

TEMPORAL LABELS AND SPECIFICATIONS IN MONOLINGUAL ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

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Abstract

The article examines the temporal labels and other specifications of time affixed to twenty-five words in monolingual dictionaries of English. The selection of works studied includes learners', collegiate, and general-purpose dictionaries, both British and American. In addition, the treatment of the lexemes in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is noted. The analysis reveals some clear differences between the different types of dictionaries in the overall propensity to furnish temporal labels and other specifications of time. The terminology employed to convey such information varies from one group of dictionaries to another. There is also plenty of variation between the individual volumes inside each group. The target audience of the works examined varies, which explains some of the differences in the treatment of particular lexemes. In general, Osselton's calls for more consistent terminology in the labelling of old words, presented several decades ago, are still valid. The differences between the labels are not always clear, and the explanations in the front matter of the dictionary may be lacking or unhelpful.

Keywords: temporal labels, usage notes, definitions, monolingual dictionaries

1. Introduction

The vocabulary of a living language is in a state of constant flux as new words and phrases emerge while some of the older ones fall into oblivion. The newcomers may have a relatively short life. Algeo (1993) studied a total of 3,565 new English words first recorded during the period 1944–1976 and discovered that only 1,515 of them were listed in the 1987 *Random House Dictionary* or the 1988 *Webster's New World Dictionary* (p. 283). The usage information supplied by dictionaries includes statements about the currency or chronological connotations of a lexeme. Recent neologisms that are not expected to survive for long may be marked as 'ephemeral', but in general such descriptions are avoided by editors, who do not possess 'a crystal ball' (Atkins and Rundell 2008: 229). More often, it is the other end of the life span of a word or phrase that is commented upon, commonly with the help of a label such as *archaic* or *obsolete*. Occasionally, the dictionary entry may contain a longer usage note, one example being found in the *American Heritage Dictionary* under *hearken*, said to have 'an archaic and formal air today, in part stemming from its extensive use in the King James Bible...and in traditional storytelling'. Observations about the datedness of a word have a long history in English lexicography, appearing in works published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries already (Osselton 2009: 137, Reddick 2009: 169).

Back then, an asterisk or a dagger (†) was often attached to headwords no longer current, but longer descriptions such as ‘an old word’, ‘an old Saxon word’, ‘Chaucer’, or ‘an old law-term’ were also employed (Bately 1988: 17–29).

The temporal labels used by modern dictionary-makers are divided into two main groups by Svensén (2009: 326–327). Descriptions like *archaic* and *old use* relate to the ‘expression side’, signifying that the word itself is ‘an instance of old use’. The label *historical* means something different. It is associated with the ‘content side’, being applied to words that refer to ‘a former state of things’. Verkuyl et al. (2003: 301) also distinguish between archaic words, that is, ones replaced by other words, and historical words, which refer to things no longer spoken about. For both types of label, there may be alternatives. The past tense, for example, may be used in the definition to indicate that the referent belongs to the past (ibid., Hawke 2016: 183), a time adverbial like *formerly* serving a similar function (Hoare and Salmon 2000: 159). The temporal labels in Benson et al. (1986: 214) comprise *archaic* (*obsolescent*), *obsolete*, and *old-fashioned*, the last-mentioned having a function that is ‘transitional between temporal and stylistic’. Landau (2001: 217) cites *old-fashioned*, *dated*, *archaic*, *obsolete*, and *old use* as examples of typical indications of currency or temporality. The difference between *archaic* and *rare*, Jackson (2002: 114) notes, is not entirely clear. Osselton (1995: 50) observes that the labels *literary* and *poetic* in fact refer to older literature and older poetry, respectively, thus having a diachronic as well as stylistic dimension. All of the labels mentioned can be applied to individual senses as well as the lexeme in general. The ‘illegitimate child’ sense of *bastard*, for example, is described as old-fashioned in some dictionaries (Jackson 2002: 114).

As seen from the above, lexicographers have employed a whole range of terms to single out words associated with the past. Osselton (1995: 50) criticizes the rather haphazard, even misleading, application of the labels, calling the situation a ‘rather alarming disarray in terminology’. In his article, Osselton aims at presenting a more coherent system of describing lexemes that have become outdated or extinct. ‘Obsolete terms’ have disappeared from use, are no longer known to educated speakers, and would not be listed in other than historical dictionaries. ‘Historical terms’ refer to things that existed during certain periods in the past. ‘Discontinued terms’ like *elementary school* have been replaced as unmarked terms, the entity itself still being with us under a different name (cf. *primary school*). ‘Obsolescent terms’, too, have a ‘modern equivalent’, but they may still be used by some people or in some contexts, in spite of being on their way out. Osselton instances *wireless*, in the process of being superseded by *radio* at the time the article was written. The four remaining categories of old word comprise different types of archaisms. These words do not refer to specific past periods, are nevertheless stylistically associated with the past, and have been replaced as unmarked terms. Some archaisms are jocular (e.g. *wench*), others poetic (e.g. *welkin*) or formal (e.g. *mien*), but there are also archaisms pure and simple, with no such colouring (e.g. *aviator*). Osselton lays out the principles of his categorization in a helpful table, with the eight types of old word receiving pluses or minuses for eight different components of datedness (p. 51).

Devising a workable system of temporal labelling is a demanding task, but the nature of English vocabulary itself poses further challenges. No matter what labels one uses, placing a particular word under them may be far from straightforward. Foster (1970: 165) explains how *Asian*, considered ‘archaic’ by dictionaries, replaced its synonym *Asiatic* as the more acceptable form in British official terminology. Such cases, in Foster’s view, show that ‘[n]othing is more difficult to be certain of than the death of a word, so that even the most ailing member of the vocabulary may take upon itself a new lease of life’. Hawke (2016: 183) comments on the ‘enormous revival’ that the above-mentioned *wireless* has had in the field of computer technology. In his discussion of ‘lexical revivals’, Katamba (2005: 178–179) cites *frigate*, *corvette*, and *armour*, earlier discussed by Barber (1964: 95). The three terms were revived during the Second World War in new meanings, *frigate*

and *corvette* originally signifying small sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fighting ships, *armour* a knight's suit of mail. [Baugh and Cable \(2013: 293\)](#) mention further examples of words that had a limited circulation before the World Wars, including *hand grenade*, first attested in the seventeenth century. *Thorn*, the name for an Old English letter taken from the runic alphabet, has a gap of some five hundred years in its citational evidence in *OED* ([Algeo 1993: 282](#)). Sometimes it is the referent of a word that returns, but under a different name. [Hughes \(2000: 364\)](#) instances *chopines*, women's shoes with high soles made of cork, worn in Elizabethan times, which came back into fashion in the twentieth century under the name of *platforms*. Whether *chopines* would count as an example of Osselton's 'discontinued terms' is, however, open to question in view of the gap of several centuries. Our perceptions of fashion, furthermore, are also relevant in assessing the appropriateness of the label in this particular case.

Writers and speakers may use words and phrases of bygone days for stylistic and rhetorical purposes. Renaissance poets expanded their lexical stock by borrowing from medieval authors like Chaucer, a practice that was both acclaimed and criticized by their contemporaries (see [Blank 2006: 283–286](#)). [Crystal \(2006: 144\)](#) discusses *inwit* 'conscience', which disappeared after the sixteenth century, to re-emerge in the writings of twentieth-century novelists and poets, among them James Joyce and Ezra Pound. The former Senator Orrin Hatch would every few years startle the Senate by resuscitating an obscure archaism, the examples cited by [Safire \(2007\)](#) including *hissy fit* 'temper tantrum' (1996), *canoodler* 'sly kiss and squeeze' (1998), and *absquatulation* 'act of absconding' (2007).

Geographical factors are a further source of complexity. Many regional and dialectal forms that are now obsolescent or no longer present in Britain are 'alive and flourishing' in New Zealand ([Gordon 1988: 182](#)). There is also lexical traffic between dialects and standard language. [Knowles \(2010: 28\)](#) cites *claggy* as an example of how 'words of a more limited currency may suddenly appear in mainstream use'. In their letters to the *Times*, readers commented on the appearance of *claggy* 'sticky, excessively moist' in a cookery column in 2008. The usage has since gained a firm foothold in baking terminology (see [Keldgord 2021](#)). Besides dialects, different sociolects (especially those of older age groups) have kept words no longer in common use.

One of the prominent characteristics of technical terminology is its rapid turnover, especially in fields witnessing fast ongoing development. It may, however, be difficult 'to distinguish the point at which *current usage* merges into *obsolete*' ([Hoare and Salmon 2000: 159](#)). According to [Opitz \(1983: 167–168\)](#), one of the problems of technical dictionaries is their inclusion of 'terminological deadwood', that is, lexical items which have ceased to be actively used. Landau observes that although there are some specialized corpora, we may still have to rely on the opinion of experts in the field when drafting the dictionary entry. He concludes that '[w]hen dealing with a large number of specialists, some of whom may have only a primitive grasp of dictionary practice and little intuitive feeling for the use of language, uniformity of treatment of currency is impossible' ([Landau 2001: 219](#)).

