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In this very nicely presented book Henri Béjoint, Professor Emeritus at the University Lumière Lyon 2 and former president of Euralex, gives an impressive overview of the history of English lexicography, from the first tentative works to the most recent editions of all authoritative English dictionaries. The book is divided into ten chapters which I will briefly describe.

The first chapter is devoted to a number of definitions in lexicography: what is a dictionary? and what types of dictionaries can be distinguished? The second chapter presents a brief history of English dictionaries, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, including discussions of British as well as American dictionaries. The two chapters that follow describe in much detail the British tradition of scholarly dictionaries and the American tradition of utility dictionaries: on the one hand the *Oxford English Dictionary*, on the other *Webster's International Dictionary* and their derived products. But dictionaries produced by others, such as Chambers in the UK and the Heritage dictionaries in the US, are also discussed. The conclusions of the two chapters neatly describe the most salient differences in the two approaches: more linguistic in Britain, more encyclopedic in America, more descriptive in the UK, more prescriptive in the US, etc.

The fifth chapter presents and discusses the ‘Big Five’ learners’ dictionaries: Oxford, Longman, Collins, Cambridge, and Macmillan (the recent Merriam-Webster is missing for obvious reasons), as well as a number of other dictionaries that have been devised for foreign learners of English such as the *Longman Language Activator*, the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms*, and the *BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English*, to mention only a few (here again an important new dictionary of synonyms by Diana Lea is not yet taken into consideration for the same reason).

Chapter six sets out to discuss some characteristics that are found in all types and traditions of dictionaries and which have to do with cultural aspects. Politics, religion, ethnicity, and sexism all complicate the task of the lexicographer who wants to give as objective a description of the language as possible. This chapter also tries to take stock of what has been achieved in lexicography at the beginning of the twenty-first century: more user-friendliness, better coverage of varieties of English and of scientific and technical terms.

Chapters seven, eight, and nine examine a number of more general issues: the use and the users of dictionaries, the relationship between lexicography and linguistics, and the use of computers and corpora in lexicography. A fair overview is given of the various methods that have been used over the years to study dictionary use and results and remaining questions are discussed in sufficient detail. A new difference between the UK and the US pops up when it comes to the role linguists have played in the making of dictionaries. But mainly fundamental questions about the choice of lexical items, the macrostructure, polysemy, multiword items, and definitions are discussed and clearly explained here.
In chapter nine not only the use of different types of corpora as the main source for modern lexicography is described, but the ways corpora have to be annotated and can be interrogated are reviewed.

The last chapter, by far the shortest one (1 page), is entitled ‘A theory of lexicography?’. This question is answered in a negative way: ‘I simply do not believe that there exists a theory of lexicography, and I very much doubt that there can be one’, Béjoint says (p. 381). At the end of the book there is a bibliography (35 pages long!) and an index of terms and proper names. In the middle 29 plates represent some title pages or sample pages of mainly older dictionaries as well as a number of screen shots and photographs of lexicographers and their offices.
This very rich and well written book both gives more and less than its title suggests. It gives more in the sense that many aspects that are not specific to the lexicography of English but are much more general, are examined, especially in the first and the three last full chapters. It also gives more because on many occasions English lexicography is compared to what has been done in other countries, especially in France, the native country of the author (see for instance p. 78 or p. 154). On the other hand the book gives less than it promises by almost only studying general purpose monolingual dictionaries. Bilingual dictionaries are only mentioned once, dictionaries of synonyms are just present with a number of titles dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth century (section 3.3.2.2; the term ‘synonym’ does not even figure in the index), dialect dictionaries are not really presented, and the term ‘specialized dictionary’ is explained (p. 46) but no specimen of this genre is mentioned throughout the book.

The book is well structured although one could wish that the cross-references in the text had been more precise. In many cases the reader is referred to other places by ‘see below’ without further indication of where to look. Frequently this means that the subject is treated in more detail later on in the same section, but this is not always the case. In section 2.3.2 on Samuel Johnson, for instance, one of his critics, Horne Tooke, is mentioned (p. 74), but further details about his opinion are only given in section 2.4.1 (p. 83). Or the American College Dictionary is presented in section 4.1.2 (p. 135), but more is said about this dictionary in 4.2.2 (p. 140). The same goes for a remark about the term ‘entry’ which is ‘ambiguous, as we have seen’ (p. 150); the reader would have been better served if he had been directly referred to the relevant page (p. 10).

Sometimes the text could lead to some discussion because the author makes too general a statement. On p. 146, Béjoint says that all American dictionaries have been influenced, one way or another, by the Merriam-Webster dictionaries, ‘just like all British dictionaries have been influenced by the Oxford English Dictionary’. I think the Collins Cobuild dictionary forms an exception to this rule, as is clear also from its description in the same book (p. 177 ff.). Another statement that might be too general is on p. 257 where it is said that ‘most of the research into dictionary use has been carried out by academics, not by lexicographers’. My idea is that in many cases the researchers are both academics and lexicographers, just as I happen to be myself.

As will be clear, these marginal critical notes cannot and are not meant to argue in any way against the great value of this important contribution to the description of English dictionaries and to the field of lexicography at large.