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The Persistence of Chaucer's Lexis in Late Modern English Dialects (Based on *EDD Online*)

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1. Introduction

While it is a truism that traditional dialects and their speakers tend to be culturally conservative and that their lexis and other linguistic features can often be traced back to earlier centuries, concrete evidence of this longevity is hard to come by except in the form of eclectic examples. The reason seems to be twofold: first, over the last decades, the focus of research has been on Present-Day English varieties worldwide and on socially conditioned dialects in the British Isles rather than on the former geographical distribution of variants. Second, there was, until recently, no tool for providing largescale surveys of dialectal continuity and survival so that researchers have focused on detailed singular issues, mostly concerning English phonetics, morphology, and syntax.¹

Now, however, such a tool is available. In 2019, the result of a long-term Innsbruck project that involved the digitisation of Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (*EDD*) was launched (*EDD Online 3.0*, cf. Markus 2019).² The query software allows for complex analyses of the rich data available in the *EDD*, which is the most comprehensive English dialect dictionary ever published (4,670 pages). The time covered is the Late Modern English period (exactly 1700–1903), but owing to Wright's basic historical interest, there are many references back to earlier centuries of Early Modern, Middle and, occasionally, Old English. The search options of *EDD Online* also include quantification and illustration by maps, as well as identification on the time axis and attribution to sources and lexical precursors. It is thus possible to trace dialectal features back to authors such as Chaucer and Shakespeare. In a previous study (Markus 2021: 124–135), I investigated the dialectal survival of the specific lexis in the works of the *Gawain* poet. Along these lines, the present paper suggests investigating the role of Chaucer's language for 18th- and 19th-century dialects.

Chaucer's interest in English dialects has often been pointed out and is evident from his mimicking (other) dialect speakers, for example the two northern clerks in "The Reeve's Tale" and the Reeve himself, the latter mainly by his version of the firstperson pronoun as *ik* (cf. Tolkien 1934). What scarce evidence there may be of parody or ironic intention, however, has been questioned (cf. Knox 2014). One should also bear in mind that Chaucer repeatedly used dialectal forms and words for the sake of meter and rhyme (cf. Burnley 1983: 110–19). By and large, Chaucer's use of dialect features

¹ I provided a survey of dialect scholarship in view of features in Markus (2022c).

² The three projects *EDD Online 1*, *2*, and *3* were all rendered possible by grants of the Austrian Science Fund ('FWF').

is not interpretable as an ironic imitation of specific dialects other than his own, but reveals a generally tolerant view of dialect. With the same attitude, his famous reference to the *Northern* alliterative poets (“rum, ram, ruf”) in “The Parson’s Prologue” (I 43), though an indirect statement of Chaucer’s own poetical position, is not, in my view, a disparaging comment on others but rather indicative of his benevolent tolerance, with a self-deprecating line immediately following: “Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel better” (I 44)³.

Chaucer’s interest in dialect, then, is based on his general interest and competence in languages. It is known that he had a command of Latin, Italian, and French. His curiosity concerning dialects was certainly nourished by his rich life experience and his noticeable professional flexibility. Both his intellectual curiosity and his social openness were preconditions of his affinity to dialects as well as his enduring success as an author.

Given Chaucer’s social and biographical proximity to various social classes including ‘the people’, this paper begins by discussing in due brevity the social and linguistic diversity and ambivalence of Chaucer the man and the author. After this assessment of the background, Section 3 analyses the role of Chaucer in dialects across time, followed by Section 4 on the spatial distribution. Section 5 zooms in on the relationship of Chaucer’s lexis with the linguistically exceptional Irish county of Wexford. I investigate the reasons why 54 headwords in the *EDD* can be associated with both Chaucer and Wexford. Section 6 provides a summary and a methodological conclusion. Methodologically, this paper is interdisciplinary in that it combines methods of biography (Chaucer) and literary reception history with historical background analysis (Wexford) and linguistic approaches of corpus linguistics (*EDD Online*) and dialect statistics with a (traditional) lexicological investigation. The paper is an attempt to revitalise the interest in traditional dialects in their wider historical, literary, and cultural context. As a by-product, the paper provides information on how to use the *EDD Online* interface.

2. Chaucer’s Social and Linguistic Position

Geoffrey Chaucer, like Shakespeare, has remained a socially and linguistically ambivalent figure. Neither his own life nor the characters of his works indicate his own class position, but they do reveal the important role of social mobility in his attitude and during his time (cf. Brewer 1968: 293). In terms of his language, Chaucer, as has often been stated (e.g., by Colette 2017: 1), played on many registers, with his oeuvre revealing his proficiency in traditional and innovative genres and styles.

To first stay with the latter point, Chaucer’s language – at the time when English was coming back into general use instead of French (cf. Cottle 1969) – is of course one of the major reasons why Chaucer also remained popular after his lifetime. His London

³ Unless otherwise mentioned, all quotations from Chaucer’s works refer to Benson (1987).

dialect paved the way for and was to become an important factor in the development of the Southern English Standard.⁴ In addition, his introduction of the *Heroic Couplet* was a pioneering metrical achievement, and his poetic style was exemplary. Moreover, he mastered plain prose as well as colloquialisms, slang, oaths, and other characteristics of the language of *cherles*, i.e., of dialect speakers of the lower classes (Elliott 1974: 132–284).

Another aspect of Chaucer's continuing success is what he had to say and who he was in terms of social class. By his social position, Chaucer was mainly middle class, working as a customs comptroller for the Port of London in the 1370s and 80s. While he came from a prosperous merchant family,⁵ most of his professional contacts were with members of the nobility and the court. However, his life was also marked by many professional changes and contacts with people other than those of the court.

Admittedly, in his early years, Chaucer worked as an attendant for various members of the court. Prince Lionel and John of Gaunt, both sons of King Edward III, employed him in various military and diplomatic missions, many of them including journeys to France and Italy. Later the Westminster Parliament elected him a knight of the shire for Kent. In 1389, Chaucer became King Richard II's clerk (supervisor) of all construction and repair work at royal residences and other properties; two years later he was appointed deputy forester of a royal forest in Somersetshire (Benson 1987: xi–xxii).

Such details show that Chaucer personally owed his economic well-being to his good connections with nobles and royals, above all, John of Gaunt, who was not only his patron, but, in 1396, also became his brother-in-law and his "beste frend" (cf. the poem *Fortune*, written in the 1390s, cf. Benson 1987: 652). For all this proximity to royals and aristocrats, Chaucer certainly did not lose touch with the middle classes of his family background and with "people" in general. When he lived in Somerset as a forester starting in 1391, he was bound to come into contact with common people. This is the time of Chaucer's often so-called English period (Benson 1987: xxv), when *The Canterbury Tales* were written.

