

“Practised among the common people”: “vulgar” pronunciations in eighteenth-century pronouncing dictionaries

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In a corpus compiled from the notes in John Walker’s pronouncing dictionary (first edition 1791), Trapateau (2016) found that the most frequently occurring evaluative term used was *vulgar*. In Walker’s dictionary, *vulgar* is defined as “plebian, suiting to the common people, practised among the common people, mean, low, being of the common rate; publick, commonly bruited”. The frequency of this term in Walker’s critical notes suggests that the role of his dictionary was to warn against unacceptable pronunciations as well as to provide an account of acceptable or, to use Walker’s second most frequent term, *polite* ones. In this presentation, I discuss some of the pronunciations labelled *vulgar* by Walker and other eighteenth-century authors and argue that, far from dismissing such evidence as prescriptive, we should consider the role played by Walker and his contemporaries in the enregisterment of stigmatised variants and varieties.

Trapateau, Nicolas. 2016. ‘Pedantick’, ‘polite’ or ‘vulgar’? A systematic analysis of eighteenth-century normative discourse on pronunciation in John Walker’s Dictionary (1791). *Language and History* 59 (1): 25-36

Walker, John. 1791. *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*. London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson and T. Cadell.