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On the colonial element in Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary**

Abstract

This paper takes a preliminary approach to the colonial element of Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (1896-1905). Drawing on the electronic version of the dictionary that has recently been launched, it examines the entries which refer to the colonial usage of words documented in British dialects, considering the links that Wright made with Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, and New Zealand, as well as the isolated evidence recorded on items used in South Africa and the West Indies. The aim is twofold. Firstly, lexicographical, as this paper explores the role of the colonial material by ascertaining the proportion of words that are cited from the colonies, and analysing the treatment they are given: attention is paid to their lexicographical function, labels, and the evidence provided to support their inclusion. Secondly, I argue that, despite the narrow coverage of Australian, Canadian, Newfoundland and New Zealand Englishes, the data may add to our understanding of the lexical links between British varieties of English and colonial speech of the late 1800s.

1. Introduction

On 7 July 1896, *The Leeds Mercury Review* announced the reception of 'an advance copy of the opening instalment of the long projected "English Dialect Dictionary," which is under the editorial control of that well-known philologist, Dr. Joseph Wright' (Bodl. MS Eng. lang. c. 13: 1). This instalment, which saw the light in June 1896, was the first of the thirty volumes that Joseph Wright (1855-1930) had originally planned for his monumental work (henceforth *EDD*). Wright's unprecedented undertaking received a decidedly enthusiastic response. Contemporary reviews did not just praise the dictionary's endeavour to preserve the 'old dialect speech of the people' (*Yorkshire Daily Post*, 22 July, 1896), they also highlighted Wright's unprecedented attempt to record historical dialect variation in the English language over the late modern period, which he extended beyond the British Isles by venturing into North America and the colonies, seeking to identify and document those dialect words that had been transported and were by then also employed elsewhere around the world. This large geographical coverage of the *EDD* was indeed underlined by contemporary newspaper reviews and was acknowledged by Wright himself in the Preface to the six-volume dictionary that we know today (1896-1905a): 'It also includes American and Colonial dialect words which are still in use in Great Britain and Ireland, or which are to be found in early-printed dialect books and glossaries' (v).

Examples of words found in Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, New Zealand, the United States, as well as in South Africa and the West Indies found a place in the dictionary. Needless to say, evidence on these varieties of English, as documented in the dictionary, is small, given that Wright's major concern was to register dialectal differences in the British Isles in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The materials he mined to document American and colonial words are few in comparison with

the breathtaking number of sources representative of British Englishes, as well as chronologically narrower for obvious reasons. Overseas items are thus sparsely recorded in the dictionary, which explains the neglect of Wright's project as a source for early information on American and colonial varieties of English (e.g. Ramson 1966: 56), not least because it was not conceived as a historical repository of transatlantic and colonial speech. What little scholarly work has been done on the *EDD* has chiefly looked at the British dialect element of the dictionary and its sources (Thompson 2006, Markus 2010, 2012, 2014, Markus et al. 2010, amongst others). An exception is perhaps Ruano-García et al. (2015), in which the reception of US words is explored, concluding that such an analysis may shed some light on 'the links existing between varieties of English in Britain and overseas as understood by [late modern English] lexicographers on different sides of the Atlantic' (114).

This paper takes a preliminary approach to the colonial element of the *EDD*.¹ Drawing on the electronic version of the dictionary that has recently been launched (Markus 2016), I look into entries which refer to the colonial usage of words documented in the British Isles from 1700 to 1900, considering the links that Wright made with Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, and New Zealand, as well as the isolated evidence recorded on items used in South Africa and the West Indies. My aim is twofold. Firstly, lexicographical, as the paper explores the role of the colonial material by ascertaining the proportion of words that are cited from the colonies, and analysing the treatment they are given: I examine their lexicographical function, labels, and the evidence provided to support their inclusion. Secondly, I argue that, despite the narrow coverage of Australian (AusE), Canadian (CanE), Newfoundland (NfldE) and New Zealand Englishes (NZE), the data may add to our understanding of the lexical links between British varieties of English and colonial speech of the late 1800s, providing an example of the 'fascinating research possibilities provided by the *EDD Online* interface' (Markus 2017a: 881).

2. Colonial sources in the *EDD*: an overview

Like other historical dictionaries, the *EDD* built upon its sources and quotations so as to trace the history of British dialect words in the late modern period. Markus (2009: 265) notes that 'The value of Wright's *Dictionary* naturally depends on the number and validity of these sources'. Studies that have explored their role in the making of the dictionary, focusing either on glossaries (e.g. Beal 2010), manuscript documents (e.g. Ruano-García 2013), private correspondents (e.g. White 1987), or on literary materials (e.g. Markus 2017a), remark on their impressive number and highlight Wright's careful reproduction and systematic lexicographical deployment (see further Markus 2009; Ruano-García 2012: 242-244, amongst others, on Wright's sources and their function in the context of the dictionary).

The colonial sources employed in the *EDD* are listed in the first section of the Bibliography which is appended to the sixth volume of the dictionary. This section contains the 'principal books, MSS, etc. quoted in the dictionary' (Wright 1896-1905b: 1). The colonial material listed by Wright comprises a total of twenty texts representing AusE, CanE, and NZE, most of which are literary works or travelogues. Amongst them we can find Peter William Barlow's (1847-1890) *Kaipara, or Experiences of a Settler in North New Zealand* (1880), James Francis Hogan's (1855-1924) *The Lost Explorer, an Australian Story* (1890), and Edward Roper's (1854-1891) *By Track and Trail; A Journey through Canada* (1891).

Careful examination of these colonial texts on *EDD Online* reveals, on the one hand, that Wright cited nineteen of the twenty works listed in the Bibliography: he did not cite A. Constable Geikie’s (1821-1898) essay on CanE published in *Canadian Journal* (1857). However, he did use citations from nine other printed documents which are not listed in the catalogue of bibliographic records. They include John Boyle O’Reilly’s (1844-1890) *Moondyne: A Story from the Under-World* (1889), Ethel Gwendoline Vincent’s (1861-) *Newfoundland to Cochin China* (1892), and Bertram Mitford’s (1855-1914) *The Fire Trumpet: A Romance of the Cape Frontier* (1891) where Wright found a couple of items localized to South Africa and the West Indies.² To these sources are added six private correspondents designated by means of abbreviations, including ABG and GP. *EDD Online* has identified them respectively as Mrs A. B. Gomme, who provided information on various dialects, and George Patterson (1824-1897), who was one of Wright’s informants for NfldE. He also used citations from seven non-literary works, including periodicals (e.g. *Dialect Notes*), magazines (e.g. *The Cornhill Magazine*), and newspapers (e.g. *The Aberdeen Weekly Free Press*), none of which are listed amongst the colonial material. In total, Wright employed forty-two colonial sources and those that were printed were all produced during the late nineteenth century (1872-1898).³

Figure 1 shows that 50% of these sources are representative of Australia, followed by documents in which Newfoundland, Canadian, and New Zealand usage is attested; the material illustrative of South Africa and the West Indies is negligible. The uneven coverage of colonial varieties in the *EDD*, and the Australian bias of the colonial sources in particular, had an inevitable impact on the representation of colonial English in the dictionary.

