

## **THE MEANING OF DICTIONARIES**

**March 2007 - July 2007**

### CASE 1 INTRODUCTION

Dictionaries traditionally defined meaning and functioned as unquestioned sources of authority. Considered neutral and unbiased, they nonetheless served important political purposes, creating a sense of nationhood through a shared language. But over time, the nature and function of the dictionary has changed dramatically. A number of factors influenced the development of the dictionary, among them changes in language itself, the expansion of knowledge, nationalism, and colonialism. Today, current technologies allow a level of interaction between users and dictionaries that poses a basic challenge to their authoritative role. This exhibition traces the history of the English language dictionary and looks at how – and what – dictionaries mean at various historical and cultural junctures. Far from being free of personality or politics, the “meaning” of a dictionary is shaped by the historical, cultural, social, economic, and human elements that contributed to its production.

The English language dictionary emerged from several earlier types of reference works, including bilingual and polyglot dictionaries, which give the meaning of words from one language or several in another; and encyclopedias, compilations of information on all or a particular branch of knowledge. Now recognized as quite distinct, early dictionaries and encyclopedias shared many characteristics; and as late as the 18th century the two words were used interchangeably. John Harris’s *Lexicon Technicum, or, an Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1704) identifies itself as a dictionary by its title, but to 21st-century eyes appears to be more like an encyclopedia. Both were alphabetical arrangements of words or concepts and contained an explanation of their meaning, sometimes with pictorial illustration. Over the course of the 18th century, dictionaries began to offer additional information such as guides to pronunciation, parts of speech, and sometimes even a history, or etymology, of the word’s origin.

In the early 17th century, English language dictionaries began to appear alongside bilingual dictionaries. At first these consisted chiefly of lists of less familiar words (and thus designated as “hard words”) with definitions. “Hard word” lists or collections lacked many of the common elements one now expects from a dictionary, although their emergence is important as an indication of increasing attention to English, moving it from merely a “vernacular” into a language deserving its own study. Hard word lists were often hybrids, heavy on Latin words, suggesting that dictionaries were now being used by those who had not studied the language. At the same time, an English language dictionary was often published together with a French dictionary.

During the 18th century, enthusiasm for categorizing, defining, and collecting sparked efforts to gather artifacts from the physical world and items that were rather less tangible, such as words, information, and ideas. Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* (1751), one volume of which is shown here, perhaps best illustrates the Enlightenment desire to enumerate, organize, and explain all known knowledge of the world. Many thinkers of this time promoted reason and experience of the world as the best path to knowledge, rejecting the

notion that meaning or knowledge should be received without question from a higher authority, such as the Church. Ironically, it was at this time that reference works such as the dictionary quietly assumed status as being authoritative.

Just as no dictionary was completed alone, this exhibit about dictionaries is the product of many people's contributions. I have benefited greatly from the input of Erin McKean (AB '93, AM '93), Library Visiting Committee member and Chief Consulting Editor, American Dictionaries, Oxford University Press, who provided invaluable suggestions and generously shared information regarding dictionary history as well as insights into contemporary lexicography. I am also indebted to my colleagues in Special Collections. Alice Schreyer continually helped to shape my ideas into more articulated concepts; her insights regarding content and presentation of the exhibit have been greatly appreciated. Kerri Sancomb provided creative ideas for display, and it has been a real pleasure to work with her. Mike Kenny photographed the poster image. Finally, I owe a tremendous debt to Monica Mercado, graduate student in the Department of History, whose enthusiasm and ingenuity were surpassed only by her superb research skills in getting this project off the ground. She helped me identify and evaluate scores of dictionaries and related materials and contributed expertise on early 19th-century American history.

*Julia Gardner  
Reference and Instruction Librarian  
Special Collections Research Center*

## CASE 2 ANATOMY OF A DICTIONARY ENTRY

Despite small variations in layout, by the mid-18th century dictionaries began to display consistent elements that are recognizable to contemporary users. These key elements helped separate the dictionary from a reference work such as an encyclopedia and made the dictionary more than a list of hard words, or a speller.

Common elements of a dictionary entry include the following, examples of which can be found in this case and throughout the exhibit:

- Headwords, or entry words, usually set off in bold type and broken into syllables
- Guidewords to indicate the alphabetical range from the start to end of a given page
- Parts of speech
- Etymologies
- Numbering of definitions, if more than one definition exists
- Pronunciation, indicated by syllable breaking, and typographical or phonetic markings
- Usage notes, telling the user if a word is slang, for instance, or warning if a word has derogatory connotations

The dictionaries in this case illustrate the various ways in which common elements appear in different time periods. The dictionary format can be seen as a continuum, evolving toward a common format with which we are now familiar.

## CASE 3 PRE-JOHNSON DICTIONARIES

An increasing need for specialized knowledge raised demand for a different sort of reference book. But perhaps the most important stimulus to developing a comprehensive dictionary of English based on principles of evidence and usage was competitiveness with continental nations such as France and Germany, which already had produced their own dictionaries.

