

# Lecture Series: “Variation and change in the history of the English lexicon”

Spring Semester 2023, **Tue 16:15-18:00, KOL-E-21**

Convenors: Olga Timofeeva & Annina Seiler

## 1. “Our Vernacular Tongue”: Noah Webster, Joseph Worcester, and the creation of American dictionary culture

21 February 2023

Kory Stamper, Merriam-Webster and Cambridge Dictionaries

Part of the founding of any new nation involves the creation of a unique national identity; in many instances, this can also involve linguistic identity. Such was the case for the newly founded United States. But where that linguistic identity came from, and which of the nation’s factions gained control over it, eventually rested with two lexicographers and the rivalry between them that lasted well beyond the deaths of both. This lecture will examine how the Webster-Worcester “Dictionary Wars” of the 1800s shaped the modes and methods of American lexicography in the 19th and early 20th century, the ways in which modern American lexicography sought to break free of the paradigms that it had (unwittingly) created and sustained, and how American identity and American dictionary culture have affected and continue to affect each other.

## 2. Scottish, northern, obsolete – navigating the overlaps between the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of the Scots Language*

28 February 2023

Joanna Kopaczyk, University of Glasgow

Sir William Craigie, the co-editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), postulated in 1919 the creation of a separate “older Scottish” dictionary which would capture the lexicon of a period when one could talk about Scots as a language in its own right, i.e. up to 1700. That proposal gave birth to the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST), completed in 12 volumes 83 years later. Despite the existence of that massive resource, in the OED Scots vocabulary forms part of a larger history of English vocabulary. Consider the OED entry for *lounge* v. ‘to move indolently’ (of obscure origin, regionally unmarked), where the first English attestations come over 100 years after the word’s use by Scots makars, William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas. This talk is about how the well-known historical dictionaries were shaped in relation to each other, and how to navigate the metalinguistic information which results from that relationship to avoid pitfalls of analysis.

## 3. Variation and change as seen by seventeenth-century lexicographers

7 March 2023

John Considine, University of Alberta

The seventeenth century was the first in which an awareness of variation and change really shaped English dictionaries. The hard-word dictionary tradition from Cawdrey (1604) onwards was driven by the awareness of variation between registers: Latinate hard words (*meditate*) and their more familiar equivalents (*bethinke*). Lexicographers in that tradition also came to address change explicitly, documenting lexical innovations (*chocolate*) and exploring the developing terminologies of the arts and sciences (*magnetick*). Some of the most interesting work beyond the hard-word tradition explored regional variation, and variation through the centuries, in the lexicography of Old English, and in the historical and etymological lexicography of the modern language. A very lively sense of variation and change had developed by 1700, and we may ask why it was not sustained in eighteenth-century dictionaries.

#### **4. The *Dictionary of Old English* and methods of historical lexicography**

14 March 2023

Stephen Pelle, University of Toronto

This lecture will discuss the history, methodology, and progress of the *Dictionary of Old English*, beginning with the origins of the project over fifty years ago. Topics covered will include the construction of the DOE Corpus, the entry-writing and revision processes, and the relationship of the DOE to other dictionaries, especially the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which, together with the DOE, form an interlinked network covering the entire history of the English lexicon. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which the DOE has approached various problems inherent in historical lexicography, such as the interpretation of hapax legomena, the determination of linguistic and chronological criteria for inclusion, and the dialectal and orthographical standardization of headword forms.

