Ruling the Language

year
2015
1980
1950
1900
1800
1700
1600
1200
600
400
0
500
3000
5000
30,000
50,000

week
1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  10  11  12  13  14  15

LEXICOGRAPHER, n.s. [λεξικογράφος; lexicographe, Fr.] A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words. Commentators and lexicographers acquainted with the Syriac language, have given these hints in their writings on scripture. Watts.
Itinerary: 2/19

Why language matters

Rise of the vernacular

The creation of the modern dictionary

The circles of knowledge
Many, if not most, of the cultural phenomena of the modern world derive from [the 18th century] — the periodical, the newspaper, the novel, the journalist, the critic, the public library, the concert, the public museum [not to mention advertising, intellectual property, propaganda, the scientific society (and science itself), the modern dictionary and encyclopedia, etc.—GN]. Perhaps most important of all, it was then that 'public opinion' came to be recognized as the ultimate arbiter in matters of taste and politics.”

—Tim Blanning, The Culture of Power
Why Language Matters

Language controversies: The “dream work” of culture...
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Language controversies: The “dream work” of culture...
Rise of the Vernacular
The stirrings of English

English diglossia/triglossia in the Middle English period

- English: the spoken vernacular
- French: used by nobility, in courts.
- Latin: used for religion, scholarship.
The creolization of English

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath Perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(so priketh hem nature in hir corages);
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages…
Out of the shadow of Latin

Emergence of standard dialects
   (London English, Parisian French, Tuscan Italian)

Printing & Literacy

The Reformation

Proto-nationalism
The Emergence of the Vernacular

The decline of Latin

Pct of Latin titles in German-speaking world:

- 1650: 67%
- 1700: 38%
- 1750: 28%
- 1800: 4%

Rob't Boyle, The Sceptical Chemist, 1661
The Emergence of the Vernacular

Concerns that the vernacular (i.e., ordinary spoken) language is not an adequate vehicle for philosophy, history, etc.

Shall English be so poore, and rudely-base
As not be able (through mere penury)
To tell what French hath said with gallant grace,
And most tongues else of less facunditie?

John Davies, 1618
"Inkhorn words" -- learned words coined from Greek or Latin: absurdity, dismiss, celebrate, encyclopedia, habitual, ingenious

But also adminiculation, `aid'; adnichilate - 'annihilate'; eximious - `excellent'; temulent - `drunk'

...wee never affect any straunge ynkehorne termes, but to speake as is commonly received: neither seeking to be over fine or yet living over-carelesse. Thomas Wilson, Arte of Rhetorique, 1553
Refining & Codifying the Language

Robert Cawdrey, Table Alphabeticall, 1604:

Some men seek so far for outlandish English, that they forget altogether their mothers language, so that if some of their mothers were alive, they were not able to tell, or understand what they say, and yet these fine English Clearks, will say they speak in their mother tongue...

Also, some far journied gentlemen, at their returne home, like as they love to go in forraine apparrell, so they will poucher their talke with over-sea language....
The Composition of Mod. English

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

Anglo-Saxon
Old Norse
French (> vulg. Latin)
New Latin (inkhorn)
The Creation of the Modern Dictionary
Early Wordbooks

Robert Cawdrey, *Table Alphabeticall of Hard Usual English Words*, 1604 ("for the benefit and helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or other unskillful persons")
If thou be desirous (gentle Reader) rightly and readily to understand, and to profit by this Table, and such like, then thou must learne the Alphabet, to wit, the order of the Letters as they stand, perfecty without booke, and where every Letter standeth: as (b) neere the beginning, (n) about the middest, and (t) toward the end. Nowe if the word, which thou art desirous to finde, begin with (a) then looke in the beginning of this Table, but if with (v) looke towards the end. Againe, if thy word beginne with (ca) looke in the beginning of the letter (c) but if with (cu) then looke toward the end of that letter. And so of all the rest. &c.
If thou be desirous (gentle Reader) rightly and readily to understand, and to profit by this Table, and such like, then thou must learne the Alphabet, to wit, the order of the Letters as they stand, perfecty without booke, and where every Letter standeth: as (b) near the beginning, (n) about the middest, and (t) toward the end. Nowe if the word, which thou art desirous to finde, begin with (a) then looke in the beginning of this Table, but if with (v) looke towards the end. Againe, if thy word beginne with (ca) looke in the beginning of the letter (c) but if with (cu) then looke toward the end of that letter. And so of all the rest. &c.

