Interpreting the Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English

Michiko Ogura

When the history of a particular word is under investigation, the first tool to be consulted is the Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter OED). Spelling variants in historical and typological classification, etymology with the appropriate length of additional explanation, significations according to historical principles with minutely subdivided shades of meaning, dates of the first and the last (in the case of obsolete words) quotations, phrases, and compounds — all this information is given under a headword. The Middle English Dictionary (hereafter MED) has a somewhat different presentation of information; some headwords are not identical with modern forms, and some of the first quotations under each headword or each signification predate those in the OED. Quotations of Middle English documents are, of course, enriched by way of the variety of manuscript variants of the text quoted. The Dictionary of Old English (hereafter DOE) shows quite a different disciplinary approach. Its uniqueness lies in providing significations which emphasize phrasal expressions and glosses on Latin words. Though a comparison among the three dictionaries is feasible only for headwords from A to G at this stage, it seems worth trying, particularly when another historical tool, the Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter HTOED), based on the categories proposed by the Thesaurus of Old English (TOE) and the Historical Thesaurus of English (HTE), has been available since autumn 2009. The aim of this paper, then, is to make a comparison among the significations

---

1 I am grateful to Christian Kay, Professor Emeritus, University of Glasgow, who advised me with respect to the HTOED and graciously allowed me to use her website for this paper.
of OED, MED, and DOE, in particular using quotations which exemplify the subdivided senses. On the one hand, we may hope to learn to use these dictionaries properly, with a sufficient knowledge of both their individual merits and peculiarities and their shared proclivities. On the other, it may also be possible to suggest some better ways of structuring the significations, particularly for those headwords which undergo significant change in the transition from Old English to Middle English. The examples for this study are mainly taken from among the words of emotion, which I have been working with for some years, in the DOE fascicles for A to G, in order to keep the comparisons clear. The examples will be presented alphabetically, since that seems the most coherent method of organizing the relevant evidence and assessing the differences among the dictionaries for the significations of the relevant headwords. If the ideal is to gain a sense of the whole history of a given word by “simply pushing a button of your PC,” then the three diachronically based dictionaries need to work from a common basis of understanding, especially with respect to signification.

Awe

The OED signification of awe sb. is divided into two parts: “I. As a subjective emotion,” and “II. As an objective fact.” This headword corresponds to two in MED, aue (n.) and eie (n. (2)). Senses 1 and 2 of both aue and eie mostly correspond to I. and II. of OED awe, though such phrases as to stand in awe of are included in I.4 in OED, aue 3. and eie 1. in MED. DOE uses a somewhat different division of signification; it divides 1. fear and 2. awe and discusses phrases in 3., but collocations, phrases, and glosses are subdivided minutely.

For example, Genesis 9.2 in example (1) below is cited in DOE under 1.b. in an alliterative collocation, as an instance of ege and oga ‘fear and terror.’ The same example appears in OED II. 5., but the two words & oga are omitted, and thus the trace of an alliterative pair disappears. Readers of Old English who are concerned with the poetic tradition will be grateful to the DOE for its care in providing the full citation and will appreciate the care with the signification here.

---

2 See Ogura, “Words of emotion” and “Words of Emotion.”
3 This is the expression Professor Antonette di Paolo Healey used in private communication.
4 Old English texts are cited by the short-titles employed in publications of The Dictionary of Old English Project; full bibliographical details may be found on the website of the Project, at <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/st/index.html>. Modern translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English

(1) Gen 9.2 (DOE ege m. 1.b.; OED awe sb.1 II.5.)

& beo eower ege & oga ofer ealle nytenu & fugelas & ofer ealle ða ðíngc ðe on eorðan styrið (cf. Gn: et terror vester ac tremor sit super cuncta animalia terrae).

[And the fear and terror of you shall be over all beasts and birds and over all those things which move on earth.]

A relevant instance of ege occurs in the Psalms at verse 90.5. Example (2) is cited in OED under †7, which reads, “Something which inspires fear; a cause of dread; a restraint.” OED quotes the Vespasian gloss, and here I add the Lambeth and Paris Psalters to show the variants; DOE does not provide this signification in this entry, but the word nihtegsa ‘night-terror’ will no doubt be included in fascicle N.

