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Anglo-Indian slang in dictionaries on historical principles

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with the lexicography of Anglo-Indian English; specifically it examines both past and contemporary work in the style of dictionary known as the 'dictionary on historical principles'. This type of dictionary is commonly viewed as the pinnacle of the western lexicographical tradition and for world Englishes scholars wishing to find out detailed information about a particular lexical item in a certain variety of English, a dictionary on historical principles is by far the best type of dictionary to use, provided one exists that covers the variety in question. The goal of the present study was to gauge the need for greater lexicographical research into Anglo-Indian English by conducting a focussed lexicographical study and comparing the results against both *Hobson-Jobson* and the *OED*. The results, now published as dictionary entries in the online version of *Green's Dictionary of Slang*, add greatly to our knowledge of Anglo-Indian English and reveal a need for continued dictionary work to improve upon the coverage provided by previous lexicography.

INTRODUCTION

Indian English is today one of the most widespread and abundantly used varieties of English, in extensive use not only throughout South Asia but in virtually every corner of the globe. It is difficult to determine the exact number of speakers, but estimates for India alone range from 125 million (Pandey 2015: 301) to 350 million speakers (Crystal 2008: 5), numbers that omit the numerous Indian diaspora populations around the world. Consequently, Indian English has attracted a great deal of attention from linguists (recent publications include Hundt & Sharma 2014; Lange 2012; Balasubramanian 2009; Sedlatschek 2009; see also the collected works of Kachru 2015). Yet, in spite of this interest there has been little movement in the field of lexicography, so that Indian English has no up-to-date dictionaries to speak of,

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certainly nothing published in the twenty-first century. Moreover, the dictionaries of Indian English that do exist are of limited scope and quality (see Lambert 2012).

In contrast to Indian English, many other major varieties of English around the world have been very well served by lexicography, especially with regard to a specific type of scholarly dictionary known as the *dictionary on historical principles*. A dictionary on historical principles is one that is modelled on the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In fact, before undergoing rebranding, the original title of the now-familiar *Oxford English Dictionary* was *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. This type of dictionary is concerned with tracing the entire history of each word that falls under its purview. As such, dictionaries on historical principles not only treat pronunciation, grammatical category, etymology (word derivation and history), orthographical form, and semantic content (in the form of definitions), but do so from a historical perspective, displaying the changes (and stabilities) of these various features of the lexis over time, from the earliest days of the language to present. Thus, alongside current lexis, words and senses now obsolete find a place in a dictionary on historical principles. In this way such dictionaries provide a history of a language. The idea for the dictionary on historical principles was first promulgated in the mid-nineteenth century (Trench 1857), and the idea immediately gained traction in Victorian scholarship. It is still widely in use today. The other defining feature of the dictionary on historical principles is that it presents the user with the documentary evidence that the lexicographers based their entries on. This is done in the form of what are known as ‘quotations’ or ‘citations’: excerpts of original texts containing the target lexical item, with bibliographical details appended, including year of publication, author name, title, page number, and so on. Thus the user is able to read genuine examples of the words in context.

The following dictionaries are the entire complement of dictionaries on historical principles for all varieties of English. Modern British English is covered extensively by the

Oxford English Dictionary (Murray et al. 1888–present), hereafter *OED*, for the period 1250 onwards. Middle English is treated in Kurath et al. (1956–2001) and a dictionary on historical principles for Old English is currently under way (Healey et al. 1994–present). Scottish English is covered by Craigie et al. (1931–2002) and Grant & Murison (1931–1976). American English is covered by Craigie et al. (1938–1944) and Matthews (1951), and for more recent lexis the *OED*. American regional English is extensively treated in Cassidy & Hall (1985–2013). Morris (1898) was the first dictionary on historical principles for Australian English, but this has been more latterly superseded by Ramson (1988) and thence Moore (2016). New Zealand English is covered by Orsman (1997), and South African English by Silva (1996). Canadian English was first treated by Avis et al. (1967) and more recently by Dollinger and Fee (2017), while more focused works have covered Newfoundland English (Story, Kirwin, & Widdowson 1982), Prince Edward Island English (Pratt 1988), and Cape Breton English (Davey & Mackinnon 2016).

Moving outside of the Inner Circle, there have been four dictionaries on historical principles for the Caribbean region, starting in Jamaican English (Cassidy & Le Page 1967), then Bahamian English (Holm & Shilling 1982), and most recently the English of Trinidad and Tobago (Winer 2009), while the entire Anglophone Caribbean was treated by Allsopp (1996), for which a supplementary volume has recently appeared (Allsopp 2010).

To these dictionaries on historical principles may be added a host of smaller volumes on specific subsets of English, such as cricket (Rundell 1985), the Antarctic (Hince 2000), Australian convict lexis (Laugesen 2002), and New Zealand rural lexis (Bardsley 2009). However, the language subset that has received the greatest lexicographical attention is slang. The first dictionary on historical principles restricted to slang was Farmer & Henley (1890–1904), after which there was a long hiatus before the appearance of Lighter (1994–1997) treating American slang, then two dictionaries treating the slang lexis of Britain, America,

Australia, New Zealand, and to a lesser extent other Inner Circle varieties such as Canadian English and South African English, namely, Dalzell and Victor (2005) and Green (2010).