What is this called?
The desire for "illustration" in France

1530: Founding of Collège de France, with French admitted as language of higher education

1539: Ordonnonces de Villers-Cotteret (1539) establish use of French in law courts

Percentage of book titles published in Paris in French:
- 1501: 10%
- 1528: 14%
- 1549: 21%
- 1575: 55%

Would to God that some noble heart could employ himself in setting out rules for our French language... If it is not given rules, we will find that every fifty years the French language will have been changed and perverted in very large measure.
—G. Tory, 1529
Formation of the Académie Française

Modeled on the accademia della Crusca, Florence (1583), which published 1st dict. In 1612
Formed in 1635 by Cardinal Richlieu; 40 members ("les immortels")
1st ed. of dictionary appears in 1694 (6 or 7 others since then).
Print, the Public, and Linguistic Anxiety

[Britain] has become a nation of readers. --Samuel Johnson, 1781

The problem of the public sphere:
How to coordinate public opinion via an impersonal print discourse between people who are anonymous to one another, in the absence of context...
The Growing Sense of Crisis

John Dryden (1693): "we have yet no prosodia, not so much as a tolerable dictionary, or a grammar, so that our language is in a manner barbarous.

William Warburton (1747): the English language is "destitute of a Test or Standard to apply to, in cases of doubt or difficulty.... For we have neither Grammar nor Dictionary, neither Chart nor Compass, to guide us through this wide sea of Words."

When I took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech copious without order, and energetick without rules: wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled, and confusion to be regulated; choice was to be made out of boundless variety, without any established principle of selection...Johnson, Preface to the Dictionary
The Growing Sense of Crisis

Continuing desire to fix ("ascertain") the language:

"Suffer not our Shakespear, and our Milton, to become two or three centuries hence what Chaucer is at present, the study only of a few poring antiquarians, and in an age or two more the victims of bookworms."

Thomas Sheridan

Short is the date, alas! of modern rhymes,
And 'tis but just to let them live betimes.
No longer now that Golden Age appears,
When partiaarch wits survived a thousand years:
Now length of fame (our second life) is lost,
And bare threescore is all ev'n that can boast:
Our sons their fathers' failing language see, 
And such as Chaucer is shall Dryden be.

Cf Alexander Pope, "Essay on Criticism"
An academy to "ascertain" the language?

1712: Swift writes "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue in a Letter to Lord Harley

My Lord; I do here in the Name of all the Learned and Polite Persons of the Nation, complain to your Lordship, as First Minister, the our Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; and the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and, that in many Instances, it offends against every Part of Grammar...
The Rejection of an Academy

If an academy should be established for the cultivation of our stile, which I, who can never wish to see dependance multiplied, hope the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy...

—Johnson, Preface to the *Dictionary*

As to a publick academy... I think it not only unsuitable to the genius of a free nation, but in itself ill calculated to reform and fix a language. ... the best forms of speech will, in time, establish themselves by their own superior excellence...Joseph Priestly, *Rudiments of Grammar*, 1761

Contrast the role of the state in French....
1746: J. approached by "conger" of booksellers to make dict. for 1500 guineas

1747: "Plan of an English Dictionary"

1755: *Dictionary of the English Lg.*
Some Johnsonian Definitions

**Excise**: A hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged not by the common judges of property, but wretches hired by those to whom excise is paid.

**Lexicographer**: A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words.

**Oats**: A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland appears to support the people.
Some Johnsonian Definitions

**shrewmouse** A mouse of which the bite is generally supposed venomous, and to which vulgar tradition assigns such malignity, that she is said to lame the foot over which she runs. I am informed that these reports are calumnious, and that her feet and teeth are equally harmless with those of any other little mouse. Our ancestors however looked on her with such terour, that they are supposed to have given her name to a scolding woman, whom for her venom they call a shrew.
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Until the [seventeenth century], History was the inextricable and completely unitary fabric of all that was visible of things and of the signs that had been discovered or lodged in them: to write the history of a plant or an animal was as much a matter of describing its elements or organs as of describing the resemblances that could be found in it, the virtues that it was thought to possess, the legends and stories with which it had been involved, its place in heraldry, the medicaments that were concocted from its substance, the foods it provided, what the ancients recorded of it, and what travellers might have said of it. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*
The Success of the Dictionary

Talk of war with a Briton, he’ll boldly advance,
That one English soldier will beat ten of France,
Would we alter the boast from the sword to the pen,
Our odds are still greater, still greater our men . . .
First Shakspeare and Milton, like Gods in the fight,
Have put their whole drama and epick to flight...
And Johnson, well-arm'd like a hero of yore,
Has beat forty French, and will beat forty more!"

