**Title:** *It’s not cricket:* Lack of consistency and accuracy in labels applied to phrasemes in five English dictionaries for advanced learners

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**Abstract**

*One complaint about dictionary usage labels is that they lack consistency. The word ‘usage’ refers not only to corpus evidence but also to pragmatic suitability, and most unmarked words are considered ‘standard’ by the lexicographer (Benson 2001, p. 28). However, labelling may vary within and between dictionaries, and standard language varies according to country and age group. Although usage labels should reflect users’ needs (Ptaszynski 2010, p. 413), can a university-aged international student in Australia, for example, rely on usage labels in learners’ dictionaries when communicating with native English speakers in Australia?*

*This paper will address the currency label* old-fashioned*, and the regional labels* British English *and* Australian English*, in relation to 84 idioms from the ‘Big 5’ dictionaries published by Cambridge, Collins, Longman, Macmillan and Oxford. These dictionaries use the old-fashioned label for terms either used by older people, or fading from common use. However, they do not indicate if a term is used by different age groups. Moreover, the labels British and Australian English need not be mutually exclusive, and may be inaccurately applied.*

*The central argument is that English learners’ dictionaries need greater consistency and accuracy in their labelling to be truly user-friendly. To address this argument, 84 idioms, similes and proverbs (here referred to as ‘phrasemes’) are compared across the Big 5 to see which labels are applied, how they are used, and whether they match the findings of a wider study into the use of these idioms by different age groups in the UK and Australia. The conclusions are that the labels* old-fashioned*,* British English *and* Australian English *are frequently applied inconsistently; in addition, they are often incorrect, sometimes inadequate, and, in the case of old-fashioned, often vague.*

**Introduction**

Learners and speakers of English as an Additional Language (EAL) are well served with dictionaries, not only for translation, but also for decoding and encoding entirely within their target language. The first monolingual English learners’ dictionary (MELD) was Hornby’s landmark 1942 *Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary* (Cowie, 2009: 386). There are now five British English MELDs on the market, known as the ‘Big 5’: *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (*CALD*); *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary* (*COBUILD*); *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (*LDOCE*); *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (*MEDAL*); and *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (*OALD*). These MELDs are produced primarily for the British English market, but are available worldwide. While they cover British English vocabulary and usage, and frequently give American English variants, coverage of other varieties of English is less comprehensive, no doubt reflecting the smaller number of speakers of these varieties. This means, however, that learners of English in other countries may be unsure whether a term is used in that country or not. Usage labels can be of great help in this respect, but these labels often vary between dictionaries. In order to test the accuracy of labelling in the Big 5, a questionnaire was sent to 2053 native speakers of English in the UK and Australia, examining their use of 84 idioms, similes and proverbs (here referred to as ‘phrasemes’). The questionnaire aimed to discover whether there was a difference in participants’ knowledge and use of the phrasemes in the study, in terms of their age and location. The findings of the questionnaire are applied to the coverage given to the phrasemes by the Big 5 to see whether the labels *old-fashioned*, *British English* and *Australian English* are used accurately.

**Background**

The aim of pedagogical lexicography is to produce a learners’ dictionary which is user-friendly (Zgusta, 1971). In order to achieve this, lexicographers should consider not only the ease with which entries can be accessed, but also the value of entries for the learner. Given that most learners want to communicate with their peers, and that most of those who consult a MELD are of tertiary education age (Nesi, 2000), information needs to be given which will allow users to know whether an entry in the dictionary is appropriate to use in communication with a certain age group. Moreover, usage may vary not only between age groups but also between countries. EAL learners consulting a MELD thus need appropriate labelling to indicate such differences. One area of particular difficulty is that of idioms and other phrasemes, such as similes and proverbs. These set phrases may be very region- or age-specific in their use.

