

The Survey of English Dialects

The internationally renowned Survey of English Dialects (SED) remains the only systematic survey to have been carried out into the dialects of England. The notion of a linguistic survey took root in the 1930s with the establishment of a committee at the Second International Congress of Phonetic Sciences in London in 1935, but initial work was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. After the ceasing of hostilities Harold Orton, a member of the original committee and now working in the Department of English Language and Medieval English Literature at The University of Leeds, and Eugen Dieth, Professor of English Language at the University of Zürich, felt it had become even more crucial to conduct a survey into English usage as they sensed that the changing social landscape of post-war Britain - particularly the likelihood of increased social and geographical mobility and more widespread access to the new broadcast media - would drastically alter the linguistic landscape.

After a series of pilot studies to establish methodology, Orton and Dieth finally settled on a questionnaire as the basis of the survey. This questionnaire is published in its entirety in *Survey of English Dialects : An Introduction* (Orton et al, 1962). The questionnaire features over 1300 questions designed to elicit responses from informants which it was felt would best give access to the dialect of a chosen locality. The questions are arranged into nine books, covering such topics as the farm, the human body and social activities and were chosen so that the responses to them would shed light on the lexical, phonological and morphological diversity of spoken English. It was hoped the results would enable linguists to produce a linguistic atlas of England and trace the historical development of the language. The questionnaire was used in conjunction with a number of diagrams and pictures, but the ensuing interview naturally led to passages of spontaneous conversation, which the fieldworkers also duly noted. The questionnaire, however, formed the central part of the interview with an informant in order to ensure the data was comparable between sites and amongst fieldworkers.

Having finalised details of the questionnaire, a team of fieldworkers was assembled and a

network of localities emerged. The selection of the locations was based on a number of criteria: almost all of the localities were rural communities, as it was felt that traditional dialect is best preserved in isolated areas. Preference was given to small communities with a historically stable population, and areas of known dialect contact were avoided. Sites were also chosen to reflect a geographic spread and consideration was given to physical features, such as hills and rivers, which might at one time have formed natural dialect boundaries.

The data was collected over an eleven year period from 1950 to 1961. Each fieldworker undertook preliminary research into a chosen locality in order to establish the presence or otherwise of suitable informants. The criteria for selecting informants were also crucial to maintain the ultimate goal of comparability. In most cases two or three informants were used and more males were interviewed than females as there is a considerable body of evidence which suggests that males are statistically more likely to employ the vernacular. It was felt that older inhabitants with a long-established presence in the community (preferably born of native parents) were the repository of the traditional dialect of a given speech community.

The data itself was recorded by individual fieldworkers who had received training under the guidance of Harold Orton. Informants' answers to the questionnaire and any other additional information were written down on recording sheets using a narrow phonetic script. These sheets were then collated and bound into the form of a notebook - one for each location - and the originals, along with a carbon copy are currently held at The Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture (LAVC), which is housed in the Leeds University Library. As a result of advances in audio technology during the fifties, it became increasingly possible and indeed desirable to make a sound recording with an informant and thus several of the sites were subsequently revisited and either an original informant or an informant with a similar profile was recorded, a process which was completed in 1974. The original open reel tapes, gramophone discs and recently digitised recordings are held within the LAVC.

The data gathered by the fieldworkers was analysed by Orton's editorial team in the former Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies at Leeds University. This was an ongoing process during the fifties and sixties and answers to the specific questions were published between 1962 and 1971 in four volumes (each in three parts) entitled *Survey of English Dialects: The Basic Material, Vols. I-IV* (Orton et al). The material contained within these volumes continues to be used by regional, social and historical linguists worldwide, and has led to a number of dedicated publications, most notably, *The Linguistic Atlas of England* (Orton et al, 1978), *Word Maps: A Dialect Atlas of England* (Upton & Widdowson, 1987) and *Survey of English Dialects: The Dictionary and Grammar* (Upton et al, 1994). In addition, there remains the hitherto unexploited additional material, referred to in the *SED Introduction* as "incidental material", which arose out of the natural conversation between informant and fieldworker alluded to earlier. During the editorial process it soon became apparent that this incidental material (IM) was both abundant and important, though the nature and indeed the amount of information varies significantly from fieldworker to fieldworker and from locality to locality.

