

american dictionary of the english language 1828

American Dictionary of the English Language 1828 is a landmark work in the history of American literature and linguistics. Compiled by Noah Webster, this dictionary not only served as a critical reference for the English language but also played a significant role in shaping American identity and culture. In this article, we will delve into the background of Webster's dictionary, its structure, its impact on the English language, and its relevance today.

Background of Noah Webster and His Dictionary

Noah Webster (1758-1843) was an American lexicographer, grammarian, and language reformer. He is best known for his efforts to standardize American English and to create a distinctly American linguistic identity. Before the publication of the American Dictionary of the English Language in 1828, the English language in America was largely influenced by British norms. Webster sought to change that by focusing on the unique vocabulary and spelling of American English.

The Motivation Behind the Dictionary

Webster's motivation for creating a comprehensive dictionary stemmed from several factors:

1. National Identity: After the American Revolution, there was a growing sense of nationalism. Webster believed that a standardized language would promote unity among the states.
2. Educational Reform: Webster was an advocate for education and believed that a dictionary would be an essential tool for teaching American children.
3. Language Evolution: He recognized that the English language was evolving in America, and a dictionary was necessary to document and standardize this evolution.

The Structure of the Dictionary

The American Dictionary of the English Language was groundbreaking in its scope and organization. It was designed to be comprehensive, covering not just definitions but also etymology, pronunciation, and usage.

Content Overview

The dictionary contained over 70,000 entries and was divided into several sections:

- Definitions: Each entry provided clear definitions, often with examples of usage.
- Etymology: Webster included the origin of words, tracing their history and showing how their meanings had evolved.
- Pronunciation: To aid readers, he developed a system of phonetic spelling, which was innovative for its time.
- Usage Notes: Webster often included notes on common usage issues, helping to clarify nuances between similar words.

Innovations in Spelling

One of Webster's most significant contributions was his advocacy for simplified spelling. Some notable changes included:

- Dropping the 'u' from words like "color" (from "colour").
- Changing "theatre" to "theater."
- Standardizing words like "defense" instead of "defence."

These changes were part of Webster's vision for a unique American English that distinguished it from British English.

The Impact of the 1828 Dictionary

The American Dictionary of the English Language had profound implications for both American society and the English language at large.

Cultural Influence

- Educational Tool: The dictionary served as a foundational text in American schools, helping to standardize spelling and grammar.
- Promotion of American Literature: By providing a reference for writers and educators, Webster's work encouraged the development of American literature and scholarship.

Language Standardization

Webster's dictionary was instrumental in establishing a standardized form of American English, which was crucial for:

- Communication: As America expanded, a common language helped facilitate communication across diverse regions.
- Legislation and Governance: A standardized language was essential for legal documents and government proceedings, ensuring clarity and reducing misunderstandings.

Legacy of the American Dictionary of the English Language

Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary laid the groundwork for future dictionaries and language reference works. Its influence can be seen in several areas:

Subsequent Editions and Revisions

Webster's work inspired many subsequent dictionaries, including:

- Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: First published in 1898, this edition built upon Webster's original work and is still in publication today.
- The Oxford English Dictionary: While this British dictionary is distinct, it was also influenced by Webster's efforts to standardize English.

Contemporary Relevance

The legacy of the American Dictionary of the English Language continues in modern times:

- Digital Dictionaries: Online platforms like Merriam-Webster's dictionary still reflect Webster's original methodologies and principles.
- Cultural Discussions: Webster's work remains a point of reference in discussions about American identity, language evolution, and cultural differences between American and British English.

The Continued Study of Webster's Work

Scholars and linguists continue to study the American Dictionary of the English Language to understand its impact on American culture and language. Some areas of interest include:

- Language Change: How Webster's changes paved the way for ongoing evolution in American English.
- Cultural Identity: The role of language in shaping and reflecting American values and identity.
- Education: The dictionary's influence on educational practices and the teaching of language arts.

Conclusion

The **American Dictionary of the English Language 1828** is more than just a reference book; it is a cornerstone of American culture and language. Noah Webster's contributions to the standardization of American English have had lasting effects on education, literature, and national identity. As we continue to navigate the complexities of language in a globalized world, the principles laid out in Webster's dictionary remain relevant, reminding us of the importance of language in shaping our understanding of ourselves and our communities.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the significance of Noah Webster's 'American Dictionary of the English Language' published in 1828?

The 1828 dictionary was significant because it was the first comprehensive dictionary of American English, establishing American spelling and usage, and helped to standardize the language.

How did Noah Webster's dictionary differ from earlier dictionaries?

Webster's dictionary differed by focusing on American English, including words unique to the United States, and it emphasized phonetic spelling, which was a departure from British standards.

What impact did the 1828 dictionary have on American education?

The dictionary had a profound impact on American education by providing a standard reference for teachers and students, facilitating the teaching of reading and writing in schools.

What was one of the main goals Noah Webster had in writing his dictionary?

One of Webster's main goals was to promote national unity and identity through a standardized language that reflected American culture and values.

How did Webster's dictionary contribute to American nationalism?

Webster's dictionary contributed to American nationalism by codifying the language used by Americans, which helped to distinguish American identity from British colonial influence.

What innovations in language did Webster introduce in his 1828 dictionary?

Webster introduced innovations such as simplified spelling, the inclusion of Americanisms, and a focus on the pronunciation of words, which were not emphasized in earlier dictionaries.

Was 'American Dictionary of the English Language' influential beyond the United States?

Yes, the dictionary influenced English language dictionaries in other countries and contributed to the understanding of American English globally.

What is one criticism that has been leveled at Webster's 1828 dictionary?

One criticism is that some of Webster's definitions reflected his personal biases and opinions, which could lead to a lack of objectivity in certain entries.

How many entries were included in the 1828 edition of Webster's dictionary?

The 1828 edition included approximately 70,000 entries, making it one of the most extensive dictionaries of its time.

How has the legacy of Webster's 1828 dictionary continued in contemporary dictionaries?

The legacy continues as many modern dictionaries still reference Webster's work and its principles of American English, highlighting its foundational role in lexicography.

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