

## WILL THE *OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY* BE MORE 'EUROPEAN' AFTER ITS FIRST COMPREHENSIVE REVISION SINCE ITS FIRST EDITION OF 1884-1928?

**JOHN SIMPSON**

Chief Editor, *Oxford English Dictionary*

---

59

An ESSE conference is a particularly appropriate forum to discuss the growing internationalization of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*). The editors of the dictionary today spend a considerable amount of time addressing specialist philological and dictionary audiences, but the *OED* isn't only about philology in the narrow sense. It spans the English language in general, and alongside this the culture that surrounds the language and allows it to develop.

My title may sound surprising: will the *OED* be more 'European' after its first revision for a hundred years? How indeed can the *OED* claim to be 'European' at all? In order to examine this question, we may need to start thinking about the *OED*, and the language it describes, in a slightly new light.

In order to find an answer, I would like to address a range of features in the *OED*, and to apply our question to each. And I would like to illustrate each feature briefly with examples from the revision work on the *OED* on which we are now engaged. This will also give some impression of the editorial work that is currently under way in Oxford.

The *OED* was originally published in twelve volumes over forty-four years between 1884 and 1928. Supplements of recent material were added in the twentieth century, and these were then incorporated into the Second Edition of 1989. But at this point the mass of original text from the first Edition was not updated, and what I and the other seventy or so members of the *OED* staff in Oxford are

currently working on is the first comprehensive revision of the *OED* in its history of over one hundred years.

The foundations for the present revision of the dictionary were laid in the 1980s, when the text of the First Edition (1884-1928) and its four-volume *Supplement* of (principally) nineteenth- and twentieth-century additions to the language were converted to machine-readable format as a result of a substantial keyboarding and proofreading operation managed by the Oxford University Press. An account of this process may be read in the introductory matter published in the Second Edition of the dictionary (Simpson and Weiner 1989: 1-1v). The Second Edition presented the text of the First Edition and that of the *Supplement* in a single alphabetical sequence, but without substantial editorial revision. A CD-ROM of the dictionary, published in 1993, became the format in which the Second Edition became perhaps most widely disseminated throughout the academic world.

The machine-readable (SGML-tagged) text of the dictionary became the starting point for the current comprehensive revision of the dictionary. The first fruits of this revision were published online in March 2000, and further revised and updated text is now published at quarterly intervals. This text is available to subscribing institutions and individuals. The complete cycle of revision and update is expected to last another twenty years or so.

Work on the revision is conducted principally in Oxford. Staff are divided into various areas of speciality: general revision, scientific revision, etymology, bibliography, library research, new words, and editorial finalization. Editorial work in Oxford is complemented by that of the *OED*'s North American Editorial Unit in New York, established in 1999. The dictionary has access to several hundred specialist consultants around the world, to whom draft revisions and new entries are presented for scholarly review, prior to publication. In addition, the dictionary continues to benefit from many voluntary contributions offered by scholars and others throughout the world.

For future reading on the history of the *OED*, see *Caught in the Web of Words*, the biography of the founding editor, Sir James Murray, written by his granddaughter Elisabeth Murray, and two books by Simon Winchester: *The Surgeon of Crowthorne*, and *The Meaning of Everything: the Story of the Oxford English Dictionary*.

At this point it should be remembered that the English language started life as a 'European' language —or at least has its strongest roots on mainland Europe—around 1500 years ago, and so even then possessed strong continental credentials. Needless to say, these credentials consisted of the Germanic base from which English arose. The Romance component of English, which is so much a part of English today, dates principally from a later era.

But what pan-Europeanism the English language lacked in its earliest Germanic origins, it soon adopted after the Norman Conquest of 1066; the Germanic skeleton was clothed in an array of French garments. And subsequently English followed continental Europe through the Renaissance, sharing an influx of classical terms in the arts and sciences. Despite its insularity, Britain has been linked to Europe throughout its history through trade, travel, shared military and colonial experience, and many other things. It is hardly surprising that the network of English contains so many continental 'European' strands.

But that is to anticipate my argument. It is important to remember at the outset that because of its history English is a sponge-like language, absorbing features from all over the world in the course of its history.

## The *OED* and new words from continental Europe

The first feature I would like to address is new words —words which have entered the English language in the recent past. English has imported words from the continental mainland in the past, but what is happening at present?

