

REVIEW

The Whole World in a Book: Dictionaries in the Nineteenth Century. By Sarah Ogilvie and Gabriella Safran (eds), Oxford University Press. 2020. Pp. 328.

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The title of the book implies that its primary focus is lexicographic enterprises spanning the whole world. It is fortunate that the volume does not concern only the most popular and prestigious languages like English, German, Russian, or Chinese, but also low-status vernaculars. Dykstra writing on Frisian, Remysen and Vincent on Québécois, Rennie on Scots, Safran on Yiddish, or Russell on small Asian languages spoken in the communities reached by American missionaries reveal how lexicography addressed the needs of language minorities in the 19th century. This is an aspect that truly justifies the apt title; “The Whole World” encompasses also small languages and their speakers around the globe, not only the (geographically widely distributed) languages of the biggest nations (and empires).

The subtitle, *Dictionaries in the Nineteenth Century*, seems to hold obvious appeal for those passionate about historical (nineteenth-century) lexicography. While the book indeed throws light on worldwide lexicography, the limitation to the 19th century is transcended, as the discussion is set in a much broader temporal context. Intellectual, social, political, and economic aspects of not only the 19th century, but also the preceding ones are highlighted to provide the background indispensable to trace and understand the lexicographic projects discussed. No less important are the outlines of previous lexicographic endeavors, which help to recognize the significance of those which followed. For example, the look back at the beginnings and early development of French-Canadian lexicography makes it possible to fully appreciate the weight of Dunn’s *Glossaire Franco-Canadien* and its role in restoring Canadian French, challenging some French (especially Parisian) usages and paving the way for historical and more descriptive lexicography in Québec. Yet, the specificity of the 19th century, which was a propitious time for lexicography to flourish, is also duly accounted for. The

favorable conditions of that age included cheap machine-made paper, which fueled the publishing boom, fast print, affordable book prices, the resulting rise of literacy, or railroad travelling. All these factors made it possible to democratize knowledge. As contemporary digital solutions enable virtually unconstrained access to information, too, it is only natural that nineteenth-century lexicographers and dictionaries arouse interest and come into focus. A component of the book which at first sight may not fit neatly into the nineteenth-century time frame is a large part of the last chapter devoted to dictionaries of Libras (a sign language in Brazil) in the 20th and 21st centuries. The Authors clearly explain that they discuss da Gama's legacy of 1875, when he published the first dictionary for the deaf in Brazil. They point out challenges to sign language lexicography inherited from the past and suggest current, technology-driven ways of meeting them. Among the proposed solutions there is a new dictionary model influenced and inspired by da Gama's work. Even though the discussion goes much beyond the 19th century, it needs to be remembered that for about one hundred years Libras was banned from Brazil, which naturally left a massive void in the development of Libras lexicography. The look into the future seems to be fully justifiable under the circumstances.

The Editors point out that the book is organized chronologically and geographically, and developments are described from the general to the specific (p. xix). Nonetheless, it is sometimes difficult for the reader to follow the sequence of lexicographic projects and achievements in the 19th century and fully appreciate the significance of international influences. The editors did not in fact manage to adhere strictly to the chronological order. This is by no means a reservation, considering the tremendously impressive lexicographic output of the century and its wide geographic scope. Vast networks, such as the one formed by lexicographic endeavors in the 19th century, cannot be (by definition) chronological. Fortunately, the clear and helpful *Timeline of Lexicography in the Long Nineteenth Century* at the end of the volume helps the intimidated reader to get back on track should they be lost in the plethora of dictionaries and dates.

One of the many valuable observations made in the book is that scientific lexicography arose out of Romanticism. Romantic linguists were interested in etymology, comparative and historical analyses, which only naturally influenced lexicographic enterprises. The links which are drawn between the intellectual environment of the epoch and lexicographers' methods are difficult to overestimate. So are those shown between the largely nationalistic spirit of the time, with language as the foundation of national identity, and the role that the dictionary was often expected to assume; it was to be a symbol of national identity, a source of peoples' pride and an expression of cultural nationalism.

