
ABSTRACT

Lexicography is considered a topic limited to the hallowed halls of learning; it is considered a scholarly discipline. A dictionary provides a description of the language in general use. English lexicographers study and record uses of language, analyze a corpus of language for evidence. They consider both the meaning and usages of words and compile definitions in a structured manner. Not many of us think of compiling a dictionary, nor do we pause to consider what is expected of a dictionary. For many of us it is a bound book and for the Gen Y or Z it is a soft copy, the format more or less remaining the same; our expectations that it shows the way to meanings like the traffic constable remain the same. But just as the entire world has been transformed with digitalization, the dictionary is also poised for a metamorphosis. Against this background this paper seeks to identify what exactly the role of a lexicographer is, in the current world ruled by technology. Is it merely to direct traffic to the words or can we expand the boundaries going beyond? How can digital technologies be used to enrich the format of a dictionary and enhance its function of mapping the words? This paper proposes to deal with these questions.

KEYWORDS: Lexicography. Lexicographer, online dictionaries, enriched format.

INTRODUCTION

Lexicography is considered a scholarly discipline limited to the hallowed halls of learning. It is the process of compiling a dictionary. (Lexicography is the lexicographer's lexicographical adventures in the realm of the lexemes of the language resulting in a lexicon.) A dictionary provides a description of the language in general use. English lexicographers study and record uses of language, they analyze a corpus of language for evidence. They consider both the meaning and usage of words and compile definitions in a structured manner.

People consider the dictionary an authority in matters of language. People look up a dictionary as a referential source of information related to orthography, pronunciation, meaning and usage, in certain cases the etymology, synonyms and antonyms are also referred to. People also refer the dictionary for identifying the correct usage. The dictionary acts as an arbiter of usage distinguishing between proper and improper usage. It plays a significant role in standardizing the language. It was Dr. Johnson's Dictionary of the English language that led to the standardization of the English Language.

Dr. Johnson's "The Dictionary of the English Language" (1755) was one of the authoritative dictionaries in English, considered the first comprehensive and most influential dictionary in the English language. Johnson was considered the seminal authority on language. For more than one and a half centuries Dr. Johnson's served as the Bible of the English Language until the publication of the Oxford English Dictionary in twelve volumes in 1928. Oxford English Dictionary remains the most comprehensive and trusted English language dictionary to this day, regularly being updated by a dedicated team. "The Dictionary" as it is revered, is a sacred book, an authority on the language. It comes with the tag authoritative and reliable. The appearance of the dictionary was also grandiose some even needing a dictionary stand.

Down the centuries language was continuously changing. Accompanying the linguistic changes were the socio political changes and technological advancements each affecting the language significantly. With the advent of computers, print dictionaries were available in electronic form and were very identical with the print form. Along with the hard copy of the book, CD ROMs were also provided. The CDROMs provided the searchability option. It

was easy for the user to type in the word and refer the word of his or her choice. The print form was soon enriched by the multimedia offering the audio content to the dictionaries.



Oxford Advanced Learner's Compass (CD ROM)

The internet was the defining moment even in dictionary making. Winds of change soon blew through lexicography ushering in radical changes in dictionary writing. Video content was also introduced into the dictionary. Hitherto, mere textual definitions became enriched with the audio –video content. There was no constraint for the dictionaries on the net for online dictionaries. The constraint of space that is found in print dictionary was no longer a hindrance. The dictionary could be enriched in terms of content. Searching the meaning became faster and easier, meanwhile enriching the user's experience. Internet provided easy accessibility and could reach out to any number of users. The internet powered by multimedia made it convenient for user collaboration and innovation. This, in turn, was fuelled by the rise in literacy and the easy accessibility of the internet bringing the once very bulky dictionary into the palm of the users. The dictionary evolved rapidly, from the print form through the electronic form to the mobiles and the internet.

Lexicography took a totally different turn as the norms began changing. Online dictionaries became an all encompassing and engaging experience. Dictionaries are both free and paid. While the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) needs subscription, there are also dictionaries like Dictionary.com, Merriam Webster Dictionary, Collins English Dictionary and Collins Dictionaries, Oxford Dictionaries, Macmillan Dictionary, Cambridge Free English dictionary that offer free access to the readers. Simultaneously the dictionaries go beyond the traditional dictionaries which have referral function and evaluative function.