Before the publication of Samuel Johnson's dictionary in the mid-18th century, dictionaries in England were far from uniform in their approach to organization, definition and etymology. The first English language dictionary appeared in 1604, Robert Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall*. While this work was distinct in its focus on defining only English words, elements such as pronunciation, parts of speech, or the history of the word and its use were not included.

John Kersey's *A New English Dictionary* (1702; see case 5) marked an important moment in the development of the modern dictionary. Considered by many scholars to be the first modern English lexicographer, Kersey included everyday words in addition to unfamiliar or "hard" words. He also edited Edward Phillips's *New World of Words* (shown here) in 1706.

Phillips himself was an important dictionary figure as well, publishing his first edition of *New World of Words* (1658) on the heels of Blount's *Glossographia* (1656). Blount accused Phillips of copying his entries, and eventually published a collection of the words he thought Phillips had plagiarized from him. This argument-in-print was titled *A World of Errors Discovered in the New World of Words*. Despite Blount's outrage, Phillips's dictionary remained very popular and went through several editions even after his death.

Reproductions of the word "logomachy" from several of these early dictionaries are shown here, allowing the viewer to compare differences – and striking similarities – among the definitions.

**CASE 4**      **JOHNSON AND THE *DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE***  
Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was not the first English language dictionary, but it dominates popular imagination far more than its predecessors and contemporaries. What was it about Johnson's *Dictionary* that set it apart from other 18th-century English language dictionaries?

While other dictionaries may have included more words, Johnson's entries are distinguished by their thorough coverage. Earlier dictionaries may or may not have included a word's etymology, but Johnson did so consistently, providing examples from literature or other sources to illustrate the history of usage. Indeed, one of Johnson's innovations as a lexicographer was his evidence-based approach to defining words.

Johnson's goal of comprehensiveness can also be seen in his *Plan for the Dictionary*, in which he outlined the means by which he intended to create the *Dictionary*. No other 18th-century dictionaries were crafted in such a methodical, meticulous manner. His work had the support of a number of significant men of letters, with Jonathan Swift,

Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison among those who felt a comprehensive English dictionary was needed, not only to put English (and England) on a par with other modern languages, but to “protect” the English language from decay through improper usage.

Johnson worked as an individual, not for a formal lexicographical or other scholarly academy, as had been the case for his peers working on the continent, although his work was certainly informed by language dictionaries created in Italy and France. Johnson had the backing of the Earl of Chesterfield, to whom Johnson addressed his Plan. Although the relationship between Johnson and Chesterfield was fraught, he provided authority for Johnson’s project on a number of levels: Chesterfield was Secretary of State, with the result that his patronage conferred a sense of national support for Johnson’s work. Additionally, his financial backing was seen as ensuring its commercial viability.

#### CASE 5 JOHNSON’S CONTEMPORARIES AND COMPETITORS

Some examples of other significant 18th-century English language dictionaries can be seen here, among them Nathan Bailey’s *An Universal Etymological Dictionary* (1721). Johnson relied heavily on Bailey for the content of his own work. Bailey’s dictionary was extremely popular throughout the 18th century, more so than Johnson’s. In both works, what had once been simply “hard words” or specialist terms had now turned into general knowledge.

Similarly, Benjamin Martin’s *Lingua Britannica Reformata*, while providing multiple definitions of a word, lacks the deliberateness found in Johnson’s careful, systematic approach. Martin’s title also harkens to an earlier style of English dictionary that relied heavily on Latin, in contrast to Johnson’s privileging of English.

In comparison to other dictionaries of its time, Johnson’s emerges as more ambitious. Compare, for instance, the style seen in the preceding case of Johnson’s entries with those found here. Johnson not only gives authoritative sources for his definitions, he regularly and methodically provides multiple definitions, identifies parts of speech, and demonstrates how a word is used. And while his peers and predecessors tended to quote only from literary texts to illustrate usage, Johnson drew on examples from scientific and technical works, among others.

Works such as James Harris’s *Hermes, or, a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Universal Grammar* (1755) also contributed to Johnson’s creation of a dictionary. The copy displayed here was Johnson’s own, and reminds us that Johnson drew on not just the work of other lexicographers, but also on related works about the English language and its use. These sources reinforced Johnson’s aim to provide not just an authority but the authority for English language meaning.

#### CASE 6 WEBSTER AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICA

When Noah Webster proposed work on an American dictionary in 1800, an American identity was just emerging. Webster was a prolific writer and political critic whose schoolbooks and dictionaries were part of a developing body of intellectual work shaping the United States into a new nation.

In the prefaces to his earliest readers, published in the 1780s and 1790s, Webster argued for the teaching of a distinct American culture. By providing the tools to understand and participate in a unified American culture, he hoped to bestow upon the new nation a sense of its own identity and a measure of political stability.