Phraseology is a field “bedevilled” (Cowie, 1998: 210) by the number of terms it uses and by conflicting or overlapping use of the same terms, and one writer’s ‘idiom’ may be another writer’s ‘phraseological unit’. While some researchers apply semantic criteria when defining an idiom, others use syntactic criteria (Liu, 2008: 16), and there is a proliferation of terms with many nuances of meaning. In the Big 5, there is no consensus as to how the terms ‘idiom’, ‘saying’, ‘proverb’ or ‘simile’ are used. For example, the idiom *to turn the other cheek* is listed in *OALD* as an idiom, in *COBUILD* and *MEDAL* as a phrase, and with no label at all in *CALD* and *LDOCE*. For the purposes of this study, the term ‘idiom’ is used to refer to a figurative expression of more than two words whose meaning cannot be deduced from its literal meaning. An example of this is the idiom *to carry/take coals to Newcastle*, which means *to perform an unnecessary act*. The study also includes similes, sayings and proverbs. The word ‘phraseme’, widely used in German and French phraseological research (Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen, 2005: 30), has been adopted to cover all of these, and will be used throughout the remainder of this paper.

**Labels in MELDs**

Labels in MELDs are used to direct the reader towards such features as usage and part of speech. Since a MELD may potentially have many labels, abbreviations are normally used. Labels and abbreviations may vary, however, from one dictionary to another (Kipfer, 1984; Marckwardt, 1973), and even within a single dictionary. This means that the user of more than one dictionary may be confused and, worse, may consider labels to be unreliable. Moreover, few users are likely to read in detail the introduction to the dictionary, where labels and their abbreviations are explained in greater detail (Béjoint, 1981: 216).

Labels may refer not only to actual usage but also to features such as “time, place or circumstance”, and any word that is not given a label is usually considered to demonstrate standard usage (Benson, 2001: 7;Kipfer, 1984: 140). Many writers have suggested categories for labelling, and a summary of these appears in Table 1 (below). The first six labels in the table are taken from Atkins (1992/93, p. 27), with examples of labels which match these and are suggested by other writers given in the second column; writers’ names appear in the third column. Works referred to are Card, McDavid, Jr and McDavid (1984); Gläser (1998); Kipfer (1984); Landau (1984); Norri (1996); and Stein (1999).This paper will concentrate on labels of *currency*, *region* and *maturity*.

Table 1: Dictionary labels suggested by different writers

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Labels | Sub-categories | Writers |
| **1. Register** | formal | (Atkins; Gläser) |
|  | familiar | (Atkins) |
|  | informal | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid; Landau) |
|  | colloquial | (Kipfer; Gläser ) |
|  | standard | (Kipfer; Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid) |
|  | non-standard | (Kipfer; Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid |
|  | conformity to a situation | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid) |
| **2. Currency** | obsolete | (Atkins; Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid) |
|  | old-fashioned | (Atkins; Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid) |
|  | archaic | (Kipfer; Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid; Landau; Gläser) |
|  | modern | (Gläser ) |
| **3. Style** | poetic | (Atkins) |
|  | technical | (Atkins) |
|  | literary | (Gläser ) |
| **4. Pragmatics** | pleasure | (Atkins) |
|  | surprise | (Atkins) |
| **5. Status** | dialect | (Atkins) |
|  | slang | (Atkins; Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid; Gläser; Kipfer; Landau) |
|  | jargon | (Atkins) |
|  | attitude/expressive markers | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid; Gläser; Stein) |
|  | - derogatory | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid; Gläser ) |
|  | - euphemism | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid; Gläser ) |
|  | - taboo | (Gläser; Landau) |
|  | - facetious | (Gläser ) |
|  | - jocular | (Gläser ) |
|  | insult | (Landau) |
| **6. Field** | e.g. architecture, music etc. | (Atkins; Gläser; Kipfer; Landau) |
|  | occupation | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid) |
| **7. Region** | etymological – word from the country, referent anywhere (e.g. *billabong*) | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid; Kipfer; Landau; Norri; Stein) |
|  | geographical – referent specific to the country but word recognised elsewhere (e.g. *kangaroo*) | (Norri) |
| **8. Medium** | speech | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid) |
|  | writing | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid) |
| **9. Frequency** | rare | (Landau) |
| **10. Maturity** | age of speaker (e.g. juvenile) | (Card, McDavid Jr & McDavid) |

Atkins’ *currency* label is particularly relevant to this study, but it is hard to measure, since it relates to who is using the dictionary (Atkins & Rundell, 2008: 186). However, as Atkins and Rundell point out (2008: 229), currency is a very useful label for EAL learners, although many items may turn out to be ephemeral. It is important for learners to know, too, if an item is merely old-fashioned or actually obsolete, and to be clear whether the label *old-fashioned* means it is used only by older speakers or whether it is actually passing or has passed out of use. (It should also be borne in mind that to a 17 year old, anyone over the age of, say, 40 may seem to be old-fashioned, so there is a definite need for the application of this label to be clarified for the user.)

