

English Words: History and Structure

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Appendix I: an introduction to dictionaries

1 The origins of dictionaries

Dictionaries are a recent invention. Human language, in a form that must have resembled modern languages pretty closely, has existed for at least 50,000 years, and it may have been developing in ways unique to humans for more than a million years. But writing systems of any kind are quite recent, originating in the Near East no more than a few thousand years ago. Obviously writing systems have to exist before there is any need for dictionaries. The earliest alphabetic writing system, the kind that is universally used in western languages, is that of Greek, developed around the Aegean Sea less than a thousand years before the birth of Christ, and from it all the others are descended, either in the eastern version (Cyrillic) or the western (Roman). But inventive as the ancient classical civilizations were, they did not invent dictionaries – they invented grammars, they invented geometry, they invented the Olympic games, but not dictionaries. Dictionaries, curiously, are a quite accidental by-product of ignorance. The monks working in scriptoria (places where books were copied by hand, since printing had not been invented) in the Middle Ages often did not know Latin very well. Most of the texts they were copying were written in Latin; but the monks could not read it easily, and they jogged their memories as any elementary language student might do today. They wrote translations (“glosses”) between the lines. Other monks later made lists of the glosses, and these were the earliest Latin-to-English “dictionaries.” All this took place about 700 years before someone realized there might be money to be made by publishing lists of hard words with explanations of their meanings. The first such publication appeared within the lifetime of Queen Elizabeth I, who died in 1603. 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.

2 Types of dictionaries

Dictionaries either give information about equivalences between two languages – so-called bi-lingual dictionaries, which we use

in translating a language we do not know well; or they give information about a language we already know and want to know better. These latter books are monolingual dictionaries. Such dictionaries now exist for virtually all national languages and for many local languages. We are concerned here specifically with monolingual English dictionaries.

Monolingual English dictionaries are of two distinct types, depending on the audience to which they are addressed: (1) specialized dictionaries, aimed to clarify the technical jargon of various professional and scholarly areas; and (2) general-purpose dictionaries, aimed to help native speakers understand the precise meanings, pronunciations, spellings, usages, and histories of the words of their language, including some of the technical words. The technical words that are found in a general-purpose dictionary usually constitute only a small fraction of the technical terminology of any specialized field, and the more recent coinages rarely appear. Furthermore they almost never have the kinds of encyclopedic explanations and illustrations that make a special-purpose dictionary useful to specialists. It is impossible to assess the technical dictionaries unless you are already an expert in the relevant field. We will refer briefly to some specialized dictionaries of interest to a general audience (for example, dictionaries of slang, dictionaries of Americanisms). Our main concern, however, is with the general-purpose dictionaries of English that all of us consult with great frequency, simply as part of being or becoming educated users of English.

General-purpose dictionaries are of two types also: (1) so-called unabridged dictionaries, and (2) desk dictionaries, which are shortened forms of the full dictionaries, either for college use or for use at lower educational levels. Desk dictionaries are the ones that we consult most of the time, in part because the unabridged dictionaries are ungainly and over-sized, in part because most of us don't have access to an unabridged dictionary at home or in our offices.

2.1 Unabridged

What does “unabridged” mean? First, it does not mean, as one might think, that an “unabridged dictionary” contains every English word. Nobody knows how many words English has. The blurbs on the jackets of various dictionaries may state that the dictionary contains “more than” 200,000 words, but that is difficult to determine. All one can count is “entries” or “headwords,” and even that turns out to be a slippery notion because what is a headword in one dictionary may be subordinated – listed below the main entry – in another. Landau (*Dictionaries: The Art and Craft of Lexicography*, p. 84) characterizes the American system of entry counting thus:

- (1) Every word or phrase that is explicitly or implicitly defined, so long as it is clearly identifiable, usually by appearing in bold-face type, is an entry.
- (2) The more entries one has or can claim, the better.

He goes on to point out that in a particular dictionary the entry for *parachute* (*n.*) counts as five entries because the forms *parachuted*, *parachuting*, *parachute* (*v.*) and *parachutist* all appear down inside the entry. But there is surely a large difference in the “counting value” of some of these “countable” entries. Size alone, measured by number of entries, does not make a dictionary better. In fact entry-counts are good mostly for publicity purposes. “Unabridged” means only this: the dictionary is not a shortened version of some other dictionary. It was compiled from scratch, which is to say, largely from its own files of citations, with all definitions and arrangements of meanings and examples determined by its own editors. However, dictionary producers are notorious plagiarists, and in fact have to be: every dictionary of the last 250 years has depended heavily on its predecessors, simply because the job is too big to be done really from scratch. The extremely high degree of originality of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (discussed below), the only one certainly compiled from its own files of citations, is in part due to necessity: it was the first (and still the only) dictionary ever to try to include every word that had appeared in English since the Norman Conquest, barring only technical terms that had not become common parlance. Probably the best understanding of “unabridged” is therefore something like “too big to serve easily as a desk dictionary, and having considerably more entries than desk dictionaries typically do, normally at least twice as many.”