Searching the word could not have been easier with the online dictionary. Entering the word followed by a click brings the entire information about the word. For example: the word vape yielded 2,79,00,000 results in 0.61 seconds.(Oxford English Dictionary crowned vape the word of the year for 2014). This would enormously benefit the reader as a wealth of information can be accessed.

Generally dictionaries offer meanings of words, spelling, pronunciation, etymology, grammatical references, synonyms and antonyms and usage. Online dictionaries now expand their purview offering additional features. Collins English Dictionary provides a dictionary, thesaurus, translator, and interesting information about words and word games for word buffs and also blogs. Word for the day is a common option provided by many online dictionaries. Merriam Webster of the Encyclopedia Britannica Company, in addition to the corpus of words for meanings, also reaches out to the language enthusiasts with quizzes, word of the day (for which the reader has to subscribe).



Merriam Webster Dictionary (Online Dictionary)

Macmillan Dictionary offers meanings, and offers options to learn English, live English and love English. Adding to these usual search features, the Reverse Dictionary.com, the Onelook reverse Dictionary provide the option of finding the word for the meaning. All these new features have enriched the content and made it all the more interesting. Rather than being a source of reference alone used to look up meanings or usage, the book (?) started assuming new dimensions. It became more interesting, more readable, where users can read it like a book.

The interactive features of the internet facilitated user interaction. Any person could add a word and present his own entry in the dictionary. Some dictionaries can be written by the users for the users. The definition assumes a democratic significance as it becomes by the users for the users. Wiktionary and Urban dictionary.com offer this opportunity to the users to add their entry. For them any one who contributes becomes a lexicographer. Macmillan offers the option of open dictionary where the readers send the new entries.

It can be seen that the entire concept of Dictionary writing and compiling is changing. Modern lexicography is introducing revolutionary changes. Earlier compiling a dictionary was the prerogative of a select few. But with online dictionaries who should write a dictionary or compile a dictionary also started changing. Bypassing the lexicographer anyone could be one. How the dictionary is to be used, how it is to be presented, and who should compile and write the dictionary are all potential areas to be addressed.

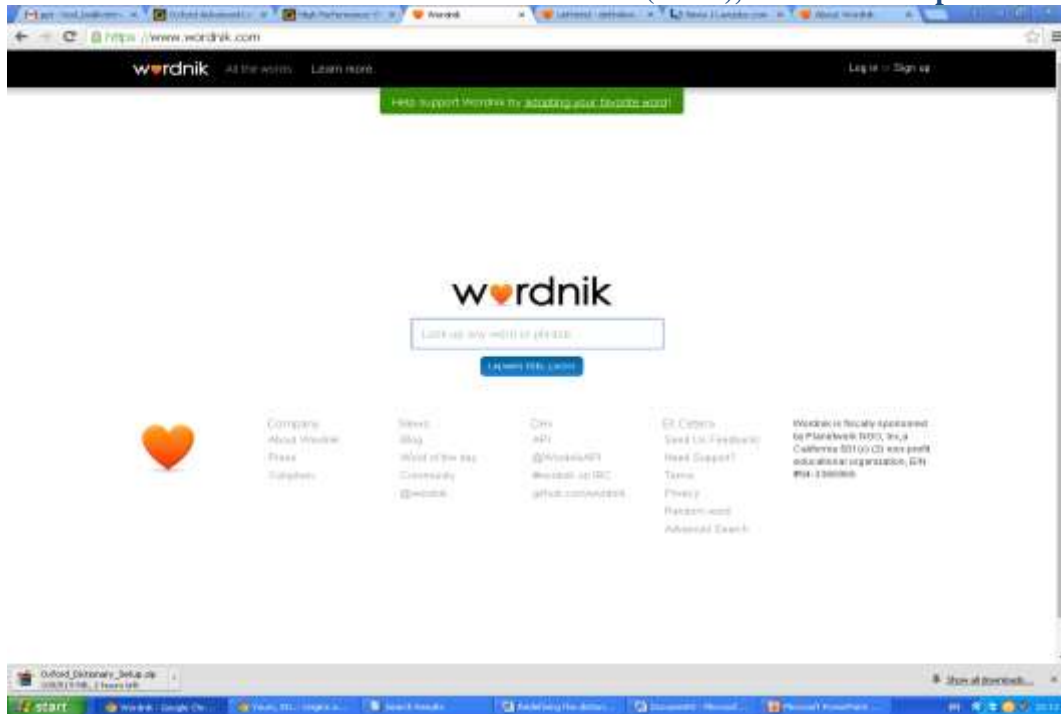
As the constraint of space got limited, and with the internet providing tools of accessibility and interaction, the content of the online dictionaries enlarged from merely giving the meanings, and usage and etymologies, in addition to spelling and pronunciation. Dictionaries through audio and video facilities help in greater understanding. In addition, translation, quizzes and word games make it interesting. Of late, the dictionary has also acquired a new dimension of humour. Bordering on wit and pun the “Dictionary of English: The Udder Side” makes dictionary reading an enjoyable experience.

