> I have in the first Part of this Work proved that to be the true, and only Cause, why the learned Languages, as Latine, &c. are alwais written as sounded, because in learning them we sound them as written, or according to the visible Letters, because we learn them by Book, and not by common Discourse, (which gradually alters their Sound) as National Languages are learnt. It follows, that if any Child, &c. did learn English, or any other Language, as we do Latine, &c. by reading, and sound all Letters according to the printed Words, he must spell all rightly, because he always sounds them as written.
>
> John Jones, *Practical Phonology*, 1701

> For argument's sake, why not take spelling itself as the standard [for speech]? Is it possible to derive all the variant pronunciations of English synchronically from spelling alone? The answer to this question is a qualified "yes," and most of this article will be devoted to demonstrating why. Can spelling do anything else? Can it help create pronunciation, perhaps even shape the lexicon? To some degree, I believe it can.
>
> Ralph H. Emerson, "English Spelling and Its Relation to Sound," 1997

First appearing over three centuries ago, John Jones' *Practical Phonology* argues that the printed letter more accurately represents "correct" English pronunciation than a child's innate capacity to learn phonemes – and, as Emerson points out, "few people would disagree" today (Emerson 265). Indeed, this belief has influenced some of the most prominent studies on English phonology. For instance in *The Sound Pattern of English*, Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle use the writings of four seventeenth- through nineteenth-century orthoepists to "trace the evolution of the pivotal rules of the modern English Vowel system" (Chomsky and Halle 249), proving that "English orthography … comes remarkably close to being an optimal orthographic system for English" (Chomsky and Halle 49).[1] Although critical of Chomsky and Halle's "highly selective approach to

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[1] Chomsky and Halle ignore the political and sociolinguistic context and bias of these orthoepists – scholars who *prescribe*, not describe, rules for pronunciation – in part because they are working from the assumptions of generative phonology, which holds that grammars, not sounds, discontinuously change by generation.

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evidence," Joan Beal cites Thomas Spence's *Grand Repository of the English Language* as "direct evidence" for eighteenth-century English pronunciation. She writes that

> pronouncing dictionaries produced in the later eighteenth century constitute a potentially very valuable source of information on the pronunciation of English in that period, not the least because the respelling of each dictionary entry provides enough instances of any sound for patterns of variation and hence of the diffusion of sound changes, to be observed. (Beal 69; see 36-68)

In these studies, published writings on language, much of them prescriptive in nature, exist outside their social, political or technological context, providing data as reliable as the sound clips used to research modern English phonology.

Certainly the alphabet and speech share an intimate relationship. However, these studies fail to ask: how does the medium – not just writing, but *printed* orthography – shape the message of orthoepy? And furthermore, what leads John Jones, Ralph Emerson and the many linguists in the three centuries between to accept print as a natural, unmediated representation of sound?

Early language reference works and, in particular, dictionaries are not passive mirrors reflecting linguistic trends but are themselves media objects, circulating among speakers and writers of a language. Shaped, to some extent, by the material constraints of print, they propagate a mediated view of language, constructing social attitudes even while presenting them as the inevitable progress of civilized communication. In four case studies, this paper explores this process of naturalization, arguing that dictionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by synthesizing speech and writing, attempt to construct a monolithic super-English – a third, typographic "classical tongue" that both conquers Britain's savage past and marches them toward a colonial future.

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Beginning from premises established by Peter Ramus and Francis Bacon – two
sixteenth-century philosophers whose work epitomizes the shift from manuscript to print
culture – John Wilkins constructs one of the earliest universal languages in 1668. The
printed characters in his scheme, based on an ideographic system, bypass speech to
represent named objects directly. Although it never became the "new Latin" for
scholarship, as he hoped, Wilkins' universal language lays the foundation for Samuel
Johnson's *Dictionary*, the cornerstone of England's "metaphysical empire," in Adam
Beach's words. By constructing a canon of printed texts and a standardized orthography
based on John Locke's linguistics, Johnson's *Dictionary* frames "civilized" English
culture in typography, shaping speakers' relationship with their language according to the
standards of print. Shortly after the *Dictionary*'s publication in 1755, the elocutionist
movement, lead by Thomas Sheridan and John Walker, more rigorously connects
orthography and orthoepy in their pronouncing dictionaries, popular lexicons delimiting
rules for a homogenized English pronunciation that, as John Jones envisioned, "sound[s]
all Letters according to the printed Word." Circulating as both products and producers of
print culture, these four dictionaries establish print as the ingenerate standard for both
verbal and visual discourse, a naturalization with, as the work of Emerson, Chomsky,
Halle and Beal evinces, continues to influence linguistic scholarship today.

I. From Scholasticism to Print Culture: Ramus, Bacon and Wilkins

Ramus and Bacon

For over four hundred years, scholasticism dominated medieval universities, grounding education in the oral, dialogic tradition of the Socratics. The scholastic method centers around two forms of dialectical reasoning: *lectio*, the reading of a text with commentary, and *disputatio*, a formalized debate on philosophical problems (*quæstiones*). Although texts – which, in medieval Europe, implied handwritten codices – play a central role in both *lectio* and *disputatio*, the boundaries of a written document are permeable in the scholastic tradition, pervious to additions and alterations. For instance, annotations occupy the margins of manuscripts; passages from other works infiltrate copies; and, in a society short on the materials and skills requisite for handwritten production, lines from a palimpsest compete for space with later creations. To borrow Jacques Derrida's term, the medieval manuscript is an "open text" – not a "finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces" (Derrida 84). Contra the modern disjunction between written and spoken language (often characterized as a "natural" outcome of the invention of writing), this medieval "open text" functions alongside speech, mirroring its reliance upon multisensory integration and the interruptive, interrogative flow of dialogue. In other words, a medieval text was both a communal text and, in turn, a textual community – an open space for scholars to inscribe their interpretations or dispute others'.

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As has been well-argued in the last century,[2] the invention of moveable type fundamentally shifted Western culture's attitude toward texts and their production. Marshall McLuhan writes that "the sixteenth century Renaissance was an age on the frontier between two thousand years of alphabetic and manuscript culture, on the one hand, and the new mechanism of repeatability and quantification, on the other" (McLuhan 141). Whereas a scholastic manuscript served a dialectic community, print fortified the boundaries of the page, enclosing language inside a uniform, infinitely reproducible space. As a result, the static correspondence of isolated "texts," each occupying a branch on the tree of knowledge, replaced the dynamic discourse of scholastic learning. One of the most influential philosophers in his own century, Peter Ramus stands at the rubicon of print culture: behind him trails the sixteenth-century scholastic tradition in which he was taught; ahead, a new methodology centered around closed texts. From a historical perspective, his anti-Aristotelian reforms epitomize the impact of typography, casting a prototype of scholarship in print culture.

Ramist method begins from three principles of philosophy: *lex veritatis*, stating that axioms must be general to an entire discipline; *lex justitiae*, which "demanded that all parts of an art should be homogeneous"; and *lex sapientiae*, positing that theorems should proceed from the general to the particular (Sellberg 2.4). Applying these principles to scholasticism, Ramus argues for a divorce of logic from rhetoric, integrated in the Ciceronian model, and subdivides each discipline into two dichotomized categories – for instance, invention (*inventio*) and judgment (*iudicium*) compose logic – which may

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[2] Harold Innis' *The Bias of Communication*; Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*; Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*; and Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* comprise the core texts in the study of print culture, although the constellation of works surrounding them are beginning to reevaluate the assumptions these writers make. For a survey of the most recent work on print culture, see Nicholas Hudson's "Challenging Eisenstein: Recent Studies in Print Culture."

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be further subdivided until the chart exhausts all possibilities (Figure 1). In a Ramist

table, then, knowledge does not circulate in an open "differential network" of "traces

referring endlessly to something other than itself" but forms a rigid chart of epistemic

units, or "corpuscles," referring redundantly to their referent, and only their referent.

Walter Ong describes Ramism as a type of "'corpuscular epistemology,' a one-to-one

gross correspondence between concept, word and referent which never really g[ets] to the

spoken word at all but t[akes] the printed text, not oral utterance, as the point of departure

and the model for thought" (Ong *LO* 168; c.f. *RM* 203).

The textbook is Ramus' lasting legacy to education – a harbinger of the massive

sociocultural changes enacted in part through the new communications technology.

Unlike handwriting or manuscript production, the printing press could rapidly reproduce

identical copies of a ramified chart or scientific diagram, and the burgeoning publishing

industry could, by the sixteenth century, distribute copies to universities across Europe

relatively quickly. With its telescoped taxonomies, Ramus' own logic textbook,

Dialectique (1555) – the first Western work on dialectic written in a vernacular (Sellberg

1.4) – exemplifies the new medium not only in its production but in its underlying

"corpuscular epistemology" which crystallizes knowledge into moveable parts. By 1600,

a century of sweeping educational reforms had replaced the mnemonic devices of oral

dialectic and the scholastic community with an academic machine, fed by these

homogenized corpuscles of information.

Print technology and, indeed, any media are not deterministic, spurring only one

cultural movement or school; rather, as Martin Heidegger famously argues, they

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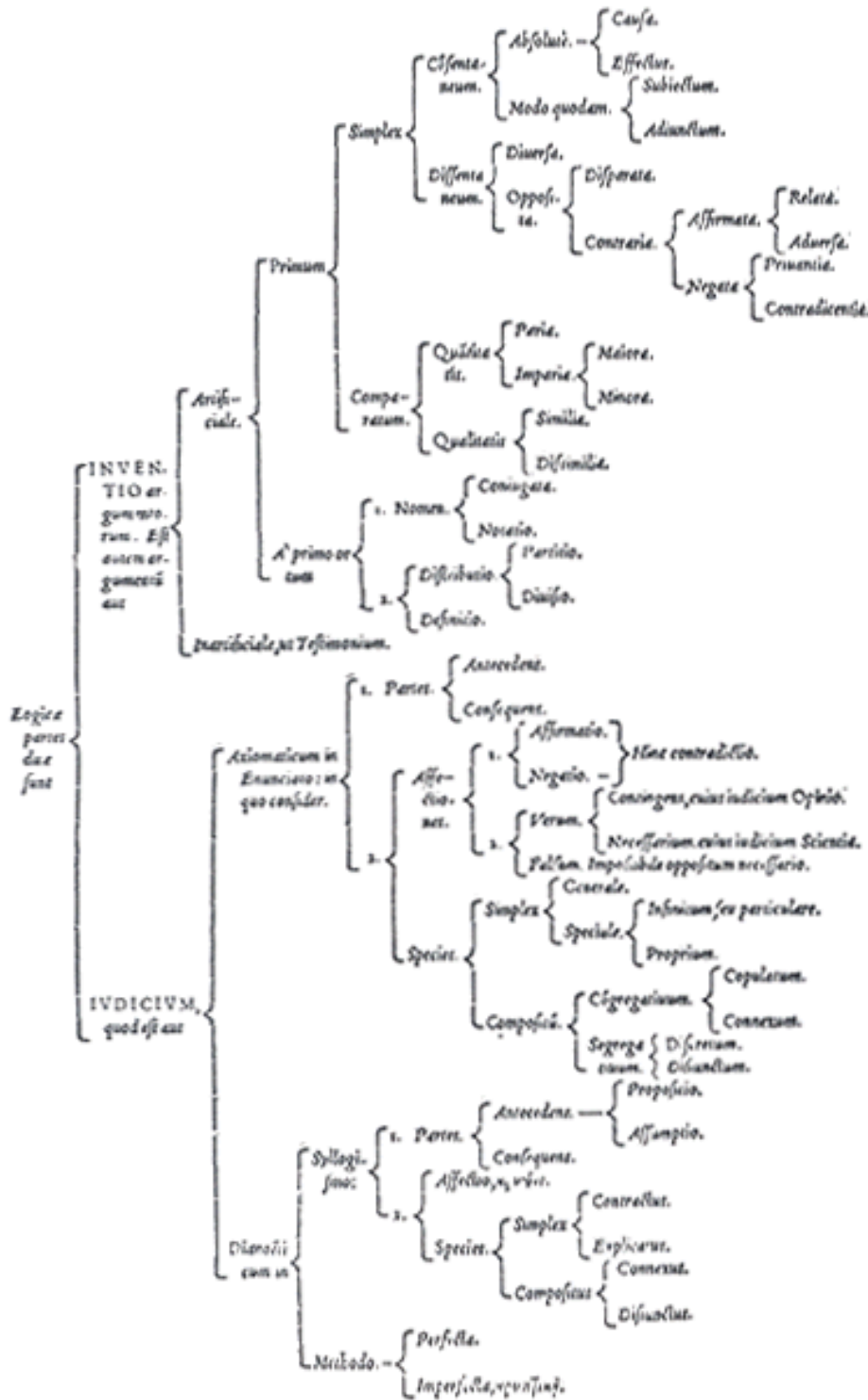Please do not quote without permission. Email: whitney.trettien@duke.edu

Figure 1 (*left*). A typical Ramist table representing the dichotomies of dialectic. From the 1576 edition of Ramus' "arts," edited by Johann Thomas Freige. Reprinted in Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, p. 202.