In the case of Indian English, the story is rather different. The only dictionary on historical principles devoted specifically to Indian English is Yule, Burnell and Crooke (1903), commonly known by its enigmatic title *Hobson-Jobson*, now over a century out of date.[1] The date of 1903 is significant when compared to the other varieties listed above, for which the oldest dictionaries date from the 1960s, placing the lexicography of Indian English very far at the back of the pack. While it is clear that *Hobson-Jobson* is not a suitable dictionary of contemporary Indian English since it does not cover any terms that have entered the language since 1903, it is less well known that there are substantial problems with using *Hobson-Jobson* even as a guide to Anglo-Indian lexis of the colonial era. One scholar who has turned a critical eye to *Hobson-Jobson* is Görlach who commented that the 'compilers collected rare and often dubious words, many of which were probably little known and whose status as *English* was doubtful even in the 19th century' (1994: 49; italics in original). Görlach did not offer any direct evidence for this statement, but certainly the matter is worth looking into, for if Görlach is correct, then it becomes important to know which words are 'dubious' and which are not.

The only other dictionary on historical principles that treats Indian English is the *OED*, but as Indian English was not the primary focus of the dictionary, this also has its limitations. Briefly, the first edition (1888-1928) relied heavily on *Hobson-Jobson* for its Indian entries (see Nagle 2014); some relevant entries were added and updated in the various supplements (Craigie & Onions 1933; Burchfield 1972–1986), and some entries have been updated in the third edition (2000–present), hereafter *OED3*. Nevertheless, still today many entries relating to Indian English lexis in the *OED* have not been updated since the first edition or since Burchfield's supplements. Moreover, much of the lexis in *Hobson-Jobson*

never made its way into the *OED*, so that for many words the century out-of-date *Hobson-Jobson* is still the best dictionary currently available.

While *Hobson-Jobson* is usually described in glowing terms, as a dictionary on historical principles, it has serious limitations. Lambert (2014) notes that aside from little pronunciation information and an over-reliance on a small number of sources (the 20 most frequently cited works account for approximately 19.8% of all citations), some of the inadequacies of *Hobson-Jobson* include the fact that (a) headword forms are often at odds with current orthography (e.g. *crease* for *kris*, *hadgee* for *haji*), (b) over half of the headword forms (52.2%) are not found in the citations, (c) the index (987–1021) is not complete and contains some errors, and (d) a number of citations are dated according to the editors' conjecture about when the text was composed, rather than by the more reliable publication date of the text.

Given the shortcomings of *Hobson-Jobson*, Indian English's current best dictionary, I argue that a modern reassessment of the content of *Hobson-Jobson* is called for. Such a reassessment would have a number of beneficial outcomes. There is the possibility of locating antedatings of the earliest citations in *Hobson-Jobson*, thus revealing that the term in question was present in English at an earlier date. Heading the other direction in time, any postdatings located will show the use of the lexical item after 1903, and give an indication of how long that use continued. For entries without any citations, documentary evidence may or may not be located, thus either validating the status of the term and obviating the need to rely on the say-so of Yule, Burnell, and Crooke, or strongly suggesting that the term in question was, at the very least, not very common. This will provide some measure of clarity to Görlach's statement about the amount of 'dubious' lexis in *Hobson-Jobson*.

Since *Hobson-Jobson* has 4315 separate definitions, it was necessary to select a subset of terms in order to limit the field of research. This was accomplished by concentrating solely on the slang lexis recorded in *Hobson-Jobson*.

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this paper, *Anglo-India*(*n*) refers to the colonial British in India (not to those people who are of British and Indian parentage or ancestry), while *India*(*n*) refers to 'British India', that is, any of the various regions under British colonial rule up until Partition, including all or parts of present-day Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The term *Hindustani* refers to the north Indian language that is the parent of modern-day Hindi and Urdu.

In order to locate the slang items in Yule, Burnell and Crooke (1903), the dictionary was read through and every definition was categorised according to the semantic field and register. The semantic analysis was based on that used by Baumgardner, Kennedy & Shamim (1993), though expanded to suit the peculiarities of the lexis covered in *Hobson-Jobson*. Although *Hobson-Jobson* is subtitled a 'glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words,' analysis reveals that very little of the lexis covered is actually colloquial in nature.[2] The amount of slang recorded was small, with only 83 definitions classified as 'informal' out of a total of 4315 definitions in the entire dictionary (approximately 2%). Nevertheless, these 83 items provided a substantial starting point for the investigation.

