

## Using phonetic methods to widen representation of pronunciation variation in the *Oxford English Dictionary*

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The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s mission is to guide researchers in any discipline to the meaning, history, and usage of over 500,000 words and phrases across the English-speaking world. As pronunciation lexicographers working on the *OED* we focus on contemporary usage, and we create both written transcription and live-voice audio to provide pronunciation guidance and information to all dictionary users (see <https://www.oed.com/information/understanding-entries/pronunciation>). The policy is to give current pronunciations for British and U.S. English throughout and, for appropriate words, pronunciations in nineteen other global varieties of English as well.

We have recently made significant steps forward in widening representation of pronunciation variation, both within varieties and across the English-speaking world, and the subject of our proposed presentation is an overview of three specific areas of progress. We look forward to sharing our methods and decisions with fellow phoneticians, and gaining their insight and perspective to guide future work.

At the 2024 BAAP colloquium we demonstrated the development of our pronunciation hub, OPTRA, which is a central store of super-specified IPA transcriptions of English wordforms linked to audio files and other metadata. It covers British English (RP and beyond), U.S. English and multiple other World Englishes. The super-specified transcriptions are transformed for use in *OED* and in OUP's other dictionaries and licensed datasets to suit each end use.

OPTRA has enabled us to progress in several areas, and our 2026 presentation highlights three of these:

- Restructuring our presentation of British English to include **regional pronunciations** (Northern England and North-Eastern England published in *OED*'s March 2025 release)
- Expanding to add **new varieties of World English** – most recently Sri Lankan English and Maltese English (in *OED*'s June 2025 and December 2025 releases respectively), and how these are defined and developed
- Offering **multiple audio files for a single transcription** (feature launched on *oed.com* in September 2025). The new ability to share two or more audio files, typically from different speakers, allows us to demonstrate variation at a more nuanced level than our broad phonemic transcriptions alone can convey. This is being rolled out gradually and was first applied to World and regional Englishes only, but coverage of selected phonological features of British and U.S. English begins with the March 2026 release