2.2 The *Oxford English Dictionary*

The *OED*, as it is generally called (or simply *The Oxford*), 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 nevertheless has to be viewed as the greatest of all unabridged dictionaries – not just in English but in any language. Nothing exactly comparable to it exists for Russian, German, Spanish, French, or Italian. 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 period of Geoffrey Chaucer, who died in 1400). 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 fully-updated 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 together on a single page – and a magnifying glass is provided; and (3) a compact disk, containing the whole dictionary as well as search programs which enable you to bring up onto your computer screen information which would take days to assemble from the printed versions. Unfortunately, the only one of these three versions which might be called "inexpensive" or even "moderately priced" is the compact edition, which has on several occasions been made available at a very reasonable price as a bonus for joining one book club or another. The CD-ROM version is between \$200 and \$400, depending on which version you choose; the hard-copy version is about three times that much. A third edition, which will certainly be available in electronic form also, is projected for the year 2005.

This great dictionary is so important to all work on the history of the English language that one should know how it came in existence. The first edition of the *OED* was compiled between 1884 and 1928; it contained about 240,000 entries. Recall, however, that this number included all the earlier as well as current words of English, so probably half the headword entries were obsolete. Furthermore, 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. The policies of later dictionaries like *Merriam-Webster's* have been somewhat inconsistent on this issue, but they have generally included much more such terminology than the *OED*.

2.2.1 The editors

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. Prior to that there were two very important earlier editors, under the loose control of The Philological Association which had initiated the entire project of data collection by hundreds of readers: Herbert Coleridge, a descendant of the poet, who died after two years; and

Frederick Furnivall, who installed a hierarchical structure of sub-editors to organize the citation slips that were sent in by the readers. He was otherwise negligent, and the project nearly died. But he was responsible for bringing into the work both Murray himself, and the backing of the Oxford University Press. 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 tombstone-sized¹ volumes in 1928. He worked at it continuously for the last thirty-seven years of his life,² eighty to ninety hours a week. He collected and organized citations from the hundreds of individual readers who were solicited from all over the English-speaking world though mainly from England and Scotland. While it was Samuel Johnson (1755) who first provided citations to defend and illustrate his definitions, citations usually chosen by Johnson from learned authors and often written down straight out of Johnson's own prodigious memory, it was Murray who made a science of it, insisting that every nuance of every word be justified by citations from published and dated sources. He carefully sorted his citation slips and arranged them in historical order by senses, so that one can see for every word what the date of the earliest occurrence³ was and what the earliest sense was and how, step by step, the meaning changed or new meanings arose from older ones. The *OED* citation file, at the time that publication of fascicles began in 1884, was already in excess of six million; and it has continued to be enriched to the present day under the later editors. The editor who produced the four-volume supplement of 1986 (incorporating the 1933 supplement) was R. W. Burchfield. The second edition of the *OED*, in 1989, which fully integrates both supplements, contains two-and-a-half million quotations selected from the citation files to support the definitions. The CD-ROM versions appeared in 1992 and 1994. The second edition was produced by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, who were also responsible for directing the work that put the dictionary into its present computer-accessible form on CD-ROM for either Macintosh or PC's.

2.2.2 Reduced versions of the *OED*

The *OED* has twice been the source of highly selective reduced-size versions. The first of these is *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*⁴

¹ This felicitous phrase is borrowed from Simon Winchester's *The Professor and the Madman*, New York: Harper Collins 1998. His delightful book recounts in detail the twenty-year relationship between Sir James Murray and Dr. William C. Minor, Murray's most prolific supplier of citations. ² He died in 1915 at the age of 78.

³ The *OED*, first edition and supplements, was not always correct about earliest occurrence, and there are many learned articles in the lexicographic literature citing earlier occurrences than those that Murray and his readers found – about 40,000 of them up to this time. All this new information of course has been included in *OED2*, and the scholarly game of finding earlier dates starts all over again. ⁴ Edited by William Little.

published in 1933. It has been revised twice, once in 1944⁵ and most recently in 1993⁶ under the title *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. This version was released on CD-ROM in 1997. This dictionary, in its various editions and formats, has been very popular and has sold well, though it is somewhat difficult to appreciate how so many purchasers have put it to use. It is too big for a desk dictionary and it is certainly not unabridged. As Onions wrote in his Preface to the second printing of 1936, “The aim of this Dictionary is to present in miniature all the features of the principal work.”