The present article examines the temporal labels and other specifications of time accompanying twenty-five lexemes in a selection of British and American dictionaries. Previous studies on labels used for indicating region ([Norri 1996](#)) and the word's potential to cause offence ([Norri 2000, 2020](#)) have revealed plenty of variety in the policies adopted by the lexicographers. Nor has the treatment of words of a similar status always been uniform in a particular work. It will be of interest to see whether temporal labelling yields a similar picture. The analysis of the entries for the twenty-five words also suggests the extent to which Osselton's recommendations for more coherent and less profuse terminology have been followed in subsequent decades.

The present study will not suggest a system for labelling old words that could be applied across dictionaries of English. Osselton himself (1995: 47) stated that '[t]he number,

and kind, of usage labels you adopt will of course depend upon the public you have in mind', adding that '[a]n elementary pocket dictionary covering merely a basic vocabulary can very well do entirely without them'. Atkins and Rundell (2008: 403) also comment on the importance of the size and type of dictionary, observing that 'an unabridged dictionary (or an electronic version of a print dictionary) may use a more fine-grained set of labels than a concise one'. In his discussion of ways of improving usage labelling, Ptaszynski (2010) emphasizes the crucial role of the needs and skills of the target audience. According to him, the 'functional perspective' has been unduly upstaged by the 'formal perspective' focussing on the nature and typology of the restrictions affecting the use of a word.

The twenty-one dictionaries studied below have been divided into five main groups according to their type and prospective users. One of the aims of the analysis is to provide an overview of the frequency and wording of temporal labels in each group. Although no single system of labelling can be recommended for works as varied as the ones examined, the treatment of individual words can often be considered apter or more accurate in some dictionaries than others, such comparisons suggesting possible improvements in the application of temporal labels. From the user's point of view, a degree of systematicity can be expected, with similar cases labelled similarly in a particular dictionary. To what extent that is the case will also be discussed in the following sections. Whether and how the temporal labels are explained to the reader is yet another issue of interest.

Burkhanov (2003: 104) observes that '[i]t would be an oversimplification to claim that furnishing pragmatic specifications is a prerogative of usage labels'. Information about the restricted contexts where the lexeme occurs can also be provided in usage notes and within the definition (ibid: 104–106). Ptaszynski further mentions the possibility of supplementing usage data by longer texts in the front or back matter, stating that techniques other than labels have received scant attention in lexicographic literature (2010: 418). In the present analysis, all occurrences of temporal information in labels, notes, or definitions have been gathered. Sometimes, indeed, a longer description is appropriate where a label would oversimplify matters. Brewer (2016: 494) states that information has often been shifted from labels to 'much more explicit (and visible) usage notes or other forms of metalinguistic language'. The best technique for indicating the restrictions in the use of the lexeme needs to be decided case by case.

The emphasis in the following sections lies on monolingual dictionaries, but similar complexities arise in bilingual works. Much of Osselton's (1995) article, in fact, deals with bilingual dictionaries, where he saw a 'sloppy, illogical use of labels' (p. 49) in cases where it was unclear whether the temporal label applied to the source-language or the target-language item, or both. Landau (2001: 218) notes that in bilingual and learners' dictionaries 'accurate currency labelling is essential', the learner otherwise running the risk of using the word in an inappropriate context. The examples in Ptaszynski's (2010) article mostly come from bilingual lexicography, too.

2. Notes on the dictionaries studied

The dictionaries examined can be divided into five main groups according to their target audience and geographical provenance. In each category, the most recent versions of the works are studied, whether printed or electronic. The latter can be constantly updated and have been shown to contain more observations about the offensiveness of lexemes than the latest printed editions (Norri 2020). Other aspects of usage, including those to do with time, may have undergone similar revision.

Most learners' dictionaries of English have been produced by British publishers, who dominate the market for works aimed at especially the more advanced levels (Heuberger

2016: 26–29, 2018: 300–301). Of the ‘Big Six’ learners’ dictionaries, five are British (Miller 2018: 354), earlier referred to as ‘the Big Five’ in books on lexicography (e.g. Béjoint 2010: 164). The present study focusses on the British volumes, that is, the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (CALD), the *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (Cobuild), the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE), the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (MEDAL), and the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* (OALD). All five are available as digital versions, the most recent printed editions ranging from 2007 (MEDAL) to 2018 (Cobuild). Learners’ dictionaries, including the ones mentioned, have a long tradition in the use of electronic corpora (cf. Cowie 1999: 121–125).

The term for the second group is slightly misleading, as college or collegiate dictionaries, produced by American publishers, have a target audience that in fact extends beyond college students. Kipfer (2013: 392) describes this type of work as ‘an intermediate-size, single-volume dictionary intended for use by students or at an office desk and containing information similar to an abridged general dictionary’. Béjoint (2016) discusses college dictionaries under the heading ‘Dictionaries for General Users’ and characterizes them as ‘originally designed for students but bought and used by families’ (p. 16). Of the five volumes in this category, four are printed, comprising *The American Heritage College Dictionary* (AHCD; 4th ed. 2007), *Encarta Webster’s College Dictionary* (EWCD; 2nd ed. 2005), *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary* (RHWCD; 2nd ed. 2005), and *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* (WNWCD; 5th ed. 2014). The data for *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (MWCD) comes from the online version, the most recent printed edition dating from 2003. Among the five, WNWCD is the only independent compilation, the other works being abridgements of American general-purpose dictionaries mentioned below (Landau 2001: 90–94, Béjoint 2010: 138–142). In the process of condensation, the number of headwords was reduced and many of the definitions were shortened, at times rather radically (Norri 2001: 110–111, Béjoint 2010: 139).

In the next category, five British general-purpose dictionaries are surveyed. Three of them are printed works, two electronic. The former are the *Bloomsbury English Dictionary* (BED; 2nd ed. 2004), *The Chambers Dictionary* (ChD; 13th ed. 2014), and the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (COED; 12th ed. 2011). Digital versions were available for the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (ODE) and the *Collins English Dictionary* (CED), the latest printed editions of which date from 2010 and 2014, respectively. As stated in the blurbs and prefaces, all five works have used electronic resources, but the amount of detail given varies and is sometimes limited to a mere mention of a corpus or database.

The last group of five consists of American general-purpose dictionaries. The *Encarta Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language* (EWD; 2nd ed. 2004) and the *Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* (RHD; 2nd ed. 2001) have been published as printed editions only. For *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (AHD) and the *New Oxford American Dictionary* (NOAD), there is also a digital version besides the latest printed one from 2011 (AHD) or 2010 (NOAD). Another electronic dictionary, *Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* (MWUD), states that it is ‘built on the solid foundation of *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*’, published in 1961. Of the five works, EWD and NOAD, based on British dictionaries, have utilized computerized corpora. The publication histories of AHD, RHD, and *Webster’s Third* began in the 1960s, long before corpora started to play a significant role in lexicography. Landau (2001: 339) has observed that ‘[c]orpus use has been slower to develop in America than in Britain’. In its assessment of the acceptability of particular usages and grammatical constructions, AHD is assisted by its Usage Panel, ‘a group of nearly 200 prominent scholars, creative writers, journalists, diplomats, and others in occupations requiring mastery of language’ (see also Nunberg 1990, Béjoint 2010: 136–138).

In addition to the above twenty dictionaries, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED 2000) was included in the study. Currently in the process of being updated for the third edition, OED is a historical dictionary with a chronological span that extends to present-day English. Brewer (2016: 491) observes that the challenges of temporal labelling were a headache for the chief editor of the first edition (1884–1928), J. A. H. Murray, who noted that it was often difficult to say whether a rare word was in fact obsolete and should be marked with a dagger (†), a practice favoured at the time. Labels like *rare*, *nonce-wd*, and *arch.* (archaic or obsolescent) were also used, but somewhat inconsistently. Brewer states that ‘no version of OED to this day has published either a comprehensive list of labels or an account of the principles of their application’, but adds that OED is ‘certainly not alone in this’ (p. 493). It will be of interest to see the degree of systematicity in OED’s use of temporal labels and other specifications of time for the lexemes examined, comparing the entries already updated for the third edition with those not yet finished.

3. Temporal labels and specifications in the dictionaries studied

Twenty-five lexemes were chosen for closer analysis, some of them discussed in earlier studies of temporal labels. Osselton (1995), for example, cites *elementary school*, *shilling*, and *wench* in his classification of old words. Some fairly commonly known words with an old flavour (e.g. *asunder*, *damsel*, *hearken*, *yonder*) were included in the sample, important for ensuring that there would be enough data for learners’ dictionaries. A variety of lexical fields are represented, some examples being people (*damsel*, *doxy*), animals (*grimalkin*, *pismire*), occupations (*almoner*), clothes (*codpiece*, *crinoline*, *raiment*), household objects (*inkhorn*, *trencher*, *warming pan*), money (*shilling*), and institutions (*elementary school*). Nouns predominate, but some adjectives (*wonted*), verbs (*assay*, *hearken*), and adverbs (*asunder*, *betimes*, *fain*, *yonder*) are also present.