(2) Ps 90.5 (PsGlA in OED awe sb.1 †7)

(Non timebis a timore nocturno.)

A: Ne ondredes ðu ðe from e∫e naehlicum.

I: þu ne ondrætst fram nihtlicum ege.

[Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night.]

Cf. P: ne ðu þe nihtegsan nede ondrædest.

In addition, an example from Cursor Mundi is found in OED under †7 and MED aue 2.: Cursor 1773 þat sorou to see was ful grete au (cf. (Fairfax) þat sorrow to se was ful grete aghe [it was very great terror to see the sorrow]). For awe, then, the MED and OED correspond in their division of the entry into significations and quotations, but the DOE’s different division offers students of Old English a clearer sense of the word in its earliest English usage.

Bliss

Bliss shows a morpho-phonological and semantic blending with bless in both nouns and verbs. Metres of Boethius 2.14 in example (3) is cited in OED bliss sb. under †1, which reads, “Blitheness of aspect toward others, kindness of manner; ‘light of one’s countenance,’ ‘smile.’ (Only in OE).” However, the same example is found under 2. in DOE bliss, blip ‘benevolence, favour.’ Here the prose part has no corresponding section from which to draw a conclusion about the exact meaning of the word in this context. The sense †1 in OED may be influenced by Latin, which I quote in (3) below, even though the quotation is from the Metres, where direct Latin
influence is debatable. The use of bliss here in this Metre seems to be a result of the constraints of alliteration. I see no reason why the sense given in DOE should be rejected in favour of that offered in OED.

(3) Met 2.14 (DOE bliss, blijps f. 2; OED bliss sb. †1)

hi [wuruldsælða] me to wendon heora bacu bitere, and heora blisse
from [they turned their bitter backs on me and [took] from [me]
their favour]. (trans. in DOE)

Cf. Bo 2. 8.11-12

þa wendon hi me heora bæc to, 7 me mid ealle from gewitan
[Then they [worldly prosperities] turned their back to me, and
entirely departed from me.]

Cf. Bo Bk.I, Met I, 17-20

Dum levibus male fida bonis fortuna faveret, / Paene caput tristis
merserat hora meum. / Nunc quia fallacem mutavit nubila vultum, /
Protrahit ingratas impia vita moras.

[While fortune favoured me — / How wrong to count on swiftly-
fading joys — / Such an hour of bitterness might have bowed my
head. / Now that her clouded, cheating face is changed / My cursed
life drags on its long, unwanted days.]

Another example from Boethius, this time from the prose, is given under 2 in DOE, immediately after the example cited in (3); there is again no corresponding part in Metres: Bo 35.102.25 Ða ongon he biddan heora blisse (B miltse; cf. Boeth. Cons.Phil.metr. 3.12.27 ueniam [Then he began to ask their favour]). The fact that MS. B has a variant miltse is an important indicator of the semantic rivalry among these synonyms in the early medieval period.

DOE bliss, blijps 3. rendering gloria’ glory’ corresponds to OED bliss sb. †3. “Glory.”

The first example in OED is taken from the Trinity Homilies, which is one of the examples also offered by DOE (TrinHom (Morris 19) 115.21). DOE has, however, another twelfth-century example from HomU 1 (Bodley 343, ed. Belfour), which has a reference to Matthew in Latin (I note here that the relevant Old English word in the gloss texts, as listed here, is wuldor). All three instances follow in example (4):

5 Concerning the debate, see Szarmach, “An Apologia for the Meters of Boethius,” 107-36.
7 Twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts like the Peterborough Chronicle, Lambeth Homilies, and Trinity Homilies are in the data of both DOE and MED. All manuscripts from the transitional period included in the DOE Corpus are enumerated, with permission of the DOE staff, in Ogura, “Late OE and Early ME.”
Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English