SED Incidental Material

According to the *SED Introduction* (Orton et al, 1962: 17) the left hand side of the fieldworkers' recording sheets was used to note an informant's response to the questionnaire, whilst the right hand side was to be used for any supplementary information arising from spontaneous conversation with the informant. Reference is made in the Introduction (Orton et al, 1962: 22) to the ultimate objective of publishing the information contained within this IM in four Companion Volumes, to supplement the *Basic Material Volumes I-IV* (BM) although sufficient funds were never forthcoming. The stated aim was to use the proposed Companion Volumes to focus on the development in each locality of the Middle English (ME) sounds and record any other significant features or usage. Much of the IM is therefore of purely linguistic interest, although there is also a good deal of reference to local customs, traditions and folklore as well as several sketches made by the fieldworkers to illustrate a particular issue or object.

In the accompanying document an attempt has been made to divide the material into discrete categories, although there are many instances where entries could conceivably belong to two or more categories. It seems an appropriate system would cover the following:

- **Language**

This includes lexical items and phrases of which there is no record in the BM, e.g. in 1Nb4 p73 the fieldworker notes the informant's use of the word *bleary* [@ bI@RI de@]. The editor has subsequently quoted a definition in support of this usage from the English Dialect Dictionary (Wright, 1898 - 1905) *bleary* 'bleak, windy, cold, showery'. Also included here are examples of individual morphological and syntactic issues, such as irregular inflections of verbs not covered by the questionnaire, non-standard syntactic constructions, or unusual word order. Thus in 1Nb4 p99 there is an instance of *telled* [tEld] for *told* and in 3Du4 p19 *we haven't could* [wI av=nt kUd i:t It] for *we haven't been able to*. There are also a number of entries in this section to illustrate connected speech processes or phonological phenomena, the salience of which might not be apparent from individual entries in the BM. A good example of this is the frequent tendency amongst many of the informants in the West Riding to substitute [r/] for /t/ in a specific phonetic environment, e.g. 6Y24 p37 *put it in and let it boil* [pUr/It In @n lEr/It bOI].

This category also encompasses the "collecting points" referred to in the SED *Introduction* (Orton et al, 1962: 21). These collecting points are often, but not always, additional examples of a linguistic phenomenon to support or contradict an informant's response to a specific question and are therefore collected at the point where this information is most relevant, e.g. in 1Nb1 p41 the space next to the informant's response to question V.1.1 *house* [hu:s] contains a series of other instances where the speaker used the target word. At the same time this has been used as an appropriate assembly point for examples of words featuring the ME long u: vowel in a closed syllable. In other cases a space in the IM or frequently the back of one of the recording sheets is used to gather information relating to informants' realisations of the ME vowels or other specifically

local phonological or morphological phenomena, e.g. in 2Cu5 p52v there is a collecting point for examples of H-dropping and instances of hypercorrect [h].

- **Custom and Belief**

This includes references to local culture and heritage, calendar customs, sayings and proverbs, superstitions and traditional remedies or simple anecdotal information about the locality's traditional way of life, e.g. in 1Nb5 p78 the informant talks about traditional Easter pastimes and makes reference to *jauping* [dZa:pIn] *the pace egg*. The fieldworker provides both a sketch and a brief description of what the informant means and the technique involved in the game, whilst the editor refers to supporting evidence in the English Dialect Dictionary (EDD). At the present time it has not been possible to establish whether any of the accompanying recordings contain additional information about such events or traditions although it may behove future researchers to use this reference point to gain access to the recordings.

