Partridge in print and online

Tom Dalzell & Terry Victor (eds), *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. Second edition. London: Routledge, 2012. Pp. xix + 2481. Hardback £200.00, ISBN 9780415619493.

Partridge Slang Online (http://www.partridge-slangonline.com) £600; or Online Access plus Hardback £700 (for 3 years from original publication to December 2015)

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Eric Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, first published in 1937, ran to 8 editions culminating in 1984 and is widely acknowledged as the definitive record of twentieth-century British slang. *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (NPD)* maintains the tradition impressively, enhanced by a more conventional approach to citing sources, a broader focus to include examples of colloquial and vernacular vocabulary worldwide and prominence given to usage since 1945. A thousand new entries from the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, South Africa, Ireland and the Caribbean, and increased representation of the language of social media, document linguistic innovation and/or reflect more sophisticated lexical data capture since the previous print edition of 2006. The 19 pages of introductory text outline criteria for inclusion, describe the structure of entries and provide a fascinating set of observations on slang drawn from Partridge's many published works. With over 60,000 entries the second edition of *NPD* is complemented for the first time by *Partridge Slang Online* (*PSO*), a resource which offers new ways to access and interrogate the data.

Part of the charm of the earlier Partridge volumes is the inclusion of supporting notes in the form of anecdotal observations. Entertaining and informative – and unquestionably genuine – as it is, such evidence is unfortunately problematic, since it is difficult to evaluate. Tracing the evolution in the presentation of an entry selected at random – *buggerlugs* – across 75 years of the Partridge 'brand' illustrates the current editorial team's move towards a more *OED*-inspired methodology, while retaining the appeal of the 'house style':

1937 (1st edn.) to 1951 (4th edn.)
buggerlugs. An offensive term of address: mainly nautical: late C.19–20 (J. Brophy, *Waterfront*, 1934)
1961 (supplement to 5th edn.)
buggerlugs. (p. 103) An offensive term of address: mainly nautical: late C.19–20 (J. Brophy, *Waterfront*, 1934). Not – in Liverpool at least – necessarily offensive; so a Liverpudlian assured me in 1952.
1984 (8th edn. edited by Paul Beale)
buggerlugs. A not necessarily offensive term of address: orig. mainly nautical: late C.19–20 (J. Brophy, *Waterfront*, 1934). P.B.: I first heard it from a Cumbrian during RAF National Service, early 1950s, describing the Station Warrant Officer as 'Old buggerlugs'. Cf. the Aus. *fuck-knuckle*.
2006 to 2012 (*NPD* 1st and 2nd edns edited by Tom Dalzell and Terry Victor)
buggerlugs *noun*
used as a form of friendly address *UK*, 1934
Originally nautical, used between men.
▶ DAD [to Denise] See y' buggerlugs. – Caroline Aherne and Craig Cash, *The Royle Family*, 1999

As this selection illustrates, entries now record part of speech, definition, location and earliest known date – 1934 here refers to J. Brophy's *Waterfront*, which although not listed can be confirmed by referring to previous editions. A passage from a published source records the term's use in popular literature, newspapers, magazines, movies or songs – in this case, dialogue from the popular BBC sit-com *The Royle Family* – and additional notes describe the term's origins and/or geographical/social distribution.

For individuals and institutions able to meet the additional subscription one can readily imagine the attraction of access to the companion online resource at http://www.partridgeslangonline.com. The web package includes access to a selection of Eric Partridge's major works and collections of slang dating back to the 1600s, a fully searchable Bibliographic Library and, of course, the enhanced search and browse functionality one expects of digital content. If one compares a simple reference query by, for instance, looking up entries for 'sick' in both versions, the benefits of *PSO* are immediately apparent. The print edition has 18 headwords beginning with the orthographic string <sick> listed alphabetically from *sick* via *sickie* to *sick to death of*. An online search query for <sick>

doi:10.1017/S0266078413000230

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078413000230 Published online by Cambridge University Press