Webster's *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking* promised not only to improve the grammar and elocution of young readers, but also to give the nation's youngest citizens instruction in American history and politics. "Information on these subjects is necessary for youth," he wrote in the fourth edition of the *American Selection*, "both in forming their habits and improving their minds. A love of our country, and an acquaintance with its true state, are indispensable—they should be acquired in early life."

Webster's readers, spellers, and dictionaries were joined by a host of other early efforts to instruct Americans in the national enterprise. Jedidiah Morse's *American Geographies* familiarized Americans with the vast expanses of territory that were first surveyed under the provisions of the 1787 Northwest Ordinance and grew within two decades to include the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, charted by Lewis and Clark. Like Webster, Morse intended his work for both children and their parents, issuing a number of different editions for school and home use. These early educational texts, and the men who collected the information that was found in them, helped Americans figure out their place in the nation—and world.

#### CASE 7 WEBSTER AND AMERICAN NATIONALISM

"The tie of language is perhaps the strongest and most durable that can unite men."  
--Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835)

Scholars of the American Revolution have noted the impact of the written word in spreading the contagion of liberty. Once freed from British rule, Americans would continue to use words—through new usages and spellings—to distinguish themselves as a separate people.

Noah Webster's *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789) was one of the first American essays on linguistics, and in it he called for an American English that would both distinguish the new nation from Europe and bring together the citizenry in like speech. "Let us seize the present moment and establish a national language, as well as a national government," Webster declared in his *Dissertations on the English Language*. Indeed, Webster's first attempt, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (1806) began asserting new spellings, pronunciations, etymologies, and definitions that differed from the English dictionaries he consulted. Webster was convinced that it was necessary to replace the foreign authority with something home-grown. Completed after more than twenty years of research, Webster's two-volume *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828) continued his project of asserting that Americans had the right—if not a moral imperative—to correct and improve British works, and not feel bound to the intellectual and etymological traditions of their former rulers.

Noah Webster's name was irrevocably tied to this national enterprise, so much so that by the end of Webster's life, his name had become a desired commodity. In 1841 G. & C. Merriam Company of Springfield, Massachusetts acquired the Webster name for their publications; when their copyright expired in 1889 a number of other publishers rushed to put Webster's name in the titles of their dictionaries to legitimate their publications.

#### CASE 8 WEBSTER'S SPELLERS

Webster's first *American Spelling Book*, published in 1783, began a project of creating a national language, despite regional variation. Webster removed the "u" from words such as labour, favour, and honour, and the "k" from the ends of words such as public and republic, later arguing that they were simply "useless" letters. While Webster's readers were soon passed over in favor of those by William Holmes McGuffey, American schoolhouses continued to use Webster's spellers throughout the 19th century.

Webster's first attempt at a dictionary in 1806 is believed to be based partly on John Entick's *New Spelling Dictionary*, first published in London in 1764. Entick's was one of two British lexicons widely used in the Atlantic World during the 18th century that Webster sought to displace, the other being *John Walker's Principles of English Pronunciation*.

Webster and his son-in-law, Chauncey Goodrich, worked together to edit the *American Dictionary of the English Language* for publication in 1828. While Webster purged some of the "unnecessary" British roots of American spelling and grammar, Goodrich, who favored British English, would later delete many of the new American spellings in his 1841 abridgment of the dictionary.

#### CASE 9 THE IMPERIAL DICTIONARY

*The Imperial Dictionary* impressed: in the bulk of its two volumes, in the elegance of its 2,000 wood-engraved illustrations, in its lexicographical completeness, and in its positioning of the English language as having moved beyond being solely the language of England. Rather, the dictionary positions English as the imperial language, the lingua franca of the British Empire.

The map reminds us of the immense geographic expanse of the British Empire in the 19th century. As the ruling group, the British established English as the official language in its colonies and at the same time picked up words from the languages they encountered. Thus colonization took place not only politically, but linguistically as well. The British absorbed foreign words, in many cases Anglicizing them (particularly place names), or, as seen in a work like *The Imperial Dictionary*, appropriating the foreign word into an English language dictionary.

British English had already asserted its superiority over alternate "Englishes," as seen in the title changes by Noah Webster from a dictionary of American English or Americanisms, to his ultimate title, *An American Dictionary of English*. Although the United States was no longer a British colony at the time of Webster's work, British

English retained a certain linguistic prominence in the U.S., against which Webster reacted.

Published in 1850 in two volumes by Blackie and Son, a Glasgow publisher, the *Imperial Dictionary* was in many ways a dictionary of its age. While the editor, John Ogilvie, made liberal use of other lexicographers' work, and Webster is named in the title, the inclusion of various words gleaned from British colonial expeditions, complete with illustrations, was perfectly in keeping with British interest in the exotic. Other items displayed here, such as the guide to the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851, and travel guides and travel accounts from the same decade, demonstrate the keen interest in the reach of Britain's imperialism.