(4) HomU 1 and TrinHom (DOE bliss, blihs f. 3; TrinHom 115.21 in OED bliss sb. †3)
HomU 1 118

eft þe deofel . . . sceawedæ him [þam Hælende] alles middæn-

eardes rice and his blisse (Mt. 4:8 omnia regna mundi et gloriam
corun) (Li. wuldur; Ru1&WS wuldor)
[Again the devil . . . showed him [the Lord] the kingdom of all the
world and its glory.]
TrinHom (Morris 19) 115.17

intrabit rex gloriæ . . . þe king of blisse þe wile faren herin.
[the king of glory who wishes to come herein]
TrinHom (Morris 19) 115.21

quis est iste rex glorie hwæt is þis blissene king? . . . dominus uirtutum
ipse est rex glorie he þe is alre mihtene louerd he is alre blissene king.
[What is this king of glories? . . . he who is the Lord of all powers, he
is the king of all glories.]

The development of bliss as a translation for Latin gloriam, and with a meaning more
akin to modern English ‘glory,’ seems likely to be a feature of the transitional period.

The verbs bliss and bless illustrate more obvious blending than the associated
nouns. The fact of blending is clearly stated in the etymology to OED bliss v., which
notes that, for signification 2., the blending occurred in the sixteenth to seventeenth
centuries. OED bless v. is classified according to three major senses: “I. To make sacred,
consecrate, hallow; II. To hold or call holy; to extol as holy, divine, gracious; III. To
declare to be supernaturally favoured; to pronounce or make happy.” Example (5) from
Genesis A comes from III. 7., which reads, “To confer well-being upon; to make happy;
to prosper, make successful.” DOE cites the same example in bletsian 1.a., meaning
‘to bestow divine favour.’ Also relevant in this respect is a comparison between Gen-
esis A line 2354 and the Hexateuch text at Genesis 17.20, which DOE quotes in Latin
in parentheses and for which I add the Old English text in (5) below. Here, the sub-
junctive form is used by contrast to GenA, where the infinitive should bear allitera-
tion. As the explanatory definition under 7. in OED demonstrates, a “divine blessing”
must bring success or happiness. Thus, we can see the early evidence for the later
semantic merger of bless and bliss.8

8 OED bless v.1, III. 7: “orig. said of God; in later use also of men and things, but generally with an im-
plication of their conferring instrumentally a divine blessing. (Here the association of bless with bliss
becomes apparent.)” In MED both blissen and blessen should be consulted; the merger can be seen
in blessen, especially under 3. (a) “To make (sh.) fortunate or happy, be a blessing to.”
(5) GenA 2354 (*DOE* bletsian 1.a.; *OED* bless v.† III 7)

ecce drihten andswarode . . . ic Ismael estum wille bletsian nu
(cf. Gn 17:20 [ecce benedicam ei] efne ic hine bletsige)

[The eternal Lord answered . . . I am now willing to bless Ishmael.]

Example (6) PsGlJ 94.1 is cited in *DOE* under bletsian 3.a.i., which reads, “bletsian ‘to extol, praise’ loosely glossing *exsultare* ‘to rejoice,’ perhaps because the word is superficially close to blissian.” Example (7) PsGlJ 48.14 is cited under 4., glossing *complacere*, here ‘to be pleased.’ Both examples are taken from the Arundel Psalter, which suggests that a further comparison among the glosses should be made. D-type glosses other than J use blissian in contexts similar to that in example (6), which shows dialectal contrast with A-type gefeon. In example (7), bletsian appears in ABCDE, translating *benedicere* of the Roman text, and in FGIJ translating *complacere* of the Gallican text. In F and J, bletsian is used, but G and I choose the renderings geliciað and gecwemde, respectively. The detail in which the *DOE* lays out this material, providing all the psalter glosses for comparison against the chosen sample gloss, suggests a very careful approach to determining the significations.

(6) PsGlJ 94.1 (*PsGlJ* in *DOE* bletsian 3.a.i.)

cumaþ uton bletsian drihtne uton dreman Gode hælende urum uenite exultemus domino iubilemus deo salutari nostro (DFGHJK blissian, ABC forms of gefeon, E to gedremene).

