

FROM *SHOE-CROPS* TO *MOSQUITO HAWKS*: LABRADOR ENGLISH IN THE ONLINE DIALECT ATLAS OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

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NEWFOUNDLAND ENGLISH IS WITHOUT DOUBT the best-described of any variety of Canadian English. Yet though this observation may be true for the island portion of the province, research into the English spoken in Labrador has lagged considerably. Fortunately, this situation is changing, as for example in the recent and ongoing work of Memorial university Linguistics graduate students (e.g. Thorburn 2014; Edwards this volume). Likewise, the new online Dialect Atlas of Newfoundland and Labrador (www.dialectatlas.mun.ca), launched by the English Language Research Centre in October 2013, offers insights into the traditional spoken English of Labrador. In this paper, I present some Labrador findings from the online Atlas. Prior to this, however, a word on Labrador English and its history is in order.

Labrador and Labrador English: A brief overview

Permanent, year-round European settlement in Labrador is considerably more recent than European settlement on the east coast of the island of Newfoundland, which dates to the early 17th century. Coastal Labrador did not come under the control of the English until 1763, and the foundations of English settlement in southern coastal Labrador were not laid until after 1815. In this area, settler sources echo in large measure those that we find in much of coastal Newfoundland (particularly southwest England and the Channel Islands; for more information, see e.g. Handcock n.d.; Clarke 2010, Ch. 1). From the 1830s, the cod fishery attracted Newfoundlanders of English and Irish origin, especially from Conception Bay, and an initial largely migratory fishery gradually gave way to permanent settlement. Given these settler sources, there is considerable linguistic overlap between southern Labrador and the island. For example, the pronunciation and grammatical features of a traditional speaker from Cartwright, as analyzed in Clarke (2010: 181-184), show marked similarity to those found among comparable speakers of southwest English origin from the east coast of the island.

Inland and farther north, the picture is more complex. In the Lake Melville area, the establishment of fur-trading posts by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1836 brought, for example, Scottish (particularly Orkney) employees to the area. Some of these married aboriginal Labrador women, both

Innu and Inuit. Indeed, many Labradorians whose family roots predate the mid-20th century (when employment opportunities in the urbanized areas of Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Labrador City-Wabush attracted in-migration from all over the province, as well as from outside) have mixed European and aboriginal ancestry. In northern Labrador, aboriginal input is more obvious. Despite considerable ancestral language loss among younger generations in northern coastal Inuit communities, Labrador Inuttitut has left its effects in local phonology and lexicon.

The online Dialect Atlas: Background

The online Dialect Atlas, grounded in materials originally assembled in the 1970s and 1980s by linguist Harold Paddock, documents features of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary in the traditional speech of the province. The Labrador component of the Atlas, however, is restricted to vocabulary. Yet the English Language Research Centre's forthcoming Voices of Newfoundland and Labrador project (see <http://www.mun.ca/elrc/projects/VoicesofNewfoundlandandLabrador.php> for a description) will help fill this gap, by documenting pronunciation and grammatical patterns in recorded speech samples collected from traditional speakers in 11 Labrador communities, from Nain in the north to L'Anse-au-Loup in the south.

The vocabulary component of the online Atlas derives from responses to an over 560-item lexical questionnaire, administered in 1982 by Paddock's research assistant Kathleen Manuel in 20 representative communities throughout the province. In each community, interviews were conducted with six traditional speakers,¹ both male and female, from a range of typical occupational backgrounds. The majority of these speakers were born in the first two decades of the 20th century. In the Atlas, Labrador is represented by three communities located in the southern portion of the peninsula:

- West St. Modeste, a small fishing village on the Strait of Belle Isle near the Quebec border, permanently settled since c.1860, largely from the east coast of the island of Newfoundland

¹The Labrador component of the Atlas was supplemented by an additional six speakers, representing residents of Cartwright who had moved to the more urban centre of Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

- Cartwright, a coastal community just south of Hamilton Inlet, site of a fur- and fish-trading business established in 1775 by English officer Captain George Cartwright (eventually purchased by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1873)
- North West River, near Happy Valley-Goose Bay and adjacent to the present-day Innu community of Sheshatshit, established in 1836 as a Hudson's Bay fur-trading post.

As the website shows, lexical questions in the Atlas are divided into 16 different semantic areas. These were designed to elicit vocabulary which figured prominently in the daily lives of residents of rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Semantic areas range from "House and household", "Names and folk beliefs" and "Wind and weather", to local flora and fauna, as well as such typical seasonal occupations as fishing, hunting and trapping.

