

The
CONCISE
OXFORD
DICTIONARY
of
Current English

FIRST EDITED BY
H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler

EIGHTH EDITION
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Preface

THE *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is among the most famous books of the world. It is probably the best-known household dictionary despite the appearance in recent years of several rivals. In its previous seven editions, it has reached millions of users in many walks of life, who look to it for comprehensiveness and authority. It is even cited in lawsuits (though usually from old editions). It is, in fact, an institution. When I and my colleagues began the work of writing this edition we were faced, essentially, with the task of producing a dictionary for the 1990s without making it totally unrecognizable as the *Concise*. The result is a completely redesigned edition with clarity and ease of use as the paramount aims, yet retaining and enhancing the authority and thoroughness on which its reputation depends.

We have made very profound changes, especially to the structure and layout of the articles. These now have a systematic numbering of individual definitions (arranged in order of comparative familiarity), separate sections of idioms and phrases, and a greatly increased number of derivatives (routine formations in *-ly*, *-ness*, *-able*, and so on). A main entry is assigned to every defined item that is spelt as one word, and 'nesting' of items has been considerably reduced. Special conventions and abbreviations have been reduced to a minimum, and the swung dash (~) of the last four editions has been discarded. Grammatical information and collocation of words (such as the many constructions with *get* and *take*) are given as accompanying explanations and are no longer embedded in the definitions. A great deal of extra information is given on inflection (*taxi*s, *budgeted*, and so on) even where this is arguably 'regular'; and a minimum is left implied, and therefore dependent on explanations given in the Introduction. The definitions have been rewritten in clear continuous prose without dictionary 'telegraphese'. The accounts of word origins (etymologies) have been recast to eliminate speculative and postulated material and to give the user a clearer path to the ultimate sources.

Of great importance is the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA: see the *User's Guide* at 2.1), newly adopted in this edition (as in the latest editions of the smaller *Pocket* and *Little Oxford Dictionaries*) in the interests of greater precision and consistency and to enable the guidance on pronunciation to be relevant internationally. At the same time the freeing of every headword from special marks and signs further enhances the straightforwardness of presentation which underlies all the changes introduced in this edition.

The choice of vocabulary has been reconsidered and extensively revised. The criterion of currency has been rigorously applied with regard both to

individual words and to idiom, so that in general only uses that are well attested in current English are included and uses that are archaic or obsolete are included only when of special interest either because of their importance in literature (as with *e'er* and *forsooth*) or because they are sometimes still used for special effect. A great deal of new vocabulary has been added (several thousand items in all), and this falls broadly into four main areas, with considerable overlap between them.

The first is idiomatic colloquial English, as ever highly productive under many influences. This has been generously treated with the copious use of illustrative examples. The second is what may be loosely termed international English, the varieties of English in use in America, Africa, Australia, and other parts of the world (as more fully explained on p. xix). Thirdly, there are many new words adopted, often along with the things they designate, from other languages and cultures: for example, many terms from international cuisines, such as *nacho* and *tzatziki*, terms for political concepts, such as *glasnost*, and terms for religious ideas and concepts, such as *atman* and *fatwa*.

There is, finally, the vocabulary of science and technology, a growth area commensurate with the expansion of knowledge in the subjects concerned. Two subjects in particular call for mention: information technology (where, however, the new technical vocabulary surprisingly shows little sign of influencing or extending into general idiom), and environmental studies (where our growing awareness of the conditions around us compels us to take note of many new items of fundamental concern: *acid rain*, *CFC*, *global warming*, and so on). More generally, account has been taken of IUPAC nomenclature and other International Systems, such as the SI units. Formal binomial classification of plants and animals is given to support the definitions and to give them an international status.