The Big 5 vary in their use of the *old-fashioned* label. In *CALD* (2008) the label signifies that a term is “not used in modern English – you might find these words in books, used by older people, or used in order to be funny” (*CALD3*); and *MEDAL* (2002) has “no longer in current use but still used by some older people”. In *COBUILD* (2009),however, it refers to a term which is “no longer in common use”, while *LDOCE* (2003) has “a word that was commonly used in the past, but would sound old-fashioned today” and *OALD* (2010) has “passing out of common use”. There is a difference of opinion here, with two dictionaries using the label to restrict a term both to older users (of unspecified age) and little-used expressions, and three dictionaries using it to refer only to a term which is no longer commonly used. There is definitely a need for clarification of the *old-fashioned* label.

The seventh label is *region* (Card, McDavid, Jr, & McDavid, 1984; Kipfer, 1984; Landau, 1984; and Stein, 1999). Norri (1996) divides this further into etymological and geographical. *Etymological* means that while a word may originate from a particular country, its referent may be found elsewhere. For example, the Australian word *billabong* is also known as an *ox-box lake* in the UK. *Geographical*, on the other hand, means that the referent is specific to a country but the word is recognised elsewhere. An example of this is the word *kangaroo*. Such regional labelling is important, as learners need to know whether a term is used in the country where they are using their English. There is often inconsistency in this area, however (Norri, 1996: 26), and although unmarked entries may be assumed to be standard usage (Benson, 2001: 7) this may not be the case in every country. British English terms, for example, may not be applicable in Australia.

The tenth label, *maturity*, is used by Card, McDavid Jr and McDavid (1984) to refer to items which are usually restricted to certain age groups. *Dolly*, for instance, would be appropriate to use when talking to a young child, but not to an adult. Such information is necessary for learners, who may not know which language is appropriate to a certain context (Chan & Loong, 1999: 302). However, most MELDs do not include this information, although the *Macquarie learners dictionary*, now out of print, informed the reader that the word *spook* “is generally used in children’s stories. The usual word is **ghost**.” A linking of this *maturity* label with the *old-fashioned* label could clarify usage for learners. For example, a new label such as *youth* might establish a particular age group who typically use an item, or the label *older speaker* might be used for an older age group.

To examine whether certain phrasemes are used more by people of particular age groups and in certain regions, a study was conducted among native English-speaking participants of five different age groups in the UK and Australia. This information provides vital data to inform the needs of EAL learners who wish to interact with their peers in Australia.

**Methodology**

For this study, 84 phrasemes were chosen and divided into five different categories, using the “idiom finder” at the back of the paper edition of *CALD3* as a starting point. The categories chosen were those which appeared to have origins or referents which were readily identifiable to this writer, namely Biblical, literary/historical, Australian in reference, UK in reference and of older reference. Examples are *as old as Methuselah* (Biblical); *all that glitters is not gold* (literary: Shakespeare); *not to have a bar of something* (Australian); *to send someone to Coventry* (UK); and *to let off steam* (older). All the phrasemes, with the exception of the Australian expressions, appeared in at least two of the Big 5.

The list of 84 phrasemes was then divided into six smaller surveys, each containing questions on 14 phrasemes, and an online questionnaire was formed and sent to native speakers of English in the UK and Australia. The questionnaire asked participants to rate their familiarity with each phraseme prompt; choose the most appropriate of four suggested meanings; indicate how frequently they would use each phraseme, and in which situations from a given list; and write down any other phrasemes which came to mind. Participants also gave demographic information about age, gender, level of education, and the area in which they lived. Responses from those who were not native speakers of English, or who had not lived most of their lives in the UK or Australia, were discounted. A total of 2085 questionnaires were eligible for analysis. Participants were given a choice of how often they would use a phraseme, from ‘never’, ‘almost never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘very often’. The findings below are based on the frequency with which participants said they would use a phraseme ‘sometimes’. Generally, ‘sometimes’ was the highest usage rating given to a phraseme.