The etymological portion of the *OED* – just the etymological portion – was the basis for the second selective version, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966).⁷ This version is wonderful for etymology, and it is the right size for a desk dictionary, but in fact since it has neither extended definitions nor illustrative quotations, it is not useful as a desk dictionary and is useful even for etymological purposes only if you can’t get your hands on the *OED2* CD-ROM. In 1986 Oxford published *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*,⁸ with a paperback reprint in 1993. The *Concise* version succeeds in reducing the Onions version from 1,024 pages to half that length, with most information preserved in spite of the reduction, to say nothing of the quite affordable price. But it is really difficult to use because it is so compact and abbreviated; and it does not serve at all as a desk dictionary and rather minimally as an etymological dictionary.

2.3 Merriam-Webster

Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, published by the Merriam-Webster Company in 1961 (*NID3*), 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. The fact that it is almost forty years old says something about the incredible expense and time required to update or replace a great unabridged dictionary. It replaced *Webster’s New International Dictionary* of 1934 (*NID2*), which remains the largest of all English dictionaries, having over 600,000 entries. *NID3* was shortened (at the same time that over 100,000 new entries were included, which means that 250,000 entries were dropped from *NID2*) mainly to make it possible to bind it by machine (it would have been prohibitively expensive,

⁵ Edited by C. T. Onions. ⁶ Edited by Leslie Brown.

⁷ Completed by Dr. C. T. Onions in 1966 (he died while it was going through final editing; the work was completed by Dr. G. W. S. Friedrichsen and R. W. Burchfield). Onions was himself the sixth and last editor of the original *OED*.

⁸ Edited by T. F. Hoad.

in 1961, to bind it by hand-stitching in the way that *NID2* was bound during the Great Depression when labor was cheap).

The name “Webster’s,” at least in America, is almost synonymous with “dictionary.” One should know, however, that the name “Webster’s” is in the public domain. The only publishing company whose work is directly descended from that of the nineteenth-century American lexicographical giant, Noah Webster, is the G. and C. Merriam Company of Springfield, Massachusetts. Its founders, after Webster’s death in 1843, bought out the rights to the 1841 edition of Webster’s *American Dictionary* (first edition 1828). But the Merriam-Webster dictionaries are not the only ones that use the Webster name to add prestige to their product. One of the best desk dictionaries with the Webster name, *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the English Language* (first edition 1953) is totally unrelated to the Merriam-Webster company or to the Webster family. Another great desk dictionary (also unrelated to the earlier Webster’s), the *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary* (1992), simply has the name “Webster’s” inserted into its earlier title, which was *The Random House College Dictionary* (1968, 1975).

2.4 Webster’s competitors

Although the name “Webster’s” has great visibility in the modern marketplace, and though the cachet of the name certainly helps to sell dictionaries in modern America, it is worth pointing out that this is due to a considerable extent to hype and mythology. Noah Webster was not the best lexicographer even of his own time, though he was the most influential one because of his *Speller* – which was the textbook of choice throughout most of the century. In his own time the best American lexicographer was probably Joseph Worcester, whose *Universal and Critical Dictionary of the English Language* appeared as the only American competitor for Webster in 1846, the final revised version in 1860. At both dates it was superior to Webster’s in almost every way, but in 1864 a vastly improved version of the Webster’s appeared (reworked by two scholars hired by Webster’s son-in-law, and consequently known as the *Webster-Mahn* in deference to the German scholar who totally replaced the Webster etymologies). This was really the first “unabridged” Webster’s dictionary, and it won the competition against Worcester in the marketplace. Near the end of the century William Dwight Whitney, a Sanskrit scholar at Yale University, produced the great *Century Dictionary*, which, in the words of Sidney Landau “is surely one of the handsomest dictionaries ever made.”⁹ It was never revised, however, and is now of historical interest only. But

⁹ Sidney I. Landau, *Dictionaries: The Art and Craft of Lexicography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989: 72.

Whitney was not the only end-of-century competition for Webster's place in lexicography: There was also the 1893 Funk and Wagnalls unabridged *Standard Dictionary of the English Language*, revised and enlarged in 1913 as the *New Standard Dictionary*, with 450,000 entries, making it a true competitor for the unabridged Webster's. Though it was never later fully revised, and it therefore dropped out of competition, this dictionary made many important changes in dictionary practice which are continued in the various dictionaries connected with the name of Clarence Barnhart and with the dictionaries published by Random House.

