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Words in Sheep's Clothing

Summary

The paper focuses on various types of **dictionary words**, i.e. infrequent and rather uncommon words often listed in comprehensive monolingual English dictionaries but virtually nonexistent in actual usage. These are typically learned derivatives of Greek or Latin origin that are given as unlabeled synonyms of everyday vocabulary items. Their inclusion seems to stem from the application of two different bits of lexicographic philosophy: great respect for matters classical and the principle of comprehensiveness. Seen from this perspective, descriptive corpus-based lexicography is still too weak.

While in large native-speaker-oriented dictionaries of English such entries do not seem to cause any harm, they can be positively dangerous in EFL/ESL environments, because using them can easily lead to strange or downright incomprehensible lexical items. Learners are advised to be careful and check the status of such "dubious" items also in English monolingual learners' dictionaries, in which dictionary words are virtually nonexistent.

Key words: monolingual dictionary, English, decoding, dictionary word, "dubious" word, potential word

Besede v ovčji koži

Povzetek

Prispevek obravnava raznovrstne **slovarske besede**, tj. redke in nenavadne besede, ki jih večji enojezični slovarji angleščine pogosto vključujejo kot gesla, v dejanski rabi pa jih skoraj ni. To so pogosto učene klasične izpeljanke; navedene so kot sopomenske alternative vsakdanjih besed, in sicer brez kvalifikatorjev. Vključene so zaradi velikega spoštovanja do latinsko-grškega elementa v angleškem jeziku, pa tudi zaradi principa izčrpnosti. Pri tovrstnih geslih deskriptivnosti in uporabe korpusov v leksikografske namene torej še ni opaziti.

Čeprav v slovarjih za materne govorce angleščine tovrstna gesla najbrž nikomur ne škodijo, pa je v okoljih, kjer angleščino poučujejo/rabijo kot tuji jezik, ta praksa lahko nevarna, saj bi lahko marsikaterega uporabnika zapeljala v napačno ali vsaj čudno rabo. Pri uporabi večjih enojezičnih slovarjev je zato priporočljivo preverjati status "dvomljivih" leksikalnih enot tudi v enojezičnih angleških slovarjih za tujce, ki tovrstnega besedišča dosledno ne navajajo.

Ključne besede: enojezični slovar, angleščina, razvezovanje, slovarska beseda, "dvomljiva" beseda, potencialna beseda

Words in Sheep's Clothing

Words. A fascinating and fitting topic, to me at any rate, especially in a Festschrift for Meta Grosman, since it is a topic we have always shared a keen interest in, even if in different contexts. For most people, words are there simply to be used at will. The concept is clear, unproblematic, straightforward, useful, even indispensable, and dynamic enough to be recorded in a myriad of dictionaries, whether print, CD-ROM, or online. But on looking at them more closely, the serene picture of simplicity and clarity may no longer be at its most convincing …

1. Introduction: The Elusive Word Captured and Recorded

Whenever we need to look up a word, most of us turn for help to a good, up-to-date comprehensive dictionary, thus demonstrating an awareness of the overall quality deriving from the dictionary's **size**. In other words, we assume that in assessing a dictionary's authority, size alone must be taken as a key factor. Indeed, it seems logical that the bigger a dictionary the better it is bound to be as a reference source, since it both contains more entries and provides more information on them than smaller works of reference. However, matters lexicographical are not always so straightforward, meaning that the seemingly unassailable "the bigger the better" philosophy need not always work, at least not for all purposes.

This paper focuses on words and dictionaries, specifically monolingual English dictionaries, and further on the situation when advanced-level speakers or users of English are in need of decoding information, that is, one of **understanding** a lexical item they encountered in reading or listening. In this task, dictionary users routinely consult a comprehensive dictionary. Users typically look at words in binary terms, viz. they are perceived as being either simple or difficult to understand, and of course it is the latter situation that often calls for dictionary consultation.

2. Lexical Items Listed in the Dictionary: A Motley Crew

Virtually all general dictionaries (especially the larger ones) contain various types of entries - not only general but technical, scientific, dialectal, slangy, jargon, formal and informal, literary, archaic, obsolete, merely old-fashioned, not to mention, on another level, abbreviations and acronyms, a variety of phrasal items, encyclopedic terms for people and places, foreign terms, etc. etc. that have different degrees of relevance for different types of dictionary users.