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construct a media environment, framing all language and images that circulate within it (Heidegger 4). Because Ramus focuses his work on the *studia humanitatis* – arts such as grammar, rhetoric and reformed schools of logic – modern scholars label him a humanist, one of the many teachers who turned to the classics with renewed interest during the Renaissance. Yet, even as the invention of moveable type enabled the anti-scholastic humanism of Ramus, it also played a significant role in the development of scientific empiricism, an anti-humanist movement led by Francis Bacon in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Although in his own time Bacon positions himself in opposition to Ramus – he writes, "I have nothing in common with that hide-out of ignorance, that pestilent book-worm, that begetter of handy manuals" (Bacon *MBT* 64)[3] – the distance of several centuries sheds light one of their common denominators: they both reflected the transition from manuscript to print culture in their philosophies.

The humanists' glorification of rhetoric concerned Bacon, who argues that the art of eloquence corrupts words with emotions, obscuring the Book of Nature with rococo ornamentation. He termed this linguistic imprecision the "Idols of the Market," or those false conceptions "formed by the reciprocal intercourse and society of man with man":

> For men converse by means of language, but words are formed at the will of the generality, and there arises from a bad and unapt formation of words a wonderful obstruction to the mind. Nor can the definitions and explanations with which learned men are wont to guard and protect themselves in some instances afford a complete remedy – words still manifestly force the understanding, throw everything into confusion, and lead mankind into vain and innumerable controversies and fallacies. (Bacon *NO* I.xliii, 320)

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[3] He continues: "Any facts [Ramus] gets hold of and begins to squeeze in the rack of his summary method soon lose their truth, which oozes or skips away, leaving him to garner only dry and barren trifles. Aquinas, Scotus, and their followers out of their unrealities created a varied world; Ramus out of the real world made a desert" (Bacon *MBT* 64).

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To Bacon, the idols of the market "are the most troublesome of all" (Bacon *NO* I.lix, 324). As he points out, the "great and solemn disputes of learned men often terminate in controversies about words and names," which then cause men to fix language through definitions, which themselves "cannot remedy the evil in natural and material objects, because they consist themselves of words, and these words produce others without end" (Bacon *NO* I.lix, 324). In a humanist system, Bacon believes, eloquence only begets more loquacious eloquence, resulting in "merely verbal learning" (Stillman 91).

By contrast, a universal grammar ties language directly to its referent, fixing it to an objective reality. In the *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon divides grammar, the *vehiculum cogitationum*, conductor of thoughts, into two categories: literary and philosophical. While the former suffices for speech, the latter is "subservient to philosophy" and thus must be "neither corrupted by any vulgar, depraved phrases, and customs of speech, nor vitiated by affection" (Bacon *AL* VI.1, 164). To render language a more useful tool for natural philosophy, Bacon proposes culling the most precise vocabulary and syntactic structures from the world's tongues to construct "one grand model of language for justly expressing the sense of the mind, formed, like the Venus of Apelles, from the excellencies of several" (Bacon *AL* VI.1, 165). In this manner, Bacon argues, philosophy restores the unity of the original Adamic language through a linguistic pastiche, reversing the confusion of Babel – with a slight difference. Whereas Adam and Eve *spoke* God's proto-language,[4] Bacon's philosophical language is explicitly *written*. For Bacon, "the primary elements of simple letters, or the inquiry with what percussion

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[4] The theory for an Adamic language is taken from Genesis 2:19, which reads: "Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (*NIV*, Gen. 2:19).

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of the tongue, opening of the mouth, motion of the lips, and use of the throat, the sound

of each letter is produced, has no relation to grammar (sic)" but belong to less

consequential arts such as rhetoric (Bacon *AL* VI.1, 166). As print assumes a greater role

in scholarship, written language – which, in *lectio* and *disputatio*, functioned closely with

dialogue – splits away from speech, growing into an autonomous mode of

communication that, for Bacon, is a more accurate *vehiculum cogitationum* than

speaking.

　　As a consequence of this division, Robert Stillman points out, "Bacon effected a

divorce of philosophy from eloquence in the interests of a new experimental philosophy

that placed the mind in direct contact with things," transferring "cultural hegemony from

oratory, poetry, and disputatious philosophy to natural philosophy" (Stillman 91).

Understood from a slightly different angle, the standard of eloquence itself shifted from

emotional beauty to concrete knowledge, or from oral fluency to the strictures of print.

As the *OED* records, prior to the fifteenth century, 'eloquence' referred to an oral

utterance; between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, it became a

synonym for 'rhetoric', which had itself come to mean argumentative *writing* that was, or

was not, read aloud.[5]

　　Therefore, although Ramus and Bacon champion opposing schools of thought –

humanism and scientific empiricism – their plans to taxonomize knowledge in a God's-

eye-view chart both emerge from the matrix of new communications technology taking

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[5] Rhetorician Richard Whately identifies this shift in the beginning of his *Elements of Rhetoric*, published
in 1828: "The invention of printing, by extending the sphere of operation of the writer, has of course
contributed to the extension of those terms which, in their primary signification, had reference to speaking
alone. Many objects are now accomplished through the medium of the press, which formerly came under
the exclusive province of the orator; and the qualifications requisite for success are so much the same in
both cases, that we apply the term 'eloquent', as readily to a writer as to a speaker" (Whately 14). Today,
both 'eloquence' and 'rhetoric' can refer to either speech or writing.

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root in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. As Ong points out, typography and, specifically, the printer's font becomes the "dialectical locus" of thought in Ramist logic – "a 'common' place from which can be pulled an unlimited number of printed pages, each blanketed with 'arguments'" that were "reduced to a visually apprehensible and spatially maneuverable form" (Ong *RM* 310).[6] Thus, whereas in oral discourse myths and icons serve as cultural repositories, storing the scientific, religious and artistic knowledge of a society, with the advent of printing, the material mode of communication – the fonts, the matrices, the molds, the book – becomes a culture's magazine of information. Bacon also relates print to his project, writing in "Temporis partus masculus": "On waxen tablets you cannot write anything new until you rub out the old. With the mind it is not so; there you cannot rub out the old till you have written in the new" (Bacon *MBT* 72). In the seventeenth century, scholarship no longer produces incomplete chronicles of knowledge, as ephemeral as wax writing, but an indelible record, erasing nothing but only correcting knowledge through publication.

Thus as the material logic of moveable type replaces the sensuality of oral and handwritten communication, knowledge and the language that stores it become economic goods. Drawing from the work of Harold Innis, McLuhan points out that while spoken language is a real-time phenomenon, a communal state of being, print "translate[s] the dialogue of shared discourse into packaged information, a portable commodity" (McLuhan 164). For Ramus, this shift exteriorizes itself in textbooks which elucidate the entire Western philosophical corpus, building a foundation for the modern education industry. Bacon, on the other hand, incorporates the economics of print into his

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[6] See Ong *RM* 307-314 for a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between Ramus' philosophy and the printing press.

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underlying philosophy, arguing that scholars must study language as the "science of grammar." As Michael Tang explains, Bacon believes that

> any grammarian should study other symbol systems beside linguistic ones because as economics is the science of monetary transactions, grammar is the science of knowledge transactions. As the economist studies the different kinds of currency which exist in the market, the grammarian should study the different kinds of symbol systems which convey knowledge and information. (Tang 8-9)

As the treasury of language – a country's greatest cultural resource – print mints communal property as personal cash, accumulative and exchangeable. Thus, as McLuhan points out, whereas manuscript scholars employed "the medieval Book of Nature for *contemplatio* like the Bible," viscerally immersing themselves in the world, the new Renaissance Book of Nature "was for *applicatio* and use like moveable types" (McLuhan 185). The goal of Enlightenment science was not, as it was for Aristotle, merely to observe apparent physical phenomena but to look *through* nature, reading the cryptic laws behind phenomena. Through "encyclopedic fact-finding sweeps" that translate the cultural treasures of a nation into stores of cash, mankind could translate processes into visual quantifications thereby rendering Nature transparent through taxonomy.[7] Hence, McLuhan notes, "Bacon used the new technology for an attempt to tidy up the text of nature," taking "the lesson of print to be that we could not literally get Nature out in a new and improved edition" (McLuhan 185).

Case Study: John Wilkins' Universal Grammar

John Wilkins was, as Jorge Luis Borges describes him, a man who "abounded in happy curiosities: theology, cryptography, music, the fabrication of transparent beehives,

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[7] McLuhan adds Biblical layer to his argument, pointing out that Bacon believes that by restoring the Book of Nature, "man's wits can be reconstructed so that they can once again mirror the perfected Book of Nature. His mind is now an enchanted glass, but the hex can be removed" (McLuhan 191).

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the course of an invisible planet" (Borges 1). One of the founders of the Royal Society in the mid-seventeenth century, Wilkins invented gadgets before their time – hydraulic machinery, an automatic garden mister, the hearing aid – and even proposed travel to the moon. However, the project that has generated the most interest is his last: a plan for the construction and implementation of a Baconian universal language encompassing grammar, writing and speech.

Published in 1668, Wilkins' *An Essay Toward a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* attempts to "enumerate[s] and describe[s] all such things and notions as fall under discourse" (Wilkins 22) – in other words, the entire known universe.[8] In his table, forty major genera subdivide into 251 characteristic differences, from which Wilkins derives 2,030 paired species. For example, sensitive animal substances, or fauna, comprise four major genera: exanguious creatures (insects "destitute of that red juice, commonly called blood" (Wilkins 122)), fish, birds and beasts. Beasts then split into two characteristic differences, viviparous (producing living offspring) and oviparous (producing eggs), and viviparous beasts further subdivide into whole-footed, cloven-footed, not rapacious, rapacious, cat-kind and dog-kind.[9] Other characteristics subdivide these categories further, such as the length of the beast's legs or its habitat. Thus a tiger, as classified by Wilkins, is a viviparous, cloven-footed, rapacious cat-kind beast with shorter legs but a larger body than other cats, characterized by its spots (Wilkins 159).

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[8] By necessity, this summary of Wilkins' tables – which run for 270 pages in Wilkins' 600-page, two-volume tome – is simplified. For a more detailed discussion of its nature and context, see Knowlson's *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1600-1800.*

[9] These characteristic differences are actually nested within each other, although Wilkins still considers them all characteristic differences. See Figure 2.

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Having thus categorized the universe, Wilkins outlines his system for a natural, or universal, grammar. As Umberto Eco explains, this grammar

> establish[es] morphemes and the markers for derived terms, which can permit the generation, from the primitives, of declension, conjugations, suffixes, and so on. Such a simplified grammatical machinery should thus allow the speaker to articulate discourses, as well as to produce the periphrases through which terms from a natural language might be defined entirely through the primitives of the artificial one. (Eco 239-42)

In other words, this simplified grammatical machinery is not descriptive but prescriptive. For Wilkins, polysemy "render[s] speech doubtful and obscure" and "argues a deficiency or wants of a sufficient number of words" (Wilkins 17); metaphors and idioms "prejudice the native simplicity of [the language], and contribute to the disguising of it with false appearances" (Wilkins 18); while synonymy "make[s] language tedious, … since the end and use of speech is for humane utility and mutual converse" (Wilkins 18). His natural grammar, by contrast, strips language of those "anomalous limbs and irregularities in grammatical construction" that, as Bacon believes, hinder communication with false idols (Wilkins 18).

After outlining his natural grammar, Wilkins employs his tables to construct an ideographic "language of real characters" that "may be fixed upon" his system (Wilkins 385). All words proceed from a simple dash; a marking in the middle of the dash, such as a raised bump, indicates genus, while lines on the left end of the dash signify differences and, on the right end, species (Figures 2 and 4). Hooks and small diacritics written in various locations around the main dash indicate different grammatical forms, conjunctions, opposition, pronouns, and so on. For the pronunciation of these characters, Wilkins assigns a distinct sound, or syllable to each genus – for instance, beasts are 'Zi.' The consonants B, D, G, P, T, C, Z, S and N, in that order, indicate the characteristic

The Differences are to be affixed unto that end which is on the left side of the Character, according to this order;
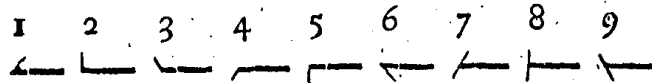
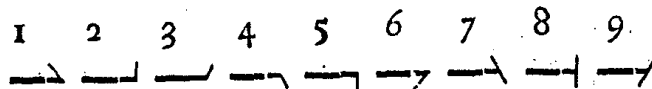The Species should be affixed at the other end of the Character according to the like order.

Figure 2 (*above*). The characters of Wilkins' philosophical language. From John Wilkins'
An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language. Page 387.