[Come, let us praise the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the Saviour.]

(7) PsGlJ 48.14 (*PsGlJ* in *DOE* bletsian 4.)

þes weg heora æswic þeowþ biþ him & æfter þon on muþe heora hi bletsiaþ haec uia illorum scandalum ipsis et postea in ore suo complacunt (F bletsið, G geliciað, I gecwemde k hig gelifiaþ glossing forms of complacere; BD bletsið, E bletsiaþ, AC bledsið glossing benedicent).

[This way of theirs is an offence for them and afterwards they will be pleased in their mouth.]
Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English

Care

A semantic change of the word care from ‘sorrow’ to ‘care’ is evident in the Middle English phrase without(n) care. In OED care sb.1 under 2. we read, “Burdened state of mind arising from fear, doubt, or concern about anything; solicitude, anxiety, mental perturbation; . . . . ‘withouten care: without doubt.” In MED care (n. (1)) under 4., we read, “(a) Fear, dread; withouten ~, without fear; (b) withouten ~, without doubt, truly.” The only example for (b) in MED is the same as that found in OED under 2.: Castle Love (1) 1509 O God hit is, wip-outen care, Of alle schaftes schuppare. Example (8) is an early thirteenth-century example of care ‘fear’; MS. B has bute care but T wiðute care.

(8) HMaid (B) 30/497 (MS. B in MED care n. (1) 4 (a))
Nis ha neauer bute care [(T) 507: wiðute care] leaste hit misfeare.

She is never without fear lest it go wrong.

The sense ‘fear’ is well attested by other examples under 4.(a), as in WPal. 288 Pe couherd comsed to quake for kare & for drede and Cursor (F) 5090 Make Š ou redy wiþoute mare and dose Š ou hame wiþ-out care. As these contexts indicate, care seems to have had a wider range of senses in Old and Middle English. DOE demonstrates this peculiarity with its focus on phrases and collocations. Example (9) shows caru ‘sorrow’ used in cearum cwihan (from DOE caru 1.b.) and example (10) don care ‘to take care’ in the gloss (under 2.a.):

(9) ChristC 889 (DOE caru f. 1.b.)
þær mon mæg sorgende folc gehyran hygegeomor, hearde gefysed, cearum cwipende cwicra gewyrhtu, forhte afærde.

There one can hear people crying, sad in mind, greatly disquieted, bewailing with sorrows the deeds of a lifetime, terrified, being afraid.

(10) LibSc 45.27 (DOE caru f. 2.a.)
(sic debemus agere curam nostram ut non neglegamus curam proximi.) swa we scylon don care ure þæt we na forgymen care nehstan.

We must take care of us so that we may not neglect the neighbour’s care.
Doubt

A loan word, *doubt* shared its semantic field with the native *dread* and was used synonymously in Middle English.9 *Doubt* in the sense of ‘fear’ is seen in *OED* *doubt* sb. under †3.a. “Apprehension, dread, fear,” which corresponds to *MED* *dōut(e)* n. 3. (a) “Anxiety; fear, fright,” the common example being *St. Juliana 28* for *dute of deade* ‘for fear of death.’ In *OED* *dread* sb. under †3. “Doubt, risk of the thing proving otherwise,” we find examples from 1340 (*Ayenbit of Inwit*) to 1556, including phrases like *without (but out of) dread* ‘without doubt, doubtless’ or *no dread* ‘no fear, no doubt,’ a signification which corresponds to *MED* *drende* n. 4. (a)(b). The verb forms also show semantic overlap. Example (11) illustrates manuscript variants in *Cursor Mundi* (Trinity in *OED* and Göttingen in *MED*, with Cotton and Fairfax from Richard Morris’s EETS edition):10

(11) *Cursor* 21870 (MS. T in *OED* *doubt* v. †8 intr.; *MED* *dōuten* v. 2 (e))

C: Mani man sal dei for dute.

G: Mani man sall drede and dute.

F: mani man sal sorou for doute

T: Mony mon eref shal doute.