Spelling and hyphenation have been extensively revised. Because English is a language that has an exceptional tolerance of variations in spelling (*enquire* and *inquire*, *generalize* and *generalise*, and so on) these are areas of particular difficulty to the users of a dictionary. The spellings have been revised in accordance with a critical evaluation of the evidence, which shows, for example, that *jail* is preferred to *gaol*, *inflection* prevails over *inflexion*, and *cooperate* is very widely spelt without a hyphen. With the hyphenation of compounds matters are not so straightforward. Some eighty years ago H. W. and F. G. Fowler, the editors of the original *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, complained that 'after trying hard at an early stage to arrive at some principle that should teach us when to separate, when to hyphen, and when to unite the parts of compound words, we had to abandon the attempt as hopeless, and welter in the prevailing chaos'. Although usage is still often chaotic with individual collocations spelt in any of the three ways (*race course*, *race-course*, or *racecourse*) there are discernible tendencies in more recent usage which make guidance more realistic. The wide use of computer technology in printing (especially in journalism) and in word-processing at all levels is perhaps one important

reason for the diminished use of the permanent hyphen in straightforward compounds, and there is now a marked tendency to combine into one word, especially when the elements are both of single syllables. (For further consideration of the hyphen in compounds, see Appendix VIII, § 13.) Among the many changes are *benchmark*, *birdsong*, *breadwinner*, *coalface*, *eardrum*, *figurehead*, *lawbreaker*, *nationwide*, *playgroup*, and *scriptwriter*. This is a welcome tendency, because the hitherto much overused hyphen can now enjoy an enhanced role as a syntactic link to avoid ambiguity (as in *twenty-odd people*, *a third-world conflict*, words such as *re-form* (= form again), and so on).

The need for guidance in these respects is complemented by that relating to areas of disputed and controversial usage and sensitive and offensive vocabulary. Correspondence from users of dictionaries, together with market research, shows that this is an important consideration, and we have given it much attention in the preparation of this edition. Difficulties of linguistic and grammatical usage are dealt with by a system of brief usage notes, supplemented by the designation *disp.* (= disputed) when a use is well attested but controversial. Notes are also included to give additional information not readily contained in the definitions, for example to explain the status of *broker* and *dealer* since the London Stock Exchange reforms of 1986, the change in legal terminology relating to *burglary* and *housebreaking*, and the disappearance in the UK of inland telegrams.

Far greater difficulty attends the treatment of vocabulary that is or can be offensive, either generally or to particular groups of people. All languages contain such words, and no dictionary that claims to treat the language in current use can exclude them. In this edition we have added the label *offens.* to words and uses that are offensive either directly because they offend the people they refer to or by indirect reference or association, often by historical stereotypes. Linguistic usage in such stereotypes is seldom concerned with historical truth but the use, once established, has to be explained, and I hope that by explaining them with appropriate historical comment and a clear indication of the offensiveness involved, a better awareness of their inherent distastefulness may be generated. There are of course terms that vary in the offence they cause with the manner and context in which they are used, and some (such as *pommy* and *mick*) can range in effect from the jocular or even affectionate all the way to the downright offensive. We have tried to take account of these circumstances in the individual dictionary articles, and the user should be aware of them as a general underlying factor.

Users of the *Concise* in the past have often enquired about how the dictionary is written. I have added a brief account of the book's history and the way this edition has been compiled and produced. I have also written a short article on the way English has evolved over many centuries, especially as this affects the circumstances and difficulties that attend its use today.

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A central feature of the preparation of this edition has been the in-house computer-keyboarding of the text. Mrs Anne Whear, who has been involved with the *Concise* for some years and worked on materials for the sixth and seventh editions, undertook the management of the data-capture, and has performed a remarkable service which has been crucial to the production of the text; by her sharp vigilance and keen awareness of problems she has indeed contributed substantially to its quality. I am deeply indebted to her, and also to Dr Kate Mertes, who has given invaluable assistance in keyboarding and in organizing the distribution of materials in the proofreading and consultancy stages, and to Mrs Alison Allen, who has also contributed to the keyboarding.