Labrador English vocabulary as represented in the Dialect Atlas

The most striking observation to emerge from the online Atlas is the high degree of lexical similarity between southern Labrador, on the one hand, and the island of Newfoundland, on the other. In the traditional speech of Atlas respondents from Labrador as well as throughout the island, pieces of firewood sawed to the ideal length for burning in a stove were called *junks*; dry fir bushes, reddish in colour, were referred to as *blasty boughs*; an oilskin hat was termed a *sou'wester*; old-fashioned yeast was referred to as *barm*; and a door that swells in damp weather was said to *plim* or to *plim up*.

For a handful of lexical items, however, Labrador proved distinct, in that it yielded terms that did not emerge in any of the 17 island communities surveyed in the Atlas.² These are presented in the next section. Following that, I list several Labrador terms of aboriginal origin, some of which have spread to the island portion of the province. In a final section, I examine a handful of terms shared by Labrador and particular regions of the island, and point to historical and geographical connections.

²This of course does not necessarily imply that these terms are unknown on the island. Since most are not included in the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English (DNE; Story, Kirwin and Widdowson 1982)*, further fieldwork would be needed to draw this conclusion.

Terms elicited only in Labrador

The different ecologies of Labrador and the insular portion of the province lie at the root of several terms that the Atlas registers only in Labrador. Notable among these are words for the small, mouse-like animals with long pointed noses known in Standard English (as throughout the island of Newfoundland) as shrews. In all three Labrador communities, the majority variant proved to be *shoe-crops* (or its abbreviated version, *shoes*); in North West River, two slightly different pronunciations, *shore-crops* and *shoal-crops*, were also elicited. These lexical items have been in existence in Labrador for some time; Strong (1931), for example, also documents *shore crap* as the Labrador term for shrew. The Survey of English Dialects (see Orton and Wakelin 1967: 435-436) reveals the origin of all of these variants to be southwest England: *show-crop* was the traditional regional term for shrew in Dorset in the English West Country, while both *show-crop* and *show-mouse* were minority variants in neighbouring Somerset and Wiltshire. Southwest England is also the source of two less frequent terms for shrew that were elicited in Cartwright, though not in the other two Labrador communities: *grassmouse* and *mole(-mouse)* (with the latter also given by two residents of LaPoile on Newfoundland's south coast). There is an obvious non-linguistic reason as to why these terms turn up (virtually) only in Labrador, since Labrador is the only part of the province in which the shrew is indigenous. When shrews were introduced to the island in 1958, most Newfoundland speakers had only the standard term at their disposal.

An ecological factor also helps to clarify a second term which the Atlas elicited only in Labrador. This is *beaver-tail*, the name of a snowshoe with an oval frame and a short beaver-tail-like tailpiece. In the Atlas, *beaver-tail* was elicited in all three Labrador communities, but nowhere on the island, in response to the question "What names do you have for different types of snowshoes?" (Note however that beaver-tail snowshoes are also well-known elsewhere in North America, rather than simply Labrador.) In fact, of the multitude of terms elicited in response to this question, all variants provided from the island by a total of more than two respondents occur in at least one Labrador community (terms with the initial element *pot*, such as *pot-heads* or *pot covers*, being the sole exception). The centuries-old importance of the snowshoe in Labrador has provided the region with a rich repository of terms.

At least two other items that the Atlas suggests to be unique (or almost unique) to Labrador can be attributed to differences in European settler origins. The first is *mosquito hawk* for what in Standard English is referred to as a *dragonfly*, and which in much of southwest-English-settled Newfoundland is called a *horse stinger*. *Mosquito hawk* was given as a variant only in North West River, which suggests it may have Scottish or northern British or origins. The

same term is documented in volume III of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, or *DARE* (Cassidy and Hall 1996: 664), which associates it particularly with the southern USA. A second item which may also have Scottish origins is *scones*, provided by three residents of Cartwright to designate "fried bread dough" (generally known as *toutons* throughout the province). This term is shared with the southern west coast Newfoundland community of Highlands, settled by Cape Bretoners of Scottish descent, along with the nearby community of St. Georges.³