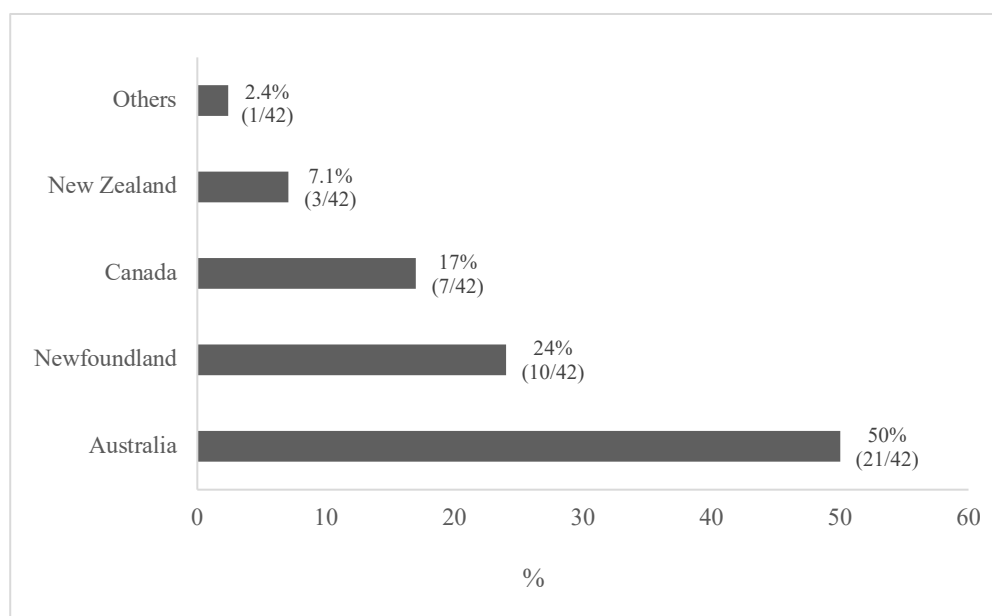


Figure 1. Distribution of colonial sources in the *EDD*.⁴

3. Colonial words in the *EDD*

As Markus (2017b: 28) explains, the dialect filters of the *EDD Online* interface make it possible to interrogate the dictionary concerning the distribution of words or forms at three different levels: nation (e.g. Australia), region (e.g. North Country), and county (e.g. Lancashire). Users of *EDD Online* can therefore make quick searches of the words or

forms that Wright cited from Canada, for example, by simply activating the corresponding filter: ‘dialect area = nation = Canada’. In order to retrieve an alphabetical list of headwords in accordance with this filter, it may also suffice to activate the simple search mode and type in an asterisk in the search box, as Figure 2 shows.

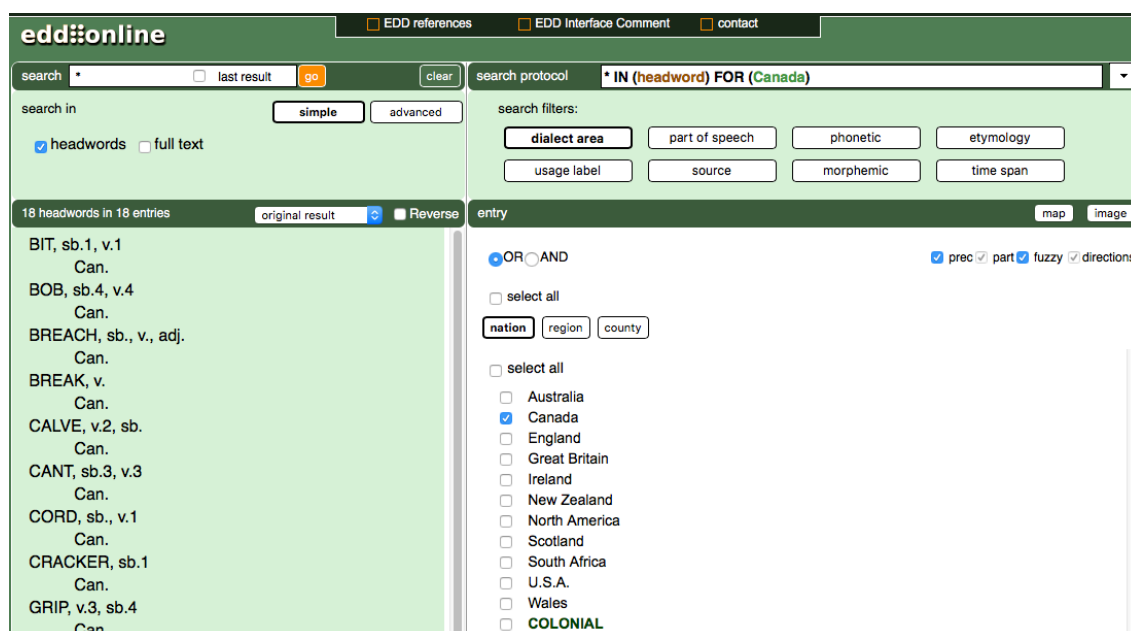


Figure 2. Query routine for the list of headwords that refer to Canada.

The results include the number of entries with information on the Canadian usage of a word or sense, which I refer to as *hits* in this paper. Given that some entries may contain more than one sense attributed to Canada, I use the term *references* to indicate the total numbers. As displayed in Table 1, *EDD Online* retrieves 18 hits and 19 references in total for CanE, which means that there are 18 entries with information on Canada, one of which contains more than one sense attributed to this nation: **on** prep., adv., and v.

In order to evaluate the role of colonial words in the *EDD*, all references to AusE, CanE, NfldE, NZE, South African, and West Indies Englishes have been identified thanks to these search facilities. Different headword queries with the filter ‘dialect area = nation / region / county’ activated have been undertaken; e.g. ‘dialect area = nation = Australia’, ‘dialect area = region = West Indies’, ‘dialect area = county = Newfoundland’. They have returned a total number of 347 hits, with 368 references in total, which is not an inconsiderable sample. As displayed in Table 1, their distribution reveals a bias towards Australian and Newfoundland words, which received comparatively more detailed treatment in line with Wright’s employment of a larger number of sources from these varieties. In fact, some of these words are localized to specific territories, such as the states of New South Wales (e.g. **brace** sb.¹ ‘the mouth of a shaft or ‘claim’’) and Queensland (e.g. **blather** v.¹ 2. ‘to make any disturbance or commotion; to cry out’) in Australia. In contrast, the evidence from South Africa and the West Indies is sparse, with one word marked as employed in each of them: **ruck** v.⁶ ‘to strain, jerk, twist’ and **fig** sb.¹ 5. ‘a division of an orange’, respectively.

