English-language dictionaries, past and present

Philip Bradley

Some dictionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are discussed, followed by an account of the *Oxford English dictionary* and its Scottish equivalent; three important recent works published in Britain and America are then considered in more detail.

Abbreviations used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSD</td>
<td>Concise Scots dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARE</td>
<td>Dictionary of American regional English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOST</td>
<td>Dictionary of the older Scottish tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OED</td>
<td>Oxford English dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SND</td>
<td>Scottish national dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>(in connection with <em>The wordtree</em>) refers to column numbers in the Introduction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introduction

A dictionary, like an index, is basically a list of words and although they have this much in common their functions differ. Whereas a dictionary may cover all the words in a language or may be restricted to certain areas of knowledge, the words listed in an index are limited to the subjects represented in the particular book or other document concerned. Moreover, a dictionary is intended to define words whereas an index indicates the location, not the meaning, of the subjects indexed. The importance of dictionaries cannot be overstressed and at least one, albeit sometimes rather worn with age, can be found in most households. This need is particularly true when literary work is envisaged and this is certainly as true of the indexer as of any other kind of worker.

The word ‘dictionary’ evokes different ideas in different people. It may conjure up phrase books, words relating to specific subjects, particular authors, particular kinds of words, the massive encyclopaedic dictionaries produced in the heyday of German classical learning or the comprehensive multi-volume dictionary of a language. To most of us it will imply a volume giving the meaning and perhaps other details of any word we have occasion to look up. This article deals briefly with the earliest English dictionaries, then with some of the major English and Scottish works of the last hundred years, and finally in more detail with three recent dictionaries.

In considering the importance of a dictionary there are several points to be taken into account. These are: the field of knowledge covered by the work; the territorial area it includes; the amount of information given for each entry; whether it contains any new kind of information as opposed to the introduction of new words bringing it up-to-date; and whether there is anything new in its method of compilation. These matters decide the likely audience for the dictionary. Of the dictionaries considered here all are general although some restrict themselves to ‘hard words’; they cover varying geographical areas; the amount of information for entries varies considerably; and in all cases except for *The wordtree* the words are arranged in alphabetical order.

In the beginning

Historically, dictionaries can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. In the second century BC Aristarchus of Samothrace produced an edition of Homer that contained glosses of difficult words. These, together with words from other writers, were then listed separately in the form of an alphabetical glossary.¹ Before the introduction of printing, subject lists intended to be used as dictionaries were compiled, but the earliest English dictionary generally considered to be a dictionary as opposed to a simple wordlist was that of Robert Cawdrey, *A table alphabeticall*, published in 1604. This was followed by others containing much the same sort of information as is found in modern dictionaries. For instance, the wide range of Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia*, 1656, can be seen from the full title.² This work was reprinted in 1707 and is described by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as ‘most amusing and instructive reading.’³ The dictionary contains about 680 pages preceded by a 14-page note *To the reader* written by the author. This states that although he had a reasonable knowledge of Latin and French, yet he found himself ‘gravelled in English Books; that is, I encountred such words, as I either not at all, or not throughly understood, more than what the preceding sence did insinuate.’ He therefore decided to compile his *Glossographia*. It was intended chiefly for ‘the more-knowing Women, and less-knowing Men,’ and indeed for all who were literate enough to be able to locate a word in an alphabetical
sequence. Even the learned should find it useful, claimed the author, because it contains words outside the range of languages known to most scholars. As the title states, it was restricted to ‘hard words’. Two important features are the inclusion of etymologies and occasionally the name of an author or work where the word appears. As this was an early dictionary much of the compilation was Blount’s own work, but clearly, as time went on, dictionaries would, by their very nature, be based more and more on earlier works.

Another important seventeenth-century work was that of Elisha Coles, *English dictionary*, 1676. This was claimed to have more words than appeared in any other dictionary, and included the country of origin for many words and, in the case of British dialect words, the county or larger area where they were used. Here again the emphasis was on ‘hard words’. What is considered to be the first fairly comprehensive dictionary was that compiled by John Kersey, *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*, 1708. Here the country or locality of origin is given and, as in Blount and Coles, the emphasis is on ‘hard words’. It is estimated to contain about 35,000 words. Clearly these dictionaries contained only words that might cause difficulty and omitted words that most users would be expected to know. These three dictionaries are still sufficiently important to have been reprinted in recent years.