For most people, recognizing general and specialized words, and common nouns and proper nouns, may well be salient; for them, the linguists' standard division (e.g. Harley 2006, 117-19) of lexical items into **content words** and **function words**, based on the distinction between lexical and grammatical meaning, is not so obvious.

In this paper, I will briefly discuss a number of remarkable types of words, focusing on several categories of rather infrequent, uncommon and/or learned lexical items that get routinely listed in many (larger) general monolingual dictionaries of English produced on both sides of the Atlantic,

notably the major *Oxford, Longman, Collins, Chambers; Merriam-Webster, Random House, Webster's New World,* and *American Heritage* educated-native-speaker-oriented productions.

3. Sound Footing in Question: Dictionary Words

Let us first consider a handful of the <u>less-than-common</u>, abstruse, learned and/or borrowed, words listed - typically as undefined and unlabeled run-ons - in the bigger monolingual native-speaker dictionaries of English (say Butterfield ed. 2003, Higgleton and Thomson eds. 1998, Agnes ed. 1999, Soukhanov and Rooney eds. 1999, Pearsall ed. 1998, Mish ed. 2003, Steinmetz ed. 1997, and of course the 20-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* {Simpson and Weiner eds. 1989} and some of its offspring): *acceptableness* (cf. *acceptability), cooperator* (cf. *collaborator / co-worker), declaratory, delict, donator* (cf. *donor), endangerment, etheric (oil), facultative* (cf. *optional), feuilleton* (cf. *sketch), garniture* (cf. *set), geometer* (cf. *surveyor), graver* (cf. *engraver), incalculably, jalousie, legitimation, nautics, natality, narcomania©, nostrification, pelerine, prosaist, radicchio, redaction,* and scores of other items that are mere **dictionary words**, defined as those that you find only in a dictionary (Newmark 1991, 147). They are rarely – if ever – used but have time-honored places in the dictionary. Who, for example, would really use *pelerine* for *cape*? Talk about *conquerableness*? Such words – typically learned "latent" derivatives of standard vocabulary items – are chiefly artificial creations that serve almost no purpose in the language. Sometimes (Read 1978, 96) words are coined for the express purpose of being inserted into a dictionary; the status of such **opportunistic words**, as Read calls them, as viable lexical items is questionable. Note that this is not the question of deciding on either of two (or more) synonymous items that might make a native speaker think twice before settling on it, as in the case of *encyclopedicness* vs. *encyclopedicity* or *appropriateness* vs. *appropriacy*, or, more formally and with a personal view as to the "needless variant," of *averment* or *averral,* or *normality and normalcy* (Garner 1998, 67, 445-6, 453). I am rather talking about the formal, learned "potential" words that are virtually nonexistent in actual usage.

It would seem that dictionary words are commoner in those larger monolingual dictionaries which were compiled making little use of computer technology, and of corpus analysis in particular; thus a recent edition of the *Collins English Dictionary* (Butterfield ed. 2003) enters among its undefined run-ons the derivatives *oppositionist* and *oppositionless*; neither of these is to be found in the similar-sized (well, even larger) but corpus-based *New Oxford* (Pearsall ed. 1998).

Dictionary words also get listed in large bilingual dictionaries designed primarily for decoding tasks, that is, for understanding an L2 (=foreign-language) text or translating from an L2 into one's L1 (=first language, typically mother tongue). However, since bilingual dictionaries play a role that is considerably different from that of their monolingual counterparts, and are moreover still widely regarded as imperfect, flawed, partly outdated, or at least old-fashioned reflections of the monolingual tomes, they will be left out of discussion.

Some words are clearly different while still qualifying as dictionary words. For instance, take the general concept of 'which cannot be eliminated'; it should be expressed by *ineliminable*. Isn't

this just another dictionary word too? Why so? Do dictionaries (and corpora) concur, showing largely the same picture?

3.1 Dictionary Words Subdivided

Anyway, while pondering on such and similar lexical items, I realized that they are more diverse than might appear at first sight. To begin with, dictionary words appear to belong to at least two related subcategories.