Chaucer's intellectual autonomy can also be derived from his audience. It is true that upper-class "lords, ladies, knights, well-to-do gentry-folk" (Brewer 1968: 295) were needed as patrons and 'sponsors' for the immediate success of Chaucer's works and of medieval literature in general. Clerics were likewise needed to produce the dozens of Chaucer manuscripts that have come down to us. However, in the late Middle

⁴ The 'dialect' of London, in late Middle English and after, was, as more recent research has pointed out (Wright 2000), not purely regional, but particularly complex, including influences from the spelling norms of the Chancery, i.e., the king's writing office, as well as aspects of London's economic, social, and cultural interaction with its hinterland. Cf., in particular, the contributions in Wright (2000) by Keene (2000: 93–114) and Taavitsainen (2000: 134, 144–146).

⁵ Details on Chaucer's life are available in most editions of Chaucer's works, e.g., in the edition by Skeat 1965 (orig. 1912) and in that by Robinson, re-edited by Benson 1987 (pp. xi–xxii by Martin M. Crow and Virginia E. Leland).

Ages, the traditional estates lost their former role to some extent. The recipients of literature changed to include non-courtly and non-clerical people. Chaucer was wise enough to anticipate this new development and address his implicit audiences and readers not as members of an inherited or economic status, but as those that could share his socio-moral attitude. They had to be classically educated to be possibly interested in works such as *Troilus and Criseyde*, open-minded and tolerant towards people of different classes, including gentles, clerics, and *cherles* alike. And they had to be non-orthodoxically religious – or why else did Chaucer discuss the good and bad aspects of Christianity so much, as in “The Parson’s Tale” and “The Summoner’s Tale”? Implicit readers also had to accept Chaucer’s sense of humour in order to be able to appreciate much of his writing, for example, tales such as “The Tale of Melibee” and “The Tale of Sir Thopas” (cf. Markus 2004).

The criteria of form, content and the author’s personality may thus explain why Chaucer remained popular in later centuries and for people of all social levels. I will first check his popularity across time, then across space.

3. The Role of Chaucer in Dialects across Time

It is possible for *EDD Online* users to combine searches for sources, such as *Chaucer*, with the filter of time spans, such as centuries. Both parameters refer to the dictionary’s complete entries. Wright’s returning to Middle English, usually in an entry-final comment, is motivated by either lexical or etymological or morphological details concerning the headword. The time factor, strictly speaking, refers to the scope of dates of source publications, with the sources often illustrating special meanings or formal aspects of the headwords. The time asked for can be truncated, so that “13*” means the 14th century, “14*” the fifteenth century, and so on. Users can also ask for complete spans of time, for example, 700 to 1903, to cover the dictionary’s complete range.

The screenshot shows the EDD Online 3.0 search interface. The search bar contains the text "Chaucer". The search protocol is set to "IN (headword) AND (time) FOR (Chaucer)". The search filters are set to "headword" and "time spans". The search results are displayed in a table with columns for the headword, time span, and source dates. The results are sorted by "original result".

Headword	Time Span	Source Dates
ACCESS, sb.	1380-1895	CHAUCEUR C.T.
ABACK, prep. adv.	1768-1889	CHAUCEUR Leg. G. W.
ABREDE, adv.	1787-1787	CHAUCEUR
ACCESS, sb.	1670-1895	CHAUCEUR
ACCORD, v.	1814-1865	CHAUCEUR C.T.

Figure 1: Search for Chaucer plus source dates of the headwords involved

On this basis of query possibilities, we can consult *EDD Online* for Late Modern English dialect headwords affiliated with both Chaucer and evidence of their historical occurrence. Figure 1 shows the headwords retrieved in combination with the time spans concerned between 700 and 1903.

As one sees in the dark bar above the listed findings (on the left), the query of Figure 1 has provided 303 items, that is, headwords, prompted by our filter constellation. The short extract of the long list shows that some of the Chaucer references are equipped with abbreviations for individual works, with *CT* (for *The Canterbury Tales*) as expected being the most frequent one. The sorting box on top of the retrieval list allows for various options: instead of the presentation mode visible in Figure 1, the headwords from A–Z can show up alone, so that users can copy and paste them. Users can also opt for the Chaucer sources or time spans to be the first criterion of arrangement. Figure 2, however, presents the beginning of the list of the tokens used by Joseph Wright for Chaucer or his works.

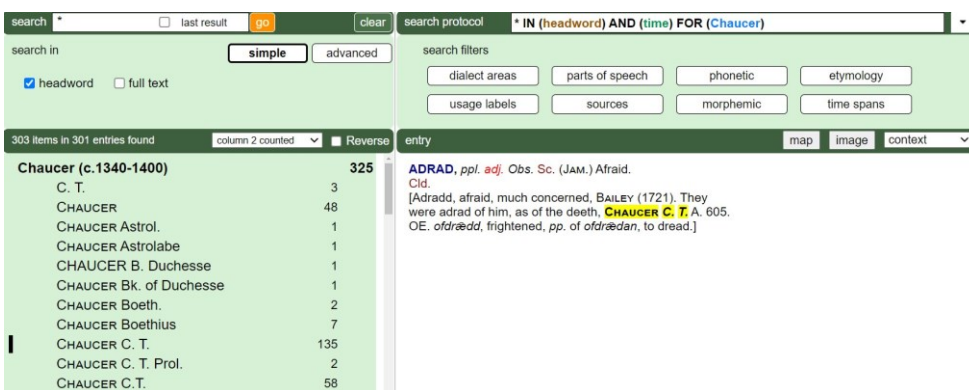


Figure 2: Highlighting the Chaucer sources of the query of Figure 1 (in the *column 2 counted* mode)

Our software has counted 325 strings, with Wright's inconsistent practise of abbreviating Chaucer works being only a slightly disturbing factor. It is easy for users to manually select and summarise the passages and headwords affiliated with *The Canterbury Tales*: there are 303 (if we include three references to Skeat's notes).

Figure 2, in its entry window on the right, also shows an example of the headwords concerned. *ADRAD* illustrates Wright's fundamentally historical approach. This participial adjective, meaning 'afraid', was obsolete by the 19th century (Wright follows Jamieson [1808]), but was still included in Bailey (1721), which was a good enough reason for Wright also to include it in his *EDD*, the *Dictionary's* official time of coverage being the 18th and 19th centuries. The references in our entry to both Chaucer and Old English simply attest to the age of a dialect word retrievable in Late Modern English in addition to providing some morphological transparency (*a-* < *of-*; *dd* < *d-ed*).

