

From 'Outlandish Words' To 'World English': The Legitimization Of Global Varieties Of English In The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

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Abstract

This paper is about changing policies at the OED towards words which have come into English from languages outside Europe. It examines how, as global varieties of English emerged and stabilized, lexicographic practice changed to meet the demands of the language. Using archival material never before accessed, this paper examines editorial work on World English from the beginning of the dictionary in the mid nineteenth century through to the current third edition, focusing on editors' inclusion policy and the practice of distinguishing World English from other vocabulary, often with a marker || denoting it as 'alien or not yet naturalized'. It shows that the OED has now incorporated World English without any distinguishing label. This is not perhaps a surprising practice. What is more surprising is that this practice is occurring for the second time: the paper argues and demonstrates that the OED did this at other times in its history too, in particular in 1933, and that the early editors were ahead of their time in giving World English a legitimate place in the OED.

1. Introduction: James Murray, E. B. Tylor, and the Problem of 'Outlandish' Words in the OED

In a letter dated 1888 from the famous British anthropologist E. B. Tylor to James Murray, he commiserated with Murray's task of having - as Tylor put it - "to decide whether such outlandish words have any place in an English Dictionary". Murray was editor of what was to become known as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), Tylor was head of the Oxford University Museum and founder of the Anthropology department, and the word in question was *boyuna* a large, black, Brazilian snake which came into English in 1774 from Tupi *moiauna* (< *moia* 'cobra' + *una* 'black') via the Portuguese who in turn took the word to Sri Lanka where they gave an unrelated water-snake the same Tupi name¹.

Murray included *boyuna* in his new dictionary, as he did many words from languages outside Europe. What others of the day may have deemed too outlandish for inclusion in an English Dictionary, Murray did not. He did, however, mark all such words with two small parallel lines beside the ||headword, known in-house as "tramlines". The tramlines would distinguish these headwords from the others as "alien or not yet naturalized".² As Murray slowly published completed sections of his work, he often lamented in the prefaces how difficult he found these 'words on or near the frontier line'³. In a lecture, given early on in his lexicographic career to the Philological Society, he likened English to an ink spot or "spot of colour on a damp surface" - the centre of which is solid, discrete and finite and the

circumference of which is fuzzy, imperceptible and infinite⁴. The bulk of an English Dictionary, he said, was made up of words from the centre of the ink spot, while the rest were foreign words, slang, and scientific terms whose degree of “Englishness” was often impossible to determine⁵.

At this stage, none of the dictionary had been published, but already Murray was vexed by policy issues relating to when a foreign word is “English” enough to be included in an English dictionary. He recognised that on a certain level the degree of a word’s “Englishness” depended on the individual speaker. As with technical and scientific words, words from indigenous languages around the world could easily be considered as “English” to one speaker while being foreign gobbledegook to another.

It is man by man that Englishmen get the idea of a *boomerang*, a *reredos*, a *caucus*, or a *tomato*, and find a use for the name of it. Thus the English language is surrounded by a penumbra of French, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Arabic, Hindustani, Malay, Zulu, words, some of which are “English” to some Englishmen, and undreamt of to others. At which Englishman’s speech does English terminate?⁶

In this paper I compare the policy and practice of different editors throughout the making of the OED, ie. the first edition of OED (*OED1*), its *1933 Supplement*, the four volume Supplement (1972-1986), the 1989 second edition (*OED2*), and the revised edition (*OED3*) currently in progress and published on-line quarterly⁷. Policy on tramlines is an interesting case: are tramlines more helpful as a barometer of an editor’s attitude toward foreign words than as a gauge of a word’s usage in English contexts? In this comparison, the *1933 Supplement* will prove vital - in a Derridean way - in telling us about the dictionary policy and lexicographic practice that went before it and came after it. Any accusation that the first editors of *OED1* deliberately excluded words from World English or made ‘wrong-headed judgement-calls’ will be proved false⁸. Most words which appeared in the *1933 Supplement* were never seen by the first editors of *OED1*. Those which were seen were excluded on fair grounds according to the policy of the time (discussed below) or they were seen too late to be included in publication and were relegated to a separate ‘Supplement file’ to await publication in 1933.