(1) First, there are also **dictionary-word morphemes**, that is, morphemes that are dubious as real language products. For example, the acclaimed monolingual *Collins*, referred to above, lists both the noun *catharsis* and its irregular plural, *catharses*. By contrast, the bilingual *Oxford Hachette* (Corréard and Grundy eds. 1994) does not enter any plural form at all. I am referring to a bilingual dictionary only to point out that in spite of what many people may think about bilingual dictionaries, the better bilingual dictionaries of today might be less prone to treat their entries mechanically than their large monolingual counterparts, opting instead for a more selective, corpus-based and thus more realistic, selection and presentation of their entries. Or consider the entry *falsie*, 'either of two pads worn inside a bra to make the breasts look larger or more shapely,' in the *Encarta* (Soukhanov and Rooney eds. 1999), which many other dictionaries list in the plural form only, in this sense at any rate. The dubious singular form seems to reflect the conviction that a canonical noun form be listed in the singular, whatever the cost.

(2) Second, there is the **dubious sense**, a "somehow suspect" sense of a polysemous lexical item. For example, some of the larger English dictionaries (e.g. *Collins*) define *detector* also as a person doing detecting work, while many others restrict it to mean only a device for detecting. Even though corpus evidence suggests that the former sense is dubious, many respectable dictionaries keep recording it.

4. "Dubious" Words at Large

Quite a few native-speaker dictionaries of English contain many (mostly unlabeled) "dubious" words that are not really technical or dialectal or slangy or archaic, not being residues of specialized discourse or of an older state of the language (these, of course, are needed for decoding purposes in reading specialized or older texts), but rather made up e.g. by applying an existing word-formation rule, or borrowed wholesale from a reputable donor (typically Greek or Latin). When such items are entered in a dictionary, they seem to reflect two things: One, "the more the better" lexicographic policy of entry inclusion/exclusion, particularly if the item under discussion is of classsical origin, and two, an acute sense of scholarly comprehensiveness. But do such words, which are often derivatives, interpretable, possible words that are not actual words, existing as they do in theory rather than in practice (Miller 1991, 108-9), really belong in a (general) dictionary? I believe they do not, for the most part, given that their very existence is suspect, so that you are not likely to come upon them, which is precisely why you are not likely to need

information about them. Accordingly, Bailey (1991, 278) observes that "big dictionaries are nothing but storerooms with infrequently visited and dusty corners." On the other hand, in a large monolingual dictionary designed expressly for the native speaker, thus chiefly for decoding (=elucidation of the meanings of "hard" words or "difficult" senses), such items are defensible, on the grounds that ANY conceivable lexical item just might be found in a text, say used by an eccentric author, in which case it would of course need to be entered and defined somewhere. By contrast, in the context of English as a foreign language, such items may be positively harmful, especially for encoding (=either L1-to-L2 translation or writing in L2), because their inclusion might tempt the learner to use them in composing in (everyday) English, which could make one's prose, well, unusual, ponderous, outlandish, just slightly odd, or downright incomprehensible.

"Dubious" or "fringe" lexical items can be found - and quite legitimately at that - in certain smaller and specialized wordbooks, often repositories of arcane lexica, that is, idiosyncratic, colorful collections – usually compiled by non-linguists – of strange, preposterous, weird and wonderful, incredible, obscure, etc.etc. words, but these esoteric volumes too (e.g. Dickson 1982 and Saussy III 1984) will be left out of discussion. A related and more widely known English wordbook, the dictionary of difficult words, however, will not be totally ignored (cf. below).

