Words and Dictionaries from the British Isles in Historical Perspective

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CHAPTER ONE

WRITING THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH LEXICOGRAPHY: IS THERE A HISTORY OF ENGLISH LEXICOGRAPHY AFTER STARNES AND NOYES?

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1. Early Monolingual English Dictionaries: Types and Sources

In the writing of the history of English lexicography, the monolingual dictionary, sometimes called the “general-purpose” English dictionary, is generally and implicitly considered the central object of study. The dictionaries are divided into a set of types which includes glossaries; vocabularies; spellers; monolingual dictionaries; bilingual dictionaries; and multilingual dictionaries. By now articles on the history of English lexicography also describe the history of specialized English dictionaries, including those compiled according to linguistic ideas (for example, historical dictionaries and phraseological dictionaries); taxonomic categories (“topically arranged” dictionaries); language community (national, regional, dialect, and slang dictionaries); and specialized users (for example, learners’ dictionaries). When we consider the range of writing on the history of lexicography in general and of English lexicography in particular, we can extract a good if incomplete outline of dictionary typology. Even so, it is mostly the history of the “general purpose monolingual English dictionary” that influences the way we understand and receive the history of English lexicography.

The English dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson 1604–1755 by DeWitt T. Starnes and Gertrude E. Noyes (hereafter cited as The English dictionary) is the most comprehensive book on the history of English monolingual dictionaries, despite its covering a limited time period (1604–1755) and a limited bibliography (due to the scope of its authors’ research agenda). As Gabriele
Stein notes, “Their historical account of early monolingual English lexicography still stands to the present day” (Stein 1991, ix). Stein also notes that in the intervening years since the publication of *The English dictionary* we have expanded the idea of English lexicography to include bilingual and multilingual dictionaries, to which we could add dictionaries ordered by concept rather than alphabetically, glossaries and other lists of words, and the study of the dictionary as text. Undoubtedly, Starnes and Noyes continue to have an important and continuing influence on general works on English lexicography: Sidney Landau writes in an endnote to the second chapter, “A brief history of English lexicography,” of his successful *Dictionaries: The art and craft of lexicography* that *The English dictionary* is “the chief source of information for early, monolingual English lexicography” (2001, 428). The same influence can be found in Jonathon Green’s *Chasing the sun: Dictionary makers and the dictionaries they made* (1996). Both authors also rely on articles and books published subsequent to the work of Starnes and Noyes.

A different perspective on *The English dictionary* can be found in the work of Jürgen Schäfer (1970; 1980; 1984; 1989). Schäfer had been working on describing the growth and development of English lexicography in the Early Modern English period at the time of his death. The work he did accomplish and publish called for a reappraisal of some of the basic findings in Starnes and Noyes. Along the way of this research he presented evidence that the *Oxford English Dictionary* fell short in its documentation of the vocabulary of the period, because its policy of treating evidence from dictionaries compiled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with some circumspection led to an inconsistent treatment of lexical items registered in those dictionaries. So, for instance, he noted that

> Some words are cited exclusively [in the *OED*] from hard word dictionaries without reference to earlier sources or to the successive dictionary transmission. Other words are last assigned to the Middle English period without reference to their sudden reappearance in the hard word dictionaries. (Schäfer 1989, 2:16)

His study of early modern lexicography contradicts some widely held notions about the sources of the dictionaries (for supporting and similar evidence see Stein 1986 and Osselton 1990, 1950; for further insight and elaboration on “hard words” see Zgusta 2006, 166ff., “‘Hard words’—‘schwierige Wörter’ in der älteren englischen einsprachigen Lexikographie”).