It was important that the lexemes studied manifest different aspects of oldness or datedness. Some of them refer to things in the past, for example clothes that people used to wear (*codpiece*, *crinoline*) or vehicles no longer in general use (*penny farthing*). In other instances, the referent is still part of the modern world, but the word for it is different (e.g. *fourscore*, *orison*, *raiment*). Sometimes the transition from the old to the new term can be located at a specific time in the past (*elementary school*, *shilling*).

Many of the words considered for inclusion have several senses listed for them in dictionaries. In order to avoid excessive complexity in the presentation of the findings, the analysis had to focus on a manageable number of meanings. The twenty-five lexemes that will be surveyed in the sections below are the following, with the relevant senses given for the polysemous words: *almoner* ‘social worker in a hospital’, *assay* ‘to attempt, try’, *asunder*, *bathing machine*, *betimes* ‘early; in good time’, *codpiece*, *crinoline* ‘stiffened or hooped petticoat’, *damsel* ‘young (unmarried) woman; girl’, *doxy* ‘woman of low morals; prostitute’, *elementary school* ‘school where the first years of formal education are given’, *fain* ‘willingly; gladly’, *fourscore*, *grimalkin* ‘(old female) cat’, *hearken* ‘to listen; hear; give heed to’, *inkhorn* ‘portable container for holding ink’, *Macassar oil*, *orison*, *penny farthing*, *pismire*, *raiment* ‘clothing, garments’, *shilling* ‘British coin and monetary unit, the 20th part of a pound’, *trencher* ‘wooden platter for serving food’, *warming pan*, *wonted* ‘customary, usual’, *yonder* ‘over there’.

The findings for each set of dictionaries are presented in tabular form, which will make the similarities and differences between the works studied more obvious. There is a great deal of variation in the wording of the temporal label or specification, the tables citing the exact formulations. The association of the lexeme with the past is often mentioned in the definition rather than a label. Those cases, introduced with the abbreviation ‘def’, are marked in square brackets. A minus sign - means absence of any information about datedness or obsolescence. Words not listed in a particular volume are marked n/e (no entry). Instances where a word is given but not in the relevant sense are indicated with

the abbreviation *n/s*. Besides temporal labels, the tables also present the geographical and register descriptions found in the entries. The latter data is sometimes closely connected to the handling of issues of time.

In the more detailed observations about the treatment of the individual lexemes, Osselton's 'historical terms' are discussed first, to be followed by what would be considered 'discontinued terms' in his classification. The remainder of the section will be devoted to the group of words where the role of the referent is not central, the word itself having an old flavour.

3.1. Learners' dictionaries

In their front matter and blurbs, the five learners' dictionaries emphasize the usefulness of the work for learners who aim to develop their skills in the production of English.¹ The verb *communicate* appears frequently in these descriptions: *CALD* 'helps you to communicate naturally, fluently, and correctly' (p. ix), *Cobuild* will 'show you what you need to know to be able to communicate easily and accurately in English' (p. v), and *OALD* is 'the ultimate speaking and writing tool for developing the skills you need for passing exams and communicating in English' (blurb). The 'register notes' in *LDOCE* 'focus on the differences between spoken and written English so you always choose the right word' (blurb). The 2007 printed edition of *MEDAL* similarly aims at helping learners in 'productive tasks' ('writing and speaking natural English, accurately and with confidence'), but 'receptive tasks' ('understanding what you read and hear') are also explicitly mentioned. In his article on dictionaries for text reception, Leroyer (2018: 253) notes that '[a]dvanced learners have normally learnt to receive texts in the foreign language, and a monolingual learner's dictionary is therefore the best-suited type of dictionary'.

The emphasis on communication skills, in particular the production of texts in second language, explains why learners' dictionaries focus on present-day vocabulary and generally omit words that are no longer seen or heard. *Cobuild*, for instance, states that 'you can trust COBUILD to help you speak and write accurate and up-to-date English' (blurb). Similarly, it is important that words still in use but not among younger speakers are furnished with temporal labels or other indications of being associated with the past (Landau 2001: 218, Atkins and Rundell 2008: 229). In the five works examined, the emphasis on current usage is seen from the missing entries and senses in Table 1 for *assay*, *fourscore*, *grimalkin*, *inkhorn*, *Macassar oil*, and *pismire*. Another four words (*bathing machine*, *be-times*, *doxy*, *orison*) are given in one dictionary only. Perhaps predictably, whenever a word is listed, it is accompanied by a mention of its datedness or special contexts of use.

Some of the temporal labels mentioned in the introductory section do not appear at all in the learners' dictionaries studied. It is possible that the lexicographers felt that the meaning of *historical*, *obsolescent*, or *archaic* might not be immediately obvious to a foreign learner. The absence of the three labels may also have to do with the unlikelihood of a learner coming across a word or phrase that would warrant the use of such descriptions.

When the referent of the word is an object or entity of the past, the definition is often formulated in such a way as to obviate any need for the label *historical*. *Codpiece*, for example, is defined as 'a small piece of clothing like a bag that was used in the past to cover the opening at the front of men's clothes for the lower body' in *CALD*, the four other volumes stating more specifically that the garment was worn in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Whether a particular time period is mentioned or not also varies in the entries for *crinoline* and *penny farthing*. The looser formulation 'in the past' appears in all the definitions of *trencher* and *warming pan*, two objects used across centuries, and in the single entry for *bathing machine*, a hut on wheels that provided privacy for swimmers from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth (Grall 2014).

Osselton (1995: 50), focussing on British English, classifies *elementary school* and *shilling* as 'discontinued terms', that is, terms whose referents are still in existence but under a

Table 1. Labels and specifications in learners' dictionaries. Words not listed in a particular dictionary are marked **n/e**. Words listed but not in the sense examined are marked **n/s**.

	CALD	Cobuild	LDOCE	MEDAL	OALD
<i>almoner</i>	n/e	old-fashioned	n/e	n/e	old-fashioned, British English
<i>assay</i>	n/s	n/e	n/s	n/s	n/s
<i>asunder</i>	literary	literary	literary	literary	old-fashioned or literary
<i>bathing machine</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	[def: in the past]
<i>betimes</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	literary	n/e
<i>codpiece</i>	[def: in the past]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries]
<i>crinoline</i>	[def: especially in the 19th century]	[def: in the 19th century]	[def: in the past]	[def: in the past]	[def: in the past]
<i>damsel</i>	old use	literary, old-fashioned	old use	[def: old word]	old use
<i>doxy</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	old use
<i>elementary school</i>	UK old-fashioned or US	mainly US	[def: in the US]	[def: in the US]	[def: in the US]
<i>fain</i>	old use	n/e	n/e	literary [def: old word]	old use
<i>fourscore</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>grimalkin</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>hearken</i>	literary ²	n/e	literary ²	literary ²	old-fashioned ²
<i>inkhorn</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>Macassar oil</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>orison</i>	old use	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>penny [farthing]</i>	[def: in the past]	mainly British [def: old-fashioned bicycle]	British English [def: in the late 19th century]	British [def: old-fashioned bicycle]	British English [def: early type of bicycle]
<i>pismire</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>raiment</i>	old use	literary	literary	literary	old use

Table 1. Continued

	<i>CALD</i>	<i>Cobuild</i>	<i>LDOCE</i>	<i>MEDAL</i>	<i>OALD</i>
<i>shilling</i>	[def: used in Britain until 1971]	[def: used in Britain until 1971]	[def: old British coin or unit of money]	[def: used in the UK until 1971]	[def: in use until 1971]
<i>trencher</i>	[def: in the past]	n/e	British English [def: in the past]	n/e	[def: in the past]
<i>warming pan</i>	n/e	n/e	[def: in the past]	[def: in the past]	[def: in the past]
<i>wonted</i>	formal	n/e	n/e	literary	n/e
<i>yonder</i>	old use	[def: old-fashioned or dialect word]	old use	[def: old word]	old use or dialect

different name. Elementary schools, for example, ‘do still exist, even though we now refer to them as *primary schools*’. The emphasis on present-day usage in learners’ dictionaries explains why the earlier British use is explicitly mentioned only in the CALD label *UK old-fashioned or US*. In the four other works, *elementary school* is associated mainly or exclusively with the US. Instead of characterizing the compound as *old-fashioned*, it would be more informative to define British English *elementary school* as an earlier word for what is now called *primary school*. As regards *shilling*, the coin had the same value as the five-new-pence coin following the 1971 decimalization in the UK, but has not been legal tender since 1990. The two coins were physically different, and the identity of the referent seems questionable. All of the learners’ dictionaries examined state that the coin or unit of money belongs to the past. LDOCE does not mention any specific year in its definition ‘an old British coin or unit of money’, but the four other volumes mention use until the year 1971. What a shilling would correspond to in present-day currency is explained, except in MEDAL, which defines the word as ‘a small unit of money that was used in the UK until 1971’.