However, instead of such a retrospective view, this paper uses the *EDD* in its online version for a new, prospective analysis. I suggest starting from lemmas documented for Chaucer, which we may, for the rest of this paper, call “Chaucer words”, and raising the question of when and why they were used in English dialects up to 500 years later.

As mentioned, users of *EDD Online* can also focus their attention on the temporal implications of a result list, that is, on the time spans covered by an entry. In our case of Figure 2, the “column 2 counted” mode includes the time spans attributed to each of the entries; they are visible in Figure 1, but cut off in Figure 2. Figure 3 shows the beginning of this bottom part of column 2 of Figure 2, with the phases of time chronologically arranged according to the smallest initial year number.

The example of the headword opened in Figure 3, FODDER, may give us an idea of the fascinating potential of the *EDD Online* software.

The screenshot shows the EDD Online search interface. The search bar contains 'FODDER' and the search protocol is set to '* IN (headword) AND (time) FOR (Chaucer)'. The search filters include dialect areas, parts of speech, phonetic, etymology, usage labels, sources, morphemic, and time spans. The search results are displayed in a table with columns for the word, its time span, and its frequency. The word 'FODDER' is highlighted in yellow. The table shows the following data:

Word	Time Span	Frequency
SKEAT's Notes to the Canterbury Tales	1	1
various/total	2488	
0852-1891	1	1
1000-1895	1	1
1175-1895	2	1
1200-1874	1	1
1200-1898	1	1
1201-1895	1	1
1225-1775	1	1
1225-1865	1	1
1250-1790	1	1
1275-1889	1	1
1290-1895	1	1
1294-1897	1	1
1300-1861	1	1
1300-1893	1	1
1300-1894	1	1

The entry for 'FODDER' is detailed below the table:

FODDER, sb. 2 and v. 2 Sc. Nhb. Dur. Yks. Der. Lin. Also in forms **fother** N.Cy.1 Nhb.1 Dur. n.Yks. w.Yks.12 **fudder** N.Cy.1 Der.1; **futher** Fif. N.Cy.1 Nhb. [fo-de(r), fo-ðe(r)] 1. sb. A load, cartload; a large quantity. Also used fig. **Fif.** He summon'd soon together His regiment (a jolly futher). The wabsters o' the town o' Crail, **TENNANT Papistry** (1827) 91. **n.Cy.** GROSE (1790). Nhb. Of dung and lime, a two-horse cart load, **MORROW Cyclo. Agric.** (1868). Who iver lent Grainger 't... mun hev at least had a fother, **ALLAN Tyndside Sings.** (ed. 1891) 243. **Nhb.1** A fother of muck, or of lime, &c. The fother differs from the load, the latter being as much as can be carried on the back of a pack-horse. **Dur.** A one-horse load of any material. A fother of hay. A fother of stones, N. & Q. (1877) 5th S. viii. 138. **n.Yks.** **SEDGWICK Mem. Cowgill Chapel** (1868) 108. 2. A weight of lead of varying quantity. **n.Cy.** (P.R.): 8 pigs or 16 cwt., **GROSE** (1790); **N.Cy.1** A fother of lead is 21 cwt. **Nhb.1 Nhb., Dur.** Pig lead is sold by the fother, a quantity containing 21 cwt., **BAILEY & CULLEY Agric.** (1806) 19. **w.Yks.** **THORESBY Lett.** (1703); **w.Yks.1** The Craven fother consists of 19 pigs or pieces of lead, each pig weighing 123 lbs.; **w.Yks.4 Der.** 1726 to Francis Staley for a fother of... Lead. £15 0. 0. **Cox Churches** (1877) II. 340; **Der.1** The weight is 22½ cwt. **n.Lin.1**

Figure 3: Re-arrangement of the results list of Figures 1 and 2 by spans of time

For practical reasons I had to cut off part of the entry on FODDER, which is about twice the length of what we see. Many entries in the *EDD* actually fill several pages. In the block of citations, with its challenging length, the years of the publication or edition of sources were not, of course, Wright's principle of order. On this basis, it would practically be impossible by hand to define the 'life spans' of Chaucer words. As it is, in the face of the complete entry of FODDER, we would be able to see at a glimpse that this lemma, with its ramified meanings of 'load', 'weight', and 'measure', had a time range of occurrence from 852 to 1891. Such words with a pre-Chaucerian relevance (i.e., of a first date up to, say, 1360) are a small minority of the full list: only 21 of the overall 303 Chaucer words. This is not even seven per cent and suggests, beyond Chaucer's literary and rhetorical achievements, his fundamental originality in the choice of words: more

than 93 % of the words shared by Chaucer and Late Modern English dialects are not attested by the *EDD* to pre-Chaucerian occurrence.

However, the span-of-time figures just used generally conceal the fact that the early dates retrieved in the way shown in Figure 3 may bridge longer periods of missing evidence. FODDER is a case in point: 852, the earliest year of a source provided in the entry, is a date that refers to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but then, apart from Chaucer, no Middle or Modern English source is provided until 1703. After all, Wright's *EDD*, unlike the *OED*, is not a historical dictionary that claims to cover all periods of the history of the English language. Nevertheless, the material available for the 15th to the 17th century is sufficient to allow for valid conclusions.

search *

search in

☒ headword ☐ full text

18 items in 18 entries found

various/total 84

1400	6
1424	1
1432	1
1450	2
1477	1
1481	2
1483	5
1487	1
1488	2
84	

search protocol * IN (headword) AND (time) FOR (Chaucer)

search filters

entry

refers to whole entry

span of time between 700 and 1906

from: to:

refers to search string

exact or truncated year

☒ date of public. ☒ date of edit. ☒ fuzzy date

Figure 4: Search for strings affiliated with Chaucer and dates of sources from the 15th century

The fifteenth century can be grasped, in the filter called *time spans*, by a second mode, illustrated in Figure 4. Unlike in the query of Figure 3, the search now refers to all Chaucer-affiliated entries that contain some source date of the 15th century (14*; cf. the right box of the *time spans* filter). The result, 84 references to the given time affiliated with 18 headwords and entries, encourages comparison with the other centuries up to the nineteenth. Table 1 provides a survey list.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
century	# references	# words	overall century-spec. # words	overall century-spec. # references	% words	% references
13*	172	36	629	2,701	5,7	6,4
14*	84	18	706	3,056	2,5	2,7
15*	268	57	1,597	7,113	3,6	3,8
16*	524	86	3,687	21,113	2,3	2,5
17*	2,040	178	10,834	48,568	1,6	4,2
18*	10,788	287	29,177	78,778	1,0	13,7

Table 1: Dialectal Chaucer words across time, with normalised figures of occurrence

The difference between columns 2 and 3, that is, of the date references and of the lemmas, perhaps needs some explanation. The number of references found for one of the centuries between the 14th and the 19th (column 2) refers to specific aspects of the headwords and, thus, of their entries, no matter how often or for what reason a certain date may have been mentioned. A source associated with the date may illustrate a formal variant of the headword, a type of word formation, or one of several meanings of the headword. Unsurprisingly, a source with its year(s) of publication may be mentioned several times within the same entry. By contrast, column 3 in Table 1 is based on the number of headwords and entries prompted by our query. While each entry is, naturally, only counted once, entries may exceptionally contain more than one headword (for example, variants of a lemma), which is why the number of “items” (= headwords) occasionally slightly exceeds that of the entries.