While the ultimate origins of the Labrador terms listed above may be in large part traceable, this is not the case for several other lexical items which are uniquely Labradorian. Firstly, *redberry* is well-known as the Labrador term for the *vaccinium vitis-idaea*, a berry referred to as the *partridgeberry* on the island of Newfoundland. This term may well have originated in Labrador. Secondly, the Atlas question on words used for fried bread dough (which resulted in almost two dozen different lexical items province-wide) yielded two terms each of which was elicited in a single Labrador community, and for which the *DNE* provides citations only from Labrador, though no source for either term. The first of these, *stove cake*, was obtained only in Cartwright, where it was supplied by three respondents. Defined by the *DNE* as "bread dough baked on a hot stove," it may well be a Labrador creation. (A somewhat similar term, *stove top*, was elicited on the island in the Great Northern Peninsula (GNP) community River of Ponds, south of Port au Choix.) The second term, *flummy* (along with *flummy dumpling*) was elicited only in North West River. In the *DNE*, *flummy* or *flummy dum* is defined as "a kind of bread made by hunters and trappers." A somewhat similar term, *flummadiddle*, can be found in volume II of *DARE* (Cassidy and Hall 1991: 500), which states it to be most common in New England, and provides the meaning "stale bread, pork fat, molasses, water, cinnamon, allspice, cloves" or "a kind of mash baked in oven." Given the semantic similarity, these terms may possibly be related.⁴

³The Atlas suggests, however, that though they may share the same term, *scone*, Labrador and the island differ as to its pronunciation. In Cartwright, the word is pronounced "scoon" [sku:n], while the island exhibits the more usual pronunciation "scon" [skan].

⁴A third term for fried bread dough was also elicited from only one Labrador settlement. This is *dough cake*, from the Straits community of West St. Modeste. The closest parallel from the island is *dough dog*, from Change Islands, NDB. Neither term appears in the *DNE*. Responses to student questionnaires that I have collected over the years suggest, however, that *dough cake* may indeed be restricted to Labrador, and *dough dog* to the island's northeast coast.

Labrador terms of aboriginal origin

Despite the important aboriginal component in the population of Labrador, very few lexical items of either Inuttitut or Innu origin were registered by the Dialect Atlas in the three Labrador communities surveyed. Of the half dozen or so Inuttitut borrowings that surfaced in the Atlas, the best known is *komatik*, from the Inuttitut word for sled. Though elicited only in Cartwright in response to the question "How did you transport firewood in the winter?," this term is also known in the island portion of the province. The Inuttitut word *ulu* (designating a knife with semicircular blade) also emerged in the Atlas in response to a question on ways of removing fur from a seal skin; it occurred in both Cartwright and North West River.⁵ Though both *komatik* and *ulu* are well-known in Labrador, they are by no means unique to this province; they also occur elsewhere in northern Canada where European and Inuit populations have come into contact.

Labrador Inuttitut borrowings also figure in the Atlas in the set of words used traditionally as commands to dog teams or horses. Six speakers from Cartwright, three from North West River and one from West St. Modeste correctly gave *etta* (from Inuttitut *hara* or *arra*) with the meaning of "turn left," as well as *ouk* to mean "turn right." Likewise, three speakers from Cartwright and one from North West River gave *aw* or *aw aw* (from Inuttitut *aa*) as the command to stop. Apart from a single resident of St. Anthony, who also gave *etta* as the command to turn left, these Labrador respondents were the only ones with full knowledge of these terms, though the meanings of *etta* and *ouk* were occasionally confused even in Labrador.⁶

One obvious shortcoming of the online Atlas is its lack of documentation of the vocabulary of more northerly Labrador communities. Flowers (2007), a compendium of Labrador terms gathered via an online questionnaire, shows that a number of borrowings from Inuttitut can be found in northern Labrador. By way of example, Flowers lists several words of Inuttitut origin for fried bread dough (*mukmuk cake*, *panitsiak*, *sunamajuk* and possibly

⁵*Ulu* was also provided by a resident of Port de Grave, yielding further linguistic evidence of the close connection between southern coastal Labrador and Conception Bay (see the following section).

⁶As the Atlas shows, these terms have also been transported to the northern and western regions of the island, though their meanings are typically confused. Confusion also exists, however, among some island respondents with respect to non-aboriginal terms used with the same functions (e.g. *hold in* for "turn left" and *keep off* for "turn right").

mappa cake), none of which were collected in the three southern Labrador communities surveyed in the Atlas.

Lexical connections between Labrador and the island of Newfoundland

In quite a few instances, the regional lexical items uncovered by the Atlas point to more specific historical and demographic links between Labrador and particular parts of the island. A selection of these items is presented in Tables 1-3 below. Several generalizations emerge from these Tables. The first, and most obvious, is that lexical links are especially prevalent between the coastal community of Cartwright (CRT in the Tables) and the island's east coast, reflecting the important input of the latter (particularly Conception Bay) in the early settlement of southern coastal Labrador. Secondly, several terms point to a relationship between Cartwright and the Labrador Straits community of West St. Modeste (WSM), on the one hand, and the west coast of the island on the other, from Port au Choix/River of Ponds on the Great Northern Peninsula (GNP) to more southerly west coast communities (represented in the Atlas by Curling and McIvers in the Corner Brook area, and by St. Georges and Highlands farther south). Thirdly – and not surprisingly, given its unique settlement history, along with its trapping rather than fishing orientation – the more inland community of North West River (NWR) is noteworthy with respect to the relatively low number of items in the Tables below that it shares with the island, by comparison to the other two southern Labrador settlements surveyed in the Atlas.

