

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH DICTIONARY

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The evolution of the English dictionary is rooted on the general evolution of the English language. The pressure of vocabulary has always been influenced and reinforced by the intellectual climate of each period of the language. The beginning of dictionary history is concerned with the international language of medieval European civilization: Latin. Very early in the Anglo-Saxon period, one can find glosses containing native English (i.e. Anglo-Saxon) equivalents for the hard Latin terms. The next stage development, attained in English around 1400, was the collection in of the isolated glosses into what is called a glossarium, a kind of very early Latin-English dictionary. The first example of the glossarium, was called «Medulla Grammatica» written in East Anglia around 1400. The breakdown of Latin as an international Language and the rapid development of international trade led to an immediate demand for foreign-language dictionaries. The first of such works was rapidly followed by the best known of such works , Elorio`s Italian-English dictionary (1599). Meanwhile, the first great classical dictionary Cooper`s. Thesaurus (1565) had already appeared.

The first dictionaries didn`t use the title «dictionary». They were called by various kinds of fanciful or half-fanciful names, of which «hortus» (garden) and thesaurus (hoard) were very popular. During the late 16-th century the full tide of the Renaissance had been sweeping a curious flotsam and jetsam into English literary harbors. The principle in writing was to use Latino-Greek poly syllabics in a Latino-English syntax.

So non-Latinate Englishman could ever hope to read many works in his own language until he was provided with explanations of elements unfamiliar to him.

The «Dictionary of Hard Words» the real predecessor of the modern dictionary was developed to provide such explanations. The first English word book to use the name «dictionary» was titled as An Interpreter of Hard Words.

So the 16-th was the century of the foreign language dictionary, the 17-th was the century of the dictionary of hard words. Between 1708-1721 hard-word dictionaries began to be replaced by word books giving attention to literary usage.

The first word book to embody the ideals of the age was Nathaniel Bailey's. Universal Etymological Dictionary of the English Language

(1721). Johnson's Dictionary (1755) enormously extends the techniques' developed by Bailey.

In his two-volume work dominated English letters for a full century after its appearance and after various revisions, continued in common use until 1990.

As late as 90's most Englishmen used the word «dictionary» as a mere synonym for Johnson's Dictionary. It was only a question of time before someone combined Johnson's perception with the findings of the new science historical linguistics. That person was Charles Richardson, who in his «New Dictionary of the English Language» produced a dictionary completely lacking definitions, but one in which both the senses and the historical evolution of senses were accurately indicated by dated defining quotations.

Richardson's work leads directly to the great New English Dictionary on Historical Principles. It was first organized in 1859 and completed under Sir William Craigie in 1928. With its supplement (1933), the new English Dictionary or Oxford English Dictionary (N.E.D. or O.E.D.) covers the vocabulary of English with a completeness of historical evidence.

Since the publication of the O.E.D. the only important British dictionary has been Henry Cecil Wyld's Universal Dictionary of the English Language (1932), a work of somewhat restricted vocabulary coverage, but one which may well point the way to the dictionary of the future. The modern American dictionary is typically a single compact volume containing: definitive American spellings, pronunciation indicated by diacritical markings, selective treatment of synonyms and antonyms.

Соціально-гуманітарні аспекти розвитку сучасного суспільства : матеріали всеукраїнської наукової конференції викладачів, аспірантів, співробітників та студентів, м. Суми, 21-22 квітня 2014 р. / Відп. за вип. О.М. Сушкова. — Суми : СумДУ, 2014. — С. 84-86.