That which at prefent feems moft convenient to me, is this ;

Tranfcend.			Animals			Action			
General	Bα		Exanguious	χα		Spiritual	Cα		
Rel. mixed	Ba		Fifh	Za		Corporeal	Ca		
Rel. of Action	Be		Bird	Ze		Motion	Ce		
Difcourfe	Bi		Beaft	Zi		Operation	Ci		
God	Dα	Parts	Peculiar	Pα					
World	Da		General	Pa		Oecon.	Co		
Element	De	Quantity	Magnitude	Pe		Poffef.	Cy		
Stone	Di		Space	Pi	Relation	Provif.	Sα		
Metal	Do		Meafure	Po		Civil	Sa		
Herb confid. accord. to the	Leaf	Gα	Quality	Power Nat.	Tα		Judicial	Se
	Flower	Ga		Habit	Ta		Military	Si
	Seed-veffel	Ge		Manners	Te		Naval	So
	Shrub	Gi		Quality fenfible	Ti		Ecclef.	Sy
	Tree	Go		Difeafe	To			

The *Differences* under each of thefe *Genus*'s, may be expreffed by
thefe Confonants B, D, G, P, T, C, Z, S, N.
   in this order; 1 2 3 4 5 6 7. 8 9.

The *Species* may be expreffed by putting one of the feven Vowels
after the Confonant, for the Difference ; to which may be added (to
make up the number) two of the Dipthongs, according to this order
α, a, e, i, o, ʊ, y, yi, yʊ.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9.

Figure 3 (*left*). The
pronunciation of
Wilkins'
philosophical
language. From John
Wilkins' *An Essay
Towards a Real
Character and a
Philosophical
Language*. Page 415.

The Lords Prayer.

Figure 4 (*above*). "The Lord's Prayer" written in Wilkins'
philosophical language. From John Wilkins' *An Essay Towards a Real
Character and a Philosophical Language*. Page 395.

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differences of the genera, while the species are represented in seven vowels and two

diphthongs, added after the consonants (Figure 3). Thus in Wilkins' system, 'tiger' would

be pronounced 'Zipa,' since spotted cats are the second species in the fourth

characteristic difference of beasts.

Although Wilkins' grammatical and semantic machinery is complex, it produces

only 2,030 primitives – not nearly enough to sustain philosophical or scientific

communication. To expand the scope of his language, Wilkins devotes the final section

of his *Essay* to a dictionary of 15,000 English terms. If his tables include the headword,

the entry points to its genus, characteristic difference and species – for example, Be.IV.2

for 'Tygre' – thereby translating the English term into the philosophical language.

However, if the tables do not directly represent the headword, the dictionary may point to

a synonym, such as 'soft' and 'brittle' for 'Tender', or offer a periphrastic term, such as

'Preceding part of the day' for 'Fore-noon'. In some instances, Wilkins employs a system

of transcendental particles, or special markings that indicate the characteristics of a

primitive. For example, since a 'Fole' is 'young' + 'horse', placing a symbol for 'young'

within or around the word 'horse' conveys the same meaning. Transcendental particles

may also indicate metaphorical usage, modifying a word such as 'Root' to mean

'Original'. Ironically, these methods – designed to strip off the "anomalous limbs" of

English – only amplify the imprecision in Wilkins' system, underscoring the

impossibility of absolute synonymy, the absurdity of periphrasis and the confusion of

particles. Natural language represents synergy, its whole greater than the sum of its

constituent parts: for instance, though semantically related, 'tender' does not comprise

the meanings of 'soft' and 'brittle', and 'foal' conjures an image more detailed than

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'young horse'. Wilkins' artificial language, by contrast, is mechanical, crude, constrained by the rigid form of a printed table; thus it cannot achieve the ingenuity which the human linguistic faculty manufactures on its own.

Of course, the printed page that twenty-first-century scholars find restrictive was, for Wilkins, an exciting new technology. For constructing seventeenth-century empirical theories of science, spoken language is messy, rife with "anomalies and irregularities in grammatical construction" and vocabulary (Wilkins 18). Through "the mixture with other nations in commerce" and "marriages in regal families," many "common words" corrupt the language, and the "affectation incident to some eminent men in all ages, of coining new words, and altering the common forms of speech" generates unnecessary synonymy and, therefore, imprecision (Wilkins 6). Writing presents similar chaos. For example, since "*scriptio est vocum pictura* [writing is the image of sounds] … it should seem very reasonable, that men should either speak as they write, or write as they speak" (Wilkins 18); yet, the alphabet is "inartificial and confused," with vowels and consonants "promiscuously huddled together, without any distinction" (Wilkins 14). The assignment of sounds to letters is "redundant and superfluous," with one sound represented in several letters or letter groupings, and several sounds represented in one letter (Wilkins 15); while, likewise, some words are "distinguished in writing, and not in pronunciation," while others are "distinguished in pronunciation, but not in writing" (Wilkins 16). Any "regular" alphabet, Wilkins argues, "should be reduced into classes, according to their several kinds, with such an order of precedence and subsequent is as their natures will bear; this being the proper end and design of that which we call method, to separate the heterogeneous, and put the homogeneous together, according to some rule of

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precedency" (Wilkins 14). Thus, applying Ramus' spatial organization of knowledge and

Bacon's theory of Idols to his grammar, Wilkins presents "ideas as commodities whose

value could be enhanced by more efficient means of coinage and circulation" – that is,

through a universal language, designed for and hence united with its medium (Tang 9).[10]

Wilkins' anxiety over linguistic incongruity is, in part, the result of print's rising

prominence in British intellectual culture. Because a listener's inquiry may always probe

the imprecision of a speaker, oral cultures maintain a balance of power between meaning

and the speech-community, or between what George Kingsley Zipf terms a "speaker's

economy," which promotes a simplified, general vocabulary, and an "auditor's

economy," which demands a large store of semantically-specific words to facilitate

comprehension (Zipf 19-20). Or, as Ernst Robert Curtius puts it,

> to reading conceived as the form of reception and study, corresponds writing
> conceived as the form of production and creation. The two concepts belong
> together. In the intellectual world of the Middle Ages, they represent as it were
> the two halves of a sphere. The unity of this world was shattered by the invention
> of printing. (Curtius 328)

As McLuhan adds, printing "split apart the roles of producer and consumer," although "it

also created the means and the motive for applied knowledge", and "the means creates

the want" (McLuhan 186). By shifting power to the "speaker" (that is, the writer), print

destabilizes communication's economy, allowing "all sorts of liberties to be taken with

the meanings of words by those in control of the press" (Hughes 8). Hence mass

communication increased the growth rate of the English vocabulary – as much as a

sevenfold increase between 1500 and 1600, Geoffrey Hughes estimates (Hughes 101-

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[10] Tang argues that "the *Essay* [is] a direct consequence of the Ramist movement which developed into
inquiries concerning the possibility of constructing a language which was at once logical as well as
universal" (Tang ii).

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103) – and simultaneously decreased a speaker's ability to communicate effectively with her audience, which could no longer be assured of semantic stability.

Likewise, even as print standardizes written language so that spelling is "always fixed and determined" (Wilkins 15), pronunciation continues to change, drifting farther from the standard that print constructs. Many (if not most) newly-coined terms were never spoken and therefore never heard; they existed only in print, which can preserve and perpetuate words for centuries after they have become colloquially obsolete. Similarly, words borrowed from other languages may retain that language's spelling, attaching new sounds to English letters. Thus final *e*'s grow silent, the letter *y* takes the place of an *i* in Greek-derived English words, and speech syncopates syllables that are frozen in print.

Yet, despite its role in divorcing spoken and written language, print may also help reduce the incongruity "betwixt the writing and pronouncing," acting as a preservative for written language while reducing pronunciation to a set of rules governed by orthography. As Wilkins believes, because "men did first speak before they did write" (Wilkins 385), the printed word is but "the picture or image of speech," and "ought to be adapted unto all the material circumstances of it" (Wilkins 355):

> Those learned Languages which have now ceased to be vulgar [that is, living, or spoken by common people], and remain only in Books, by which the purity of them is regulated, may, whilst those Books are extant and studied, continue the same without change. But all Languages that are vulgar, as those learned ones formerly were, are upon the fore mentioned occasions, subject to so many alterations, that in tract of time they will appear to be quite another thing then what they were at first. (Wilkins 6)

Wilkins intimates that since the phonetic alphabet leads language to the "common fate and corruption to which Languages … are subject" (Wilkins 6), scholars must instead

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prioritize writing, inscribing speech with the standards of print. Echoing Bacon's theories

on language, Wilkins writes that the "principal design of this treatise" is a "real universal

character, that should not signify words, but things and notions, and consequently might

be legible by any nation in their own tongues" (Wilkins 13). Even as print disconnects

speech and writing, it may also help to publish a "new and improved edition" of the Book

of Nature.

Wilkins achieves this end by tying both orthography and orthoepy to the universe

outlined in his tables, guaranteeing that a word's pronunciation never changes; for the

very characteristics of the signified imbue the signifier, both in sound and letter. Wilkins

writes in the dedicatory epistle to his dictionary, his system is "much to be preferred …

as things are better than words, as real knowledge is beyond elegancy of speech, as the

general good of mankind is beyond that of any particular country or nation." As Borges

points out,

> The words of the analytical language created by John Wilkins are not torpid
> arbitrary symbols; each letter has significance, like those from the Holy Scriptures
> had for the cabbalists. Mauthner observed that children could learn this language
> without knowing that it was artificial; later, at school, they would discover that it
> was also a universal key and a secret encyclopedia. (Borges 4)

As a contemporary admirer of Wilkins, who was plotting ways of disseminating his

philosophical language, noted, young students learning Wilkins' taxonomy "will

probably ere long have *a foundation for general learning, not to talk so much as to know*"

(quoted in Knowlson 104); and indeed, James Knowlson explains, "learning and using

the philosophical language would be the linguistic equivalent of learning and using real

knowledge" (Knowlson 97). In Wilkins' system, then, language is not a medium through

which thinkers convey ideas but is itself immediately representative of objects in the

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world – that is, not a *vehiculum cogitationum* but simply *cogitationes* encoded in, as

Bacon imagines, "one grand model of language" (Bacon *AL* VI.1, 165).

Thus the construction of a universal language and grammar naturalizes print in all

communication as a gestalt technology comprising pronunciation, orthography, speakers,

auditors and the known world. Transcending its role as speech's derivative in Wilkins'

system, the printed word establishes itself as standard, fixing language within its material

limitations; paradoxically, though, doing so frees knowledge from the boundaries of the

medium, implanting wisdom directly in the user's mind. Put another way, the taxonomic

disposition of print allows Wilkins to construct a system that erases the technological

reality of taxonomies, rendering them transparent, "natural" representations of the world.

By becoming competent in the universal language, readers do not simply forget the

presence of the medium – most literate persons already experience the alphabet as

transparent – but understand the very essence of the objects represented, including their

distinguishing characteristics, their relationship to other objects, and their unique place in

the universe. As Wilkins writes at the beginning of his treatise, "supposing such a thing

as is here proposed, could be well established, it would be the surest remedy that could be

against the curse of the confusion [of Babel], by rendering all other languages and

characters useless" (Wilkins 13).

Yet, even as it attempts to naturalize the print medium, a universal grammar can

only come to fruition through the technology of print. From an economic perspective,

standardizing and then disseminating such a language is impossible without the

communications advancements brought about through the printing press; in fact, only

after the invention of the printing press did the idea of a universal language move from

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Biblical myth to attempted reality. Furthermore, as Marina Yaguello points out, only through print can the solitary "lunatic in love with language" sit "in his book-lined study," collecting "great piles of information":

> he collates and classifies it, he makes lists and fills card indexes. He is in the clutches of a denominatory delirium, of a taxonomic madness. He has to name everything, but before being able to name, he has to recognize and classify concepts, to enclose the whole Universe in a system of notation: produce enumerations, hierarchies, and paradigms. (Yaguello 17)

As Yaguello's description makes clear, Wilkins' attempt to render print transparent inadvertently constructs a typographic empire of lists, charts, systems and taxonomies – a system so complex that, as Eco points out, "without constant double-checking against the tables, it is difficult to avoid misprints and misunderstandings" (Eco 249). Indeed, Wilkins mistakes *Gαde*, or 'barley,' for 'tulip,' which should be *Gαpe* (Eco 249), since in a philosophical language based on an affinity between genera it is actually quite easy to muddle members of the same species, which are phonetically and graphically similar. Whereas the alphabet is, as Walter Ong points out, "a democratizing script, easy for everybody to learn," ideographic systems, such as Wilkins', are "intrinsically elitist: to master it thoroughly requires protracted leisure" (Ong 92).