Dr Johnson’s dictionary

The best known of the earlier dictionaries is that compiled by Dr Johnson and published in 1755, *A dictionary of the English language*, which ran to several editions and was still in general use many years later. His views on what other people thought of lexicographers are well known: ‘A harmless drudge’, ‘those who toil at the lower employments of life’. His view of Lord Chesterfield’s lack of support for his undertaking is one of the highlights of English literature. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes Johnson’s work as ‘the first dictionary which could be read with pleasure’, and comments on his command of language and excellent sources of citations, but wretched etymology. The following is an example (from 6th edn., 1785):

HOUSE n. s. [hus, Saxon; huys, Dutch; huse, Scottish.]
A place wherein a man lives; a place of human abode.

(There follow examples from Shakespeare, Bacon and Watts.)

The OED

The principal English dictionary produced during the last hundred years is *The Oxford English dictionary (OED)*, published between 1884 and 1928 and reissued in 1933. This contains, as far as is humanly possible, every word in the English language known to have been used from about 1400 to the time of its publication, and has been kept up-to-date by means of supplements. Each entry contains the word itself, with alternative spellings, its pronunciation, part of speech, etymology, meaning and examples. The examples give the date the word was used, the author and title of the work where it was used, the page or other reference and the quotation itself. A number of existing dictionaries were used in the compilation of the OED; works such as Skeat’s *Etymological dictionary of the English language*, 1882, and Wright’s *English dialect dictionary*, 1898–1905.

Scottish dictionaries

The Scottish equivalent of the OED is the *Scottish national dictionary (SND)*, 1931–1976, which covers the period from about 1700 to date, but there is also another work, the *Dictionary of the older Scottish tongue (DOST)*, begun in 1931, which covers the earliest years to 1700. These two works owe much to John Jamieson’s *Etymological dictionary of the Scottish language*, 1808. The kind of information contained in SND and DOST is the same as that in the OED. The compilation of these three dictionaries was clearly a major task, as their size and the time taken for publication indicates, and involved many workers being allocated texts to peruse and then completing slips with information about the words required. Although much of the drudgery would today be taken out of the work by the use of computers, the use of human power to complete slips is still the only way to carry out the initial stages of the work.

Abridged dictionaries

It is interesting to note that both Skeat’s and Jamieson’s works were subsequently published in an abridged form, and of course shortened versions of dictionaries are produced today. A long-established work of this kind is the *Shorter Oxford English dictionary* (3rd edn. 1944) in two volumes. The Oxford University Press is noted for its large range of English dictionaries. There are at least eleven adult works. In addition to the OED and the Shorter OED there are the *Concise Oxford dictionary of current English*, the *Pocket Oxford dictionary of current English*, the *Little Oxford dictionary of current English*, the *Oxford mini-dictionary*, *Oxford paperback dictionary*, *Oxford illustrated dictionary*, *New Oxford illustrated dictionary*, *Oxford dictionary of current idiomatic English* and *Oxford-Duden pictorial English dictionary*. In addition to these the Oxford University Press has also produced several children’s dictionaries such as the *Oxford children’s dictionary* and the *Oxford junior dictionary*.

Of other general dictionaries one of the most popular in Britain is *Chambers twentieth century dictionary*. This has been produced in several editions over many years and the latest edition, published in 1983, contains many new technical and scientific words and is also the dictionary preferred by scrabblers. Among American
dictionaries perhaps the best known is Webster’s third new international dictionary of the English language, 1971, in two volumes (known as Merriam 3 from the publisher and the edition). This work first appeared in 1909 and was based on Noah Webster’s American dictionary, 1828, also in two volumes.

Of the dictionaries published during the last few years there are three which seem of particular interest to readers in the English-speaking world. These are the Concise Scots dictionary (CSD), 1985, the Dictionary of American regional English (DARE), 1985 and The wordtree, 1984.