Almoner, like *elementary school*, has undergone a process of renaming. OALD states that the person seeing to the welfare of patients is ‘now usually called a medical social worker’. In 1964, the Institute of Almoners officially changed its name to the Institute of Medical Social Workers (Gosling 2014). The two dictionaries listing the word label it *old-fashioned*. As with *elementary school*, the definition could have been drafted in such a way as to emphasize the aspect of renaming and render the temporal label unnecessary.

The ten other lexemes given in the learners’ dictionaries are not associated with processes of renaming or particular periods in the past. Rather, these words have gradually become rarer as time has passed. Osselton, as noted earlier, regards such words as either obsolete or archaic, the former not yet replaced as unmarked terms. Something similar to Osselton’s classification is found in OALD, where the label *old-fashioned* is applied to words and phrases that ‘are passing out of current use’, and *old use* ‘describes expressions that are no longer in current use’. OALD furnishes *asunder* and *hearken* with the label *old-fashioned*, the phrase *old use* appearing in connection with *damsel*, *doxy*, *fain*, *raiment*, and *yonder*. CALD and LDOCE also include *old-fashioned* and *old use* in their array of labels, both stating that *old use* signifies that the word was used in earlier centuries. The explanation of the label *old-fashioned* in CALD sounds almost contradictory: ‘not used in modern English—you might find these words in books, used by older people, or used in order to be funny’. The corresponding description in LDOCE has an element of circularity about it: ‘a word or phrase that was commonly used in the past, but would sound old-fashioned today’. As seen from Table 1, whenever CALD or LDOCE mention *old use* in their entries, the same description is found in OALD. The three volumes are not in complete harmony, however, as *raiment* carries the label *literary* in LDOCE, *old use* in CALD and OALD.

Osselton (1995: 49–50) criticizes the labels *poetic* and *literary*, claiming that *poetic* ‘works all right if you are willing to say that English poetry stops with Tennyson’. As regards *literary*, ‘[t]he fact is that “lit.” refers to “older literature”, just as “poet.” refers to “older poetry”’. Such objections notwithstanding, the label *literary* continues to be used in the sense of ‘older literature’ in particular. The above-mentioned *raiment* is also characterized as *literary* in *Cobuild* and MEDAL. The verb *hearken* is said to be *old-fashioned* in OALD, *literary* in CALD, LDOCE, and MEDAL. *Fain* belongs to *old use* according to CALD and OALD, the entry in MEDAL considering the adverb *literary* and defining it as ‘an old word meaning “gladly”’. It is noteworthy that MEDAL has more occurrences of *literary* in Table 1 than any of the other volumes. Among the five dictionaries, MEDAL is the only one that explicitly connects the label with the temporal dimension of words in its explanation ‘old but still used in some kinds of creative writing’.

As shown by the MEDAL entry for *fain*, lexicographers sometimes indicate the datedness of a word by beginning the definition with a phrase such as ‘an old word’. The same formulation is also found under *damsel* and *yonder* in MEDAL. *Cobuild* is another dictionary

resorting to this technique under *yonder*, defined as ‘an old-fashioned or dialect word for “over there”’. That the word has survived in dialects is similarly noted in the geminated label *old use or dialect* in *OALD*, which also cites alternative contexts of occurrence under *asunder* (*old-fashioned or literary*).

3.2. Collegiate dictionaries

Collegiate dictionaries, as noted earlier, have a wider target audience than just college students. It has been observed that ‘[i]n the USA, in contrast to Britain, the “collegiate” dictionary is also used as a LEARNER’S DICTIONARY by students and teachers of English as a foreign language’ (Hartmann and James 1998 under *college dictionary*). As in learners’ dictionaries, usage notes giving ‘important cautions and explanations’ (*WNWCD*, blurb) are generally included, aimed to help the reader in the production of appropriate English. Collegiate dictionaries are, however, not optimal works of reference for learners especially on the lower levels of the mastery of English. In the USA, learners of English can now increasingly resort to works specifically designed to serve the process of learning English, including the first American learners’ dictionary, *Merriam-Webster’s Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary*, issued in 2008 (Heuberger 2018: 301).

The collegiate dictionaries analysed are, generally speaking, very different in nature from the learners’ dictionaries discussed in the previous section. The scope of the target audience is typically described as being wider than just college students. *MWCD*, for example, comments on its potentially misleading title, which ‘may suggest a special appropriateness for the older student, but those who work in offices and those who read, think, and write at home will equally find [the dictionary] a trustworthy guide to the English of our day’ (p. 6a). Etymologies, usually missing from learners’ dictionaries (Jackson 2002: 126, Jackson and Zé Amvela 2007: 201), are a regular part of the entries in the five collegiate works. The date when the headword is first recorded in use is given in *EWCD*, *MWCD*, and *RHWCD*, the last-mentioned also listing ‘the less common, historical, or technical senses of the term’ (p. viii). A further difference between the learners’ and collegiate dictionaries lies in the wider coverage of vocabulary in the latter. The size of the lexical inventory, in particular the inclusion of ‘the rapidly growing lexicon of contemporary English’ (*WNWCD*, p. viii), is emphasized. As appears from Table 2, just two of the words in the set (*bathing machine*, *penny farthing*) are missing from all five volumes. There are also four gaps for *Macassar oil*, and one for *doxy* and *orison* each. Temporal labels and specifications are used far more sparingly than in the learners’ dictionaries. Table 2 contains fifty-eight minuses, as opposed to none in Table 1. But there are also similarities between the two tables, including the absence of some labels, notably *historical* and *obsolescent*.

Usually, no separate label is employed to inform the reader that the referent existed in the past. The indication of time instead appears as part of the definition, with the insertion of words and phrases like *former*, *formerly*, and *in former times*. Besides such general statements, more limited time periods are occasionally mentioned. *Codpiece* is in all the entries said to have been worn in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. With some of the lexemes, there is variation as to whether the pastness of the referent is commented upon or not. The definitions of *warming pan* in *EWCD*, *RHWCD*, and *WNWCD* contain the adverb *formerly*, absent from *AHCD* and *MWCD*. According to *MWCD*, the compound means ‘a long-handled covered pan filled with live coals that is used to warm a bed’, the use of the present tense in fact suggesting that the object is still in use. Unlike the four other works, *MWCD* also omits any mention of past times under *inkhorn*, ‘a small portable bottle (as of horn) for holding ink’. *EWCD* is the only dictionary to state that the wooden platter known as *trencher* was used in bygone days: ‘formerly, a wooden platter used to serve or cut food (*archaic*)’. The addition of the label *archaic* can be questioned in a case where the object belongs to the past and is still called by the particular name in historical contexts. The same label is, however, found in *WNWCD*. To add to the confusion, the present tense in *AHCD*

Table 2. Labels and specifications in collegiate dictionaries

	AHCD	EWCD	MWCD	RHWCD	WNWCD
<i>almoner</i>	chiefly British	UK [def.: formerly]	British	Brit.	n/s
<i>assay</i>	-	literary	-	-	-
<i>asunder</i>	-	literary	-	-	-
<i>bathing machine</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>betimes</i>	-	archaic	-	-	archaic
<i>codpiece</i>	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: especially in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th cent.]
<i>crimoline</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>damself</i>	-	archaic or literary	- ³	-	now literary
<i>doxy</i>	slang	n/e	-	-	old slang
<i>elementary school</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>fain</i>	-	archaic	-	archaic	archaic
<i>fourscore</i>	-	archaic	-	-	archaic
<i>grimalkin</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>hearken</i>	archaic ⁴	archaic ²	archaic ⁵	archaic ⁶	now literary; archaic ⁷
<i>inkhorn</i>	[def: formerly]	[def: in former times]	-	[def: formerly]	[def: formerly]
<i>Macassar oil</i>	n/e	[def: formerly]	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>orison</i>	-	n/e	-	-	now literary
<i>penny farthing</i>	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e	n/e
<i>pismire</i>	-	archaic or informal	-	-	archaic
<i>raiment</i>	-	archaic or literary	chiefly literary	-	archaic

Table 2. Continued

	AHCD	EWCD	MWCD	RHWCD	WNWCD
<i>shilling</i>	[def: formerly used in the United Kingdom...prior to 1971]	[def: former British coin; former subunit of British currency]	[def: former monetary unit of the United Kingdom]	[def: coin and former monetary unit of the United Kingdom...discontinued after decimalization in 1971]	[def: former monetary unit of the United Kingdom...coinage discontinued in 1971]
<i>trencher</i>	-	archaic [def: formerly]	-	-	archaic
<i>warming pan</i>	-	[def: formerly]	-	[def: formerly]	[def: formerly]
<i>wonted</i>	-	literary	-	-	-
<i>yonder</i>	-	regional	-	-	-

In their book on American English dialects, [Wolfram and Schilling \(2016: 384\)](#) cite the locative adverb *yonder* as an example of ‘adverbial lexical items not found at all in standard varieties’. The learners’ dictionaries studied described *yonder* as old-fashioned or dialectal, but in the collegiate works, unaccountably, the only label present is *regional* in *EWCD*. *Doxy* is another word whose context of use is explained rather sparingly. *MWCD* and *RHWCD* include no such information in their entries. *AHCD* assigns the label *slang*, *WNWCD* more specifically *old slang*. The last-mentioned description seems apt in the light of what [Rawson \(1989 under doxy\)](#) tells us about the word: ‘An old word for a loose woman, a beggar’s wench, a prostitute...Not commonly encountered today’.