For each lexical item in the list, documentary evidence from published texts was searched for in a range of online resources, primarily Google Books, Internet Archive, and HathiTrust. These sites include numerous Anglo-Indian texts, especially in the form of memoirs and travellers' tales written by colonists and visitors to British India, as well as novels, poetry, and newsprint. Each instance of the lexical item was then collected in the form of a lexicographical 'citation', that is, a textual excerpt containing the target word

accompanied by the relevant bibliographical details. Where possible, each text in which a term appeared was downloaded in both plain text and searchable image format (either PDF or DjVu). The reasoning behind this was that if a certain text contained one item of informal lexis, this increased the potential that it may contain other items of informal lexis. The plain text versions were then combined into a small Anglo-Indian English corpus of over 32 million words which could be searched for further tokens of target vocabulary. The search program was written in the Perl programming language and allowed for wildcard searches in order to handle variant spellings. This searching was facilitated by the author's knowledge of the vagaries of Anglo-Indian spelling and the numerous colonial-era transliteration systems used for loanwords from Indian languages. When new Anglo-Indian items of an informal nature were noticed, these too became part of the data set and more citations were sought for these terms. Citations were also taken from online sources that could not be downloaded and added to the corpus, but these were only taken when the online texts could be viewed either in full or with considerable context, and only when bibliographical details, especially with regards to publication date, could be verified.

Once the collection of citations was finished, the citations then served as the basis for writing a set of dictionary entries in the dictionary on historical principles style. The entries included the following linguistic information types: headword, variant spellings, etymology, part of speech label, and definition, followed by a listing of the citations for each lexical item and sense. The etymologies gave words from Hindustani in the Devanagari script accompanied by transliterations in parentheses. The transliterations follow the system used by McGregor (1993), with the exception of transliterating च as (*ch*) and छ as (*chh*).

PUBLISHING THE DATA

The traditional publishing outlet for historical lexicography work is a major scholarly print dictionary in the style of the *OED*, such as those published by Oxford University Press (e.g.

Silva 1996; Orsman 1997; Moore 2016), and other publishing houses (e.g. Grant & Murison 1931–1976; Kurath et al. 1956–2001; Lighter 1994/1997). This avenue for print publication was, however, not open due to the small number of dictionary entries produced by the research (less than 150). Today, however, an increasing amount of large-scale scholarly dictionaries on historical principles are being made available online. For example, Dollinger and Fee (2017) is freely available at http://www.dchp.ca/DCHP-2/ and Silva (1996) is online at http://www.dsae.co.za.[3] Importantly, the monumental *Green's Dictionary of Slang*, the print edition of which was published in three volumes by Chambers in 2010, is now also available online at https://greensdictofslang.com. *Green's Dictionary of Slang* (hereafter *GDoS*) is a watershed publication in the annals of slang lexicography, being, beyond doubt, the most comprehensive scholarly dictionary of slang ever published (as of July 2017 it recorded approximately 133,000 lexical items supported by 626,000 citations (Green 2017)). It has been described as 'quite simply the best historical dictionary of English slang there is, ever has been […] or is ever likely to be' (Coleman 2012: 193). Its coverage extends from the sixteenth century to the present and while concentrating on British and American slang it also covers Australian, New Zealand, and South African slang to a greater depth than any other slang dictionary on historical principles. The online version of *GDoS* was launched in October 2016 and is continually updated on a quarterly basis. As one of the goals of the dictionary going forwards is to broaden its scope by including increasingly greater coverage of slang items from world Englishes, Jonathon Green, the author and editor of *GDoS*, agreed to publish the results of the present lexicographical research on Anglo-Indian slang. To this end, the bulk of the terms researched were added to the April 2017 update of *GDoS*. The original edition of *GDoS* had already covered 28 Anglo-Indian terms that overlapped with lexical items treated in *Hobson-Jobson*. For these, the present research was able to add to the

material already in *GDoS*, particularly with antedatings, extra citational evidence, and by providing accurate etymologies from Hindustani.

RESULTS

The present research investigated 131 slang items of Anglo-Indian English, providing a wealth of previously unknown information about Anglo-Indian lexis with regards to (a) antedatings of earliest instances in both *Hobson-Jobson* and *OED*, (b) additional citational material, (c) new senses of words, (d) previously untreated lexical items, (e) etymology, (f) postdatings, and (g) frequency. These will be dealt with in turn.

Antedatings

Of the original 83 terms classified as slang in *Hobson-Jobson*, only 52 had supporting citations in that dictionary. The present research discovered earlier attestations for 30 of those 52 lexical items (approximately 57%). The antedatings ranged from less than 5 years (7 instances) to over 30 years (8 instances), with an average of approximately 22 years. The most substantial antedating was for *burra sahib*, 'a title of respect for an important man', which was recorded from 1889 in *Hobson-Jobson*, but was found to have been in use since 1793, a 96 year difference. The overall level of antedating indicates that *Hobson-Jobson* is not to be relied upon for information about when a certain term entered English.

In comparison with the *OED*, the findings are similar. A total of 48 terms treated by the present research were also included in the *OED*, of which 26 were able to be antedated (approximately 54%). The antedatings ranged from less than 5 years (4 instances) to over 30 years (6 instances), with an average of approximately 14 years. The greatest antedating was for *Ditch*, 'a colloquial name for Calcutta', for which the *OED*'s earliest citation of 1886 was antedated to 1839, a 47 year difference. Admittedly, the bulk of these terms in the *OED* had not been updated since the first edition of that dictionary (1888–1933). There were, however, a total of 9 entries that had been added or updated for *OED3* (*mem*, *Mofussil*, *Mofussilite*,

Mull, *Mulligatawny*, *nutcut*, *pagoda tree*, *poggle*, and *puckerow*) and for 7 of these the present research antedated the earliest attestations in *OED3*. This indicates that, for Anglo-Indian lexis at least, the *OED* is not to be wholly relied upon for information about when terms first appeared.

