

Negative prefixation from 1300 to 1800: A case study in *in-/un-* variation*

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1 Introduction

In its long history, English has had to cope with a massive influx of vocabulary items from various source languages. This has caused inconsistencies in lexis and word-formation, and confusion to those using it or trying to learn it. For example, uncertainty as to negative prefixation has been a characteristic of the language throughout its history. In the 18th century, grammarians and lexicographers produced serious proposals for ‘correcting, improving and ascertaining the English Tongue’ (Swift, 1712) in order to prevent the corruption of the language caused by linguistic mutability. This paper describes the variation in negative prefixation between *in-* and *un-* during the period between 1300 and 1800. Evidence of usage is to be found in dictionaries and other books about language, which were described by Puttenham (1589: 121) as the main source of authority for language use in the late 16th century. Dictionaries provide information about the meaning and perceived correct usage of individual words. A computer-assisted analysis of a large body of data may be capable of revealing various features of the language which the early lexicographers were not aware of.

The entries and definitions of early monolingual and bilingual dictionaries give much of the information we now have about the variation between *in-* and *un-* words. An examination of dictionary entries shows the conceptual distinction between ‘hard/elegant’ and ‘easy/vulgar’ words in the Early Modern English period. The 17th-century English dictionaries of hard words provide ‘a selection of English words which are likely to be found obscure’, and the majority of the words listed are ‘either of classical origin or from French’ (Barber 1976: 107).

The title page of Cawdrey’s *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604), cited as the first monolingual English dictionary, explicitly refers to the nature of the listed words within the dictionary:

A Table Alphabeticall, conteyning and teaching the true vvriting, and vnderstanding of hard vsuall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French. &c.

With the interpretation thereof by *plaine English words, gathered for the benefit and helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other vnskilfull persons.*

Whereby they may the more easilie and better vnderstand many hard English wordes, vvchich they shall heare or read in Scriptures, Sermons, or elsewhere, and also be made able to vse the same aptly themselues.

Legere, et non intelligere, neglegere est.

As good not read, as not to vnderstand.

The tradition of explaining ‘hard English words’ by ‘plaine English words’ continued to be adopted throughout the 17th century until the first comprehensive English dictionary, J.[ohn] K.[ersey]’s *A New English Dictionary* (1702), started to include the whole range of English vocabulary. The title page of J.K.’s work makes a clear difference between the objective of the hard word dictionary and that of the comprehensive dictionary, which provides ‘a compleat collection of the most proper and significant words, commonly used in the language’.

This paper compares the results obtained when examining the dictionaries with those obtained from authentic corpus texts, and describes the similarities and differences between these different sources of information. Appropriate attention is also paid to the attitudes of Samuel Johnson towards the *in-/un-* variation, as shown in his *Dictionary* (1755).

2 Corpus Information from 1300 to 1800

There is a range of historical texts available in computer readable form, particularly on CD-ROM, such as the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts, the Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Chadwyck-Healey’s English Poetry Full-Text Database, etc. There are also many text archives on the Internet where individual texts can be accessed. This paper focuses on the *in-/un-* variation using the English Poetry Database. The Database contains the full text of all English poetry written between 600 and 1900 which is available in printed form. It consists of 5 discs: Disc 1 covers the period 600–1600, Disc 2 1600–1700, Disc 3 1700–1800, and Discs 4 and 5 1800–1900.¹ This paper simply follows the division of

the Database, which in turn is based on the categorization of the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*.

Let us first look at the words with the negative prefix *in-* and those with *un-* in each period. All the variant forms of the prefix *in-*, such as *ig-*, *il-*, *im-* and *ir-*, are classified under the prefix *in-*, and the variant spelling *vn-*, which had in fact been the major form until the beginning of the 17th century, is classified under the prefix *un-*. Table 1 shows the changes in the proportions of *in-* and *un-* words in the English Poetry Database:

Table 1: Number of *in-* words and *un-* words in Chadwyck-Healey's English Poetry Full-Text Database