French is one of the dominant lenders of words to English, as we can examine briefly some of the recent imports from France. Amongst many others, *nul points* is an example of a French phrase which has seeped its way into the *OED* (see Fig. 1). It is defined as: 'No points, as scored in the Eurovision Song Contest. Hence (*allusively* and *humorously*): no points scored in any context, esp. as a hypothetical mark awarded for a failure or dismal performance.' The *OED*'s evidence for the existence of the expression in English dates from 1978. We might add that when first encountered, the United Kingdom couldn't imagine scoring no points in the Eurovision Song Contest. But things have changed since then!

Fashion, and food and drink, are other areas where French culture has had an important effect on English. The *bustier* ('a short, close-fitting, often strapless bodice or top worn by women as a fashion garment') made its way into English by 1979, subsequently to be elaborated in *bustier dress* ('a dress having a bodice styled in this way'). This comes at the end of a long line of French fashion terms in English. On the food and drink menu we find the recent innovation (in English) *fromage frais* ('unripened soft cheese, originally French; subsequently also, any very soft, fresh, low-fat cheese sold esp. as a dessert; hence, any of various dairy products based on such cheese, often with fruit, herbs, or other flavourings added') recorded in English since 1976.

Intellectual challenge is something that is associated with France. In the case of the following new terms from the last few decades, the English have adopted the words

Oxford English Dictionary

nul points

NEW EDITION: draft entry Mar. 2004

## nul points, *n.*

Chiefly Brit.

PRONUNCIATION ETYMOLOGY QUOTATIONS DATE CHART

*Brit.* /nju:l 'pwɑ:l/, *U.S.* /nʊl 'pwɑ:n/ [*< French nul points < nul zero (see NULL a.) + points, plural of point point, mark (see POINT n.<sup>1</sup> A.)*].

The phrase refers originally to a score of zero points in the Eurovision Song Contest, in which the compèring is delivered in both English and French.]

**No points, as scored in the Eurovision Song Contest. Hence (allusively and humorously): no points scored in any context, esp. as a hypothetical mark awarded for a failure or dismal performance.**

1979 *S. PILE Bk. of Heroic Failures* (1982) v. 122 Singing an entrancingly drab number called 'Mile after Mile', a Norwegian pop singer, Mr Jan Teigan, scored nul in the 1978 Eurovision Song Contest. The voting, was unanimous: 'Norway—no points.—nul points.—keine Punkte'. 1989 *Independent* 18 Mar. 49/1 Malaysia's singing lawyer, Sudirman, pulls in crowds of over 100,000 for his epic 3-hour shows. Nul points, Kate? No way. 1994 *Scotsman* (Electronic ed) 28 Feb., According to the league tables [of babies' names] published today by the Registrar General for Scotland, things are no more predictable among the boys. Nul points in the top 10, for example, for John, Peter and Robert. 2000 *Elle* Sept. 51/1 Norway. *Crispbread and brown cheese*. May be a firm favourite with our Scandi sisters, but sadly scored nul points from us.

LIST BY ENTRY LIST BY DATE ENTRY MAP PRINT MAIL HELP SIGN OUT  
SIMPLE SEARCH ADVANCED SEARCH SUBSCRIBER: Oxford University Press

62

FIGURE 1: the entry for *nul points* from *OED3* (OED Online)

and fitted them into English spelling patterns, so that one might not realize, just by looking at them, that their origin is French: *intertextuality*, *logocentrism*, *phonocentrism*, and *spontaneism*. But *intertextuality* ('the need for one text to be read in the light of its allusions to and differences from the content or structure of other texts; the (allusive) relationship between esp. literary texts') derives from French *intertextualité*, coined by Julia Kristeva (in volume 23 of *Critique*, in 1967); and *logocentrism* ('the belief that the rational analysis of text and of its articulation through language is central to the meaning of being; hence, any system of thought in which the analysis of meaning is based upon the analysis of words, symbols, and other external references used to express meaning') stems from Jacques Derrida's 1967 text *De la Grammatologie*.

Other terms from French which have found their way into English include standard expressions such as *SCART*, as in *SCART socket*, the 21-pin socket used to connect video equipment (from the name of the Syndicat des Constructeurs des Appareils Radiorécepteurs et Téléviseurs), and the *nootropic* drugs ('any of a group of drugs considered to improve cognitive functioning, esp. to enhance memory, and used to treat some cases of dementia').