For this and other reasons, Wilkins' philosophical language – or any philosophical language – has not and most likely will not ever come into widespread use. However, although Wilkins did not succeed in "fixing" English, the goals and direction of his project profoundly influenced later lexicographers. For example, Wilkins' *Essay Toward a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* is one of the first writings on language to utilize the properties of print, identified by Ramus and Bacon, to construct a uniform standard, delimiting a linguistic reality through a dictionary. In Wilkins's system, then,

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the printed book, "valued for its capacity to preserve and display fixed structures,"

achieves its authoritative status as, in Jay David Bolter's words, "a technological

reflection of the great chain of being, in which all of nature had its place in a subtle, but

unalterable hierarchy," showing "subordination and superordination" and outlining "the

order in which [the reader] will encounter these ideas in reading from first page to last"

(Bolter 105).[11] Like Narcissus falling in love with his own image, by taxonomizing nature

Wilkins replaces the universe, his subject, with its technological reflection, substituting

the hyperreal order of print's visual quantifications for the chaotic reality of the natural

world. No longer a metaphor, Nature becomes, in Wilkins' system, a Book – a fixed

arrangement of objects transmitted across space and time.

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[11] Bolter notes that although the classification of knowledge has roots in Aristotle and gains most prominence with Hugh of St. Victor and Francis Bacon, "even as late as Coleridge, an encyclopedist thought" argued "that the purpose of his great book was to demonstrate how each notion is subordinated 'to a preconceived universal Idea' – in other words, to present hierarchies of knowledge" (Bolter 105). In "Nature," Emerson similarly argues that classifying nature evinces truth, indicating that this idea held sway well into the nineteenth century in both Britain and American and still influences scientific inquiry today.

II. John Locke, Jonathan Swift, and Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*

Locke

As a student and tutor at Oxford, John Locke fraternized with members of the Royal Society, developing, as Mary Slaughter notes, "a close connection with Wilkins" (Slaughter 198). Both Locke and Wilkins sat on the committee that arranged experiments; Locke was intimate with Tillotson, Wilkins' son-in-law; and both Locke and Wilkins joined their respective patrons, Shaftesbury and Buckingham, in an "informal committee … to work on" the issue of religious toleration (Slaughter 198). Influenced by early print culture thinkers such as Wilkins and Bacon, John Locke developed his own theory on language based on the arbitrariness of words, rather than Adamic named objects girded by a universal grammar. Thus in the Enlightenment, communication became, as Hayley Davis puts it, "a social institution, not an Adamic creation" (Davis 79).

In many ways, Locke begins from the same premise as Bacon. For Locke, language is primarily a *vehiculum cogitationum*, "the great bond that holds society together, and the common conduit, whereby the improvements of knowledge are conveyed from one man and one generation to another" (Locke III.xi.1). Yet, though language unites communities, its acquisition and its usage are individual acts, such that words "in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing, but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them" (Locke III.ii.2). Augmenting this thesis, Walter Ott explains: for Locke, "all categorematic words [*i.e.*, words having meaning independent of their context] conventionally signify (here, serve as grounds of inference for) nothing but ideas

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in the mind of the speaker," which results both "from the nature of signification" and

"from a set of contingent facts about what sorts of things words can be used to indicate"

(Ott 32). To a speaker who has only ever witnessed a full moon, the term 'moon'

signifies, or triggers, a different mental object than it may for a person who has witnessed

the moon rising and setting, obscured and visible in all its phases.

In Lockean linguistics, as in Baconian, language is a system of combinatory

discrete units, or "common sensible ideas" (Locke III.i.5), which, as the simplest

components of language, "are not capable of any definition" but refer to real objects

empirically known (III.iv.4). Through the "workmanship of the understanding that

abstracts and makes those general ideas" (III.iii.12), simple ideas combine to build more

complex ideas. For example, a word such as 'messenger' is a sensible idea, a simple

linguistic component referring to a role understood by all people and in all languages; the

word 'angel,' however – whose primary signification, for Locke, is 'messenger' – is a

complex compound of 'messenger,' 'heavenly,' and other simple ideas (III.i.5).[12]

However, a word such as 'messenger' has no Adamic connection to reality in Locke's

system, as it does in Bacon's universal language. As he writes (quoted at length to stress

the import of these distinctions), words

> belong not to the real existence of things; but are the inventions and creatures of
> the understanding, made by it for its own use, and concern only signs, whether
> words or ideas. Words are general, as has been said, when used for signs of
> general ideas, and so are applicable indifferently to many particular things; and
> ideas are general when they are set up as the representatives of many particular
> things: but universality belongs not to things themselves, which are all of them
> particular in their existence, even those words and ideas which in their

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[12] Not all words fit into these categories. Locke admits to at least one obvious exception: particles. As Stephen Land points out, "the distinction between names (sometimes called 'integral' words) and particles was a commonplace of seventeenth-century grammatical theory," reflected in the work of John Wilkins, Arnauld and Lancelot (Land 60-61). For a thorough discussion on how particles fit – or do not fit – into Lockean theory, see Land 59-63.

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> signification are general. When therefore we quit particulars, the generals that rest
> are only creatures of our own making; their general nature being nothing but the
> capacity they are put into, by the understanding, of signifying or representing
> many particulars. For the signification they have is nothing but a relation that, by
> the mind of man, is added to them. (II.iii.11)

Whereas Bacon attempts to strengthen the bond between words and their reality through a gestalt linguistic program in which Adam, "like Shakespeare's poet," uses "his unblemished intuition to pierce all mysteries and to name them like a nominalist magician" (McLuhan 188), Locke recognizes the fundamental arbitrariness of linguistic systems. If things are always particular in their existence, and if universals are only tools for representing many particulars, then a language isomorphic with nature and built around a ramified taxonomy becomes, he recognizes, "an impossibility" (Slaughter 198). As Mary Slaughter points out, in this way Locke "broke the connection between (the ideas in) the mind and the nature of reality" (Slaughter 198) and, similarly, inverted Wilkins' project; for whereas a philosophical language represents Nature, Locke's reality comes into focus via the complex ideas – in other words, the various and infinite combinations of simple ideas – that men impose upon it.

By shifting from an Adamic to a proto-Saussurian understanding of language, Locke also shifts the problem of linguistic incongruity from within the system to between individuals. Because each speaker composes complex ideas out of arbitrarily signified simple ideas in her own mind, successful communication depends upon a close correspondence between words and their signification among a community of speakers. He writes that

> Words, by long and familiar use, as has been said, come to excite in men certain
> ideas so constantly and readily, that they are apt to suppose a natural connexion
> between them. But that they signify only men's peculiar ideas, and that by a
> perfect arbitrary imposition, is evident, in that they often fail to excite in others

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> (even that use the same language) the same ideas we take them to be signs of: and
> every man has so inviolable a liberty to make words stand for what ideas he
> pleases, that no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their
> minds that he has, when they use the same words that he does. (Locke III.ii.8)

In other words, when one speaker says 'angel', she must be assured that the listener's

mental conception of 'angel' corresponds with her own; any irregularity, inconsistency or

imprecision in definition results in erroneous ideas. In this system, authority devolves

from God – or, at least, the creator of the language – to the collective, and from the

community to the individuals that comprise it, mirroring the shift from collaboratively

produced and interpreted manuscripts to closed texts. In scholasticism, interpretation

developed through thesis, antithesis and synthesis; Locke's system, however, isolates

arbitrary sounds and signs, locking language in the mind the way print imprisons text on

the page. Communication, then, becomes a butting of brains, which can forge a

connection only through a third party.

   Just as his political philosophy emphasizes personal liberty, Locke's linguistic

system eschews authority, either from the Bible or the monarchy. Instead, a "tacit

consent" to "appropriat[e] certain sounds to certain ideas" satisfies the "common use" of

language (Locke III.ii.8; see also III.vi.51). Thus the "market and exchange must be left

to their own ways of talking, … gossipings [must] not be robbed of their ancient

privilege," and sidewalk debates suffer nothing for linguistic irregularity, since the

interlocutor can ask for clarification of any imprecise word or concept (Locke III.xi.3).

Yet, echoing Bacon's Idols of the Market, Locke believes that those "who pretend

seriously to search after or maintain truth, should think themselves obliged to study how

they might deliver themselves without obscurity, doubtfulness, or equivocation, to which

men's words are naturally liable, if care be not taken" (Locke III.xi.3). Although

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solecisms do not hinder speech much, printed words absent any auditory context may

result in communication that is "much more obscure, uncertain, and undetermined in [its]

meaning, than [it is] in ordinary conversation" (Locke III.x.6). In other words, speech

suffices for mundane correspondence, but the language of philosophy and science must

observe a fixed standard that, like the book itself, transcends regional differences,

orthographic deviancy, individual idiosyncrasies and time. Knowledge, then, assumes the

autonomous, mechanical traits of the technology that frames it.

To forge a connection between isolated texts, thereby solving the problem of

linguistic imprecision, Locke proposes the construction of a dictionary. In the two

centuries preceding the publication of Locke's *Essay*, English lexicons were either "hard

words" dictionaries[13] or bilingual,[14] typically Latin-English or English-Latin. As Sidney

Landau writes, since "the entire stock of English words in the fifteenth century was less

than a fifth of what it is today," lexicographers "turn[ed] to other languages to provide

descriptions of things for which no English word existed" (Landau 37), and, in most

cases, they designed their lexicons for a specific context, such as religious instruction.

Ramus' and Bacon's charts, it could be argued, function as a type of "hard words"

dictionary, assigning terms, often culled from foreign languages, to different aspects of

the known world. Locke, however, criticizes this method of lexicography for perpetuating

ambiguity, asking: "The atomists, who define motion to be 'a passage from one place to

another,' what do they more than put one synonymous word for another? For what is

passage other than *motion*?" (Locke III.iv.9). Unless, he quips, "we will say every

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[13] William Caxton's *Promptorium* (1499), Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604), and Edward Phillips' *The New World of English Words* (1658) are a few examples (see Landau 37-43).
[14] John Withals' *A Shorte Dictionarie for Yonge Begynners* (1533) and Thomas Thomas' *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (1588) were well-known. As Sidney Landau writes, schoolmasters wrote many of these early glossaries as teaching aids (Landau 37).

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English word in the dictionary is the definition of the Latin word it answers, and that

motion is a definition of *motus*," these methods propose merely "to translate, and not to

define" difficult words, leaving the complex language of philosophers and scientists

slippery, obscure, existing only in the minds of individuals (III.iv.9).

By contrast, a monolingual English dictionary "showing the meaning of one word

by several other not synonymous terms" anchors all written language (II.iv.6),[15] For this

dictionary,

> men versed in physical inquiries, and acquainted with the several sorts of natural
> bodies, would set down those simple ideas wherein they observe the individuals
> of each sort constantly to agree. This would remedy a great deal of that confusion
> which comes from several persons applying the same name to a collection of a
> smaller or greater number of sensible qualities. (III.xi.25)

Although Locke acknowledges that "a dictionary of this sort … requires too many hands

as well as too much time, cost, pains, and sagacity ever to be hoped for," he believes that

"it is not unreasonable to propose," since, once completed, the printing press may

infinitely reproduce the final product. Unlike Adamic dictionaries of the seventeenth

century, in Locke's dictionary, simple ideas define complex ideas, and simple ideas

themselves are "expressed by little draughts [*i.e.*, drawings] and prints made of them"

(III.xi.25), creating a defining machine by which any user, given a basic understanding of

English, can determine the grammar and usage of more difficult words. Thus even though

the arbitrariness of words locks language in the mind, and even though print closes texts,

a dictionary would fix English syntax and vocabulary to a universal standard.

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[15] The entire passage reads: "I think it is agreed, that a definition is nothing else but the showing the
meaning of one word by several other not synonymous terms. The meaning of words being only the ideas
they are made to stand for by him that uses them, the meaning of any term is then showed, or the word is
defined, when, by other words, the idea it is made the sign of, and annexed to, in the mind of the speaker, is
as it were represented, or set before the view of another; and thus its signification ascertained. This is the
only use and end of definitions; and therefore the only measure of what is, or is not a good definition."
(III.iv.6)

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Although today it is little noticed outside of the history of lexicography, this proposal resonated with eighteenth-century scholars seeking to standardize the language and, as Davis remarks, "probably gave rise to both etymological and prescriptive dictionaries" (Davis 79). Nathan Bailey, for one, founds his *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721) upon Lockean linguistics, noting that words "form erroneous Ideas in the Mind" unless lexically fixed by their constituent parts (Bailey ii). Following Locke's regulations, his definitions contain only simple ideas, which are themselves left undefined: for instance, Bailey marks flora and fauna common in England simply as a tree, or a bush, or a berry "well known" – e.g., 'almond', a "sort of nut well known" – and simple body parts such 'nose', 'eye' and 'ear' he omits altogether. The purpose of his dictionary, he concludes, is to define not known but complex ideas, so that "Persons might have recourse, whensoever any Word occurs with which they had been either till then unacquainted or has slipt their Memory; or when they themselves would either speak or write properly" (Bailey ii).