#### CASE 10 ENGLISHES

The English language took on global reach with the expansion of the British Empire in the 19th century. The *Imperial Dictionary* naturalized non-English words that came into common British usage through settlement and travel in colonized countries, but as can be seen in the proliferation of English language dictionaries in today's Commonwealth nations, English is far from being monolithic. Rather, speakers of English around the world each have their own variations on English meaning and usage.

While some of these styles are strictly regional, as seen in the example of the *Dictionary of Prince Edward Island English*, from the small Canadian maritime province, others, such as the Australian dictionary, are founded on the idea that a national dictionary is fundamental to a sense of nationhood.

Similarly, English speakers from different countries refer to dictionaries of idiomatic English for help in understanding the ways in which the same word or phrase may take on very different (and potentially embarrassingly different) meanings in a different country. The *English A to Zed* dictionary provides many such examples for the American visiting England. Interestingly, many words in the dictionaries of Commonwealth countries first appeared in the mid-19th century, demonstrating again the connections between imperialism and language.

#### CASE 11 ILLUSTRATION

Initially, dictionaries relied solely on explaining meaning through words. "Illustrations," when provided, referred to quotations from literary or other works providing examples of the word in use. As seen with the rise of mid-19th century dictionaries, however, pictorial illustration became an important element, particularly in popularizing dictionaries. Seeing pictures depicting both exotic and historical words was a new experience for dictionary users, and the trend quickly became widespread, especially in dictionaries created for the use of children.

Perhaps the best known 19th-century illustrated dictionary is the *Century Dictionary*. First appearing in 1889, it was published by the same company that produced the *Century* magazine, an illustrated periodical noted for its artwork. Conveniently, the *Century* magazine ran an article titled "Why and How the Great Dictionary Was Made" in its

January 1892 issue. Examples of the artwork from the dictionary appear throughout the article, with attention called to “the seventy-five hundred illustrations.” Independent reviews of the dictionary, such as a brief review appearing in the July 25, 1889, issue of *Bookishness*, also call attention to the fact that “the illustrations add very much to the value of the definition.”

A word was selected to be illustrated for several reasons. In some cases, a word may have been deemed sufficiently unusual or “exotic” to require visual illustration. In other cases, the illustrations are simply easy to come by. For instance, the United States government makes available free pictures of American presidents, and NASA similarly makes available images related to space and astronomy, while the United Nations does the same for UN governors-general. Not surprisingly, these categories are well represented in pictorial illustrations of contemporary dictionaries.

#### CASE 12 POPULIZING THE DICTIONARY

Beginning in the 19th century and continuing into 20th, dictionaries became more widely available and more affordable. Whereas Johnson relied on subscriptions and patronage to produce his dictionary, and Webster struggled to finance his, by the mid-1800s dictionaries became a far more established business, with publishers willing to assume the costs of production in anticipation of profits from the work.

Publishers adapted form to function and audience, creating all variety of dictionaries, from imposing, authoritative reference works to be displayed in the home or office to portable pocket dictionaries. Often these smaller versions were used as a form of marketing, with a company’s name included on the front and “extras” geared to the targeted audience, such as the pocket dictionary featured here which includes a financial glossary.

Dictionaries were even designed to fit certain kinds of clothing, as can be seen in the example of a vest-pocket dictionary shown here. With its slim, narrow design, this dictionary is seemingly aimed at men, perhaps specifically a businessman who would wear a vest as part of his three-piece suit.

While the small, pocket-sized dictionaries were made to be portable, dictionaries also became objects of display and markers of social status. The popularity of the *Century Dictionary* was so great that furniture manufacturers created and advertised tables and stands made specifically for this dictionary. And as seen in the photographs in this case, dictionaries featured as part of the middle-class living room or study. Whether the dictionary was consulted frequently or was merely ornamental, the fact that furniture was designed around it, and that guides of the time incorporated dictionary placement as part of home décor, indicates that it was important to own and display a dictionary.

#### CASE 13 SLANG DICTIONARIES

The notion of the dictionary was not limited solely to definitions of standard English, and dictionaries of slang and cant began appearing as early as the late 16th century. Slang presents an interesting challenge for its compilers, since terms tend to become obsolete or



change meaning much more quickly than do definitions for standard English. Similarly, defining slang requires first-hand knowledge of particular groups who create and use the terms.

While 19th-century dictionaries seem to have a middle-class audience in mind, the intended users of slang dictionaries shown here are less clear. In some ways, such dictionaries display a kind of linguistic voyeurism, allowing the assumed middle-class reader the opportunity to indulge in curiosity about the “other”: Gypsies, criminals, and the lower class, for example, are often cited as sources of the slang appearing in these dictionaries.

In some instances the purpose of these slang dictionaries is quite clear, as can be seen by the use of the *Rogue’s Lexicon* by the San Francisco Police Department. The police could consult the dictionary to understand slang overheard in their street patrols, or to be able to use slang effectively themselves when working.