We can see similar trends arising in words borrowed into English in the recent period from German. There are fewer of these than from French, but they too indicate typical points of contact between the two language areas. Transport is represented by the *O-bahn* (1982 in English; the bus track, or the bus service running on this), and drink by *Eisbock* (1977). Major political shifts manifest themselves in *Ossi* (1989; a former East German) and *Wessi* (1990; a former West German), and in *Westpolitik* (1970) and *eco-socialism* from 1985. From Dutch we have the Rotterdam style of house music *gabba* (from 1992) and perhaps the more familiar *woonerf* (a road in a residential area provided with traffic-calming measures), from 1978. From Italian we might expect culinary terms, and sure enough we find *lollo biondo* (1987), *lollo rosso* (1987), *orecchiette* (1975; pasta in small ear-shaped pieces), and *panna cotta* (1987), along with *barista* (a bar-tender, from 1982). From the traditional interest in English-speaking countries with Italian crime, we have *capo di tutti capi* (1972; a regional Mafia boss) and the *ndrangheta* (1978; the Calabrian organized crime syndicate). And then as a curious add-on from Tuscan dialect, *skeevy*, meaning 'disgusting', 'sleazy'.

## The *OED* and old words from Europe

What started me thinking about the way the revised *OED* is presenting English in a new way in relation to the other European languages wasn't the new entries, but the etymologies. After working through the first few ranges of entries for publication I started to see the effects of our new etymological policy taking hold. The etymologies of the First Edition of the *OED* (until now unrevised) tended to concentrate on the formal development of words in the donor languages, and to take less account of the semantic ramifications, and also to privilege English as a creative force rather more than the evidence in fact showed. Put in such a bald way this is perhaps a little hard to follow, so I have some examples.

Firstly we can investigate the suggestion that the original edition of the *OED* tended to concentrate on the *formal* development of words in the donor languages and in English. *OEDI* is particularly concerned to document the word forms in other languages (French, Italian, Norwegian, Spanish, Latin, Greek, etc.) before a word enters English, and there is no doubt that this is vital information. The word *mundane* is a typical example. *OEDI*'s etymology runs to only two lines, effectively saying that the word entered English from French (where the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century form was *mondain*), which itself derived directly from the Latin adjective *mundanus*, itself from Latin *mundus* meaning 'world'. This is, however, a very formal and rather minimalist etymology, showing how the word arrived historically at the point of borrowing from French into English in the late Middle Ages.

But much work has been done on etymology in French, Italian, Spanish, and the other European languages since the days of the First Edition of the *OED* (the entry for *mundane* dates from around 1904). The editors on the *OED* today are able to make use of this extensive range of scholarly work in their revision of the dictionary's own etymologies.

The word *mundane* has several meanings in English:

- belonging to the earthly world (as opposed to heaven) (and this is the earliest recorded meaning) —“It was bad to sacrifice things mundane; but this thing was the very Holy of Holies!” (Trollope),
- belonging to the ‘world’ as opposed to the Church —“The beginnings of the mundane poetry of the Italians are in Sicily” (Matthew Arnold),
- belonging to the world of fashion (comparable, as *OEDI* points out at the relevant sense, to French *mondain*),
- relating to the cosmos or the universe,
- in Astrology: relating to the horizon as opposed to the ecliptic or zodiac —“Not only national but world-wide disasters are foretold in mundane astrology” (Louis MacNeice),

and two meanings not sufficiently attested —or not even in use— at the time of *OEDI* but which have now been included:

- ordinary, commonplace, humdrum, lacking in excitement, and
- belonging to the world outside the sphere of interest of a particular group of enthusiasts.

A small word with quite a history! There are additionally a number of meanings of *mundane* as a noun.

The policy on *OED3*, when revising *OEDI*'s etymologies, is to try to fill out the picture both formally and semantically. It seems important to us to document the meanings available in the donor language at the point at which a word entered English, but also to remember that few words experience an explosive introduction in English. The language contact which gave the opportunity for *mundane* to enter English from French was not immediately severed as soon as the word entered English, but continued as the two languages remained in contact, allowing other meanings in the French word (or the earlier Latin term) to influence the development of the word *mundane* in English.

So an understanding of the nexus of meanings that pre-date the introduction of *mundane* into the English language is important for a proper appreciation of the subsequent development of the word in English. Indeed, later developments in French may, for whatever reason, also become significant in English as language contact is maintained.

So how does this affect *mundane* in the current revision of the dictionary? Firstly, modern scholarly work on Anglo-Norman, the variety of French used in England after the Conquest of 1066, shows that our word is found both here and in Middle French in senses which are retained in English:

- late 12<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Norman: worldly, earthly,
- c1225 Old French: secular,
- c1275 Old French: cosmic,
- c1480 Old French noun: person fond of worldly pleasures,
- 1498 Old French: dweller in the earthly world,

ultimately derived from classical Latin *mundanus*, where the word possessed the following meanings:

- belonging to the world,
- relating to the universe,
- cosmic (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD in Apuleius, but earlier as noun);

and in post-classical Latin also in the senses:

- secular (4<sup>th</sup> century),
- c1230 in astrological sense,

from classical Latin *mundus* 'world' and *-anus* '-ane' (the suffix also found in English in, for example, *germane*, *humane*, and *urbane*).