The linguistic implications of these technical explanations are as follows. The number of retrieved headwords (column 3) is a rough and ready tool for tracing the portion of Chaucer words from each century from the 14th to the 19th. Given that Wright, in his selection of sources, certainly did not aim at attributing an equal share to each century, columns 4 and 5 have been added for the overall numbers of words and temporal references, respectively, to allow for normalised percentage figures in columns 6 and 7.⁶

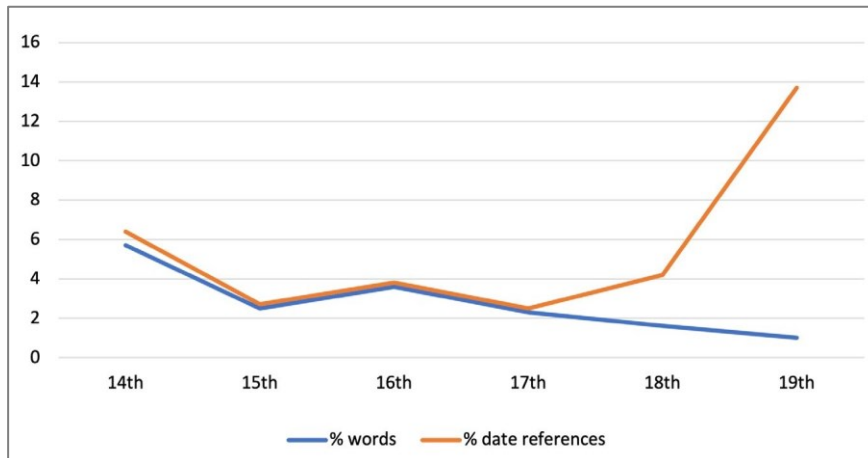


Figure 5: Chaucer words and date (and source) references in their entries (in %)

⁶ In concrete terms, normalisation here means that – in the case of the 14th century – the figure of retrieved Chaucer words (26) is divided by the figure of all headwords related to the 14th century (irrespective of Chaucer). The quotient is then expressed in per cent.

When transferred into a diagram (Figure 5) the numbers of columns 6 and 7 in Table 1 tell us two stories: first, the changing numbers of Chaucer words (in blue) reveal the linguistic impact Chaucer already had in his lifetime, and second, the enduring popularity of the words up to around 1600. After that there is a steady decrease, as one would expect, but one per cent of all 19th-century lemmas of the dictionary having Chaucerian predecessors is a remarkable survival rate.

The numerical figures of column 7 in Table 1, visualised in Figure 5 by the orange line, tell us another story. In this case, it is not the numbers of lemmas affiliated with lexical predecessors in Chaucer that have been counted, but rather all (date-equipped) source references in the entries of such lemmas. The higher the number of such source references in relation to the complete century-specific figures for source dates (irrespective of Chaucer), the more this can be interpreted as evidence for the vitality of lexical Chaucer survivals.

The two lines of the diagram showing words and date references in percentages reveal that the number of dialect words in Late Modern English (as from 1700) associable with Chaucer gradually decreased with time, as one would expect. The blue line shows a slight increase in the 16th century, which can be interpreted as the result of the remarkable editorial interest in Chaucer just before and during Shakespeare's time. The editions by William Thynne (1532), John Stowe (1561) and Thomas Speght (1602) are just three examples of what one critic later called "the omnivorous character of sixteenth-century Chaucerian editing" (Lerer 1997: 18)⁷, with the metaphor standing for an editorial policy that included many works later identified to be apocryphal. The steep increase in the 18th and 19th centuries shown by the orange line contrasts nicely with the evidence provided by the blue line: unlike the number of Chaucer words as such, the frequencies of their use increased – not in absolute terms, for which Wright's focus on the Late Modern English period would be a sufficient reason, but in relative terms, that is, in relation to all references to dated sources given for those two centuries. As we are talking about dialect sources here, this simply means that Chaucer became more popular than ever in the 18th and particularly the 19th century. This result is in line with the general tendency of popularising Chaucer's "Englishness" in the nineteenth century (cf. Morse 2003, Ross 1998: 95–96; 139–42; 159–63, 198–201).⁸ And it is also in line with the fact that both manuscripts and early editions of Chaucer's works and of literature in general were, as Forni (1998: 173) has explained, "clearly luxury commodities". Forni goes on to say that even in the eighteenth century, Chaucer's works were, as before, primarily available in the format of showpiece folios, "suggesting an author who was perhaps more esteemed than

⁷ For a general survey of sixteenth-century Chaucer editions, cf. Bly (1999); also Edwards (1998).

⁸ In the words of Morse (2003: 99), "Charles Cowden Clarke (1787–1877), Charles Knight (1791–1873), and John Saunders (1810–1895) were the most effective boosters of Chaucer's common readership before the university in the mid-1860s took over the care and promotion of Middle English language and literature, including Chaucer".

studied” (1998: 173). The fact that there was a radical change in the 19th century is clearly shown by the striking rise of the orange curve in Figure 5.

4. Chaucerian Lexis in Late Modern English across Space

Given Chaucer’s general popularity, it is surprising that there has yet not been a study of the spatial profile of the reception of his works. The association of the Hengwrt Manuscript to Wales (National Library)⁹ and of the Ellesmere Manuscript to the USA (Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.)¹⁰ suggests the internationality of Chaucer’s reception and reputation. The numerous Chaucer editions, from those by Caxton to the more scholarly ones since the 19th century, attest to their global rather than regional scope.

However, the survival of Chaucer’s lexis allows for a finer-grained analysis of his popularity than does the history of manuscripts and editions. *EDD Online*, by a simple search for Chaucer words in all UK counties and regions, provides query results with a clear, though surprising, profile (cf. Figure 6). The *warm* colours of Figure 6 (brown to yellow) mark the higher-frequency counties; the *cold* colours (green to lilac) the lower-frequency ones.