Middle-class readers also encountered slang in novels. The late 19th century saw a marked interest in true-crime fiction and exposé-style novels, many of which included slang to lend verisimilitude to dialogue.

A different kind of encounter with slang can be seen in the ethnographic interviews conducted by University of Chicago anthropologist Ernest Burgess and his students. In many cases these interviews focused on groups who were marginalized by mainstream, early-20th century American society: hobos, gay men and lesbians, and prostitutes were among the interviewees. Slang figured in these individual’s accounts, and their word choices were dutifully transcribed by the interviewer, as seen in the excerpt featured here.

#### CASE 14 THE POLITICS OF WORDS AND WEBSTER’S THIRD

*Webster’s Third International Dictionary* (1961) was a drastic revision of the second edition (1934) in terms of style of entries, additions, deletions, and perhaps most significantly, authoritative usage notes. The post-World War II need for an expanded knowledge base (driven in part by the Cold War) determined the massive scope of the revision, which was surpassed only by the magnitude of criticism. Public outcry over the changes that appeared in *Webster’s Third* made headlines across the country.

In addition to incorporating new words and reflecting changes in language, *Webster’s Third* was designed to be more user-friendly. *Webster’s Second*, as can be seen, is extremely thick and bulky, asserting itself and its authority by sheer physical size. The third edition is taller but narrower, making it easier to page through and giving the dictionary a less imposing appearance.

Despite the fact that *Webster’s Third* was not the first mainstream dictionary to include words such as “ain’t,” detractors seized upon this word, widely publicizing its inclusion to stir up controversy. The edition also included usage example quotes from popular culture figures. This strategy, perhaps intended to make the dictionary more accessible, had the unintended effect of providing newspaper editors with fodder for editorials about

the decline of the language. The impassioned tone of the objections reached a ferocity difficult to imagine being caused by a dictionary revision in today's world, where the influence of popular culture on language is widely acknowledged.

This furor over updating Americans' vocabulary shows the powerful symbolic position dictionaries occupied in American society. Dictionaries were still seen as perpetuating the ideal of a unified America, a concept that would be challenged in the coming decades by activists in areas such as anti-war movements, civil rights, or feminism.

#### CASE 15 TRADEMARKS

Companies devote considerable effort and expense to develop trademarks and do not want their value diluted by a dictionary listing a trademark as a word in general use. Corporations, their lawyers, and dictionary editors negotiate the line between the trademarked name and the thing itself, trying to determine when a trademark becomes a generic term. For instance, "escalator", "thermos" and "elevator" all came into being as trademarked terms, yet now function as generic words.

At the heart of the difficulty is drawing a distinction between a word as a piece of property (a trademark) and simply as a word. Ironically, while editors of dictionaries routinely receive (and ignore) notices from companies' lawyers pointing out the use of a trademarked word and asking the editor to remove it, the appearance of a trademark in a dictionary can be taken as evidence that the trademarked product is deeply engrained in daily life and culture.

The correspondence between Mitford Mathews and the Cracker Jack Co. illustrates these difficulties. "Crackerjack" may not have appeared in the second edition of the *Dictionary of Americanisms*, but "Eskimo Pie" does, as seen here.

Words identified as trademarked crop up in standard dictionaries, but there are specialized dictionaries listing trademarked words for various industries, a few of which are shown here. In many cases the trademark involves not just a word or phrase, but a recognizable logo as well.

#### CASE 16 PRACTICES OF DEFINING

Definitions of words may seem self-evident: a word simply means what it means. How, then, can dictionaries differentiate themselves or assert their right to a particular definition? Early dictionary-makers constantly faced plagiarism by rivals, who engaged in outright theft of dictionary content, and it has long been standard practice to feature the name of a prominent dictionary editor on the cover (Johnson and Webster are the most popular names to include), even if that individual had nothing to do with the publication in question.

Dictionary-makers today have their own means of thwarting outright plagiarism. For instance, they might insert fake words in a dictionary and check to see if a rival publication includes them, indicating the other publication has lifted the entries wholesale from the original.

Modern dictionaries also have their own, unique defining styles which help differentiate among different dictionaries. The *Oxford English Dictionary* arranges its definitions for a given word chronologically, as does Merriam-Webster. *The American Heritage Dictionary* focuses on frequency of use in ordering its definitions, while the *Oxford American Dictionary* begins with the definition that is deemed most important conceptually. An example of an in-house style guide is shown here from Random House. The existence of such guides demonstrates just how particularized the style of a given dictionary has become, and how each dictionary has its own “personality,” associated with its publishing house. Similarly, works such as the one shown here, by Eric Partridge, further contribute to an established practice of word definition.

Note the different ways in which the reproduced entries on display here approach defining the word “mystery.” While there may not be any essential difference in actual meaning, the way in which the word is presented – its etymology, examples of use in sentences, whether or not pronunciation is included, etc. – subtly differs, giving each dictionary its own style.