2. World English in OED1 and the 1933 Supplement

The problem of a word’s “Englishness” was never solved by Murray nor by Bradley. Can we say the same of the two men who out-lived them both: Craigie and Onions? I refer in particular to the letters X, Y, Z of *OED1*, the only letters edited entirely by Onions (published in 1921), and the *1933 Supplement* edited by Onions and Craigie. These volumes stand out from the rest in that X, Y, and Z include more World English than other letters and much of it appears without tramlines⁹. While it may be expected that the majority of words in these letters are naturally going to come from ‘exotic’ languages because of their phonological systems, it does not explain why Onions did not mark them all with tramlines. The *1933 Supplement* does away with tramlines altogether¹⁰.

The preface to the letters X, Y, and Z is the first of any fascicle of *OED1* to herald inclusion of World English as a “considerable” feature. Onions waxes lyrical about the inclusion of words from India such as *zamorin* and *zenana*, words from Africa such as *zebra* and *Zulu*, Turkish *yelek* and *zaptiek*, Chinese *yulan* and *yamun*, Tibetan *yak* and *zho*, Mexican *zopilote*,

Tagalog *ylang-ylang*, Arabic *yashmak*.... We see here the inclusion of ethnonyms along with regional localized words for plants and customs, some of which are marked with tramlines (eg. ||*yoga*) and others which are not (*ylang-ylang*).

Many words in the *1933 Supplement* were included from World English on quotational evidence pre-dating Murray. One might deduce from this that Murray had seen this evidence and actively excluded it. But this would be a false deduction. The only way to prove this is to dig through the OED archives and compare the slips for compilation of the *1933 Supplement* with the slips for the compilation of *OEDI*. In particular, the evidence lies in the slips rejected by *OEDI* editors. These fell into either of two files: 'Supplement' or 'OED1 Superfluous'¹¹. The file labelled 'Supplement' was made up of words or corrections which had come to light after respective parts of *OEDI* had been published. These were set aside for the day when a proper supplement volume would be published in 1933¹². The file 'OED1 Superfluous' contained excess quotational evidence for words which were included in *OEDI* and slips for words or senses of words which were deemed not fit for inclusion, often on the policy of lack of frequency or distribution of use, or for the fact that they were ethnonyms. (This system is still in use today: nothing is thrown out at the OED; every slip is kept and stored for future reference, either on paper or electronically.)

For example, on the surface one might deduce that Murray had deliberately rejected words like *aba* a vest worn by Arabs (with *1933 Supplement* quotational evidence from 1811, 1833, 1880), *bangy* a yoke used for carrying heavy loads in India (with quotational evidence from 1789, 1809, 1810, 1837, 1841, 1842), *boyam* the root of an Australian orchid (1834), *corocoro* a Malaysian boat (1634, 1779, 1798, 1800, 1869), *ghoont* an Himalayan pony (1625, 1834, 1858, 1871), *korimako* a New Zealand bird (1855, 1872, 1873), to list but a few. None of these words was published in *OEDI* and yet all have quotational evidence pre-dating Murray's editing. Were these words considered by Murray? Searches through the archived 'OED1 Superfluous' file and the 'Supplement' file suggest that Murray never saw them. In other words, he never contemplated including these words in *OEDI* because he never knew they existed.