The implication of this new information is that the word had a much broader European application than the First Edition of the *OED* was able to demonstrate. Many of the specific uses in English can be seen to have their origins in the French or Latin of the Middle Ages or earlier, and it now becomes possible to identify more easily those meanings of the word in English which are native developments. Even the more recent sense 'relating to fashion' was plucked from later French *mondain*, which is first recorded in this meaning from the middle of the nineteenth century (at *OED3*'s entry for *mondain* adj.).

What had seemed a fairly simple picture, with a straight progression from Latin to French and finally into English, is seen as a much more complex story of interconnection and influence.

The second suggestion mentioned above is that the First Edition of the *OED* gives English slightly more credit as a creative force than may, strictly speaking, be deserved. Critics have made similar observations with reference to a sense of Empire which it has been said the First Edition of the dictionary was actively or inadvertently peddling.

Here is a short example. The First Edition of the *OED* has an entry for the term *natural history*, with an earliest example (in English) from 1567. The etymology

of this term was given in *OED1* as simply from the word *history* (*natural* is not even mentioned, on the assumption that *natural history* is self-evidently a compound based on this word). *OED3* takes a wider view, deriving the term formally from the English terms *natural* and *history* (to which it cross-refers), but also drawing in European equivalents which preceded the English term and can be regarded as influential in its development (see Fig. 2).

- Classical Latin has *naturalis historia* (particular known as the title of a work by the elder Pliny)
- Ancient Greek has *physike historia* (Aristotle)
- Middle and modern French have *histoire naturelle*, recorded from the mid sixteenth century in the sense ‘a work on the natural world’ and from 1765 as ‘the branch of knowledge that deals with all natural elements’.

A new earliest example of the English term, from 1555, comes from Richard Eden’s *Decades of the newe worlde or west India*, a translation of Petrus Anglerius’s

The screenshot shows the Oxford English Dictionary entry for 'natural history, n.'. At the top, there is a search bar with 'natural history' entered and buttons for 'FIND WORD' and 'LOST FOR WORDS'. The entry title is 'natural history, n.' with a 'NEW EDITION: draft entry June 2003' and 'EARLIER' link. Below the title are tabs for 'PRONUNCIATION', 'SPELLINGS', 'ETYMOLOGY', 'QUOTATIONS', and 'DATE CHART'. The 'ETYMOLOGY' tab is selected, showing the following text:
 

*Brit.* /ˌnætʃ(ə)rəl ˈhɪst(ə)rɪ/, /ˌnætʃ(ə)rɪ ˈhɪst(ə)rɪ/, *U.S.* /ˌnætʃ(ə)r(ə)l ˈhɪst(ə)rɪ/, /ˌnætʃ(ə)r(ə)l ˈhɪst(ə)rɪ/

**Forms:** 15 *natural historie*, *naturall history*, 15-16 *natural historie*, 16- *natural history*; *Sc.* pre-17 *naturale history*. [< *NATURAL* *a.* + *HISTORY* *n.* Cf. classical Latin *naturalis historia* (esp. as the title of a work by the elder Pliny), after ancient Greek φυσική ιστορία (Aristotle); also Middle French, French *histoire naturelle* a work on the natural world (mid 16th cent.), the branch of knowledge that deals with all natural objects (1765).]

**1. a.** The facts relating to the natural objects, plants, or animals of a place; the natural phenomena of a region as observed or described systematically.

Freq. in the titles of works, and so tending to pass into sense 2.

1555 *R. EDEN* tr. P. Martyr *Decades of New Worlde* f. 174 Plinie, who .hath wyrtten in xxxvii. bookes al that perteyneth to the naturall historie. 1593 *G. HARVEY* *Pierces Supererog.* 163 Let him read the naturall histories of the Asse, and the Sheepe, in Aristotle, Pliny, or Gesner. 1677 *R. PLOT* (*title*) The naturall history of Oxford-shure, being an essay toward the naturall history of England. 1766 *Philos. Trans. Royal Soc.* 57 111 The naturall history of these .insects is sufficiently known. 1797 *Encycl. Brit.* XIV. 645/1 A short sketch of what may be called the naturall history of the physical sciences. 1805 *T. WEAVER* tr. A. G. Werner *Treat. Fossils* 1 Mineralogy or the naturall history of fossils. 1930 *J. GRINELL* et al. (*title*) Vertebrate naturall history of a section of northern California through the Lassen Peak region. 1951 *L. S. WEST* (*title*) The housefly: its naturall history, medical importance and control. 1989 *Yankee* May 26 The huge *Rhododendron maximums*. are vestiges of a milder period in the region's naturall history. 1991 *C. A. RONAN* (*title*) The naturall history of the universe.

