

## LABRADOR AND THE *DICTIONARY OF NEWFOUNDLAND ENGLISH*

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OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS, the English Language Research Centre has fielded a number of inquiries about the representation of Labrador in the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (*DNE*; Story, Kirwin and Widdowson 1982). This paper reports on some of the Labrador and Labrador-related terms in the *DNE*. These terms can be divided loosely into three categories: Newfoundland English terms that are Labrador-related; terms for flora and fauna belonging to Labrador; and words from Labrador's two aboriginal languages, Inuttitut (spoken by the Inuit) and Innu-aimun (formerly called *Montagnais-Naskapi*), and spoken by the Innu. The Labrador Virtual Museum (<http://www.labradorvirtualmuseum.ca/>) is a good resource for more background as is the Innu Language Project (ILP, Department of Linguistics, Memorial University; see [www.innu-aimun.ca](http://www.innu-aimun.ca)) which published the *Innu-English Dictionary* and the *English-Innu Dictionary* in 2013.

Under many of the *DNE* headwords discussed below, citations have been drawn from several common sources. The oldest is a 1792 journal from George Cartwright, who was a British officer and trader in addition to an explorer. Other popular sources for word-forms particular to Labrador are De Boilieu (1861), Wallace (1905), Grenfell (1906), Jeddore (1976) and Brice-Bennett (1977). One way to find more sources on Labrador life which were used in the *DNE* is to search the online bibliography for the term "Labrador" (<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary/bibliography.html>). These books are typically expedition journals and have a wealth of information available on Labrador geography and local traditions for the interested reader.

The *DNE* contains number of terms under the headword **Labrador n**, including numerous compounds with *Labrador* as the head of the compound. The first sense of the term relates to the land mass, the physical place, itself. In its second sense, *Labrador* refers to a heavily salted semi-dried cod produced in the Labrador fishery. *Labrador n* sense 3 pertains to species and animals having *Labrador* in their name. These entries appear with their Latin names, making it quite simple to locate images of the different Labrador-designated species. A Google images search for the Labrador duck (*Camptorhynchus labradorius*) reveals a very different duck than many readers may be used to seeing.

Staying with the animal theme, the *Labrador dog* may at first bring to mind the popular yellow, golden or black Lab. According to the *DNE*, a *Labrador dog* can be a short-haired dog from which the Labrador retriever was bred but it can also mean, in its second sense, a husky or sled-dog. *Eskimo dog*

and *komatik dog* are linked to this term, sharing a similar meaning. *Lesser Newfoundland* is another name for a Labrador dog. There are several dog-sledding terms from the *DNE* that come from Inuttitut. *Komatik* is one such term for a sled that can be pulled by dogs, though it is sometimes pulled by men. *Aw* is the command for a dog team to stop. *Hold in* or *ra* are commands to turn left while *keep off* and *ouk* are commands to turn right. (*Hold in* and *keep off* are terms elicited from Newfoundland English and have only been attested on the island of Newfoundland.) The driver of a dog-team is called a *carter*, though this is not from Inuttitut. *Oo-isht*, *hoo-eet*, *puit*, and *twet* are all different ways to command a dog-team to go or pull ahead in Inuttitut.

Turning to the human element, there are several terms cited in the *DNE* pertaining to human inhabitants of Labrador. *Labradorian* and *Labradorman* appear, in addition to *Labradorite*, which in its first sense refers to the iridescent crystalline mineral but has a second sense meaning a person from Labrador. *Labradorman* can also refer to a migratory fisherman (synonymous with *floate* or *stationer*) and a vessel engaged in the Labrador cod-fishery. There are other terms cited that originate in the province with European settlers. These include *Huskimaw* and *husky*, derived from *Eskimo*, now considered derogatory when referring to Labradorians. *Eskimo* appears in the *DNE* as the head of many compounds but does not appear as its own entry as it is widespread. These last terms may have a pejorative meaning for some.