	1300–1400	1400–1500	1500–1600	1600–1700	1700–1800
total words	1,378,996	2,265,380	10,499,677	15,127,352	15,349,480
<i>in-</i> words	377 0.03	1,846 0.1	9,236 0.1	22,901 0.15	26,375 0.2
<i>un-</i> words	1,454 0.1	2,614 0.1	21,823 0.2	47,930 0.3	51,256 0.3

There is a steady increase in the total occurrences of negative words in the history of the language of poetry. Perhaps the most interesting point in Table 1 is the sharp increase of *in-* words in the 15th and 17th centuries and that of *un-* words in the 16th and 17th centuries. The figures suggest that, while large numbers of loan words were borrowed from other source languages, a significant number of words were coined by the use of prefixes like *in-* and *un-* in the Early Modern English period. There was also a general tendency to use the native negative prefix *un-* instead of the foreign negative prefix *in-* in the derivational processes of word-formation, especially in the 16th century.

Let us now turn to the frequencies of individual words. Before we consider the main items to be included in this analysis, it may be useful to consider briefly the range of spelling variation in the period between 1300 and 1800. As an example, consider the variant spellings of *in-/uncertain*, *in-/unperfect* and *in-/unpossible*. Table 2 shows the total number of spelling variations of these words found in the English Poetry Database:

There was a fairly wide variation in the spelling of these words until the 17th century. For example, the lemma *uncertain* has four spelling variants in the 14th century, nine in the 15th century, 19 in the 16th century and five in the 17th century, but only one standard spelling in the 18th century. In considering these examples, however, it must be remembered that the size of the 14th- and 15th-century text collection is very small compared with that of other periods.

Morphological changes produced different word forms in the 14th and 15th centuries. In many cases, the labio-dental *n* of the prefix *in-* occurring immediately before the labial sound *p* of the following base *-possible* had not been assimilated to the labial *m*. For example, there are 18 occurrences of the lexeme *impossible* in the 14th century, and the unassimilated form constitutes 44 percent (eight occurrences) of the total. In the 15th century, the unassimilated form accounts for 32 percent (19 occurrences) of the total occurrences of the lemma *impossible*. There is no unassimilated form in the 16th century. This shows that the assimilation process had been completed by the end of the 15th century.

The form *vn-* was the major form until the end of the 16th century. In fact, the *v* was used instead of *u* in all the bilingual dictionaries being examined in this paper. In general, the *un-* form started to outnumber the *vn-* form from the 17th century onwards.

Given the complexity of the spelling variation, it is necessary to treat all the spelling variants under one and the same lexeme. Table 3 shows the frequencies of occurrence of some *in-/un-* doublets in the period from 1300 to 1800. In most cases, both *in-* and *un-* forms occur in the headword lists of 18th-century comprehensive dictionaries like J.K. (1702) and Johnson (1755). Percentages are calculated on the total number of both forms.

Table 3: Frequencies of in-/un- doublets Chadwyck-Healey's English Poetry Full-Text Database

	1300–1400		1400–1500			1500–1600			1600–1700			1700–1800		
	in-	un-	in-	un-	%	in-	un-	%	in-	un-	%	in-	un-	%
in-/un-accessible	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	34	39	1	2	34	1	3
in-/un-capable	0	0	1	0	0	8	7	47	26	33	56	55	6	10
in-/un-certain	0	6	12	16	57	29	271	90	5	452	99	2	456	100
in-/un-cessant	0	0	0	0	0	51	19	27	81	23	22	556	0	0
in-/un-cessantly	0	0	2	2	50	50	27	35	52	11	17	51	0	0
in-/un-constant	0	1	15	2	12	114	145	56	201	154	43	201	21	10
in-/un-curable	5	0	12	1	8	19	10	34	42	1	2	43	0	0
in-/un-discreet	0	2	1	4	80	7	20	74	28	5	15	32	0	0
in-/un-expert	0	0	2	2	50	7	7	50	5	11	69	13	1	7
in-/un-just	0	0	4	4	50	18	414	96	17	811	98	2	455	100
ig-/un-noble	0	0	3	0	0	18	9	33	269	0	0	286	0	0
im-/un-patient	2	1	18	3	14	152	7	4	484	1	0	1203	1	0
im-/un-perfect	17	1	21	4	16	49	69	58	240	15	6	275	1	0
im-/un-possible	18	1	59	4	6	108	23	18	191	10	5	169	0	0
in-/un-satiable	0	0	12	3	20	27	21	44	20	6	3	16	1	6