For provision of an excellent computer program and support service I must acknowledge Compulexis Ltd., and in particular Mr Henning Madsen, its managing director; Mr Jerry Freestone; and Mr Simon Mills. They not only provided us with first-class materials, but stimulated a lively reconsideration of many aspects of the editorial work that has been of great benefit to the eventual text. It is a pleasure to be able to record at last my appreciation of their most important role. I must also thank Mr Ronald McIntosh, who put his considerable experience and wisdom at our disposal in the early stages. The work of setting and producing the

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I owe a very special debt to my predecessor, Dr J. B. Sykes, editor of the sixth and seventh editions of the *Concise*. Despite the many changes and additions introduced in the eighth edition, it continues to benefit from his scholarship and his profound understanding of language. I am also much indebted to Dr R. W. Burchfield, formerly Chief Editor of the Oxford English Dictionaries, for his continued interest in the work of this dictionary.

R.E.A.

February 1990

English over Fifteen Centuries

1. Fifteen centuries of English cannot easily be summarized in about the same number of paragraphs, and this account is intended to pick out features on the landscape of language rather than to describe the scene in detail. This may afford some perspective to the information given in the dictionary, and help to make more sense of the strange and often unpredictable ways in which words seem to behave.

Origins

2.1 English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, a vast group with many branches, thought to be derived from a common ancestor-language called Proto-Indo-European. The words we use in English are derived from a wide range of sources, mostly within this family. The earliest sources are Germanic, Norse, and Romanic; later, they are the languages of Europe more generally; and most recently, with the growth and decline of the British Empire and the rapid development of communications, they have been worldwide.

2.2 It is difficult to be sure exactly what we mean by an 'English' word. Most obviously, words are English if they can be traced back to the Anglo-Saxons, Germanic peoples who settled in Britain from the fifth century and eventually established several kingdoms together corresponding roughly to present-day England. From this time are derived many common words such as *eat, drink, speak, work, house, door, man, woman, husband, wife*. They displaced the Celtic peoples, whose speech survives in Scottish and Irish Gaelic, in Welsh, and in the local languages of two extremities of the British Isles, Manx (in the Isle of Man) and Cornish. Little Celtic influence remains in English, except in names of places such as *Brecon, Carlisle, and London*, and in many river names, such as *Avon, Thames, and Trent*. This fact may be attributed to a lack of cultural interaction, the Celts being forced back into the fringes of the British Isles by the Anglo-Saxon invaders, although there must have been some social integration.

3. Anglo-Saxon Britain continued to have contact with the Roman Empire, of which Britain had formerly been a part, and with Latin, which was the official language throughout the Empire and survived as a language of ritual (and for a time also of learning and communication) in the Western Christian Church. Christianity was brought to England with the mission of St Augustine in AD 597. The Christianized Anglo-Saxons built churches and monasteries, and there were considerable advances in

art and learning. At this time English was enriched by many words from Latin, some of which are still in use, such as *angel*, *disciple*, *martyr*, and *shrine*. Other words were derived from Latin via the Germanic languages, for example *copper*, *mint* (in the sense of coinage), *pound*, *sack*, and *tile*, and others were ultimately of oriental origin, for example *camel* and *pepper*.

4.1 The next important influence on the vocabulary of English came from the Danish and other Scandinavian invaders of the ninth and tenth centuries, collectively called Vikings. They occupied much of the east side of England, and under Cnut (Canute) ruled the whole country for a time. The Danes had much more contact with the Anglo-Saxons than did the Celts, and their period of occupation has left its mark in the number of Scandinavian (Old Norse) words taken into English. Because Old Norse was also a Germanic language (of a different branch from English) many words were similar to the Anglo-Saxon ones, and it is difficult to establish the extent of the Old Norse influence. However, a number of Norse words are identifiable and are still in use, such as *call*, *take*, and *law*, names of parts of the body such as *leg*, and other basic words such as *egg*, *root*, and *window*. Many more Norse words are preserved in some dialects of the east side of England, in place-names such as those ending in *-thwaite* and *-thorpe* (both meaning 'settlement') and in *-by* (*Grimsby*, *Rugby*, *Whitby*, and so on), and in street-names ending in *-gate* (from the Old Norse *gata* meaning 'street') such as *Coppergate* in York.