Concise Scots dictionary

The first of these is an abridged version of the Dictionary of the older Scottish tongue and the Scottish national dictionary. The geographical area covered is that where lowland Scots is spoken, and it omits the Highlands where the predominant language is, or has been, Gaelic. It includes words that were used in England but were also used in Scotland at a different period or where there is a difference in meaning. There is a long and most interesting introduction on such subjects as pronunciation, grammar, definitions, dating of words, distribution and etymology. The dictionary is a good example of how a great deal of information can economically be included in the entries by the use of symbols. For instance, the entry for ‘boat’ (the sort in which one goes to sea, not a wine butt) contains ten lines in a 56 mm wide column, but the amount of information contained is considerable. We are given five spellings of ‘boat’ as a noun with their dates, and two slightly different meanings of the word. ‘Boat’ as a verb has two meanings with dates given. There are then five derivatives with meaning, date and, where appropriate, location. An example of this conciseness is the single line:

\[\text{boatic, bottick} = \text{boat-hook} 20-, \text{now Sh Bnf.}\]

From this we learn the two spellings of the word, its meaning, that it is of twentieth-century origin, and that it is used in Shetland and Banff. The main thing which this dictionary lacks, intentionally, compared with its two parent works, is the citation of sources of words. To most users this information will not be necessary.

With the publication of the Shorter OED in England an abridged version of the SND was an obvious development in Scotland, and for those people interested in the Scottish language who feel that the ten volumes of the SND may be expensive and perhaps too space-consuming for an individual to own, this one-volume work is a very good alternative. The compiler, Mairi Robinson, has worked on it for ten years to produce a most useful book.

A talk at the Society of Indexers’ Conference at Edinburgh in 1977 given by Russell Walker, who had helped in preparing the SND, concluded with the words, ‘And so . . . the Scottish language is recorded [in the SND], as is proper, for it is rapidly disappearing.’ This is perhaps true as far as the spoken language is concerned, hastened by the use of ‘standard’ English in broadcasting and to some extent in education. In the matter of written Scots the story is different. There, a conscious attempt is being made to maintain the language. This can be seen in the work done by the Association of Scottish Literary Studies, by the Scottish Arts Council which makes awards and offers bursaries, by having Writers in Residence at some universities, by the launching of the journal Books in Scotland in 1978, and the Scottish Book Club founded in 1985. The University of Stirling has recently opened its own publishing house. These are only some of the many forces interested in retaining the Scots language. This language may be spoken less than in years gone by, but in literary circles it is thriving.

American dictionaries

Preparations for the Dictionary of American regional English began in 1964, although the idea of such a work had been in mind for many decades before. The history of the dictionary is traced back to the founding, in 1889, of the American Dialect Society, but the bulk of the work was organized by the chief editor, Frederic G. Cassidy, of the University of Wisconsin, who had already carried out a survey, the Wisconsin English Language Survey, and the questionnaire used for that was the basis of the one used for DARE. This dictionary is, like the OED, DOST and SND, based on traditional lines and is an impressive and important work, a worthy product of the Belknap Press.

The words contained in it were obtained partly from literary sources and partly by visits carried out by fieldworkers who interviewed informants in communities of various sizes in all the states, including Alaska and Hawaii. The work of the fieldworkers was most important because the purpose of the dictionary was to list dialect words, many of which are not found in literature. The questionnaire they used was worded in such a way that the informants would not become suspicious of any ulterior motive. There were 1,847 questions, and the interviews lasted for a week with each household. The informants are listed, arranged by code numbers so that they can easily be identified. For each of them there are eleven columns giving personal details and other information. An interesting feature is that the informants, who are listed as black or white, are predominantly white. Most of the questions sought to establish the regional or local name for an object. For instance, a dragonfly is known by 79 other names (p. xii). Of the 2½ million words in the dictionary those taken from literary sources are from the works published by the American Dialect Society and from 5,000 other publications. These are principally works of local interest and therefore contain local words.

A useful and interesting aspect of the dictionary is the
barefeeted adj
Without shoes, barefoot.