Alternative contexts of use are suggested in the three geminated phrases appearing in *EWCD*, *archaic or literary* (under *damsel*), *archaic or informal* (under *pismire*), and *archaic or literary* (under *raiment*). The overall frequency of temporal labels and comments on usage varies a great deal between the five volumes. Such observations are common in *EWCD* and *WNWCD*, whereas in the remaining three dictionaries they are found under half a dozen or fewer entries.

3.3. British general-purpose dictionaries

In their front matter and blurbs, general-purpose dictionaries tend to emphasize their suitability for a wide variety of users. Of the British volumes, *BED* describes its audience as ‘diverse, worldwide, encompassing a wide range of ages and backgrounds’ (p. xi). *CED* writes that it is ‘perfect for word lovers, crossword addicts and word gamers on the move’ (blurb), a list resembling that in *ChD*, ‘crossword fans, word lovers and curious people everywhere’ (p. vii). In another passage, however, *ChD* mentions that it was ‘written with the British speaker of English in mind’ (p. xii). Usage notes, absent from *ChD*, will offer ‘help with tricky and controversial questions of English’ (*COED*, p. viii), but the emphasis lies on receptive rather than productive tasks. The coverage of vocabulary is typically said to be vast, including different types of old lexemes, variously characterized as words ‘found in the literature of the past’ (*ODE*, p. viii), ‘rare, literary and historical words’ (*ChD*, p. vii), ‘rare, archaic, and literary language’ (*COED*, p. viii), and ‘literary or historical language that users of the Dictionary may encounter especially in their reading’ (*BED*, p. xi).

The lexical items studied are mostly included in the five British general-purpose dictionaries. The only gaps in [Table 3](#) are those for *orison* in *BED*, and *almoner* in *COED* and *ODE*, which list the latter word only in the sense ‘official distributor for alms’. The entries contain plenty of comments on usage, there being no more than twelve minuses in the table. The variety of labels employed is greater than in the learners’ or collegiate dictionaries. *Historical*, for example, now makes its appearance, signifying that the referent is a thing of the past. The same information is also conveyed through the definition, with time adjectives, adverbs, and phrases such as *early*, *former*, *formerly*, and *in former times*. The five dictionaries are in harmony in their assessment of *Macassar oil*, all of the definitions containing the adverb *formerly*, but usually there is at least some variation in the indications of time. *Formerly* and *in former times* occur in three definitions of *inkhorn*, but *COED* and *ODE* resort to the label *historical* instead. *Warming-pan* is labelled *historical* in three volumes, the other two adding the time adverbials *in former times* (*BED*) and *formerly* (*CED*) to the definition. The picture is similar with *bathing machine*, but this time *BED* and *CED* give more precise information about the period of popularity of the referent, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are other entries where the precision of the time reference varies. *ChD* states that *codpiece* denotes a garment ‘once worn by men’, but for the readers, the more exact phrase ‘in the 15th and 16th centuries’ in the other works is surely more helpful than the vague ‘once’. All five works explain that *penny farthing* is an ‘early’ or ‘old-fashioned’ type of bicycle, *BED* further mentioning that it was used in the nineteenth century. Considering that the definition already places the referent in the past, the label *historical* under *penny-farthing* in *ODE* seems superfluous. *CED* is the only dictionary to inform the reader that the petticoat known as *crinoline* was worn ‘esp in the mid-19th century’. *ChD* is alone in including no reference to time under

Table 3. Labels and specifications in British general-purpose dictionaries

	BED	CED	ChD	COED	ODE
<i>almoner</i>	[def: formerly]	British obsolete	[def: no longer an official title]	n/s	n/s
<i>assay</i>	formal	-	- ⁸	archaic	archaic
<i>asunder</i>	literary	-	-	archaic or literary	archaic or literary
<i>bathing machine</i>	[def: in the 18th and 19th centuries]	[def: used in the 18th and 19th centuries]	hist	historical	historical
<i>betimes</i>	archaic	archaic	literary	archaic	archaic
<i>codpiece</i>	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: once worn by men]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]
<i>crinoline</i>	[def: formerly]	[def: esp in the mid-19th century]	-	historical	historical
<i>damsel</i>	archaic or literary	archaic or poetic	archaic or poetic	archaic or humorous	archaic or literary
<i>doxy</i>	archaic slang offensive	archaic, slang	sl; archaic	archaic	archaic
<i>elementary school</i>	[def: formerly in the United Kingdom] ⁹	British [def: a former name] ¹⁰	<i>obs</i> in the UK since 1944, but still current in N America	especially (N. Amer.) ¹¹	North American; British historical ¹²
<i>fain</i>	archaic	archaic	archaic and poetic	archaic	archaic
<i>fourscore</i>	archaic	an archaic word	archaic	archaic	archaic
<i>grimalkin</i>	-	archaic	-	archaic	archaic
<i>hearken</i>	archaic ²	archaic	archaic or literary; poetic ¹³	archaic	archaic ²
<i>inkhorn</i>	[def: in former times]	[def: formerly]	[def: formerly]	historical	historical
<i>Macassar oil</i>	[def: formerly]	[def: formerly]	[def: formerly]	[def: formerly]	[def: formerly]
<i>orison</i>	n/e	literary	-	archaic	archaic
<i>penny farthing</i>	[def: an early type of bicycle... used in Britain in the 19th century]	British [def: an early type of bicycle]	[def: an old-fashioned bicycle]	Brit [def: an early type of bicycle]	historical [def: an early type of bicycle, made in Britain]
<i>pismire</i>	archaic or informal	[def: an archaic or dialect word]	archaic or dialect	archaic	archaic
<i>raiment</i>	archaic or literary	archaic or poetic	archaic or poetic	archaic or literary	archaic or literary

Table 3. Continued

	<i>BED</i>	<i>CED</i>	<i>ChD</i>	<i>COED</i>	<i>ODE</i>
<i>shilling</i>	[def: former]	[def: former; not minted in Britain since 1970]	hist	[def: former]	[def: former]
<i>trencher</i>	archaic [def: formerly]	[def: esp formerly]	old	historical	historical
<i>warming pan</i>	[def: in former times]	[def: formerly]	hist	historical	historical
<i>wonted</i>	literary	-	-	archaic or literary	literary
<i>yonder</i>	regional	-	-	archaic or dialect	archaic or dialect

crinoline. For some users, it may be clear from the definition ('a hooped petticoat or skirt made to project all round by means of steel wire') that the referent is not a modern item of clothing, but others may be left wondering who would wear such cumbersome garments.

Attached to *trencher*, the *BED* label *archaic* seems out of place, contrary to the time adverb *formerly* appearing in the definition. The collegiate dictionary *EWCD* has an entry for *trencher* identical to the one in *BED* (cf. previous section), the former dictionary deriving much of its content from the latter. *ChD* under *trencher*¹ explains that the object is 'a plate or platter (*old*)'. Those consulting the dictionary may be left wondering whether it is the plate or the word that is described as old.

The treatment of Osselton's 'discontinued terms' closely resembles that of the historical lexemes discussed above. Four of the definitions for *shilling* characterize the coin or currency as 'former', *ChD* using the label *hist* to convey the same idea. All five works indicate the value of a shilling in terms of present-day currency, but only *CED* adds a specific time reference, 'not minted in Britain since 1970'. The learners' and collegiate dictionaries, unexpectedly, were more informative in this respect, seven out of the ten works mentioning the year of decimalization, 1971. *COED* defines *elementary school* as 'a primary school, especially (N. Amer.) for the first six or eight grades', but the four other volumes make a more explicit distinction between modern US and past UK usage. The definition in *CED*, usefully, points out that the term has been discontinued and refers the reader to the modern equivalent: '*British* a former name for **primary school**'. The most exact period reference appears in the *ChD* passage '*obs* in the UK since 1944, but still current in N America', where, however, the appropriateness of the label *obsolete* can be questioned. As regards *almoner*, the same dictionary provides the clearest explanation of the destiny of the term, 'no longer an official title'. *CED*, uniquely in the material studied, treats *almoner* as *obsolete*. *BED* and *EWCD* again have a similar policy, beginning the definition with 'formerly', which leads to potential ambiguity, as observed in the previous section.