Table 1. Distribution of colonial words in the *EDD*.⁵

	N hits	N references
Australia	209	229
New South Wales	3	3
Queensland	1	1
Newfoundland	98	98
Canada	18	19
New Zealand	11	11
Colonial	5	5
South Africa, West Indies	2	2
Total	347	368

As in other studies concerned with the *EDD* sources, a detailed evaluation of the colonial material shows that the data did not serve the same functions. According to the role that the sources have in the context of the dictionary, their lexicographical treatment seems adequate and in accordance with the underlying purposes of the *EDD*. References to colonial sources were included in the body of the entries either for citations or comments.⁶ 98.64% of the words (363/368) were treated as Type 2 comments (T2-C), whilst 1.35% of the data (5/368) were used as citation material, and 0% as Type 1 comment (T1-C). Two clear implications follow from this distribution. First, the important number of cases in which the colonial data were treated as T2-C suggests that Wright found them valuable to explain and illustrate the overseas distribution of a relatively important number of British dialect words and senses listed in the dictionary. Such is the case of **dinkum** ‘work; a due share of work’, which Wright cited from Derbyshire and Lincolnshire in the 1890s, and likewise found in Australia. Morris (2008: 206) notes that this noun ‘embod[ies] and carr[ies] a history of Australian values and attitudes’. The *Australian National Dictionary (AND)* records it for the first time in 1888, as also does the *EDD*, the evidence for which is shared by both dictionaries: Rolf Boldrewood’s (pseud.) (1826-1915) *Robbery under Arms* of 1888.

The second implication relates to the small number of entries in which the colonial evidence is employed as citation material. The fact that 1.35% of the data are treated in this way suggests that they were of little value in Wright’s attempt to document late modern British dialects, which is, however, unsurprising. Interestingly, two of the five cases of colonial words used as citation in the *EDD* (three of which are Australian) provide unique attestations. They are **Cousin Jack** ‘a Cornishman’ (sv *cousin* sb. v. 5. *Comb.* (4)), which Wright localized to Australia, and **cove**, one of whose senses ‘an overseer; a master’ (sv *cove* sb.² 1.) is documented in Boldrewood’s novel *A Colonial Reformer* of 1890 and *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (1879), in which its Australian distribution is likewise reported. Another instance of citation is the adjective **patienate** ‘patient, long-suffering’ (sv *patienate* adj.), which Wright found in Newfoundland. Of interest is also the noun **Geordie** ‘a man from Tyneside; a miner’, attested in Boldrewood’s *The Miner’s Right* (1890), which Wright treated as such possibly because it mirrored the usage characteristic of the North of England: ‘Whose yer friend; a Geordie, most like?’. Wales’s (2010) insightful study of the transportation of Northern English refers to Boldrewood’s novel, noting that here ‘Geordies are very visible and audible’ (73). Needless to say, the fact that **Geordie** appears in an Australian source does not necessarily imply that the usage of this noun was AusE. Rather, its attestation in *The Miner’s Right* (1890) testifies to the fact that, as Wales (2010: 72) explains, ‘Geordies

were not an insignificant grouping in the goldrush', whilst showing that the word was also used in Australia, which Wright documented. The *AND* does not record this noun.

For the most part, the colonial information included in the dictionary was faithfully reproduced, evincing Wright's careful treatment of his materials, as well as his labelling practice. This accuracy is particularly noteworthy in the deployment of source labels, which are consistently attached to Wright's examples and sources in order to designate the overseas usage of British dialect items and senses, whilst reporting on the variety represented in each of the works scrutinized: Aus., Can., N(ew).Z., and S.Afr. are used alongside Nfld., N.S.W., Qnsld., w.Indies. In some cases, Wright combined some of these labels to indicate that a word was used in different colonial varieties: an example is **anckle-jack** 'a heavy boot coming above the ankle', quoted from William D. Hay's (c.1853-) *Brighter Britain* of 1882 and labelled as 'Aus., N.Z.'. Such combinations are also frequent in those cases that are more precisely localized to a state or county: **clinker** 'anything very good or large of its kind' (sv *clinker* sb.² 6.) is cited from Boldrewood's *Robbery under Arms* (1888) and labelled as 'Aus., N.S.W.'. They are likewise found to report on the distribution of a given item in one of the colonies and another country: **stock-duck** 'the mallard or wild duck, *Anas boscas*', attested in Canada and elsewhere in North America; the *EDD* source label reads 'Can., Amer.' (sv *stock* sb. and v. 26. *Comb.* (2)). Like **stock-duck**, the noun **murphy** 'a potato' (sv *murphy* sb.¹) was identified in more widespread North American distribution, which in this case Wright designated by means of the combination 'Col., Amer.', the former label pointing at the colonial usage of this item on the basis of its Canadian distribution.

The use of this marker (and the more frequent 'Colon.') is rarely found as a source label, whilst often employed as an entry label to indicate the general colonial distribution of some British words. There are some fifty-four entries that are marked as such, even though Wright labelled his colonial sources precisely; thirty-four of them are cited from Australia. Two clear instances are the entry for **cock** v.³ 'to indulge, pamper, spoil with over-indulgence', which Wright labelled as 'Sc., Irel., Colon.' and cited from New Zealand, and **jannock** 'fair, honest, straightforward, upright, genuine, 'square'' (sv *jannock* adj., adv., sb.¹ 1.), which is recorded from Newfoundland and Australia. As in this latter example, the fact that a word or meaning was not restricted to a single colony explains the general entry label. Similarly, Wright attached the marker 'Colon.' to those entries in which different senses are ascribed to different varieties: this is the case of **cracker**, the meaning 'a hard biscuit' being documented in Canada, whilst Rosa C. Praed's (1851-1935) Australian novel *The Romance of a Station* (1890) informed on the sense 'the lash of a whip, the small cord at the end of a whip which makes it crack' (sv *cracker*, sb.¹ 1., 2.). Such a labelling practice is thus consistent with Wright's sources, although it is not deployed systematically throughout. As with the entry for **cock**, there are a number of cases in which the label 'Colon.' is employed to refer generally to overseas usage that is, however, restricted in light of the *EDD* sources: **bit** 'a piece of money; coin; a threepenny piece' (sv *bit* sb.¹, v.¹ 4.) is an example recorded from Canada. It is unclear why Wright may have chosen to use 'Colon.' in cases like these.