4.1 Identification Stage: Easier Said Than Done

It is not always easy to determine whether a given item qualifies as a dictionary word, even if it is not a lengthy, learned Latinate term listed in a large desk dictionary (but hardly anywhere else). Take *jazzer* (or *jazzist), guitarist,* and *bassist*, for instance: Are these legitimate, as it were, words, existing side by side with *jazz musician, guitar player,* and *bass player*? What about *boatful*? And *labourist* or *persiflage*, both entered as headwords in the acclaimed *Collins* (Butterfield ed. 2003)? Or consider *agendum*: Is it a <u>real</u> word? The *Encarta* and *Collins*, for instance, both enter it, while the *New Oxford* does not. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has a mere two citations, both fairly old, as against as many as 67 for *agenda*. Next, consider the noun *casualization* and the related verb, *to casualize*. Both the noun and the verb are entered and defined in the *OED* (Simpson and Weiner eds. 1989), but neither can be found in the *New Shorter Oxford* (Brown ed. 1993). The *New Oxford* (Pearsall ed. 1998) defines the noun, listing the verb only as an undefined run-on. Neither is listed in most of the other major dictionaries of English. It is not to be found in the 100-million-word British National Corpus either. Is the verb a likelier candidate for a dictionary word? What about the status of the suspiciously-looking adjectives *circulative* and *ensurable*? Next, is *problematics* a standard English word or a "European" dictionary word? The former, according to the *New Oxford* (Pearsall ed. 1998); a nonexistent item, hence the latter, according to most other dictionaries. Also, there are "competing derivatives": Is *torpidity* a dictionary word, given that the *Collins* (Butterfield ed. 2003) lists it as a mere undefined run-on while treating *torpor* as a headword? The same applies to the pair *ardor* (commoner) and *ardency* (rarer). A similar observation can be made about the "real" noun *detention* vs. the unlikelier *detainment*, routinely entered in most larger dictionaries of English as a run-on s.v. the verb *detain*, as in the *Collins* or *Encarta*, or less commonly as a headword but only cross-referred to *detention*, as in the two-volume *World Book Dictionary* (Barnhart ed. 1996). By contrast, the frequently revised

bilingual *Collins Robert* (Duval and Back eds. 1998) lists them side by side, suggesting two more or less equivalent competing noun forms. Still on the subject of pairs of learned words - are *appositive* and *appositional* dictionary words? The former seems to be commoner, so perhaps the latter only should be regarded as the culprit. The problem can indeed be discussed in terms of "clines of acceptability/use," as in the case of *-able* adjectives derived from verbs: *knowledgeable* and *washable* are OK, *attributable* being slightly less so, while *attemptable* is clearly less credible as a "real" lexical item. Can we draw the lines? Should we?

Or let us consider *applier* and *associator*. They are, to be sure, only listed, chiefly as run-ons, in the larger dictionaries. Are they dictionary words, carrying the stamp of questionableness (questionability?) as far as their very existence goes? Not long ago, I realized that sometimes a curious situation arises that complicates matters even more: Linguists discuss *idiomaticity*; however, the larger monolingual dictionaries of English either list *idiomaticalness* or *idiomaticness* (Barnhart ed. 1996, Butterfield ed. 2003, Soukhanov and Rooney eds. 1999), ignore the item altogether (Pearsall ed. 1998), or treat it as an undefined run-on (*Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* on CD-ROM [Steinmetz ed. 1997] lists *idiomaticalness* and *idiomaticity*). The *New Shorter Oxford* (Brown ed. 1993; CD-ROM 1997) does get the better of all of its competitors: It lists and defines - as a subentry - one nominal derivative, *idiomaticity*.

Again, why do dictionaries enter such dubious items in the first place? To enhance their aura of authority or to inflate their entry count are probably the likeliest reasons. But this need not be as bad as it may sound: Since most of the works in question are comprehensive – containing upwards of 150,000 entries – native-speaker-oriented decoding dictionaries, the idea that it will do no harm to include as large a word stock as possible cannot really be faulted, even if that means including some really outlandish vocabulary items. After all, who can say that this or that **potential word** (Katamba 2005, 74) will NEVER be used, or has never been used, in any of the many millions of texts, written and spoken, short and long, general and specialized, for kids or for adults, generated on a daily basis throughout the English-speaking world?

Dictionary words proper can be broken down into
(1) rare spelling variants, such as *independency*
(2) words with "suspect" - well, ghost - senses, such as *to wolf*, an intransitive verb meaning also 'to hunt wolves' in the *Collins* (Butterfield ed. 2003, sense 15 s.v. **wolf**)
(3) strange-looking, especially obsolete, forms of irregular verbs, such as *wrought, rove*
(4) derived words such as *catchily* or *censurable*, both listed as run-ons (ss.vv. *catchy* and *censure*) in the not-so-large *Concise Oxford* (Soanes and Stevenson eds. 2004), for which there frequently exist "competing" forms, one of them being typically a dictionary word (e.g. *gentility* vs. the less likely *genteelness*, found e.g. in the bilingual *Oxford Hachette* [Corréard and Grundy eds. 1994]).

Sometimes, dictionaries do label such words; *Webster's New World* (Agnes ed. 1999) enters the adjective *longevous*, labels it *[Rare]*, and defines it simply as 'long-lived'. An excellent candidate for the status of a dictionary word, subject to confirmation by available corpus evidence!