The research underlying the present compilation was originally prompted by the discovery that the Jacobean compilers of hard words, Robert Cawdrey (*Table Alphabetical*, 1604), John Bullokar (*English Expositor*, 1616) and Henry Cockeram (*English Dictionarie*, 1623), had gathered many of these difficult
words from earlier monolingual glossaries and had not merely Anglicized Latin or Graeco-Latin lemmas taken from bilingual dictionaries of their time, the widely accepted thesis advanced by DeWitt T. Starnes and Gertrude E. Noyes. (Schafer 1989, 2:2)

Allen Walker Read, predeceased to Schäfer, made a similar argument in a posthumously published article written in 1935, “The beginnings of English lexicography” (Read 1935/2003). Needless to say, Read’s original essay was not influenced by The English dictionary, and was not available to its authors; we can only speculate as to how his findings might have influenced them. Read makes this claim:

The purely English dictionary, in the Coote–Cawdrey–Bullokar–Cockeram tradition, arose as a “schoolmaster’s help” (with or without an actual schoolmaster), and I regard this as the main stream of development. The other streams of influence that converged to produce the English dictionary are as follows:

(2) The model of the dictionaries of the classical languages;
(3) Glosses and interlingual dictionaries;
(4) The impulse from the scientific study of language;
(5) The antiquarian and etymological dictionaries;

In summation he says that “the first faint indication of English lexicography is to be found in the effort during the Reformation to make the scriptures intelligible to common people” and that the “most important names in the ensuing years are John Bullokar, Henry Cockeram, Thomas Blount, Edward Phillips, William Lloyd, Samuel Clarke, Elisha Coles, and John Kersey” (Read 1935/2003, 223–224).

These discoveries tell us how much more bibliographic and textual research needs to be undertaken as part of writing the history of English lexicography. As Schäfer points out—and it is even more relevant today—the availability of microfilm and computer technology allows us to be more comprehensive and discrete in our analyses of the documents covered by The Short Title Catalogue

1 Read’s inclusion of Lloyd (see Lloyd 1668 and Wilkins 1668) raises the questions of “dictionariness” and “influence” in the history of English lexicography (cf. Dolezal 1985 and 1986 and Knappe 2004). The English dictionary compiled by Samuel Clarke in 1670 was sold by his bookseller as the twelfth edition of Cockeram’s English dictionary (Read 1935/2003, 221). Clarke is not identified by Starnes and Noyes, who cite him as “S.C.,” calling him the “reviser” of Cockeram’s Dictionarie (1946, 34).

2 For example, Sidney Landau has recently written that “The first English dictionary occurred almost inevitably as a modification of bilingual dictionaries, some of them of far greater importance” (2001, 47).
than was possible in 1946 (and 1989). His research helps broaden our understanding of the “hard-word” tradition. Here is what Schäfer writes:

The evidence assembled on the following pages gains significance in further refuting the Anglicization thesis since it strongly suggests that the compilers did indeed take much of their material either directly from contemporary texts or from explanatory glossaries attached to a variety of English publications. This means that their materials should be considered authentic, that is, actually used in Elizabethan texts and that the origins of monolingual lexicography have to be re-examined. (1989, 2:2)

What was the use of an early modern dictionary? Was it a collection of lexical oddities introduced in an ink-hornish manner, or could the “hard words” be found in the printed texts of the day, so that the dictionary was really a reference aid to contemporary readers? The people who consulted and bought dictionaries presumably did not read them sequentially, though this is not to deny that some dictionaries, and related reference texts, have a limited readership, or that some because of their systematic lexical structure even lend support for a readerly construction of narrative.\(^3\) There is even some evidence that the authors of some early dictionaries intended the text to be read in a fairly consecutive manner.\(^4\) The commercial venture of English lexicography and the cultural and individual reception of dictionaries (and the like) require their own respective studies.

\(^3\) I have addressed the issue of narrative by analyzing prayer in a religious text and in a scientific text by Bishop Wilkins (Dolezal, 1994). Topical dictionaries, and the like, belong in this category, and have a place in the definition and historiography of dictionary (for a detailed account in the early English tradition see Hüllen 1999). From a related perspective, David Cram (1994a; 1994b) considers the influence of seventeenth-century universal language schemes and “concordances of words” and of “things” in the early history of English lexicography.

