The Dictionary as a Cultural Institution

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1.0 Role of the Dictionary

The usefulness of the dictionary is readily recognized and this partially explains why such a tool has been produced for centuries. However, it has been only recently, that is from the 1950s onwards, that the effort of some lexicographers concerned with the theoretical aspect of their work, linguists and historians of lexicography has created the conditions necessary to the study and development of lexicography (Rey and Delesalle 1979 : 4-5).

As a result, the perception which users have of the dictionary became more accurate. The dictionary had long been considered a technical object and an authority by those who use it (Rey and Delesalle 1979 : 10-11; Beaujot 1989 : 80); it almost seemed that the dictionary possessed a intrinsic neutrality. In reality, however, it turns out to be an illusion (Tournier 1988 : 14-15). Furthermore, even if some lexicographers believe that the dictionary must reflect usage, be of a descriptive rather than a prescriptive nature (Gove 1967 : 6-7), the fact remains that the dictionary is biased (Tournier 1988 : 15).

Researchers have come to realize that the dictionary acts as a filter (Buzon 1979 : 29) and does not list in a neutral way all the words that are in usage. Sometimes, words that are frequently used do not appear in he macrostructure of the dictionary; in other cases, the words do figure in the macrostructure, but their treatment within the microstucture leaves something to be desired. According to Jean-Pierre Beaujot (1989 : 80), the editorial restrictions which are often cited to justify the absence of a certain number of lexical units always hide an ideological choice. Despite its seeming neutrality, the dictionary reflects the sociolinguistic norm of a group (Girardin 1979 : 89); it is the product and the vector of the dominant ideology (Beaujot 1989 : 79-80). It is arbitrary by nature, passes judgements on values and behaviors, and reflects the way society itself feels about certain issues (Rialland-Addach 1995 : 92).

As a result, certain marginalised groups may feel that the way in which a word pertaining to their reality is dealt with in the dictionary is inadequate. Such groups could include women or homosexuals, for instance. They could also include people who speak a variety of a language which differs from that which is used as the norm : this would be the case of speakers of Canadian French, or South African or

Australian English, for instance. In the last few decades, the need to consult dictionaries which reflected more accurately the usage in particular parts of the world has been felt, thus leading to the publication of regional dictionaries on the market. The goal of this study is to determine the degree to which these regional dictionaries take into account the regional realities which they are supposed to describe.

2.0 Regional dictionaries

The dictionary mirrors a specific linguistic norm. In the case of French, for example, it is the Parisian norm; in the case of English, it is the British norm or the American norm. Dictionaries that claim to be universal thus marginalize other linguistic varieties.

As mentioned above, a number of regional dictionaries have been published in the past few decades. In some cases, a list of words specific to a particular linguistic variety has been added to the macrostructure of a dictionary. In other cases, an attempt to describe a linguistic variety as a whole has been undertaken. These dictionaries must, in theory, reflect the society whose linguistic variety they are supposed to describe.

The goal of this study was to ascertain the image of a society given by dictionaries. To this end, the treatment given certain regionalisms in two regional dictionaries was analyzed. One of these dictionaries describes Canadian English, whereas the other describes Australian English. If the dictionaries truly reflect the societies, two completely distinct images should emerge from this study: that of the Canadian culture, and that of the Australian.

3.0 Comparative study

Given the limited scope of this study, it would have been impossible to analyze in depth all the lexical particularities specific to Canada and Australia. In order to determine which image of society regional dictionaries give, a sample of lexical particularities has been chosen. This was done by listing and analyzing all the Canadianisms and Australianisms that could be found under the letters D and F in the dictionaries that were used.

3.1 Canadianisms

The Canadianisms, which were analyzed in this study, were taken from the pages of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. Furthermore, we added some lexical units which are recognized as Canadianisms by the Bilingual Canadian Dictionary project (BCD) but which were not labeled as such in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. Most of these lexical units are labeled "North Americanisms" in the dictionary. Researchers at the BCD consider that Canadianisms is a word or expression that has its origin in Canada or that is used mostly in Canada, or that

refers to a Canadian reality. This explains why some lexical units, which are considered North Americanisms by the Canadian Oxford Dictionary, are considered Canadianisms by the researchers at the BCD. There were 194 Canadian lexical units under the letters D and F.