Thus although the beginning effects of print culture are evident in the work of Ramus and Bacon, Locke is the first philosopher to channel the material reality of the new medium in his philosophy, naturalizing the constraints of print in a linguistic system. Whereas Ramist charts and Bacon's grammar reflect the mechanization of scholarship through moveable type, Locke embeds the concept of combinatory discrete units of information in his understanding of the "natural" processes of human communication – a normalization which, Roy Harris argues, continues to govern modern linguistic theories such as Chomsky's transformational grammar (Harris 86-9). Moreover, for Ramus print is a new technology that demands new educational tools, such as textbooks, and new

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models of scholarship; Locke – likening all of knowledge to a book "in [man's] reach …

containing pictures and discourses, capable to delight or instruct him" (Locke IV.xiii.1) –

takes for granted that print is the medium of scholarship, emphasizing only corrective

measures to utilize more efficiently and effectively an already dominant form of

communication.

Locke's proposition of a dictionary marks the beginning of print culture proper –

the point at which the typography became transparent, no longer recognized as a "new"

technology. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the verb 'print', meaning to stamp

or brand prior to the invention of the printing press, became synonymous with 'write';

today, 'printing' refers to a type of handwriting that mimics typography. Moving out of

the late age of print, twenty-first-century scholars such as Alvin Kernan now see

dictionaries – strange again, as digital lexicography reshapes our relationship to the

English lexicon – as "not just another book but the essential book of print, Gutenberg's

secular bible, at once a supremely practical manual for author, compositor and

proofreader, and a revelation of the metaphysics of print, its ability to abstract, order, and

idealize language" (Kernan 184-85). By offering the dictionary as a panacea for all

linguistic problems, Locke imprinted homogenized typography onto cultural assumptions

about language, transforming a list of words defined into the shared foundation for

philosophical and scientific scholarship.

Swift, Dryden, Defoe, and the Prescriptivists

While John Locke's philosophy organized language according to the constraints

of print, other writers of the period focused on harnessing the dispersive power of the

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new communications technology. In his "Proposal for Correcting, Improving and

Ascertaining the English Tongue" (1711), Jonathan Swift complains to the Earl of

Oxford, Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain, that

> our Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; and the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and, that in many Instances, it offends against every Part of Grammar. (Swift 2)

Translators frequently left entire Latin or French phrases untranslated, while rampant

inkhorn terms, coined "merely to sound more erudite" (Jackson 39) allowed for semantic

ambiguity in the literary canon. Likewise, deviant orthography threatened to obscure the

etymologies, and therefore the true meanings, of words. Swift's demands to stop the tide

of monosyllables and corruptions were urgent: every day, he argued, English drifted

farther from its perfection attained during the reign of Elizabeth, the "golden age" of

Shakespeare.

Swift was not alone in his concerns. John Dryden had offered similar complaints

in 1664, lamenting that "speaking so noble a language as we do, we have not a more

certain Measure of it" (Dryden 26). Later that year the Royal Society appointed Dryden,

as well as Edmund Waller, John Evelyn and others, to a committee to "improve the

English tongue" (Birch 499); however, the plague and the Great Fire of London

interrupted regular meetings (Lloyd 164), and "nothing seems to have come of it"

(Jackson 39). Daniel Defoe also bemoaned how "defective" the English were in

preserving their language, calling for an English academy "to encourage Polite Learning,

to polish and refine the English Tongue, and advance the so much neglected Faculty of

Correct Language, to establish Purity and Propriety of Stile, and to purge it from all the

Irregular Additions that Ignorance and Affectation have introduc'd" (Defoe 91).

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A uniquely British anxiety permeates these concerns. In 1583, the Italian Antonia Francesco Grazzini co-founded the Accademia della Crusca – literally, "the Academy of the Chaff," designed to separate the flour (the good language) from the bran (Accademia 1) – and France followed in 1635 with the establishment of the Académie française, whose "principal function" was "to work with all possible care and diligence" to render the French language "pure, eloquent and capable of dealing with the arts and sciences" (Académie Art. XXIV). As DeWitt Starnes and Gertrude Noyes point out, the continental academies, which both published prescriptivist dictionaries, "made the English uncomfortably aware of their backwardness in the study of their own tongue" (Starnes and Noyes 146-47) – indeed, the language itself discomforted polite Englishmen, many of whom, as Adam Beach writes, "feared that their provincialism appeared most readily in matters of language" (Beach 119). A messy amalgamation of Teutonic tongues with deep, but inconsistent, imprints of both French and Latin, the English language was believed to be "less Refined than those of Italy, Spain, or France" – the Romance languages (Swift 3). John Barrell points out that Swift

> regarded it as a great misfortune the occupation of Britain by the Romans had begun after the Golden Age of Latin, and also that their language had never come to be spoken by the 'vulgar' in occupied Britain as it had done in Gaul and Spain. On the departure of the legions, the Britons were forced to call in the Saxons to protect them from the Picts, and the Saxons imposed their customs, religion and language on the country. (Barrell 127).[16]

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[16] The passage Barrell refers to is Swift's third paragraph: "Tis plain that the Latin Tongue, in its Purity, was never in this Island, towards the Conquest of which few or no Attempts were made till the Time of Claudius; neither was that Language ever so vulgar in Britain, as it is known to have been in Gaul and Spain. Further, we find, that the Roman Legions here, were at length all recalled to help their Country against the Goths, and other barbarous Invaders. Mean time, the Britains, left to shift for themselves, and daily harassed by cruel Inroads from the Picts, were forced to call in the Saxons for their Defense; who, consequently, reduced the greatest Part of the Island to their own Power, drove the Britains into the most remote and mountainous Parts, and the rest of the Country, in Customs, Religion, and Language, became wholly Saxon. This I take to be the Reason why there are more Latin words remaining in the British Tongue, than in the old Saxon; which, excepting some few Variations in the Orthography, is the same, in most original Words, with our present English, as well as with the German, and other Northern Dialects" (Swift 3).

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Because of its savage history, the English language constantly threatened to "lapse into the Barbarity of those Northern Nations from whom we are descended, and whose Languages labour all under the same Defect" (Swift 13).

Of course, from the anxiety of being conquered follows a strong desire to become, in turn, the conquerors of others. Calling for an English academy to rival those on the continent, Daniel Defoe analogizes this project to war:

> As in the War [the King] has given surprising Instances of a Greatness of Spirit more than common; so in Peace, I dare say, with Submission, he shall never have an Opportunity to illustrate his Memory more, than by such a Foundation: By which he shall have Opportunity to darken the Glory of the French King in Peace, as he has by his daring Attempts in the War. (Defoe 89-90)

Defoe is not concerned with the philosophical precision of language – indeed, if properly maintained, English is naturally "capable of a much greater perfection" than French and thus is better suited to disseminate correct knowledge (Defoe 89). Nor is he concerned with the mechanics of print, how the medium shapes the message, or its impact upon the organization of knowledge. Rather, as the bearer of culture, language for Defoe is a colonizing force, one of the treasures of England that both civilizes savages and exalts the nation. Because print rapidly reproduces and disseminates written culture – at least in comparison to manuscripts – it enables these dreams of conquest.

Thus inhabitants of *paene orbis alterius*, "almost another world" from the continent, English Enlightenment thinkers sublimated their own perceived linguistic inferiority into massive projects of standardization and codification. Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope and Ambrose Philips all began work on their own dictionaries, (Jackson 40-41, Hedrick 424), and in 1717, a newspaper advertisement excitedly reported the publication of a proposal for a "standard Dictionary of the whole English Language …

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according to the Method of the celebrated one of the French Academy" – though none of

these projects came to fruition (Jackson 40). Not until Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, the

exemplar of print culture, did the English language have an authoritative survey of its

written language, charted according to Lockean principles and capable of conquering the

tongue's savage tendencies.

Case Study: Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, first published in 1755, is the most studied

dictionary in history. A massive project undertaken during a time of social

transformation, it is the keystone in Britain's metaphysical empire of culture,

constructing a standard orthography, grammar and literary canon that relieve the

linguistic inferiority complex of the English. By normalizing print as the standard for

written discourse, however, Johnson also wields typography as a weapon that conquers

the civilized, ushering England into a new era of cultural imperialism.[17]

In developing his *Dictionary*, Samuel Johnson, like Nathan Bailey, begins from

Locke's premises. In his *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language*, Johnson

envisions "tracing … every word to its original, and not admitting, but with great caution,

any of which no original can be found," since those words deviate from the definitive

norm established by the speaking community (Johnson 571). Additionally, within the

definitions, Johnson plans to arrange the different "senses" in a Lockean hierarchy,

"exhibit[ing] first [the word's] natural and primitive signification," then "its

consequential meaning," and finally "its metaphorical sense," that definition which has

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[17] For its purposes, this paper does not include the history of Johnson's *Dictionary*, fascinating as it is; for a thorough outline of the social and political context of the *Dictionary*'s construction see Jack Lynch's "Introduction."

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drifted most from the word's concrete usage (Johnson 574).[18] And of course, in Johnson's

Dictionary and every lexicon since, the definitions themselves must be written in "terms

less abstruse than that which is to be explained," though in his Preface Johnson readily

admits that "such terms cannot always be found" (Johnson 32).[19] Thus the *Dictionary* is

firmly rooted in the foundation of print culture, framed by the material logic of

typography.

The tradition of Swift, Defoe and others also inspires Johnson, who wants not

only to fix the living language but to establish a written tradition – a metaphysical empire

of literature on the model of Greece or Rome. In his *Plan*, he writes,

> When I survey the Plan which I have laid before you, I cannot, my Lord, but
> confess, that I am frighted at its extent, and, like the soldiers of Cæsar, look on
> Britain as a new world, which it is almost madness to invade. But I hope, that
> though I should not complete the conquest, I shall, at least, discover the coast,
> civilize part of the inhabitants, and make it easy for some other adventurer to
> proceed further, to reduce them wholly to subjection, and settle them under laws.
> (Johnson 579)

Johnson's plan emerges from a matrix of colonial anxieties and desires, from a notion of

inevitable British progress that operates through denigration of the British themselves. On

the one hand, as Beach points out, by positioning himself as a Roman conqueror, Johnson

"underlines his sense that the entire British nation was ravaged by the linguistic problems

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[18] Although Johnson, faced with the messy reality of lexicography, was ultimately "forced to admit that there were no lexical rules governing the definition and use of words," his use of hierarchical definitions "was later adopted by the initiators of the *OED*" – though they, too, eventually rejected such prescriptivism (Davis 81).

[19] Barrell posits that, despite these nods to contemporary linguistic theory, Johnson's primary concern is proper usage. He does not want to construct a "rational grammar," like Bacon, nor "improve" the language according to Swift's proposal; rather, he wants simply "to ascertain what is customary usage" and "fix it beyond the reach of reformers and innovators" (Barrell 153). Thus, Barrell writes of Johnson's relationship with Locke's work: "he seems to refer to Locke's notion that words are the signs of *ideas*, but he is insufficiently interested in the notion to avoid expressing the wish, two lines later, that these signs might be made permanent, 'like the *things* (my italics) which they denote' – an expression which entirely misses the point of Locke's definition" (Barrell 153). Although Barrell is correct that Johnson ultimately deviates from his theoretical foundations, he nonetheless begins from certain Lockean premises about language that, most importantly, imply a distinct shift from the Adamic models of the seventeenth century.

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of fluctuation and change" – problems identified with the "primitive languages" of native Britons, not the smooth Latin of the Romans, as Swift argues (Beach 124-25). Johnson is also addressing Lord Chesterfield, his would-be patron, and thus is attempting to generate a demand for his product while establishing his own credentials. On the other hand, Johnson sympathizes with his conquered fellow Englishman. His fear at looking upon this "new world" which "it is almost madness to invade" and his confession that he will "not complete the conquest" exposes a resistant text of admiration for his mongrel tongue and its (almost) noble savages. In his Preface, even as he laments the "spots of barbarity impressed so deep in the English language" (Johnson 26), crediting the anxieties of Swift, Johnson also rejects Swift's proposal for an English Academy, writing that "if an academy should be established for the cultivation of our stile" he "hope[s] the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy" the project (Johnson 90).

By positioning himself as conqueror of a wild, uncharted terrain, Johnson also taps into Enlightenment ideologies of nature as entangled, fluid and feminine, in need of control. Citing the work of feminist critic Luce Irigaray, Ruth Salvaggio argues that the Enlightenment mind marked the "other" space of nature "as a fluid realm outside the pristine islands and systems of men" in which "woman inevitably became a sign and symptom of everything that would not conform to systematic structures" (Salvaggio 11). In a now famous passage, Johnson explicitly genders the terrain of language, writing that "words are the daughters of the earth, and that things are the sons of heaven," while hoping that language, then, "might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote" (Johnson 17). By fixing the wild impermanence of the "mother tongue" – a language which, like a loose woman, has been

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"hitherto neglected, suffered to spread, under the direction of change, into wild exuberance, resigned to the tyranny of time and fashion, and exposed to the corruptions of ignorance" (Johnson 3) – Johnson imposes patrilineal order, tracing the pedigrees of legitimate words while exposing cant terms, the bastards of ill-bred language. Thus Johnson's goal is to "secure our language from being over-run with cant, from being crouded with low terms, the spawn of folly or affectation, which arise from no just principles of speech, and of which therefore no legitimate derivation can be shewn" (Johnson 571). Through his *Dictionary*, then, Johnson conquers a feminized linguistic space that is "too porous, too open to penetration by change and by words from other cultures" (Beach 128).