1928 Peterkin. *Scarlet Sister Mary* 245 SC, E 'got such a awful splinter in e heel de last time e danced barefeeted. 1967 DARE Tape A14. We didn' have shoes ... We would go barefeeted.

barefooted adj Also barefoot [Cf. SND barefoot(ed) broth broth made without meat]
1 also bare, rarely bare-handed: Of coffee, tea, or liquor: undiluted. chiefly Mid and C Atl, Ohio Valley See Map Also called naked B1 Cf socks

1847 Paulding. *Amer. Comedies* 194 Philadelphia PA, I thought even a Yankee knew that 'stone fence barefooted' is the polite English for whisky uncontaminated—pure, sir! 1867 Lowell. *Biglow vixi NEEng, "I take my tea barefoot." said a backwoodsman when asked if he would have cream and sugar. 1888 Whitman. *November Boughs* 406, "Barefoot whiskey" is the Tennessee name for the undiluted stimulant. 1954 PADS 21.20 eSC, Barefoot ed1960 Wilson Coll. csKY, Barefooted(ed) . . . Straight, as coffee without cream and sugar, or whiskey, undiluted. 1965-70 DARE (Qu. KK61, . . "Would you like milk or lemon in your tea?" "No thanks, I'll take it . . . .") 19 InfS, chiefly Mid and C Atl, Ohio Valley, Barefooted; NC7, Barefooted (coffee); TX11, Barefooted—naked; GA67, IN32, NJ1, 39, PA234, TN13, VA15, Barefoot; PA35, Branch water and barefoot; 11 InfS, chiefly Mid and C Atl, Ohio Valley, Bare; KY47, Bare-handed. 1967-68 DARE FW Addit eel A, Barefoot—coffee with neither cream nor sugar—heard from waitress in Iowa City; swOR, Barefooted coffee—straight.

parenthesized add

2 Of bread: plain, without anything added.

3 Of horses: unshod. West

bare-naked adj [Redund] scattered, but chiefly Nth See Map See also bare-ass(ed)
Naked.
1914 *DN* 4.69 ME, nNH, Barenaked . . . Usually "All barenaked."
1923 *DN* 5.201 SWMO, He come a-runnin' out just plumb bare naked.

From Dictionary of American regional English, reproduced by permission of Belknap Press.

The wordtree

The CSD and DARE are both examples of the traditional, painstakingly prepared dictionary and will certainly have their niches in their respective countries. They will serve their purpose for many years to come, and the small amount of space allocated to them here compared to the amount given to *The wordtree* is not intended to reflect in any way the relative value of the three works. Henry Burger's *Wordtree* requires more extended treatment not because it is more important—that remains to be seen—but because of its originality and ingenuity. Indeed, its importance may well be a matter of controversy. In passing it may be added that some dictionary definitions of the word 'dictionary' imply that a work such as *The wordtree* is not really a dictionary at all because it is not, at least in its main part, arranged alphabetically. It begins with a lengthy and closely argued Introduction which explains the reasons for the compilation of the work; this is followed by the Hierarchy and an Index to the Hierarchy. Dr Burger's aim in compiling it results from his belief that language is not being used to the best advantage. His thesis is that language must change in order to keep up with the technological world. In the past the world has accepted descriptive rather than active words, words involved with thinking rather than doing. Because such manoeuvring or activity is best described by the use of transitives, not intransitives, many new transitives are necessary. These may be made either by altering existing words or by making new ones. Furthermore, he believes that the words in such a dictionary should be arranged hierarchically, not alphabetically, therefore the traditional kind of dictionary, which is arranged alphabetically, is not adequate for his purpose. Contrast this with *The wordtree* which is,

a dictionary of cause and effect. It reveals alternative ways of affecting the physical and social environments, by means of single words that summarize each procedure. Each idea in the language is defined and differentiated in just two words (p. 16).

and

Each procedural word (transitive verb) simply adds one new process to the next lower, next simpler stem.
Thus, to free something and to power it is to enable it (p. 12).

Putting it into somewhat more technical language, Burger says, 'many processes may be defined binarily, by combining the next simpler process and its addendum, and may be hierarchized' (C 23). It is a 'new add-on dictionary [which] seems to be the first evolution-based wordbook' (p. 12).