In addition to content how the meaning or definition is to be conveyed is also undergoing change. Traditional dictionaries present only words that are acceptable in the language. Words considered bad are avoided. But Erin McKean, a lexicographer, questions this very function of a lexicographer. She believes that the lexicographer is not a traffic cop policing the language and keeping the bad elements out. Her argument is that lexicographers need to have a scientific attitude. They should record all the words in the language and leave out the aesthetic judgments to the writers and the speakers.

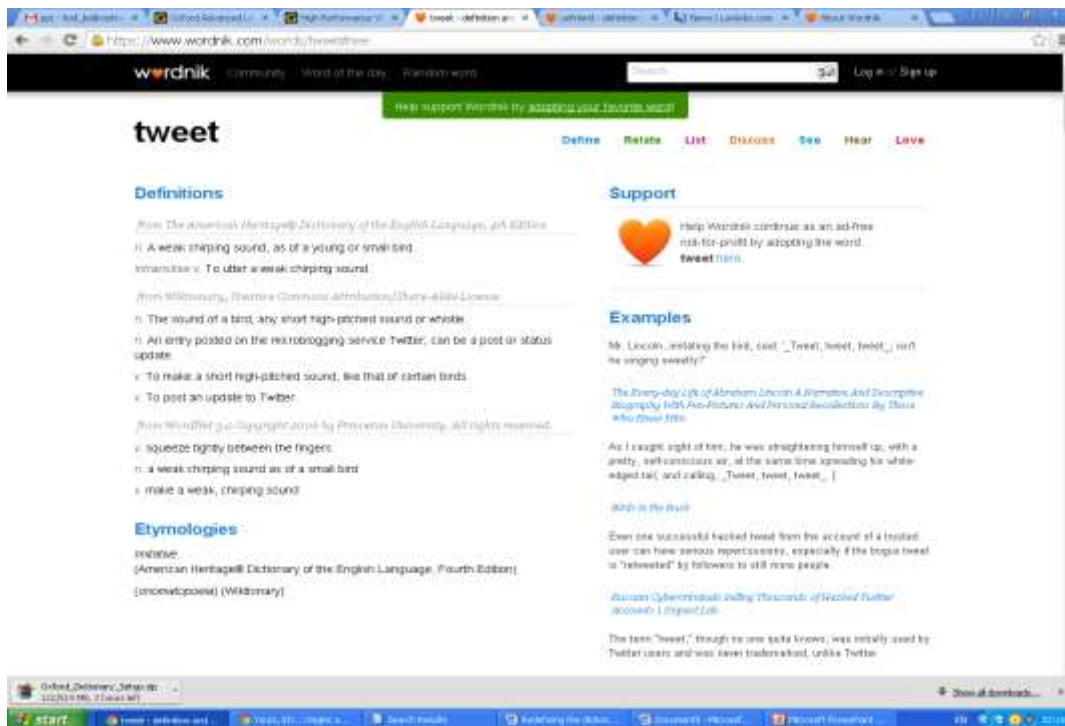
Erin McKean finds that the print dictionaries are only a limited part of the language. Similarly the electronic versions reflect the print mode only that they are faster. One cannot but agree with Ms. Mc Kean’s suggestion that traditional dictionaries are synechdochical, i.e. these dictionaries do not have all the words in the language, and a part represents the whole. She criticizes the people for limiting the function of a lexicographer, considering them to be like cops separating the bad from the good. What should a lexicographer do? He or she should be like a fisher man casting his net into the big, deep ocean of language. She advises the lexicographers to be scientific and record all the words in the language. A lexicographer should be like a scientist, objective and rational. Just as a biologist studies all the animals irrespective of whether they are beautiful or ugly, a lexicographer must not be concerned with good or bad words. A lexicographer’s job is to record all the words in the language. For her words are tools to express ideas and there are no bad tools or good tools. She questions ...”if we think words are the tools that we use to build the expressions of our thoughts, how can you say that screwdrivers are better than hammers? How can you say that a sledgehammer is better than a ball peen hammer? They’re just the right tool for the job.” She invites contributions from the people and encourages users to add more new words. She created Wordnik to house words that are not found in traditional dictionaries.