Those critics who charge Murray with deliberate exclusion - as though evidence of a Victorian view of the world - have failed to take account of this evidence. It is true that the OED consultant E.B. Tylor was typical of many attitudes in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when Britain's empire was at its height, but nothing in Murray's writing implies that he shared those attitudes. Although Tylor's use of 'outlandish' was probably closer in meaning to the word's older sense of 'foreign' rather than its modern derogatory sense, he is famous for his hierarchical view of culture in which 'savages' were ranked beneath 'barbarians' who in turn were beneath the acme of the 'civilized European'¹³. In his most famous book entitled *Primitive Culture*, he declared that "few would dispute that the following races are arranged rightly in order of culture: Australian, Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese, Italian"¹⁴. But Murray's view of the world was quite different from E. B. Tylor's; Murray never judged words as outlandish and he always weighed up their evidence - quotational and etymological - before including or excluding them. This is evident from the slips in his OED1 Superfluous file and his comments on those passed into the Supplement file. It is clear from these that he struggled as much with non-European words as he did with slang and scientific terms, all of which he saw as inhabiting the fringe of the ink spot.

In the few cases where the *1933 Supplement* and the OED1 Superfluous do overlap, it is (in Murray's case) mainly for ethnonyms such as *Kabyle* a people of Algeria and Tunisia, and (in Bradley's case) for exotic plants and animals such as *mamba* a venomous African snake. We know that Murray had a policy of only including ethnonyms if they had derivatives - hence *American* was included because it was needed to explain derivatives such as *Americanism* or *Americanize*, but not enough evidence could be gathered in 1884 for derivatives of *African* and certainly no derivatives existed for *Kabyle* in 1901, so neither were included in OED1¹⁵. The reason for Bradley's exclusion of *mamba* is less easy to explain¹⁶. The OED1 Superfluous for *mamba* shows good quotational evidence spanning the years 1876 to 1899. Here we see the drawback of the fact that the *1933 Supplement* did not access OED1 Superfluous. If they had, they would have antedated *mamba* by fourteen years. Here is the *1933 Supplement* entry, clearly without the 1876 antedating which lay untouched in OED1 Superfluous.

3. Reinstating 'Tramlines': Burchfield's Four-Volume Supplement

These examples suggest that inclusion policy began to change in 1921 with the publication of letters X, Y, and Z of OED1, and continued to change for the *1933 Supplement*. However, policy changed again in 1972 when Robert Burchfield reinstated tramlines in his four-volume Supplement. The four decades which lay between the publication of the *1933 Supplement* and these four volumes had been eventful for the English language. Most importantly, varieties of English which had begun to emerge globally in Murray's day were now stable and fully-fledged languages. What neither Murray nor Tylor nor anyone else in the 1880s could have predicted, was that speakers of English around the world would make it their own. They would pronounce it in their own way, add words and innovative syntax from their indigenous languages, and what's more they would be proud of it and claim it, respectively, as their own national language - even financing English dictionary projects of their own. Over a century later, emerging World English had stabilized into distinct World Englishes, and the problem of inclusion faced by James Murray was becoming even more complex for an all-inclusive diachronic dictionary of the English language like the OED.

Burchfield's four-volume Supplement was designed to replace the *1933 Supplement* and incorporate additional words from English in Britain and around the globe since 1928. In the preface Burchfield recognized the increased internationality of English by what he called "bold forays into the written English of regions outside the British Isles, particularly that of North America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, and Pakistan"¹⁷. Despite boasting in the preface that "readers will discover by constant use of the Supplement that the written English of regions like Australia, South Africa, and India has been accorded the kind of treatment that lexicographers of a former generation might have reserved for the English of Britain alone"¹⁸, a closer inspection reveals that the editor, himself a native speaker of a World English (of the New Zealand variety), had in fact re-instated OED1's tramlines for words from many other varieties, thereby affording them the kind of treatment that lexicographers of the former generation had NOT reserved for the English of Britain alone¹⁹. Burchfield also excluded World English which the *1933 Supplement* had included²⁰.