4.2 In the Saxon kingdom of Wessex, King Alfred (871-99) and his successors did much to keep English alive by using it (rather than Latin) as the language of education and learning; by the tenth century there was a considerable amount of English prose and verse literature. Saxon and Danish kingdoms existed side by side for several generations, and there was much linguistic interaction. One very important effect on English was the gradual disappearance of many word-endings, or inflections, leading to a simpler grammar. This was partly because the stems of English and Norse words were often very close in form (for example, *stān* and *steinn*, meaning 'stone'), and only the inflections differed as an impediment to mutual understanding. So forms such as *stāne*, *stānes*, etc., began to be simplified and, eventually, eliminated. The process continued for hundreds of years into Middle English (see below).

The Norman Conquest

5. In 1066 William of Normandy defeated the English king, Harold, at the Battle of Hastings; he was crowned King of England on Christmas Day. The arrival of the French-speaking Normans as a ruling nobility brought a transforming Romance influence on the language. The Romance languages (chiefly French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian) have their roots in the spoken or 'vulgar' Latin that continued in use

until about AD 600. For two hundred years after the Norman Conquest, French (in its regional Norman form) was the language of the aristocracy, the lawcourts, and the Church hierarchy in England. Gradually the Normans were integrated into English society (for example, by inter-marriage), and by the reign of Henry II (1154-89) many of the aristocracy spoke English. During these years many French words were adopted into English. Some were connected with law and government, such as *justice*, *council*, and *tax*, and some were abstract terms such as *liberty*, *charity*, and *conflict*. The Normans also had an important effect on the spelling of English words. The combination of letters *cw-*, for example, was standardized in the Norman manner to *qu-*, so that *cwēn* became *queen* and *cwic* became *quik* (later *quick*).

6. This mixture of conquering peoples and their languages—Germanic, Scandinavian, and Romance—has had a decisive effect on the forms of words in modern English. The three elements make up the basic stock of English vocabulary, and different practices of putting sounds into writing are reflected in each. The different grammatical characteristics of each element can be seen in the structure and endings of many words. Many of the variable endings such as *-ant* and *-ent*, *-er* and *-or*, *-able* and *-ible* exist because the Latin words on which they are based belonged to different classes of verbs and nouns, each of which had a different ending. For example, *important* comes from the Latin verb *portare*, meaning 'to carry' (which belongs to one class or conjugation) while *repellent* comes from the Latin verb *pellere*, meaning 'to drive' (which belongs to another). *Capable* comes from a Latin word ending in *-abilis*, while *sensible* comes from one ending in *-ibilis*, and so on.

Middle English

7. Middle English, as the English of c.1100-1500 is called, emerged as the spoken and written form of the language under these influences. The use of French diminished, especially after King John (1199-1216) lost possession of Normandy in 1204, severing an important Anglo-French link. Many Anglo-Saxon words continued in use, while others disappeared altogether: for example, *niman* was replaced by the Old Norse (Scandinavian) *taka* (meaning 'take'), and the Old English *sige* was replaced by a word derived from Old French, *victory*. Other Old English words that disappeared are *ād* (disease), *lof* (praise), and *lyft* (air: compare German *Luft*). Sometimes new and old words continued in use side by side, in some cases on a roughly equal footing, and in others with a distinction in meaning (as with *doom* and *judgement*, and *stench* and *smell*). This has produced pairs of words which are both in use today, such as *shut* and *close*, and *buy* and *purchase*, in which the second word of each pair is Romance in origin. Sometimes an even larger overlap was produced, as when *commence* (from the French) was added to the existing Old English

begin and *start*. (The original meaning of *start* was 'leap', 'move suddenly', which is still current though no longer the main sense.)