\(^4\) Considine (1998) has presented evidence on owners and users of large historical dictionaries (Johnson 1755 and the fascicles of the OED) as readers for pleasure; and in a study of some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dictionaries and phrasebooks he claims that “Early modern dictionaries were texts which were read . . . .” citing Mainwaring 1644 as an example of a dictionary “to be read from end to end” (2001, 196; 205). At this time, we do not know how many readers there were (or are) in relation to the number of non-pleasure-reading users, or even among the readers how frequently they consulted or used, rather than read, their dictionaries.
2. Establishing a History of English Lexicography

A variety of books and essays since *The English dictionary* have modified and extended our understanding of “influence” in the genealogy of English dictionaries. Writing a history of English lexicography leads us to consider the usefulness of “influence” as a term of art, and to develop a historical perspective more comprehensive than constructing a great chain of vocabulary items organized around a principle of entries borrowed or plagiarized from earlier dictionary sources. A comprehensive study of dictionary texts would require the production of scholarly editions of each text, and this would include, for example, identifying and emending printing errors, and documenting changes to the lexicon across editions. The abstraction, “the dictionary,” is not the printed resolution of a textual chain of events. It is by now widely reported in the literature that the idea of “the dictionary” had taken hold of the literary imagination of readers and authors in the earliest period of English lexicography. Therefore, I have considered the history of English lexicography as a special case of bibliography and textual study (see Dolezal 1986 and 1989); so that, to name one consequence, the ideas of “borrowing” and “plagiarizing” have limited usefulness in understanding not only textual history, but also notions of ownership, property and language. In a broader sense, a history of lexicography provides insight into questions regarding the means of transmitting information through application of linguistic and lexicographic principles.

The notable achievement of Starnes and Noyes has made their book the standard text on the history of English lexicography. Gabriele Stein (1986) has illuminated the history of English lexicography before 1604, but there is no unified or standard history of English lexicography from 1755 to 1900 to provide a balance of perspective to the standard text, nor has there been a unified revision of the history from Cawdrey to Johnson. One result has been the general acceptance among non-specialists of an historical division of dictionaries into Before Johnson (“curiosities of a neologizing age”), Johnson’s Dictionary (“the standard for all English dictionaries”), and Modern Dictionaries (“authorities of current pronunciations and definitions”). More than fifty years has passed since the original publication date of *The English dictionary*; in those years the published work on dictionaries both in the academic and commercial domains has steadily expanded. Unfortunately, the new information and findings go mostly unnoted by the general scholarly audience, perhaps because the articles and books on the history of lexicography usually follow their own internal logic and principles, and therefore, taken together, do not provide a unified historical or thematic perspective.
2.1. English Lexicography in Literary History

A history of English lexicography would not be complete that did not take full notice of dictionaries and the mutual literary, philosophical, and cultural dependencies that are revealed when we look at the print artifacts that provide the sources and legitimation of orthography, history, definition, and so forth that are recorded in the linguistic commodity called the English dictionary. The commodity over time has become a cultural and intellectual standard by which all texts, including the source texts for the dictionaries, are themselves interpreted through the instantiation of meanings and forms found in a dictionary. One alternate major trend in writing the history of English lexicography can be found in literary critical studies. Since Johnson’s Dictionary stands at the pinnacle of esteem in the literary convention of our time, it is not surprising that he and his dictionary have been the object of the most studies. One well-known example of the trend, W. K. Wimsatt’s Philosophic words, relying partly on the chronology and narrative of events found in Starnes and Noyes and some word and author counts of Freed (1939), takes English lexicography in the form of Johnson’s Dictionary into literary and cultural history and intellectual biography. In this kind of history the emphasis is on the dictionary as word-hoard and cultural repository. This study and succeeding studies like it do not necessarily show awareness of methods of linguistic and text analysis that would seem essential for adequately describing dictionary text types. As Rüdiger Schreyer points out in his essay on quotations (or illustrations) in Johnson, the categories that have been used to describe the Johnson corpus “tend to be based on criteria often vague and not mutually exclusive” (2000, 75); he shows in particular that because twentieth-century categories cannot be used to legitimately describe seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ideas, and because we have no single accepted taxonomy of texts, “Wimsatt’s division of authors into classes is simply ad hoc” (78). However, another point is worth making since it touches upon our understanding of any dictionary. Dictionaries are a marketplace commodity. The successful return on investment in making a dictionary requires the maker and the publisher to coordinate, even subordinate, their plans and ideals to their best judgment of what will sell.

