INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH LEXICOGRAPHY

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THE ORIGINS OF DICTIONARIES

- Writing system is obviously needed for the creation of dictionaries.
- Classical societies did not have dictionaries, they were first created in Middle Ages, by monks in monasteries, who worked in scriptoria. They probably did not know Latin very well, so they would write translations or *glosses* between the lines. Afterwards, other monks created lists of glosses, and these were the first Latin-to-English *dictionaries*.
- Of course, the invention of printing press has also made possible the development of dictionaries and their wider usage.
- All this happened 700 years before someone realized they could make some money publishing and selling explanations of meanings of hard words.
- The first such publication appeared in 1604, *A Table Alphabeticall of Hard Words* by Robert Cawdrey (some 3,000 words). The first moderately complete English dictionary was another 150 years later, the work of Samuel Johnson published in 1755.
- Modern lexicography is therefore only 250 years old.
TYPES OF DICTIONARIES

Dictionaries can give information about equivalences between two languages (bi-lingual dictionaries), or about a language we already know and want to know better (monolingual dictionaries). Monolingual dictionaries now exist for virtually all national languages and for many local languages.

Monolingual English dictionaries are of several distinct types, depending on the audience to which they are addressed:

1. **specialised dictionaries**, aimed to clarify the technical jargon of various professional and scholarly areas; and

2. **general purpose dictionaries**, aimed to help speakers understand the precise meanings, pronunciations, spellings, usages, and histories of the words of the English language, including some of the technical words;

3. **children’s dictionaries**, aimed at those acquiring English as their first language or through English-medium education;

4. **learner’s dictionaries**, aimed at those learning English as a second or foreign language, usually in adolescence or adulthood.

In addition to these two types, there are also some specialised dictionaries of interest to general audience (e.g. Dictionaries of slang, euphemisms, Americanisms,...).
GENERAL PURPOSE DICTIONARIES

General purpose dictionaries are of four types:

1. so-called **unabridged dictionaries** (e.g. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st and 2nd edition)

2. **desk dictionaries**, which are shortened forms of the full dictionaries, either for college use or for use at lower educational levels (e.g. *Collins English Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of the English Language, New Oxford Dictionary of English,*...)

3. **concise dictionaries** (e.g. *Concise Oxford Dictionary, Longman Concise English Dictionary,*...)

4. **pocket size dictionaries** (e.g. *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*)
WHAT ARE UNABRIDGED DICTIONARIES?

- Unabridged does not mean that it contains every English word, because nobody knows how many words English has. All one can count is *entries* or *headwords*.

- Unabridged means that the dictionary is not a shortened version of some other dictionary. It was compiled from scratch, that is, largely from its own files and citations, with all definitions and arrangements of meanings and examples determined by its own editors. However, many unabridged dictionaries are actually compiled with the help of previous dictionaries, because it would be very difficult to do it really from the scratch.

- We can say that the highest degree of originality can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which was certainly compiled from its own files of citations.
JOHNSON’S DICTIONARY

- Samuel Johnson published his *A Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755. Over a seven-year period, Johnson wrote the definitions of c. 40,000 words, illustrating their use from the best authors since the time of the Elizabethans.

- Although in his 1747 *Dictionary* plan he had shown some purist and prescriptive ideas, in the Preface to the *Dictionary*, Johnson stressed that his aim was ‘not to form, but register the language’, which is a very important new principle in lexicography.
SOME JOHNSONIAN DEFINITIONS

LEXICOGRAPHER A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words.

OATS A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.

PENSION An allowance made to anyone without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country.

Which political party did Johnson support?

TORY One who adheres to the antient constitution of the state, and the apostolical hierarchy of the church of England, opposed to a whig.

WHIG The name of a faction.
THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

- The OED is the only English dictionary compiled totally from its own citation files. Its editors, wisely, also consulted the work of their predecessors, especially Samuel Johnson. Though it excludes most technical words, it has to be viewed as the greatest of all unabridged dictionaries – not just in English but in any language.