 At the bottom of the entry, there are navigation options: 'LIST BY ENTRY', 'LIST BY DATE', 'ENTRY MAP', 'PRINT', 'MAIL', 'HELP', and 'SIGN OUT'. There are also links for 'SIMPLE SEARCH' and 'ADVANCED SEARCH', and a note 'SUBSCRIBER: Oxford University Press'.

FIGURE 2: the entry for natural history from *OED3* (OED Online)

Latin text *De orbe novo*. The fact that the first English usage derives from a translation of a text written in Latin by a European writer, and actually referring to Pliny, is a clear indication that the term *natural history* is not a native creation within English! Without wishing to multiply example upon example, suffice to say that this particular instance is not isolated. When additional European information is provided for what may otherwise appear to be native English compounds the true position of English amongst the other European languages in the Renaissance and later begins to appear.

### How does the *OED* find words from continental Europe?

But where do the editors of the *OED* search for evidence of continental influence? The principal answer is in the source texts which are read as evidence for the lexicon of English. Journals of travellers into foreign countries furnish much useful data, as do translations of European texts. Both were widely used in the days of *OED1*, but with our knowledge of what has previously been read, and the extensive databases of Early Modern and later Englishes available to editors (as well as to other researchers) the picture can be extended.

Again an example, and this time the plant *nasturtium*. *OED1* dates this in English from 1570 (Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*), with the next example coming from *Five Godlie Sermons* by a certain R. T. The impression given by these two leading examples is that the documentation begins in English texts in Britain. However, the picture is rather different if we factor in all of the information that has built up about the word over the one hundred years since *OED1*. The evidence shows that early uses of the word in English occur in translations from Latin and French. Rather than first appearing in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, *nasturtium* is actually recorded in an Old English text (the translation of Pseudo-Apuleius' *Herbarium*) of many centuries earlier. Then we find it in Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, before it appears in the translation of Guy de Chauliac's *Grande Chirurgie* of around 1425. The word was clearly well known in mainland Europe before it found its way into native English sources.

This is further supported by its appearance in Italian *nasturcio* around 1320, Spanish *mastuerzo* in 1385, Catalan *nasturci* in 1492, and Middle French *nasturce* in 1587. By drawing this information into the revised *OED3* entry for *nasturtium* we are able to achieve a more rounded picture of the emergence of the term in medieval Europe and to plot the place of English within this development.

It is often said that the *OED* favours the canonical authors of English literature, and (as far as the First Edition is concerned) there is some truth in this, though not as much as is sometimes claimed. Not many of these travel writers count as

canonical authors, and nor do many of the other sources in which we find the early appearance of European words from pre-modern periods of the language.

It is interesting to take a closer look at this aspect of the *OED* with reference to words entering English from, say, Dutch in the latter half of the eighteenth century. In particular we can investigate those recorded as entering English between 1760 and 1770.

First there is *span*, a kind of cable or rope, first recorded in William Falconer's *Universal Dictionary of the Marine* of 1769; another new arrival in English at this time is *twiffler*, 'a plate or shallow dish intermediate in size between a dessert plate and a dinner plate' (1770). Next we have *raad*, a legislative assembly, from Banks's journal of 1770; and then *to slinger*, an obscure verb meaning 'to swing or roll (as of a ship at sea)' from the poetry of William Meston in 1767. Meston's poetry is not well known: this volume was entitled *The poetical works of the ingenious and learned William Meston*, which gives some idea of the sort of cachet he had!

The results of looking at this small batch of Dutch borrowings into English show that they do not arise in the words of the classic writers of English literature. And the more one investigates the *OED* (and increasingly more so in the current revision), the more one sees the language being formed in contexts which are not consciously literary, but a mixture of everyday, specialist, exploratory or experimental, as well as literary texts.