returns 34 items and presents the first line of each (e.g. *sick* – 'excellent; wonderful') and the option to click through to access the definition, citation(s), date and supporting notes that constitute an individual entry. In addition to the 18 headword entries at SICK the online search also captures every occurrence of 'sick' elsewhere in the dictionary and so can be used, for instance, to compile a set of synonyms for SICK [= UNWELL] (e.g. rhyming slang *Tom and Dick*, onomatopoeic *yack* [= 'to vomit'] and phrases deriving from emoticons such as *Q-sign* [= 'open mouth with tongue hanging out']). Clearly this would take a prohibitively long time to accomplish using the conventional print dictionary. Users can bookmark entries and save and manage searches to create and annotate their own datasets.

PSO also offers the additional experience of browsing from a menu of categories – by subject, type, place of origin, part of speech, date or alphabetically. Content can be explored and queries gradually refined by applying combinations of filters to enable fine-grained searches and obtain more focused results. A basic search for 'truant' for instance returns 15 entries. Selecting *wag* from the list of 15 provides the definition 'to play truant', earliest cited usage (1848) and three citations that demonstrate the range of publications contained within the current dictionary's database: Louis S. Leland's *A Personal Kiwi-Yankee Dictionary* (1984), Shaun Ryder's autobiography *In His Own Words* (1998) and an episode of the British television soap opera, *Coronation Street* (10.12.2001). A set of related entries is automatically generated and presented in a side panel (e.g. *moonlight* – 'a discreet and hurried departure to avoid debts, especially of an absconding made at night') alerting users to potentially useful content which they might otherwise not have considered. By applying the additional filters <date: early 20th century> the original list of 15 here reduces to 2 (*bunk* and *skive*), a feature which opens up a range of interesting possibilities. One can imagine researchers in creative industries – authors, scriptwriters, advertisers – would benefit greatly from this kind of functionality. Browsing for <part of speech: intensifier> in combination with the filter <date: early 19th century>, for example, gives a range of expressions (e.g. *and a half, rattling, real*) that would assist in creating and editing dialogue to ensure period and/or location authenticity.

In terms of the functionality and substance of *PSO* there are elements of the resource that could be developed further. I would hope there will be an opportunity, for instance, to integrate legacy content fully – i.e. include within the searchable dataset entries from all previous editions dating back to 1937. I appreciate this might not make economic sense for updates to future print editions but it would position the online resource as an unrivalled complement to the online *OED* for researchers interested in English lexis defined by community of practice and/or social domain. There are also additional filters one can envisage adding value for specialist audiences. The fascinating analysis by Ruano-García (2012) of sources cited in the *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898–1905) to illustrate Lancashire dialect suggests that an option to filter citations by genre e.g. autobiography, fiction, glossary (online or printed), multi-media (film, radio, popular music) would offer invaluable insight into the relative frequency of publication types represented in *NPD*, thereby contextualising research enquiries and, presumably, informing future data elicitation.