The entry label 'Amer.' has a similar purpose with regard to some items that are found in Canada and/or in Newfoundland. In some thirty-six cases, Wright preferred this general label to report widespread North American distribution of a word or sense, which he attested in different sources. An example is the entry for **rampick** that is labelled as 'Irel. Chs. Midl. Lei. War. and Amer.' on account of two citations from *Dialect Notes* (1896) and George Patterson's notes, quoted by Wright from *Transactions of the American Folklore Society* (1894), which record the meaning 'a young tree stripped of

boughs and bark’ from the US and Newfoundland, respectively (sv *rampick*, sb. and adj. 1.).

It is also worth noting that some thirty-eight of the entry labels provide no information as to the colonial distribution of the British words cited in the dictionary. This is particularly frequent in those entries which report on the general British dialect distribution or the various dialect uses of a word in the form of labels such as ‘Var. dial. uses in Sc. and Eng.’ and ‘In gen. dial. use in Eng.’. Items cited from Australia and Newfoundland are found amongst them, which Wright may have decided not to detail in his entry labels given their widespread currency both in Britain and beyond. We may refer to the noun **bobbery** ‘a noise, disturbance; a quarrel, dispute’, which the *EDD* labels as ‘In gen. dial. use in Eng.’ and records from Boldrewood’s *Robbery* (1888). The *AND* does not record this noun, which the *OED* marks as a slang term.

As expected, all of these source and entry labels may have been based on ad hoc evidence from Wright’s dictionary materials, presumably not on his actual knowledge of the colonial varieties referred to in the dictionary. In this regard, as we have seen, the coverage of colonial Englishes in the *EDD* mostly refers to NfldE and especially AusE, most of it being based in turn on the evidence furnished by very specific works and authors. *EDD Online* shows that the Australian data were primarily extracted from the works of Rolf Boldrewood, whilst George Patterson was behind a large proportion of the Newfoundland material (see Table 2).⁷ While it is possible that Wright had a preference for these texts, seeing them as uniquely trustworthy witnesses to AusE and NfldE, it is more likely that he relied upon the sources that were more immediately available to him. At this time, literary works containing samples of colonial speech were published and circulated in the homeland. Wales (2010: 72) points out that Boldrewood’s novels ‘were regularly reviewed back home in England, e.g. in the Manchester *Examiner*’, which may explain Wright’s acquaintance with and reliance on this material.⁸

Table 2. Top colonial sources in the *EDD*: Australia and Newfoundland (> 10 quotations).

Australia		Newfoundland	
Rolf Boldrewood	136	George Patterson	62
○ <i>Robbery under Arms</i> (1888)	72	○ GP	41
○ <i>A Colonial Reformer</i> (1890)	34	○ <i>Folklore Society</i> (1894)	21
○ <i>Nevermore</i> (1892)	8		
○ <i>The Squatter’s Dream</i> (1890)	6		
<i>Aberdeen Weekly Free Press</i> (1898-1903)	13		
Praed’s <i>The Romance of a Station</i> (1890)	13		
Vogan’s <i>The Black Police</i> (1890)	11		
Ferguson’s <i>Vicissitudes</i> (1891)	10		

This bias notwithstanding, the *EDD* provides insight into the British dialect words that were also used in the colonies, with information on a range of fields. In the case of AusE, we find words that belong to specialized registers, some of which have been noted by Ramson (1966: 56-76) (see also Görlach 1991). They include examples of animal husbandry, such as **bailing-up pen** ‘a place of fastening up cattle’ (sv *bail* v.), **flapper** sb. and v. 2. ‘a young bird of any kind only just able to fly, esp. a young wild duck’, and

granny sb. 3. ‘one of the oldest ewes of a flock’. Instances of mining vocabulary are **mullock** sb.¹, v.¹, and adv. 1. ‘dirt, a heap of rubbish; refuse’ and **tailing** ‘the poorest tin, the sweepings or refuse of ore’ (sv *tailin(g)* sb. and ppl. adj. 4.). Wright likewise reported on names of drinks (**caulker** ‘a bumper, drink, esp. of spirits’), plants (**fat-hen** ‘Var. species of the goosefoot, esp. *Chenopodium album*’), as well as items denoting confusion and loud talk (**deray** ‘uproar, merriment, noise, disorder; a noisy party’), grammatical words such as **all out** adv.¹ ‘completely, altogether, fully’, and the plural subject pronoun **yous** ‘You; used when speaking to more than one person’.

Concerning CanE, there is evidence on vocabulary relating to timber and timber work, including **bob-sled** ‘a rude sledge used for drawing logs out of wood’ (sv *bob* sb.⁴ and v.⁴ 2.), **cord-wood** ‘the small upper branches and loppings of trees, &c., cut into lengths and stacked into ‘cords.’’ (sv *cord* sb. and v.¹ 6. (2)), and **piece** sb. and v. 5. ‘a piece of timber; a log’. The *EDD* also furnishes data on husbandry practices (**break** v. II. 1. ‘to prepare for cultivation by ploughing’), as well as isolated expressions such as **to send one a mitten** ‘to reject one; to cast one off’ (sv *mitten* sb. 1. (3)). The dictionary testifies more largely to words used in Newfoundland, with items that report on different fields of the lexicon, amongst which those relating to fishery are of particular interest as they witness one of the main occupations of the community (see Clarke 2004: 244–246). We may refer to **barvel** sb. 2. ‘a leather apron or petticoat worn by fishermen, when hauling in their nets’, **flake** sb.¹ and v.¹ 7. ‘a platform or shelf of rough supports, made of firpoles, covered with branches, used for drying fish on’, **ram’s-horn** ‘a winding-net supported by stakes to enclose fish that come in with the tide’ (sv *ram* sb.¹ and v.¹ 1. (5)), **yafful** sb. and v. 1. ‘a handful; an armful’. Of interest is also the adjective **clever** ‘of inanimate objects: good, well-made, satisfactory’, which was used by fishermen to speak of ‘a clever-built boat’ as the *EDD*’s citation reveals (sv *clever* adj. and adv. 8.). As with the vocabulary of more widespread Canadian distribution, there are instances of words relating to timber (**billet** sb.¹ 1. ‘wood cut to a convenient size for burning’) and husbandry: **linhay** ‘a shed or open building; a farm building for cattle or for storing provender, &c.’, as well as grammatical words (**to-year** ‘this year’).