One general characteristic of the items given in Table 3 is that, from the 15th century onwards, there was considerable variation between *in-* and *un-*.² Many doublets, such as *in-/unaccessible*, *in-/uncapable*, *in-*

/unconstant, in-/uncurable, ig-/unnoble, im-/unperfect, im-/unpossible and in-/unsatiabile, provide evidence of the increase in the use of *un-* forms in the 16th century when compared to the 15th and 17th centuries (eg the proportion of *unperfect* to *imperfect* is 16 percent in the 15th century, 58 percent in the 16th century and 6 percent in the 17th century). The distribution of frequencies of these doublets shows that the variation was at its height in the 16th century. From the 17th century onwards, patterns emerged which showed the dominant form for each pair of doublets. In most of these cases, *in-* forms established themselves in the language, although some doublets, such as *in-/uncapable* and *in-/unexpert*, show a preference for *un-* forms still in the 17th century.³

A great number of *in-/un-* doublets were produced from the co-existence of the foreign prefix *in-* and the native prefix *un-*, especially in the earlier stages of Early Modern English. The widespread use of doublets may be considered in relation to the conflict between the adoption of foreign words without modification and their adaptation to English, which in this case was effected by the simple process of replacing the Latin prefix with the English prefix. Perhaps the opposition to inkhorn terms, which was at its peak in the middle of the 16th century, led to the increase in the use of *un-* words in the 16th century.

It may be interesting to investigate the usage of these doublets in context. During the Early Modern English period doublets were seen as variant forms of the same word, and writers often had a preference for one form over the other. On closer examination, however, there is variation between *in-* and *un-* forms even within the works of one poet. There are cases in which poets made use of this variation for stylistic purposes. As an example, consider the use of *in-/invisible* and *in-/unseparable* in the lines of Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586) and John Donne (1572–1631):

He was **invisible** that hurt me so,
And none **unvisible**, but Spirites, can go.
(Sir Philip Sidney, 'A shepherds tale no height of stile
desires', lines 455–456)

So meet thy Fredericke, and so
To an **unseparable** union goe,
Since separation
Falls not on such things as are infinite,

Nor things which are but one, can disunite.
You're twice **inseparable**, great, and one;
(John Donne, 'An Epithalamion, Or marriage Song on the
Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine being married on St.
Valentines day', lines 46–51)

The variation between *in-* and *un-* forms in both these examples seems to be a stylistic tactic to avoid repetition of the same word in close proximity.

3 Dictionary Information from 1538 to 1755

Although glosses had been in existence from the Old English period onwards,⁴ the immediate predecessors of Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabetical* are the explanatory glossaries appended to 16th- and 17th-century publications, and bilingual dictionaries compiled to help people to read French, Italian or Latin texts. This section deals with four of the main bilingual dictionaries and eight monolingual English dictionaries.

At first glance, early bilingual dictionaries may seem inappropriate for a proper analysis of words with negative prefixation, because they do not contain entries for *un-* words. However, the type of words under investigation can often be found in the translation of Latin or Latin-derived languages into English. Bilingual dictionaries made extensive use of both *in-* and *un-* words for translating words with the negative prefix *in-* into English. An examination of the definitions of all entries under the letter *I* provides a substantial list of words with the negative prefixes *in-* or *un-*.⁵

Each form of the doublets in Table 3 has been checked to see whether it was used as a headword in the monolingual dictionaries, and whether it was found in the translation text of the bilingual dictionaries. In Table 4, the first four dictionaries are bilingual and the rest are monolingual, all in chronological order. The occurrence and non-occurrence of a word are indicated by the letters 'o' and 'x', respectively.