2.5 Writing dictionaries

All modern dictionaries draw much of their historical and etymological information from the *OED*. Etymologies and definitions are based on citations. What is a citation? It is an index card (or, these days, a computer file) which lists a word and a quotation containing that word – if possible in a context that clearly implies a specific meaning – and gives the source, author, and date of the citation. As Landau says, “In spite of other sources [such as earlier dictionaries, either your own or your competitors”], a large ongoing citation file is essential for the preparation of any new general dictionary or for the revision of an existing dictionary.”¹⁰ We have already mentioned the citation file of the *OED*, and a bit about how it came into existence. In America, the G. and C. Merriam Company is reputed to have the largest continuously updated and current file of citations of the words they enter into their dictionaries. Both Random House and Barnhart have independent citation files. The quality of a dictionary ultimately depends on the quality of the writing and editing.

2.6 Desktop dictionaries

2.6.1 For British users

There is really only one desktop dictionary likely to be satisfactory in Britain – *The Chambers Dictionary*. This great dictionary is available in many editions, with small variations in the title. An edition called *The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* was ambitiously published in 1997, three years in advance of the millennium bug. Its ultimate ancestor, *The Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, first edition, came out in 1901. The 1998 edition does away with the centennial puffery and goes simply under the name *The Chambers Dictionary*. The one-page discussion (p. xx) of what American English is like (i.e., how it differs from

¹⁰ Landau, *Dictionaries*, p. 152.

British English) is about as useful as a comparable American one-page explanation of British English would be that was supposed to include the southern counties of Britain, the north country, Scotland, and Ireland. However, *Chambers* often records American usage in pronunciation, a favor which is not reciprocated by some American dictionaries. For instance, *schedule* is recorded by *Chambers* with the [sk-] pronunciation marked as “esp. US,” but *The American Heritage Dictionary* (see below) does not record the British sh- pronunciation at all, even though it is widely favored in Canada. *Merriam-Webster’s* (every modern edition), however, does record the difference.

The most conspicuous feature of *Chambers* is that all derived forms are listed within the entry under a single headword. Thus if you want to find the computer term *descriptor*, you have to look under *describe*. If you want to find *repentance* you look under *repent*. Thus there are many fewer headwords in *Chambers* than in typical American dictionaries, though the total number of words defined in *Chambers* is actually somewhat larger than we find in any American desk dictionary. *Chambers* also has an appendix that lists common phrases and even quotations from the classical languages and modern foreign languages, and another appendix which gives the origins of many first names. *Chambers* does not give the dates when a word entered English, which is a useful feature of several American dictionaries and of the *OED*. In general, etymology is treated with minimal detail in *Chambers*.

2.6.2 For American users

At least four possible choices have to be considered.

- (1) *The American Heritage Dictionary*
- (2) *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*
- (3) *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*
- (4) *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*

2.6.2.1 The *American Heritage Dictionary*.¹¹ This dictionary was innovative in two important ways:

(1) Rather than placing all the etymological information in the entry, in case the word contained a root derived from Proto-Indo-European (the parent language of most European languages, discussed in Chapter 3) the entry provided a reference to an appendix called *Indo-European Roots*, where one can find, for every root, not only the word

¹¹ Ed. by William Morris. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969, reprinted with minor updating, 1979. (*AHD1*) – Now superseded by the Third Edition of 1992 (*AHD3*), ed. by Anne H. Soukhanov. In between *AHD1* and *AHD3* appeared a “College Edition” (*AHD2*, 1982) which is so drastically shortened, especially in the word histories (etymologies), that it is of much less value than the other versions of the *AHD*, for any purpose whatever.

in question but often dozens of other words which are related by virtue of being derived from the same point of origin. Although fine for our purposes in this book, most readers found the appendix of little value because they did not know how to use it. It is unlikely ever to be valued highly by the general public.

(2) Since there had been much negative publicity about the usage labels in *Merriam-Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, the *American Heritage Dictionary* took advantage of the bad publicity to step into the breach and created a "Usage Panel" who made judgments, reported in the dictionary, about their preferences in several hundred instances of disputed usage (e.g., as between "He laid down on the bed" and "He lay down on the bed"). The panel's recommendations were sometimes too sensitive to "establishment" usage; they were often keen to protect the language from decay and corruption, metaphorically speaking. But the *Heritage* received lots of good publicity from this ploy: as a merchandising technique it was successful. As a record of actual usage, which is what dictionaries are obligated to report, it is dubious, at best, and cannot be viewed as especially authoritative.