We do not know Burchfield's motives for the changes he made. Perhaps he saw as premature the move by Onions and Craigie to publish the *1933 Supplement* with no words marked as

“alien or not yet naturalized”? Perhaps he saw it necessary to bring into the fold a chosen few (‘Australian, South Africa, and India’) while lexis from other varieties was ‘tramlined’. If he did, he would be supported by academic models of World English such as Kachru’s (1985) concentric circle model, or similarly others by Gorlach (1990) and McArthur (1987), which all view World English as a set of differing standards²¹. Each variety in the outer rings - for example Zimbabwean English, Aboriginal English, or Korean English - has the potential to join the more standard inner rings such as British, American or Canadian English, depending on their standardization. As Burchfield perhaps saw it, until varieties in the outer rings are standard enough to be included in the inner rings, a large proportion of their lexicon should be marked as “alien or not yet naturalized”. Interestingly, one can see in these models an image which harks back to Murray’s inkspot: a solid and discrete centre of standard vocabulary, surrounded by a fuzzy and often imperceptible circumference.

4. World English Policy Today

The *OED2* reproduced the tramlines of the original texts, without any editorial intervention. Our new policy for *OED3* is closer to that of the *1933 Supplement*, in that no words are marked with tramlines and all are treated as we would treat any other English words. Regional labels, definitional metalanguage, and carefully chosen quotations can speak volumes in conveying how and when a word is assimilated into English.

In the past decade, the OED’s ability to track, access, and record words from all varieties of English has increased immeasurably, and this is reflected in what we are able to include in the Dictionary. Today, we have electronic access to newspapers, journals and books published in all far flung corners of the world, from the *Ghanaian Chronicle* to the *Ayr Advocate*, allowing us to follow developments in World English from Ghana and Outback Queensland, to the Philippines and Brazil. We also have targeted reading programmes, supported by Oxford University Press offices throughout the world, which ensure that often neglected and harder-to-access varieties are covered in our incomings database. Etymologies are expanded by access to new grammars and dictionaries of indigenous languages, and the invaluable email-instant support of language consultants around the globe - our Khoekhoe specialist at the University of Namibia has been known to respond sooner than our Tocharian specialist in Oxford.

4.1 Myall: An Example of New Lexicographic Practice for World English

The face of lexicography in the twenty-first century has certainly changed since the nineteenth century, but more and more we appreciate today the superb job Murray and his colleagues performed in recording what they did of words from the newly emerging global varieties of English. One last example is the word *myall*, meaning ‘stranger’, from an Australian Aboriginal language. This word was included in *OED1* and edited by Bradley. I will show you what a remarkable job he did with this entry, and how it was built on in the revision for *OED3* using all the resources which were available to us but denied to him.

Starting from the top of the entry, we notice that he correctly distinguished two different types of *myall*, that of the person (*myall* n1) and the wood (*myall* n2). I will now confine my analysis to *myall* n1. Whereas *OED1* left the Australian designation for the definition, *OED3* brings that out of the definition and marks the whole entry with the regional label *Austral*. It

also identifies the term as *derogatory*, a nuance not mentioned in *OED1*. As is general policy in *OED3*, we then list any spelling variants which exist now or in centuries past, along with mention of any variation in capitalization or plurality. The etymology has gone from ‘native name: Bigambel’ to a more precise rendering of the host language and etymon: “< Dharuk (Sydney region) *maiya* stranger, person from another tribe” along with a dated quotation taken directly from the original source. The most significant change to the entry, however, lies in the structure of the rest of the entry and the use of definitional metalanguage to distinguish Australian Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal use of the word in English contexts. In this case we have evidence of the former being used twenty years before the latter, hence the ordering of sense 1 and sense 2 respectively.

Here is an example of how the *OED* is able - for the first time in its history - to distinguish what Kachru, McArthur, and Gollach (and perhaps even Burchfield) would call ‘outer circles’ of English from its ‘inner circles’. Tramlines are no longer necessary because lexicographic practice has evolved to meet the demands of the language, in all its subtlety and complexity. World English is here to stay; what was once seen as outlandish by some has taken its legitimate place in the *OED*.