The other term on display here, “niacin,” came into use about 50 years ago as a substitute for nicotinic acid. With no room for interpretation, there is little variation in its definition across dictionaries. On the other hand, definitions of “mystery” alter over time.

#### CASE 17 THE MAKING OF A *DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH*

The University of Chicago Press has a long-standing interest in lexicography and has sponsored a number of major ancient and modern language dictionary projects over the past century. One of these, *A Dictionary of American English* (DAE), reveals the issues of personality and authority that arise in collaboration, so much a part of dictionary-making.

The selection of Sir William Craigie, one of the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s editors, to produce the definitive work of American English was bound to cause tension. The DAE needed a well-known and respected authority, and as an editor of the OED when it finally was completed in 1931, Craigie was prominent among lexicographers at the time. Indeed, by 1925 he had already been engaged by the University of Chicago to work on its *Dictionary of American English*, and taught in the English department as well as working on the project.

While Craigie’s name and reputation provided legitimacy to the DAE, his personality and management style did not always mesh well with others such as assistant editor Mitford Mathews and co-editor James Hulbert. Some of these interpersonal difficulties can be seen in correspondence related to the dictionary.

Craigie returned to England in 1936, the year the first part, or fascicle, of the DAE was published; it would be two years before the first complete volume appeared. This physical distance between Craigie and the University of Chicago, combined with the start

of the Second World War, caused further difficulties, particularly regarding reliable transport of dictionary material back and forth between the U.K. and the United States.

#### CASE 18      MARKETING THE DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH

In addition to dealing with difficulties caused by clashing styles and those posed by world events, other challenges for the DAE took a more material form. Funding was a constant issue. Mathews created several 250-word brief articles, or “shorts,” for Reader’s Digest highlighting American words, such as “skunk,” seen here, complete with history and illustration. The shorts would provide much-needed revenue for the project.

At the same time, the significance of the DAE’s project was clear, and it enjoyed support not only of the Press but of others interested in American English. Promotional efforts focused on academic audiences, as seen in the marketing materials, while at the same time the Dictionary of American English was presented as having relevance to the general user, as a reference work dedicated to American English. The DAE’s determined emphasis on defining American English on historical principles marked a new standard of scholarship regarding American English and placed it on the same level as British English.

Once volumes of the DAE began to be published, the Press publicized it with a variety of brochures, advance ordering opportunities, and kept a clipping file of response to the dictionary. The DAE anticipated the publication of Webster’s Third by many years, but reviewers’ reactions to the presence of slang in the DAE offered a preview of the outcry over Webster’s Third. Yet as quotes in the promotional materials shows, scholarly response to the project was positive.

The British monarchy received presentation copies, as did American president Franklin Roosevelt. Ironically, the Press made much of the presentation copies given to King George V and Queen Elizabeth, as seen in the special bookplate made for the occasion and the feature in the Chicago Magazine. The creation of a scholarly, authoritative dictionary of American English coincided with the emergence of the United States as a truly global power.

#### CASE 19      *A DICTIONARY OF AMERICANISMS*

*A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (1951), also published by the University of Chicago Press, never seemed to catch on with popular audiences as did the DAE, remaining more an object of academic interest. Without the oppressive influence of Sir William Craigie, Mitford Mathews was able to assert his personality, and the *Dictionary of Americanisms* can be seen as his personal project.

Mathews had a long-established interest in the etymology of American words as a scholar prior to becoming involved in lexicographical work. *A Dictionary of Americanisms* is the culmination of this academic research. Mathews’s interest in American English extended to further studies in language, such as identifying what he termed “Southernisms” or more academic works such as *The Beginnings of American English*.

Mathews's aim with *A Dictionary of Americanisms* was to highlight words originating in the United States. The University of Chicago Press embraced the project. Promotional materials announcing the new dictionary can be seen here, along with correspondence within the Press discussing how much to pay Mathews and how to promote his dictionary.

Unfortunately, potential buyers of the new dictionary, even scholarly organizations, had difficulty distinguishing this title from the four-volume DAE. As the sampling of correspondence shown here illustrates, readers from the National Geographic Society to academic libraries asked for clarification of how this work differed from its predecessor. The work was later abridged and published as *Americanisms, a Dictionary of Selected Americanisms on Historical Principles*.

#### CASE 20 RAW MATERIALS

The intellectual and physical processes of dictionary-making demand vast amounts of time and space. Dictionary editors from the *Oxford English Dictionary's* first editor, James Murray; to the *Dictionary of American English*; to modern editors use citation cards to record examples of words, their meaning, and use. Here we see historical examples from the *Dictionary of American English* and from the contemporary *Historical Dictionary of American Slang*. These cards or slips provide a wide range of examples of usage, contributing to dictionary editors' decisions about adding new words or reconsidering definitions and usage of terms already included.