- **Material Culture**

This category includes foodways and references to traditional working techniques and therefore encompasses the many sketches produced by the fieldworkers to illustrate particular artefacts. Much of the material here is either visual or descriptive and tends to be the fieldworker's own sketch or brief summary of an informant's response, e.g. in 1Nb2 p48 the fieldworker paraphrases the informant's distinction between a *dairy* [de:ORI] and a *milk-house* [mIlkhu:s], whilst in 1Nb3 p18 the fieldworker sketches the differences between two types of latch: the *sneck* [snEk] and the *snib* [snIb].

- **Birth, Marriage and Death**

This is the holding point for any information relating to birth, marriage and death. It includes any reference to church ceremonies, such as christenings, weddings and burials, and traditional folk customs surrounding these events, e.g. in 3Du5 p66 the fieldworker notes in detail an old local custom after the birth of a baby, concerning superstitions surrounding the mother and the use of symbolic gifts to bring luck.

- **Traditional Song, Dance, Music and Drama**

This category features any reference to traditional songs and dance, popular music and folk drama, e.g. in 2Cu4 p71 the informant describes the custom of the Easter Jolly Boys: people used to parade round dressed as various traditional characters - Miser Brown Boys, Lord Nelson, Toss Pot etc. - and collect eggs or money.

Recording Conventions used by the Current Researcher

For the purposes of the current research project various conventions have been adopted to make reference to particular pieces of information. Each individual notebook contains all the information pertaining to one location in the SED and is identified by a reference containing a number and an abbreviation which refers to the county, followed by a number which refers to the actual site.

- **1Nb1** refers to county number one (Northumberland) location 1 (Lowick), whilst **2Cu3** refers to county number 2 (Cumberland) location 3 (Brigham).

This reflects the practice of the SED and the current cataloguing procedure of the LAVC. As the interviews with informants did not always proceed chronologically in the order of the questionnaire, the fieldworkers' notebooks often contain two page numbers - one used at the time by the fieldworker and the other used when the sheets were collated and bound together. The former number (either hand-written or stamped) appears in the top right hand corner of the recording sheet. The latter is generally stamped and usually appears below the former, just to the right of the space reserved for noting the Book number of the questionnaire on the recording sheets. It is this latter number which will be used in referring to any entry in the notebook.

- **1Nb1 p25** refers to page 25 of the Lowick notebook.
- **2Cu5 p52v** refers to the reverse, i.e. verso of page 52 of the Hunsonby notebook.

Any reference to a target word taken from the SED questionnaire or a word or phrase elicited from an informant during spontaneous conversation will be written in italic script, with the phonetic realisation attached in square brackets if it is felt the actual utterance is of interest. A definition or more standard word will also be provided where necessary. The abbreviation (EDD) indicates a note made by the fieldworker to confirm an entry in the English Dialect Dictionary, whilst (OED) indicates that the current researcher has been able to find a reference in the Oxford English Dictionary (<http://dictionary.oed.com>). The symbol (?) indicates that the researcher is uncertain about the word or has found no other corroborating evidence. The phonetic entry will be transcribed using SAMPA and X-SAMPA in order to ensure accurate electronic transfer of the information should this be desirable.

- **1Nb1 p3 wig (EDD) [wIgz] = teacake**, illustrates that the informant for Lowick used the word *wigs* to denote teacakes and that this definition is confirmed by the EDD.

A reference to a particular orthographic issue will be identified using angled brackets and the actual phonetic realisation will be indicated using square brackets. Angled brackets will also be used to identify the collecting points for content relating to ME issues and any English phonemes or consonant clusters.

- **1Nb3 p5 <wh->** refers to the local realisation of words which begin orthographically with the letters <wh>, e.g. *whistling* [WUsIIn].
- **1Nb1 p91 ME <o:2n>** refers to the collecting point for examples of the local realisations of words which in Middle English featured a long o:2 (or long a:) vowel followed by an alveolar nasal, e.g. *stone* [st2:n].
- **3Du1 p9v <cl-> → [tl]** refers to the collecting point for examples of the

tendency for underlying /kl/ to surface as [tl], e.g. *o'clock* [ˈtɒlQk].