The evidence regarding NZE is very small, as we have seen, yet provides a glimpse into everyday vocabulary. Bauer (1994: 407) explains that ‘There are quite a few New Zealand English words which have their origins in British regional or non-standard dialects. Some of these are words relating to agriculture, or to special areas such as prospecting, but most of them are not so specialised’. In this vein, the *EDD* includes husbandry words such as **bail** sb.² 1. ‘a frame to which cows are tied in the byres’ and **slasher** ‘a knife for cutting hedges’ (sv *slash* v.¹ and sb.¹ (1)), whilst referring to items that belong to a range of different fields, including clothing (**angle-jack**, which is likewise cited from Australia), food and drink (**lolly** sb.² 1. ‘sweetmeat’, **lush** v.³ and sb.² 2. ‘intoxicating liquor’), verbs denoting different kinds of action (**dump** v.¹ and sb.⁴ 1. ‘to set down heavily, throw down with violence’), and children’s games: **sally water** ‘children’s singing games’ (sv *sally* sb.¹ 2. Comb. (6)).

Some of these items have been recorded in dictionaries of these varieties, and as such could be seen as survivals from British dialects. They have been attested either with the same meaning and form as the one documented by Wright (e.g. **lolly**), or with some modification in sense and/or form (e.g. **yafful**), which Schneider (2004: 293) refers to as transmitted and modified words, respectively. For instance, the *AND* records **yous** (sv *youse*), which is first attested in 1902 with this sense; the *EDD* citation is from 1901. **Yafful** is recorded in the *Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles (DCHP-2)* as a fishing term characteristic of Newfoundland found in 1862. It reproduces the *EDD*

definition of the term, specifying that it ‘has been semantically narrowed in Newfoundland to an armful of fish (or wood) because of the province’s close ties to the sea and fishing industry’ (sv *yaffle* 1a n.). In fact, the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English (DNE)* defines it as ‘An armful (of dried and salted cod-fish, kindling, etc); a load’, which is documented for the first time in 1862. Similarly, the *Dictionary of New Zealand English (DNZE)* explains **lolly** as ‘the usual word in New Zealand for any sweetmeat’, which is first recorded in 1862; the *EDD* citation dates from 1888.⁹ The *DNZE* accounts for the British dialect origin of this item and acknowledges the *EDD* as its source. It does not, however, specify the British dialects where it was used, which Wright localized to Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, and East Anglia, pointing at the originally Midland distribution of this usual New Zealand noun. This information is of particular interest if we want to ascertain which dialects had the greatest impact on the vocabulary of the colonies, and how they may have been used abroad (either as transmitted or modified items). Obviously, the evidence provided by the *EDD* alone cannot provide the whole picture, especially taking into account the chronological coverage of the colonial data and the sources whereby they are represented. However, it is worth looking into the *EDD* data to determine whether it is indeed possible to build some historical correspondences relying on Wright’s work, and if they tally with other studies on this matter.

4. The legacy of British dialects in the vocabulary of the colonies

The genesis and development of colonial varieties of English has earned detailed scholarly attention over the past decades (see Hickey 2014: 395ff. for a comprehensive list of references). Research has shown that, as Hickey (2004: 49) underlines, ‘The survival of lexical features in extraterritorial varieties is normally a straightforward matter as they are usually fairly easy to identify’. To this Schneider (2004: 292) adds that

‘In an attempt to build historical linguistic connections, we have to be aware of the paradoxical fact that vocabulary is most easy and most difficult to trace at the same time...for individual words correspondences can be established readily in a relatively large number of instances...On the other hand, these individual observations have little general significance—the vocabulary of any language is extremely large and always in constant flux and consists of largely isolated entities, so it reflects principles of internal development less directly than other levels of language organisation. Investigating historical roots of words must pay tribute to this ambivalence: we may look at individual words but should also attempt to gain a more comprehensive picture’.

In line with earlier studies that have examined the British dialect element in the lexis of NZE (Bauer 2000) and southern American English (Schneider 2004), the present analysis considers which of the British dialectalisms that the *EDD* found in colonial English did actually survive in the colonies. As already noted, the fact that Wright documented a British dialectalism in a colonial source does not necessarily qualify this word as an example of Australian, Canadian or New Zealand lexis. There seems to be a difference between the *EDD* data, indicating that some dialect items were also used abroad, and the evidence furnished by dictionaries of these extraterritorial varieties, showing that they are Australian, Canadian or New Zealand words. It is for this reason that I have searched for and compared their entries in the *AND*, *DCHP-2*, *DNE*, *DNZE*, and *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles*. The purpose has been to ascertain the proportion of items that were retained, and, most importantly, determine whether they survived as transmitted or modified words.¹⁰ Second, I have quantified the input of each British dialect by counting the number of times they are cited in the entries

for senses and/or forms that Wright found in the colonies. Each of these attributions has then been plotted on a map (Figures 4-5). The quantification is thus based on an analysis of the source labels of the citations provided for each item scrutinized, as it is sometimes the case that the entry labels refer to dialects with which Wright found no colonial correspondence (they represent other senses and/or forms listed in the entry). *EDD Online* offers the advantageous possibility to interrogate the dictionary in this direction. It suffices to activate the filter ‘dialect area = nation AND county’, thereby making simple headword queries that would yield the exact number of cases in which *EDD* lists words that are cited, for example, from Australia and Yorkshire. Such a query returns hits that comprise both the senses of a given word that are indeed cited from Australia and Yorkshire, as well as others that are listed in the entry and that Wright found in Yorkshire alone. For this reason, the results have been inspected manually in order to discard hits that are not relevant for the present purpose. Also, it is worth noting that the quantification of the data has not taken into account Wright’s geographical specifications in terms of dialect (e.g. south Lancashire, East Riding of Yorkshire), all references having been grouped as representative of Lancashire, Yorkshire, etc. This likewise applies to the data localized to Scotland, Ireland, and Wales: *EDD* specific references to Scottish, Irish, and Welsh counties have been counted respectively as instances of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Similarly, references to East Anglia rather than to Norfolk or Suffolk have been plotted in both counties. Words that are vaguely localized to the North Country have not been plotted.

Out of the 368 colonial items identified in the *EDD Online*, 129 (35.05%) are recorded in the dictionaries mentioned above. This suggests that the colonial terms recorded by Wright largely did not survive in colonial forms of English. This is especially noticeable concerning AusE and CanE, which have retained 26.2% and 16.6% of the words identified, as Figure 3 shows. Indeed, 60 of the 229 items cited from AusE are recorded in the *AND* (e.g. **cuffer** ‘a tale, a yarn’) whilst just 3 of the 18 ascribed to CanE are found in *DCHP-2*: **ride and tie** ‘a method of travelling when there is only one horse between two people’. In contrast, the evidence from NfldE is of particular interest in terms of quantity, as the results indicate that nearly 60% of the dialect data were preserved: 58 of the 98 terms are recorded in the *DNE* (an example is **loggy** ‘heavy, slow-moving, dragging’). Similarly, in the case of NZE the results suggest that the legacy of British dialectalisms was strong here, with 63.6% of the *EDD* words (7 of 11) having been recorded in the *DNZE*: **hump** ‘to carry on the back or shoulders’. This should be taken cautiously, though, because the NZE sample is too small for reliable generalizations. The words found in South Africa and the West Indies did not apparently survive, whilst the noun **dutchman** ‘the broad-leaved birthwort or pipe-vine, *Aristolochia Siphon*’, which Wright labelled as ‘Colon.’ and quoted from Roper’s Canadian travelogue *By Track and Trail* (1891), has been recorded in the *OED* in American use.