Olgilvie and Safran's publication projects many other images of the dictionary. First of all, the dictionary is presented as an authority, the role largely

redefined today, when dictionaries do not take on the respectable book form, can be produced by anybody and immediately changed (cf. Béjoint 2010: 375). It is shown as a true national treasure, an enduring national icon and an embodiment of homeland, for which room was found even in the tiny luggage space of emigrants leaving behind not only their country, but also their language. It is how Rennie begins her fascinating story of Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*. The illustration showing a richly annotated page from the 1867 edition supports one of the points she makes – the dictionary had a powerful social significance and was a material thing that, among others, could allay misgivings that emigrants were filled with. Jamieson's dictionary of the Scottish language assumed a separatist function in linguistic and cultural terms. It was a cornerstone of national identity and a repository of encyclopedic information on the nation's customs and cultural traditions. Such an image of a dictionary may surprise the reader in the age of globalization, where divisions between countries, languages, and cultures are increasingly blurred. A different approach to the dictionary is presented in the chapter on Webster and his *American Dictionary*, devised as an instruction tool designed to propagate religious, national, and political views. This image might be at odds with the widely held conviction that America is the epitome of democracy and freedom. Richardson's *New Dictionary of the English Language* and Dahl's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great-Russian Language* are shown to be fictional, invented, and prescriptive rather than scientific, researched, and descriptive. The latter is even labeled as democratic and all-inclusive, which sounds reminiscent of the bottom-up lexicography of today and user-generated content (Lew 2014). Another role of the dictionary is that of a tool which may integrate languages and maintain a balance between them, and thus prevent cultural loss. That was the function that Banihūn's and Pu-gong's *Manchu-Chinese Literary Ocean* was supposed to perform with respect to two literary languages in China: Manchu and Chinese. All these and other dictionary images and roles which the volume vividly describes sensitize the reader to the importance of dictionaries in history and encourage quiet reflection on their functions in the contemporary world.

The book also gives an insight into whether nineteenth-century dictionaries complied with target users' requirements. This aspect is of particular interest to present-day lexicographers, who more than ever have to bear users' needs in mind (cf. Atkins & Rundell 2008). American Baptist women missionary lexicographers, respectful of indigenous languages, produced moderately prescriptive dictionaries which directly addressed (and presumably satisfied) converts' reference needs. On the other hand, Steingass's *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* by all accounts failed to live up to the expectations of British officials administering India, where Persian was the literary language. Its publication coincided with the time when local vernaculars had already gained so much in status that there was little

demand for such a reference work. It might be slightly surprising to learn that joke books and dictionaries, as explained by Safran, were marketed by the same publishing companies and appealed to the same target users. Public interest in both genres stemmed from the fact that there were people who wanted to know a high-status standard language (like English), a low-status one (like Yiddish), and be able to tell jokes in an ethnic register (like Jewish English or Jewish Russian). Catering for such needs shows that lexicographers' and comedians' goals happened to converge at some point in the 19th century. The result, which might almost stun the contemporary lexicographer, was an intriguing confluence of the two genres (joke books and dictionaries) in an alphabetically-arranged six-volume compilation of Jewish (and other) jokes – the *Conversations-Lexicon für Geist, Witz und Humor* (*Conversation Lexicon of Wit, Jokes, and Humour*) by Saphir. Bringing such hybrid publications to the reader's attention is a considerable advantage of the book.

Importantly, the contributors to the volume show how different lexicographic projects were connected, how they affected each other, and how lexicographic teams drew from the experience and methods of their foreign counterparts. For example, resemblances in the works of Dunn, Webster, Jamieson, Halbertsma, and the Grimm brothers are highlighted. As a result, despite the geographical organization whereby each chapter concerns the lexicography of a specific country or language community, a coherent picture emerges. Multiple cross-references to different chapters also help the reader to see lexicographic links across geographic divisions.

The book shows a number of different perceptions of the lexical object of a dictionary in the 19th century. Words were conceptualized as linguistic facts or cultural phenomena. Thus, they were conceived of mainly as repositories of meaning(s), or artefacts whose form and historical development are no less important than the meaning(s) which they convey. Dahl's approach to words was in turn spiritual; he considered them nothing short of living creatures in need of human attention and appreciation. In fact, he wanted to save Russian words from loneliness and isolation. Finally, the lexical object in dictionaries of sign language was a sign composed of at least 3 cheremes: Points of Articulation or Location, Handshape, and Movement. All these views are of great interest to contemporary lexicographers, many of whom are influenced by the idiom principle, which states that language comes in semi-preconstructed, almost ready-made chunks, or phrases, which only seem to be decomposable into smaller segments (cf. Sinclair 1991: 110). Words, in turn, are claimed to have not so much meaning(s) as meaning potentials, or clusters of semantic components, activated to a different extent in different contexts (Hanks 2013: 81–83)