8. Hundreds of the Romance words were short simple words that would now be distinguished with difficulty from Old English words if their origin were not known: for example, *bar*, *cry*, *fool*, *mean*, *pity*, *stuff*, *touch*, and *tender*. Others, such as *commence* and *purchase*, have more formal connotations. The result was a mixture of types of words, which is a feature especially of modern English. For many meanings we now have a choice of less and more formal words, and the more formal ones in some cases are used only in very specific circumstances. For example, the word *vendor* is used instead of *seller* only in the context of buying or selling property. Many technical words derived from or ultimately from Latin, such as *estop* and *usucaption*, survive only in legal contexts, to the great confusion of the layman. These levels of formality are reflected in the dictionary's identification of usage level in particular cases as colloquial, formal, and so on, more fully explained in the *Guide to the Use of the Dictionary* at 9.3.

Printing

9. There was much regional variation in the spelling and pronunciation of Middle English, although a good measure of uniformity was imposed by the development of printing from the fifteenth century. This uniformity was based as much on practical considerations of the printing process as on what seemed most 'correct' or suitable. It became common practice, for example, to add a final *e* to words to fill a line of print. The printers—many of whom were foreign—used rules from their own languages, especially Dutch and Flemish, when setting English into type. William Caxton, the first English printer (1422–91), exercised an important but not always beneficial influence. The unnecessary insertion of *h* in *ghost*, for example, is due to Caxton (who learned the business of printing on the Continent), and the change had its effect on other words such as *ghastly* and (perhaps) *ghetto*. In general, Caxton used the form of English prevalent in the south-east of England, although the East Midland dialect was the more extensive. This choice, together with the growing importance of London as the English capital, gave the dialect of the South-East a special importance that survives to the present day.

Pronunciation

10. At roughly the same time as the early development of printing, the pronunciation of English was also undergoing major changes. The main change, which began in the fourteenth century during the lifetime of the poet Chaucer, was in the pronunciation of vowel sounds. The so-called 'great vowel shift' resulted in the reduction of the number of long vowels (for example, in *deed* as distinct from *dead*) from seven to the five which

we know today (discernible in the words *bean*, *barn*, *born*, *boon*, and *burn*). It also affected the pronunciation of other vowels: the word *life*, for example, was once pronounced as we now pronounce *leaf*, and *name* was pronounced as two syllables to rhyme with *farmer*. In many cases, as with *name*, the form of the word did not change; and this accounts for many of the 'silent' vowels at the ends of words. The result of these developments was a growing difference between what was spoken and what was written.

The Renaissance

11. The rediscovery in Europe of the culture and history of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds exercised a further Romanizing influence on English. This began at the end of the Middle Ages and blossomed in the European Renaissance of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. Scholarship flourished, and the language used by scholars and writers was Latin. During the Renaissance words such as *arena*, *dexterity*, *excision*, *genius*, *habitual*, *malignant*, *specimen*, and *stimulus* came into use in English. They are familiar and useful words but their Latin origins sometimes make them awkward to handle, as, for example, when we use *arena*, *genius*, and *stimulus* in the plural. There was also a tendency in the Renaissance to try to emphasize the Greek or Latin origins of words when writing them. This accounts for the *b* in *debt* (the earlier English word was *det*; in Latin it is *debitum*), the *l* in *fault* (earlier *faut*; the Latin source is *fallere* fail), the *s* in *isle* (earlier *ile*; *insula* in Latin), and the *p* in *receipt* (earlier *receit*; *recepta* in Latin). Some words that had gone out of use were reintroduced, usually with changed meanings, for example *artificial*, *disc* (originally the same as *dish*), and *fastidious*.

Later influences

12. The development of machines and technology in Britain from the eighteenth century onwards, followed by the electronic revolution of our own times, has also played a part in continuing the influence of Latin. New technical terms have come into use, and they have often been formed on Latin or Greek source-words because these can convey precise ideas in easily combinable forms, for example *bacteriology*, *microscope*, *radioactive*, and *semiconductor*. Combinations of Germanic elements are also used, as in *software*, *splashdown*, and *take-off*. This process has sometimes produced odd mixtures, such as *television*, which is half Greek and half Latin, and *microchip*, which is half Greek and half Germanic.