Table 4: Occurrence of words in the translations of bilingual dictionaries and in the entries of monolingual dictionaries

	bilingual dictionaries				monolingual English dictionaries							
	Elyot (1538)	Cooper (1565)	Florio (1611)	Cograve (1611)	Cawdrey (1604)	Bullokar (1616)	Cockeram ^a (1623) I	Blount (1656)	Phillips (1658)	Coles (1676)	J.K. (1702)	Johnson (1755)
	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-	in-un-
in-/un-accessible	x x	x x	o x	o x	x o	o o	o o	x x	o x	o o	o o	o x
in-/un-capable	x x	x x	x o	x o	x x	o x	o x	x x	x x	x x	o o	o o
in-/un-certain	x o	x o	x o	x o	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x o	x o
in-/un-cessant	x x	x x	x o	x x	x x	x x	x o	x x	o x	x x	o o	o x
in-/un-cessantly	x x	x x	x x	o x	o x	x x	x x	o x	x x	o x	x x	o x
in-/un-constant	x x	x o	o o	o x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	o o	o o
in-/un-curable	x x	o o	x o	x o	o x	x x	x x	x x	o x	o x	o o	o x
in-/un-discreet	x x	x o	o x	o o	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	o o	o o
in-/un-expert	x x	x o	x o	x o	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x o	o o
in-/un-just	x x	x o	x o	x o	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x o	x o
ig-/un-noble	x o	x o	o x	o x	o x	o x	o x	x x	o x	o x	o o	o o
im-/un-patient	x x	x o	o x	o x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	o o	o x
im-/un-perfect	x x	x o	o o	o x	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	o x	o o	o o
im-/un-possible	x x	x o	o o	o o	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x	o x	o o	o x
in-/un-satiable	x o	o o	o o	x o	o o	o o	o o	x x	x x	x x	o o	o o

^a Cockeram (1623) I: The first book of *The English Dictionarie*

Comparisons of the doublets between the dictionaries provide a valuable insight into lexicographers' ideas about hard words in the early stages of the development of lexicography. The series of dictionaries from 1538 to 1755 under examination can be divided into three types: bilingual dictionaries, monolingual hard word dictionaries and comprehensive dictionaries.

First of all, let us look at the bilingual dictionaries. There is a significant difference between Elyot (1538) and Cooper (1565) on the one hand and Florio (1611) and Cotgrave (1611) on the other. The first two dictionaries make more frequent use of *un-* words, such as *unconstant*, *undiscreet*, *unnoble*, *unpatient* and *unperfect*, whereas the last two show a greater use of the corresponding *in-* words, such as *inconstant*, *indiscreet*, *ignoble*, *impatient* and *imperfect*. These examples clearly illustrate the contrast between the preferred use of *un-* forms in the 16th-century bilingual dictionaries and that of *in-* forms in the early 17th-century bilingual dictionaries. Table 5, which shows the proportions of *in-* and *un-* words in the translation of *in-* words in the bilingual dictionaries, demonstrates this tendency towards an increased use of *in-* words in the 17th century:

Table 5: Number of *in-* words and *un-* words in the translation of *in-* words in bilingual dictionaries

	Elyot (1538)	Cooper (1565)	Florio (1611)	Cotgrave (1611)
<i>in-</i> words	10 (13%)	66 (20%)	163 (30%)	164 (37%)
<i>un-</i> words	66 (87%)	267 (80%)	388 (70%)	284 (63%)

The figures show that 16th-century lexicographers used a higher percentage of *un-* words than 17th-century lexicographers in the translation of Latinate *in-* words. It is also possible to see the growing number of *in-* words in the bilingual dictionaries, while *un-* words slowly decreased. This may have been caused by the conscious efforts of the earlier lexicographers to translate as many elements of the source language as possible into the target language.

The monolingual English dictionaries of hard words, ie from Cawdrey (1604) to Coles (1676), provide a different picture from the contemporary bilingual dictionaries. They tend to provide a large number of entries for *in-* words, and only a limited number of *un-* words, with the

exception of two particular doublets: *in-/unaccessible* and *in-/unsatiabile*. Incidentally, the repeated provision of these pairs in several dictionaries may be due to the tradition of plagiarism in lexicography.