The remaining fourteen lexical items are each said to be *archaic* in at least one of the British general-purpose dictionaries. *Fourscore* and *doxy*, for example, are described as archaic words in all the entries. *Grimalkin* is so labelled in *CED*, *COED*, and *ODE*, the two other works omitting any mention of context of use. The aptness of Osselton's remark that *literary* in practice tends to mean 'older literature' is seen from the treatment of *betimes* and *orison*, characterized as *archaic* in some dictionaries, *literary* in others. In the entries for *asunder* and *wonted*, the usage information given is either *archaic or literary* or just *literary*. Another label criticized by Osselton, *poetic*, now appears, but mainly as part of longer phrases such as *archaic and poetic for fain* in *ChD*, a word simply described as *archaic* in the four other volumes. Osselton's four subtypes of archaism come to mind from the entries for *damsel*, the various labels including *archaic or literary*, *archaic or poetic*, and *archaic or humorous*. Two further combinations with *archaic* occur, *archaic or informal* for *pismire*, and *archaic or dialect* for *pismire* and *yonder*. The transitive and intransitive applications of *hearken*, as in the two previous groups of dictionaries, have again been something of a challenge to those drafting the entries. *CED* and *COED* give the part of speech, *BED* and *ODE* listing the intransitive construction in particular. *ChD* makes a distinction between the transitive and intransitive uses, the former labelled *poetic*, the latter *archaic or literary*. On the basis of the dictionary evidence overall, the transitive *hearken* has fallen by the wayside more clearly than the intransitive verb. It is possible that the *ChD* lexicographers thought that *poetic* implies something older and more stilted by modern standards than *literary*.

3.4. American general-purpose dictionaries

The five volumes in this category, like their British counterparts in the previous section, all emphasize the scope of the vocabulary listed. *RHD* mentions a 'coverage of major British, Canadian, and Australian terms' (blurb), but usually we find statements such as 'the focus is on American English' (*NOAD*, p. xii) or 'the editors have set down the core vocabulary

of North American English, most particularly US English, in the breadth and depth required by twenty-first century users' (*EWD*, p. 10). *MWUD* describes itself as 'the largest, richest dictionary of American English'. There are few observations about prospective users. *EWD* has the same description of target audience as its British sibling *BED*, 'diverse, worldwide, encompassing a wide range of ages and backgrounds' (p. xiii). *RHD* states that it aims to meet the needs of students, scholars, professional writers, businesspeople, and, above all, 'word lovers' (blurb). All five works contain usage notes, *NOAD* characterizing them as helping readers 'to use the language more accurately, more clearly, and more elegantly' (p. xix). The main focus lies, however, on receptive rather than productive tasks, as also seen from the inclusion of 'words or senses whose use in modern English is uncommon' (*AHD*, p. xxiii), 'literary or historical language that users of the Dictionary may encounter especially in their reading' (*EWD*, p. xiii), lexemes 'found in the literature of the past' (*NOAD*, p. xii), and 'terms of historical interest' (*RHD*, p. xvii).

The inclusion rate of the words studied is fairly high among the five American general-purpose dictionaries. There are only ten slots marked *n/e* or *n/s* in Table 4. *NOAD*, like its British sibling *ODE* in the previous section, gives *almoner* only in the sense 'official distributor of alms'. *AHD* and *EWD* are the two works with most gaps, both lacking entries for *bathing machine*, *Macassar oil*, and *penny farthing*, *EWD* also for *doxy* and *orison*. *Penny farthing* is similarly missing from *RHD*. The fifty-two minuses in Table 4 are far more than the twelve for the British general-purpose dictionaries. The great majority of the minuses, forty-nine, are found in the columns for *AHD*, *MWUD*, and *RHD*, the three volumes of uniquely American provenance. Labelling and other usage information is in fact common in *EWD* and *NOAD*, based on works originally published in Britain.

The paucity of temporal labels and specifications is particularly striking in *MWUD*, a dictionary built on the foundation laid by *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. The editor in chief of the latter, Philip Gove, saw little need for labelling where illustrative quotations and usage notes could convey the typical environment where the word occurred (see Morton 1994: 135–138, Brewer 2016: 494). The electronic *MWUD* similarly appears to use labels rather sparingly. Of the twenty-five lexical items, only the transitive sense of *hearken* carries a temporal label, *archaic*. The definitions of *codpiece*, *penny farthing*, and *shilling* associate the objects with the past, but there is no such observation under *bathing machine*, *crinoline*, *inkhorn*, *Macassar oil*, *trencher*, or *warming pan*.

The treatment of words signifying erstwhile objects and things varies from one volume to another. *NOAD* stands alone in using the label *historical* for *bathing machine*, *crinoline*, *inkhorn*, *penny farthing*, *trencher*, and *warming pan*. As noted in the previous section, *NOAD*'s two Oxford siblings, *COED* and *ODE*, follow a similar policy. In the corresponding passages in the four other American works, the definition contains a time adverbial, in most cases *formerly* or *in former times*, or there is no mention of the object or thing belonging to history. The lack of such information for *crinoline*, *trencher*, and *warming pan* in the majority of the dictionaries is somewhat surprising. The difficulty of being consistent in the labelling policy is well illustrated by the treatment of *Macassar oil* in *NOAD*, where instead of the label *historical* affixed to the above-mentioned words, the time adverb *formerly* appears in the definition. *EWD* belongs to the same family of dictionaries as the earlier discussed *EWCD* and *BED*, the entries for *trencher* in all three placing the infelicitous label *archaic* after a definition containing the word *formerly*. *NOAD* and *ODE*, American and British versions of the same basic work, both manifest the same tautology, assigning the label *historical* to *penny farthing* in spite of the definition already mentioning 'an early type of bicycle'. References to a specific time period are made only seldom, but all five dictionaries mention that *codpiece* signifies a garment worn in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. *MWUD* provides more exact information than *NOAD* about the golden days of *penny farthing*, 'from about 1870 to 1890'.

Table 4. Labels and specifications in American general-purpose dictionaries

	AHD	EWD	MWUD	NOAD	RHD
<i>almoner</i>	chiefly British	UK [def.: formerly] formal	British	n/s	Brit.
<i>assay</i>	-	literary	-	archaic	-
<i>asunder</i>	-	n/e	-	archaic or literary	-
<i>bathing machine</i>	n/e	archaic	-	historical	[def: formerly]
<i>betimes</i>	archaic	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	-	literary	-
<i>codpiece</i>	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	archaic or literary	[def: especially in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]	[def: in the 15th and 16th centuries]
<i>crinoline</i>	-	n/e	-	historical	-
<i>damsel</i>	-	archaic or literary	- ¹⁴	archaic or literary	literary
<i>doxy</i>	archaic	n/e	-	archaic	-
<i>elementary</i>	-	-	-	North American	-
<i>school</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>fain</i>	archaic	archaic	-	archaic	-
<i>fourscore</i>	-	archaic	-	archaic	-
<i>grimalkin</i>	-	-	-	archaic	-
<i>hearken</i>	archaic; usage note: has an archaic and formal air today ²	archaic ²	archaic ¹⁵	archaic ²	literary, archaic ¹⁶
<i>inkhorn</i>	[def: formerly]	[def: in former times]	-	historical	[def: formerly]
<i>Macassar oil</i>	n/e	n/e	-	[def: formerly]	[def: formerly]
<i>orison</i>	-	n/e	-	archaic	-
<i>penny farthing</i>	n/e	n/e	British [def: common from about 1870 to 1890]	historical [def: early type of bicycle]	n/e
<i>pismire</i>	archaic	archaic or informal	-	archaic	-
<i>raiment</i>	-	archaic or literary	-	archaic or literary	-

Table 4. Continued

	<i>AHD</i>	<i>EWD</i>	<i>MWUD</i>	<i>NOAD</i>	<i>RHD</i>
<i>shilling</i>	[def: coin formerly used in the United Kingdom...prior to 1971]	[def: former British coin; former subunit of British currency]	[def: a British monetary unit that was used...to the 20th century]	[def: former British coin and monetary unit]	[def: coin and former monetary unit of the United Kingdom]
<i>trencher</i>	-	archaic [def: formerly]	-	historical	-
<i>warming pan</i>	-	[def: in former times]	-	historical	-
<i>wonted</i>	-	literary	-	literary	-
<i>yonder</i>	-	regional	-	archaic or dialect	-

Of the three ‘discontinued terms’ in Osselton’s classification, *shilling* is treated similarly in four of the dictionaries, with *former* or *formerly* inserted into the definition. *MWUD* is also rather vague in its observation that the monetary unit was used ‘to the 20th century’ in Britain. Only *AHD* specifically mentions the year of decimalization, 1971. The ‘national biases’ (Algeo 1995) in lexicography are illustrated by the entries for *elementary school* and *almoner*. The former lexeme carries a label in just one dictionary, *NOAD*, where it is said to be *North American*. None of the five dictionaries state that the compound is no longer current in Britain and has been replaced by *primary school*. All the works that list *almoner* state that the word is British, but the only period reference, ‘formerly’, occurs in the *EWD* definition.