One example that demonstrates the worth of doing such historical lexicographical research is the term *lunkah* or *lunka*, 'a type of cheroot formerly popular in Anglo-India', a term that has been the cause of some lexicographical debate since the 1930s. The present research found seven examples of this term dating from the 1870s to the 1890s, and five more citations for *lunkah cigar*/*cheroot* from the 1850s to the 1880s, all of which attest to the presence of the word in Anglo-Indian English. However, as detailed in Brewer (2007: 70–72) and Ogilvie (2013: 142–144), in the 1930s, Colonel H. G. Le Mesurier, an advisor on Indian words for the *OED*, questioned the inclusion of *lunkah* which had been entered into the *OED* on the basis of a sole citation from Arthur Conan Doyle's second Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four* (1890). Le Mesurier stated that he had never heard the term although he had been in India for twenty years. He attempted to track the word down by asking a number of ex-India retirees living in his home town of Exmouth whether they knew the word. Le Mesurier could only find one person who remembered having once heard the word *lunkah* in Madras despite a residence of forty years in India and thus concluded that the term was never common, was purely restricted to southern India, and hence was of little worth recording. The present research locates *lunkah* as far back as 1878 (antedating both *Hobson-Jobson* and Doyle), shows that the term was not uncommon, and reveals that far from being restricted to southern India it was used throughout India and also in Britain. This not only validates the famous caveat of the *OED's* first editor James Murray, 'no one man's English is *all* English' (1888: xvii), but also shows the worth of such historical-lexicographical work.

Additional citational material

The present research collected 1200 citations from Anglo-Indian texts. For terms that overlapped with *Hobson-Jobson*, the present research collected 679 citations where *Hobson-Jobson* had 95 citations. The large discrepancy results from the fact that *Hobson-Jobson* offered few citations for most terms, and for 32 terms presented no citations at all. In comparison with the *OED*, the present research had 405 citations where *OED* had only 216. It should be noted that in historical lexicography it is not uncommon for many more citations to be collected than the number that eventually appear in the published version, a consequence of limited page-extent. In this respect, the final entries in *GDoS* also did not reproduce all citations collected in the research. Nevertheless, for terms that overlap, the citations presented in the new *GDoS* entries far outnumber those of both *Hobson-Jobson* and *OED*, and thus the *GDoS* entries provide a fuller account of Anglo-Indian slang lexis by giving more examples of the terms used in context.

The research was able to discover citations for 18 terms for which *Hobson-Jobson* offered no citations and which were not recorded in *OED*. This represents an important addition to the knowledge of Anglo-Indian slang lexis, proving the actual existence of these words beyond the mere say-so of *Hobson-Jobson*. Examples include, *bhanged*, 'under the influence of marijuana (*bhang*)', *buck stick*, 'a braggart', and *Europe morning*, 'a morning on which one sleeps in rather than getting up early'. Citations were also found for most lexical items that belong to a set of peculiar Anglo-Indian words based on Hindustani imperatives. These words were first noted by Yule in the Introductory Remarks to the first edition of *Hobson-Jobson* (1886):

> One peculiarity in this use we may notice, which doubtless exemplifies some obscure linguistic law. Hindustani *verbs* which are thus used are habitually adopted into the quasi-English by converting the imperative into an infinitive. Thus to *bunow*, to

> *lugow*, to *foozilow*, to *puckarow*, to *dumbcow*, to *sumjow*, and so on, almost *ad libitum*, are formed[.] (Yule 1886: xix, 1903: xx)

For example the Hindustani imperative बनाओ (*banāo*) of बनाना (*banānā*) ‘to create or make’, was adopted into Anglo-Indian English as a single morphological form, variously spelt *bunow*, *bunnow*, *bunao*, etc., as a verb meaning ‘to counterfeit’, and as a noun meaning ‘a fake or counterfeit’. *Hobson-Jobson* records 7 of these but provides little evidence of their use, offering only 7 citations spread across 4 forms, and no citations for *foozilow*, ‘to cajole or inveigle’, *gubbrow*, ‘to confuse or bewilder’, *lugow*, ‘to moor a boat’, or *puckerow*, ‘to seize or grab’. The present research was able to verify the existence of all these words, with the exception of *foozilow*, bringing together 55 citations illustrating their use.

As to Yule’s statement that such forms were created ‘almost *ad libitum*’ (1886: xix; 1903: xx), the research did discover a further two terms of this type not in *Hobson-Jobson*. One of these, *dekko*, ‘a look’, from Hindustani देखो (*dekho*), imperative of देखना (*dekhnā*) ‘to look at or watch,’ is today a well-known slang word in British, Australian, and New Zealand English, though clearly Anglo-Indian in origin, where it dates back to at least 1856. The other is the uniquely formed term *hitherao*, a blend of the Hindustani phrase इधर आओ (*idhar āo*), ‘come here!’, with the English preposition *hither*, a consequence of the phonetic similarity of *idhar* and *hither*. Although this word appears in Kipling’s famous poem ‘Gunga Din’ of 1890, it was not recorded in the second edition of *Hobson-Jobson* nor has it ever been recorded in the *OED*. The present research found 14 uses of *hitherao* ranging from 1828 to 1936, plus an isolated instance from 1976.