Unfortunately due to the nature of English orthography this might mean the notation is not necessarily inclusive of all the relevant tokens. Orthographic <cl-> (phonemic /kl/), for instance, should be taken to encompass words such as *tackle* and *ankle*, whilst the holding point listed here as orthographic suffix <-er> (i.e. word final /-@/) should be interpreted as including words such as *doctor* and *colour*, and in some cases even words like *barrow* and *follow*. Although this might not adhere to current phonetic transcription conventions the researcher feels that it is a more accurate reflection of the editorial focus of the SED notebooks. It is also to be hoped that this provides a much more unified approach, avoiding a confusing combination of notations.

Abbreviations & Symbols used by current researcher

C	consonant
V	vowel
ME	Middle English
<i>italics</i>	lexical item
<>	orthographic
<x~y>	orthographically represented by either x or y
x ~ y	x occurs as frequently as y
x > y	x occurs more frequently than y
[x]	actual phonetic realisation is x
[xˑ]	x is half-long
[x:]	x is long
[x~y]	phonetically realised by either x or y
#	word or syllable final
→	becomes
=	means
+	followed by
C + x	word with consonant coda followed by x
V + x	word with vowel coda followed by x

x + C	x followed by word with consonant onset
x + V	x followed by word with vowel onset
<Vx>	vowel followed by x word internally
<xV>	x followed by vowel word internally
<Cx>	consonant followed by x word internally
<xC>	x followed by consonant word internally
<VxV>	x is word medial and intervocalic

Editorial Conventions of the SED (Six Northern Counties and Man)

Editorial corrections or amendments to the notebooks were made in red ink, e.g. in notebook INb2 p77 [fO^R:nI@n] (*forenoon*) has been added in red alongside [f9:nI@n] for the informant's response to question VII.3.15, which was designed to elicit the word used for *morning*.

Many of the entries in the IM are instances of the fieldworker noting, during the course of normal conversation, an expression or morphological / phonological phenomenon relevant to a different part of the questionnaire. During the editorial process these items were underlined in red (or pink) crayon and a reference to their specific relevance for the questionnaire is made in pencil above the entry, e.g. in notebook INb1 p5 [bIg^{II.4.5} jInz^{II.4.5} @n II^{VII.8.20}]=l jInz] is noted in the IM. The pencil reference [bIg^{II.4.5} jInz^{II.4.5}] locates this information as relevant to question II.4.5, which was designed to elicit the response *big ones*, whilst the reference [II^{VII.8.20}]=l] relates this information to question VII.8.20, which was designed to elicit the response *little*. Most of the underscoring is of an unbroken straight line, although in some books there are occasional examples of wavy underscoring. Having spent some time considering whether the two styles represent a different linguistic or editorial focus, a brief consultation with fieldworker Stanley Ellis left the researcher feeling it might simply reflect different editors, which is also borne out by handwriting discrepancies.

Any material drawn from the IM and subsequently published is prefaced in the BM by a

superscript ^o and the informant is identified by a superscript number, e.g. Volume 1 BM Part 1, p55: in response to the question designed to elicit the word for *paddock* (question I.1.10), the informant for 1Nb5 said *garth* [gɑ^R:T], which is duly entered in the BM. Subsequently the word *close* [kl2:s] was used in conversation by a different informant for the same location, so this is entered in the BM as [°kl2:s¹] which indicates that informant number 1 for this site used this word during the course of normal conversation, rather than in response to a specific question.

In addition to the underscored entries in the IM a number of pages of the notebooks contain pencil notes. These are examples of the “collecting points” referred to in the *SED Introduction* (Orton et al, 1962: 21) and can be found either in the right hand side of the notebooks, or occasionally on the reverse of the sheets. These were established to collate all the IM which referred to a particular issue, e.g. in INb1 p5 [lEt D@m hE D@ WUp] is noted in the IM and other examples of the local informants’ realisations of words with orthographic <wh> have been added in pencil. The references next to these pencil notes refer not to a location in the published BM, rather to the point in the recordings where the utterance was noted by the fieldworker, e.g. in INb1 (Lowick) p5 the pencil note [WEn VIII.6.3²] indicates that this information is recorded by the fieldworker in the notebook at the point where informant number 2 was asked to respond to question VIII.6.3. This is confirmed by the entry on page 90 of the same notebook.