As Janet Sorensen points out, the metaphor of controlling the orifices of a feminized language implies a more literal regulation of women, as well. For Johnson and his contemporaries, the gossipy, chattering discourse of women – and, by extension, all oral language, emanating from an uncontrollable mouth – produces unfathered words and expressions; for instance, the Earl of Chesterfield asks Johnson if he

> will allow into his *Dictionary* 'those words and expressions, which, hastily begot, owe their birth to the incontinency of female eloquence.' Eloquence, a talent that, when masculine, is a form of control over language, connotes a lack of control in women. The use of the term 'incontinency' suggests specifically a lack of control over the body, both a failure to control sexual appetite, or what a woman takes in, as it were, and an inability to control evacuative functions, what a woman lets out. (Sorensen 81).[20]

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[20] Sorensen adds another example: "Chesterfield goes on to describe the consequence of such incontinency, the scene of a word's birth. He writes, 'I never see a pretty mouth opening to speak, but I expect, and am seldom disappointed, some new improvement of our language, I remember many expressive words coined in that fair mint. I assisted at the birth of that most significant word, 'flirtation'.' Such scenes suggest that in appropriating the production of linguistic value, polite women destabilize the 'universal' value of English" (Sorensen 81-82). Note that Chesterfield's language and Sorensen's analysis utilize prominent metaphors of language as the offspring of feminine speech and as an economic unit of value which is minted and stored, both images tied to the print medium.

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If language is, metaphorically, the female body, her mouth is its reproductive organ

which must, literally, be controlled and contained. Robert Cawdrey, author of the earliest

monolingual English dictionary, *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604), explicitly characterizes

his work as an attempt to control the reproductions of women, "gathered for the benefit &

helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull persons" (Cawdrey, title page).[21]

By composing a written dictionary that denies the language any vestige of orality,

Johnson illegitimizes oral (and therefore, during this period, feminine) discourse. Johnson

therefore operates from assumptions about nationality, land and the feminine body,

controlling and containing the mother tongue so it can perform its proper function – that

is, as Beach points out, "giving birth and rebirth to the English literary canon in an easily

accessible language for the common reader of the distant future" (Beach 128).

To conquer the feminine, unstable, unruly realm of the English tongue, Johnson

wields print as his tool. For Johnson, the mouth's productions are non-exclusive, "for

anyone, even animals, who mouth sounds instinctively, can utter sounds as a physical

impulse, and any person, educated or not, can mechanically mouth a phrase or statement

without understanding it" (Sorensen 299).[22] As Johnson writes in his Preface, oral

communication is "too volatile and subtle for legal restraints," comparable to "lash[ing]

the wind," while speech "unfixed by any visible signs" is "spoken with great diversity, as

we now observe those who cannot read to catch sounds imperfectly, and utter them

negligently" (Johnson 7). Early attempts at alphabetic writing only further destabilized

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[21] Allon White discusses this passage: "Holding out the tantalizing promise to the reader that she will gain skill and power through the purchase off the book, it nevertheless places her precisely as an outsider to her own national language, by and in the very act of producing the 'table alphabeticall.' These words are not *her* words, they belong to others, the learned men who *constitute themselves as learned* by producing the separation of language assumed and reproduced in dictionary-making" (White 127).

[22] See Sorensen, "Dr. Johnson Eats His Words," for an insightful analysis of Johnson's bias against the mouth in his definitions and lexicographical practice.

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"this wild and barbarous jargon," since "every penman endeavoured to express, as he could, the sounds which he was accustomed to pronounce or to receive, and vitiated in writing such words as were already vitiated in speech" (Johnson 7). Printed books, by contrast, stabilize the mutability of writing:

> From this uncertain pronunciation arise in a great part the various dialects of the same country, which will always be observed to grow fewer and less different, as books are multiplied. (Johnson 8).

As Sorensen notes, Johnson's characterization of linguistic history presents a "circular scenario": dialectical variations "originate 'imperfect' and 'negligent' use of the language because speech lacks 'fixed visible signs', yet when such 'visible signs' do emerge, they simply reproduce faulty pronunciations in their written recordings" (Sorensen 297). By locking spoken and handwritten communication in a loop, Johnson leads his reader to the inevitable conclusion that print must set the written standard, since, circuitously, only language framed in print resists change – a criterion that print sets.

Johnson's distinction is not simply between oral and written culture, typically characterized in opposition to each other, but between the old polite culture of manuscripts and the new mechanical culture of print. On the one hand, Johnson's would-be patron Lord Chesterfield was, as Kernan points out, a "perfect image" of the former – a "brilliant conversationalist" and "notable public speaker, … famous for his eloquent, though seldom persuasive, orations in the House of Lords" (Kernan 199). His letters to his son, vestiges of the handwritten, dialogic manuscript culture, preserve his thoughts on language, including his vision of a great English dictionary, a prescriptive, authoritative standard delimiting the proper sounds of his tongue (Neuman 465). Johnson, on the other hand, embodies the new print culture which, recalling the philosophy of Locke,

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transferred power from God and King, divine authorities, to individuals and the

institutionalized power of print. A dictionary, produced by a Grub Street hack without

any financial "favours from the Great" (Johnson, "Letter" 1), is Johnson's lasting legacy

– an emblem of the shift from speaker to writer, from patron to author. As Kernan points

out, this shift "was immediately established socially by a dramatic power struggle for

control of the language" between Johnson and Chesterfield, who

> proceeded to act out a linguistic revolution that paralleled what was going on in
> the philosophical world and dramatized the central changes in the world of letters.
> Chesterfield, unconsciously, played out a part that could not have been written
> better to show how irrelevant he and his class were becoming in the realms of
> language and letters. … Chesterfield was still attempting to preserve 'The King's
> English.' But Johnson was about to make it 'The Authors' English,' his own and
> his great precessors', Spenser's, Shakespeare's, Milton's, Pope's. (Kernan 201-
> 202).

As Beach points out, this shift may also be characterized in terms of "what it means for a

cultural work to 'survive' into the future" (Beach 128). Whereas ancient Greeks such as

Plato understood the opposition between oral and written culture as one between

ephemerality and permanence, Johnson invites a new distinction between the literacy of

manuscript culture, which produces a small quantity of unique texts, and the transmission

of mass-produced print volumes available for future generations. The former circulates

language among the scholarly elite, represented by Chesterfield's letters to his son; the

latter operates by ascertaining, fixing and transmitting the English literary canon in a

democratic public forum, as in Johnson's expansive project.

With fantasies of "transforming English, along with Greek and Latin, into the

third 'classical' tongue" (Beach 118), Johnson set about delimiting this canon in his

Dictionary, first published in 1755. His "purpose was to admit no testimony of living

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authours" who might object to his characterization of their usage but only those dead

writers who have passed into the mythic unconscious of British letters. He adds,

> So far have I been from any care to grace my pages with modern decorations, that
> I have studiously endeavoured to collect examples and authorities from the
> writers before the restoration, whose works I regard as the wells of English
> undefiled, as the pure sources of genuine diction. (Johnson 36)

As has been well-documented, Johnson does not simply record the Great Books of

Britain but confers the status of Greatness. Kernan notes that the popularity of Johnson's

Dictionary "guaranteed the general acceptance in the long run of its central idea that the

great writers and their books determine the language" (Kernan 199), while Barrell

similarly points out that, "like the *OED*, it is to be regarded as a dictionary of the written,

not the spoken language, and of the written language as it is to be found in the pages of

polite authors, though as far as possible purged of the barbarisms that from time to time

even the politest have admitted" (Barrell 155). As with the Romans or the Greeks, the

transmission of an English record – and, by implication, a standardized language with

which to read these texts centuries, even millennia later – conquers British fears of

linguistic inferiority and simultaneously allows the English to become colonizers

themselves, sowing the seeds of literate culture throughout Scotland, Ireland, Wales and,

later, Africa and the East.

The construction of a literary record, however, has implications beyond written

language. In his *Plan*, Samuel Johnson ties the written standard to the "living" language,

noting that proper pronunciation "is of great importance to the duration of a language,

because the first change will naturally begin by corruptions in the living speech."

Therefore "since one great end of this undertaking is to fix the English language, care

will be taken to determine the accentuation of all polysyllables by proper authorities,"

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which will be noted through illustrative rhymes (Johnson 569). Likewise, "it is still more necessary to fix the pronunciation of monosyllables by placing with them words of correspondent sound," although differences – such as "state/great" in Pope and "seat/great" in Rowe – will be suffered if "defensible by authority," granted by printed texts (Johnson 570).

Norman Blake points out that "it was a common view at this time that pronunciation should be as close as possible to the written form" (Blake 238). Since the fourteenth-century development of the Chancery standard – a written standard borne of bureaucratic necessity – the speech of London and the North Midlands began to emerge as a non-localized linguistic superordinate, a process greatly accelerated by the advent of print in the fifteenth century.[23] Likewise, as Lynda Mugglestone argues, ideologies of superiority affected beliefs about linguistic superiority:

> As the poet and essayist, James Beattie, was later to write, it was natural to 'approve as elegant what is customary among our superiors', and the superiority vested in knowledge of the written word, and in familiarity with the metropolitan above the provincial, readily served as major determining factors in these early perceptions of linguistic elegance with regard to speech. (Mugglestone 14)

For instance, in 1619 Alexander Gil argues that, as Mugglestone notes, "all spelling is to be accommodated to the sounds used, not by ploughmen, maidservants, and porters, but by learned or elegantly refined men in speaking and writing," while schoolmaster Owen Price writes in *The Vocal Organ* (1665) that his book "has not been guided by our vulgar pronunciation, but that of London and our Universities, where the language is purely spoken" – because the speakers are literate (Price A3ᵛ). Through written language and, in

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[23] On the Chancery Standard, see John Fisher's "Chancery and the Emergence of a Standard Written English in the Fifteenth Century." For a discussion on the process of standardizing Middle English prior to the invention of the printing press, see J. D. Burnley's "Sources of Standardisation in Later Middle English" and Crystal 229-242.

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particular, its dissemination through print, the English tongue acquired a sense of

propriety: those literate men who spoke as they read pronounced English properly and

were even, by implication, more moral than the illiterate (Blake 239). By the early

eighteenth-century, John Jones' *Practical Phonography* was recommending that

Englishmen speak "according to the sound of the printed letters, and not as usually

sounded," firmly embedding the tradition of print in speech (Jones 12).

Johnson more explicitly endorses this view in his Grammar, affixed to the

Dictionary. As he notes, in English "there is a double pronunciation": the first, "cursory

and colloquial" speech, is "always vague and uncertain, being made different in different

mouths by negligence, unskilfulness, or affectation," while the second, "regular and

solemn" speech, is "always less remote from the orthography, and less liable to

capricious innovation" (Johnson 21). Johnson faults previous English grammarians for

creating pronunciation tables formed "according to the cursory speech of those with

whom they happened to converse" and, in doing so, "stabili[zing] the jargon of the lowest

of the people as the model of speech" (Johnson 21). In addition, since pronunciation

fluctuates, Johnson argues that stabilizing writing through pronunciation is backwards.

He notes that some reformers

> have endeavoured to accommodate orthography better to the pronunciation,
> without considering that this is to measure by a shadow, to take that for a model
> or standard which is changing while they apply it. Others, less absurdly indeed,
> but with equal unlikelihood of success, have endeavoured to proportion the
> number of letters to that of sounds, that every sound may have its own character,
> and every character a single sound. (Johnson 21)[24]

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[24] Johnson expresses a similar sentiment in his Preface, writing that "academies have been instituted, to
guard the avenues of their languages, to retain fugitives, and repulse intruders; but their vigilance and
activity have hitherto been vain; sounds are too volatile and subtile for legal restraints; to enchain syllables,
and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength"
(Johnson 85).

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Pronunciation cannot form a model for written language, for then the errors of speech infiltrate the perfection of print; yet orthography cannot be tied to phonology either, since forcing orthographic change upon a literate nation is an impossible feat. He concludes: "for pronunciation, the best general rule is, to consider those as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words" (Johnson 21). Thus pronunciation, the "living language," becomes a subsidiary of written language, which thereby forms the standard for speech – a manufactured cycle made stable only through print.

If the standards for proper speech are the literate elite, who form their words by dint of literacy, then speech, ironically, may be the most affected part of language in this system. As Blake writes, it follows from Johnson's grammar that "one could not speak proper English unless one could spell and knew the rules of orthography," implying that "there is a polite pronunciation acquired through listening and speaking as a child but which carried with it no sense of politeness or acceptability" (Blake 238). Thus the lower classes became marginal speakers of their own language, while the educated classes expressed themselves as books. This "ever-increasing gulf between the written and the spoken language" in eighteenth-century print culture leads Blake to conclude that "the written language had its own rules and these were quite separate from the way most people spoke" (Blake 239), and, one might add, this gulf divides not simply the written and spoken but the speakers and the writers. The former engage with the world through verbal, multisensory communicative acts, while the latter observe the world through the prism of print, stripping their speech of all affectations, cant or dialect. In other words, the former speak, while the latter speak as they read.