Tables 1-3 are organized in terms of semantics rather than in terms of the above generalizations. An asterisk before the name of any community indicates that the variant in question was provided by three or more respondents in that community; the precise number appears in brackets. Note that the lexical items listed in the Tables may represent answers to more than one question in the Atlas. For example, the words that refer to a boat-bailing implement combine responses to both "What name do you have for the container used by hand to get the water out of the bottom of a boat?" and "What names do you have for the different types of containers used by hand to get the water out of the bottom of a boat?" (A full set of questions for which any term was elicited can be obtained via the "Search for a Word" function in the "Words" section of the Atlas.) In addition, in a couple of cases the Tables separate out words that are grouped together in the online Atlas; among these is *bail bucket*, which is combined onscreen with *bailer*. In such cases, precise information as to which communities contributed which response(s) has been retrieved from the Atlas data bases, which will be made available to interested researchers.

Table 1 "Land-related" lexical items shared by Labrador and the island of Newfoundland

Term	Meaning	Where elicited by Atlas	
		Labrador	Island
tilt	temporary shelter or hut	*CRT (8) NWR WSM	Change Islands & Twillingate, Notre Dame Bay (NDB); Port de Grave, Conception Bay (CB); Monkstown, Placentia & Burin, Placentia Bay (PB); Burgeo, south coast
angle dog	earthworm (used as bait in trout fishing)	CRT WSM	(<i>angle worm</i>) Bay Roberts & Port de Grave, CB; Highlands, southern west coast ⁷
browse (pronounced with final [s])	kindling, firewood gathered from ground	CRT ⁸	Port au Choix, GNP; Bay Roberts & Port de Grave, CB
brambles	kindling, dry dead firewood	CRT	St. Anthony & River of Ponds, GNP; Placentia PB; Curling, west coast
stint	beaver dam	CRT	Port au Choix & River of Ponds, GNP; McIvers, west coast

Despite the generalizations drawn above, the terms grouped in Tables 1-3 provide a small-scale indication of the rich vocabulary of southern Labrador, given its multiplex historical links to the island portion of the province. Among "land-related" words in Table 1, the noun *tilt* – the only one in this section elicited in all three Labrador communities, and particularly well-known in Cartwright – shows strong connections with the eastern and southern portions of Newfoundland, rather than with the island's west coast. This word has been in use in Newfoundland and Labrador for centuries: the *DNE* gives a citation from Cupids in 1612, with the meaning of "tent," along with a 1771 Labrador example from Captain George Cartwright. A connection between the

⁷Though only the term *angle worm* was elicited from Atlas respondents on the island, *DNE* citations indicate that *angle dog* has also been documented in Conception Bay. Volume I of *DARE* (Cassidy 1985: 64) notes that in the USA *angle dog* is found chiefly in New England, and suggests a regional British (particularly Devonshire) origin. Orton and Wakelin (1967: 478) also document *angle dog* in the traditional speech of Dorset.

⁸The variants *growse* and *grout* were also elicited in Cartwright.

community of Cartwright and Conception Bay is also clearly in evidence in two terms inherited from southwest England, *angle dog* and *browse*. The term *brambles*, on the other hand (which, like *browse*, can refer to kindling) links Cartwright to the GNP, the west coast and Placentia Bay.⁹ A west coast rather than east coast link is also found in the term *stint*, meaning "beaver dam," for which the *DNE* provides several late 18th century Labrador citations. Since the west coast communities represented in the Atlas (e.g. Port au Choix, McIvers, Highlands) were in general not settled until the mid 19th century, it is quite possible that this term, rather than travelling the usual historical route from the island to Labrador, is a Labrador export to the island of Newfoundland.