The sheer volume of citation slips is partly conveyed in the photograph of Mitford Mathews in his office. Similarly, the amount of human labor involved in processing citation cards and physically putting together the dictionary can be seen in photographs from the University of Chicago Press as work progressed on the *Dictionary of American English*.

Dictionaries continue to use citation slips to track instances of usage. As the flow chart depicting the way a word is (or is not) selected for dictionary inclusion and the "Story of Phat" brochure show, a word goes through a number of steps and analyses before being added to a dictionary.

#### CASE 21 UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LEXICOGRAPHICAL LEGACIES

Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of formal training of lexicographers, interesting sorts of lexicographical genealogies and legacies have emerged. In his reflections on dictionary work, for example, Sir William Craigie reminded readers of his connections to James Murray, the first editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

In turn, the University of Chicago Press dictionary tradition produced many lexicographical protégées in the first half of the 20th century, one of whom was Mitford Mathews, a 1927 graduate who took Craigie's lexicography class and went on to work with Craigie on the DAE. After Craigie left, Mathews was promoted from assistant to full editor at the University of Chicago Press. He edited not just the *Dictionary of*

*Americanisms*, but several other dictionaries focusing on American and regional American English.

Another Chicago graduate of this era, Clarence Barnhart, went on from his student work at the DAE to become editor of the *Thorndike Century Dictionary*, and was a noted lexicographer, editing dictionaries for Random House and many others. His ties to the University of Chicago's lexicographical projects remained, and he purchased surplus citation cards from the DAE to form the basis of his first *Barnhart Dictionary*. Some of the correspondence concerning this transaction is seen here.

The University of Chicago lexicographical family extends to its seminal dictionary projects. For instance, James Breasted started the *Assyrian Dictionary* at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute in 1921. Erica Reiner began working on it in 1952 as a graduate student, eventually becoming its editor for over twenty years. In turn its current Editor-in-Chief, Martha Roth, who worked with Reiner before assuming editorship of the project herself, is now bringing the final volume to completion. Erin McKean, Chief Consulting Editor, American Dictionaries, Oxford University Press, wrote her thesis under the direction of Erica Reiner in 1993, and worked as an assistant to Martha Roth when she was a student in the College.

#### CASE 22      LEXICOGRAPHY: THE GROWTH OF A PROFESSION

As dictionaries evolved into a separate and specialized genre, lexicography developed as a profession in its own right. Such development was not without its share of growing pains. James Murray of the *Oxford English Dictionary* became editor of the authoritative English language dictionary after a series of predecessors had abandoned the project. Murray occupied a marginal position in Oxford, not a professor yet indisputably a scholar. Decades later, Mitford Mathews was to find himself in a similarly difficult position while working at the University of Chicago Press as a dictionary assistant editor; he, too, felt the need for the security and standing that a professorship would provide in the academic world.

Despite the lack of formal preparation, early lexicographers made contributions to the field, even helping to define it, not only through the dictionaries they produced but also through their own scholarship. Some examples are seen here in the works produced by Murray, as well as University of Chicago lexicographer James Hulbert.

Today lexicography is an established field, complete with professional organizations, such as the Dictionary Society of North America, the professional group for those working in lexicography on this continent. The Australasian Society for Lexicography plays a similar role for professionals in Australia and New Zealand, as well as those in English-speaking countries in Southeast Asia. Euralex is the professional body for European lexicographers, and Afrilex fulfills this role for the African continent.

Lexicographers have always dealt with wrangles over words, often needing to make difficult decisions over whether to include particularly fraught terms and if so, how to present the entry in terms of usage. Dictionary editors must similarly stay abreast of the

cultural context in which a given word is used, and decide if, and how, changes in these contexts lead to changes in meaning. For instance, much debate exists in the United States today over the definition of “marriage.” Recent dictionaries include a range of definitions, from those defining it as “a legal union of a man and a woman” to “a legally recognized relationship between two people.” Thus dictionaries, assumed to be ideologically neutral, can and do display the bias of their editors in decisions about definition and word inclusion or exclusion.

### CASE 23      PREFACES

Prefaces of dictionaries offer quite a bit of information to the patient reader. They provide, in addition to practical information about arrangement of entries and methodology, places for dictionary editors to lament, apologize, instruct, as well as an opportunity to acknowledge the work of others who contributed to the project. While such explanation and instruction often take up many pages (see several examples in this case), few contemporary users take the time to read them.

Particularly in 18th-century works, prefaces were seen as being as important as the main work itself, rather than something to be skipped over. Today scholars of the period read these prefaces as historical texts of interest in their own right, and they are often anthologized in the same way prose essays are.

Editors still use prefaces to explain the rationale for the project and changes in the edition, to highlight new words included, or to point out features unique to that dictionary. The prefaces of 20th- and 21st-century dictionaries seen here provide instruction in how to use the work and explanations of the components of a word entry. Some also include usage guides in the preface, while others integrate this material into the dictionary content itself.