3.2 Australianisms

The Australianisms which were analyzed in this study were taken from the pages of the *Australian Oxford Concise Dictionary*. However, typically Australian lexical units are not labeled as such in this dictionary; the editors of the *Australian Oxford* felt that the Australian readers would know these lexical units. Thus, the only regional units which bear a label are those which are not Australian.

To determine which lexical units constituted Australianisms, all the lexical units under the letters D and F in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* were compared to all those under the letters D and F in the *Australian Oxford Concise Dictionary*. A first selection was completed by listing those lexical units that appeared in the Australian dictionary but not in the Canadian one. The second step was to look up these lexical units in two dictionaries, the *Collins English Dictionary* and the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. If they were found in these dictionaries with an Australian label, they were kept automatically during the second selection. In addition, if those lexical units could not be found in the British dictionaries, they were considered to be Australianisms. The lexical units that did appear in the British dictionaries without any labels were taken off the original list. A total of 331 Australianisms could be found under the letters D and F.

3.3 Realias

First of all, a rough classification of the regionalisms in this study was established. They were divided into two broad categories: on the first hand, there were realias, and on the other hand, linguistic particularities. In this study, the term "realia" refers to "a lexical unit which refers to a concrete reality". This term has been used fairly loosely so as to include not only those lexical units pertaining to the flora and fauna, for instance, but also those referring to political and cultural realities.

Among the regionalisms analyzed, there were 178 Canadian realias, that is 91.75% of Canadianisms. As for Australianisms, 219 of them were realias, which represents 66.16%. Clearly, a great majority of Canadianisms are realia. Although a majority of Australianisms are also realias, their proportion is not as overwhelming as is the case with Canadianisms. Examples of realias:

Dall sheep (CD), dépanneur (CD), dormant oil (CD), fishway (CD), flowerpot (CD)devil ray (Austral.), didgeridoo (Austral.), digger's hat (Austral.), fairy wren, (Austral.), fleece-picker (Austral.)

3.4 Linguistic particularities

As opposed to realias, linguistic particularities do not refer to concrete realities. This category includes expressions, locutions, etc., which are unique to Canadian or Australian English. In the case of Canadian English, very few lexical units belong to this category. Only 16 of the 194 units are linguistic particularities, that is 8.25%. In the case of Australian English, a greater proportion, that is 112 of the 331 Australianisms, belong to this category. This represents 33.84% Examples of linguistic particularities:

> to dream in colour (or Technicolour) (CD), the very devil (Austral.), take one's dick (Austral.), to give someone the dingbats (Austral.), a dog tied up (Austral.), fair dinkum! (Austral.), feed the fishes (Austral.), flat out like a lizard drinking (Austral.)

4.0 Image of society given by regional dictionaries

4.1 Analysis of definitions and usage labels

Dictionaries convey a certain image of society, not only through their nomenclature, but also through the definitions they give of the words which constitute the macrostructure and the labels which are assigned to those words. Two components were examined in order to determine whether anything could be brought out.

4.1.1 Content

The content of the definitions offered by the dictionaries can give the reader an idea of the society whose language is described. Through the analysis of these definitions, certain main themes to which regionalisms belong were identified. From those themes, an image of the society emerges. In the case of Canadianisms, the most frequently encountered themes were:

> GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS (e.g. delegate-general, deputy returning officer, Department of Veterans Affairs);
> FISHING (e.g. dory (doré), doryman, fish hut, fishing station);
> FRENCH FACT (e.g. francization, francization certificate, Franco-Albertan, Francophonie);
> FOOD (e.g. date square, Digby chicken, farmer's sausage, fish and brewis);
> FIRST NATIONS (e.g. Dene, disc number, fan hitch, friendship centre);
> HISTORY (e.g. dominion, factory, filles du roi, FLQ crisis).

Some other fields which appeared regularly, although not as often as those mentioned above, were: ceremonies (e.g. Dominion Day, Fête nationale); fauna (e.g. dew-worm, double-crested cormorant); flora (e.g. diamond willow, Persian

darnel); police force; immigration; topography (e.g. droke, First Meridian); sports (e.g. deke, dump-and-chase). As for Australianisms, certain themes are especially well illustrated:

FLORA (e.g. dampiera, Darling lily, finger cherry, fire-wheel tree);
FAUNA (e.g. dalgite, death adder, fairy penguin, flame robin);
ABORIGINALS (e.g. devil devil, Diyari, finger fight, fire-stick farming);
SHEEP FARMING (e.g. dags, dead wool, drummer, fat lamb);
AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL (e.g.: field umpire, bring up both flags, flick pass, flogger);
HISTORY (e.g. double-convict, female factory, first fleet, free-born, free-select).

