

How might a future version of *OED*'s model for British English incorporate variation and change?

As the pronunciation editors for the *Oxford English Dictionary* (and other Oxford Languages dictionary and dataset products), we provide pronunciations for all non-obsolete words in British and U.S. English, in both written transcription and audio form. For the model referred to as "British English", we create these transcriptions from a pronunciation model that has been developed based on descriptions of Standard Southern British English (SSBE)-like varieties of English (see <https://public.oed.com/how-to-use-the-oed/key-to-pronunciation/pronunciation-model-british-english/> for a general discussion).

In this UKLVC14 presentation we propose to discuss the current British English transcription model, and to identify particular features that are widely recognized as subject to variation or undergoing sound change. Some of these are already part of *OED*'s model, for example the use of /a/ as well as /ɑ:/ for BATH words, and yod coalescence (/dʒ/ as well as /dʒ/ for DUKE etc). However, for smaller dictionaries and datasets which prefer to give only one pronunciation rather than multiple variants, current choice tends towards the more conservative option; should this position be shifting? Other features, such as GOOSE-fronting, variation in the realization of /t/, and /l/ vocalization, are not yet part of *OED*'s model but could be the basis for potential future additions.

Having identified these accent features, we will then talk about the pros and cons as we see them of the potential alterations to the British English model. This will include consideration of whether it is appropriate to incorporate aspects of regional English into the "British" model, which has the potential to compromise its usefulness to the typical dictionary user, or whether it is better to represent them in a different way. Representation of accent variation in *OED* is not limited to what we can represent by choice of symbols for transcription, but also potentially with the use of multiple audio illustrations attached to a single transcription.

We hope to get the benefit of UKLVC attendees' insights and experience to help us shape our methodology as we bring variation and change further into *OED* editorial practice. We also hope that attendees would benefit from this demonstration of the application of sociophonetics in a context outside of academia, and that it could open up opportunities for collaboration.

--

A note for the consideration of UKLVC14 organisers:

Since our presentation seeks specifically to elicit feedback on some different directions that we could take, this feels more short and interactive than either a traditional talk or poster format; perhaps something more like a table where people can come and chat to us, if there is scope for other sorts of interactive content such as this at UKLVC14? This would be similar to our brief workshop demo at UKLVC12 (which was about the way people could interrogate our pronunciation data), which we felt was very well received.