The Hierarchy

Let us examine the Hierarchy in more detail. The accompanying illustration shows the layout. (The endpaper on which the meaning of the symbols is given cannot be copied owing to the stringent restrictions regarding reproduction.) The Hierarchy gives a word and then defines it by equating it with two other words, and also gives further words such as synonyms, antonyms, causes, effects, and other words of similar but not identical meaning. The exact relationship of these words to the main word is represented by the symbols. All these words may be found in the Hierarchy by means of the alphabetical Index. The illustration shows that the entries vary considerably in length. The order of the entries in the Hierarchy is determined so that the transitive verbs are graded by their 'enduring signification' (C 84). An example of this order is:

19760 to turpentine = resinify (8116) and oil
8116 to resinify = process (1115) and resin
1115 to process = treat and forward (197)
197 to forward = move and unbare (83 \to)
83 \to to unbare = create and no-second-step (0)

Cause and effect

Reverting to Burger’s statement that The wordtree is a dictionary of cause and effect (p. 16), he says, ‘Science and engineering seek to relate cause or agent to effect. Just such a relation is performed in language by the transitive verb’ (p. 12), and later he says ‘The wordtree offers for the first time a comprehensive classification of transitive verbs. It may eventually prove somewhat analogous for process’ (C 76). One important point in Burger’s argument is this need to use transitive verbs, and in the Introduction he constantly emphasizes it. His view is that in order to be positive and get to the point of an issue we should be as brief as possible; ‘our addition of each neology makes language ever more precise, not less’ (C 110). We should not say, ‘Let us make it final,’ but ‘Let us finalize it’ (C 154); not ‘He must go to hospital,’ but ‘Hospitalize him.’ Burger’s view is perhaps right in theory. The first request is given in a less peremptory form than the second. If we were all robots such a theory would work admirably in practice too. We would all obey our orders without question. I suggest,


Thelndexer Vol. 15 No. 2 October 1986
however, that to some extent in written communications and even more so verbally, the response depends upon not so much what we are asked to do as the manner in which the request is made. In that case a request made in the form of a transitive may have less positive impact than one given as an intransitive.

**Transitives**

The wordtree contains 24,600 of these transitives (C 13, C 18, Statistical table p. 44). This means that there are

at least 30% more basics of the key (i.e. transitive) words than the most comprehensive unabridged dictionary heretofore extant, namely, the *Oxford English Dictionary* with all its supplements (C 29).

Burger feels that because language becomes more positive by using transitives we can, if there is not one available, coin our own. The two concepts of using transitives, and of inventing them if we cannot find what we require, are the basis of the dictionary. Those who prefer positives, and of inventing them if we cannot find what we can, if there is not one given as an intransitive.

As just indicated, Dr Burger himself minted a number of words. These were for both his earlier publications and some specifically for *The wordtree* (C 221-C 223), the total number being 18 (Statistical table p. 44). Of all the words in the dictionary, taken from both written and spoken sources, ‘perhaps an eighth of all neologies accepted by *The wordtree* are sourced in speech alone (especially broadcast)’ (C 29). Burger seems to put in some special pleading on the subject of coining new words:

'But suppose the reader,' he says, ‘is a specialist in the gapped field [i.e. in a field of knowledge not fully covered by Burger], yet cannot find the term. Then he should coin, publish and report the idea transitive to us. For specifics on how to coin a new transitive, a reader may request our free report F173F’ (C 217).

As some subjects of study in some countries are quite free with the coining of new words (for example the social sciences in America) it is likely that this source will be profuse in producing new words.

It may be added that these Citation Sources are very difficult to use. Besides being ‘miniaturized’ there are sometimes several entries to a line, with the liberal use of references to other entries. In looking up the citation for the verb to favoritedaughter the reader is referred from one place to another, six in all. The sources are arranged as they are to save space, but trying to find a reference from the 2204 arranged in nine columns is hard work.

**Reservations**

Anyone reading a new kind of work such as this is bound to have some reservations. Burger's own forceful defence of his book suggests that he expects opposition. He himself says, 'Some of the technolect transitives grate on the ear [but] The lexicographer has a scientific responsibility to report them as being actually used' (C 118), and Louis Milic, Professor of English at Cleveland State University, says in the Foreword,
Though new (perhaps because new), the concept of binary transitivity will not gain acceptance easily everywhere, especially because it may seem to many to consist of outrageous barbarisms (p. 7).