#### **5. Meanings and functions of *-līc(e)/-ly* in the history of English**

21 March 2023

Ursula Lenker, University of Munich

This talk will focus on the hitherto neglected lexical and semantic aspects of the history of PDE *-ly*, which in today's English may be used to form a) de-nominal and de-adjectival adjectives (cf. *friendly*, *bluely*) or b) de-adjectival adverbs (cf. *(to walk) slowly*; *interestingly*; *additionally*). The later function is specific to English and it is only from Early Modern English onwards that *-ly* has become the English "adverbial signature". While the morphological changes of the emergence of adverbial *-ly* by way of re-analysis are well understood, the lexical and semantic conditions and parallels between the two uses have not received much attention. The two developments are semantically connected, though; this talk will, for instance, show that the figurative and subjective meanings of Old English adjectives in *-līc* (e.g. *biterlīc* 'painful' vs. *biter* 'in an acidic way') have paved the ground for specific subjective meanings of adverbs in *-ly* (still evinced in cases such as *She works hard* vs. *It hardly works*).

## **6. Lexical sociolinguistics: Networks and fireworks**

28 March 2023

Laura Wright, University of Cambridge

In this lecture I will use the lexeme *Swiss Waiter* to introduce and demonstrate Social Network Theory as applied to historical states of English, followed by an introduction to the Communities of Practice approach. We will look at a community of eighteenth-century pyrotechnists (or *fireworkers* as they were called at the time) who lived and worked in London. They brought their expertise and vocabulary with them from Italy, France and Germany, via their work networks and family networks. We will track their lexemes from fireworker to fireworker, from father to son (direct evidence from mother to daughter is lacking although women were fireworkers too), and from master to apprentice, based on evidence from their newspaper advertisements and trade-cards.

## **7. Borrowing and polysemy: French loans in Middle and Early Modern English**

4 April 2023

Richard Ingham, University of Westminster

The present study analyses a sample of some 50 French loanwords in Middle English and about the same number in Early Modern English. It is found that over three-quarters of the ME loans, but less than a quarter of the EModE loans, are polysemous as in the source language. For such a sharp drop in the likelihood of multiple meanings being taken over from French to have occurred, a significant change, we argue, must have taken place in the borrowing process. That is, the ways in which French words were taken up by English speakers and passed into use among them changed. Our claim is that the Middle English written record was the creation of a community of bilingual speakers competent in the lexis of French, whereas that is not the case for the Early Modern period. It is argued that this pattern is consistent with a contact situation characterised by the action of bilingual speakers exploiting the semantic range of French lexemes, rather than borrowing items only in a single sense lexicalising a novel prestigious concept.

## **8. Is it really all in the data?": The case of anti-colonial lexicography in Canadian English, compared with Austrian German**

18 April 2023

Stefan Dollinger, University of British Columbia at Vancouver

It is a truism that languages, including their vocabularies, change. However, we as linguists, especially socio-historical linguists, must ask ourselves what undisclosed, in-built presuppositions of looking at language we may have inherited. It seems that today, paradoxically, in the current data-driven era of linguistics, we tend to forget that our teachers'

and discipline's perspectives of languages and dialects are not objective truths, but socio-historically conditioned constructs from particular vantage points. Canadian English, like American or English ("British") English, is one such construction, whose open-class vocabulary will be showcased from its socio-historical backdrops of interpretation. This example will clearly show that any linguist's assessment of a variety's status is in no case "objective". It will be demonstrated that what is considered as "enough" or "not enough" (lexical) difference between variety A and variety B are purely and unequivocally subjective statements. We would do well, as a discipline, to recognize and foreground the constructivist aspect of our own subfields, as no data collection, however large, may answer these questions for us.

## **9. Reinvestigating the impacts of French borrowing on the vocabulary of Middle English**

25 April 2023

Louise Sylvester, University of Westminster

This lecture discusses the methodologies and results of a series of projects investigating the effects of word borrowing on the development of the vocabulary of English in the later medieval period. Accounts across the scholarship and in textbooks talk about English words narrowing or broadening in meaning, or dropping out of the language altogether, in response to the huge influx of French vocabulary. We have made use of a large dataset to examine the outcomes for native terms when new words with similar meanings were borrowed. We are also tracing the semantic development of loanwords to discover if they result from the words' new situation within the ecology of English, or if there are parallel developments in the source languages and what we are seeing is polysemic borrowing.