Johnson knew he was not expected to collect and describe the English language of his day ... He was aware that his Dictionary would be regarded as a rival of the French dictionary ... And he knew that like its rivals his dictionary was expected to correct, ascertain and fix the language ... It was to be for English what the Italian dictionary and French dictionary were for Italian and French. This was his unique selling proposition. (Schreyer 2000, 69)
Suffice it to say, the literary-critical-based model of dictionary history shows some crucial unexamined premises about dictionary making, linguistic description, and the determination of text types. A dictionary presumes some level of linguistic awareness in the maker; the lexicographer must underwrite the dictionary with an informed language theory that can identify and describe the linguistic vagaries of the language or languages concerned. Certainly those who study dictionaries, rather than consult them for practical purposes, need to have an awareness of sound methods of linguistic and lexicographic analysis. And though we can not re-imagine ourselves as eighteenth-century dictionary users, our studies can not ignore that alphabetical dictionaries are made to be consulted. For the most part, the grammatical information, etymologies, and illustrative quotations and their beauties are contingent upon looking up a word. Undoubtedly, there are “readers” of dictionaries, especially dictionaries replete with illustrative quotations or phrases; even so, those readerly illustrative quotations were most likely culled not by pleasure readings, but by readings for lexical evidence collection.

We can then see how an uncritical acceptance of a distinct period, from Cawdrey to Johnson, and a scope defined by the text types included in and excluded from The English dictionary by Starnes and Noyes can lead to an almost unassailable construct of received wisdom about Johnson’s Dictionary: of course, Johnsonian studies, like most studies of “great men” and “great works,” are rather fraught with an academic proprietary interest that gives the works and authors an almost decontextualized and autonomous existence. The scope of this present essay does not allow for a treatment of the literary scholarship on Johnson and the Dictionary; however, in general, the literary-based studies do not show a broad awareness of dictionary research based in the practical, historical, or theoretical lexicographical (and linguistic) disciplines. One result has been the tendency to promote the ideas of “innovation” and “influence” without sufficient historical and textual evidence.

2.2. Typology and the Meaning of History

If we are to attach the labels of innovative format, design, or content to any English dictionary, we must have a unified agreement on which text types count as dictionaries and which of the dictionaries so counted are to be included in a complete chronology of the English dictionary. Additionally, we must take into

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5 One particular piece of conventional non-lexicographically informed wisdom has Johnson as the inventor of the illustrative quotation; another has Johnson’s dictionary as the main inspiration for the lexicographic format of the OED—for a detailed discussion of illustrative quotations in historical dictionaries see especially Zgusta (2006) Chapter One, “History and Dictionaries.”
account that dictionaries are typologically mixed and sometimes answer to particular cultural, philosophical, or technical demands. The idea “historical dictionary” can serve as a good example of the difficulty of fixing a dictionary to a single typology.

Thus, the expression “historical dictionary” is used in reference both to period dictionaries, and to diachronic dictionaries, either of them situated on various points or stretches of the flow of time, or development. That many, perhaps even most dictionaries simultaneously consist of components that belong to different types may go without saying. (Zgusta 2006, 3)

There are some other questions we should ask: for example, what do we mean by “history” in the rubric *History of English lexicography*? “History” in practice has meant documenting a chronology of dictionaries (in general, “a chain of events”) or providing a narrative that explains the succession of dictionaries (sometimes called “historiography”). The consequence of the former would be to establish a causal history: in other words, to determine what texts (the “events”) are relevant (as primary sources) along the chain of events. The consequence of the latter would be to argue that there are commonly held principles of analysis and explanation; this would show how the chain of events and dictionaries along that chain become a narrative. The following statement, excerpted from a study by Zgusta of the history of historical dictionaries in the western tradition, helps bring focus to the question of writing histories for any dictionary (text) type (cf. Reichmann 1984).