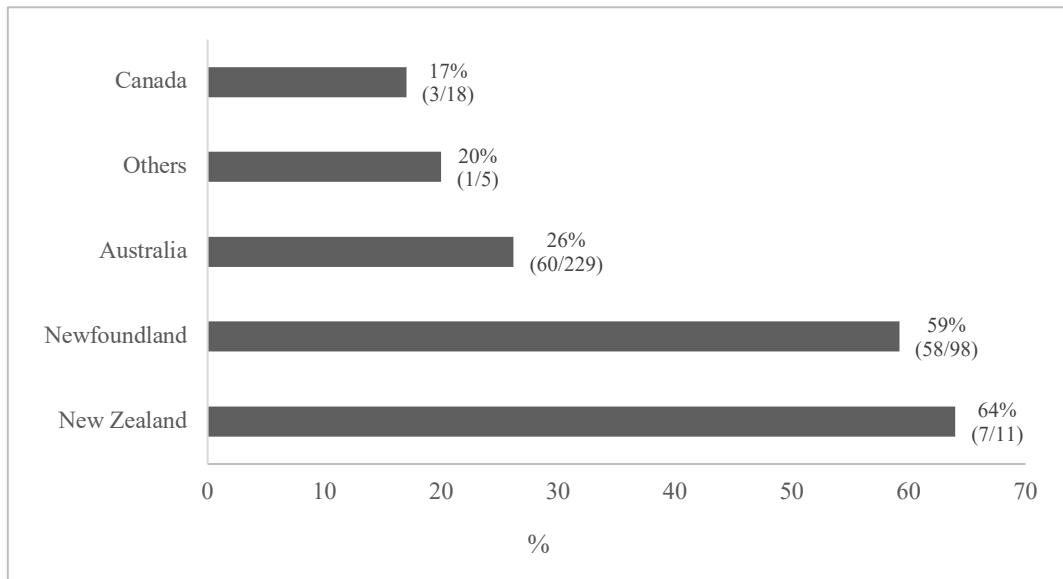


Figure 3. British dialect survivals in the colonies.

These 129 survivals can be divided into instances of direct transmissions and of modified words. I have counted a total number of ninety cases in the former category against thirty-nine words showing some kind of semantic and/or formal modification. Table 3 demonstrates that direct transmissions from British dialects are comparatively more significant in AusE and NfldE, as are modified items.

Table 3. Transmitted and modified words.

Colonial variety	N transmitted words	N modified words
AusE	36	24
NfldE	43	15
NZE	7	0
CanE	2	1
Others	1	0
Total	90	39

Again, it is clear that the data should be interpreted with care, as Wright's treatment of these varieties may account for such results. Transmitted words include the following:

- a. AusE: **graft** 'Work of any sort, esp. demanding work' (*AND*), **scruff** 'To seize (a person) by the nape of the neck; to manhandle' (*AND*).
- b. NfldE: **colcannon** 'A mixture or hash of various vegetables, and sometimes meat, eaten on Hallowe'en' (*DNE*).
- c. NZE: **kitful** 'basketful' (*DNZE*), **slasher**.
- d. CanE: **ride and tie**.

Modified words include **mullock** 'mining refuse' (*AND*), which Wright defined as 'dirt, a heap of rubbish; refuse' (*sv mullock sb.¹, v.¹ and adv. 1.*), and **jinker**, which is recorded

in Newfoundland with the meaning ‘A person (on a vessel) bringing bad luck; a Jonah’ (*DNE* 1.). The *EDD* explains **jink** v.¹ and sb.² 3. as follows: ‘to play tricks, to frolic’ (cf. *DCHP-2* sv). In both cases, as we can see, semantic changes affected their British dialect ancestors. In a similar vein, **hapse** ‘A latch or fastening (on a door or gate)’ (*DNE* sv *hapse*¹ n. 1) and **jonick** (also in the forms *jonic*, *jonnice*, *jonnick*) ‘fair; genuine; honest; true’ (*AND*) represent formal modifications of the dialect input forms *hasp* and *jannock*. The *EDD* cites *hapse* from the West Country and south-eastern dialects (Kent, Surrey, Sussex), whilst *jonick* is attested in Somerset (svv **hasp** sb.¹ and v.; **jannock** adj., adv. and sb.¹).

Figures 4-5 provide a tentative overview of the legacy of British regionalisms in the vocabulary of the colonies by considering the sample of these 129 survivals. Given that the number of *EDD* words retained in CanE and NZE are very small, the maps are concerned with AusE and NfldE, charting the distribution of these survivals in the British Isles with a view to identifying possible donor dialects.¹¹

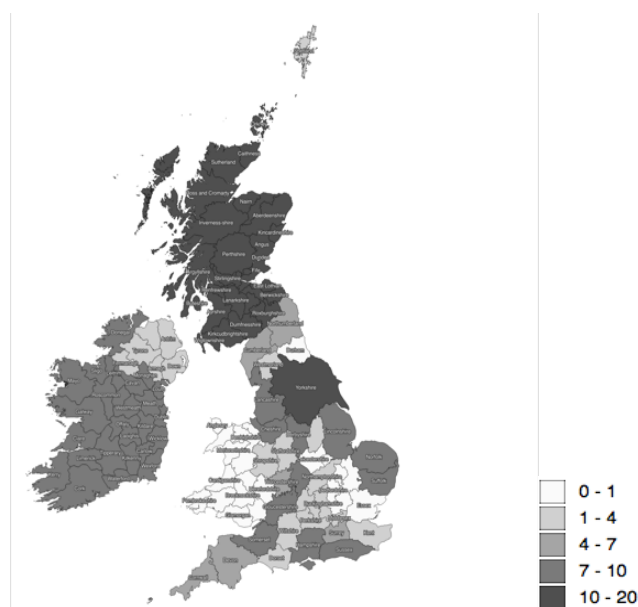


Figure 4. British dialect distribution of words found in AusE.