It seems likely that the ‘hard/easy’ distinction depended much on the origin of the prefix attached to the stem. As an example, compare the occurrence of *uncapable* in Florio (1611) and Cotgrave (1611) with that of *incapable* in Bullokar (1616) and Cockeram (1623). As shown in Table 3, there was an almost even distribution of frequencies of occurrence between the two words in the authentic 16th and 17th century texts. The provision of an entry for the headword *incapable* in Bullokar and Cockeram, and the occurrence of *uncapable* in Florio and Cotgrave may serve as an example showing the association of *in-* words with ‘hard’ words and that of *un-* words with ‘easy’ words during the Early Modern English period. In contrast, both *incapable* and *uncapable* occur in the headword lists of J.K. (1702) and Johnson (1755).

The association of ‘hard’ words with words beginning with the foreign prefix *in-*, implied by these differences of approach to *in-/un-* doublets between the hard word dictionary range and the comprehensive dictionaries, can be further illustrated by the proportions of *in-* words and *un-* words in the dictionary entries, as shown in Table 6:

Table 6: Number of *in-* words and *un-* words in the headword lists of monolingual English dictionaries

	Cawdrey (1604)	Bullokar (1616)	Cockeram ^a (1623)I	Cockeram ^b (1623)II	Blount (1656)	Phillips (1658)	Coles (1676)	J.K. (1702)	Johnson (1755)
total entry	2,543	4,249	5,836	4,136	10,499	11,000	25,000	28,000	42,773
<i>in-</i> words	80 (3.2%)	121 (2.9%)	215 (3.9%)	10 (0.2%)	177 (1.7%)	248 (2.3%)	326 (1.3%)	292 (1.0%)	806 (1.9%)
<i>un-</i> words	4 (0.2%)	5 (0.1%)	8 (0.1%)	50 (1.2%)	2 (0.02%)	4 (0.04%)	22 (0.1%)	606 (2.2%)	1,463 (3.4%)

^a Cockeram (1623) I: The first book of *The English Dictionarie*

^b Cockeram (1623) II: The second book of *The English Dictionarie*

The number of *in-* words is much greater than that of *un-* words in all hard word dictionaries, with the exception of the second book by Cockeram (1623).⁶ Cockeram’s work consists of three parts, and the

most distinctive feature of his work is the second part of the dictionary in which he translation of ‘the vulgar words’ into ‘the more scholastick, or those derived from other languages’. In contrast to the first book, the second book lists a large number of *un-* words which did not appear in the hard word dictionaries.

J.K.’s dictionary provides a large number of entries for *un-* words which are not in the headword list of the hard word dictionaries. The same is true of Johnson’s *Dictionary*. The two comprehensive dictionaries thus contrast with the hard word dictionaries in their attitude towards *un-* words. Both of the comprehensive dictionaries contain a considerable number of *in-/un-* doublets in the headword lists, eg 60 pairs of *in-/un-* doublets in J.K. (1702) and 108 pairs in Johnson (1755), as reflected in the sample in Table 4 above. In addition to the marked difference between the two books by Cockeram (1623), the sharp increase in the total numbers of *un-* words in comprehensive dictionaries like J.K. (1702) and Johnson (1755) suggests that the ‘hard/easy’ distinction was closely associated with that between the foreign prefix *in-* and the native prefix *un-*.

4 Johnson’s adaptation of quotations

In *The Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* (1747: 32), Johnson states that ‘a chaotic dialect of heterogeneous phrases’ had been formed by the limited knowledge of translators. The main objective of *A Dictionary of the English Language* (Johnson 1755) was to fix the characteristics of the language by producing ‘a dictionary by which the pronunciation of our language may be fixed, and its attainment facilitated; by which its purity may be preserved, its use ascertained, and its duration lengthened’ (Johnson 1747: 32). The publication of Johnson’s *Dictionary* initiated a new tradition in English lexicography — the use of illustrative quotations for almost every word and meaning in chronological order taken from the texts of major writers. Béjoint (1994: 97), however, points out that 18th-century lexicographers adapted their corpora of quotations ‘to suit their needs’.