As for history as the chain of events itself, there are two types of connection between dictionaries and the chain of events called history (of language): either the dictionary in question (or rather, its author) tries to exercise an influence on that chain of events, that is, tries to determine or change the development; or the dictionary does not attempt that, but by being descriptive it is a source of our knowledge of that chain of events, a source of data that can be used in giving the narrative of these events. (Zgusta 2006, 2)

The strictly chronological narrative has the strength of being accessible and coherent in its presentation: chronology, like alphabetic order, has the advantage of presenting a complex set of texts in an immediately understandable and usable format. However, the very appeal of accessibility and seeming coherence has the possibility of encouraging a narrative of “influences,” or an uninformed ideology of “progress” or “evolution” in the history of English dictionaries. As a result, the answer to the basic question “What is an English dictionary?” is mostly retrospective and inferential. Obviously, any history of lexicography must be conversant with lexicographic principles and practice of the period under examination and of the present day.
A typology of English dictionaries would allow us to both rearrange and preserve the chronological narrative. The scope of this approach is wide-ranging: there are dictionaries of English for specialized purposes and there are the dictionaries of English that attempt to create, modernize, protect, proselytize, or describe a written standard (or are permutations or combinations of the various typologies), which fall under the broader issue of the intended influence of dictionaries on the user. Other typological variations can be found in dictionaries of English connected to single authors (for instance, a dictionary of the words found in the works of William Blake), or, for example, to literary, scientific or cultural movements; we should also consider dictionaries as they reflect, ignore, or disturb prevailing theories of language, historical, grammatical and cultural. In effect there would be an interlocking structure of chronologies; that is, each designated dictionary type would have its chronology that would then fit into the chain of dictionary events.\(^6\)

A primary effect of writing a history of English lexicography would bring attention to the inherent mix of diachronicity and synchronicity found in dictionaries, for “the most unabashedly synchronic dictionary over time becomes a period dictionary” (Zgusta 2006, v). The inherent historicity of all dictionaries makes for a challenging and fruitful set of inquiries.

The history of any subject has its origins in a present moment that describes or explains a past that will finally culminate in a description or explanation of that present moment. We would be surprised if the scholarship on the intellectual history of a discipline claimed that the current generation had engendered ideas and texts inferior to preceding scholars in the discipline. In addition, the succession through time of material events also provides us with a certain logical progression that promises more than the chronological history can deliver. That which we have in our present seems naturally and logically better than that with which others in the past had to make do; the development of a subject then seems predetermined, as if the succession of events had to occur in the sequence and manner our history describes. This is especially true if we think of the history of lexicography as a chronology or succession of dictionaries. Histories can also be invoked to enhance the prestige of a present-day theory or practice by providing a legitimated genealogy that sets off the theory or practice from other competing theories and practices within the academic subject area.

The idea of canonical works is another important consequence of “history.” And yet, histories of academic subjects generally do not hold great interest for most practitioners of the subjects, unless to do “history” means to divide good

\(^6\) The first chapter of Béjoint 1994, “Dictionaries and The Dictionary,” includes a rather comprehensive overview of dictionary typology and dictionary as objects of study.
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genealogy from bad. In other words, if a work from the past has found its way onto a present-day list of the well-received, or canonical, then quite naturally a work in the present day will gain some prestige if its content is genealogically linked to the well-received past. In the contemporary discipline of linguistics we find a notable tension between the historically-engaged humanistic approach and the present-day-engaged scientific approach. The history of linguistic ideas as practiced today was not invented by Noam Chomsky (see Chomsky 1966) but he surely gave linguists permission to acknowledge and, in contemporary words, to own a history. By asserting a linguistic genealogy for generative linguistic theory, Chomsky created a ready-made linguistic canon. In this case, the prestige of a current practitioner of linguistic theory conferred canonical status upon a set of ideas and writings three hundred years in the past. From one set of linguistic milestones from the past Chomsky devised an explanatory narrative of linguistic history for the present.7