Other fields are quite common as well: activities; agriculture; alcohol and drinking (e.g. dead house, dead marine, to drink with the flies); ceremonies; climate (e.g. Darling shower, fremantle doctor); geography; immigration (e.g. Dally, ding); insults (e.g. dingo, drongo, droob); mining; food (e.g. damper, fairy floss, floater); politics; topography (e.g. dead men's graves, drowned valley); clothing.

4.1.2 Labels

Dictionaries usually give usage labels to the lexical units within their pages. As was previously mentioned, the Canadianisms that were analyzed in this study were all identified as such in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, but such was not the case for Australianisms.

In addition to the geographical labels, dictionaries give register labels when a lexical unit is not considered to be neutral. Certain regionalisms in this study bore register labels. However, none of the Canadianisms and none of the Australianisms were considered "formal". In both cases, the majority of lexical units are neutral. But both types of regionalisms do have a number of lexical units that belong to more informal registers. One of the things that became obvious when looking up regionalisms in various dictionaries is that register labels are not applied uniformly, and that they are not necessarily the same from one dictionary to the next for the same lexical unit. Thus, a lexical unit considered "slang" by one dictionary can be considered "informal" or "colloquial" by another. This is the reason why all lexical units bearing any type of informal label have been classified in one category.

Here are the results:

Among the Canadianisms analyzed, a small number, that is 12 of them, had a register label. In all cases, it was an "informal" label. This total represents 6.19% of all Canadianisms analyzed. Some examples of Canadianisms belonging to this register were:

Deke, dipsy-doodle, dirty thirties, dogan, French safe

More Australianisms were considered familiar. There were 91 of them that bore an "informal" label, that is 27.49% of the total. Some examples of Australianisms belonging to this register were:

dead meat ticket, to have a derry on, dog licence, dubbo, up the duff, no flies about

It is obvious that a greater proportion of Australianisms than Canadianisms belong to an "informal" register.

4.2 Shared lexical units

The lexical units which analyzed for this study were those which could clearly be identified as belonging to those specific regions. However, the distinction between what is Australian, for instance, and what is from New Zealand, is very difficult to establish. Lexical units such as *dawn parade* (or *dawn service*), *demon* (= policeman), *over the fence* show that, to a large extent, both societies have gone through a similar evolution. The same situation exists with the Canadianisms. A certain number of lexical units belong to both the Canadian and the British vocabularies, for instance, *detached* (of a house), *direct debit*, *dummy* (pacifier), *face cloth*, *financial year*, *fixed link*. These lexical units were not kept for this study, but they do show how Canadian society has evolved. There are cases, such as the majority of those that pertain to the political system, that are in use in both Canada and Great Britain. One only needs to think of *front-bench* (CD, GB, Austral., NZ) or *front-bencher* (CD, GB, Austral., NZ) to realise that the political systems in Australia, New Zealand or Canada are all offspring of the British parliamentary system, or *demob* (= to demobilize) (CD, GB, Austral.), or *diplomatic bag* (CD, GB, Austral.) to see that those countries have lived through some of the same realities.

In addition, Canada and the United States share an important number of lexical units. These North Americanisms were not included in this study, even though they are not used in other parts of the world.

5.0 Conclusion

This study is far from exhaustive, but it does show that regional dictionaries do constitute a reflection of the societies whose linguistic variety they attempt to describe. The lexical units included in regional dictionaries as well as the definitions given allow the dictionary users to infer a certain image of the society in question. Nevertheless, while it is undeniable that dictionaries are a reflection of society, one can wonder to what degree this image corresponds to reality. Who determines what the characteristics of a given society are? The members of that society? Members of another society, looking upon this one? Lexicographers who seek to impose their vision of society? The question remains unanswered. If a group of Canadians or a

group of Australians were shown the regionalisms analyzed for this study, would they feel that those lexical units adequately represent them? Would they consider that those units are units that they use on a regular basis? Or would they feel that the image given of them by the lexicographers is not accurate, maybe more a product of folklore than of reality?

One thing is certain, however: even if they are not perfect, regional dictionaries give a chance to certain groups which used to be marginalized to find themselves in a lexicographical work, thus legitimizing several elements of their usage.

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