Table 2 Terms shared by Labrador and the island of Newfoundland for "bailing utensil"

Term	Meaning	Where elicited by Atlas	
		Labrador	Island
piggin	container for bailing water out of boats (long-handled)	CRT	Change Islands, NDB; Bay Roberts & Port de Grave, CB; Monkstown (PB); Burgeo, south coast
spudgel	bailing container (long-handled)	CRT	Port au Choix, GNP; *Twillingate (4) & Change Islands, NDB; Bay Roberts & Port de Grave, CB; Placentia & Burin, PB; St. Georges, southern west coast
bail bucket	bailing container (usually sharp-bottomed)	CRT *WSM (4)	St. Anthony & Port au Choix, GNP; Curling, west coast
scoop	bailing container (usually flat-bottomed and short-handled)	CRT WSM NWR	(Virtually all areas on the island except the northeast coast)

⁹*Brambles* also occurs with the related meaning of "small stunted bushes" in both Cartwright and Change Islands, NDB; a similar sense, "tree limbs," was elicited in Port de Grave and Burin. On the island of Newfoundland, however, *brambles* (less frequently, *brimble*) is more usual with the meaning of "needles of conifers," particularly in Placentia and Conception Bays. The "needle" meaning, however, was not provided by Atlas respondents either in Labrador or on the northeast coast of the island, though it does occur on the south and west coasts, including the GNP.

The terms in Table 2 also illustrate the complex geographical connections between Labrador and the island. Across the entire province, the Atlas yielded almost twenty different names to designate a container used manually to bail water out of the bottom of a boat, which in Standard English might be referred to as a *bailer*. The relationship between Cartwright and the island's east and south coasts is evident in its use of *piggin* (which, as its display map in the online Atlas shows, is not widely distributed on the island). The term *spudgel* links Cartwright not only to the east and south coasts, but also to the west coast of the island; according to the *DNE*, *spudgel* is attested as early as 1775 in Labrador. At the same time, Labrador connections to the more westerly portions of the island are apparent in two other terms for a bailer: *bail bucket* and *scoop*. In the Atlas, *bail bucket* links Cartwright – and, even more so, the Labrador Straits community of West St. Modeste – with the GNP and, farther south, the Curling region (though *bailing bucket* was also elicited by the Atlas in Change Islands, NDB, along with Burin). As to *scoop*, it occurs not only in all three Labrador communities, but in all Atlas regions surveyed on the island, with the exception of the northeast coast.

Table 3 Terms shared by Labrador and the island of Newfoundland for "pancake-like fried bread dough"

Term	Meaning	Where elicited by Atlas	
		Labrador	Island
flapjacks/ flatjacks	(pancake-like) fried bread dough	CRT	Twillingate, NDB; Bay Roberts, CB; Placentia, PB
damper dogs		WSM	Port au Choix, GNP; Highlands, southern west coast

Finally, Table 3 lists two lexical items from the almost two dozen variants elicited by the Atlas, province-wide, for "pancake-like fried bread dough." We have already noted that another two of these variants, *stove cake* and *flummy (dumpling)*, appear to be unique to Labrador, and that this may also be the case for *dough cake*. The first of the items in Table 3, *flapjack/flatjack*, reinforces the link previously noted between Cartwright and the east coast, including Conception Bay and the southern Avalon. The second, *damper dog* (designating bread dough originally fried on *dampers*, or lids of wood and/or coal stoves) was elicited in West St. Modeste rather than Cartwright; according to the Atlas, this term is shared with communities on the west coast of the island. The *DNE* gives no indication as to the geographical distribution of this item on the island of Newfoundland. However, it has also been documented in Grand Bank on the Burin Peninsula (Noseworthy 1971), and has been reported

for Conception Bay and the northeast coast in student questionnaires that I have administered over the years. In short, it appears to have had a considerably wider geographical distribution in the traditional speech of the island than the Atlas reports.¹⁰

Conclusion

Despite the many lexical similarities between Labrador and the island of Newfoundland, the online Dialect Atlas points to the richness and complexity of the vocabulary associated with traditional speakers of (southern) Labrador English. Given Labrador's relatively late settlement by Europeans relative to that of the eastern section of the island, its secondary settlement from a number of island sources, and the greater ethnic diversity of its population, this complexity is not surprising.

Since the Dialect Atlas surveyed only three southern Labrador communities, there is considerable scope for further lexical input. Though three decades have elapsed since Paddock's original survey, the Atlas welcomes input from present-day residents of Labrador, whether via comments on individual lexical items, or via contribution forms at

<http://www.dialectatlas.mun.ca/contact/>. In this way, we hope to be able to fill in obvious lexical gaps, and obtain more insight into regional Labrador vocabulary, particularly in northern coastal communities which the original Atlas survey did not tap.

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¹⁰The term *dampers buns* was also given by an Atlas respondent in Placentia, NB. However, the Atlas does not record *dampers boys*, *dampers cakes* and *dampers devils*, all of which are listed in the *DNE*.

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