13.1 In recent times English speakers have come into contact with people from other parts of the world, through trade, the growth of the British Empire, and improved communications generally. This contact has produced a rich supply of new words that are often strange in form. India, where the British first had major dealings in the seventeenth

century, is the source of words such as *bungalow*, *jodhpurs*, and *khaki*. Usually these words have been altered or assimilated to make them look more natural in English (e.g. *bungalow* from Gujarati *bangalo*). Examples from other parts of the world are *harem* and *mufti* (from Arabic), *bazaar* (from Persian), *kiosk* (from Turkish), and *anorak* (from Eskimo). From European countries we have acquired *balcony* (from Italian), *envelope* (from French), and *yacht* (from Dutch).

13.2 Thousands of such words, though not English in the Germanic sense, are regarded as fully absorbed into English. In addition, there are many unnaturalized words and phrases that are used in English contexts but are generally regarded as 'foreign', and are conventionally printed in italics to distinguish them when used in an English context. Very many of these are French, for example *accouchement* (childbirth), *bagarre* (a scuffle), *bonhomie* (geniality), *flânerie* (idleness), and *rangé* (domesticated), but other languages are represented, as with *echt* (genuine) and *macht-politik* (power politics) from German, and *mañana* (tomorrow) from Spanish.

14.1 Usage often recognizes the difficulties of absorbing words from various sources by assimilating them into forms that are already familiar. The word *picturesque*, which came into use in the eighteenth century, is a compromise between its French source *pittoresque* and the existing Middle English word *picture*, to which it is obviously related. The English word *cockroach* is a conversion of its Spanish source-word *cucaracha* into a pair of familiar words *cock* (a bird) and *roach* (a fish). Cockroaches have nothing to do with cocks or roaches, and the association is simply a matter of linguistic convenience.

14.2 Problems of inflection arise with words taken from other languages. The ending *-i* in particular is very unnatural in English, and usage varies between *-is* and *-ies* in the plural. A similar difficulty occurs with the many adopted nouns ending in *-o*, some of which come from the Italian (*solo*), some from Spanish (*armadillo*), and some from Latin (*hero*); here usage varies between *-os* and *-oes*. Verbs often need special treatment, as for example *bivouac* (from French, and before that probably from Swiss German) which needs a *k* in the past tense (*bivouacked*, not *bivouaced* which might be mispronounced), and *ski* (from Norwegian) where usage allows both *ski'd* and *skied* as past forms (though neither is satisfactory). In this dictionary extensive help is given with these and other difficulties of inflection.

Dictionaries

15.1 One obvious consequence of the development of printing in the fifteenth century was that it allowed the language to be recorded in glossaries and dictionaries, and this might be expected to have had a considerable effect on the way words were used and spelt. However,

listing all the words in the language systematically in alphabetical order with their spellings and meanings is a relatively recent idea. There was nothing of the sort in Shakespeare's time, for example. In 1580, when Shakespeare was sixteen, a schoolmaster named William Bullokar published a manual for the 'ease, speed, and perfect reading and writing of English', and he called for the writing of an English dictionary. Such a dictionary, the work of Robert Cawdrey (another schoolmaster), was not published until 1604. Like the dictionaries that followed in quick succession (including Bullokar's own *English Expositor*), its purpose was described as being for the understanding of 'hard words'. It was not until the eighteenth century that dictionaries systematically listed all the words in general use at the time regardless of how 'easy' or 'hard' they were; the most notable of these were compiled by Nathaniel Bailey (1721) and, especially, Samuel Johnson (1755). They were partly a response to a call, expressed by Swift, Pope, Addison, and other writers, for the language to be fixed and stabilized, and for the establishment of an English Academy to monitor it. None of these hopes as such were realized, but the dictionaries played an important role in settling the form and senses of English words.