## Assimilating European pronunciations

It is worth thinking for a moment about how the *OED* has changed over a hundred years in its representation of the pronunciation of foreign words in English. The First Edition of the dictionary marked many words as 'alien', that is, not naturalized as English words. This labelling applied to a vast number of Latinate words, and many from French, German, and other continental languages. Examples include *bottega*, *chaparral*, *maillot*, *religioso*, and even *insomnia*. Some attempt was made in the original transcription system of *OED1* to indicate that the vowels (in particular) in such words had not been accommodated to the regular English pronunciation system.

In what may appear at first sight to be a shift away from the Europeanization of the dictionary, for *OED3* we have reassessed such vocabulary. Many words, such as *insomnia*, will now be regarded as regular English words, with an English pronunciation. Others will also be shown fitting into the English system of pronunciation (though nasalization is still retained when appropriate). The assumption is that in the real world most native English-speakers are unable to

reproduce the precise sounds of the donor language, and accommodate such words to English patterns. There are occasionally times when we feel that a word or expression has not (yet) been accommodated to English patterns of pronunciation, and in these cases we state that the relevant term is 'not fully naturalized in English'. Examples of this are: *mal du pays* ('homesickness'; recorded in English from 1777), the rather literary *mise en abyme* ('self-reflection within the structure of a work'), the Italian *manca* or tip, and *pensiero*, a sketch or rough design in Art.

### Assimilating European spellings

This practical approach to the pronunciation of continental newcomers in English is to some extent carried over to the spelling of such words. But here, as elsewhere in the dictionary, we are led by the written evidence which we have collected. Words which entered English many centuries ago have now largely been accommodated to the spelling patterns of English, and their continental origin is all but hidden, although they may have been very clear to most English-speakers, say, in the Middle Ages.

The tendency nowadays is to leave such new arrivals untouched as regards spelling, unless they fall easily into a pattern suggested by their various affixes, or unless diacritics can be dispensed with. So, in a sequence of words from Spanish, we find *marvedi*, *margarita*, *maria*, *maricon*, and *mariposa*; and from Italian we have *maestoso*, *maestrale*, *maestria*, *maestro*, *maestro di capella*. It's not that these words are considered to be English in origin, but that the English-speaker does not feel the need to anglicize their appearance.

To summarize:

- There are plenty of new entries coming into the *OED* nowadays from the modern European languages.
- The etymologies of the current revision of the *OED* attempt to give more detail about the meaning and chronology of words in the modern European languages that are significant for the emergence and development of terms in English.
- There is some evidence that the First Edition of the *OED* tended to over-portray the creativity of English in word-formation and semantic development by not mentioning continental models.
- For English pronunciation the *OED* is nowadays likely to assume that native English speakers apply the regular English sound to words from the European languages, rather than reproduce precisely the original pronunciation.
- Many foreign words are used in English without accommodating the spelling to English patterns, though this is not always the case.

## The *OED* and the Internet

What is the effect of the Internet in all of this? One big change for the *OED* is that we now allow certain illustrative quotations from Internet sources (and this occurs particularly when the term is first recorded on a newsgroup or similar archived resource). Here's an example:

*Weblog*: the earliest recorded example of this term, dating from 1993, comes from the title of a posting on a Usenet newsgroup (*comp.infosystems.www*): “Announcing getsites 1.5, a Web log analyzer.”

There the word simply means: ‘A file storing a detailed record of requests handled (and sometimes also errors generated) by a web server.’ (See Fig. 3.)

