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New Oxford Dictionary to have 3 lakh words in book, disc form

LONDON, Mar. 29: Sixty-one years young, and bigger than ever: the Oxford English Dictionary is about to launch a much-awaited second edition which will boast no less than 300,000 entries, to be available in traditional book form or on a set of computer laser discs, reports AFP.

The massive work, which for many is the definitive "Bible" of the English language and which writer Anthony Burgess has hailed as the most important publishing event of the century, has been painstakingly entered on to computers for the new edition, which

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Dictionary

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fills 20 volumes and contains 35 per cent more words than the original, first published in 1928.

The new "OED", to be officially launched on Thursday by Oxford University Press, is without a doubt the most complete dictionary of the English language in existence.

The publishers in particular claim that it lists not just current meanings of words, but all their historical meanings. It contains some 2.4 million quotations, including no less than 30,000 from Shakespeare.

But perhaps the most exciting aspect of the new edition for researchers will be the possibilities offered by computerization.

Cross-referencing tasks which in the past would have taken years of poring over musty volumes—or would have been quite simply impossible—will be feasible at the press of a key.

It will be possible to treat the entire dictionary as one enormous database, pulling out all possible occurrences of a word, or of combinations of words.

The mammoth task of compiling the new dictionary has taken five years, most of it spent on keying in the entire first edition and its four subsequent supplements on to computers.

The editors had originally hoped to use the ultra-modern technique of optical character recognition—getting a computer to "look at" pages of the dictionary and decipher the text by electronic scanning, but the technology did not prove up to the task.

Good old-fashioned typists employed by a private American company did the job instead, with the strict proviso that they be capable of making no more than seven typing errors per 10,000 characters. But in spite of all the high-tech type, the OED retains the same basic philosophy imparted to it by its founder Sir James Murray.

Sir James devoted 50 years of his life to the dictionary, and when he died in 1915 work had progressed as far as the letter "T".

The most prolific of all, the late novelist and critic Marghanita Laski, submitted more than a quarter of a million, most of the culled from detective novels.

The 20-volume book version of the dictionary is to go on sale at 1,500 pounds (2,500 dollars).

Oxford University Press says the edition cost seven million pounds (12 million dollars) to produce, and International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) provided computer and staff services worth an additional 1.3 million pounds (2.2 million dollars).