2.6.2.2 The *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionaries*.

Produced by The G. and C. Merriam Co. of Springfield, Mass. The latest edition is the 10th (1993). The 9th (1983) and the 8th (1973) are also excellent dictionaries, but the 7th (1963) is too old to use today. These dictionaries, depending on when they were printed, go by slightly different names, such as *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*. New printings with minor revisions come out almost every year, but as the dates above indicate (1963, 1973, 1983, 1993), major re-editing to produce a really new *Collegiate* takes about ten years. Several editors have been responsible for these superb dictionaries over the years, beginning with Philip Babcock Gove.¹² The important thing to realize about all the *Collegiate* dictionaries that the G. and C. Merriam Company has produced is that they are based squarely on the citation files of the two greatest unabridged American dictionaries of this century, namely Second (1934) and Third (1961) *Webster's New International Dictionaries*, and of course all of them draw on the *OED* for etymological information and much else.

2.6.2.3 *Random House Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.¹³ Based on *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*,¹⁴ 1966 and 1973. The latter is claimed to be an unabridged dictionary, and is the

¹² Gove edited the unabridged *3rd International* and the *Seventh Collegiate*; Henry Bosley Woolf and Frederick C. Mish, respectively, edited the *Eighth* and *Ninth Collegiate* dictionaries.

¹³ Ed. by Robert Costello, New York: Random House, 1991. ¹⁴ Ed. by Jesse Stein.

basis of the 1993 *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*. But this excellent dictionary is just too large to serve as a desk dictionary, and one is probably better served by the 1991 College version. Both for etymology and for general use, the College version is hard to improve upon.

2.6.2.4 Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language.¹⁵ The third edition is available in both full and college versions, like the *Heritage*. In spite of the gimmicky title (it has no special connection with Webster, and there is nothing specific to the New World or to American English about it except for the fact that it gives etymologies for American place names, a feature which is not found in other general-purpose dictionaries), this is a good desk dictionary, one of the very best when it first appeared in 1953, and it remains highly competitive in quality after its 1988 revision.

2.6.3 Important differences between dictionaries

Most words have several different, though related, meanings. These are called senses. Dictionaries divide up their definitions into categories, one for each discernible sense. Thus the *OED*, for the noun *work*, divides the senses into 23 main categories, with up to seven or eight sub-categories under each of the main ones. *Chambers* has 20, though unlike most dictionaries they are not labeled a, b, . . . x, but are only set apart by semicolons. The *Heritage* has 15 categories. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate* has 11. Such distinctions are a necessary part of providing comprehensive definitions, and it is to be expected that all dictionaries will have similar if not identical categories of sense. But the order in which the senses are presented is radically different, and has been known to lead to serious misunderstandings on the part of dictionary users.

2.6.3.1 Historical order vs. logical order. The *OED* and all the Merriam-Webster dictionaries arrange their senses according to the dates when each sense first came into English. Quoting from Frederick C. Mish, the editor-in-chief of the *Ninth Collegiate*,

The order of senses within an entry is historical: the sense known to have been first used in English is entered first . . . When a numbered sense is further subdivided into lettered sub senses, the inclusion of particular sub senses within a sense is based upon their semantic relationship to one another, but their order is likewise historical. Divisions of sub senses . . . are also in historical order with respect to one another (*Merriam-Webster's Ninth Collegiate*, p.19)

Since the word *fatal* is used in the example quoted just below by the *Heritage*, let us see how the *Ninth Collegiate* defines it:

¹⁵ First edition by David Guralnik and Joseph Friend. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953, rev. 1970, 1976, 3rd edn. 1988.

1 obs: fated 2: fateful <a ~ hour> 3 a: of or relating to fate b: resembling fate in proceeding according to a fixed sequence c: determining one's fate 4 a: causing death b: bringing ruin.