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This ostensibly slight distinction sheds light on the role of technology in the creation of a national language. By the standards of print, communication is chaotic, a tangled web of diverse auditory, paralinguistic, visual and visceral signs representing, creating and decoding meaning via an opaque logic. As Samuel Johnson puts it in the Preface to his *Dictionary*, the English tongue is "copious without order, and energetick without rules" (Johnson 4), echoing his predecessors from Ramus to Locke. In other words, by the standards of print, English needs to be standardized. Using the physical constraints of a medium as the authority, then, Johnson's *Dictionary* becomes a hyperreal sign for the English language itself or, as Kernan puts it, *The English Language*, "printed and bound in two folio volumes":

> So great is the power of type to create a positivist linguistic reality that to subsequent generations it has seemed apparent that language is what a dictionary makes it, a limited number of 'real' words ordered alphabetically, with correct pronunciations, orthography, derivations, and a limited range of meanings. (Kernan 185)

As Kernan hints at, this naturalized super-English is not simply a passive reflection of its constituent ideologies – Enlightenment philosophy, imperialism, "gentlemanly" speech, gender, technology and so on. A popular and, for almost a century, authoritative lexicon, Johnson's *Dictionary* circulated to reinforce and, more importantly, construct these principles, shaping a culture's linguistic beliefs according to, in part, the medium that conveyed them. By the end of the eighteenth century, Johnson had replaced Wilkins' theoretical fancy with an established, authoritative, print culture tome – or, as Kernan dubs it, Gutenberg's secular bible.

III. The Elocutionists

Although in 1711 Jonathan Swift lamented that "the Pretenders" who suppose "to polish and refine" the language actually "have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities," less than one hundred years later another writer accused Swift of precisely that. In his "revised and corrected" edition of Jonathan Swift's work, published in 1784, Thomas Sheridan criticizes Swift, who had given him lessons in pronunciation as a child (Beach 126), for allowing "many barbarous words of uncouth sound" into written language (Sheridan xxxvii). For example, the term 'no-ways' for 'no wise' is a "vulgar corruption" (Sheridan xl); 'I had rather' is a "strangely ungrammatical" rendering of 'I would rather' (Sheridan xli); and the final "hiss" in 'towards' or 'forwards' "savours much of barbarism," since a word "loaded with the final *s*, is more apt to run glibly into the following word" (Sheridan xxxix).[25]

Taken together, Sheridan's criticisms underscore the shift that occurred during the eighteenth century. Writing with his ear to the language, Swift does not follow strict written codes but records what he deems acceptable speech: for instance, a final *s* sound on words such as 'towards' facilitates rapid speech, though it violates written standards. Likewise, interconsonantal vowels in words such as 'further' and 'farther' would be indistinguishable in Swift's Irish pronunciation, and 'I had rather' (for 'I would rather') echoes the current 'I would of' error, which replaces 'I would have' with words that sound closer to the pronunciation. Hence the writings of Swift, who died before the

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[25] Sheridan is not the only thinker of the period concerned with the impropriety of Swift's style. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres,* published in 1783, Hugh Blair discusses the "solecisms" in, ironically, Swift's "Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue" (Blair 139, 300). In his *Short Introduction to English Grammar*, Bishop Lowth also discusses Swift's incorrect verb conjugations (Lowth 75). Even though Swift was a leading figure in the movement to standardize the English language, complaints about Swift's "slovenly" style lasted well into the nineteenth century. See Neumann, "Eighteenth-Century Linguistic Tastes as Exhibited in Sheridan's Edition of Swift," for a complete analysis of Sheridan's critique.

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completion of Johnson's *Dictionary*, reflects a culture still conflicted over linguistic standardization, unsure how to implement the massive projects of codification that he himself proposed. By contrast, Thomas Sheridan and John Walker, the two leading men of the British elocution movement, lived in a world that already accepted a written standard – a world that had, in the *Dictionary*, a grammar, a literary canon, and Gutenberg's secular Bible. With print already immediate or invisible to late-eighteenth-century readers, speech, by comparison – the most natural form of discourse for humans – became a sloppy aberration in need of correction and, likewise, the final frontier in standardization.

The elocutionists, then, set out to accomplish for orthoepy what Johnson had for orthography: the naturalization of print media. Applying the new written standard to speech, Sheridan and Walker attempted to collapse the distinction between verbal and visual linguistic media, inscribing the material logic of typography onto speech patterns. Their project manifests itself in pronouncing dictionaries – easily reproduced and disseminated handbooks that teach pronunciation absent any speaker. By naturalizing and then spreading a spoken standard, centered on print, to the furthest corner of the British Isles, the work of Sheridan and Walker helped create a linguistic hyperreality in which the ideal of technology becomes the *de facto* standard for all discourse.

Case Study: Thomas Sheridan

Educated at Trinity College, Thomas Sheridan, an Irishman, began his career as an actor, theatre manager and sometime playwright working in London and Dublin. Though lauded as an actor and compared often to his famous colleague David Garrick,

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his managerial skills failed to meet his ambitions, and he pursued a second career as an educator. In 1757, he collected supporters to open a school in Ireland, forming the Hibernian Society toward the improvement of education; however, as Philippa Spoel points out, "despite initial support for this scheme, Sheridan's position as the president of the proposed academy was thwarted by those who claimed that an actor was unfit to lead it" (Spoel 58).

Returning to London, Sheridan delivered his *Lectures on Elocution* to garner support for another academy. A century of printed dictionaries – most unsure how to represent pronunciation – brought the differences in England's diverse dialects into sharp relief. In addition, as Wilber Samuel Howell points out, the Irish, the Scots and the Americans began to feel that their "inability to speak standard English stood in the way of their occupational success in the British capital" (Howell 219-220). In both Britain and American, elocutionists emerged in response to this lack of a standardized English pronunciation, perceived as a handicap for an emerging world power with dreams of colonialism. Responding to this new demand for lessons in speech, Sheridan's addresses received positive reviews, and throughout the late 1750s and early 1760s he spoke on matters of elocution to appreciative audiences in London, Bristol, Bath, Cambridge, Oxford and Edinburgh. Within a few short years, he became, as Spoel points out, "easily the best known and most tireless promoter of elocution in eighteenth-century Britain" (Spoel 59).

In 1762, Sheridan published his lectures, along with an "Introductory Discourse" critiquing Locke's project. Although, he writes, Locke accurately identified the difficulties latent in language, his solution – "that men should carefully examine the

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meaning of each word, and use it steadily in one sense" (Sheridan vii)[26] – is unrealistic.

Sheridan writes,

> But he might have judged from the great difficulty which he himself found in accomplishing this point, and from his own experience of the great care and pains it cost, to separate ideas from words to which they were early associated, and cemented by lone use; that this was a talk not likely to be performed by many. … And if neither the companions with whom we converse, nor the authors whom we consult, are exact in the use of their words, I can not see how it is to be expected that we should arrive at any precision in that respect. (Sheridan vii)

Thus while Lockean linguistics "has indeed afforded such a gratification to men of a speculative turn" (Sheridan ix), Sheridan asks: "do men think, or reason more clearly, than they did before the publication of [Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*]? Have we a more precise use of language, or are the number of verbal disputes lessened?" (Sheridan ix). Average English speakers – men like his subscribers, who are not "persons adorned with titles, or dignified by station" (Sheridan xv) – neither speak nor understand their language any better on account of Locke's reasoning. Locke's project, he concludes, "has hitherto proved of so little benefit to the world" (Sheridan ix).[27]

As in his critique of Swift, Sheridan reproves Locke for his allegiance to the printed word over speech. Ramus, Bacon, Locke and their followers give primacy to written language and, in particular, print, the cash of philosophy and science which, recalling McLuhan's argument, "translate[s] the dialogue of shared discourse into packaged information, a portable commodity" (McLuhan 164). However, where earlier philosophers read nationalistic progress in the accumulation of linguistic wealth,

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[26] As should be evident by from the discussion above, Sheridan misrepresents Locke's answer to linguistic incongruity. Locke did not simply ask men to use words carefully, but called for the creation of a dictionary to aid in the project. Moreover, his concern was, for the most part, written language, not spoken.

[27] Sheridan's initially criticizes Locke for not "trac[ing] the disorder to its source": that children are not taught the English language – grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing – at a young age (Sheridan vii). Sheridan writes, "Nothing effectual can be done, without making [English] a distinct branch of education, and encourage (sic) proper masters to follow it as their sole employment, in the same way as the several masters in the other branches do" (Sheridan viii).

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Sheridan fears stagnation and irrelevance. Echoing Bacon's metaphor, Sheridan characterizes these philosophers of language as men running "from the mastery of one speculative point … to another, with the same kind of avidity, that misers pursue the accumulation of wealth; and much to the same end: the one, rejoicing in his hoard of concealed knowledge; the other, in his heaps of hidden gold, tho' both are equally useless to themselves, and to the world" (Sheridan vi). Because it is devoid of human expression and imagination – what he terms "the passions" and "the fancy" – writing, a mere "invention of man," cannot "giv[e] the human mind its proper shape, and enabl[e] it to display all its faculties in perfection," elucidating truth (Sheridan xiii). Indeed, Sheridan believes it is "the influence of one common delusion" that leads writers to believe "that by the help of words alone, they can communication all that passes in their minds" (Sheridan x).

By contrast, what "is beyond the power of writing" and "beyond the power of books" to convey, speech may impart through a seamless integration of tone, volume, bodily expressions, gesture, and words. As Sheridan writes, "all that is noble and praise worthy, all that is elegant and delightful, in man, considered as a social being, depends" upon spoken language (Sheridan ix). Note that Sheridan does not simply ascribe primacy to speech but strongly dissociates it from writing. As he clearly states in his first lecture,

> But these two kinds of language are so early in life associated, that it is difficult ever to separate them; or not to suppose that there is some kind of natural connection between them. And yet it is a matter of importance to us, always to bear in mind, that there is no sort of affinity between them, but what arises from an habitual association of ideas. (Sheridan 7)

For Sheridan, writing and speech are two radically different media for communication – one isolating and autonomous, the other inclusive and communal. Whereas Ramus,

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Bacon and Locke embrace the closed, uniform printed text as the ideal medium for philosophical communication, Sheridan, as H. Lewis Ulman points out, "resists the isolation of the written text from the physical presence of the rhetorical subject and the immediacy of oral communication" (Ulman 175).

In part, Sheridan hyperbolically dissociates speech and writing to sell his elocution project. By the time Sheridan delivered his *Lectures,* he had failed as a theatre manager and, more significantly, had been unable to garner enough support for an Irish academy of oration, his plan "thwarted by those who claimed that an actor was unfit to lead it" (Spoel 58). To lecture on elocution after these public failures required not only audacity but salesmanship – the ability to sell his project to the public. Spoel describes this trait, which pervades his work, as the appeal of *ethos* (Spoel 66), by which Sheridan aligns elocution with the work of great classical orators and their societies. For example, in the preface to his *Course of Lectures* Sheridan transfers the glory of the Greeks and Romans, twin pinnacles of cultural achievement, onto his project, since they share his emphasis on oratory. As he writes, since Greek and Roman writing only facilitated "silent reading" and "assist[ed] the memory," ancient scholars did not "carry the art of writing farther than was necessary to answer" the needs of oratory (Sheridan *CL* 9); in other words, the informal handwritten documents of the ancients mirrors the prosody of speech, maintaining more "natural" aspects of passion and imagination. Thus the Greeks, "follow[ing] nature," formed "no prejudices from custom to cast a mist over their sight" (Sheridan *CL* 147). By contrast, as Ulman points out, the "ill effects of printing and our subsequent dependence on 'book language'" had desiccated eighteenth-century British scholarship, according to Sheridan (Ulman 172). Centuries of written culture and the

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advent of print technologies split speech from writing so that, by the eighteenth century, a

printed essay followed rules of orthography and punctuation independent of any spoken

context, which still lacked a national standard. This split is evident in the work of John

Locke, who focuses only on inconsistencies in written communication, and Samuel

Johnson, whose dictionary all but ignores pronunciation.[28] Praising the humanists and

Lord Chesterfield, representative of the old oral aristocracy (Sheridan, "Preface" *BL*),

Sheridan aligns his project with cultural sophistication of the ancient Greeks and Romans

– who, on account of "the care taken in the cultivation of their languages," have

"triumphed over time and oblivion, and still maintain a superiority over all ages, either

before or since" (Sheridan *BE* 132).

