

TIL HÁM AWDARMA MÁSELELERI

V ilimiy maqalalar toplami

THE BEGINNING OF THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN LEXICOGRAPHY

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The first American dictionary of the English language was compiled by a man whose name also Samuel Johnson Jr., a Connecticut Schoolmaster, was published in 1798 a small book entitled “A School Dictionary”. This book was followed in 1800 by another dictionary by the same author, which showed already some signs of Americanization. I included for instance, words like **tomahawk**, **wampum** and **Cincinnati**, borrowed into English form the Indian language. It was Noah Webster, universally considered to be the father of American lexicography, who emphatically broke away from English idiom, and embodied in his book the specifically American usage of his time. His great work is “The American Dictionary of the English language”, appeared in two volumes in 1828 and later sustained numerous revised and enlarged editions. In many respects Webster follows the lead of Dr Johnson (The British lexicographer). But he has also improved and corrected many of Johnson’s etymologies and his definitions are often more exact. Webster attempted to simplify the spelling and pronunciation that were current in the USA of the period. He devoted many years to the collection of words and the preparation of more accurate definitions.

N. Warfell [1] associated with many eminent men of his country and took an active share in public life. He realized the importance of language for the development of a nation, and devoted his energy to giving the American English the status of an independent language, distinct from British English. At that time the idea was progressive as it helped the unification of separate states into one powerful federation. The tendency became reactionary later on, when some modern linguists like Mencken shaped it into the theory of a separate American language, not only different from British English, but surpassing it in efficiently and therefore deserving to dominate and supersede all the language of the world. Even if we keep within purely linguistic or purely lexical concepts we shall readily see that the difference is not so great as to warrant American English the rank of a separate language, not a variant of English. The set of morphemes is the same. Some words have acquired a new meaning on American soil and this meaning has or has not penetrated into British English. Other words kept their earlier meanings that are obsolete and not used in Great Britain. As civilization progressed different names were given to new inventions on either side of the Atlantic. Words were borrowed from different Indian

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languages and from Spanish. All these had to be recorded in a dictionary and so accounted for the existence of specific American lexicography. The world of today with its ever-growing efficiency and intensity of communication and personal contacts, with its press, radio and television creates conditions which tend to foster not an isolation of dialects and variants but, on the contrary, their mutual penetration and integration.

Later on, the title “International Dictionary of the English Language” was adopted, and in the latest edition* not Americanism but words not used in America (Briticism) are marked off.

Webster’s dictionary enjoyed great popularity from its first editions. This popularity was due not only to the accuracy and clarity of definitions but also to the richness of additional information of encyclopedic character, which had become a tradition in American lexicography. As a dictionary Webster’s book aims to treat the entire vocabulary of the language providing definitions, pronunciation and etymology. As an encyclopedia it gives explanations about things named, including scientific and technical subjects. It does so more concisely than a full-scale encyclopedia, but it is worthy of note that the definitions are as a rule up-to-date and rigorous scientifically. In case there are different schools of thought, we find several definitions, always with a corresponding reference. Soon after N. Webster’s death two printers and booksellers of Massachusetts, George and Charles Merriam, secured the rights of his family and started the publication of revised single volume editions under the name Merriam – Webster.

The staff working for the modern edition is a big institution numbering hundreds of specialists in different branches of human activity.

It is important to note that the name Webster may be attached for publicity’s sake by anyone to any dictionary. Many publishers concerned with their profits have taken this opportunity to issue dictionaries called Webster’s. Some of the books so named are cheaply made reprints of old editions, others are said to be entirely new works. The practice of advertising by coupling Webster’s name to a dictionary, which has no connection with him, continues up to the present day [2, 239-241].

A complete revision of Webster’s dictionary is achieved with a certain degree of regularity. The years when revised editions were published are 1864-1890-1909-1934-1961. The recent Webster’s Third New International Dictionary has called forth much comment, both favorable and unfavorable. It has been greatly changed as compared with the previous edition, in word selection as well as in other matters. The emphasis is on the present-day state of the language. The number of illustrative

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quotations is increased. To accommodate the great number of new words and meanings without increasing the bulk of the volume, the editors excluded much encyclopedic material, such as names of battles, organizations, cities and names of characters in fiction, folklore, and mythology, which were all present in previous editions.

The other two great American dictionaries are the Century Dictionary, first completed in 1891, and Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary, first completed in 1895. All three continue to appear in vocabulary named subsequent editions including abridged versions. Many small handy popular dictionaries for office, school and home use are prepared to meet the demand in reference books on spelling, pronunciation, meaning and usage [3, 32-39]

An adequate idea of the dictionaries cannot be formed from a mere description and it is no substitute for actual using them. To conclude we would like to mention that for a specialist in linguistics and a teacher of foreign language systematic work with a good dictionary in conjunction with his reading is an absolute necessity.

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