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### **Lexical variation and OED3**

This paper reports on a research project that seeks to explore how lexical variation has been described in the third edition of the OED (henceforth, OED3), and whether it is likely to be improved with corpus data. *Dance*-compounds were taken as a test case. The study reveals that variant forms in OED3 are given either explicitly, implicitly, or are not given at all. The first category may be exemplified by *pillow dance* = *cushion dance*, but not the other way round; the second treats *strip dancer* (1946) and *strip girl* (1961) as semantically unrelated items; and the third fails to consider *calumet dance* (1717) as an earlier variant of *pipe dance* (1778). *Witch dance* (1824) and *death dance* (1766) are among the compounds acknowledged to have operated alongside two types of genitive variant, *witches' dance* (?) and *Dance of Death* (c. 1430) respectively, both of which express largely the same meaning. A handful of OED3 headwords, together with the genitive patterns, were, therefore, searched in the Google Books corpus to examine the rate of lexical variation. The results of the research, which will be discussed in some detail, are quite promising, suggesting that discoveries remain to be made within the lexicon of English in general, and OED3 in particular.