In the case of AusE, the data suggest that there are several focal points, amongst which Yorkshire (x19) clearly predominates along with Scotland (x20). Of minor importance but likewise relevant are Norfolk (x10) and Suffolk (x10), Lancashire (x9), Ireland (x8) as well as the North Midland dialects of Cheshire (x8), Lincolnshire (x8), and Derbyshire (x8), from which county stretches a band to the South-West through Warwickshire (x8), Gloucestershire (x8), Somerset (x9), and Devon (x7). To the East, Hampshire (x8) and especially Sussex (x9) are also noticeable in terms of dialect input: e.g. **pug** sb.² 1. ‘loam; clay’. As the map shows, the legacy of the East Midlands and the rest of the South-East is very limited, if at all present in the data, with dialects such as Essex, Cambridgeshire, Middlesex, and Bedfordshire to which are ascribed one or no words. This argues against Kiesling (2006: 76), who claims that ‘the prestige and numbers of southeast English varieties played a definitive role in the character of Early AusE’.¹² Whilst this is stated in connection with the period of Australian settlement and expansion (1788-1820), Kiesling explains that later in the nineteenth century British migration from

different parts of the country increased largely as a result of the gold rushes (2006: 76), which would explain the different focal points found in the data (see Jupp 2001: 298, 300-304 on the most prominent areas of English emigration to Australia in the 1800s).¹³ In this regard, and in relation to the northern input identified, Wales (2010: 67) has found convincing evidence pointing at ‘a significant nineteenth-century input of Northern English speakers, chiefly miners, into the camps of those seeking their fortunes in the gold rushes ... of Victoria and New South Wales in the 1850s and the 1860s particularly’. She goes on to explain that ‘Earlier in the century there had been an influx of Northern convicts from the industrial towns of Lancashire into Australia; later, there were Lancashire ‘exiles’ from the cotton famine; and in the 1880s an additional influx of Northerners into the New South Wales coalfields’. This ties in with Morris’s (2008: 91) analysis, which focuses on the important legacy from ‘northern England and Scotland rather than from southern England’ especially during the last sixty years of settlement (1850-1909), suggesting that ‘the sources for borrowings of dialect words are the opposite of the sources for the main elements of the accent’. Scottish and Yorkshire items found in AusE are **note** sb.¹ 4. ‘a note for A bank-note for £1’ (Scotland) and **ringer** sb.² ‘anything superlatively good’ (Yorkshire).

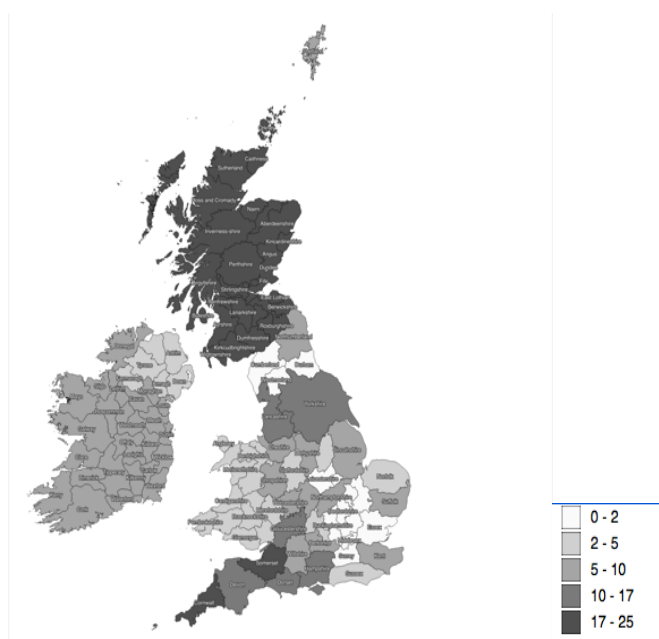


Figure 5. British dialect distribution of words found in NfldE.

Concerning NfldE, Figure 5 suggests that there are also several focal points. The West Country ranks highest with an important number of items documented in Cornwall (x23), Somerset (x23), and neighbouring counties such as Devon (x16), Dorset (x14), Gloucestershire (x12), and Hampshire (x13) to the East. In this sense, Clarke (2004: 245) highlights that ‘At least 80 per cent [of the early English settlers] came from the four south-western counties of Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Hampshire—typically, from the hinterland of the major West Country ports’. Western items attested in NfldE are **conkerbell** ‘an icicle’ (Devon, Cornwall) and **flanker** ‘a spark of fire’ (Dorset, Somerset). The *EDD* data seem also to testify to the influx of Scottish migrants over the nineteenth century (x25) (see Higgins 2009). Similarly, the northern English dialects of Yorkshire (x17) and Lancashire (x14) contributed a sizeable amount of vocabulary, including **model** ‘an exact likeness; a pattern’ (also cited from Galloway). Irish English does not feature

prominently in the sample, with words of Irish distribution being fewer than expected (x8), but still representative of the massive Irish immigration to Newfoundland over history (see Clarke 2004: 244-247): **dawnin** ‘the dawn’ (also quoted from Staffordshire). As in AusE, the legacy from eastern English dialects seems to have been quite limited, with dialects such as Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Middlesex providing no results.

5. Concluding remarks

This paper has examined the colonial element in the *EDD* in an attempt to ascertain the role of such information in the context of the dictionary, as well as to determine whether it lends itself to building historical correspondences that may shed some light on the British dialects that had a major impact on the vocabulary of the colonies covered by Joseph Wright. The research facilities of *EDD Online* have made it possible to interrogate the dictionary in both directions, allowing access to data that may have been otherwise hard to retrieve and difficult to assess. On the one hand, the analysis has highlighted the uneven coverage of colonial varieties in the *EDD*: AusE and NfldE received comparatively more detailed attention than CanE, NZE, South African and West Indies Englishes. Not only is this visible in the number of sources employed to represent each of these varieties, but likewise, and as a result, in the amount of vocabulary that Wright documented from them. As such, the sample of 368 items shows a bias towards NfldE and especially AusE, with 63.3% of the data documented in the latter. Interestingly, nearly all the colonial material was employed as T2-C, which Wright primarily used to refer to the colonial usage of words and senses that were included on the strength of their use in the British Isles. In line with this, Wright’s source labels, which he reproduced carefully and consistently for the most part, have allowed the identification of donor dialects in our attempt to determine the legacy of British dialects in colonial lexis. Cross-comparison of the *EDD Online* data with the information provided by dictionaries of these varieties has revealed that such a legacy was not especially pronounced, with 129 cases of survivals. They seem to have been most frequent in AusE and NfldE, although this is likely to respond to Wright’s more extensive coverage of these two varieties; in both cases, the number of transmitted words outweighs instances of modified items. Wright’s links between British Englishes and transoceanic speech replicate in some way what other studies have concluded on the British dialect element of colonial lexis, suggesting a larger impact from Yorkshire and Scotland on AusE, whilst showing the limited influence of south-eastern varieties. In the case of NfldE, the *EDD Online* data reveal the strong legacy of south-western dialects, whilst also pointing at the important impact of Scotland.