The fact that imperative forms were taken into English as indicatives suggests that the English speakers using the Hindustani verbs were most familiar (in some cases perhaps *only* familiar) with the imperative form. This fits in with the general picture of coloniser and

colonised and the differential power relations involved in that equation. Also of note is that, with the exception of *dekko*, none of the imperatives-turned-indicatives survived past the colonial period, and the novel verb formation process has run its course.

In addition to *foozilow*, as noted above, there were a small number of other items for which the present research was unable to find any corroborating evidence. *Babbs*, was early 'sea slang' for the island of Perim in the Red Sea, and although *Hobson-Jobson* has four citations dating from 1610–1769, no further evidence was found, suggesting it had become obsolete by the nineteenth century. The nautical term *bando*, 'to make fast with a rope', was added to *Hobson-Jobson* apparently solely on the authority of Major-General R.H. Keatinge who is noted as a contributor in the Preface (1903: ix). The dictionary quotes Keatinge as stating that *bando*

> and probably other Indian words have been naturalised in the docks on the Thames frequented by Lascar crews. I have heard a London lighter-man, in the Victoria Docks, throw a rope ashore to another Londoner, calling out, Bando! (Keatinge cited in Yule, Burnell and Crooke 1903: 59)

While we cannot gainsay Keatinge's report, no corroborating evidence for this term could be located, suggesting that its use may have been very localised or brief, or both. Also reported in *Hobson-Jobson* without citational evidence is the expression *it won't chull* meaning 'it won't answer, succeed' (1903: 218), the slang designation *Loocha Point* for *Louisa Point*, a lookout spot at the hill station of Matheran in Maharashtra (519), and *papaya* 'applied in the Philippines to Europeans who, by long residence, have fallen into native ways and ideas' (671). For these, no evidence was found by the present research, which, while not absolutely discrediting their existence, does suggest that the terms were perhaps never very common.

Thus, only 6 out of 83 terms in *Hobson-Jobson* could not be corroborated with further evidence (approximately 7.2%). This provides but small support for Görlach's comment

about the ‘dubious’ status of ‘many’ words in *Hobson-Jobson*. However, it should be noted that this figure only relates to slang lexis and cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the rest of the lexis in *Hobson-Jobson*.

New senses of words

The present research found 15 unrecorded senses for Anglo-Indian words treated in *Hobson-Jobson* and *OED*. The bulk of these involved a shift in grammatical category. Thus while *Hobson-Jobson* records the verb *buck*, ‘to prate or chatter’ (1903: 117), it was also found to occur as a noun meaning ‘conversation or chit-chat’, both deriving from Hindustani बक (*bak*), noun, chatter, babble, बकना (*baknā*), verb, to chatter, talk nonsense. Similarly, *Hobson-Jobson* records the noun *dikk*, ‘worry, trouble, botheration’, a derivative of the Hindustani adjective दिक़ (*diq*) worried, troubled, irritated, but this also turned up in the research as a verb meaning ‘to bother, annoy, or pester’: ‘I don’t want to be “dikked” with Raynier’s official affairs. As if I hadn’t enough of my own’ (Mitford 1904: 168).

Previously untreated lexis

One outcome of the research into Anglo-Indian slang lexis was the discovery of a further 38 slang terms or senses not recorded in either *Hobson-Jobson* or *OED*. A few of these had been defined in earlier dictionaries but had never received the fuller treatment afforded by a dictionary on historical principles, and to this date were only ever ‘dictionary words’, that is, no other evidence for them existed except for their appearance in a dictionary. Two such terms are *bamboo baksheesh* and *cherry-merry bamboo*, both terms meaning ‘a blow or beating given in place of an expected tip’, that is, *baksheesh* or *cherry-merry*, ‘a gratuity for service rendered’, dealt out with, or as with, a *bamboo*, ‘a length of bamboo used as an instrument of punishment’. It is clear from the contexts in which the terms appear that these terms were thought of as jocularisms from the British perspective, again demonstrating the

power imbalance of the era. Both terms were originally registered in Hotten (1864) and thence repeated in some later dictionaries on the authority of Hotten (e.g. Barrère & Leland 1889: 241; Farmer & Henley 1891: 88; Partridge 1937: 30, 145). In both cases genuine usages predating Hotten were found.

Other terms appear to have never been entered into any dictionary despite good evidence that they were regularly used in Anglo-Indian English. Examples include two typically Indian reduplicatives *gup-shup*, 'gossip', from Hindustani गप-शप (*gap-śap*), and *oolta-poolta*, 'topsy-turvy', from Hindustani उलटा-पुलटा (*ulṭā-pulṭā*), both which date back to the Anglo-Indian period and are still present in Indian English today. Another term was *burra choop*, 'a resounding silence resulting from the absence of the usual crowd', from Hindustani बड़ा (baṛā) 'great' and चुप (*chup*) 'silence', a purely English combination as this compound does not exist in Hindustani nor modern Hindi.