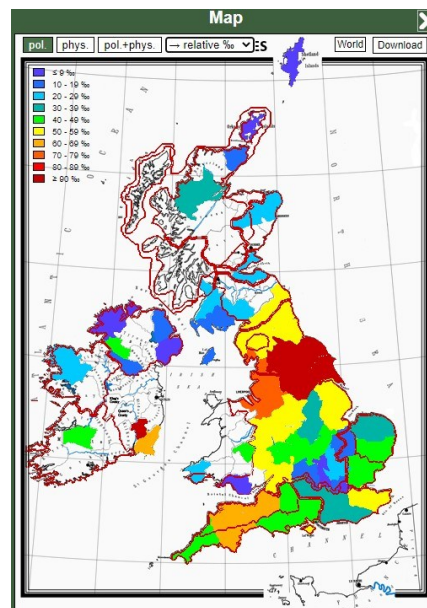


Figure 6: Areal distribution of Chaucer words in the UK

⁹ Information on the Hengwrt Manuscript at the National Library of Wales is available here: <https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/the-hengwrtchaucer#c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-1224%2C-1%2C5662%2C4815>.

¹⁰ Information on the Ellesmere Manuscript at the Huntington Library is available here: <https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll7/id/2359>.

Figure 6 allows for the following conclusions:

- Chaucer words *qua* dialect lexis were remarkably sparse in the London area and its surroundings, particularly up to Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. This part of the distribution reflects the importance of this area for the long-term formation of the Southern English Standard.¹¹ The counties to the south of London (Surrey, Sussex) were historically under the influence of the capital – we need only think of beach tourism there since the 19th century – and can, therefore, be interpreted to share the evidence of standardisation.
- The other English counties are clearly marked by higher figures of lexical survival of Chaucer words: Kent and the South-West (Somerset, Devonshire, Isle of Wight, somewhat less Cornwall) on the one hand; the West, the Midlands (except for Nottingham), and the North on the other. It seems far-fetched to argue in terms of literature reception that Chaucer should have been particularly well received and appreciated by people in these areas. Rather, the counties concerned have retained more of their dialectal characteristics than those of the other group, where Greater London, Oxfordshire, and Cambridgeshire, with their economic and cultural dominance, certainly affected language use. The opposition of strongly vs. weakly marked dialectal areas in England is well known from phonetic features such as the deviant Kentish vowels, the word-initial voicing of consonants in the South-West (Somerset pronounced as [ˈzəməzet]) and the [u]–[ʌ] opposition in words such as *butter*. We have now found that there is a correlation between phonetic dialectal peculiarities and lexical characteristics. Both survived in the tendentially rural areas versus the more urban ones.¹²
- As regards the non-England states of the UK, Figure 6 reveals that, apart from Wexford and Carlow in Ireland, there are only dispersed counties of lower frequency rates. To understand this, we should bear in mind that Joseph Wright only rarely refers to Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in terms of counties, instead using the wider areas of regions, such as the Scottish Highlands, or even the Celtic background countries in their entirety (Scotland, Wales, and so on). Therefore, the counties outside England come as mostly white territories on our map. Figure 6 includes references to regions; they are marked by red framing lines. As they are relatively rare and imply a descriptive fuzziness, they have been excluded from our quantifying algorithm of the counties.

¹¹ There is no contradiction to the statement above that Chaucer had a share in the formation of the Southern English Standard. This share only concerns the late 14th and 15th centuries and is, on the other hand, not restricted to lexis. By contrast, Figure 6 shows the distribution of lexis only and through the centuries up to 1904.

¹² The limits of this paper disallow a quantitative discussion of the dialectal distribution of phonetic features across English counties. However, cf. the description of the Home Counties ("Central") around London vs. the "relic areas" (in the rest of England) in Viereck, Viereck, and Ramisch (2002: 94–95). The authors conclude their "dialectometric" analysis by the statement that lexis, phonology and morphology in the relic vs. Central areas widely correlate (2002: 95).

- Given these limits of *EDD Online*, only the two Irish counties Wexford and Carlow are worth a comment. In Ireland's early history, County Wexford and its neighbouring county, Carlow, were repeatedly centres of invasion, settlement (often enforced) and resurgence. Of the many interesting details of the turbulent history of this area, two seem typical: the long life of the language of Yola, and the role of (Catholic) English settlers in the 17th century (mainly under Cromwell and William of Orange). Yola was the dialect that settlers from Somerset and Devon, called Wessexmen, imported around 1169 and preserved for the next 700 years (cf. Mernagh 2008: 149). In 1577, the Dublin historian Richard Stanyhurst referred to Yola as an "olde auncient Chaucer English" (quoted from Kallen 2013: 176; also cf. Sullivan 2018).

As regards the history of settlement, counties Wexford and Carlow are part of the wider dialect area of the East Coast, "which was first settled by the English from the late 12th century onwards" and was generally the region of English influence (Hickey 2008: 77). Kallen, in a detailed historical survey of the development of English in Ireland, quotes several sources confirming that after its initial impact in the Middle Ages, English in Ireland became practically extinct "except in Wexford and Fingal" (1994: 155). He goes on to say that the situation changed again in favour of English in the later 17th and 18th centuries, with county Wexford, mainly in its southern coastal baronies Forth and Bargy, being the most outstanding area of English impact (1994: 159f.).

These observations may suffice to conclude that the evidence for the prominence of counties Carlow and Wexford in Figure 6 can be found in previous centuries. The affinity of this region to Chaucer vocabulary is a by-product of lexical persistence and survival resulting from the complex circumstances of geography, immigration, and acculturation.

5. Focus on Individual Samples of Lexis

Maps illustrating quantified statistical data are useful for providing surveys but may be misleading in individual cases and should be checked when results are questionable. The role of County Carlow in the previous section is such a case because I could not give a specific reason for its prominence in Chaucer affinity, except that it was generally seen as part of the East Coast. Figure 7 is meant to fill in the gap in the argumentation.