**Findings**

This paper will address the findings for 34 phrasemes labelled either *old-fashioned*, *British English* or *Australian English* by the Big 5. Those of the Big 5 which include the phrasemes are indicated in Table 2 below, together with labels where these are assigned. Labels are taken from the online versions of each of the Big 5, consulted in 2010. Bold font is used to indicate phrasemes which appear to be accurately labelled according to the findings of this study. Rates for which participants in the study would use a phraseme ‘sometimes’ are also given. The number of participants varied between surveys, and some participants did not answer all questions. Exact numbers of participants are therefore not given for each phraseme, but the range of participants who answered each question varied from 28 (the total number of 16-22 year olds in Australia) to 622 (the total number of UK participants). For each phraseme, the average number of all participants was 168 in Australia and 193 in the UK, while the average number of participants aged 16-22 was 45 in Australia and 104 in the UK.

Table 2: Labels given to 34 phrasemes in the Big 5 denoting that an item is *old fashioned*, *British English* or *Australian English*, together with the percentage of participants in Australia and the UK who would use the phrasemes ‘sometimes’. (Bold font indicates that a label is accurate according to the findings of the study). OF = old-fashioned; Aus = Australia.

| **Phraseme** | **CALD** | **COBUILD** | **LDOCE** | **MEDAL** | **OALD** | **‘Some-times’ use % of all Aus**  **parti-cipants** | **‘Some-times’ use % of all UK parti-cipants** | **‘Some-times’ use % of 16-22 year old Aus**  **parti-cipants** | **‘Some-times’ use % of 16-22 year old UK parti-cipants** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Old-fashioned** | |  | |  | |  | |  | |
| A pretty/fine kettle of fish | ✓  *(OF)* | X | X | X | X | 10 | 16 | 3 | 13 |
| To gird up one’s loins | ✓ | **✓**  ***(OF)*** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 16 | 12 | 3 | 2 |
| In the land of Nod | ✓  *(OF)* | X | ✓  *(OF)* | ✓ | ✓  *(OF)* | 18 | 40 | 18 | 37 |
| **Old-fashioned and British English** | | | | | | | | | |
| It’s not cricket | ✓  *(OF)* | X | X | ✓  *(OF)* | ✓  *(OF, Br E)* | 26 | 20 | 3 | 10 |
| The man/  woman on the Clapham omnibus | **✓**  ***(UK, OF)*** | X | **✓**  ***(Br E, OF)*** | X | **✓**  ***(Br E)*** | 2 | 10 | 0 | 7 |
| Somebody had a good innings | *✓*  *(UK)* | X | *✓*  *(Br E)* | *✓*  *(Br E, OF)* | *✓*  *(Br E)* | 30 | 46 | 5 | 23 |
| To send somebody to Coventry | **✓**  ***(UK,*** *OF)* | **✓**  ***(Br E)*** | **✓**  ***(Br E)*** | ✓ | **✓**  ***(Br E)*** | 12 | 23 | 3 | 7 |
| To spend a penny | *✓ (UK, OF)* | X | *✓*  *(Br E, OF)* | *✓*  *(Br E, OF)* | *✓*  *(Br E, OF)* | 17 | 39 | 14 | 12 |
| **British English** | | | | | | | | | |
| To hide your light under a bushel | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓  *(Br E)* | 15 | 22 | 1 | 8 |
| To carry/take coals to Newcastle | ✓ | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | 21 | 24 | 10 | 4 |
| To have some-body's guts for garters | ✓  *(UK)* | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E, OF)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | 18 | 37 | 11 | 23 |
| To burn your boats | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓  *(Br E)* | 17 | 22 | 3 | 0 |
| To be up a gum tree | X | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | 14 | 16 | 6 | 3 |
| To grasp the nettle | ✓  *(UK)* | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | 8 | 16 | 3 | 8 |
| The cupboard is bare | ✓ | X | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | 32 | 17 | 21 | 17 |
| Out of the ark | ✓ (UK) | X | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | 21 | 33 | 3 | 6 |
| To separate the sheep from the goats | ✓  *(UK)* | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓ | ✓ | 23 | 29 | 8 | 3 |
| A dog in the manger | ✓ | X | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓ | 9 | 14 | 0 | 0 |
| Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned | X | X | X | ✓ | ✓  *(Br E)* | 15 | 28 | 21 | 10 |
| Two a penny | ✓  *(UK)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | 10 | 43 | 4 | 21 |
| Jam tomorrow | ✓ | X | **✓**  ***(Br E)*** | **✓**  ***(Br E)*** | **✓**  ***(Br E)*** | 1 | 36 | 0 | 7 |
| The penny drops | ✓ *(UK)* | ✓*(mainly Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓ *(esp. Br E)* | 55 | 56 | 34 | 32 |
| (To repent in) sackcloth and ashes | ✓ | ✓ | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓ | ✓ | 7 | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| Went out with the ark | ✓ | X | X | ✓  *(Br E)* | ✓  *(Br E)* | 19 | 21 | 9 | 0 |
| **Australian English** | | | | | | | | | |
| To be a box of birds | X | X | X | ✓  *(Aus)* | X | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| The back of Bourke | X | X | X | **✓*(Aus)*** | **✓*(Aus)*** | 26 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| To come a gutser | X | X | X | X | **✓*(Aus)*** | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Done like a dinner | X | X | X | X | **✓*(Aus)*** | 26 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Don’t come the raw prawn with me | **✓**  ***(Aus)*** | X | X | X | X | 11 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| To get a guernsey | X | X | X | **✓**  **(Aus)** | **✓**  **(Aus)** | 15 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| In the box seat | X | X | X | X | **✓**  ***(Aus)*** | 18 | 8 | 10 | 7 |
| Like a shag on a rock | **✓**  ***(Aus)*** | X | X | X | X | 18 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Not to have a bar of something | X | X | X | X | **✓**  ***(Aus E,*** *NZ E)* | 42 | 0 | 14 | 0 |
| Up the mulga | ***✓ (Aus)*** | X | X | X | X | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 2 indicates that there is variation in the consistency with which the Big 5 assign labels. From the list in this study, three phrasemes were given the label *old-fashioned* and five were assigned both *old-fashioned* and *British English* by at least one MELD. Sixteen received a *British English* label, with greater consistency among MELDs. Those which included any of the ten Australian phrasemes all marked them consistently as *Australian English*.