Example (12) again shows manuscript variants. *MED* *drende* v. 5. “To be in doubt, followed by a whether-clause” is exemplified by *MPPsalter*, which has a variant *douten*, which I quote from Karl Bülbbring’s EETS edition:11

(12) *MPPsalter* 76.15 (*MED* *drende* v. 5)

Þe wicked ben trubled, *drendand* wheþer þou be God oþer non.


We sometimes have to examine variant forms other than those quoted in *OED* and *MED* in order to confirm the breadth of the semantic fields of a particular word and its synonyms.

---

9 For the rivalry which developed between these words in the Middle English period, see Ogura, “ME *douten* and *dreden*,” 117-30.
10 *Cursor Mundi*, ed. Morris, EETS, o.s. 66.
Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English

Dream

Dream meant ‘joy’ throughout the Old English period, according to the extant written records. Dream was still used in this sense in early Middle English, as seen in example (13), but the sense ‘dream’ began to appear in Genesis & Exodus in the mid-thirteenth century (OED dream sb.1, l.a.), often as a manuscript variant, as seen in example (14):

(13) Laʒ 14285-6 (OED dream sb.1; MED drēm n. (1) (e))
C: heo æten heo drunken: dræm wes i burhþen.
O: hiie eoten hiir drongken: blisse was a-mang heom.

(14) Gen 41.22 (OED dream sb.1 1.a.; MED drēm n. (2), 1. (b))
WycEV: I sawʒ a sweuen
WyclV: and Y seiʒ a dreem

DOE drēam has three major senses: 1. ‘joy, bliss,’ 2. ‘frenzy, delirium, madness, demonic possession,’ and 3. ‘sound, music, noise.’ Example (15) is taken from sense 2., with reference to Matthew, the Latin of which is cited from DOE, and I add here a West Saxon translation. Another citation I add here is from the Vitellius Psalter, which uses woddream glossing demonia, in order to show my own speculation that this sense of woddream or on wodum dream might be one of the triggers of the semantic change of OE dream from ‘joy’ to ‘dream’ through ‘demons.’

(15) ÆCHom II, 3 27.262 (DOE drēam m. 2)
Sum wif wæs ðe com to criste. and bæd for hire dehter þe læg on wódum dreame.

[A woman was who came to Christ and prayed for her daughter who lay in a demonic possession.]

Cf. Mt(WSCP) 15.22
(filia mea male a daemonio vexatur) min dohtor ys yfle mid deofle gedreht.

Cf. Ps 95.5 (DOE woddream m.)
(Quoniam omnis dii gentium demonia dominus autem cēlos fecit.)
G: forþam þe ealle godas þeoda woddreamas I <demonia> drīhten soþlice heofenas dyde I worhte (A dioful, B deo ful, C deo fol, E Diofla, Fl deo fla, J demonia, DHK woddreamas).

The DOE offers hints of the semantic change to come, hints which can be investigated both in later dictionaries and in the DOE Corpus.
Fear

The phrase for fear needs a comment on the choice of variants, for doute and for drede, particularly since we have already examined elements of doubt and dread in this semantic range. In OED fear sb. under 3.b. we find Cursor Mundi (Trin.) as the first citation of this phrase, which is example (16) below. In MED fèr n. (1) under 1.(b), after the example with a dubious spelling wíðutan fore in Lambeth Homilies (which is nevertheless cited under 2.a. in OED as the first citation of the sense ‘the emotion of pain or uneasiness’), taken from the South English Legendary and cited with a variant, which is example (17) below. DOE fær gives a citation of the phrase from Ælfric’s Grammar of the thirteenth-century reading of the Tremulous Hand, with the choice of ege in the Old English version, as seen in example (18) below.

(16) Cursor 1908 (MS. T in OED fear sb. 3.b.; MED fèr 1. (b))
C: for doute if any demmyng brest
G: For drede if ani damising brest
T: For fere lest any damning brest

(17) S. Leg. Chris. (Hrl) 162 (MED fèr 1. (b))
For fere [Ld: drede] he ful to grounde anon.