In traditional dictionaries, the data was collected, and upon careful analysis the lexicographer provided a few statements explaining the meaning. Sometimes the definitions are a dense abstract and not clear. Erin McKean the founder of Wordnik.com attributes these definitions to lack of space. As the internet does not have space constraint, in her online dictionary ‘Wordnik’ Erin McKean, provides a new way to discover meaning. The definitions are provided from various sources, attempting to provide a comprehensive meaning of the word. She provides real examples from as many sources as possible culling information from major news media like the Wall Street Journal and USA today, from the books provided by Project Gutenberg, from the internet archive, blogs and many other internet sources. In Mc Kean’s own words, she strives to provide a 360 degree view of the word. She believes in the idea that dictionaries do not exist to give definitions but to help the readers grasp the meaning of a word.

In her dictionary, citations or examples are given along with the new words. The citations constitute the language data which illustrate “not only to understand what a word means, but how it’s being used, who’s using it, and how long it’s been around. If the word hasn’t made its way into the traditional dictionary yet, the citations stand in place of a definition”. (Tenore)



Wordnik Online Dictionary



Wordnik Online Dictionary

It is important to realize that language is constantly changing and new words are born and old words die out. Erin McKean calls upon people to contribute new words. Lexicographers and readers alike should realize that words gain

importance not because of being included in a dictionary. They assumed significance because of how people use them, and then they are added to the dictionary.

Erin McKean encourages people to come up with new words. According to her, words become real when they are used. Several online dictionaries offer this option for users to participate. McKean's online dictionary Wordnik precisely does the same. "If a word is persuasive enough, and if your usage is provocative enough and feels real enough, you can make a word mean what you want it to meanAt Wordnik, we're trying to redefine what meaning means" she adds.

Merriam Webster Dictionary also offers the option of new words. Here the neologisms and slang words come to roost, they are quarantined and after they gain respectability they enter the language.

Here are a few user submitted words displayed on Macmillan online.

[gription](#) : the purchase gained by friction...

[bougie](#) : bourgeois - ostentatiously upper-middle-class...

[ginormous](#) : extraordinarily large...

[woot](#) : an exclamation of joy or excitement...

[schwack](#) : a large amount...

Traditionally a lexicographer collected , compiled and wrote a dictionary. But many online dictionaries announce that the users can add the content, update the data. In this way they would be performing the function of a lexicographer. From a select few elite, the power passes into the hands of the contributors. The Wiktionary and Urban dictionary provide this facility. Moreover the users are also given the option to compile a dictionary of their own.

Television producer Edward Baker and Michael Mirch, the internet entrepreneur have come up with their brain child of a Visual Dictionary, Wordia.com. They work in collaboration with Harper Collins and use their headwords, and definitions. Their goal is to make the dictionary visual by compiling videos and in which interested people would contribute the words of their choice, along with it, would give their own definition of the word and post it on YouTube. Edward Baker is convinced that it's an idea whose time has come. "Wordia.com taps into the zeitgeist and a gap in the online dictionary market," he says. "Coupling personal video definitions with textual definitions is an innovative approach to learning language as, when a word is personally defined and put into video context, it acts as an aide-mémoire, a mnemonic – something instantly more memorable and useful than a textual dictionary definition alone." The dictionary encouraged the users to add new words. The dictionary also encouraged new definitions as used by the people. Neologisms and slang were also encouraged. The founder of Urban Dictionary Aaron Peckham said: "Free speech and the Internet go hand in hand, because online, anyone with a computer can be heard. The Internet equalizes people like that—no matter how much money you have, or how old you are, you can connect with a huge number of people ... Urban Dictionary evolved to what it is today because people used it for their own purpose -- self-expression."(Wikipedia Urban Dictionary)

Just like Wordia.com, the Urban Dictionary also allowed the users to define the new words. Its founder proudly proclaims "it is written by the people who use the language". Realizing this departure from traditional lexicography he announces "It's rebellious, uncensored, independent and smart". (Lloyd).