David Garrick
The Success of the *Dictionary*

The English Dictionary appeared; and, as the weight of truth and reason is irresistible, its authority has nearly fixed the external form of our language; and from its decisions few appeals have yet been made. Robert Nares, 1782

*Did the Dictionary really fix the language?*

Johnson condemns words like *bully, coax,* and *job.*
Features of Johnson's Dictionary

Meanings illustrated by citations from English writers:
"The book written by books"
The Didactic Uselessness of Definitions

Weakness of genus-differential definitions

disappointed MW: defeated in expectation or hope
The Didactic Uselessness of Definitions

Weakness of genus-differentia definitions

**disappointed** MW: defeated in expectation or hope

**disappointment** is when you expect something to happen
The Didactic Uselessness of Definitions

Weakness of genus-differentia definitions

*disappointed* [MW]: defeated in expectation or hope

*disappointment* is when you expect something to happen
And you want it to happen
The Didactic Uselessness of Definitions

Weakness of genus-differentia definitions

**Disappointed** MW: defeated in expectation or hope

**disappointment** is when you expect something to happen
And you want it to happen
And when the time comes for it to happen
The Didactic Uselessness of Definitions

Weakness of genus-differentia definitions

disappointed: defeated in expectation or hope

disappointment is when you expect something to happen
And you want it to happen
And when the time comes for it to happen
It doesn’t happen
The Didactic Uselessness of Definitions

Weakness of genus-differentia definitions

**Disappointed** MW: defeated in expectation or hope

**disappointment** is when you expect something to happen
And you want it to happen
And when the time comes for it to happen
It doesn’t happen
And you feel bad
The Methodology of Lexicography

- Method for isolation & circumscription of relevant precedents (identification of “the language” in terms of public discourse)
- Method for isolating and abstracting contributions of individual words to interpretation, independent of both linguistic and extralinguistic contexts
- Method of reducing use of word to a "mechanical" rule that determines correct application of word.
The Symbolic Function of the Dictionary
Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines consent as “to agree to do or allow something: to give permission for something to happen or be done.” An absence of no, does not mean yes.

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines deflation as “a contraction in the volume of available money or credit that results in a general decline in prices.”
Circumscribing the Domains of Knowledge
Defining "The Language"

Why include 'all the words'? Why bother to define simple words?

Cf defs in Nathan Bailey's dictionary., 1721:

*cat*: "a creature well known"

*black*: "a colour"

*strawberry*: "a well known fruit"
Defining the Compass of the Language

Let any man of correct taste cast his eye on such words as *denominable, opiniatry, ariolation, ataraxy... clancular*, and let him say whether a dictionary which gives *thousands* of such items, as *authorized English words*, is a safe standard of writing. Noah Webster on Johnson's *Dictionary*

Words have been admitted in the language that are not only disreputable in origin, not only offensive in all their associations, not only vulgar in essence, but unfit at all points for survival. The *New York Herald* (1890) on Funk & Wagnall's inclusion of *chesty* "bold"

"...that most monstrous of non-words." *Life Magazine* on Webster's *Third International's* inclusion of *irregardless*
Symbolism of the dictionary's form

There is in [Johnson's Dictionary] a kind of architectural nobleness; it stands there like a great solid square-built edifice; you judge that a true builder did it." (Thos. Carlyle)
The Form of Collections, 1

Library of the Escorial, 1543

E-L. Boulée, plan for the Bibliothèque du Roi, 1785

Labrouste, Bibliothèque Ste. Geneviève, 1851
The Form of Collections, 2: The classical version

Smirke, British Museum Reading Room, 1851

Labrouste, Bibliothèque Nationale 1868

Pelz/Casey Reading Room, LOC, ca 1898

Asplund, Stockholm City Library, 1928
Circumscription of Knowledge: Modern Interpretations

D. Perrault, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1994
That vast aggregate of words and phrases which constitutes the Vocabulary of English-speaking men presents... the aspect of one of those nebulous masses familiar to the astronomer, in which a clear and unmistakable nucleus shades off on all sides, through zones of decreasing brightness, to a dim marginal film that seems to end nowhere, but to lose itself imperceptibly in the surrounding darkness....