In the case of lexicography, there is another obstacle to writing a history of dictionaries: in a word, commerce. The demands of selling a product make the dictionary producers wary of any project that may chip away at the built-in authority of the product. Imagine a new and improved product being compared with a product already hundreds of years old, or imagine trade secrets being shared with the world at large. Not surprisingly, publishing houses are loath to allow access to files, notes, and commentaries collected and written in the course of compiling a dictionary.

3. Dictionaries as Arbiters of Standards and Ownership

The history of lexicography is also the history of public and personal attitudes toward language. Ideas about standards, correctness, and word-histories, among others, are of primary importance when people consider their expectations for a “good” dictionary. Recently, work in lexicography has revealed a greater interest among scholars in the topic of dictionary users and the uses of dictionaries; the interest in dictionary use has further revealed that we know very little about how people use dictionaries. Most of the studies on dictionary users have focused on learners, but the focus is not all that clear since we do not have a method that separates first-language learners from second-language learners (why consult a dictionary if not to learn?). What we know from the studies and our own anecdotal evidence, including introspection, tells us that an

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7 Chomsky (1966) has been harshly criticized by some prominent historiographers of linguistic ideas. I am not concerned here with the acceptance or correctness of Chomsky’s ideas; the nature and specificity of his thesis provided a literary vehicle to advance the awareness of history in the restricted domain of linguistic theory of the time.
entry that simply records an easily decipherable pronunciation and gives an
description of syntactic function, a standard spelling, and a short paraphrase will
suffice for most uses and users of dictionaries. We also know that there are few
studies of users and learners and empirical studies are fewer still: see Dolezal
and McCreary 1999—in which we found that authors working in a certain
discipline do not usually provide cross-referencing to other disciplines that
consider or touch upon studying learners, users, readers, and dictionaries, an
academic sociology that probably also pertains to studies in the history of
English dictionaries—and for a detailed method for eliciting information from
users consulting dictionaries and a detailed exploration of the structure of entries
and the typology of dictionaries see Wiegand 1998. The little reliable
information that exists about the uses of present-day dictionaries is far more
than what we know about the uses of say, Robert Cawdrey’s *A table
alphabetical* (1604), or John Bullokar’s *An English expositor* (1616), or Nathan
Bailey’s *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1730), or even Samuel Johnson’s
*Dictionary of the English language* (1755). However, we can make some
general observations. Dictionaries are mostly used for practical reasons by
people who want answers for practical questions. The practical dictionary users
also want to find the answers as quickly as possible. An alphabetical
organization insures that practicality of use is a primary goal. All other notations
and notational systems—the use of punctuation, indentation, font, and the like—
while capable of carrying nuanced theoretical information of great interest to
scholarly readers, have their first effect on the ease of accessing information.

For the most part, when people turn their attention to their language, they
concern themselves with ideas of correctness and standards, as well as seeking
information about the spelling or meaning of an unfamiliar word; without these
pragmatic concerns the market for dictionaries would be severely limited. By
now the expectations most people have about dictionaries being the arbiters of
correctness and authority are supported by the scholarly convention that the
history of English lexicography illuminates the triumph of a standard, or
standardizing, English dictionary.