No matter the style or exact content of a preface, dictionary prefaces are perhaps the most personal part of the work. Unlike title pages, where names appear of those who may have had nothing to do with the content of the work, the preface is the one place where an individual’s voice is attached to the content, reminding readers that the dictionary is not an abstract, impersonal entity but rather the result of many people’s scholarship and collaboration.

### CASE 24      USERS MAKING THE DICTIONARY

The interactive capabilities of the Web allow for user-generated content, particularly in less formal sites such as the Urban Dictionary, Wiktionary, or online slang guides. Even mainstream online sites such as Merriam-Webster’s online have a place where users can suggest their own words and definitions and identify themselves.

The emergence of such sites underscores the ways in which the user-dictionary relationship has changed. Whereas critics in the early 1960s argued for “authoritative” sources and words, a segment of the current user population is involved in creating its own words and definitions. The easily altered and updated medium of the Web allows

guides to slang to be constantly current, as opposed to earlier guides that required reprinting in order to stay up-to-date.

The Web has also changed the format and functionality of mainstream dictionaries. All major dictionaries now have online versions that provide new forms of searching unavailable in traditional print formats. The use of XML (extensible markup language) to tag elements of an entry allows users to search across a dictionary and to jump to related entries or sources.

A generation ago students tossed a paperback dictionary in their backpacks for easy reference, but today users are more likely to check an online dictionary, refer to one they have downloaded onto a PDA, or consult an entire small electronic dictionary. As seen in a photograph shown here, customers in a Japanese electronics store have an entire wall of Japanese-English/English-Japanese electronic translation devices and dictionaries to choose from. The size of a calculator, these devices provide not just the traditional word-definition function of a dictionary, but also the means to translate on the spot.

Whether users want to search etymologies for a word or perhaps suggest words and meanings of their own, today's media allow for a range of ever-increasingly interactive experiences with the dictionary. The computer across from this case provides visitors a chance to experience for themselves some of these interactions.

#### TABLE CASE 1      MINIATURE JOHNSONS

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* continued to be edited, revised, expanded, and adapted for well over a century after it first appeared in 1755. It was used as the basis for numerous new dictionaries and incorporated into several encyclopedias. These works testify to the authority of Johnson's name and its value in selling dictionaries that were vastly different in scope, content, and audience.

Gwin J. Kolb (1919-2006), Chester D. Tripp Professor in the Humanities Emeritus at the University of Chicago, taught at the University for over 35 years and was a renowned Samuel Johnson scholar. Although his research focused chiefly on Johnson's moral tale, *Rasselas*, the subject of his doctoral dissertation, Kolb formed a library of about 5,000 titles that included many works by Samuel Johnson and his contemporaries. His collection was dispersed, but the editions of *Rasselas*, together with other titles, were acquired by the University of Chicago Library through the generosity of his friends. A selection of the miniature dictionaries from the Library of Gwin J. Kolb is on display in this case.

Most of the so-called "miniature" dictionaries were very abbreviated word-lists, sometimes with added lists of useful information, such as "the Heathen Deities" or English market towns. None of these miniatures bears any direct relationship to the authorized editions of Johnson's *Dictionary*.



## TABLE CASE 2 SPECIALIZED DICTIONARIES

Specialized terms unique to a particular group or profession also have a history of being organized into dictionary format to serve that particular group. In some instances the group was professional, such as practitioners of medicine or law. While such dictionaries may have been intended for use by those working in that field, they can be just as useful to the layperson who seeks to understand a specialized term, or a word that takes on unique meaning when used within the context of a particular profession.

Sometimes specialty dictionaries appeal to a self-selecting group, such the *Ladies' Lexicon* (1856). Still others perform another kind of selection, identifying words that are particularly unusual and highlighting them in a collection. Focusing on the particular, the unusual, the specialized, the dictionaries shown here celebrate the inventiveness of language as well as the sheer fun to be had with words.

## TABLE CASE 3 HUMOROUS AND SPORTS DICTIONARIES

Other specialty dictionaries tend towards the humorous, such as the *Deb's Dictionary* or Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*. The development of humorous dictionaries shows how the format had become familiar enough that the genre of "dictionary" could be parodied. The definitions are entertaining simply for their content, but their existence also pokes fun at the notion of the dictionary as always being an authoritative guide. That is, part of the humor comes from playing with the dictionary's neutral style. For instance, Bierce's acerbic style of definition gains added sharpness by the reader's understanding of a dictionary as presenting words without editorial cynicism.

Sports enthusiasts constitute a large market for specialty dictionaries, some also humorous, some more serious. Some such dictionaries are devoted to only one sport, as seen in these examples from the Arthur W. Schultz Golf Collection. Others are closer to slang guides, such as *Sportsman's Slang* (1825). In any case, sports dictionaries demonstrate yet another way in which the dictionary genre has been adapted for a specialty audience.