How Dictionaries Are Created

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The process of learning a foreign language or developing a profound acquaintance with a native language is accompanied with dictionaries. At the same time, whereas dictionaries always surround a person, the question about how they are created and what it is to be a dictionary editor commonly remains unanswered. Since modern technologies (the availability of the Internet and online dictionaries) contribute to the rapid emergence of new words, it is a matter of great importance to understand the basic principles of the process of creating dictionaries, which is akin to scientific magic.

The process of making dictionaries is significant because each dictionary can be considered the face of a language; hence, a person who participates in the compiling of dictionaries carries a high responsibility. There is a special term defining this profession: lexicographer, a person who is a theoretical or practical compiler of dictionaries (Gouws, 2012). Along with the raised question of how dictionaries are created, there might be the delusion that they are formed through group discussion. From the example of the famous Merriam-Webster company, one can understand that dictionaries are born in silence. Kory Stamper (2017, p. 38), an editor for Merriam-Webster dictionaries, shares her experience of the first days of work in her book *Word by word: The secret life of dictionaries*: "Office chitchat of the sort you're likely used to is not conducive to good lexicography and doesn't happen." The process of creating one dictionary can be prolonged; hence, each lexicographer receives a personal part of the work in which he or she can be considered as a specialist (Gouws, 2012). In addition to that, a dictionary compilation has one peculiarity: it is placing words in separate categories while considering the specificity of grammar's flexibility.

With regards to the need for extensive knowledge, one can assume that the main requirement of a dictionary editor is possessing a master's degree related to language studies. However, it might be another misconception associated with the process of creating dictionaries, because the main principle is "feeling the language" (Stamper, 2017). A lexicographer often faces the obstacle of carefully parsing a word into one of eights categories. As a result, it establishes principles related to personality because a person must meticulously study a word and repeat the process of proofreading several times to ensure that any change in the vocabulary does not remain unnoticed (Doll, 2013). Apart from that, considering the silence in which dictionaries are born, a person should understand that one of the main principles is to withstand the absence of usual communication and not to interrupt the work of other dictionary editors. Another principle of working is understanding that many words cease to be relevant; hence, a dictionary editor should actively use online sources that help to determine whether a word still appears in readings, and this is why *thee* and *thou* appear in dictionaries regardless of the fact that modern native speakers do not use them (Doll, 2013, para. 3). Although each company has its own principles, some of them remain standards: "feeling a language," patience, readiness for hard work, and an understanding of the lack of communication with colleagues.

Rapid technological advances has significantly facilitated the compilation of dictionaries. In the first place, lexicographers had to manually collect quotes from different literary sources in order to analyze a word; apart from being an exhausting process, it implied that people might miss a small but essential detail, aggravating the proofreading process (Lew, 2013). The appearance of computers mechanized the process of collecting quotes, and the Internet simplified the task of understanding whether the word is obsolete or still relevant. It is also important to mention the COBUILD project aimed at making the systematic use of structured set of texts, or

in other words, corpora (Lew, 2013, p. 1). With the help of this technology, a dictionary editor

can access the best examples in a few minutes, whereas previously it might require several hours

at least. Apart from that, technological advancements imply the appearance of online dictionaries

and the opportunity to add a new word while not being a dictionary editor. It is possible to

assume that this mechanized process leads to the problem of permanent editing online

dictionaries; nevertheless, experts of the *Oxford English Dictionary* check and analyze each word

before it appears in the dictionary ("How our dictionaries…," 2017). However, an indisputable

advantage of technologies in the dictionary-making process lies in the fact that dictionary editors

can save time in the searching process and be more attentive during the proofreading stage.

Concluding everything mentioned above, a dictionary compilation is a demanding and

challenging process of great importance. When a person finds the necessary meaning of the word

"but," for example, he or she does not even suspect that a few minutes spent on this process

implies many hours of silence and monotonous work done by a dictionary editor. With

technological advancements, the process of dictionary-making has been simplified due to

computers, the Internet, and special programs that allow a dictionary editor to quickly gather

necessary sources to realize how relevant a word is and how many meanings it has. Nevertheless,

technologies will never replace a human, because only experience and critical thinking allows

people to understand multifaceted and flexible words to offer language learners the best means of

learning words: dictionaries.

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