An investigation of Johnson’s adaptation of quotations may reveal his attitude to the *in-/un-* variation as well as his idealized usage. As an example, in his definition of sense 2 of the headword *unexpressive* Johnson uses three quotations. It is interesting to note that two of these quotations actually contain *inexpressive*. These two words are marked in bold type:

UNEXPRESSIVE

Run, run, Orlando, carve on every tree
The fair, the chaste, and the *inexpressive* she. *Shakespeare*.
With nectar pure his ouzy locks he laves,
And hears the *unexpressive*, nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms, meek, of joy and love. *Milton*.⁷
The helmed cherubim,
And sworded seraphim,
Are seen in glitt'ring ranks, with wings display'd,
Harping in loud and solemn quire,
With *inexpressive* notes to heaven's new-born heir. *Milton*.

Even more interesting is the fact that, of the three quotations, the first and third have already been given as examples for the headwords *to carve* and *to harp*, respectively, where the original word *unexpressive* is used, not the Johnson-adapted *inexpressive*.⁸

The original texts read as follows:

Run, run, Orlando, carve on every tree
The fair, the chaste, and the **unexpressive** she.
(Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 3, Scene 2, lines 9–10)

The helmed Cherubim
And sworded Seraphim,
Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displaid,
Harping in loud and solemn quire,
With **unexpressive** notes to Heavn's new-born Heir.
(Milton, *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, lines 12–16)

This raises interesting questions as regards the replacement of *unexpressive* in the source text (and in other entries) by *inexpressive* and the provision of the altered quotations containing *inexpressive* in the entry for the headword *unexpressive*. The examination of the entire text of the English Poetry Database shows that, while each word occurs twice in 17th-century poetry, there are 31 occurrences of *inexpressive* and only one occurrence of *unexpressive* in 18th-century poetry. It seems likely that Johnson has altered the original word to show that they were spelling variants of each other, and that *inexpressive* has become the preferred word.

The variation caused by Johnson's own adaptation of the source text is also found in many other quotations. Pairs showing the *in-/un-* variation

within recycled identical quotations have been identified and then checked against the original word of the source text to see how the original word has been adapted in the dictionary quotation. The examples given in Appendix 1 show the degree of adaptation made to the dictionary quotations. The word pairs showing the variation within the quotation are underlined, and the word adapted from the source text is highlighted in bold type.

There is evidently a large number of doublets showing the *in-/un* alteration within identical quotations. Assuming that Johnson made alterations to the original text after a process of deliberation and decision-making, the comparison shown in Appendix 1 between the original text and the variation within identical quotations suggests that there may be underlying reasons for the choices that he made.

The quotation of Prior's lines without alteration in the entry for *unexpert* is repeated in the entry for *inexpert* with the substitution of the original word *unexpert* by its *in-* equivalent. In this case, Johnson's idealized, or preferred, word seems to have been *inexpert*, which he wanted to include in the dictionary entry but which did not coincide with the source quotation. In the case of the *in-/undiscreet* alteration, the source text occurs unaltered in the entry for *undiscreet*, but the same text is used in the entry for *indiscreet* with the substitution of *indiscreet* for *undiscreet*. Incidentally, of the two quotations in the entry for *indiscreet*, the original text of the first quotation taken from Spenser is also changed from *vndiscreet* to *indiscreet*.⁹ The source text of Ecclesiastes, a book of the Old Testament, shows that while the original word *unsatiabie* is replaced by its *in-* equivalent in the entry for the headword *moderate*, it is used unaltered in the entry for the headword *wit*. These examples show that adaptation was made in the direction of conforming to the usages of the period, which Johnson must have been well aware of.

By contrast, adaptation was also made in the opposite direction. Some pairs, such as *im-/unmeasurable* and *in-/unutterable*, show this. In the case of *im-/unmeasurable*, the quotation is repeated three times in the entries for *immeasurable*, *outrageous* and *vast*. The original word *im-measurable* is altered to its *un-* counterpart only in the entry for *vast*. In the case of the *in-/unutterable* alteration, the original *unutterable* is altered to *inutterable* only in the entry for *prayer*, whereas it is not changed in the entries for *oratory* and *unutterable*. The frequencies of occurrence of these words in the entire text of the 18th-century verse show that, in each case, the original word was preferred to the altered

one. It is likely that Johnson wished to show that the altered word is not an ideal choice, but that it is an alternative to the original word.