15.2 The systematic investigation and recording of words in all their aspects and on a historical basis is first and exclusively represented in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, begun by the Scottish schoolmaster James A. H. Murray in 1879. This describes historically the spelling, inflection, origin, and meaning of words, and is supported by citations from printed literature and other sources as evidence from Old English to the present day. To take account of more recent changes and developments in the language, a four-volume *Supplement* was added to the work from 1972 to 1986, and a new edition integrating the original dictionary and its *Supplement* appeared in 1989. Because of its depth of scholarship, the *Oxford English Dictionary* forms a major basis of all English dictionaries produced since. Smaller concise and other household dictionaries that aim at recording the main vocabulary in current use began to appear early this century and in recent years the number has grown remarkably.

15.3 Dictionaries of current English, as distinct from historical dictionaries, generally record the language as it is being used at the time, and with usage constantly changing the distinction between 'right' and 'wrong' is sometimes difficult to establish. Unlike French, which is guided by the rulings of the *Académie Française*, English is not monitored by any single authority; established usage is the principal criterion. One result of this is that English tolerates many more alternative spellings than other languages. The alternatives are based on certain patterns of word formation and variation in the different languages through which they have passed before reaching ours.

15.4 It should also be remembered that the smaller dictionaries, such as this one, provide a selection, based on currency, of a recorded stock of

over half a million words; that is to say, they represent about 15-20 per cent of what is attested to exist by printed sources and other materials. Dictionaries therefore differ in the selection they make, beyond the core of vocabulary and idiom that can be expected to be found in any dictionary.

Dialect

16. Within the British Isles, regional forms and dialects, with varying accents and usage, have continued to exist since the Middle Ages, although in recent times, especially with the emergence of mass communications, they have been in decline. A special feature of a dialect is its vocabulary of words (often for everyday things) that are understood only locally. It is not possible in a small dictionary to treat this kind of vocabulary in any detail, but its influence can be seen in the origins of words that have achieved a more general currency, for example *boss-eyed* (from a dialect word *boss* meaning 'miss', 'bungle'), *fad*, *scrounge* (from dialect *scrunge* meaning 'steal'), and *shoddy*. Far more information on dialect words is available in *The English Dialect Dictionary* (ed. J. Wright, London, 1898-1905), in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and in numerous glossaries published by dialect societies.

English Worldwide

17.1 Usage in modern times is greatly influenced by rapid worldwide communications, by newspapers and, in particular, by television and radio. Speakers of British English are brought into daily contact with alternative forms of the language, especially American English. This influence is often regarded as unsettling or harmful but it has had a considerable effect on the vocabulary, idiom, and spelling of British English, and continues to do so. Among the many words and idioms in use in British English, usually without any awareness of or concern about their American origin, are *OK*, *to fall for*, *to fly off the handle*, *round trip*, and *to snoop*. American English often has more regular spellings, for example the substitution of *-er* for *-re* in words such as *theatre*, the standardization of *-or* and *-our* to *-or* in words such as *harbour*, and the use of *-se* in forms such as *defense* and *license*, where British English either has *-ce* only or both forms (for example, *a practice* but *to practise*).

17.2 English is now used all over the world; as a result, there are many varieties of English, with varying accents, vocabulary, and usage. In addition to British and American English there are varieties in use in Southern Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and elsewhere. These varieties have an equal claim to be regarded as 'English' and, although learners of English may look to British English as the centre of an English-speaking world, or British and American English as the two poles of such a world, it is very important that dictionaries should take

account of English overseas, especially as it affects that in use in Britain. The process is a strengthening and enriching one, and is the mark of a living and flourishing language.

Further reading

18. This survey has had to be brief, and restricted to those aspects of English that are of immediate concern to the users of a dictionary. Those who are interested in exploring further will find a host of books on the history and development of English. Good general accounts are A. C. Baugh and T. Cable, *A History of the English Language* (3rd edn., New Jersey and London, 1978) and B. M. H. Strang, *A History of English* (London, 1970). At a more popular level, and more up to date on recent trends, are R. W. Burchfield, *The English Language* (Oxford, 1985) and R. McCrum *et al.*, *The Story of English* (London, 1986). *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (ed. T. McArthur, Oxford, forthcoming) contains much that will interest those who want to know more about the English of today and its place among the languages of the world.