The remaining fourteen lexemes have been passing out of use and are now rarely seen except in dialects and imitations of old style. The most common label applied in such cases is *archaic*, which is the only usage information provided for *doxy*, *fain*, *fourscore*, *grimalkin*, and *orison*. As shown by the minuses in Table 4, each of these words is sometimes left without any comment on its datedness. We find a similar situation in the entries for *wonted*, described as *literary* in *EWD* and *NOAD*, but left unmarked elsewhere. There are further discrepancies between the five works, including the alternation between *archaic* and *formal* (under *assay*), and *archaic* and *literary* (under *betimes*). *EWD* and *NOAD* are the only dictionaries that cite alternative contexts of use in geminated phrases like *archaic or literary* (*NOAD* under *asunder*, *EWD* and *NOAD* under *damsel* and *raiment*), *archaic or informal* (*EWD* under *pismire*), and *archaic or dialect* (*NOAD* under *yonder*). In the other volumes, the single label *literary* (under *asunder* and *damsel*), *archaic* (under *pismire*), or *regional* (under *yonder*) is employed, or no labelling occurs. As noted in connection with the collegiate dictionaries, the absence of any regional information for *yonder* seems unwarranted in the light of recent studies of American English dialects.

The picture that emerges from the treatment of *hearken* is again complex. *AHD*, *EWD*, and *NOAD* only give the intransitive sense, labelled *archaic*. *RHD* and *MWUD* distinguish between the transitive and intransitive constructions, the former regarded as *archaic*, the latter carrying the label *literary* (*RHD*) or being left unlabelled (*MWUD*). Together with the findings in the previous sections, the labelling policies point to the transitive use now being rare and more firmly in the past than the intransitive one.

3.5. The Oxford English Dictionary

OED is currently in the process of being thoroughly revised for the third edition. Of the twenty-five words examined for the present article, only nine have been fully updated so far. In Table 5, the lexemes that are still under revision are marked with an asterisk. It is not possible at this stage to make any general comments on temporal labelling and other specifications of time in the third edition of the dictionary, but a comparison of the already updated entries and the unfinished ones may reveal some changes in policy over the years.

The first edition of *OED* sometimes contains time adverbs in the entries for words signifying objects no longer in common use in the early twentieth century. *Inkborn* is said to be ‘now seldom used’, and *warming pan* was ‘formerly in common use for warming beds’. *Trencher* carries the double description *archaic and Historical*, reminiscent of how *EWCD*, *BED*, and *EWD* combined the label *archaic* with the adverb *formerly* in the definition, a practice that was criticized in the earlier sections. *Bathing machine* was not yet a thing of the past, which explains the absence of any time specification. In the entries that are now ready for the third edition, the label *historical* is employed more systematically, *codpiece* being ‘[n]ow chiefly *historical*’, *Macassar oil* ‘chiefly *historical*’, and *penny farthing* ‘[n]ow *historical*’. In all three cases, the reader is provided with more exact period reference, respectively ‘15th and 16th cent.’, ‘19th cent.’, and ‘from the early 1870s to the mid 1890s’. The works in the previous four groups of dictionaries differed in their treatment of *crinoline*, some associating the garment with the past, others omitting any such mention. The

Table 5. Labels and specifications in the *Oxford English Dictionary*

<i>almoner</i>	Originally British
<i>assay</i> *	-
<i>asunder</i>	Now somewhat archaic or literary
<i>bathing machine</i> *	-
<i>betimes</i> *	-
<i>codpiece</i>	Now chiefly historical; commonly worn in the 15th and 16th cent.
<i>crinoline</i>	enjoyed greatest popularity in the mid 19th cent.; a smaller version may still be worn as part of a formal outfit, under an evening gown or wedding dress
<i>damsel</i> *	Since 17th cent., archaic and literary or playful; not in ordinary spoken use
<i>doxy</i> *	slang
<i>elementary school</i> *	-
<i>fain</i> *	Frequent in <i>I, he, etc. would</i> († <i>had</i>) <i>fain</i> ; otherwise Obsolete or archaic
<i>fourscore</i> *	now archaic or rhetorical
<i>grimalkin</i> *	-
<i>hearken</i> *	Now only poetic. ¹⁷
<i>inkhorn</i> *	[a vessel] now seldom used
<i>Macassar oil</i>	chiefly historical; a kind of hair oil much used in the 19th cent.
<i>orison</i>	Now archaic
<i>penny farthing</i>	Now historical; current from the early 1870s to the mid 1890s
<i>pismire</i>	Now regional
<i>raiment</i>	Now chiefly archaic and literary
<i>shilling</i> *	A former English money of account...No longer in official use after the introduction of decimal coinage in 1971
<i>trencher</i> *	archaic and Historical
<i>warming pan</i> *	formerly in common use for warming beds
<i>wonted</i> *	Now archaic or U.S.
<i>yonder</i> *	Now only literary and somewhat archaic, or dialect

most informative explanation is found in *OED*: ‘Though the crinoline...enjoyed greatest popularity in the mid 19th cent., a smaller version may still be worn as part of a formal outfit, under an evening gown or wedding dress.’

Of the three discontinued terms, *elementary school* still has the same definition as in the first edition, ‘one in which primary instruction is given’, with no further comment. *Shilling*, although not yet fully updated, has been subject to revision, as the currency is stated to be ‘[n]o longer in official use after the introduction of decimal coinage in 1971’. The completed entry for *almoner* has been radically redone, with the label ‘[o]riginally *British*’ accompanying the sense ‘a social worker attached to a hospital’ (*OED* under *almoner* n.2, sense 3). The dictionary provides the following additional information: ‘The Institute of Almoners, a professional organization for hospital social workers in the United Kingdom, was formed in 1945. In 1964 it changed its name to the Institute of Medical Social Workers.’ In Australia, too, almoners started calling themselves medical social workers (Pawar and Anscombe 2014: 19). To characterize *almoner* as ‘originally British’ may give the reader the wrong impression that the term is still currently used in various parts of the English-speaking world. In the first edition of *OED*, changes in terminology were occasionally singled out in the definition, one example appearing under *azote*, defined as ‘the gas now known as nitrogen’ (Hoare and Salmon 2000: 159).

The remaining fourteen lexemes have been fading from use over decades or centuries, with an old ring to them in present-day English. The ‘General Explanations’ in the first edition of *OED* instance many labels relating to currency, among them *arch.* (archaic or obsolescent), *dial.* (now dialectal...), *rare*, and *nonce-wd.*, but their application is inconsistent. As regards *rare* and *nonce-wd.*, ‘the user is left puzzled as to what to infer from the absence of these terms as much as from their presence’ (Brewer 2016: 491). As seen from the proof sheets, the editors had different opinions about the status of a word and they sometimes changed their own earlier assessments (Mugglestone 2000: 190–191, 2009: 256). In the material examined, the non-completed entry for *fain* well illustrates the complexities of labelling, the adverb being characterized as ‘[f]requent in *I, he, etc. would* (†*had*) *fain*; otherwise Obsolete or archaic’. In the updated as well as the earlier versions, two features keep recurring, often in combination. The time adverb *now* is a frequent insertion, and double labels are assigned to many lexemes. *Asunder*, for example, is described as ‘[n]ow somewhat archaic or literary’, *raiment* as ‘[n]ow chiefly archaic and literary’, in the third edition. *Literary*, criticized by Osselton, has thus not disappeared from the array of labels in *OED*, but whether *poetic* is still present in the updated entry for *hearken* remains to be seen. In the previous groups of dictionaries, *pismire* frequently carried the temporal label *archaic*, sometimes combined with an alternative context of use (*informal, dialect*), but *OED* opts for the formulation ‘[n]ow *regional*’, which similarly indicates that the word no longer appears in present-day standard language. Many of the lexemes that have no time specification and may have been unmarked in early twentieth-century English, including *assay*, *betimes*, and *grimalkin*, are likely to be labelled as the third edition progresses.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Five different types of dictionary were analysed for the present article. Generally speaking, there is great variation in the propensity to furnish the twenty-five lexemes studied with temporal labels or other indications of time. Without exception, the entries in learners’ dictionaries specify that the word is restricted in its contexts of use or signifies a thing of the past. The rate of labelling drops drastically in the collegiate works, the reader finding no period reference or information about currency in fifty-eight instances. The five general-purpose dictionaries of British provenance are far more prolific in their use of time-related comments than the corresponding American volumes, the number of minuses in the tables being twelve and fifty-two, respectively. At the present stage in the production of the third edition, it is too early to say anything general about the historical dictionary, *OED*, included in the sample. The already updated entries contain useful observations about the datedness of the word or its association with objects or phenomena belonging to the past. Unmarked lexemes like *assay*, *bathing machine*, and *betimes* will no doubt undergo revision for the third edition.

