of Americanisms* (DAM, not to be confused with Bartlett 1848), which abandoned its predecessor's *terminus ante quem*, but confined its coverage to words and senses of words which originated in the United States. When a word is treated by both, there may be more nineteenth-century quotations in DAE but a fuller treatment of compounds in DAM: this is, for instance, true of *Mormon*, and of *store* 'shop'. Both dictionaries must therefore be consulted for the fullest historical information on a given word, as must DARE, which combines an elaborate field survey – DAE and DAM are based exclusively on printed sources – with historical evidence from published sources. DAE and DAM are not, and DARE is not yet, available online. A second, and on the whole younger, group of historical dictionaries of English includes the *Dictionary of Canadianisms* (DCHP), the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (Cassidy, LePage 1967–1980), the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (Story et al. 1982–1990), the *Australian national dictionary* (AND; see Ramson 2002: 29–81), the *Dictionary of South African English* (DSAE), the *Dictionary of New Zealand English* (Orsman 1997), and the *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago* (Winer 2009). These are all single-volume works, the four most recent being hefty quartos. DCHP is being revised for a second edition of which only an online publication is intended, and entries in the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* can be looked up online.⁷

The fact that the full text of historical dictionaries such as OED and MED can be searched online makes it possible to use them like corpora. Not only is it possible to trace the use of the idiom *off of*, as in 'gettin' sweet nothin' off of you', in a series of nineteen quotations from ?c1450 to 1990 in OED, s.v. *off* adv., prep., n¹ and

⁷ For the revision of the *Dictionary of Canadianisms*, see faculty.arts.ubc.ca/sdollinger/dchp2.htm.

adj., sense 13b, but it is possible to find further examples by searching the full text of the dictionary, for instance in a quotation of 1998 s.v. *abed* sense 3 (this entry was revised after *off*, and so its revised text was not available to the reviser of *off*): “I was brought abed of a child off of Cape Cod some few weeks after we had laid anchor there.” But a historical dictionary is not a balanced corpus. Its headwords and its evidence are chosen by lexicographers whose sense of the possible and of the useful is determined by practical expertise (nearly always greater than that of their critics) rather than by clear formulae or by a desire to represent different kinds of quotation author equitably: on the subject of headwords, for instance, Robert Burchfield remarked reasonably that “The criterion of choice for items at the boundary of the core of common words is the expectation that such words are likely to prove to be editable” (Burchfield 1973: 2).

The headword inclusion criteria of any dictionary which is not corpus-based are likely to be ill-defined. In the case of OED1, the largest, and perhaps least controversial, class of deliberate exclusions comprises semantically transparent compounds, of which no more than a sampling could be given in any entry (see Burchfield 1973: 12–13, and the famous tirade by James Murray quoted in Murray 1977: 288). Likewise uncontroversially excluded is the part of the vocabulary of Old English which did not survive into the Middle English period (Stanley 1987). Many highly technical words, or words which belong to large terminological sets, are also excluded. Burchfield gives the example of *Acropora*, which is the name of a genus of corals well known for their presence in home aquariums – and which he was thinking of including until he realised that doing so would open the door to the inclusion of the names of six thousand other genera of coral (Burchfield 1973: 6; cf. Brewer 2007: 201–2). Rare words which belong to the general vocabulary of English are excluded, but inconsistently, with a tendency to privilege those which occur in well-known texts: *fireworkless*, attested from a single occurrence in a letter by Dickens, is included s.v. *fire-work*, and *grogless*, for which an entry was drafted with a single occurrence in the *Daily Telegraph*, was deleted in proof (see Mugglestone 2005: 70–102; these examples are at 92–3). Likewise excluded are regional words which are not widely distributed or which are not well attested in published sources (Mugglestone 2005: 107–8); so are many poorly attested loanwords (Mugglestone 2005: 103–7; Ogilvie 2013); so is much ephemeral slang (particularly a twentieth-century problem: see Brewer 2007: 66–8), although there has, since Burchfield’s supplement, been no systematic exclusion of taboo words (see Burchfield 1972). In the case of other dictionaries, there are boundary lines to be negotiated between the variety registered in the dictionary and other varieties. There is, for instance, some material in MED which might be regarded as Middle Scots, and a little which might be regarded as medieval Latin (Blake 2002: 63–5). DAE includes *Anglo-Saxon* ‘person of English descent’ but DAm excludes it, no doubt regarding this use as simply a special application of a general English word; however, OED treats it as a special sense, for which the first evidence is a Wisconsin newspaper article of 1845, and from this perspective, this usage does appear to have originated in the United States.

(DCHP also includes it, with a single quotation, from a Canadian source, of 1963.) As cases like this suggest, it may be safer to err on the side of inclusiveness: Winer (2009) is all the richer for entries such as *Eid*, *Eid-al-Adha*, and *Eid-al-Fitr*, since although these lexical items are certainly not Trinbagonian origin, they play a significant part in the cultural life of Trinidad and Tobago, where six per cent of the population is Muslim and *Eid-al-Fitr* is a public holiday.

The limitations of the quotation evidence in historical dictionaries of English have been much debated, often with particular reference to OED, which has been criticised for its dependence on printed sources and the social and cultural biases alleged to be evident in its selection and treatment of lexical items. A particularly forceful attack was made by the linguist Roy Harris in a review of a volume of Burchfield's supplement (Harris 1982; cf. Burchfield 1982); a book-length successor to Harris is Willinsky (1994); different positions are taken by Considine (2009, with remarks on Willinsky 1994: 624–5) and Brewer (2010) (see also Brewer 2005– for invaluable original and reprinted material on OED). Some of the criticisms have been overstated, but it is certainly true that historical dictionaries are constrained by the records available to their makers; that these records are, for the period before the twentieth century, almost exclusively textual; and that the texts most readily available to lexicographers have tended to privilege educated, and often literary, metropolitan usage. The increasing availability of primary sources in machine-searchable form, both in subscription databases such as EEBO and ECCO and in free collections such as Google Books and the Internet Archive, has enabled lexicographers to consider a wide range of texts with equal ease, as it has enabled other historians of the language to supplement the dictionary record.

4. Conclusion

The future of the historical lexicography of English is most promising. I have suggested elsewhere (Considine 2013) that it may develop in at least three directions: the development of historical corpora will make the provision of frequency information, and perhaps of sociolinguistic information, practicable as never before; gaps in regional historical lexicography (for instance, of the Englishes of West and East Africa and South-East Asia) will be filled, and serious author-lexicography able to stand comparison with German projects such as the ongoing *Goethe Wörterbuch* and the forthcoming five-volume *Schiller-Wörterbuch* will be undertaken; the linking and eventual integration of online historical dictionaries will develop, presumably with OED as a fulcrum. A more extensive view of the future is offered by Charlotte Brewer (Brewer 2013). The gravest uncertainty at the time of writing (April 2013) is the extent to which future publications in the historical lexicography of English will, and should, have a printed form as well as an online one. The decline of paper dictionaries as tools for ready reference is rather a different matter from the question of the best medium for the reliable, long-term preservation of knowledge.

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