Adaptation has also been made in order to create an entry for a headword Johnson wished to include in his dictionary. The question of who altered the original text also remains unanswered, but Johnson, who marked those passages to be used and read the manuscript transcribed by his amanuenses, is most likely to be responsible for this. Alongside the large number of doublets in the headword list, as for example, *in-/undiscreet* and *in-/unexpert* in Appendix 1, the alteration of the original text between different entries reveals the lack of consistency in treatment and does not coincide with Johnson's definite aim of fixing the language.

5 Conclusion

This paper has discussed the *in-/un-* variation in the period between 1300 and 1800 from two different perspectives. An examination of the stages in the development of English lexicography from the 16th century, as reflected in bilingual dictionaries, monolingual hard word dictionaries and comprehensive dictionaries, has revealed the lexicographers' ideas about the conceptual distinction between 'hard' and 'easy' words in relation to the *in-/un-* variation. In the process of translating foreign *in-* words into English, the bilingual dictionaries tended to convert the characteristics of the source language into corresponding elements found in English by making wide use of *un-* words. The hard word dictionaries laid particular emphasis on a selected list of words borrowed from foreign languages. The origin of the prefix could then have been one of the criteria adopted for judging the degree of difficulty, regardless of the origin of the stem. The massive increase in entries for *un-* words in 18th-century comprehensive dictionaries strongly confirms the origin of the prefix as the primary distinguishing feature of hard words.

The analysis of the English Poetry Database provided a useful basis for investigating various features of the variation which could not be retrieved from the dictionaries: the extent to which spelling conventions were changed during the standardization process and the degree of the *in-/un-* variation during the period between 1300 and 1800. Although the corpus used in this paper contains only the language of poetry, the exploration of these texts has identified various features which were characteristic of the variation involved in negative prefixation. The empirical approach has also helped to give a deeper insight into the

development of the *in-/un-* variation. This exploratory study points a way to the further work needed to account for the variation in the lexis of the English language, well-known for its richness and adaptability.

Notes

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1. A list of poets is given in full in Kwon (1997).
2. In the case of *in-/uncertain*, there are two occurrences of *noncertein* and one occurrence of *noncerteyne* in 14th-century poetry, and one occurrence of *noncerteyn* in 15th-century poetry.
3. In some cases, however, such as *in-/unattentive*, *in-/undigested* and *in-/unsincere*, the use of *in-* or *un-* was still largely a matter of choice even in the 18th century. There are also many cases of *in-/un-* variation in Present-day English. See Kwon (1997).
4. An example is the Old English interlinear gloss found in Ælfric's *Colloquy*, a dialogue between a schoolmaster and his pupils.
5. This analysis has been carried out manually, but Elyot (1538), Florio (1598) and Cotgrave (1611) are now available in electronic form to researchers at work on the corpus (personal communication with Ian Lancashire).
6. In the introductory note 'A Premonition from the Author to the Reader' to his dictionary, Cockeram (1623) states that:

The first Booke hath the choisest words themselues now in vse, wherewith our language is inriched and become so copious, to which words the common sense is annexed. The second Booke containes the vulgar words, which whensoever

any desirous of a more curious explanation by a more refined and elegant speech shall looke into, he shall there receiue the exact and ample word to express the same ... The last Booke is a recital of seuerall persons, Gods and Goddesses, Giants and Deuils, Monsters and Serpents, Birds and Beasts, Riuers, Fishes, Herbs, Stones, Trees, and the like

7. Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 174–176.
8. One of the main characteristics of Johnson's *Dictionary* is that quotations for one headword are often repeated in other entries. In many cases, one illustrative quotation was repeated in different length in different entries. For example, one source quotation taken from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (Act 4, Scene 4, lines 12–18) occurs five times in the entries for *bitter*, *dissension*, *slippery*, *to twine* and *unseparable*.
9. Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book II, Cant. VII, lines 127–130.