Even if the results of the analysis must be taken with caution given the limitations of the dataset, both in terms of representativity and chronological coverage, it is clear that the *EDD* provides useful information that may add to the picture, as the links that Wright made between colonial speech and British dialects go some way to reinforcing what other studies have found on the dialectal element in the vocabulary of the colonies, at least in AusE and NfldE. The myriads of research possibilities that are now available thanks to *EDD Online* open up a wide range of avenues to investigate the history of early regional Englishes, which still awaits further investigation.

Notes

* I wish to thank Robert Lew and the anonymous readers of this paper for their welcome feedback and useful suggestions. Thanks are also due to Roberto Therón for the maps. Any mistakes that remain are my own responsibility.

¹ Unlike its modern meaning, which is often derogatory, the term *colonial* is used in this paper in its historical context as ‘a collective reference to all varieties of English which were carried from Britain or Ireland to locations overseas (after about 1600)’ (Hickey 2014: sv *colonial English(es)*), with special reference to forms of English in Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, and New Zealand.

² Wright also quoted from Robert Murray Gilchrist’s (1867-1917) *The Rue Bargain* (1898). This is a novel listed amongst the bibliographic records representative of Derbyshire, which is, however, labelled as Australian in the entries for **potato** and **roust** v.¹. It has not been considered in the total count of colonial sources.

³ The count is based on the list of sources available from *EDD Online*.

⁴ Because Newfoundland was still a self-governing colony by the time Wright compiled the *EDD*, it has been treated separately from Canada in this paper.

⁵ Table 1 includes the number of words that the *EDD* gives as characteristic of New South Wales and Queensland alone, thus excluding all those items that the dictionary quotes from these states and Australia, as well as the word also localized to Victoria: **jingle** sb.². The sample does not specify the number of words the *EDD* quotes from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (**bet** v., **billet** sb.¹), as they are localized to Newfoundland too, and thus have been counted amongst the Newfoundland data. The words representative of colonial English generally here exclude those items that Wright localized to the US (and labelled as ‘Colon.’), and the words that are cited precisely from AusE, CanE, NZE.

⁶ Markus and Heuberger (2007) explain that the *EDD* comments can be classified into two types. On the one hand, those that ‘refer to the entry as a whole[, which] come at the end of entries; i.e. in a separate paragraph after the block of citations’ and ‘mainly provide information on ‘early’ sources’ (365). They refer to them as Type 1 comments (T1-C). On the other hand, *ad-hoc* or Type 2 comments (T2-C) ‘are usually to be found in the citation block of the entries’ (366). T2-C, as Markus and Heuberger (2007: 366) note, have a wide range of functions, such as providing ‘statements about the meaning of the lemma’, expressing ‘Wright’s confession of having failed in getting information on a word’, as well as cross-referencing to other sources for further information about the meaning or distribution of a word or sense, as it is often the case with the colonial material.

⁷ Rolf Boldrewood was born in London and migrated to Australia where he lived from the age of five. George Patterson was born at Pictou, Nova Scotia, grandson of Scottish emigrant Revd. James Drummond MacGregor.

⁸ This is also true of other works that Wright inspected for dictionary evidence. On 10 March 1883, *The Spectator* reviewed Hay’s *Brighter Britain* (1882) as a ‘book which will excite and benefit the reader who has wisely made up his mind to emigrate to Northern New Zealand’. A few years later, it referred to Praed’s *The Romance of a Station* (1890) as ‘a transcript from memory rather than an achievement of imagination, for every page bears witness to the fact that she is writing of a life every detail of which has been made familiar to her by intimate personal experience’ (29 March 1890).

⁹ *OED* (s.v. *lolly*, n.¹ 1) explains that the meaning ‘a sweetmeat’ is chiefly used in Australia and New Zealand, being elsewhere restricted to ‘lollipop’.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that the compilation of these dictionaries of extraterritorial varieties of English was not exactly the same, using criteria which may vary and which are also different from those used in the *EDD*. Even though all of them relied on Wright’s *EDD* for comparison purposes, citing it as a source in some cases (see **lolly** above and **bark** v. in *DCHP-2*), the *EDD* element may not be comparable. To this is added that in some cases they turned to the *OED* in deciding whether a word deserved an entry in the dictionary. The *AND*, for example, explains that ‘it was necessary...to consult other historical dictionaries, in particular *OED*(S, *EDD*, Matthew’s *Dictionary of Americanisms*...and to decide, on the basis of the dictionary evidence available, whether or not a word warranted an entry in *AND*’. As is known, the *OED*’s dialectal coverage is not fully comprehensive, which may imply that some dialects are better represented than others in dictionaries of extraterritorial Englishes because they are less well represented in the *OED*. The findings of the present analysis of dialect survivals in colonial lexis may therefore reveal methodological differences between these works, and should be taken with a grain of salt.

¹¹ There are two main caveats that should be taken into account when interpreting the distribution of the data and the donor dialects of Figures 4-5. On the one hand, they may reflect Wright’s uneven coverage of dialects. As is well known, the amount of localized material varies from county to county, with some counties, including Lancashire and Yorkshire, receiving detailed treatment, and dialects like Durham, Essex, and Norfolk being poorly represented. Crystal (2015: xvi) states that this is one of the limitations of the dictionary, as Wright’s ‘geographical coverage reflects the dialect publications he consulted and the places where his correspondents lived’. Penhallurick (2009: 305) argues, however, that ‘the information about localities or speakers was probably not so accessible in the material, and neither was the *EDD* a survey in the mould of modern, synchronic linguistics’. On the other hand, given that the AusE and NfldE data were largely based on the works of Rolf Boldrewood and George Patterson, the results may show some bias towards their home dialects. In the case of AusE, the data do not reveal, however, any particular input from south-eastern dialects and London, where Boldrewood was born. This is similarly reflected in the distribution of the NfldE data where the input from the South-West is particularly noteworthy. Patterson’s ancestral Scottish origin could explain the fact that Wright localized an important amount of Scottish material to Newfoundland.

¹² Kiesling (2004: 418) also notes that ‘instead of inheriting a large number of features from a single south of England dialect, AusE reflects a levelling of most common dialects, with subsequent later changes’.

¹³ It is worth indicating that the first attestations of the vast majority of the *EDD* words examined here date from the latter half of the 1800s (see above for examples), and that many of the authors whose works Wright used to document AusE migrated to Australia during this time. By way of illustration, Hume Nisbet (1849-1923) was born in Stirling and migrated to Australia at the age of 16, whilst Arthur James Vogan (1859-1948) was born in Kent, migrated to New Zealand in 1879 and moved to Australia in the mid-1880s. John Boyle O’Reilly was Irish and transported to Western Australia in 1867.

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