Oxford English Dictionary

There are no results in the Second Edition  
NEW EDITION: 19 results

20 per page SHOW

SEARCH FOR... LIST BY: ENTRY NAME ENTRY DATE QUOTATION DATE

weblog IN full text

START SEARCH MORE OPTIONS

ENTRY NO.	YEAR	ENTRY NAME	ENTRY DATE	QUOTATION DATE
1	1999	<a href="#">blog, n.</a>		[Shortened <a href="#">weblog</a> n.1999 TBTF for 1999-08-30: = <a href="#">weblog</a> n. 2.
2	1999	<a href="#">blog, n.</a>		
3	1999	<a href="#">blog, n.</a>		bradlands.com ( <a href="#">weblog</a> diary) 23 May. Cam points ou
4	1999	<a href="#">blog, n.</a>		n peterme.com ( <a href="#">weblog</a> diary) 28 May. For those kee
5	1999	<a href="#">blog, v.</a>		or maintain a <a href="#">weblog</a> . Also: to read or browse thr
6	1999	<a href="#">blogger, n.</a>		he author of a <a href="#">weblog</a> : = <a href="#">weblogger</a> n.
7	1999	<a href="#">blogger, n.</a>		n peterme.com ( <a href="#">weblog</a> diary) 28 May. Blog coverage
8	1999	<a href="#">blogger, n.</a>		d an automated <a href="#">weblog</a> publishing tool called Blogg
9	1999	<a href="#">blogging, n.</a>		maintaining a <a href="#">weblog</a> .
10		<a href="#">tool, n.</a>		ce to create a <a href="#">Weblog</a> , automatically add content t
11	1993	<a href="#">weblog, n.</a>		<a href="#">weblog</a> , n.Computing.
12	1993	<a href="#">weblog, n.</a>		ates a log-the <a href="#">WebLog</a> -listing everyone who has acc
13	1993	<a href="#">weblog, n.</a>		net/~jorn/html/ <a href="#">weblog</a> .html. This will cover any an
14	1993	<a href="#">weblog, n.</a>		s Robot Wisdom <a href="#">WebLog</a> .. might not be pretty, but
15	1993	<a href="#">weblog, n.</a>		Oct. ii. 9/1 A <a href="#">weblog</a> is simply a site where you p
16	1999	<a href="#">weblogger, n.</a>		ger n.1, after <a href="#">weblog</a> n.]
17	1999	<a href="#">weblogger, n.</a>		he author of a <a href="#">weblog</a> ( <a href="#">weblog</a> n. 2).In quot. 1997,
18	1995	<a href="#">weblogging, n.</a>		vbl. n., after <a href="#">weblog</a> n.]
19	1995	<a href="#">weblogging, n.</a>		intenance of a <a href="#">weblog</a> (in either sense).

LIST BY: ENTRY LIST BY: DATE ENTRY MAP PRINT MAIL HELP SIGN OUT

SIMPLE SEARCH ADVANCED SEARCH SUBSCRIBER: Oxford University Press

FIGURE 3: KWIC concordance of instances of weblog from OED3 (OED Online)

But a second, and much more familiar, meaning is also first recorded from a web site. On 23 December 1997 someone on *alt.culture.www* (another Usenet newsgroup) wrote: “I decided to start my own webpage logging the best stuff I find as I surf,

on a daily basis:.. [www.mcs.net/~jorn/html/weblog.html](http://www.mcs.net/~jorn/html/weblog.html). This will cover any and everything that interests me, from net culture to politics to literature etc.”

And so the *OED* cites the first use of *weblog* from the Internet itself.

This in itself may alarm some conservative linguists, but how does this have a European perspective?

A problem for the historical lexicographer is that citing from the Internet opens up a whole nest of issues concerned with the relative unreliability of text. For online references to texts that are already published in hard-copy form, this doesn't present any problem, as we can simply recheck the text and reference in the original printed source. But, at the other extreme, there is the case in which a word is apparently obsolete, with no evidence known to us, except for a straggle of instances obtainable via a search engine on the Internet.

These instances need careful review. Sometimes we accept them as citable quotations (e.g. from an online seed catalogue). On other occasions a little investigation shows that all of the, say, seven examples in fact derive from texts written (as far as can be determined) by non-native speakers of English. This often happens in scientific texts, but can occur in almost any text type.

So the question for us, as editors, is whether to accept as citable a lone example, or a poorly attested cluster of examples, of an otherwise unknown or obsolete word recorded only in text provided by non-native speakers of English. Our view is that we do not accept these quotations as valid, as they may simply represent the anglicization of a Spanish, German, or even Hindi term. This is very much on the border of what is 'English', but is worth noting as an area where potential European creativity in English may at present find itself excluded. The Internet is a very valuable tool for lexicographers, but it cannot be used without discrimination.

## **Exporting words from Britain to Europe**

One aspect of the relationship between English and the other European countries is not illustrated by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but it is of great interest to mainland Europeans: namely, the appearance of English words in the continental European languages. This is clearly an emotive issue for some countries. I have had some experience of this through my membership of EFNIL, the European Federation for National Institutions of Language, where I represent the United Kingdom, alongside (at present) representatives from almost all of the pre-enlargement EU members. The objectives of the Federation are European plurilingualism (which was a word new to me before I became involved in the

Federation several years ago), the collection and exchange of language information, and several other related topics.

As a lexicographer in the United Kingdom I rarely sit down to consider the effect on the continental languages of the export of English words. The concerns of myself and my colleagues are almost exclusively related to the import of words into English. But membership of EFNIL has brought home to me very forcefully the differing attitudes towards English throughout Europe. Most countries see some international benefit from the increased appearance of Anglicisms in their vocabulary, and others do not. In general the concern is not so much based upon an ungrounded fear that English will sweep other national European languages aside, but that it (or other large languages such as —in the case of some enlargement countries— Russia) will prejudice the development of some of the national and minority European languages. This is a real concern, which each country is addressing in its own way.