Let us now compare the dictionary labels with actual usage by the participants in the study.

***Old-fashioned***

*A pretty/fine kettle of fish* is used almost equally by young people and older people in the UK, but less used in Australia, particularly by the youngest group.

*To gird up one’s loins* is used mainly by older speakers, especially in Australia.

*In the land of Nod* is still used ‘sometimes’ by all age groups in both locations, although it is used more in the UK than Australia.

Of these three phrasemes, then, only the second, *to gird up one’s loins*, warrants an *old-fashioned* label, if *old-fashioned* is taken to indicate that an item is not used by younger speakers.

***Old-fashioned* and *British English***

*It's not cricket* is used slightly more often in Australia than the UK, but little used by the youngest group in Australia. *Somebody had a good innings* is used more in the UK, and also widely used by the youngest group there. *To spend a penny* is also used by all age groups in both locations. These are therefore not uniquely British English phrasemes, and do not appear to be old-fashioned.

*The man/woman on the Clapham omnibus* is well labelled, being almost unknown in Australia and used ‘sometimes’ by only 10% of UK participants, mostly aged over 31.

*To send somebody to Coventry* is definitely used more in the UK (23%) rather than Australia (12%). It is used much more by the older age groups than the younger, many of whom were not familiar with it. It therefore warrants the *British English* label, though *old-fashioned* would only be applicable if it means ‘used by older speakers’ rather than ‘disappearing from use’.

***British English***

Nine of the phrasemes in the study are used almost equally by participants in Australia and the UK, and do not warrant a *British English* label. These are: *the penny drops*; *to hide your light under a bushel*; *to carry/take coals to Newcastle*; *to burn your boats*; *to be up a gum tree*; *to separate the sheep from the goats*; *a dog in the manger*; *(to repent in) sackcloth and ashes*; and *went out with the ark*.

Five phrasemes are used more frequently in the UK than Australia, but are definitely not restricted to British rather than Australian English. These are: *to grasp the nettle*; *out of the ark*; *to have somebody's guts for garters*; *two a penny;* and *hell hath no fury like a woman scorned*. One phraseme marked as *British English* in two MELDs, *the cupboard is bare*, is actually used more in Australia.