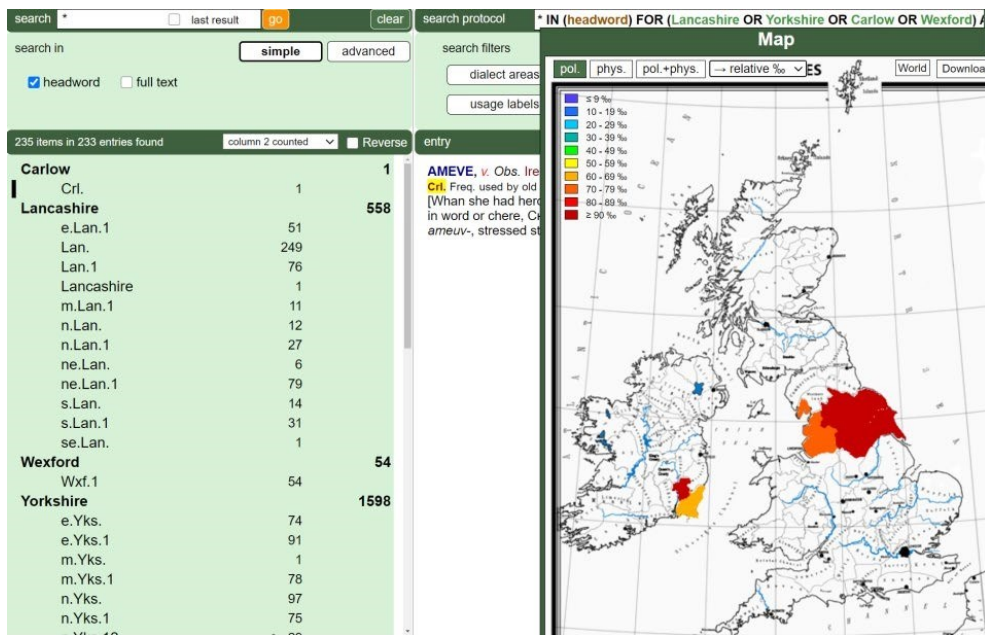


Figure 7: Quantities of source references for Counties Carlow, Wexford, Lancashire, and Yorkshire

The results of the query in Figure 7 have been sorted in the *column 2 counted* mode, which fades out the headwords concerned and only shows and counts the types and tokens of the dialectal references. We can see that there is an extreme divergence in the absolute figures for the four counties selected: the smart tag reveals only a single reference to Carlow, but 1598 matches for Yorkshire, with Lancashire and Wexford in between. The reason Carlow nonetheless shows up as a high-frequency county on the map is that the figures presented in the survey on the left are automatically normalised in the background before they are used for the map. If users click on a county of interest, they can see how this normalisation works. Figure 8 gives us the data for Carlow.

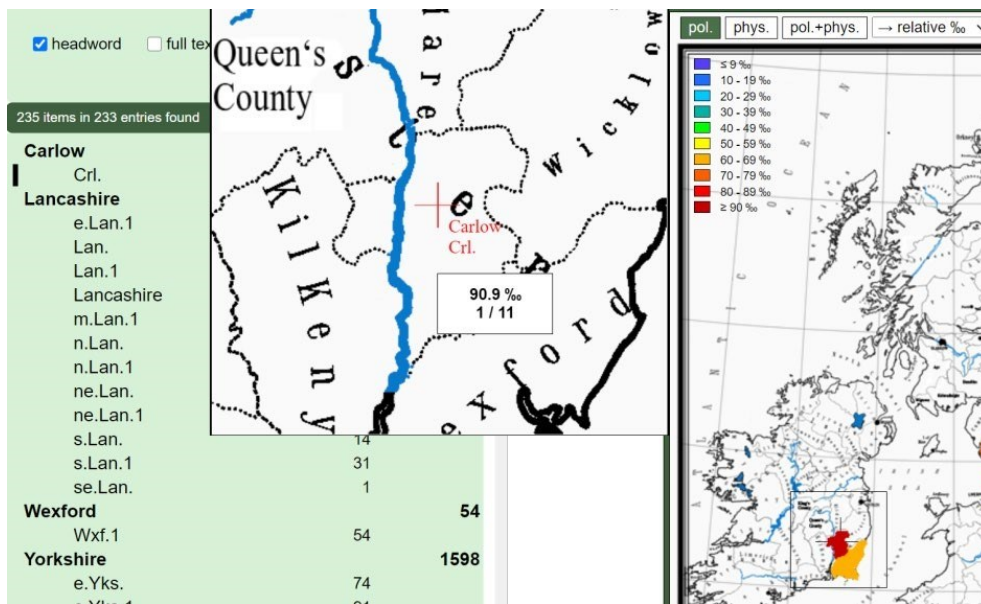


Figure 8: Zoom on Carlow, with normalised *per-mille* figure added

The zoom window (white box) shows the county's name and below it provides the information that there is only one occurrence of a reference to Carlow in combination with Chaucer and that this reference is one of the eleven references to this county (irrespective of sources mentioned), which corresponds to 90.9 *per mille*. This smarttag tool works the same way for all counties. Depending on the quantitative circumstances, the unit of measuring frequencies can be modified, from absolute to relative figures, the latter in terms of per cent, per thousand or per ten thousand. In Figures 7 and 8, the unit of measuring was per 10,000 (cf. the small box on the right above the map). The figures reveal that Carlow is statistically insignificant. The only example given, AMEVE in the sense of 'to move', is also attributed to county Wexford and may have come from there.

By contrast, the 54 samples from Wexford are both significant and quantitatively manageable, unlike the 1600-odd cases from Yorkshire. Users can scan the entries concerned by repeatedly clicking on the abbreviation *Wxf.1* (seen in Figure 8), which stands for the only source used on County Wexford in this case, a glossary by Jacob Poole, edited by William Barnes in 1867. The first sample, opened in Figure 9, is the entry of the headword ABOUTEN.

S.Lan. 1	31	
se.Lan.	1	
Wexford		54
Wxf.1	54	
Yorkshire		1598
e.Yks.	74	
e.Yks.1	91	
m.Yks.	1	
m.Yks.1	78	

ABOUTEN, *adv.* and *prep.* Irel. e.Yks. Suf. Sus. Hmp. [əbēˈtən, əbeuˈtən.] About, in its various lit. senses.

Wxf.1 Abut, Abouten, about. **e.Yks.1** Abootan, around, round about, *MS. add.* (T.H.) **Suf.** *Obso.* Only in phr. as 'Abouten ten' (F.H.). **Sus.1** I was abouten going out, when Master Noakes he happened along, and he kep' me; **Sus.2 Hmp.1** Abouten, about, near to.

[ME. *abouten*, *abuten*, OE. ā-, on-būtan. Hence E. *about*, which is merely a contracted form. *Abouten* occurs in CHAUCER and *P. Plowman* (see SKEAT's Glossaries).]