### 3.1. Englishes and The Dictionary of English

It might be useful to consider the types of English dictionaries that do not
get written or published as a way to reconsider the idea of the progress, or
evolution, of dictionaries. The term “Englishes” is used to describe what used to
be called “non-native” varieties of English (see Kachru 1975; McArthur 1998,
61–65), and stands for a constellation of attitudes and practices that this current
essay can not address for reasons of space. An underlying question implied by
the concept of “Englishes” is, who owns the English language? It is a question
that gets traditionally answered in the form of rhetorics, grammars, and dictionaries of English. The conflict between so-called prescriptive and descriptive approaches can be seen as a battle for ownership that is fought on the textual ground of grammars and dictionaries. There may be Englishes, but an English-speaking community without a grammar or a dictionary can not make a strong claim for ownership. There are comprehensive dictionaries of British, American, and Australian English, but not of any African Englishes, or Indian English, or Singaporean English, or Caribbean English (see Dolezal forthcoming 2006). Many dictionaries for these Englishes that do get written concentrate on legal and religious terms, on names of flora and fauna, and on words peculiar to the region or locale. In the earlier texts there is also a linguistically contrastive perspective inherent in the approach to lexicon formation and grammatical description. The complexities of language, culture, and identity in the formation of a dictionary tradition can not receive adequate attention here, so I will return to a central theme concerning some observations on dictionary users and buyers.

One interesting impetus for the non-comprehensive dictionaries that do exist is particularly germane to the discussion: there are dictionary users who read literary texts by authors writing in one of the new Englishes. The readers become dictionary users because they require help in understanding the words and phrases of a variety of English unfamiliar to them. In other words, these dictionaries of Englishes are to some degree written for readers of literature. The so-called hard-word tradition of early English lexicography is not limited to a reliquary of obsolete print artifacts. Kachru gives the following illustration from a publication of 1848, J. D. Stocqueler’s The oriental interpreter and treasury of East India knowledge, that describes the need for a dictionary:

Every fortnight brings a mail from India, and the intelligence which it imparts is fraught with words which perplex the speeches in Parliament, turning upon Eastern Affairs—the Oriental novels, travels, and statistical works—likewise obscured with terms “caviare to the general.” (qtd. Kachru 2005, 1274)

The full history and tradition of English lexicography must weigh heavily upon any intrepid compiler of a largely undocumented regional or national English. Mostly, comprehensive dictionaries of Indian English or Caribbean English, for example, do not exist because those Englishes have not been

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8 Read (1935/2003, 187) makes this point: “Dictionaries develop very late in the history of a language. The forms of a language are set and its vocabulary expands to wide limits even before writing is felt to be a necessity ... Anyone, therefore, who attempts to catch speech and to imprison it in books must have some special motives that arise from his time and situation.”
codified with the thoroughness and comprehension associated with the national standards of North America or Great Britain. The development of a practical grammar may help affirm a distinct regional or national English; moreover, the language users themselves must feel the need to codify and record their own language. The consequences of developing a unified grammar can be quite profound. For when a community codifies and records, it produces the idea of the standard, even if questions of who owns the language and who determines the standard are a continual source of contention. The contentiousness itself does as much to insure the publication of competing grammars and dictionaries. If it is not a linguistic necessity to establish a standard, the practicality of producing a coherent and defined grammar and vocabulary requires something of the kind. For enterprises that require capital investment, for example, the printing of a dictionary, there must be either a source of independent funding or assurance of a sufficient number of customers to create a dictionary market.

4. Concluding Remarks

The importance of filling in perceived textual gaps, expanding the bibliographic sources for the English dictionary, and generally tacking an expanded domain onto the early history will depend on establishing a critical history and bibliography of dictionaries and related lexical reference texts. What would a history of English lexicography look like if it were a narrative that not only attempted to describe and explain the succession of dictionaries, but sought also to re-establish a linguistic philology as a means to more fully understand the dictionary as text? The idea of the dictionary is related to the need for interpretation and understanding of written texts. Not far removed from any dictionary definition is a critique of literature. Those dictionaries that in some way foreground the critical response to use of the English language in literature (such as Johnson’s dictionary) seem to attract critical readers; however, all dictionaries are potentially part of the critical transaction between reader and text, even if the exchange is nothing more than an object of the reader’s desire to find order and authority in the universe of discourse.