It seems to me that many of the words are so strange, both in sound and meaning, certainly to a British reader, that it is impossible to understand the definitions. Most of us can agree that *slope = slant* and *up* (I thought it could also mean *slant* and *down*, but Burger puts this under *decline*). Presumably this is a difference in British and American usage). We can probably agree that *smoke = burn* and *fume*. Using the common -ize ending we find *gardenize = convert* and *garden*. We may dislike this, but it is an understandable definition and indeed many of the words ending in -ize are understandable, such as *rusticize, proteinize* and words formed from the names of places such as *koreanize = sinicize* and *easterinize*. Many words, however, whether or not they end in -ize, are defined in a way which is not always clear. Even to a person versed in American politics it may not be obvious that to *alexanderhaig = neologize* and *unexplain* (i.e. introduce new words in order to cloud an issue). The dictionary tells us that *thatcherize = chemolysate* and *halffill*, the word *thatcherize* having been heard on a Snapper Mower Co. advertisement on television at 2130 hours, 1st May, 1981. Although we are told that the two words together mean *thatcherize*, the question for me remains, What does it mean? I do not think it is connected with Margaret Thatcher but I am not sure. The word *haemorrhage* is probably known to most of us—perhaps in the American spelling hemmorhage—but it is rather strange to see it used as a verb and defined as *bicycle* and *gush*. Burger's source of this was a broadcast of the Paul Harvey News in 1982. The most enduring transitive verb for me, though, is *favoritedaughter = jury* and *prefer*. Furthermore, many dictionary users will certainly wonder how every transitive can be defined by just two words. It sometimes requires a great mental effort to understand the relationship between the two defining words and the word they define.

**Rapid change**

One of Burger's arguments in favour of altering the language is that it must suit the requirements of technology. He uses the analogy of refrigerators and lathes on the one hand and language on the other. These two items of machinery may be improved in design so that we wish to buy new ones (C 108). Similarly, we must change our language to suit new activities. On a long-term basis this is in fact happening all the time. Advance does depend on communication, and that means the use of written and spoken language. In the scientific fields he wants this language change to be carried out as quickly as possible. This is my main disagreement with Burger. Although his view may be right, my concern is that he is trying to change the language quickly to suit his own needs instead of allowing it to develop naturally. He would have us invent new words to suit the needs of technology, but language is not intended to be treated like that. It is an inherited possession which does its job adequately without being tortured into new shapes. Scientific language just as much as our daily language is changing all the time and will in due course do by natural means what it has to do without being forced. I think also it is inappropriate to compare language with concrete objects. In particular, if the public do not wish to purchase new objects they will not do so. A manufacturer usually tests the market first. It seems to me that Burger is not testing the market. He gives his views on language, and if the public do not wish to accept his proposed changes they are treated as reactionary. He brushes them aside and pushes on.

**Critics**

Indeed, for those who disagree with what he has to say Burger has some harsh words. Because the American heritage dictionary advertised that important personalities 'strongly object to anyone using stonewall as a verb' he says that the dictionary shames neology (C 108) and of those readers who do not like his methods he says, "Gavan" a situation?' (C 64). Mayor Gavan's con...

To such Bourbons [bourbonize = conservatize and *obstinate*] it will be hopeless for the present author to justify the ethno-semantic outlook underlying The wordtree. Since the transitive tells how to achieve a certain goal, an attack on transitivity is an attempt to jell the world into its mold of decades ago (C 156).

Burger is of course entitled to his views, but he tends to be so obstinate that he considers it not worth bothering about anyone who disagrees with him. For instance, he disagrees with the sociologist B. F. Skinner for being 'pigeon-based' (C 23, C 47) and mentions him disparagingly elsewhere (e.g. C 126). Perhaps this dislike is the reason Skinner does not appear in the Citation Sources. Elsewhere Burger lambasts the short-sightedness of social scientists and any individuals and organizations which do not support his views. He attacks politicians in general and has a very low opinion of J. A. Gavan, Mayor of Columbia, Missouri, because a tax credit on...
all columns numbered. The 54 pages contain 169 columns of printed matter numbered C 1 to C 279. The reason for this oddity is adequately explained, but the result is that the column number given in the Concordance for a subject may not tally with the column in which it appears. ‘If a listing does not appear on the indicated page,’ says the author, ‘consult the bottom of the preceding page or the top of the succeeding page’ (C 259). The discrepancies in column numbering show that the organizational interplay between man and the computer is not yet perfected. Another criticism is that for a book which has so much meat in it, albeit meat with which many readers will disagree, the Index is woefully brief. Perhaps this criticism of the Concordance is somewhat unfair since Burger does emphasize that the book should be considered for its good points and for what it tries to do. The Introduction, important as it is, is an ancillary part of it.