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Appendix 1:
Johnson's adaptation of quotations and corpus information

headwords and quotations	source text	17th C.		18th C.	
		in-	un-	in-	un-
CO'VENANT The English make the ocean their abode, Whose ready sails with ev'ry wind can fly, And make a <i>cov'nant</i> with th' unconstant sky. <i>Waller</i> .	inconstant	201	155	201	21
ABO'DE Others may use the ocean as their road, Only the English make it their <i>abode</i> ; Whose ready sails with every wind can fly, And make a <i>cov'nant</i> with th' inconstant sky. <i>Waller</i> . ¹					
REPLE'TION All dreams Are from <i>repletion</i> and complexion bred; From rising fumes of undigested food. <i>Dryden</i> .	indigested	24	36	23	21
INDIGE'ST, INDIGE'STED Dreams are bred From rising fumes of <i>indigested</i> food. <i>Dryden</i> . ²					
INDISCREE'T If thou be among the indiscreet , observe the time; but be continually among men of understanding. <i>Ecclus.</i> xxvii. 12.	undiscreet	28	5	32	0
UNDISCREE'T If thou be among the undiscreet , observe the time. <i>Ecclus</i> .xxvii.					
INEXPE'RT In letters and in laws Not inexpert . <i>Prior</i> .	unexpert	5	11	13	1
UNEXPE'RT Receive the partner of my inmost soul: Him you will find in letters, and in laws Not unexpert . <i>Prior</i> . ³					
VAST They view'd the vast unmeasurable abyss. <i>Milton</i> .	immeasurable	11	12	56	13
IMME'ASUREABLE From the shore They view'd the immeasurable abyss, Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild. <i>Milt. Par. Lost</i> . ⁴					
OUTRA'GIOUS They view'd the immeasurable abyss, <i>Outragious</i> as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild. <i>Milton</i> .					

FOUL	unquietly	0	1	0	0
Who's there besides <i>foul</i> weather? One minded like the weather, most inquietly . <i>Sh. K. Lear</i> .					
UNQUIETLY					
Who's there besides foul weather?— —One minded like the weather, most Unquietly . <i>Shakesp. K. Lear</i> . ⁵					
WEA'THER					
Who's there besides foul <i>weather</i> ?—One minded like the <i>weather</i> , most unquietly . <i>Shakesp. King Lear</i> .					
MO'DERATE	unsatiable	20	6	16	1
Sound sleep cometh of <i>moderate</i> eating, but pangs of the belly are with an insatiable man. <i>Ecclus. xxxi. 20</i> .					
WIT					
Sound sleep cometh of moderate eating; he riseth early, and his <i>wits</i> are with him: but the pain of watching, and choler, and pangs of the belly, are with an unsatiable man. <i>Ecclus. xxxi. 20</i> .					
UNSINCE'RE	insincere	5	11	29	18
Myrrha was joy'd the welcome news to hear; But, clogg'd with guilt, the joy was insincere . <i>Dryden</i> .					
DISCO'RDANT					
Myrrha was joy'd the welcome news to hear, But clogg'd with guilt, the joy was insincere ; So various, so <i>discordant</i> is the mind, That in our will a different will we find. <i>Dryden</i> . ⁶					
PRA'YER	unutterable	3	42	5	148
Sighs now breath'd Unutterable , which the spirit of <i>prayer</i> Inspir'd. <i>Milton</i> .					
O'RATORY					
Sighs now breath'd Unutterable , which the spirit of pray'r Inspir'd, and wing'd for heav'n with speedier flight Than loudest <i>oratory</i> . <i>Milton's Paradise Lost, b. xi</i> . ⁷					
UNU'TTERABLE					
Sighs now breath'd Unutterable ; which the spirit of pray'r Inspir'd, and wing'd for heav'n with speedier flight Than loudest oratory . <i>Milton's Par. Lost, b. xi</i> .					

1. Waller, *Of a War with Spain, and a Fight at Sea*, lines 26–28.
2. Dryden, *The Cock and The Fox; Or, The Tale Of The Nun's Priest*, line 142.
3. Prior, *Horace Lib. I. Epist. IX. Septimius, Claudi, nimirum intelligit unus, Quanti me facias: &c.* Imitated. To the Right Honorable Mr. HARLEY, lines 23–24.
4. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book VII, line 211.

5. Shakespeare, *King Lear* [The Folio Text], Act 3, Scene 1, lines 1–2.
6. Dryden, *Cinyras and Myrrha* (Out of the Tenth Book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), lines 258–261.
7. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book VI, lines 5–7.