Etymology

In terms of etymology, the research was able to provide pertinent information for two contentious etymologies that have long perplexed scholars. The first of these is the term *bobbery*, meaning 'noise, uproar'. Yule and Burnell suggested that this word was a derivative of the Anglo-Indian exclamation *bobbery-bob*, which is from Hindustani बापरेबाप (*bāp re bāp*) meaning 'alas!', but literally, 'father oh father!' (1903: 101). The *OED* , whose earliest citation was from an Anglo-Indian text from 1816, concurred with Yule and Burnell, stating that 'the evidence for its origination in India is decisive' (Murray 1888: 959). Since then, this etymology has become the accepted derivation, appearing in virtually every dictionary that records the term (e.g. Farmer & Henley 1890: 269; Fennell 1892: 158; Whitney 1895; Partridge 1937: 73; Gove 1961: 245; Hawkins 1984: 11; Lewis 1991: 67; Brown 1993: 252;

Flexner and Hauck 1993: 231; Lighter 1994: 216; Hankin 2003: 40). However, new citational records strongly suggest that the word was used in British and American English earlier than in Indian English. The earliest example is from Potter's *New Dictionary of the Cant and Flash Languages*, which is dated either *a*1790 or 1795 (see Coleman 2004: 106), where is it presented as cant, and the second earliest is from the *New York Magazine* for 6 January 1796, where it appears as an item of Chinese Pidgin English. Further, the *English Dialect Dictionary* notes *bobbery* as present in 'general dialect use' and cites examples from Northumberland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Suffolk, Essex, Cornwall, etc. (Wright 1898: 320). To suggest that the term could have come from Anglo-Indian English into British thieves' cant and Chinese Pidgin English while also becoming widely dispersed into British dialect use would be to beg the question. At the same time, the research did discover a number of citations for both *bobbery* and *bobbery-bob* used in Anglo-Indian English as exclamations, thus matching Hindustani usage. So, while the noun sense of *bobbery* does not appear to be Anglo-Indian, there is some evidence to support *Hobson-Jobson*'s claim of interjectional use, though these must be etymologically unconnected with *bobbery* = uproar.

The research was able to supply similar evidence for the slang term *cheese* meaning 'anything good, first-rate in quality, genuine, pleasant, or advantageous', for which *Hobson-Jobson* states that 'the most probable source' is Persian and Hindustani *chīz* (i.e. चीज़) meaning 'thing', and noting that expressions such as 'My new Arab is the real *chīz*' and 'These cheroots are the real *chīz*' meaning 'the real thing' used to be 'common among Anglo-Indians' (1903: 187). This has become the standard explanation (e.g. Whitney 1895: 944; Partridge 1937: 144; Gove 1961: 383; Lewis 1991: 83; Brown 1993: 380; Flexner and Hauck 1993: 353) and even the updated *OED3* still accepts the proposed etymology as 'probably' the case even while noting that '[t]here is no early written evidence of this word from British India.'

The theory is at least plausible due to the similarity in pronunciation of चीज़ and *cheese*, but only really holds if the original expression was ‘the real cheese’. However, although the collocation ‘the real cheese’ dates at least to 1851 in non-Indian sources, contrary to Yule and Burnell’s statement, no Anglo-Indian citations were able to be located. Moreover, the term (without the collocate ‘real’) is well recorded in British and Australian sources from the 1840s onwards, while the earliest Anglo-Indian evidence only extends as far back as 1865 and so does not hold precedence. Thus, deriving the term from Hindustani is not chronologically admissible on present evidence.

Besides assiting in unravelling these two etymological conundrums, the present research also made an effort to approach a greater accuracy in presenting the original sources of borrowed words. This was achieved by presenting etymons from Hindustani in the Devanagari script followed by a transliteration in the Roman alphabet in parentheses. So for the term *poggle*, ‘a fool’, instead of an etymology which says ‘Hind. *pāgal*, an insane person’, the etymology in *GDoS* is ‘Hind. पागल (*pāgal*) an insane person’. This use of native scripts in etymologies was not uncommon in nineteenth-century lexicography (e.g. Wilkins 1813; Elliot 1845; Giles 1878; and the first edition of the *OED*),[4] but the practice fell from favour in the twentieth century. Yet, presenting both original script and transliterations side by side in etymologies has several benefits. For dictionary users who do not know Devanagari, the transliterations are there in any case, so no information is lost. But for dictionary users who do know Hindi there are a number of advantages of using Devanagari. First, पागल is instantly recognisable, whereas the transliteration *pāgal* is much less familiar. In fact, there are a number of different transliteration systems in use in India (for example, पागल may be transcribed *paagal* or *pāgal*, or ignoring vowel length all together, *pagal*).