Readership

For what readers, then, is this work intended? Burger says it is aimed at ‘the high-level professional (such as elite patent attorneys and copywriters), rather than theoreticians’ (C 237) although the title-page gives 29 categories including authors, librarians, English-learning foreigners, and students of any discipline. Clearly the dictionary is aimed at a very wide but educated readership, although one may wonder what a non-English speaking immigrant will make of many of the words.

Conclusion

Dr Burger spent 27 years in preparing The wordtree (C 229). He is a highly qualified academic who has also been active in the Dictionary Society of North America, so this unusual work must be considered as a serious contribution in its field. Are dictionaries intended to be only for recording words, or are they to be arranged, as Burger implies, to manipulate our ideas? Has he achieved a breakthrough which, further developed, could have sinister implications of the Nineteen-eighty-four kind? Burger’s alternative to the traditional kind of dictionary is a fundamental matter which he will doubtless push strongly, but one which will probably be resisted just as strongly by many readers.

References

2. Blount, Thomas. Glossographia: or a dictionary interpreting all such hard words, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Teutonick, Belgick, British or Saxon, as are now used in our refined English tongue. Also terms of divinity, law, physic, mathematicks, heraldry, anatomy, war, music, architecture; and of several other arts and sciences explicated. With etymolo-

gies, definitions, and historical observations on the same. Very useful for all such as desire to understand what they read. London: printed by Thomas Newcomb, 1656 (rep. Menston: Scolar Press Ltd., 1969).
4. Coles, Elisha. An English dictionary explaining the difficult terms that are used in divinity, husbandry, physic, philosophy, law, navigation, mathematicks, and other arts and sciences. Containing many thousands of hard words (and proper names of places) more than are in any other English dictionary or expositor. Together with the etymological derivation of them from their proper fountains, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, or any other language. In a method more comprehensive, than any that is extant. London: printed for Samuel Crouch, 1676 (rep. Menston: Scolar Press Ltd., 1971).
7. Johnson, Samuel. A dictionary of the English language in which the words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers. To which are prefixed a history of the language, and an English grammar. 2 vols. London, 1755.
10. The Scottish national dictionary. Designed partly on regional lines and partly on historical principles, and contains all the Scottish words known to be in use or to have been in use since c. 1700, edited by William Grant. 10 vols. Edinburgh: Scottish National Dictionary Association Ltd., 1931–76.
11. A dictionary of the older Scottish tongue from the twelfth century to the end of the seventeenth, by Sir William A. Craigie. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1931–. (Vol. 5, O-Pn, was published in 1983. The dictionary is also published in parts and the end portion of vol. 5 is part 32. Both the editorship and the publisher have changed since the first vol. was published.)
plan to complete the set in 4 or 5 volumes, including a Data Summary volume, by about 1991.)


Philip Bradley is former Senior Librarian of Dundee College of Technology; Review Editor of The Indexer.

Perfect, nobody is

Two unexpected punches in the index to How I got to be perfect by Jean Kerr (Doubleday, 1978), a collection of her humorous articles from magazines. First, the l section:

idiot, 24, 87, 119, 160
idiot, tale told by a, 25
index (This is the index, idiot)

Then, for readers puzzled to find entries in the index which echo the text but cannot be found on the pages cited, the final thrust at the foot of the index:

In all cases the page numbers refer to the magazines in which these pieces originally appeared. So there!

Listed as the 'Longest index' in the 1986 edition of the Guinness book of world records (Sterling, New York) is Chemical Abstracts 10th Collective Index (1977-1981), published by Chemical Abstracts Service, a Division of the American Chemical Society, Columbus, Ohio. This was completed in June 1983 and published in 75 volumes, totalling 23,948,352 entries in 131,445 pages, and weighing 380 lb.

Our picture shows this index in a 14-foot stack, contemplated by Nancy, a 16-foot-tall giraffe at Columbus Zoo, Ohio. (Photograph courtesy of Chemical Abstracts Service.)