Endnotes

1. This word initial ‘m’ is in fact a labiodental velar. The word *boy’una* first appears in Portuguese in c.1584 Cardim *Do Clima e Terra do Brasil* fl. 16v.: Ay outra a qual se chama Boyu(acute)na .I. cobra preta, he m co(tilde)prida, e delgada tambe(tilde) cheira mujto a rapozinhos..
2. Tramlines also marked learned words from Greek and Latin (like ||Typhlitis or ||Typhomania). See a full discussion of what Murray distinguishes as ‘naturals, denizens, aliens, and casuals’ in the General Explanations section of *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* Volume I p.xxvi.
3. J. A. H. Murray (1888:ix) *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* Volume I A and B
4. J. A. H. Murray, ‘Ninth Annual Address of the President to the Philological Society, delivered at the Anniversary Meeting , Friday 21st of May, 1880’ in *Trans. Philological Soc. 1880-1* p.131. Thanks to Peter Gilliver for this reference.
5. Murray refines this concept in the General Explanations section of *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* Volume I p.xxiv
6. Murray, “Ninth Annual Address” p.132
7. See www.oed.com
8. See comments made by R. Bailey and M. Gollach (1983:4) *English as a World Language* Cambridge University Press (in particular “the initial editors of the *OED* virtually excluded words not in general use in Great Britain and the United States”), A. Curzan (2000:96-108) “The Compass of the Vocabulary” in L. Mugglestone *Lexicography and the OED* Oxford University Press , and S. Winchester (2003:145) *The Meaning of Everything: the story of the Oxford English Dictionary* Oxford University Press
9. Here is where tramline counts have given a skewed gauge of the inclusion of foreign words. A count of tramlines in X, Y, Z tells us that only 2.7% of the words are ‘alien or unnaturalized’, but in fact a count of World English without tramlines reveals a much higher percentage.
10. Except for one word on p.528 ||*kadin*.
11. At this time, *OED1* was known as the New Dictionary of English (NED), so ‘NED Superfluous’ would perhaps be a more accurate, and less anachronistic, rendering for the name of this file.

12. The 1933 Supplement was based substantially on all the slips in this 'Supplement' file and not the 'OED1 Superflous' file. In fact, my investigations suggest that no material in OED1 Superfluous was accessed in the making of the 1933 Supplement.
13. "The enquirer who seeks...the beginnings of man's civilization must deduce general principles by reasoning downwards from the civilized European to the savage, and then descend to still lower possible levels of human existence." in Tylor (1863:21, 32) "Wild Men and Beast Children" *Anthropological Review* 1)
14. Tylor (1871:24) *Primitive Culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art and customs* vol. I
15. See Murray's explanation of this in the preface to the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* Volume I A and B p.ix
16. Personal communication with Peter Gilliver. See the paper delivered by Gilliver at the North American Dictionary Society conference 2003 entitled "That Brownest of Brown Studies": the work of the editors and in-house staff at the *Oxford English Dictionary in 1903* p.5
17. Burchfield, R. W. (1972:xiv) *Supplement to the OED*
18. Burchfield, R. W. (1972:xv) *Supplement to the OED*
19. For example, see *corocoro* a Malaysian boat, or *kombe* a Central African narcotic drink, which were without tramlines in 1933 Supplement but with them in Burchfield's Supplement. Burchfield also left some entries without tramlines eg. *kavaka*, *kavakava*, *kona*, *kukama/kookama*, *mamba*.
20. For example, see *boyam* the root of an Australian orchid (1834) which appeared in 1933 Supplement but not in Burchfield's.
21. See respectively B. B. Kachru (1985) "Standards, Codification, and Sociolinguistic Realism: the English language in the outer circle" in R. Quirk and H. G. Widdowson (eds.) *English in the World* Cambridge University Press, T. McArthur (1987) "The English Languages?" in *English Today* 11:9-11, and M. Gorfach (1990:42) *Studies in the History of the English Language* Heidelberg: Winter.

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