Another somewhat derogatory term by today's standards is *Labrador Indian*, listed under **Labrador n**. This term and *northern Indian*, linked to *Montagnais* and *Naskapi*, are names given to the groups of aboriginal peoples by Europeans. These are both branches of Algonquian people collectively called Innu today, but geographically and socially distinct groups: the *Montagnais* (also called *mountaineers*) tended to live on the coast, particularly the southern shore of Labrador, while the nomadic tradition of the *Naskapi* led them to the interior. *Naskapi* also refers to the language known today as Innu-aimun. (*Montagnais* can also refer to the language though there are no citations for this meaning in the *DNE*.) In its third sense, *Naskapi* means a pile of rocks placed at a prominent point on the coast, also called a *cairn*, *naked man* or *American man* in the *DNE*.

Of course, fishing has also been very important in Labrador's past and present. *Planter* is related to Labrador in two of its senses. In the *DNE*, sense 3 means a migratory fisherperson from Newfoundland who fished the coast of Labrador, typically securing a *room* or *station* for the summer fishery. Not surprisingly then, *roomer* and *stationer* are linked to *planter*. In its fourth sense, *planter* means a European or mixed European-Inuit settler on the Labrador coast engaged in fishing and/or the fur trade.

*Pipsi* and variants *pipsey* and *pipshy* come from the Inuit *pitsik*, meaning 'dried fish.' *Pipsi* is the end result of drying fish in the open air without the use of salt. This method is not unique to the Inuit; Newfoundlanders have also used this method when salt was scarce or not economically feasible. The Inuit also made salt-fish but used a quick-drying process where fish would be spread on a *bawn*, or expanse of rocks for drying. This second sense of the term *bawn* was used in the Labrador and Bank fisheries. The term *bawn* in its first sense, meaning a grassy land or meadow, has its origins in Irish Gaelic (Clarke 2010: 107).

Hunting and sealing are very important in Labrador, resulting in a number of terms belonging to both semantic areas. The Inuit word for 'seal' is listed as *poegie* in the *DNE*. When sealing, you will likely spend a lot of time at *sinaa*, the Inuit word for the ice-floe edge where seals come to rest. Sealers, particularly older sealers, would *dart* seals. It's not clear if the same use of *dart* as a verb can apply to hunting and killing other animals. If you were to go birding, then you may make use of an Inuit birding implement called the *birding dart*. Whether sealing, hunting or fishing, you may find yourself wearing an *adikey*, a hooded outer garment made of cloth or skin derived from the Inuttitut *atigik*.

There are many *DNE* entries for other terms and sources that mention Labrador. There are even more citations in the word-file collection that did not make it into the two published editions of the *DNE*. *Eskimo fiddle* is one such term. The following citation comes from a 1916 publication by Hawkes:

A characteristic specimen of an Eskimo "fiddle" was obtained on this trip. It consists of a rude box, with a square hole in the top, three sinew strings with bridge and tail-piece, and a short bow with a whalebone strip for hair. It must be a rude imitation of "fiddles" seen on whaling ships, as the drum is the only indigenous musical instrument of the Eskimo. Most Eskimo fiddles have only one strong. When I asked an Eskimo musician about this he said, "One string is plenty for an Eskimo song." Anyone who understands the range of the Eskimo scale will appreciate the answer. (Hawkes 1916: 122)

In her 1952 book, *Labrador Nurse*, B. J Banfill talks about her experiences working as a nurse in Labrador. The term *rising* as it pertains to swelling appears in the *DNE* in the following citation:

On a sweltering First of July a boy came to the Station and said he had a "rizin finger." I had forgotten this word because it had not been part of my vocabulary since I left the Coast. One glance at the finger and I recalled these "galled fingers." His finger resembled a frizzling sausage about to burst its jacket. In other words, one of those over-ripe infected fingers which require immediate operation. (Banfill 1952: 157)

Finally, a bit of a humorous term relating to the Labrador coast: *gulch* (as a verb) means "to frequent a sheltered hollow for sexual intimacy" (Story, Kirwin and Widdowson 1990: 230). *Gulching* was a term used by Newfoundlanders visiting Labrador in the summer months, perhaps *planters*, who, according to one source, had to go to the gulches for some privacy since there were no treed forests in which they could hide away. On the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland, the term recorded in the *DNE* is *grassing*.

If you know of additional Labrador or Labrador-related terms, please feel free to send them in either by emailing [elrc@mun.ca](mailto:elrc@mun.ca) or by visiting [www.dialectatlas.mun.ca](http://www.dialectatlas.mun.ca) and filling out a contribution form at the following URL: <http://www.dialectatlas.mun.ca/contact/>.

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