This is terribly misleading unless you know that the first three definitions are ancient history, as it were, and only the fourth one applies to current usage. And this fact is not even made apparent in the definition itself (e.g., by saying "current meaning," or marking the ancient meanings with an asterisk (except for the first one, marked obsolete). One understands why the Merriam Company uses historical order: using historical order is determinate. We know the history, because the history has been thoroughly investigated and reported in the *OED*. But it has a very big disadvantage for the ordinary user, as is pointed out by the editorial staff of the *Heritage*:

Entries containing more than one sense are arranged for the convenience of contemporary dictionary users with the central and often most commonly sought meanings first. Senses and sub senses are grouped to show their relationships with each other. For example, in the entry for *fatal* . . . the commonly sought meaning "Causing or capable of causing death" appears first and the now obsolete sense "Having been destined; fated" comes last in the series of five. (*Heritage 3rd edn.*, xxxix)

This is called logical order or frequency-determined order, the idea being that the meanings which are most frequent or most central come before those that are less common or more peripheral. The problem is that unlike historical ordering this ordering is not determinate. Most frequent in what kinds of texts? at what style level? in what context of use? Does the "logical" order somehow reflect a fundamental fact about the mental storage system of the typical speaker of English, thereby having claim to genuine psychological reality? Are there enough frequency studies to base these preference judgments on? The answer is, there are some, but not enough yet to provide consistent answers. This means that the ordering really depends on the shrewd guesses of the editors. They will differ.

To see how editors can differ on this crucial judgment, consider the definitions of the adjective *appreciable* found in the *Collegiate*, the *Heritage*, the *Random House*, and *Chambers*. In the *Collegiate*, the definition is correctly historical: "capable of being perceived or measured." In the *Heritage*, the definition does not differ, surprisingly: "possible to estimate, measure, or perceive." In *Random House* the definition differs in a crucial way, namely it does not include the notion "measure." It says "enough to be felt or estimated, noticeable, perceptible." *Webster's New World* agrees with *Random House* from its very first edition in 1953. *Chambers* supports the latter two but includes the traditional sense "measurable."

It is clear from actual usage of the word *appreciable* in sentences like "There was no *appreciable* amount of moisture on the grass this

morning” that, of these four, only *New World* and *Random House* are correct, while *Chambers* has split the difference. The modern sense of the word is clearly vague and does not include literal measurement, since with instrumentation any amount of anything can be measured, and that is not what *appreciable* means. Therefore the *Collegiate* definition is historically correct but misleading about modern usage. One would not expect this lead to be followed by *Heritage*, which agrees with *Chambers* and *Random House* as to theory of presentation and the logic on which definitions should be based. The reason they differ is that it is often difficult to know what the “most commonly sought meaning” is, or what the logical “core” meaning is, and when they are uncertain, it appears that they fall back on history. History is, nevertheless, not only the easy way to go, but clearly the less desirable, except in an explicitly specialized historical dictionary like the *OED*.

2.6.3.2 The position of etymologies in dictionary entries. This correlates with the arrangement of sense ordering. In all dictionaries produced by the Merriam Company, where the earliest sense is first, the etymology is also first (right after pronunciation). This is also true of *Webster’s New World*, which arranges senses according to their historical semantic development, except that technical meanings are at the very end. The other two desk dictionaries – *Chambers* and *Random House* – place the etymology at the end of the entry, just after the oldest senses. *Heritage* has a uniquely different manner of presenting etymologies, as we noted in our discussion of it above (the *Indo-European Roots* appendix), but when they place an etymology in the text rather than in the appendix, it is placed at the end, in agreement with *Chambers* and *Random House*.

2.6.3.3 Dating of earliest examples. The tenth *Collegiate*, like its competitor the *Random House* (both College version and the unabridged version), gives the date of the earliest example of the first sense of each word (the earlier *Collegiates* do not, nor do *Chambers* or the *Heritage*). This procedure is standard in the specialized historical dictionaries but not usual in contemporary general-purpose dictionaries, though it is an extremely useful piece of information for etymology.

2.6.3.4 Specialized dictionaries. The number of specialized dictionaries is vast, and, as we remarked earlier, one cannot even judge whether a specialized dictionary is good or not unless one is a specialist in the field. There is virtually no end to specialized dictionaries – dictionaries of Old English, of Middle English, pronouncing dictionaries, reverse dictionaries, chronological dictionaries, frequency dictionaries, rhyming dictionaries, dictionaries of proverbs, dictionaries

of loanwords, bibliographical dictionaries, legal terms, medical terms, music, astronomy, geography, computer terms. Because this book is primarily about etymology, especially the classical origins of vast numbers of English words, it is appropriate to discuss specialized etymological dictionaries here, at least briefly, because they are the places where one would go – beyond our desk dictionaries – to learn more about the history of words and phrases.