As to the content of *NPD* the coverage is extremely impressive. One of the great pleasures of thumbing through any dictionary – perhaps especially slang dictionaries – is finding entries one feels personally attached to ('I thought we invented that word', 'That's what my mate/dad/grandma says') or discovering surprising omissions. I am not a lexicographer and can only begin to imagine the difficulty of deciding what to exclude, but inevitably there are editorial decisions I hope might be revisited in future. I am, for instance, a little disappointed at what appears to be an inconsistent treatment of nicknames. Personally I sense nicknames are an integral part of most English speakers' informal repertoire, but since the first edition of *NPD* many of the traditional British nicknames included in earlier versions have been intentionally withdrawn. Generally attributed to Forces slang, many of these gained more widespread currency such that people my age (born 1964) probably know the odd *Smudger* (surname Smith), *Nobby* (surname Clarke), *Chalky* (surname White), *Lofty* (anyone considered unnaturally tall or indeed unusually small) or *Curly* (anyone bald or with straight hair). Given that such nicknames are less common today, it is perhaps understandable that most no longer merit inclusion. Nonetheless, some clearly remain sufficiently alive in the public consciousness to warrant mainstream cultural reference – witness *Lofty Holloway* (EastEnders, 1983–1985) and *Curly Watts* (Coronation Street, 1983–2003) and a speaker recorded in Filey, North Yorkshire in 2004 as part of the *BBC Voices Recordings* (BL shelfmark: C1190/35/02), who demonstrates continued awareness among speakers of a certain generation: 'only during the war I was obviously a *Nobby* … every *Clark* was called *Nobby*'. Moreover in a recent *Observer* interview (James, 2013) footballer James Milner remembers sharing the disappointment of relegation for Leeds United in 2004 with other 'local lads who came through the academy, people like *Smudger* [Alan Smith] and *Robbo* [Paul Robinson], who it hit harder'.

More pertinently, according to anecdotal data I have compiled over several years, there appear to be observable morpho-phonological and sociolinguistic principles

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078413000230 Published online by Cambridge University Press

at play in contemporary nicknaming conventions that are yet to be acknowledged in *NPD*. In the UK today, and in all probability elsewhere too, nicknames are commonly derived from surnames by applying a number of productive processes: (a) monosyllabic surnames often acquire the suffix <–y>; (b) polysyllabic surnames are commonly abbreviated to initial syllable plus (i) the suffix <–s>, (ii) the suffix <–o>, particularly names ending orthographically in <-son> or (iii) the suffix <–ers>, arguably typically used by and of middle-class speakers. Celebrity autobiographies – evidently a core source for Partridge citations – provide numerous examples, as is illustrated by a list drawn simply from the world of sport: *Longy* (St Helens & GB Rugby League player Sean Long), *Lamps* (Chelsea and England footballer Frank Lampard), *Johnno* (Leicester and England Rugby Union player Martin Johnson) and *Aggers* (BBC cricket commentator Jonathan Agnew). Other innovations, possibly emanating from the USA, also include use of the definite article plus initial syllable with either the suffix <-meister>, or its shorter counterpart <–ster>, as wonderfully exploited in the British sit-com *Max and Paddy's Road to Nowhere* when, at the 40th birthday party of old school friend Kevin Wolfson, Maxwell 'Max' Bygraves (played by Peter Kay) is delighted to meet the 'old crew': *Wolfster*, *Patelster*, *Bobster*, *Munster* and *Fosterster*. Indeed a recent episode of Sky 1's *A League of Their Own* (30.12.12) featured an exchange in which regular panellists Jack Whitehead and Jamie Redknapp alternated within seconds of each other between referring to Olympic Gold Medal cyclist and guest Laura Trott as *Trottie* and *The Trottster* respectively, confirming what seems to be an increasingly widespread and mainstream vernacular trend. *Meister* and *–ster* both feature in *Green's Dictionary of Slang* (2010) and at *Urban Dictionary*, and the latter also includes several examples of types (a) and (b) above. Intriguingly only *Curly* of the older set merits inclusion in *NPD* and at least one modern nicknaming suffix (<-erino>, e.g. *Steverino*) but none of the others discussed here. I sense only a respected authority such as *NPD* could satisfactorily establish dates, precedent and social/geographic distribution of this widespread practice, particularly with the opportunities afforded by access to large corpora and to the internet to verify such phenomena.

The Partridge canon is certainly a well-used reference work here at the British Library: invaluable in documenting developments in English slang while supporting the day-to-day curatorial activity of describing, transcribing and interpreting the Library's sound recordings of vernacular speech. Linguistic researchers and devotees of the English language will, I suspect, appreciate greatly the developments in content and presentation in this latest edition of the dictionary and welcome the increased flexibility provided by online access. I am sure the Partridge brand will continue to evolve and be rightly revered for years to come.

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