Moreover, the transliteration systems are often inconsistently applied in texts, even in academic texts and reference works (e.g. Lewis 1991; Hankin 2003). Second, transliteration systems frequently entail the use of unfamiliar letters or diacritics. For instance, the transliteration system used by McGregor (1993), and hence used in *GDoS*, has the characters *ă*, *ḍ*, *ṛ*, *ṝ*, *ṅ*, *ṃ*, *ṁ*, *ś*, *ṣ*, and *ṭ*, for which the correspondence to both Devanagari and to the relevant phonemes is not obvious to the general reader. Using the native script obviates the need to decode the transliterations by utilising real-world language forms as opposed to artificially created linguistic artefacts. Finally, using Devanagari, and native scripts more generally, has the benefit of elevating indigenous scripts and languages within the context of English-language lexicography, rather than foregrounding, or purely relying on, western linguistic notations which cater solely to a monolingual English audience.

Postdatings

A 'postdating' is an example of the use of a lexical item at a later date than currently recorded and these are important in establishing the longevity of use of a term and whether or not it has become obsolete. A total of 140 citations were collected for the period 1903 (when *Hobson-Jobson* was last published) up until 1947 (when India gained independence from British rule), and these provided postdatings for 43 terms in *Hobson-Jobson*, showing continued usage in Anglo-Indian English. Indeed, for 10 of these terms, the latest known record was their inclusion in *Hobson-Jobson*, and without any published postdatings this may have suggested that those terms were obsolescent at the end of the nineteenth century. A total of 22 terms (approximately 17% of the whole) appear to have continued from Anglo-Indian times to the present with citations from the twenty-first century being found. Such terms include the Indian English terms *burra sahib* 'an important man', *golmol* 'noise, uproar, bedlam', *grass widow* 'an abandoned wife', *gup* and *gup-shup* 'gossip', and *soor* 'a despicable person'. Others, while originating in Anglo-India and still present in modern Indian English, have

additionally become part of wider English slang, such as *dekko* 'a look', *first chop* 'excellent, first-rate', and *mufti* 'plain clothes, as opposed to a uniform or business attire'.

The number of citations collected beyond 1947 amounted to less than 10% of total citations. This may be explained by two factors. First, it must be supposed that many terms died out after British rule ended. But, we cannot rule out that the paucity of post-1947 citations may also be a result of the lack of relevant texts available for research. On Google Books, HathiTrust, and in online text sources generally, there is a distinct lack of accessible texts for the mid-to-late twentieth century (no doubt, the lack of copyright clearance is a factor here). The Anglo-Indian corpus constructed during the research reflected this textual bias: approximately 74% of texts are from the nineteenth century, and there are no texts after 1947. All figures quoted above exclude citations from literary texts of the late twentieth century and twenty-first century that are set in the colonial era, though a number of citations were locatable in such sources. Such citations appear as outliers and very strongly suggest that the writers have used *Hobson-Jobson* or some other dictionary (e.g. Hotten 1864) as a source for colonial-era lexis, rather than demonstrating a continuity of usage from Anglo-India times to present. A prime exponent of this literary device is Amitav Ghosh who plumbed such dictionaries as *Hobson-Jobson* (1903), Hotten (1864), and Roebuck (1811), for lexis to use in his Ibis trilogy (see Ghosh 2008a). For example, in *Sea of Poppies* a character says 'But there's no going back – just won't hoga' (2008b: 112). According to my research, the expression *that won't hoga*, meaning 'that won't do', is recorded once in 1841 (Bellew: 53), and thence appears in the dictionaries of Stocqueler (1848: 101), Hotten (1864: 155), and Barrère & Leland (1889: I. 467).[5] No further citations for the expression's continued use could be found before it reappears in Ghosh's novel after a gap of over a century. This is not to criticise Ghosh's use of such lexis, but just to point out that Ghosh's use of such lexis must

be regarded as examples of re-use and not as evidence of continued use over the intervening period.

Frequency

The research has provided an improved knowledge of the frequency of the slang lexical items in *Hobson-Jobson*. Although it may seem reasonable to assume that lexical items with many citations in *Hobson-Jobson* had higher frequency than terms with few citations, such a rough rule of thumb does not apply, and a greater number of citations is rather an indication of editorial focus. For instance, the entry with the most citations in *Hobson-Jobson* is *suttee*, with 50 citations, closely followed by *pagoda* with 49 citations. In comparison, other obviously very frequent terms had very few citations (e.g. *half-caste* has 5 citations, *Hindu* has 4, and *Himalaya* only 1). In fact, over half of the entries in *Hobson-Jobson* have three or fewer citations, including approximately 17% which have none at all (see Lambert 2014). Thus the number of citations in *Hobson-Jobson* does not reflect the frequency of the term in Anglo-Indian English. In contrast, the number of citations in the present research (in addition to those already in *GDoS*) is reflective of how often they appeared in the corpus, and thus offers a better picture of relative frequency.