The book offers a deep insight into multiple approaches to dictionary-making. Dictionaries discussed here were achievements of independently-working lexicographers as well as lexicographic teams. Sometimes a shift in the approach

can be visible even within one project. To illustrate, the first edition of the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* was initially the work of individual lexicographers, but it became teamwork with time. Some arcana of establishing dictionary offices are disclosed to the amazement of the reader, like the involvement of students in the compilation of the DWB after they were personally introduced to lexicography by their mentor, Heyne. Interestingly enough, not all dictionary compilers whose works are discussed in the volume were lexicographers, linguists, or literary scholars when they embarked on their tasks. Jamieson, for example, was a minister, whose dictionary arose not so much out of a plan as a series of coincidences, which Rennie carefully traces. Insights into such backstage stories are a great advantage of the book. Yet, the volume also leaves no doubt that people so passionate about lexicography had to go to great lengths to produce dictionaries that ultimately made history. Some of them even published their own forays into comparative linguistics, as Jamieson did. On the other hand, it is quite intriguing to learn that others, like Webster, remained quite sceptical about the science of the time – mainly comparative philology. Yet, even their views underwent metamorphosis. Webster's original trust in linguistically, culturally, and politically ideal nation transformed into conservatism and religious affinity, probably because of his disillusionment with the Revolution. It is truly amazing to see how republican, nationalistic, and Christian commitments affected the lexicographic approach of this lexicographic giant, whose name has become a synonym of a dictionary in America. Dahl was not a linguist, either, but “a collector and recorder of words and sayings, a word hunter” (p. 210). Da Gama, who created the *Iconography of Signs of Deaf-Mutes*, was a student at Imperial Institute, who did not have much knowledge of linguistics or lexicography, but could draw well and only later learned lithographic techniques. All such pieces of information on individuals behind dictionaries not only spice up the otherwise scholarly accounts, but also provoke thoughts about the professionalization of dictionary making. They help readers realize the long way lexicography had to go to transform into an international profession (cf. Ilson 1986), which, unfortunately, has not earned much esteem in academia (cf. Adamska-Sałaciak 2006 :16)

The volume teaches deep respect for individual lexicographers and teams compiling dictionaries in the 19th century. It reveals that in many cases, dictionary compilation was a vocation to which many people sacrificed their whole lives and health. It also happened that a lexicographer paid for the compilation, print, and distribution of their dictionary, as Jamieson did. By the same token, the chapters help to appreciate e-tools which are currently at lexicographers' disposal, like electronic corpora, corpus query tools, or dictionary writing systems, which save lexicographers from staking their lives on any lexicographic enterprise.

Another praiseworthy feature of the collection is detailed information on the formative years of some lexicographers – regrettably, only few. The account of

Dunn's childhood, schooling, and early employment is a case in point. It throws light on the reasons for the approaches that the lexicographer would later adopt to describe the language of French Canadians in his *Glossaire Franco-Canadien*, helps to understand his motives as well as the significance and originality of the dictionary. Unfortunately, the book does not offer comparably exhaustive biographies of other nineteenth-century lexicographers. Possibly, it would simply be impossible to do it within the confines of a single volume. That is why the included biographic notes are quite brief, like the ones on Noah Webster or Vladimir Dahl. Yet, it may only be regretted that the book is not longer to further develop the interest aroused in the captivated reader. The biographical notes present, though short, often leave the reader in amazement at how the vicissitudes of life pushed some individuals into dictionary making.

Lexicography has always been essentially practical. At least in its primary sense, it involves compiling dictionaries (cf. Burkhanov 1998: 135–138; Svensén 2009: 2). They later need to be made available to target users, which usually means putting them on the market. The latter aspect, sale, might seem a little out of date to contemporary dictionary users, who typically consult online dictionaries free of charge, and take it for granted. Little do they realize that the business model of contemporary online lexicography allows free access mainly thanks to advertisements, which provide funds to edit, update and maintain high-quality content (cf. Dziemianko 2019). This business model appears to be markedly different from the nineteenth-century one, discussed by Sokolowski. The abridgement of Webster's dictionary is shown (at least to some extent) from the market perspective. It was abridged and re-edited, among others, to sell, and Merriam's aggressive promotion, able distribution, and innovation turned it into a business success. It may sadden the reader that Webster's magnum opus had to be abridged, updated, and priced to sell. Sokolowski (p. 168) himself notes that the fact that the then publishers "were motivated more by pressing commercial competition than dedication to linguistic scholarship must be viewed today as an instructive object lesson in the hard-headed business of reference publishing". Nonetheless, it is fortunate that this practical, rather than only scholarly, nationalistic, or patriotic aspect of nineteenth-century lexicography is clearly accentuated in the book. It is also in this respect that an analogy between the lexicography of the 19th and 21st centuries can be drawn; dictionaries must be usable and affordable. Yet, the quality of the dictionary cannot be compromised on in the face of market competition. In fact, rivalry stimulates innovation. Two centuries ago it pushed the Merriams to include illustrations in what is known as the *Webster's Pictorial* in order to outsell Worcester's upcoming edition. Competition also necessitates systematic revision and update. When Worcester's and Merriam-Webster's dictionaries had to be substantially revised, the former, in contrast to the latter, was not, and ultimately faded into oblivion. This is an

outcome that the contemporary lexicographic business should still be acutely aware of. Connecting marketplace and scholarship is what, according to Sokolowski, assured Webster immortality. No less topical is the connection today.