Figure 9: Entry ABOUTEN attributed to Chaucer and Wexford

Obviously, the word was lemmatised in the *EDD* for the sake of its old, non-contracted form *abouten*, not as a dialect word *per se*. Similarly, the next examples, AGAST ('afraid'), AGO/AGONE ('GONE'), and AMEVE ('MOVE'), show archaic patterns of word formation that are in fact Middle English. The next example fully reveals this risk of catching not unique Wexford words, but some linguistic patterns affiliated with this county. BAILIE, in the wake of Chaucer's *baili* ('municipal officer or magistrate'), is attested to County Wexford in the spelling variant *baalee*, but as a headword attributed to a total of twenty areal markers.

There are several solutions to this fuzziness dilemma. One is for users to focus on spelling variants alone, and the *advanced* button (visible in Figure 7) provides an appropriate search routine for variants as one of eight options. The result of such a search would be 19 matches with 20 Chaucer references. However, the correlation of Chaucer words with County Wexford is (again) a fuzzy one: Not only the word ABOUTEN but also a spelling variant *Abut* is Wexford-specific. Chaucer only used *Abouten*.

A more decided way of avoiding fuzzy results is provided in *EDD Online* by the operator ONLY. The filter *dialect areas* offers three operators: OR, AND, and ONLY; the latter implies that the dialect area *Wxf. (Wexford)* is the only one provided in an entry and that, as a result, the dialect marker refers to the whole headword. However, a query of this type in combination with the source filter *Chaucer* delivers a zero output, which means that Chaucer words that made it to County Wexford were not, or did not remain, county-specific. This accords with the general observation earlier in this paper that Chaucer was received and popular *everywhere*.

These two experimental attempts to automatise our access to lexical survivals in County Wexford were bound to fail because Chaucer is obviously quoted for various reasons, with variants and headwords being only two of them. If we really want to know why Chaucer is quoted in individual entries, a step-by-step analysis – in our case of the 54 references to Wexford shown in Figure 9 – is unavoidable. Users can copy and paste the list of the retrieved headwords to allow for a survey:

- ABOUTEN, adv., prep.
- AGAST, adj.
- AGO, pp.
- AGONE, adv.
- AMEVE, v.
- BAILIE, sb.
- BED-REEDE, adj.
- BEEN, sb.
- BOARD, sb.1
- BRAND, sb.1
- DAWNIN, sb.
- DELVE, v., sb.
- FEASE, v.1, sb.
- GREAVE, sb.
- GROIN, sb.1, v.1
- HAR(R), sb.
- HAY, sb.2
- KINE, sb.
- LIEFER, adv.
- MEAD, sb.1
- MOTE, sb.1, v.1
- POKE, sb.1, v.1
- SITH, prep.1, conj.
- SNEW, v.1
- THIC(K, dem. pron., dem. adj., adv.
- TO-YEAR, adv.

After the short discussion (above) of the first five examples, BED-REEDE is the next on the list. This compound (for ‘bed-ridden’) is Wright’s standardised dialect form, the Wexford form being *bethered*. The modern form, *bed-ridden*, came about due to confusion with the past participle form *ridden* (from *to ride*) (*Webster’s Dictionary*), but the Middle English form *rede* originates from an Old English nominal *rida* ‘rider; riding’ (*OED*, s.v. *bedrid*). BEEN is an old *n*-plural (as visible in German *Bienen*); ModE *bees* shows analogy to the dominant *s*-plural. BORD, in its old meaning of ‘table’, is shared by Chaucer, George Herbert (“I struck the board...” in the first line of the poem *The Collar*) and Wexford English (not to mention other dialects). BRAND (‘a log of wood for burning’) is traced back to Old English, but as the German etymon *Brand* (‘burning’) suggests, is even older. In English dialects, the meaning metonymically changed from the process of burning to the material being burnt. In terms of form, the word mainly survived as part of compounds; the Wexford source quotes the term *brand-eyrons* (‘brand-irons’), with the meaning 4c ‘kettles, pots, pans, &c.’. This support of survival

by compounds or other word combinations is common in dialects (cf. Markus 2021: 87–93).

The samples analysed so far have thus led us to three types of dialect features: survival of old affixes (as in BEEN), survival of old meanings (as in BORD), and survival of old words (i.e., their forms), preferably in the niche of specific combinations. While we have found evidence of semantic shifting, for example by metonymy, this aspect of language change is less important than the opposite, language continuity. Most of the samples of our list of Wexford Chaucer words can be attributed to one or more of the three types of survival just distinguished.

Type 1: Old affixes

In addition to AGAST, AGONE and the other above-mentioned words prefixed by *a-*, this group also includes the following lexemes:

- DAWNIN (‘dawning’, for *dawn*): in Wexford also found with the Irish spelling *dauneen*
- KINE: this old plural form borrowed from original *n*-class nouns occurred in Wexford in the spellings *khyne*, *keeine*, and *keene*. Chaucer has *kyn* (CT B 4021), the <y> here probably standing for a long *ȳ* (Langland B vi.142 has <kiin> according to Stratmann/Bradley (1967 [1891])). As the singular form was *cū*, the plural *kyne* reveals *i*-umlaut. The word is originally, in Proto-Germanic, a rootnoun (cf. Pinsker 1963: § 146, 3a). As in the case of many other frequent words, categories of word formation were mixed up or combined (like in the doublymarked plural form *children*). The above spelling variants of the Wexford plural form indicate insecurity of pronunciation, with [ai], [ei] and [i:] being the three options involved. [i:] marks the pronunciation before the impact of the Great Vowel Shift; the other two transcriptions mark the pronunciations after it. Chaucer’s version of the plural form is basically that of Wexford and other English dialects rather than that of the Southern English Standard.

Type 2: Old meanings

Type 2, of the examples BORD and BRAND, mentioned earlier, is further enhanced by the following words:

- DELVE (‘dig’): in Present-Day standard, the word is only used in a metaphorical sense (‘search’).
- GROIN: originally from French, the word for the snout of a pig was used by Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*, I 156 (*groyn*) and in Wexford in the form *gring*. There are also metaphorical by-meanings referring to architecture, which are, according to *Webster’s*, the only ones that survived in the English standard.
- MEAD: In Present-Day English standard, this word is labelled as literary; in the dialects, it is the general word for ‘meadow’.
- MOTE: This word still exists in Present-Day standard in the very specific meaning of ‘a very small piece of dust’. County Wexford retained other and more general

meanings around the concept of “a very minute quantity”. The Wexford form is *mot*. The wider semantic range, which includes figurative senses, accords with some productivity in derivations and phrases. Chaucer used the word in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” (D 869) in the sense of ‘piece of dust’, thus anticipating the very specific sense of modern standard.