But first, why should one study etymology? In view of the fact that etymology often concerns itself with aspects of language that are sometimes fossilized and no longer relevant to our ordinary synchronic understanding of what words mean or how they are used, one may legitimately ask why one should bother. It generally turns out to be true that the study of the etymology of words enlightens us both as to interesting accidents in their history and, from a practical point of view, it gives us insights into their present meanings and into the meanings of other words which are related to the same sources, thereby expanding our vocabularies substantially and sharpening our awareness of the meanings of complex words. It also often enables us to guess correctly at the meaning of a new word we have never encountered before, which happens to contain some of the parts of words we have learned to analyze by the means discussed in this book. But the most important reason is to know our language history, just as we want to know the history of our social institutions, our technology, our ancestry, our government, and so on.

How study etymology? Happily, in this area of specialization we are well served indeed. The finest historical dictionary of any language, the basis for the historical information in all subsequent general purpose English dictionaries, is the *OED*, which was discussed at some length above. However, no dictionary can meet all imaginable etymological needs. In particular, the *OED* is incomplete with respect to American English. For more information in that area, four important resources exist:

(1) *A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles*, ed. by William A. Craigie and James R. Hulbert, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1938–44 (*DAE*), the main source of information about words that originated in the United States and words that are “representative.” Dr. Craigie was one of the editors of the *OED*, and in fact received his training with Sir James Murray himself, having started to work for Murray in 1897. He moved to Chicago specifically to create an American version of the *OED*.

(2) *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*, ed. by Mitford M. Mathews, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951 (*DA*), specifically dealing with words or expressions that originated in the United States.

(3) *The Dictionary of American Regional English*, ed. by Frederick G. Cassidy (*DARE*) (as of this writing, three volumes of a projected five had been published, covering the alphabet through the letter O). *DARE* is expected to provide definitive information about the regional distribution of vocabulary items, based on almost 3,000 interviews with individuals living in over 1,000 communities all over the United States.

(4) *Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, ed. by J. E. Lighter et al., vol. I (A–G) and II (H–O), of three projected volumes, published by Random House in 1994 and 1997. Fun to peruse, but one does not find in it a sharp differentiation between slang and ordinary usage: Lighter's dictionary has many words and phrases that under a stricter definition would have to be excluded.

2.6.3.5 Thesaurus. There is one type of dictionary which categorizes words only according to their semantic similarities, without regard for shared form or ancestry: this is called a thesaurus. The most famous such listing is *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, first published in 1852 and in many editions subsequently. For expanding one's vocabulary, a thesaurus is likely to be even more useful than a standard dictionary, because it is arranged according to a universal set of concepts (e.g. *space, matter, intellect, abstract relations*) and then each of these is divided further and further until finally all the words can be grouped together which refer to closely similar meanings. Definitions are not given, or at least not normally very detailed definitions, just synonyms; and much of the book is an elaborate index to help you find the head entry under which all the semantically similar words of a particular category are listed.

2.6.3.6 Dictionaries of synonyms. Besides *Roget*, there are dictionaries of synonyms in which the headword is more or less arbitrarily chosen, and of course alphabetically listed: i.e., the editor's choice of headwords is not part of an elaborate universal classificatory system, and in the entry all the semantically similar words are listed with explanations of the distinctions among them. *Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms* is an excellent such dictionary, as also is the Funk and Wagnall's *Modern Guide to Synonyms*. These are basically tools for writers, to help them avoid repeating the same word in different contexts (since English style has always placed a premium on variation and non-repetition).

2.7 Dictionary shelf-life

Several really excellent dictionaries like the *Century* and the *Funk and Wagnalls* have disappeared from the scene because they have

not been updated. The language is constantly changing, constantly in flux, and dictionaries must stay current – i.e., not more than ten to fifteen years out of date. The turnover rate is fairly shocking. For example, in 1977 the *Chambers Twentieth Century* put out a supplement to its 1972 edition which included these **new** entries:

alternative, adj. – as in *alternative technology*, *alternative life-style*
amniocentesis – the testing for foetal abnormalities
bananas – adj. mad, crazy, wild
-bashing as in *union-bashing*, *boss-bashing*

Going further down the list we find: *catch 22*, *database*, *day care*, *digital clock*, *floating currency*, *gang-bang*, *greenhouse effect*, *hype*, *liquid crystal display*, *modem*, *Ms.*, *pixel*, *safari park*, *sitcom*, *skateboard*, *skin-flick*, *tunnel vision*, *up-market*, *voice-over*, *yucky*, *zap*, *zero in on*, *zilch*, *zip code*, *zonked*. These words are so much part of British as well as American vocabulary today that it is difficult to imagine that the parents of the current college student generation would not have been familiar with them. Yet they became dictionary-worthy in the UK only between 1972 and 1977!