Not surprisingly, dictionaries show little agreement in their inclusion/exclusion policy and treatment of dictionary words. Generally, however, the larger the dictionary the likelier it is to include such words.

Interestingly, there are "semantically motivated" dictionary words, where the reason for an item being (close to) a dictionary word is at least partly semantic in an extralinguistic sense. For example, while the adjectives *allowable, accountable,* and *readable* are semantically quite useful, the related adverbs *allowably, accountably,* and *readably* seem to be much less needed in everyday discourse (what is it that we do ALLOWABLY, ACCOUNTABLY, and READABLY?). Nevertheless, dictionaries routinely list many derived adverbs as undefined run-ons, so that one cannot really be sure about their status: *beady eyes*, sure; but what about *to look beadily (at someone)*? More generally, adverbs often seem to be less commonly used, and in fewer senses at that, than the adjectives they are formed from. This may well be the why they are typically given short shrift - in stark contrast to adjectives they are derived from - in many English monolingual dictionaries. However, problems are not restricted to adverbs. Take, for example, verbs derived from nouns indicating fields of study: archeology, ethnology, linguistics, astronomy, etc. - do we *archeologize, ethnologize, linguisticize,* or *astronomize*? The first seems acceptable, the second is suspect, while the third and the fourth sound more like a joke. Why so? Corpora are not much help here; these are rare words, and there are thousands of rare words that no corpus - however large - can be expected to contain, not even a single occurrence.

The concept of *dictionary word* can be extended to items that were once actually used but later fell into disuse. Such items are different from "hardcore" dictionary words, because they must be available in the larger dictionaries to help language users decode older texts. Moreover, they may be indicative of the dynamic nature of language: Newmark (2000, 191) thus notes that the Latin phrase *obiter dicta*, meaning 'things said in passing,' often misused "like many words that one hears but never looks up," appears to have fallen out of use, though it was not uncommon in an English intellectual's vocabulary fifty years ago, so that by the end of the 20th century it has become "merely a 'dictionary word'" (ibid.).

Aside from Newmark suggesting the label **dictionary word** for such items, linguists and lexicographers have come up with a number of related terms to better capture the varied world of lexical phenomena.

4.2 Types of Dictionary Words and Similar Kinds of Lexical Items

The concept of *dictionary word* may be said to include, or be flanked by, a number of (sub)types of less-than-everyday lexical items.

▶ First, there is the interesting **ghost word**, the best-known of the lot, also known as **ghost form** (Crystal 1999, 135; Cuddon 1999, 352), as *phantom word* (Cuddon 1999, 663), or even as *vox nihili* (Grambs 1984, 150). It is a word that never really existed but was coined due to the

blunders (including spurious readings) of printers or scribes and editors, and was in many cases inadvertently carried over from one dictionary into another. A famous example of a ghost word in English is *Dord*, listed as a synonym of *density* in *Webster's Second International Dictionary* of 1934; the error arose from an editor misinterpreting *D or d*, used to show that the item *density* could be abbreviated using either a capital *D* or a lowercase *d*, as though it were a real English word of its own (McArthur ed. 1992: 440).

The term is to be found in the literature (cf. e.g. Read 1978, 95; Cuddon 1999, 352; Howard 1985; and Iannucci 1986). Unlike *dictionary word*, it is entered in several large dictionaries of English; the *New Oxford* (Pearsall ed. 1998, 771), for instance, says it is 'a word recorded in a dictionary or other reference work which is not actually used,' thus making it more general, if we ignore the fact that the absence of a comma after *work* makes the definition ambiguous (is it the word or the reference work that is not actually used?). The *Collins* (Butterfield ed. 2003, 685) fares much better in this respect: *ghost word* is 'a word that has entered the language through the perpetuation, in dictionaries, etc., of an error', and so does the *Random House* (Steinmetz ed. 1997), which defines it as 'a word that has come into existence by error rather than by normal linguistic transmission, as through the mistaken reading of a manuscript, a scribal error, or a misprint,' giving [1885-90] as the estimate of the time the phrase entered the (written) language.