(18) ÆGram (W) 272.8 (DOE fèr m. 2)
(pre timore non audeo) for fore ic ne <dear> (ÆGram ege)

These three examples indicate (i) that OE fèr was mainly used in the sense ‘sudden or unexpected danger; peril, calamity,’ as the signification in DOE fèr m. 1 shows, and that the sense of ‘fear’ was a later development, and (ii) that the three dictionaries disagree with respect to the earliest occurrence of the phrase for fear, with the OED citing Cursor Mundi, the MED the Lambeth Homilies, and the DOE a copy of Ælfric’s Grammar.

As to the verbs, I here give an example from Deuteronomy, which is cited in both DOE and OED; the reference to the Wycliffite versions is my addition:

(19) Deut 1.28 (DOE fèran 1; OED fear v. 1.1.)
ða bodan us færđon, and cwædon: ðær is micel folc & maran men
donne we (cf. Dt: nuntii terruerunt cor nostrum dicentes maxima multitudine est et nobis in statura procerior).

[Then the messengers frightened us and said, there are greater people and more men than we.]
Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English

Cf. WycEV: the messangeris han feerde oure hertis.
WycLV: the messangeris maken aferd oure herte.

Here the sense clearly has to do with fear, and not with unexpected peril, in the DOE as well as in later references.

**Forgive**

I include one prefixed verb in my comparison of the significations of the three dictionaries, because the prefix *for-*, unlike *ge-* and *a-*, tends both to survive the centuries and to preserve its meaning. *Forgive* is one of those prefixed verbs that have survived lexically and can be easily identified as a headword in the three dictionaries. Example (20) can be regarded as syntactically ambiguous. It may be one of the earliest examples of a personal passive construction, since the verb can take the accusative and thus the passive is possible in the sense 'to give, grant.' On the other hand, some scholars such as Willem van der Gaaf maintain that the person should be in the dative and that the construction results from a contamination of the personal, active sentence with an 'impersonal' passive.\(^{12}\) DOE places this example under A.1.d. “to give, grant something acc. to someone / a city dat.” The sense ‘to give, grant’ is listed under A. in DOE *for-gyfan*, 5. in MED *foryéven*, and in OED †1 *forgive*.

(20) ÆLS (Lucy) 136 *(DOE for-gyfan A.1.d.)*
swa ic em forgifen. fram þam ælmihtigan gode nu þyssere byrig.
siracusanan. eow to geþingienne.

[So I am granted, by Almighty God, now in this city of Syracuse, to intercede for you.]

Examples (21) and (22), taken from the *Lambeth Psalter*, illustrate alternatives: (21) under A.1.c., the verb denoting ‘to give,’ and (22) under A.7., the verb meaning ‘to give back.’ Variants in other Psalters show differences in word choice, which reflect differences in the Latin source texts.

(21) PsGlI 1.3 *(DOE for-gyfan A.1.c.)*
& he bið swa swa treow þe geplantod is Þæt ðe geset is wið rynas waetera þæt þe westm his selð l forgifð on his tide *et erit tamquam*

lignum quod plantatum est secur decursus aquarum quod fructum suum dabit in tempore suo. (E giuan, CDGHJPPs[prose] forms of sellan)

[And he shall be like a tree planted by the course of water that shall give the fruit in his time.]

(22) PsGlI 50.14 (DOE forg-yfan A.7.)

Ageld forgf me blisse halwendan þines & mid ealdoricum gaste getrym me redde mihi laetitiam salutaris tui et spiritu principali confirma me. (DEFGH forms of agyldan only, ABCJL forms of agyfan)

[Give me back the joy of thy salvation and comfort me with excellent spirit.]

The Lambeth Psalter stands alone in its use of forgifan in these contexts.

Example (23) is taken from Piers Plowman, but the same example is quoted from the Piers B-text in OED under 1. and from the Piers C-text in MED under 5.(a).

(23) PPl. B (OED forgive v. †1. trans.), PPl. C (MED foryéven v. 5. (a))

B 18.76: For he was knynte & kynge sone kynde forȝaf þat tyme [vr. throwe], / þat non harlot were so hardy to leyne hands vpon hym.