My point here is to highlight a very useful study of Anglicisms in the European languages, namely Professor Manfred Görlach's *Dictionary of European Anglicisms* (published in 2001). The wealth of data which Professor Görlach has been able to amass throws a very interesting light on the export of English.

72

Take, for example, a number of the words in the region of the word *pop* (pop music). Professor Görlach documents the appearance of the English word in German and Norwegian in the 1950s, in Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, and Iceland from the 1960s. He presents much additional information on the introduction of the term in other European languages from the mid twentieth century, and is able to indicate from his evidence whether English words typically retain their formal English spelling and pronunciation, or are adapted somewhat on import.

*Popcorn* is another word he addresses. Here the word is identified in more European languages in the 1950s than *pop*, as we might expect. But he finds it in Croatian, Hungarian, and Polish, for example, at a later date than *pop*.

*Port wine* has a slightly different profile yet again. It appears in German in the nineteenth century, in Norwegian in the eighteenth, in Polish (for example) at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Some of these words do not enter a language directly from English, but by way of a more circuitous route around the languages of Europe. But the key point is that, as with imports into English, the flux of vocabulary around Europe follows cultural, social, and historical patterns, and by studying these patterns we can look at European interaction in what is for many a slightly unfamiliar but quite valid way.

## **The OED, Europe, the past, and the future**

So what does all of this tell us about the relationship between the English language and Europe, and the *OED*'s view of this? To me it shows that the dictionary plots, really quite closely, the tangled web of interaction between Britain and continental Europe over the last fifteen hundred years.

The editors of the First Edition of the *OED*, in the late nineteenth century, may not have been aware of a hidden agenda in how they approached their work. In much the same way, many English writers of that time may not have been aware that their work would be fixed by subsequent critics into a pattern of literature characteristic of their own times. But there's no doubt that the First Edition of the *OED* did place English (and in particular, British English) squarely in the centre of its world. The old canon of literary greats was well represented, authority came from Oxford, and all was right in the world.

One hundred and more years later we are living in a different universe. When we look through the linguist's microscope at the language today we don't see the tidy patterns which the First Edition of the *OED* appears to demonstrate. Words don't always enter English and then establish their own growth pattern in English entirely divorced from the influence from the donor language. English doesn't nowadays swallow the spelling of a loanword, assimilating it into its own spelling patterns. Words and meanings enter English untidily, surreptitiously, unknown, and may make their first appearance in uncharacteristic sources. As the culture changes, so too does the language. The forces which change the culture also change the language.

Where that leaves us as regards English and Europe in the future it is impossible to say. But then that's a question the British often seem to ask in political as well as linguistic contexts!

### **Additional Note**

The publication of this paper has been financed by the M.C.Y.T. (Ministerio de Ciencias y Tecnología)/Plan Nacional de Investigación Científica, Desarrollo e Innovación Tecnológica, and FEDER (Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional). Reference BFF2002-12309-E.

## Works cited

---

GÖRLACH, Manfred. (ed.). 2001. *A dictionary of European anglicisms: a usage dictionary of anglicisms in sixteen European languages*. Oxford: Oxford U. P.

MURRAY, K. M. Elisabeth. 1977. *Caught in the web of words: James A.H. Murray and the 'Oxford English Dictionary'*. New Haven and London: Yale U. P.

*Oxford English Dictionary*:

*OED1*: MURRAY, James A. H., Henry BRADLEY, William CRAIGIE and C. T. ONIONS. (eds.). 1933. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. London: Oxford U. P. (Previously published in fascicles between 1884 and 1928 under the title *A new English dictionary on historical principles*.) BURCHFIELD, Robert William. 1972-86. *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

*OED2*: SIMPSON, John A. and Edmund S. C. WEINER. (eds.). 1989. *The Oxford English Dictionary (second edition)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (Also published on CD-ROM from 1992 and online from 2000 at <http://www.oed.com>).

*OED3*: SIMPSON, John A. (ed.). 2000. *The Oxford English Dictionary (third edition)*. Oxford: Oxford U. P. (Also published online from 2000 at <http://www.oed.com>).

WINCHESTER, Simon. 1998. *The surgeon of Crowthorne*. London: Viking. (Published in the United States in 1998 under the title *The professor and the madman: a tale of murder, insanity, and the making of the Oxford English Dictionary*. New York: HarperCollins).

—. 2003. *The meaning of everything: the story of the Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford U. P.