- POKE: In the English standard, the word has survived in the diminutive form *pocket* and in phrases such as *to buy a pig in a poke*. Chaucer’s use of the word in the *CT* A 4278 (“two pigges in a poke”) somewhat anticipates the phrase just quoted. In the Late Modern English dialect, where it has the more general meaning ‘bag, sack,’ et al. and is used in a large number of compounds, it is associated with County Wexford both by the old, more general meaning and by specific spellings (*poake*, *pooke*). Chaucer (*CT* A 4278) uses the spelling *poke*.

Type 3: Old words (often in combinations)

This is the most common type, as the following examples confirm:

- DELVE (‘dig’): attributed to Wexford in the form *dell*. The word also survived in the derivations *delver* and *delving*, though not in Ireland.
- FEASE: in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* used in the form *vese* (for ‘hurry’), with precursors in Old English (e.g., *fȳsian*); the word is attributed to Wexford in the variant *vezze* (‘to hurry, pant, run up and down’).
- GREAVE (for ‘grove’): Wexford-spelling *greve*, as in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Wright mentions Old English *græfa* (‘a bush’) as a precursor.
- HAR(R): This old word (cf. Old English *heorr*) for the hinge of a gate or door was used by Chaucer (*CT* A 550) in the literal sense; the Wexford quotation attests to a figurative meaning. There are no traces of this word in Present-Day standard.
- HAY: Used in Chaucer’s *Romance of the Rose* (54) and in later Wexford texts (there also as *hye*) for a fenced-in place or garden, the general vitality of this word in various English counties is evidenced by its use in the formation of quite a few compounds (also cf. the place name *Hay-on-Wye*).
- LIEFER: This comparative form (cf. OE *lēof*), with the Wexford form *liveer*, usually occurred as an isolated adverb or in the syntactic combination *I’d liefer* (‘I would rather ...’). This is also the pattern with a personal subject that had found its way into Wexford. The quotation from Chaucer, however, uses the impersonal construction *me were lever*, which will remind speakers of German of the phrase *mir wäre lieber*. Wright starts the list of his quotations from dialects with a line from a Scottish ballad: *Me were lever hanged and drawn*. In this case, the use of *liefer* in county Wexford, though old, is not the most archaic one amongst the dialects of the UK.
- MEAD: In Present-Day English standard, this word is labelled as literary (as mentioned earlier); in the dialects, it is still the general word for ‘meadow’, formerly formed from the oblique case of *mæd* (OE *mædwe*). In county Wexford, as in some other counties, the short form was “in common use” (Wright). Chaucer

uses the form *mede* (CT A 89). In Oxfordshire and Kent, *mead* was relegated to place names. Other supportive niches fostering survival – even in Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Sussex – were compound formations, such as *meadsman* (‘an official in charge of the common meadows’).

- SITH: Modern *since* from ME *sith*, with an initially long vowel that was shortened around 1000 (OE *siððan* ‘after that’, cf. Pinsker 1963: §33, 1, note 2), has perpetuated the formal and functional mixture of the preposition and the conjunction. The *n*-less dialect form *sith* accords with the original form of the preposition, whose long stem vowel in Old English shows up in the Wexford spelling *zeeth* (for the distribution of word-initial <z>-spellings, cf. Markus (2022a, Section 4).
- SNEW: This is really an old form rather than an old word. The Wexford spelling variant *sneew* (for ‘snow’) underlines the length of the first diphthongal element in a word that was *snīwan* in Old English. The diphthong [iu] was much older than [o:] and the latter’s diphthong versions [ou] or [əu].
- TO-YEAR: This phrasal word, traced by Wright in the *Canterbury Tales* (D 168), was generally used in dialects of Ireland and England. County Wexford is specially mentioned because of the shortened form *t’year*. While the analogy of *to-year* to Present-Day *today* is obvious, only the phrase *this year* has come down to us in the standard.

6. Summary and Conclusion

The relation of County Wexford, of all places, to Chaucer may seem odd at first sight. The paper has shown that there were special reasons why some words used by Chaucer managed to survive in Wexford. The county’s history of settlement, the role of English immigrants, and the development of an English-based dialect (Yola) in the south of County Wexford were strong contributing factors. The statistical distribution of Chaucer words in the rest of the UK does not testify to a particular appeal of Chaucer’s works in the areas concerned, but is a measure of the persistence of dialectal features from Chaucer’s Middle English down to Late Modern English.

The deeper reasons for such a persistence, however, have to do with the popularity Chaucer has always had. He was appreciated and admired not only by the gentry and clerics, but also by members of the middle and lower classes, to the extent that these played a growing economic and cultural role, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries. Our temporal profile of Chaucer’s ‘success story’ reflects the varying degrees of the reception of Chaucer’s works by all levels of society. The geographical distribution, on the other hand, indicates the different degrees of proximity to dialect across the UK, with Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Southwest (Devon, Somerset) and Kent being dominant. The reason these and some other counties had a greater affinity to dialect in the past is certainly based on their rurality and on criteria of the density of population and the like. However, this is a general question outside the aim of this paper.

Instead, I focussed on County Wexford as a case in point illustrating how Chaucer's lexical heritage worked in concrete word samples. We saw that most of the samples of lexical survivals from Chaucer (or earlier) concerned full lexemes, including compositions and phrases. In some cases, it was just a specific old meaning that proved to have survived in dialect as opposed to the meaning in the Southern Standard. In a few other cases, non-standard affixation, as in KINE for *cows*, could be traced. It was obvious that some spelling habits and phonetic variants often add up to the deviant appearance of the dialect words.¹³

This interdisciplinary paper – combining methods of literary studies, historical linguistics and “dialectometry” (cf. Markus 2022c) – as a whole has shown that Chaucer's heritage, at least up to the 19th century, was not only a literary but also a linguistic one largely based on Chaucer's affinity to the language of ordinary people. As a result, many Chaucer words could travel around on the British Isles and survive in dialects while abandoned or modified in the standard. As a by-product of the analysis, the paper has shown *EDD Online* to be an irreplaceable tool for quantifying lexical evidence and, thus, for tracing some of the long and sometimes murky routes that words may take.

In the wake of modern dialect atlas work (Dieth and Orton 1962–1971; Viereck, Viereck, and Ramisch 2001), I hope to have shown that the analysis of traditional dialects and word geography, if computer-assisted, are far from being the old-fashioned linguistic disciplines that tended to rely on possibly non-representative eclectic observations. On the contrary: computer-assisted analysis provides valid and fascinating insights into the complex conditioning factors of dialect lexis across space and time.

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¹³ For these issues, see Markus (2022b).

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