C (Hnt) 21.79: Kynde forȝaf þat tyme / Þat no boye hadde hardinesse hym to touche.

The sense ‘to forgive’ is provided in OED under 3. “To remit (a debt); to give up resentment or claim to requital for, pardon (an offence).” Under OED 3.b. we find the earlier part of the Pater noster in Matthew 6.12 as an example “with the thing in the acc. and the person in the dat.” in Old English and under 3.c. the latter part as an example of “indirect object only” from an early version of the Wycliffite Gospel. Example (24) below shows these two usages, together with Latin and other versions. (In some versions of WycEV, to appears after the first forȝeue but is omitted in others.)

(24) Mt 6.12 (OED forgive v. 3. b. (Ags.Gosp.) and c. (1382 Wyclif))

(et demitte nobis debita nostra sicut nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris)

Li: 7 forgef us scylda usra suæ uoe forgefon scyldgum usum
Ru1: 7 forlet us ure scyldre swa swa we ec forleten þæm þe scyldigat (sic) wið us
Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English

Moreover, under 5. absolute use in OED, we find Luke 6.37 *Forgyfaþ & eow byð forgyfen*. It is curious to see that DOE does not choose these well-known sentences as examples. DOE is unique in giving, under D. (to forgive, 3.f.i.b. of judgement, punishment: tolerable, not hard, forgiving), four examples of the *Lindisfarne Gospel* version, two from Matthew and two from Luke, which manifest one of the priorities of this dictionary — its emphasis on glosses.

These examples, extracted from different entry structures in the three historical dictionaries of English, show hints of the modern meanings of the verb ‘forgive,’ and its connotations, through the centuries. In these references, the DOE in particular demonstrates the discipline of its approach.

**Game**

In the Old English period, *game* basically had the three meanings ‘joy,’ ‘jest,’ and ‘amusement,’ though the sense ‘jest, joke’ gradually became obsolete. Example (25) illustrates the sense ‘jest, joke’ as given in DOE *gamen* under 2., which seems to be a translation of the Latin *subsannabo* ‘I will mock.’ An example from Laʒamon (Caligula manuscript), taken from MED, follows in (26) below; the variant reading from the Otho manuscript is my addition. The first citation in example (27) is taken from OED under 2.†a:

(25) CP 36.247.23 (DOE *gamen* n. 2)

What have I to do, then, but laugh at it, when you come to destruction, and have to scoff at it, when the evil that you had feared comes upon you?
(26) Laȝ 21007-8 (MS. C in MED game n. 4)
C: heora ȝelp & heore gome: ilomp heom seoluen to scame.
O: heore ȝelop and hire game: ful ȝam seolue to grame.

[Their boast and their jest fell back on themselves to shame (grief).]

(27) Gen & Ex 3498 (OED game sb. 2.†a.; MED game n. 4. (b))
Tac ȝu nogt in idel min name, Ne swer it les to fele in gamen.

[Take not my name in vain; sware it not falsely too much in jest.]

The only signification in which the first example goes back to Old English is given by OED under game sb. in I.1. “amusement, delight, fun, mirth, sport,” which corresponds to DOE gamen 1. “amusement, merriment, mirth, joy.” Could this be a significant difference in semantic classification, given that DOE has some examples of ‘jest, joke’ as seen in (24)?

As for the verb game, OED clearly separates intransitive from transitive use, though both are obsolete. Example (28) is taken from the prose Genesis, which is cited in both OED game v. 1. intr. and DOE gamenian; the latter is quoted below, together with Latin and manuscript variants and with my addition of the Wycliffite version. Examples of MED gamen are classified according to three syntactic constructions: (a) intransitive, (b) impersonal, and (c) transitive. Example (29) is from (c), denoting ‘to give pleasure to (someone), amuse (someone, oneself)’ with a variant gladian.