Particular works sometimes differ from the rest in their category. Among the American general-purpose dictionaries, *MWUD* is very sparing in its provision of contextual information. Its offspring, *MWCD*, displays the same characteristic in the group of collegiate works, where *EWCD* and *WNWCD* employ more labels and specifications of time than *AHCD*, *MWCD*, and *RHWCD*. The two works based on British originals, *EWD* and *NOAD*, stand out among the American general-purpose dictionaries in their more frequent use of temporal labels.

In his article originally published in 1979, Osselton criticized the ‘rather alarming disarray in terminology’ that he perceived in the application of temporal labels by contemporary lexicographers. Osselton, as noted in the introduction, did not argue for absolute uniformity in the number and types of labels, recognizing the importance of the target audience and primary functions of the dictionary in deciding about the labelling policy. The main criticism in the 1979 article was that the temporal labels employed were in the

author's opinion too diverse, poorly defined, and sometimes even misleading. The picture that emerges from the findings in the previous sections shows that over forty years after Osselton's recommendations, there is still room for improvement. Even in works aimed at a similar target audience, the presence of a label and its wording often differs rather unaccountably from one dictionary to another.

The prime label for words whose referents are no longer part of the modern world, recommended by Osselton and other writers on lexicography, is *historical*. The five learners' dictionaries do not assign that label to any of the twenty-five words, instead adding an adjective or adverbial of time (e.g. *early*, *in the past*) to the definition. The policy adopted in the collegiate works is similar, with *formerly* being the usual time indication found in the entries. The label *historical* is first encountered in the British general-purpose dictionaries *ChD*, *COED*, and *ODE*. Among their American counterparts, *NOAD*, based on *ODE*, is the only volume to employ the label. In all four dictionaries, we also find the technique favoured by the other volumes in the group, the inclusion of a time expression in the definition (*ChD* s.v. *inkhorn*; *ChD*, *COED*, *ODE*, and *NOAD* under *Macassar oil* and *penny farthing*). The entries already updated for the third edition of *OED* suggest that in the final version *historical* will be a standard description for words whose referents belong to the past.

When the definition contains a reference to past times, the label *historical* seems redundant and is usually omitted. There are only a few instances in the entries studied where both types of time indication are combined. *ODE* and *NOAD* explain that *penny farthing* means 'an early type of bicycle', yet affix the label *historical*. The updated entries for *codpiece*, *Macassar oil*, and *penny farthing* in *OED* inform the reader about the periods when the referents were in common use, but in each case there is also a separate mention that the lexeme is *historical*. The 'Advanced Search' possibilities in *OED* include 'Usage', and it is possible that *historical* is added to all relevant headwords or senses to enable a systematic search for lexical items signifying things of the past.

The time adverbials occurring in the definitions range from very general to more exact ones, even with the same headword. *Codpiece* is said to have been worn in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in all the works studied except for *CALD* and *ChD*, where the references to time are the unnecessarily vague 'in the past' and 'once', respectively. Similar discrepancies were detected in the treatment of *bathing machine*, *crinoline*, *Macassar oil*, and *penny farthing*. Where more specific information about the period of currency is available, it would be helpful to include this in the dictionary entry. Sometimes, however, it is not entirely clear whether for example a garment does belong to the past or not. *Crinoline* is unlabelled and unspecified as to time in ten of the works examined, others opting for the label *historical* or temporal phrases like 'formerly', 'in the past', 'in the 19th century', 'especially in the 19th century', or 'esp in the mid-19th century'. Present-day designers of clothes are familiar with something called a *crinoline*, but the garment is very different in size, material, and wearability from the crinolines of the Victorian era. The entry in *OED* aptly notes the continuity in terminology as well as the changes in the garment itself.

Osselton suggested that lexemes like *almoner*, *elementary school*, and *shilling* should be treated as 'discontinued terms'. His recommendations have not been followed. *Almoner*, when furnished with a temporal label, is characterized as either *old-fashioned* or *obsolete*. Sometimes the specification 'formerly' is included in the definition, but it may be unclear to the reader whether that description applies to the word or the profession in question. The most explicit statement, 'no longer an official title', appears in *ChD*. *Elementary school*, in the UK context, is said to be *old-fashioned*, *obsolete*, or *historical* in various works. *BED* resorts to 'formerly' inside the definition. The solution in *CED* is neat and leaves little room for misunderstanding, the dictionary explaining that *elementary school* is 'British a former name for **primary school**', with a hyperlink to the latter compound. Rather than using a separate label for 'discontinued terms', and thus adding to the terminological disarray,

lexicographers might find the *CED* type of formulation quite useful. In the dictionaries studied, *shilling* is usually treated in the same way as historical words, with a time adverbial or modifier inserted into the definition, but *ChD* opts for the label *hist* instead. Indeed, whether the word belongs to historical terms or discontinued ones is not always entirely clear. The sameness of the referent needs to be carefully assessed.

The remaining fourteen lexical items have been fading from use over a longer period of time, without any actual process of renaming. Their referents are still part of the modern world. It is among these words where dictionary users find the most notable variation in labelling practices. *Fain*, for example, is variously described as *archaic*, *literary*, *old use*, and *archaic and poetic*. As seen from the list, the two labels criticized by Osselton, *literary* and *poetic*, continue to be used in the specific senses of ‘older literature’ and ‘older poetry’. *Literary* appears in as many as sixteen of the works examined, but *poetic* seems to have fallen into disfavour, with occurrences in only *CED*, *ChD*, and the unfinished entry for *hearken* in *OED*. In spite of its slightly infelicitous nature, *literary* is not likely to disappear from the labelling apparatuses in any near future, as seen, among other things, from its presence in the updated entries for *asunder* and *raiment* in *OED*.

The distinction between obsolescent and archaic words does not emerge in the entries studied. In fact, there are no occurrences of the label *obsolescent* in the tables. The three learners’ dictionaries *CALD*, *LDOCE*, and *OALD* do, however, distinguish between *old-fashioned* and *old use* in their labelling policies, two categories reminiscent of obsolescent and archaic words, respectively, in the Osselton classification. For those consulting the three volumes, the difference between *old-fashioned* and *old use* may not be evident unless they look up the explanations of the labels. Béjoint (1981: 216) discovered that students using a learners’ dictionary do not necessarily read the introductory matter at all, or do so only cursorily. Miller (2018: 357), furthermore, states that information about the meaning of the labels ‘may be hard to find in an online dictionary’, an observation that certainly applies to the dictionaries examined. A hyperlink from the label to its explanation might be one way of alleviating the problem.

Double labels specifying alternative contexts of use are quite frequent. The word may have become old-fashioned in standard language but survived in regular use in dialects. The geminated descriptions affixed to *yonder*, for example, include *old-fashioned or dialect word*, *old use or dialect*, and *archaic or dialect*. The dictionaries studied vary in their propensity to take dialectal uses into account in the drafting of the entries, only nine dictionaries mentioning the regional currency of *yonder*. Similar differences are seen in the treatment of *pismire*.

Archaic is found side by side with another type of environment in phrases like *archaic or literary*, *archaic or informal*, *archaic or poetic*, *archaic or humorous*, and *archaic or dialect*. The connecting word may also be *and*, as in *archaic and poetic* under *fain* in *ChD* and in *[n]ow chiefly archaic and literary* under *raiment* in *OED*. Osselton’s four types of archaism are relevant here. If corpus analyses show that an archaic word tends to be used for example in humorous contexts, *archaic or humorous* could be changed to *archaic (esp. humorous)*. In the humorous uses, the humour is likely to be largely based on the ‘quaintly old’ flavour of the word. The distinction between *archaic* and *historical* words is not observed in *EWCD*, *BED*, and *EWD* under *trencher*, where the lexicographers both assign the label *archaic* and include the time adverb *formerly* in the definition.

There are some traces of ‘national biases’ in the treatment of the lexemes studied. *Penny farthing*, labelled *British* in many entries, is listed in all the British works, but missing from as many as eight of the ten American volumes. Except for *EWCD* and *EWD*, the American lexicographers do not comment on the limited currency of *almoner*, only stating that the word is *British* or *chiefly British*. Their British colleagues invariably note that *almoner* is no longer commonly used. The only usage information given about *elementary school* in the American works is the label *North American* in *NOAD*, the British works being more

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