Editorial Conventions of the SED (West Midland Counties onwards)

There seems to have been a slight shift in both editorial procedure and editorial focus after the publication in 1962 of BM Volume 1. It is unclear what precipitated this change of approach, but the nature of the changes leads one to suspect that there was a drive towards completing the publication of the subsequent volumes of the BM and less emphasis placed on holding information relating to peripheral aspects of the IM. This is confirmed by the editorial note on the inside cover of several of the notebooks for the Southern Counties, e.g. 37D1: “Material extracted for Basic Vols. only. Material for Companion Vols. indicated by red underlining”. In some cases there are also heavy red

pencil dots to indicate a particularly interesting lexical item which could not be published in the BM.

As with the notebooks for the Northern Counties, a reference elicited during spontaneous conversation but relating specifically to the questionnaire continues to be cross-referenced in pencil by the editor to the appropriate point in the BM. Thus we find in notebook 7Ch3 p1 [DI jY:st@^{IX.4.15} bI stUd=n Qn^{VII.4.7} lEgz]. The pencil reference [jY:st@^{IX.4.15}] is, as previously, above the entry and locates this information as relevant to question IX.4.15, which was designed to elicit the response *used to*, whilst the reference [Qn^{VII.4.7}] relates this information to question VII.4.7, which was designed to elicit the response *on*. This mirrors the procedure noted above. Likewise entries in pencil at various collecting points contain a reference next to them, which again refers to the point in the recordings where the utterance was noted by the fieldworker.

However, certain phenomena, which for the Northern Counties had been held within the notebook itself appear to have been transferred instead to “recording sheets”. Although some of these recording sheets also exist for certain localities within the Northern Counties (completed copies of sheet 6 remain loose within most of the notebooks), there is no record of their content within the notebooks themselves. From SED 7 (Cheshire) through to SED 40 (Sussex), however, all the recording sheets remain intact and are located within the LAVC. There are six such sheets per locality and any information transferred to them is cross-referenced within the notebooks accordingly. The complete entry in 7Ch3 p1 therefore reads [DI^{sh3} jY:st@^{IX.4.15} bI^{sh6} stUd=n Qn^{VII.4.7} lEgz]. The entry [DI^{sh3}] denotes that this information has been transferred to recording sheet 3: the holding point for information relating to pronouns, whilst [bI^{sh6}] appears on recording sheet 6: the collecting point for various forms of the verb *to be*. As a result of this there are fewer collecting points retained within the notebooks themselves and future researchers might wish to use the books in conjunction with the recording sheets. The focus of the six recording sheets can be summarised as follows:

- Sheet 1: ME vowel sounds

- Sheet 2: ME vowel sounds (continued)
- Sheet 3: personal, possessive and emphatic & reflexive pronouns
- Sheet 4: relative pronouns, articles, prepositions, auxiliaries & modal auxiliaries
- Sheet 5: strong verbs, *to go*, treatment of <h> and specifically local phenomena
- Sheet 6: *to be*

Sheets 1 and 2 have not been filled in for any of the sites and several of the boxes on sheets 4 and 5 are crossed through with the entry “red.”, presumably meaning redundant. Thus although the information within the IM for these localities is as varied and as useful as for the Northern section, the editorial process was not as comprehensive and focuses almost exclusively on data for publication in the BM. An attempt has therefore been made to compile a list of page references in the following document of any repeated incidence of specifically local phenomena.

References

- Orton, H. *Survey of English Dialects : An Introduction* (Leeds: E J Arnold and Son Ltd., 1962)
- Orton, H., Halliday, W. J. & Barry, M.V.(eds) *Survey of English Dialects: The Basic Material, Vols.1- 4* (Leeds: E.J. Arnold & Son Ltd., 1962 - 1971)
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