## **10. Concept-led approach to semantic change**

2 May 2023

Justyna Robinson

## **11. Lexical focusing and lexical norms in Middle English**

9 May 2023

Olga Timofeeva, University of Zurich

This lecture addresses lexical focusing and lexical standardising processes in the religious domain of Middle English. Lexical change is reconstructed against the social changes within the church, such as the new ways of pastoral instruction and preaching, by examining the specificity of social networks within the clergy and between the clergy and secular communities. Following the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), it became obligatory for Christians of both sexes to confess their sins and receive the Communion at least once a year. Obligated to preach, instruct, receive confessions, and perform other spiritual ministrations in the vernacular, the clergy had to approach these tasks with an arsenal of English religious terminology that could

name and explain the persons of the Trinity, the seven deadly sins, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, etc. In one of the key subdomains of the religious lexis — terminology for vices and virtues — a peculiar division of vocabulary along etymological lines was taking shape: English-based lexemes were used to denote sins (*pride, greediness, lust, sloth, wrath*), whereas lexemes to denote virtues were predominantly French in origin (*charity, chastity, diligence, humility*). Just how these lexemes were selected and diffused is addressed in lecture 11.

## **12. *The mannes privy membris & here parties*: Let's talk about sex in Middle English**

16 May 2023

Annina Seiler, University of Zurich

In the Middle English period, a range of words is attested to describe intimate parts of the body. Some terms like *privy membris* ('private members') or *wombe* ('womb') for male and female sex organs, respectively, are euphemistic. Other sources use a more explicit vocabulary, for example, *pyntell* ('penis'), *cunte* ('vulva'), *kiker* ('clitoris'), or *ers* ('buttocks, anus'). Some of these words may seem shocking to modern readers, yet they were clearly inoffensive to a medieval audience. A third group includes loanwords from Latin and Greek, such as *vulve* ('vulva') and *peritonium* ('space between anus and scrotum/vulva'). This talk provides an analysis of the vocabulary for intimate body parts in Middle English based on material from different genres. It traces the origin and development of these terms across different registers, looking into how some terms were established as part of a medical vocabulary, whereas others underwent pejoration to the degree that they have become taboo language, resulting in a noted lack of terms when it comes to talking about female sex organs today.

## **13. Exploring the lexicalization of antonyms in the history of English**

23 May 2023

Kathryn Allan, University College London

Across the history of English, different areas of the lexicon show different lexicalization patterns: there are more partially synonymous words for some concepts than others, and this can change over time. Some differences obviously relate to extra-linguistic change: for example, there are greater numbers of terms related to chemistry as it becomes established as a scientific discipline (Alexander 2018). However, the lexicalization of closely related concepts seems much harder to explain: for example, though *scearp* and several synonyms are found frequently in Old English, there appears to be no attested form meaning 'blunt' until much later (Allan 2021), and there are more close synonyms for 'fast' than 'slow' through time. Using data from the *Historical Thesaurus of English*, this paper examines the asymmetrical lexicalization patterns of some antonymous concepts, and considers whether factors such as influence from other languages or the nature of the concepts themselves might account for the differences.

## 14. Tracking loanwords in English using dictionaries: Techniques, possibilities, and challenges

30 May 2023

Philip Durkin, Oxford English Dictionary

A historical and etymological dictionary such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides an obvious tool for investigating the impact of loanwords on the lexicon in different historical periods. We find etymologies side by side with treatment of the range of meanings and spellings shown by each word, with information on the dates at which each of these are attested. In an electronic dictionary, searching across fields such as language of origin and date of first attestation can be combined to provide detailed information rapidly and simply. However, this is only the beginning of a detailed investigation. Factors investigated in this talk include: whether we are interested particularly in words in common use, or whether we want to investigate the whole lexicon, as reflected by the dictionary; the complexities of word histories, which may show multiple inputs in the same or different historical periods, or repeated input from the same source in different periods; borrowing of meanings from the donor language as opposed to innovation of new meanings.