Thankfully, the book offers visual support in the form of illustrations of citation slips and annotated dictionary pages, or a diagram representing a timeline of dictionaries produced in Japan. There is also a picture of Jamieson's correspondence with the Caledonian Horticultural Society, where he requests advice on the entry for *guadinie*. This also proves the lexicographer's determination to include only reliable information verified down to the last detail. Another ingenious illustration is that of the 'War of the Dictionaries' from a 1860 cartoon, which represents the war in a humorous way. The book features pictures of entries from *A Vocabulary of the Sgau Karen Language*, the *Brief Vocabulary of English and Assamese*, the *Pronouncing and Defining Dictionary of the Swatow Dialect* or *The Anglo-Karen Dictionary*. Possibly, it would be difficult for an uninitiated reader to get an insight into these dictionaries elsewhere. Unfortunately, such visual support is relatively scarce. The interested reader would no doubt benefit a lot from more illustrations which would help them to imagine dictionaries themselves, their compilation process, or the tremendous (collective or otherwise) effort of lexicographers put in the usually herculean task of dictionary making. Possibly, the relatively small number of illustrations results from the cost of print. The remark above is thus not so much a criticism as an expression of regret that the lively interest developed in the reader is only sometimes whipped up by relevant visuals. Still, it might have been feasible to create an online appendix to the volume with more lavish illustrations.

Many chapters in the book provide direct citations from many primary sources, which clearly support the points made by the contributors. Some of the sources remain unpublished, which makes the volume even more unique. The chapter by Safran on dialect joke books and Russian-Yiddish and English-Yiddish dictionaries is liberally interspersed with jokes, many of which are explained to make them comprehensible to the reader, who may not be familiar with the arcana of Yiddish exploited in them, the ethnographic specificity of the language, or the extralinguistic reality of the day when they entertained interlocutors. Such generous reader support is hard to overestimate.

The book also throws light on how unappreciated the work of a lexicographer may be and exposes different criticisms of lexicographers and their work. Veinberg, for example, was called "an opportunist exploiting the market" (p. 291), because he published both English-Yiddish dictionaries and books of Jewish dialect humor, which was seen as a market-driven activity "motivated by self-hating Jews' impulse to curry favour with non-Jews or provide cheap and undignified entertainment". Da Gama was criticized for relying too much on an earlier

dictionary, which he translated into Portuguese. Even the OED was criticized for its extensive coverage of words, and the Grimms – for lack of systematicity in the DWB. Little did their critics realize that the Grimm brothers simply could not find any reliable lexicographic structure among eighteenth-century models which would be suitable to render language variety and change. The idiosyncratic approaches to entry writing represented by the consecutive editors of the DWB may even entertain the reader, who, acquainted with TickBox Lexicography (Rundell 2012), must feel amused by the mere idea of including labyrinthine and monumental entries by some editors, and terse but clear ones – by others. Prolific lexicographers, such as Heyne, were criticized by less productive ones. While the lack of a systematic dictionary plan may provoke fair criticism, as was the case with Halbertsma and his *Lexicon Frisicum*, the coverage of a variety of subjects or the Latin metalanguage does not yet have to put a dictionary at a disadvantage. These and other voices of disapproval make the reader reflect on their validity, a task which is often facilitated by the narration itself.

Overall, the book shows that dictionaries of the 19th century served different, sometimes conflicting purposes: to capture and reflect the variety of spoken registers on the one hand, and to purify and standardize a national language – on the other; to consolidate state power on the one hand, and to make the life of local communities easier – on the other. The broad linguistic (and geographic) scope of the volume enables such a comprehensive overview and constitutes its distinct advantage. The publication reveals how nationalisms and imperialisms were reflected in the approaches to vernaculars and, naturally – their dictionaries. These were brought into being not only by the technological advances connected with the Industrial Revolution, but, first and foremost – by the devotion and hard, manual labor of lexicographers working individually or in teams, an aspect which is duly highlighted in individual chapters. The impressive cross-section of lexicographic endeavors, big and small, around the world in the 19th century, shown in a broad context which transcends the confines of one century, makes the book a gripping read to those interested in languages, linguistics, history, and lexicography as well as the not-scholarly-minded who are simply interested in how the words of the world may fit in a book. Having read the volume, contemporary lexicographers may wish to reflect on how technology has facilitated compiling dictionaries, and appreciate even more the effort and stamina of their forebears.

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