The G. and C. Merriam Company has dealt with this problem by releasing new versions of the *Collegiate* at intervals of approximately ten years, though the *Third International* is over forty years old. Other companies like Barnhart, whose most recently released full dictionary is twenty-five years old, have tried to deal with the updating issue by periodically releasing new material from their constantly updated citation files, such as *The Barnhart Dictionary of New English Since 1963* (1973) and at five-year intervals subsequently. This is an enormous service to the lexicographers, though it is not as obviously a valuable tool for the ordinary dictionary user. It is a terrible nuisance to look from one volume to another hoping to find the word in question. It now appears likely anyway that the updating of the future will be done on computer disks and/or CD-ROMs. This is relatively easy and relatively cheap. As we all move into cyberspace, the conventional printed dictionary may become one of the casualties, and we'll simply check in at a Web site (or, unfortunately, more likely a dozen Web sites) for the latest lexicographical information.¹⁶

¹⁶ For over fifty years, the journal *American Speech* has been recording the appearance of new words and the development of new meanings for old words in American English. *The Barnhart New-Words Concordance* by David Barnhart (Cold Spring, NY: Lexik House, 1944) provides an index to ten sources listing new words. The current web site for the American Dialect Society, which also has a discussion group on new words and other issues of American English, is:
<http://www.et.byu.edu/~lilliek/ads/index.htm>

Appendix II: morpheme list

This list includes all the morphemes¹ cited in the root exercises of the *Workbook* (part b in each chapter), plus the affixes cited in chapter 5 of the main text. The numbers in parentheses correspond to the chapter of the *Workbook* in which the morpheme is introduced for study or memorization. In the SOURCE column, asterisks mark Proto-Indo-European forms.

This appendix does NOT include the many other morphemes introduced as examples in the textbook.

MORPHEME	MEANING	EXAMPLES	SOURCE
1. a-, au-, an-	“lacking” (5)	asymmetric, amoral, atonal	G a/an-
2. ab-, a-, abs-	“from, away” (5)	abnormal, abstinence, abjure	L ab-
3. -able	“fit for” (5)	agreeable, comfortable, incalculable	L-abil(is)
4. ac, acer, acerb	“sharp, tip” (10)	acumen, acrid, acerbic, acme, exacerbate	G ak(os)
5. -acy, -asy	“state or quality” (5)	advocacy, intricacy, accuracy, ecstasy	L-cia
6. ad-	“toward” (5)	admit, advance, admonish	L ad-
7. -ade	“an action done” (5)	fusillade, tirade, masquerade, arcade	Fr -ade
8. ag, act	“act, drive” (9)	agent, act, agile, ambiguous, litigate, navigate	*ag
9. -age	“condition, state” (5)	anchorage, postage, coinage	L-atic(um)
10. agog	“teach, induce” (2)	pedagogue, demagogue, synagogue	*ag
11. agon	“struggle” (11)	antagonize, protagonist	*agon
12. agr	“field” (11)	agriculture, agrarian	*agr
13. -al	“act of” (5)	renewal, revival, trial	L-al(is)
14. -al (-ial, -ical, -ual)	“having the property of” (5)	conjectural, fraternal, dialectal, sensual	L-al(is)
15. al(i), ol(t)	“grow, nourish” (11)	adolescent, adult, alimentary (canal), coalesce	*al
16. al, all(o)	“other” (5)	alibi, allegory, allomorph, alien	*al
17. alg	“pain” (11)	analgesic, analgesia, algolagnia	G alg
18. alt	“high” (5)	altitude, altimeter, alto	L alt
19. ambi, amphi	“both,” “around” (5)	ambidextrous, ambivalent, preamble, amphiarthrosis	*ambhi
20. amb	“walk” (5)	ambulance, perambulate	L ambul
21. ampl	“large” (10)	amplify, amplitude	L ampl
22. -an, -ian	“belonging to, resembling” (5)	reptilian, Augustan, plebeian, patrician	L -anus
23. ana-	“back” (5)	anatomy, analogy	G ana-
24. -ance, -ence	“state, act, or fact of” (5)	repentance, perseverance, emergence	L -antia
25. ander	“male” (6)	android, androgynous, androgen	*andr
26. ang	“constrict” (7)	angst, anxious, anxiety, anguish, angina	*angh

¹ We have chosen base morphemes which are, with a few exceptions, near the top of the text-frequency and list-frequency counts found in Thorndike, E. L and I. Lorge (1959), *The Teacher's Wordbook of 30000 Words* (3rd edn.). [New York: Columbia University]. They are also high on the *American Heritage Frequency List*.