There were 48 terms for which there were 10 or more citations collected from different sources (multiple uses of a term in a single text only were counted as 1 citation in these calculations). Some of the most common terms were those that had citations extending beyond the Anglo-Indian period into modern times. These fell into three groups, (a) terms still in use in Indian English, for example, *burra sahib*, *banchoot* ‘literally, sister-fucker’, *dhoby* ‘a launderer’, *gup* ‘gossip’ and *mofussil*, ‘rural districts’, (b) terms present in non-Indian slang, for example, *cheese*, *dekko*, *first chop*, and *mufti*, and (c) terms that are found in works of history about the colonial era, such as *griffin* ‘an ignorant newcomer to India’, *John Company* ‘the East India Company’, *qui hi* ‘a resident of the Madras Presidency’, and the

phrase *shake the pagoda tree* 'to make a fortune in India' (punning on *pagoda* 'a type of gold coin' and *pagoda tree* 'the banyan fig, *Ficus benghalensis*'). Still, for these terms, the bulk of the citations were from the colonial era, suggesting that they were in common use in Anglo-Indian times. At the other end of the scale, there were 34 terms for which there were 3 or fewer citations. Some of these, such as *poggly nautch* 'a fancy-dress ball' and *gram-fed* 'pampered or indulged' were recorded in *Hobson-Jobson*, but most were for terms previously unrecorded in dictionaries. Some of the low frequency items were cases where there was a different sense for a term that had a more common meaning (e.g. while the verb *dumbcow* 'to bully or browbeat' had 7 citations, the noun sense, 'a bully', had only 1).

In some cases, the evidence found contradicted that of earlier commentators. For instance, only one citation was found for the expression *that won't hoga*, but according to Stocqueler, it is 'is a phrase in every man's mouth in India' (1848: 101). It seems unlikely that Stocqueler would have made such a statement if the term was not very common. It is of course possible that it *was* in common colloquial use, but just did not make its way into printed sources of the day. Indeed, the prevailing view of slang in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that good writers avoided using it, and this is reflected in the fact that the 32 million word corpus of Anglo-Indian texts collected for the research only has a very limited amount of slang. At the same time, it is worth remembering that although a corpus of 32 million words may seem large, it is in reality only a very small sampling of the total amount of relevant printed material from the colonial era. At present, the bulk of texts from that era are not currently available for searching. For example, just focussing on the print media, such well-known newspapers as *The Bengal Hurkaru, The Civil and Military Gazette, The Hindu Patriot, The Mofussilite*, etc., are not available, nor are archives of colonial-era editions of large national newspapers or magazines such as *Modern Review*, *The Hindu, The Hindustan Times, The Indian Express, The Times of India*, etc., let alone the numerous

publications of more localised print media. Large-scale searchable databases of early Indian English texts, comparable to the Trove database for Australian newspapers – which has complete runs of over 1000 different newspapers – are yet to be produced. When such databases do become available, no doubt more citations for the lexical items herein discussed will come to light.

CONCLUSION

The present research used modern lexicographical resources and techniques to re-examine the Anglo-Indian slang lexis recorded in the only two dictionaries on historical principles that had until now treated Indian English, *Hobson-Jobson* (1903) and the *OED*. Starting from a list of 83 slang items, the study ended up conducting research on 131 lexical items, the bulk of which are now published in *Green's Dictionary of Slang* available online (the free version provides headword, etymology, and definitions, while to view the full entries with attendant citations requires a subscription). The research has substantially increased the overall citational evidence for terms and in doing so has added to the available information about the longevity of terms, specifically, antedating 48 earliest attestations and postdating 43 terms beyond 1903. It has also recorded 15 new senses for words that *Hobson-Jobson* had treated and uncovered 38 terms that had not previously been recorded in any dictionary on historical principles. Thus, now, in terms of Anglo-Indian slang, *Green's Dictionary of Slang* supersedes both *Hobson-Jobson* and the *OED* as the most up-to-date and comprehensive dictionary on historical principles. However, this still leaves work of this nature to be conducted on the non-slang lexis in *Hobson-Jobson*, the Anglo-Indian lexis not previously recorded in dictionaries, and the lexis of modern Indian English.

The research also uncovered new information regarding two long-standing and widely accepted conjectured etymologies, namely for the slang terms *bobbery* and *cheese*, in light of which the purported Anglo-Indian origin of these terms should almost certainly be

abandoned. Finally, in regards to Görlach's contention that many words in *Hobson-Jobson* were only dubiously English, the research has shown that for slang at least this does not appear to be the case, but due to limited access to Anglo-Indian sources, at present it is safest to say that more research is needed. Certainly more work needs to be done to bring the lexicography of Indian English (including the Anglo-Indian English of the colonial era) into the twenty-first century and to create dictionaries on historical principles to match those that exist for other major varieties of English.

NOTES

1. Although first published in 1886, the first edition soon went out of print and has remained essentially unobtainable ever since. All modern printings are facsimiles of the 1903 edition, edited and supplemented by William Crooke (the original editors had passed away before 1890).

2. The word 'colloquial' in the subtitle merely means that the words were in ordinary and familiar use in Anglo-India. It is not an indication of the informal or slang register.

3. *The Australian National Dictionary* (Ramson 1988) was formerly freely available at http://australiannationaldictionary.com.au, but was taken down after the publication of the second edition (Moore 2016), presumably as it might detract from sales of the newer edition.

4. Modern exceptions are *Wiktionary* (https://en.wiktionary.org/), and Lee (2004–2017).

5. Based on a similarity across a range of Anglo-Indian entries in these three dictionaries, it appears that (along with other lexis) Barrère & Leland (1898) copied this entry from Hotten (1864), who had in turn lifted it directly from Stocqueler (1848).

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