James Murray, "General Explanation" to the OED
The "canonicity" of knowledge.

Canonicity: All elements of all subdomains are ordered with regard to "centrality" of membership (i.e., discursive space is metrical, not just topological)

What defines a "reference book"

words: citet > panther > cat
authors: Michael Crichton > John Updike > Herman Melville
news events: rescued cat > school budget vote > earthquake
Also: tourist attractions (travel guides), artists (national collections), etc.

Buf cf. world records: ??Most hot dogs eaten> largest waistline > longest kiss
**Canonicity permits "essentialist" abridgement:**

"[M]en of good will have extracted the substance of a thousand volumes and passed it in its entirety into a single small duodecimo, a bit like skillful chemists who press out the essence of flowers to concentrate it in a phial while throwing the dregs away." L-S. Mercier, *L’An 2440*, 1771

Cf sense of "library" and "bibliothèque" to denote comprehensive publication series & catalogues

If the lexicon of a language is indeed something like that of a circle, then... if one moves away from the center in concentric circles, the result should be a faithful image of the total lexicon.

Henri Béjoint, *Tradition and Innovation in English Dictionaries*, 1992

i.e., In theory, every large dictionary contains every small dictionary
What happens when the material borders disappear?

New to Oxford Dictionaries, 2013 (not the OED):
BYOD, derp, srsly, vom, fauxhawk, dappy, michelada, platform, jorts, dad dancing…
What happens when the material borders disappear?

New to Oxford Dictionaries, 2013 (not the OED): BYOD, derp, srsly, vom, fauxhawk, dappy, michelada, platform, jorts, dad dancing…
The Americanization of the Dictionary
You have corrected the dangerous doctrines of European powers, correct now the languages you have imported... The American language will thus be as distinct as the government, free from all the follies of unphilosophical fashion, and resting upon truth as its only regulator. William Thornton, 1793.

From the changes in civil policy, manners, arts of life, and other circumstances attending the settlement of English colonies in America, most of the language of heraldry, hawking, hunting, and especially that of the old feudal and hierarchical establishments of England will become utterly extinct in this country; much of it already forms part of the neglected rubbish of antiquity. Noah Webster, 1806
Cf Webster’s Spelling reforms: *honor, theater*, etc., but also *tung, iz...*

"A capital advantage of this [spelling] reform in these States would be, that it would make a difference between the English orthography and the American.... I am confident that such an event is an object of vast political consequence."
The Americanization of the Dictionary

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The first ‘dictionary war’: 1830—...
Development of the Dictionary

1857-1928: Preparation of the OED; historical record of the entire language...

James Murray
We could scarcely have a lesson on the growth of our English tongue, we could scarcely follow upon one of its significant words, without having unawares a lesson in English history as well, without not merely falling upon some curious fact illustrative of our national life, but learning also how the great heart which is beating at the centre of that life, was being gradually shaped and moulded.

Richard Chevenix Trench
The Popular Dictionary

[The dictionary] is the national key to human knowledge. … It behooves all those who are concerned in the education of the young to place this book on the same plane as the churchmen of old placed the English Bible. The dictionary should be placed on a lectern in every school throughout the land.

—Frank Vizetelly, 1898
Corpus Lexicography

Concordance for ‘matrix’ from the Brit. Nat Corpus

largely free of the enclosing matrix, and look now much as they wou poetry from the whole social matrix and milieu in which such a subj h ward. The result was a data matrix giving pixel counts for five l vision by a matrix, when the matrix happens to be zero. what does are summarized in the Payoff matrix in Figure A. Now, why the shing on its own, green is a matrix in which to set other colours l erent crystal structure. The matrix is a yellow limestone common in t eight. The team competency matrix. it's upside down. There it archy to a flat hierarchy, a matrix model or a team-based structur , and are acquainted with the matrices of Derrida 's thought in Heg e a substance is in the lipid matrix of olfactory cells, the more i cultural text, which is the matrix or master code that the literar are well-preserved in a clay matrix, some of which adheres to one ar tissue, connective tissue matrix. Which particular technique di

“personal information”
1920-2000
Readings & Assignment for Feb. 24


Assignment: Fisher suggests that the technology of accounting can help his readers control their lives, while Thompson suggests that the technology of time led to people having their lives controlled. Whose argument is more convincing and what implications might these arguments have for today?