- Its size cannot be compared with other modern dictionaries of English because it includes, in principle, all the words that have ever appeared in the English language subsequent to 1150, a date which corresponds roughly to the beginning of the Middle-English period.

- The other great modern unabridged dictionaries like the *Merriam-Webster’s* have excluded older, obsolete and obsolescent words, but they considerably exceed the OED’s coverage of technical words from all the major fields of knowledge. Of the 291,627 entries in the OED, half or more than half are older words that no longer occur in modern usage.

- To say that more than half the words are no longer in contemporary use is not a criticism: the OED set out to create a record of the history of the English vocabulary and the historical development of the meanings of English words. It is a historical work par excellence.
The Oxford English Dictionary

- The fully-up-dated second edition of 1989 is available in three formats:
  1. Twenty very large heavy printed volumes, which one is likely to find only in libraries;
  2. A two-volume *compact edition* in which four regular printed pages of the full-sized version are reduced to one-quarter size and printed on a single page – and a magnifying glass is provided;
  3. A compact disk, containing the whole dictionary as well as search programmes which enable you to bring up onto your computer screen information which would take days to assemble from the printed versions.

- The first edition of the OED was compiled between 1884 and 1928, (although the project started in 1850) and it contained around 240,000 entries. The OED explicitly chose not to include technical terminology from the sciences and medicine unless these terms had become common parlance outside the jargon of specialists.

- In spite of its staggering size, the OED is to an astonishingly large extent the work of a single individual, Sir James A. H. Murray, the first official editor after the task was taken over by Oxford University Press.
THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

- Murray edited, starting in 1879, more than half of the first edition, the one which appeared in fascicles over a period of forty-four years, and these were assembled in the first edition of twelve volumes in 1928.
- He worked at it continuously for the last thirty-seven years of his life, eighty to ninety hours a week.
- In 1986 the editor R.W. Burchfield produced a four-volume supplement.
- In 1989 the second edition of OED is published, incorporating all supplements, and containing 2,500,000 quotations to support the definitions. The CD-ROM versions appeared in 1992 and 1994.
- The OED has twice been the source of highly selective reduced-size versions:
  
  *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1933, 1944, 1993)*
  
**Merriam – Webster**

- *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, published by the Merriam-Webster Company in 1961, is the only other relatively complete unabridged English dictionary of recent times. It differs from the OED in that it does contain very large numbers of technical words, going far beyond just those that have moved out into common parlance. It has some 450,000 entries. It replaced *Webster’s New International Dictionary* of 1934, which remains the largest of all English dictionaries, having over 600,000 entries.

- The name *Webster’s*, at least in America, is almost synonymous with dictionary. But the name Webster’s is in the public domain. The only publishing company whose work is directly descended from that of the 19-cent. American lexicographer Noah Webster, is the G. and C. Merriam Company of Springfield Massachusetts.

ADDITIONAL DATA

- Dealing with homographs
- Alphabetical order
- Ordering of data in electronic dictionaries
- Definitions can be: single phrases, substitutable for the word being defined in a given context, e.g. CRIME a serious offence punishable by law; CRUSH compress with force or violence, so as to break; whole sentences, e.g. CRIME A crime is an illegal action for which a person can be punished by law; CRUSH If you crush something, you press it or squeeze it very hard so that you break it or destroy its shape.
- Sense relations can be included in the dictionary
TYPES OF LEXICAL FACT

1. Phonology: the pronunciation of a word and variants;
2. Morphology: a word's morpheme composition, and any irregular inflections;
3. Syntax: the word class and particular structures a word may enter;
4. Semantics: the *meanings* of a word and the semantic structures it may enter;
5. Context: restrictions on social context and style in which a word may be used;
6. Spelling: the normal and any variant spellings of a word;
7. Etymology: the origin and history of a word;
8. Usage: frequency of use, when acquired, any taboos.
DICTIONARIES OF OTHER ENGLISHES

- Macquarie Dictionary
- ...