(28) Gen 19.14 (OED game v. 1. intr.; DOE gamenian)
Loð þa eode to hys twam ȝðumum, þe woldon wifian on hys twam dohtrum, & cwæð him to: arisað & farað of þissere stowe, for þan dê God wyle adylegian þas burh; þa wæs him geðuht swyle he gamenigende spræce (Z gamnigende, L gamiende; cf. Gn: et visus est eis quasi ludens loqui).

[Then Loth went to his two sons-in-law, who wished to marry his two daughters, and said to them, Arise and go out of this place, for God intends to destroy the city; then it seemed to them as if he spoke jokingly.]

Cf. WycEV: And he was seen to hem as pleynge to speke.
Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English

(29) S. Leg. Prol. CV (Ashm) 60 (MED gāmen v. (c))

Here mone was deol to ihure; ne gamede [vr. gladede] hem no gle.

[Their mourning was sorrowful to hear; no amusement entertained them.]

These examples demonstrate the lost history of the verb ‘to game,’ and their predecessors have taken the lingering sense of gamen as a ‘jest’ or ‘joke,’ not just as ‘delight’ or ‘glee.’ With the other case studies given here, they demonstrate the ways in which comparative study of the three historical dictionaries of English clarifies past and present meanings, and especially syntactic usages, of the words for emotions over the centuries. As further letters of the DOE emerge, so too can this work develop further.

Those who use the Historical Thesaurus of English (HTE) may simply remember the sections and categories used in TOE and find which words had been synonymous before, during, or after a particular period of time. The thesaurus is particularly enlightening for the words studied here: synonyms of awe can be found under the categories anger, esteem, regard, fear, etc.; bliss under pleasure and enjoyment, and bless under their subcategory happiness; care under mental pain and suffering; doubt under the mind or fear; dream under sleeping, pleasure, and enjoyment; fear under the very category of fear; forgive under forgiveness and giving; game under pleasure, enjoyment, amusement, entertainment, and sport. The dates of the first and last quotations in OED are used in HTE to show when a particular word enters and departs from a particular category of synonyms. This means that the dates and significations used in OED become the master key to the Thesaurus, which offers scholars another link in the chain to a fuller understanding of these words and their usages.

We have seen here some examples of words whose significations may or may not differ in OED, MED, and DOE. Generally speaking, OED is to be consulted first, as long as the word in question is recorded. When the word is included in a quotation, MED and DOE should be consulted to see if the quotation is classified under the same or a similar sense of the word. MED is, of course, specifically concerned with Middle English texts and might also be expected to update the first example of each sense of the word in OED, as long as the sense is attested in the Middle English period. DOE might also be expected to update OED in some meanings of the word if the particular sense appeared in Old English contexts. Since the materials of DOE include texts from the transitional period and transcriptions of later hands (for instance, example (4) above), greater precision in the significations is possible. A particular
advantage of *DOE* lies in its treatment of phrasal expressions and alliterating word pairs (as in example (1)); another lies in its separate signification for the glosses. The cross-references to *OED* and *MED* found at the end of the definitions of each word in *DOE* are indispensable. At times, the same quotation may be defined differently (as in example (3)) or the dictionaries may give different first quotations to support a specific definition (as in examples (16)-(18) and (25)-(27)). When the word in question is native and included in the corpus of *DOE*, quotations under the headword should be carefully chosen, since in most cases they are the representatives of each sense. That said, there are times when as scholars we must go back to the *DOE Corpus* and check all the examples of a particular word ourselves. The *DOE* makes this work easy for letters from *A* to *G*, since all attested spellings are provided. For this useful tool — especially for syntacticians who always want more attestations and more evidence — and for the significations in general, we hope for the completion of *DOE* in the very near future.

*Chiba University*

**Bibliography**

Full bibliographical details concerning the texts cited by the short-titles employed in publications of The Dictionary of Old English Project may be found at the website of the Project, at <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/st/index.html>.


*HTE. Historical Thesaurus of English.* Test website at <http://libra.englang.arts.gla.ac.uk/historicalthesaurus/>. See also *HTOED*. 
Differences in Signification among Historically-Based Dictionaries of English