Howard (1985, 80-82) mentions several famous "ghosts," including *dord, foop/foup(e), phantomnation, howl* ('a Scottish spelling of *hovel*'), and *momblishness*, observing that there are in addition some other words that "do not sound healthy"; rather than being ghosts, however, these words are merely **superannuated**, that is, 'old and no longer useful or no longer able to do things' (Summers ed. 2005). Furthermore, there are **poltergeist words**, or those which 'change their meanings through misapprehension' (Howard 1985, 83), such as *scarifying*, used as a colloquial synonym for *scaring*, while its former meaning was 'covering with scratches or scars.'

► Next in line, there is the humbler **hothouse word**, a term referring to a learned word that has never been used, so far as anyone can find; the older dictionaries contain many such words, e. g. *decircinate*, 'to bring out of compass,' listed in Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* (1656). Such items can be regarded as individualisms. Some of the hothouse words were probably also ghost words, i.e. those that never existed "but have dragged out a ghostly existence down through the years merely because some early lexicographer like Thomas Blount saw fit to include them in his dictionary" (Read 1978, 96).

► Further down the road, the **latent word**, a term suggested by Malkiel (1962, 9) for a word - mostly a derivative - that was created deliberately and entered into dictionaries by lexicographers according to the existing patterns of word formation, so that it is readily understandable and gives the appearance of authenticity, even though for such words "no record exists to prove that they have ever been used" (Landau 2001, 102; Svensén 1993, 41), because "speakers have not bothered to activate on the same scale all the grammatical potentialities" (Malkiel 1962, 9).

► The **spurious word** is a word that is erroneous, false, or one that cannot be authenticated (Berg 1993, 175). The large historical dictionaries record such items out of the need to enter and define whatever appears to be a lexical item, even if it can only be found in remote, outdated, or otherwise uncommon sources.

► Not to be forgotten, we can come across the **nonce (word)**, i.e. a word created for a particular occasion or publication and thus usually short-lived. The concept is listed in dictionaries of linguistic terms such as Crystal (2003) and discussed by Steinmetz and Kipfer (2006, Chapter 27). Such an item is coined by a native speaker who, feeling at home with the formative practices of the language, creates a "makeshift or convenient term, such as one invented by a novelist for a special usage or meaning" (Grambs 1984, 245). Katamba (2005, 74) defines *nonce words* as "words expressly coined for the first time and apparently used once."

► Next, the **nonwords**, or "words that aren't really words" (Garner 1998, 451-2), that is, meaningless words not recognized or accepted as legitimate (Steinmetz and Kipfer 2006, 227), such as *analyzation* ("a pseudo-learned variant of *analysis*" [Garner 1998, 39]), *annoyment* ("worse than a needless variant" of *annoyance* [ibid., p. 43]), and *seldomly* ("nonword" that is "never … needed. It isn't even listed in most dictionaries" [ibid., p. 587]). While all these items have in fact been used by some native speakers, they are widely regarded as incorrect and/or unnecessary, which is why they often get listed - and criticized - in usage guides. Garner (1998, 451) notes that nonwords were discussed at least as early as 1899. A caveat, though: The term *nonword* may mean different things to different people: *The New Oxford* (Pearsall ed. 1998, 1262) defines *non-word* [sic] as 'a group of letters or speech sounds that looks or sounds like a word but that is not accepted as such by native speakers.'

► There are also the related **nonsense words**, i.e. words that may have little - if any - meaning but were coined to create a particular effect (Steinmetz and Kipfer 2006, Chapter 28).

► Another relevant term, **individualism** (Read 1978), refers to a word coined to fulfill the need of a particular speaker. The avant-garde writers like James Joyce and Jack Kerouac provide many examples.

► A stern technical term known cheifly to language specialists, **hapax legomenon** indicates a word found in classical texts in only one instance. The term can be applied more narrowly in word-formation; thus Aronoff (1976, 10) defines *hapax legomena* as 'morphemes which only occur in one English word,' such as the prototypical *#cran#* in *cranberry*, whence originates the alternative appellation, ***cranberry morphs***.

► More broadly, Read (1978, 95) suggests a catchall term, **evanescent words**, those which are commonly regarded as not being 'part of the language.'