Real speakers of the language write the dictionary. New expressions are edited by voluntary editors. Visitors are allowed to submit definitions to the Urban Dictionary but before they are included in the dictionary they have to be approved by voluntary editors, who are members from the public. A point to be noted is that the editors are neither bound by any criteria nor are given any guidelines. Then the posted definition can be voted up or down by the site visitors.

These are significant steps in democratizing the dictionary. While in traditional dictionaries volunteers did a lot of work, suggested new words, classified the data, spotted inconsistencies, this was done in collaboration with the editor

or the professional team. But in collaborative online dictionaries anyone who adds a new word or sense is a lexicographer in a sense, at least at one level.

Urban dictionary and Dictionary give the readers the option to edit using the web browser and to add words, meanings or usage to the dictionary. Here the lexicographer is sidelined. Earlier too, in lexicography, the help of volunteers was sought in compiling a dictionary, but for the OED, for example, the editors were there, between the act of publishing and contributing, there was a moderator. Even Wordnik does not allow readers to provide the definition directly. In these open dictionaries the contributions are directly available on the web. This also leads to rude and crude expressions. And all kinds of words and definitions appear. But there are people who find many words to be rude and do not find the intellectual element. Since it is open to discretion, meanings are far from being objective. They are even subjective and biased. Not all entries sent by the users are good. Perhaps this was what Erin McKean had in mind that the lexicographer should not be a police cop but a fisherman. Solving this problem, we have Merriam Webster's option of new words where new words are placed before they enter a dictionary.

These lead to a handful of questions. Do, or should, dictionaries control language? How do they treat language change, both now and in the past? Which words do dictionaries leave out - and on what grounds? Erin McKean has suggested to collect all the words in the language and then have them edit for public use, much better having an option like Open dictionary where the words are left and then make it as neutral or objective as possible.

Moreover in the online dictionaries the format also changes. Wordnik provides citations for the meanings of new words. The meanings and usage are not arranged according to a structure but as and when the posts appear. In Urban Dictionary the most popular meaning is listed first. Multiple definitions for one word are sorted by popularity. For example, the word "emo," which applies to punk music and teen angst. has been defined more than 1,000 times. The definition with the most "thumbs up" is the one that shows first even if people don't agree on what a word means, Urban Dictionary can teach people what they all think.

Macmillan, Wordnik and other online dictionaries also offer offers blogs for discussions on issues of language. Contributing to blogs makes the users active participants in the process of language development.

Modern lexicography therefore demonstrates that there is a change in the content of the dictionaries, the methods that are adopted and the identity and functions of a lexicographer. Some people would like to embrace authority. There are the modernists like McKean and Peckham who want things to change. Peckham himself says that his dictionary is not an authority. Yet it does contribute to the language. As is evident there are conflicting opinions in any new method or technique adopted. It would make sense if one could adopt a mid path without resorting to extremities. The intention is important, the dictionary should help the reader understand the meaning of a word and use it appropriately in the right context. To quote Samuel Johnson "I am not yet so lost in lexicography, as to forget that words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven. Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas..."

All said and done, change is the only thing that is constant. The dictionary also has changed in form, content and method. It has evolved into a rich format which provides data about a word. At the same time they also reveal how we engage with the world and articulate our experience, thoughts and feelings about it.

McKean states that they believe people that people really love words. Exploring words, finding their meaning and connecting meaning should be entertaining according to her. "We should make exploring words and finding meaning and connecting meaning as fun an experience as possible. Some sites make you feel like you should be punished for looking up a word. We like you to feel rewarded." (Tenore)
"Let's love words, learn them, use them and make them real."

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