Only one phraseme is used much more in the UK and deserves the label *British English.* This is the phraseme *jam tomorrow*, used ‘sometimes’ by 1% of participants in Australia but by 36% of participants in the UK.

***Australian English***

The only group of phrasemes which appears to be labelled accurately with any consistency are the Australian phrasemes: *to be a box of birds*; *the back of Bourke*; *to come a gutser*; *done like a dinner*; *don’t come the raw prawn with me*; *to get a guernsey*; *in the box seat*; *like a shag on a rock*; *not to have a bar of something*; and *up the mulga*. One of these, *box of birds*, was actually almost unknown to the Australian participants, and may be a New Zealand expression. The others, however, are all much better known and more greatly used in Australia than the UK.

**Discussion**

It is clear from the above information that an EAL learner may experience confusion when attempting to apply usage labels the Big 5. Four major problems can be identified.

The first problem is inaccuracy. Only 13 of the 34 phrasemes in this study are correctly labelled, and 9 of these are from Australian English. Only *COBUILD* has correctly assigned *to gird up one’s loins* as an *old-fashioned* term. *CALD* and *LDOCE* correctly give an *old-fashioned* label to *the man/woman on the Clapham omnibus*, but *OALD* fails to do so. *MEDAL* does not indicate with the other Big 5 that *to send someone to Coventry* is *British English* in use, and *CALD* fails to give the *British English* label to *jam tomorrow*. All the other phrasemes are incorrectly labelled, since native speaker usage indicates that most terms in this survey marked *British English* or *old-fashioned* may be used equally in Australia, and by speakers of different ages.

In addition to inaccuracy, there is a large degree of inconsistency. First, there is a difference in coverage. Of the 34 phrasemes in this paper, *OALD* includes 29, *CALD* and *MEDAL* each includes 24, *LDOCE* has 17 and *COBUILD* has only 5. When a phraseme is included, it may be assigned a different label in different dictionaries. For example, *the penny drops* is given as *British English* in *CALD, LDOCE* and *MEDAL*, but as *mainly/especially British English* in *COBUILD* and *OALD*. Does this mean that three of the Big 5 restrict the use of the term to British English only? Whatever the implication, the findings reveal that the phraseme is used equally in Australia.

There is a related problem here of inadequacy. If a term is marked as *British English*, does that mean that it is used only in the UK? Or is the UK given as a contrast to American usage? In that case, speakers of English in other countries such as Australia are not catered for.

The final problem is one of vagueness. What exactly is meant by *British English*? If a term is not marked with a label, does that mean that it is standard in British English, or that it could be used in any English speaking country? In particular, what does the term *old-fashioned* mean? The findings of this study indicate that many phrasemes termed *old-fashioned* by the Big 5 are in fact still in common use by younger speakers. It is important for each MELD to clarify exactly what is meant by *old-fashioned*.

It may be that there is a place here for a new maturity label (Card, McDavid, Jr, & McDavid, 1984) such as *youth*, or *all ages*, to indicate that speakers of all ages use a phraseme. Or it may be that *old-fashioned* should be restricted to items passing from common use, and *older speaker* be used to indicate that young native speakers are unlikely to use an expression.

**Conclusion**

The above discussion indicates major problems with labelling in the Big 5 in regard to items labelled *old-fashioned* and *British English*. *Australian English* is well identified, but items with this label may not be used by a younger age group. Inaccuracy, inconsistency, inadequacy and vagueness are the main issues. It is of course true that usage labels can only give principles, and cannot necessarily keep up with changing language (Card, McDavid, Jr, & McDavid 1984; Atkins & Rundell, 2008). It is also time consuming and labour intensive to monitor all items of a language for changing use. Two recommendations are made, however. First, MELDs need to state clearly that the *British English* label does not preclude the use of a term in Australia. Secondly, a note needs to be made that different age groups may use different phrasemes. Greater precision of the *old-fashioned* label is therefore necessary, and a new label such as *youth* or *older user* may need to be introduced. In order to monitor changing usage, nationwide surveys could be conducted, promoted by various media, to establish native speaker usage and translate this into information provided for users of MELDs in a particular country. While this would take time and effort, it would be an invaluable exercise in providing truly user-friendly material and enabling MELDs to lead the way in research-informed lexicography.

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