5. More Than Meets the Eye: Yesterday and Today

Formerly, many strange-looking learned words, known as **hard words** and **inkhorn terms/ words**, were commonly listed and defined, particularly in the 17th-century monolingual English dictionaries, when the "hard-word" tradition was the order of the day (Hartmann and James 1998, 67, 75). Cuddon (1999, 420) defines them as "pedantic terms and learned borrowings from foreign tongues." Such terms are still present in the large dictionaries of English, for instance the awesome-looking *aurantiaceous* in the *World Book Dictionary* (Barnhart ed. 1996). Such outlandish items are entered in some usage dictionaries as **sesquipedalian words**. Garner (1998, 590-3) discusses them in his entry on *sesquipedality*, or "the use of big words."

Today, wordsmiths (cf. Lederer 1990, 155-9) are acutely aware of a number of other types of words, such as **alphabet words, letter words, palindromic words, pronoun words, pyramid words, snowball words, isograms** (the last-named being words in which no letter of the alphabet appears more than once, e.g. *uncopyrightable*). And there is the *-nym* army: not only **synonyms, homonyms, meronyms, pseudonyms** and **antonyms** but **eponyms, contronyms** (or **antagonyms**)[1], **heteronyms, retronyms –** and a whole lot more (ibid., pp. 56-64, 65-84). Further, a glance at the *Wikipedia* can let you in on yet another category, **power words**, i.e. those words (or phrases) which are "used to make one's statement stronger" (cf. *http://en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/Power_word*). Evidently, words can be – well, more than words can say. Moreover, there are quite a few types of words that have no special appellations, such as *all-vowel words* and *one-letter words*, witness "Strange & Unusual Dictionaries," a delightful website (*http://www.oneletterwords. com/*). And there's more, for instance items known as **mondegreens**, or words misheard in songs (Safire 1980, 166-72), a class of items that still awaits lexicographical recognition.

A related and rather more general but elusive term, **difficult word**, will not be discussed in this paper, even though the concept behind it is intriguing. It has received its share of lexicographical attention in English dictionaries of, well, difficult words (edited e.g. by Laurence Urdang [1993] and by John Ayto [1994], an earlier version of the latter work being currently available on the Internet from *http://www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/dictionaries/difficultwords/*). Most dictionaries of difficult words have been designed for native speakers, to help them with "obscure, exotic, complex, misunderstood and misused words" (Urdang 1993, front cover). They are based on the assumption that native speakers of English are not likely to look up items such as *yes, but, father, nice, sure, to get*, but rather the likes of *intrados, intrant, intravasation, introgression, introjection,* and *intussusception*, all listed as headwords in the *Chambers* (Higgleton and Thomson eds. 1998) - so why bother to list the former at all? The trouble lies at the heart of the concept: What is it that makes a word difficult, and who is it difficult to?

6. Conclusions

As Landau (1984, 78) points out, a number of dubious items listed in the college dictionaries, e.g. *sluggardliness*, *oppressingly*, and *idioticalness*, all of which appear in the *Collins*, may never

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1   **Antagonyms** or **contronyms** are words having two diametrically opposed meanings, such as *hold up*, meaning either 'support' or 'hinder.' For English there exists a dictionary of antagonyms on the Web: Check *http://www-personal.umich.edu/~cellis/antagonym.html*.

have been used. College dictionaries include them (as rare run-on derivatives) in an effort to inflate their entry count. In a monolingual context, this practice does not really contribute to confusion or misunderstanding. By contrast, in a bilingual one, it often does, as when a Slovenian college student of English decided to use *facultative* instead of *optional* on the seemingly unassailable grounds that it is treated as its synonym (sense 1b: OPTIONAL) in Merriam-Webster's *Collegiate*® (Mish ed. 2003) without any restrictive label whatsoever! This implies that in the EFL context, the danger associated with dictionary words is likely to be lurking in encoding tasks, that is, in L1-to-L2-type translation or in producing L2 text. In such cases, the EFL student is advised to consider the possibility of a <u>two</u>-stage dictionary lookup process - to go from the large monolingual native-speaker-oriented tome to a good monolingual learners' dictionary, where dictionary words are virtually nonexistent.

The continued presence of dictionary words in the larger monolingual dictionaries of English even today implies that dictionary revisions chiefly concentrate on additions rather than deletions, so that a lot of deadwood remains recorded, the logic probably being that such items are not likely to do any harm. As long as they once really existed in the language, one should not complain. But *dictionary words* that never existed in English - well, that's another story, especially in the context of EFL. Moreover, in the age of corpus-based lexicography, the machines do not throw up nonexistent items! Yet most larger reputable dictionaries of English still contain them. Go figure . . .

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