However, for Sheridan print is both a divisive and a unifying media. Even as it

splits speech and writing into two independent languages and, in doing so, casts a

unnatural "mist" over communication, advanced technology also facilitates the creation

of a new super-language that encompasses spelling, pronunciation, grammar and the

suprasegmental linguistic features in one standard. For instance, through the

homogenizing and preserving power of the typographic alphabet Sheridan can (and does)

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[28] In his *Life of Johnson*, Boswell records the following conversation with Johnson, who, commenting on Sheridan, explains why he focuses on a written, instead of a spoken, standard in his *Dictionary*:
BOSWELL: It may be of use, sir, to have a Dictionary to ascertain the pronunciation.
JOHNSON: Why, Sir, my Dictionary shows you the accents of words, if you can but remember them.
BOSWELL: But, Sir, we want marks to ascertain the pronunciation of the vowels. Sheridan, I believe, has finished such a work.
JOHNSON: Why, Sir, consider how much easier it is to learn a language by the ear, than by any marks. Sheridan's Dictionary may do very well; but you cannot always carry it about with you: and, when you want the word, you have not the Dictionary. It is like a man who has a sword that will not draw. It is an admirable sword, to be sure: but while your enemy is cutting your throat, you are unable to use it. Besides, Sir, what entitles Sheridan to fix the pronunciation of English? He has, in the first place, the disadvantage of being an Irishman: and if he says he will fix it after the example of the best company, why they differ among themselves. I remember an instance: when I published the Plan for my Dictionary, Lord Chesterfield told me that the word *great* should be pronounced so as to rhyme to *state*; and Sir William Yonge sent me word that it should be pronounced so as to rhyme to *seat*, and that none but an Irishman would pronounce it *grait*. Now here were two men of the highest rank, the one, the best speaker in the House of Lords, the other, the best speaker in the House of Commons, differing entirely. (Boswell 470)

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implement new rules naturalizing orthoepy in orthography, while mass production and

decreased cost of supplies in the late eighteenth century allowed them to widely

disseminate his guidelines. For Sheridan, this marriage of "living speech" to the "dead

letter," consecrated through print, allows Britain to surpass the Greeks and Romans – and

also, as Spoel points out, "allows his audience the satisfaction of perceiving themselves –

at least potentially – as superior to classical culture" (Spoel 67). Sheridan writes,

> Had the Greeks or Romans been blest with the light of revelation; had they been
> possessed of such a constitution as ours, together with some discoveries which
> time has produced; they would have carried all the powers belonging to human
> nature to the utmost degree of perfection; and the state of society amongst them
> would have approached as nearly to that blissful state, to which we are taught to
> look forwards, a fellowship with angles, as the boundaries of the two worlds
> permit. (Sheridan *CL* xiv)

Although the Greeks and Romans have reigned superior in culture, advanced

communications technology may propel the English toward even greater glory than the

ancients (Sheridan *CL* xiv).

Underscoring the differences between speech and writing not only sells

Sheridan's project, aligning it with those of the ancients, but also his own leadership

within the elocution movement. As Sheridan no doubt learned after public scrutiny sank

his Hibernian Society scheme, his Irish heritage hindered any serious attempt to become

educational reformer, particularly in the realm of oratory and pronunciation. R. B.

McDowell points out that throughout the eighteenth century, "Irish intellectual, cultural

and fashionable life was dominated by England" (McDowell 145), a fact of which

Sheridan, who attended an elite public school in England as a child (Spoel 57), was

painfully aware. Contemporaries attacked his ability to teach rhetoric: for instance, Lord

Campbell mocked Sheridan's endeavors "in his strong Irish brogue 'to teach all the

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delicacies of English intonation'" (Howell 158), and Johnson derisively asks, "what

entitles Sheridan to fix the pronunciation of English? He has, in the first place, the

disadvantage of being an Irishman" (quoted in Boswell 470). By dissociating speech and

writing, Sheridan both creates a linguistic "problem" – the lack of a uniform English

pronunciation – and simultaneously markets his lectures, grammar and dictionary as its

logical "solution," with Sheridan himself acting as the poster child for a standard dialect.

Thus Sheridan ingeniously turns his greatest handicap as an elocutionist, his Irish accent,

into his best promotion; for only a fellow Irishman may fruitfully implore his countrymen

to "get rid of that disgusting tone called an Irish brogue, which pervades every sentence

they utter and renders them a perpetual subject of ridicule to all English hearers"

(Sheridan SS, quoted in Howell 158). Neither drawing attention to nor hiding his Irish

background, Sheridan can safely preach reform, asserting that "all other dialects [besides

the court pronunciation of London] are sure marks, either of a provincial, rustic, pedantic,

or mechanic education; and therefore have some degree of disgrace annexed to them"

(Sheridan *CL* 30).[29]

Sheridan's anxiety highlights a key difference between scholarship from early

print culture and his own, which marks the beginning of the elocution movement. In a

comparative study of George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) and Thomas

Sheridan's work, Mugglestone identifies the differences in their "framing ideologies of a

standard" (Mugglestone 18) and, therefore, the shift which print instates in the notion of

linguistic standardization. According to Mugglestone, Puttenham focuses on the social

[29] Sheridan's lecture was so successful on this point that, after hearing Sheridan speak, the Select Society of
Scotland passed a unanimous resolution arguing "that it would be of great advantage to this country, if a
proper number of persons from England, duly qualified to instruct gentlemen in the knowledge of the
English tongue, the manner of pronouncing it with purity, and the art of public speaking were settled in
Edinburgh" (Howell 158). The resolution resulted in the establishment of "The Society for Promoting the
Reading and Speaking of the English Language in Scotland."

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stratification of language barriers within local communities, or vertical differences;

Sheridan, however, wants to "create a uniform, and non-localized, variety of

pronunciation which was to be used throughout the entire country," flattening out

horizontal differences in speech (Mugglestone 18). Hence,

> Whereas for Puttenham it had been impossible, and indeed acceptable, for a
> gentleman to speak in ways manifestly influenced by the area where he lived
> (even if in his written discourse he ought to approach and adopt court standards),
> for Sheridan the retention of such markers was to be connotative of 'disgrace',
> capable of contravening the status of 'gentleman' in itself. … Sheridan, for
> example, formalizes the socio-symbolic affiliations of accent in ways expressly
> designed to appeal to a society in which, as contemporary commentators
> observed, emulation and social ambition seemed to operate as a dominant social
> force. (Mugglestone 19)

When contextualized in the late-eighteenth century elocution movement as a whole,

Mugglestone's study presents an interesting challenge to current models for linguistic

standardization. Traditionally, sociolinguists define language standardization as a process

whereby, as James Milroy and Lesley Milroy write in their landmark study, a variety "is

selected as a standard," then "influenced by influential people" and finally is "diffused

geographically and socially by various means" (Milroy and Milroy 27). Language

guardians and their institutions, such as lexicographers and their dictionaries, maintain

this standard through prestige, education and codification (Milroy and Milroy 27). In

historical studies, standardization morphs into a study of power ideologies, as in, for

example, Barrell's argument that "the advocates and codifiers of Standard English

belonged to an educated class and cultivated a standard reflecting their own linguistic

forms, communicative practices, and social privileges" (Barrell 26). However, the case of

Sheridan and Walker – who, "ironically, … were themselves outsiders who had

consciously studied and formalized the idioms of the dominate culture" (Miller 138) –

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indicates that standardization, particularly of speech, is not a top-down suppression but

the bottom-up self-regulation of linguistic outliers. Thus, although a powerful group of

elite may authorize their own dialect as a standard, once it has infiltrated society (as it

had by the end of the eighteenth-century) the nonstandard speakers become its guardians,

since they, not the elite, bear the burden of learning a new dialect. For the powerful,

standard maintenance represents merely power, which they already have; for the rest, it

represents the status they lack.

Thus, recalling the metaphor of the "mother tongue," English was not only a tool

of colonialism but also what Beach, borrowing from Michael Hechter, describes as a

form of "'internal' cultural imperialism" (Beach 118; see Hechter 3-14). Before Britain

could "reform savage body practices abroad," the "national body would have to be

unified by a standard English" (Beach 119): that is, dialects would have to be squelched,

orthography fixed, and diversity stricken from the language, or British colonizers "will be

judged as barbaric conquerors instead of civilizing imperialists" (Beach 123). Just as

Johnson imagines himself as a Roman conqueror, the elocutionists wield print as a

weapon that the Greeks and Romans lacked, deploying dictionaries and practice word

lists across the nation to homogenize English pronunciation in a way not possible before

the invention of the printing press. By simultaneously depicting standardized rules for

pronunciation and disseminating orthoepy without the presence of an actual speaker, print

extends Johnson's metaphysical empire of written language into the literal sphere of

British citizens, establishing a nation of English-speaking drones.

To propagate this standard, Thomas Sheridan publishes his *General Dictionary of

the English Language*, credited "with the invention not only of respelling but also of the

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pronouncing dictionary" (Emsley 57). Sheridan's *General Dictionary* is the first dictionary to respell every entry, even for the simplest word, although his logic is confusing to everyone but himself. Sheridan's system operates by an internal, subjective logic, employing not an objective standard like the International Phonetic Alphabet, but English letters that may be just as polyphonic as those they replace; as a consequence, Sheridan has difficulty remaining consistent. He often leaves in silent letters (as in *de-zi-ne*), extra letters (as in *ak-sess*) or does not completely respell the word (as in the 'c' in *a-kwe-duct*). As his second means of indicating pronunciation, Sheridan uses the elaborate diacritic system pioneered by Kenrick in his *New Dictionary of the English Language* (1773). Kenrick's system places small numbers, ranging from 0 to 16, over or following individual letters to represent phonetic quality. As Landau remarks, the system is also highly inefficient, since "the numerals can easily be mistaken for insect droppings, shredded dots dumped across the page, or the hallucinatory effect of too many brandies" (Landau 57).

In his pronouncing dictionary, Sheridan reverses his hyperbolic dissociation of speech and writing, collapsing the two forms into one print standard. Spoken language naturally changes and morphs; it may be pronounced or pitched differently according to each speaker's attitude, tone or dialect. However, the printed page of Sheridan's pronouncing dictionary forces speech into a type of Ramist corpuscular epistemology, positing a one-to-one correspondence between symbol and sound that, to borrow Walter Ong's description of Ramist philosophy, "t[akes] the printed text, not oral utterance, as the point of departure and the model for thought" (Ong *LO* 168; c.f. *RM* 203). In a

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famous passage often cited as the thesis for his project, Sheridan describes the effect he

hopes that print will have on speech:

> It is a disgrace to a gentleman, to be guilty of false spelling, either by omitting,
> changing, or adding letters contrary to custom; and yet it shall be no disgrace to
> omit letters, or even syllables in speaking, and to huddle his words so together, as
> to render them utterly unintelligible. The reason for the unequal judgment past by
> mankind in this case, is that written language is taught by rule, and it is thought a
> shame for any one, to transgress the known rules of an art, in which he has been
> instructed. But spoken language is not regularly taught, but is left to chance,
> imitation, and early habit: and therefore like all other things left to chance, or
> unsettled principles, is liable to innumerable irregularities and defects. (Sheridan
> *CL* 20-21)

As Spoel argues, this dissociation creates a "dysanalogy" (Spoel 75): Sheridan exalts

"living speech" as the most dynamic form of communication – much better than the

"dead letter" – while simultaneously presenting written language as the type of regulated

standard which speech must strive towards. Therefore to standardize pronunciation – and,

more importantly, to disseminate that standard across the British Isles – Sheridan must

utilize the very medium he presents as antithetical to his project. The result, represented

in Sheridan's pronouncing dictionary, is a monolithic super-English – an agglutination of

verbal and visual modes of communication in one immediate format.

When interpreted within its media context, then, Sheridan's project is not simply

to "correct" pronunciation – for even Cicero encourages his audience to pronounce their

letters "neither drawled nor clipped," and to speak "without effort, in a voice neither

language nor shrill" (Cicero I.37). Nor does Sheridan seek simply to teach better

speaking skills, since, as Thomas Miller points out, elocutionists "generally ignored the

art of speaking in the extemporaneous fashion that is characteristic of unscripted speech"

(Miller 140). Rather,

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> Completely inverting the basic claim that speech is the primary 'archetype' of discourse, elocutionists scripted oral performances to reduce speech to a set of written rules. … Sheridan was right to claim to be a successor to Swift and Johnson, for he carried the project of standardizing English into the domain of oral discourse to inscribe rules for 'speech.' (Miller 140)

Contextualized in the specific medium Sheridan champions, the reduction of speech to rules is more than a desire to apply a written standard: it is, specifically, an attempt to naturalize print as the standard for all discourse, posing mechanical logic and homogenized typography as the natural, organic outcome of a gentleman's mind. Print provides the impetus for Sheridan's project, setting up a juxtaposition between speech and writing that underscores the instability and disorder of verbal discourse; but, more than that, it makes his project possible. Through print technology, Sheridan can circulate his pronouncing dictionary and, therefore, a vision of written and spoken language united in one homogeneous type.

Case Study: John Walker

John Walker observed the publication of Sheridan's *General Dictionary of the English Language* with great interest. With its systematic respelling of words and diacritic system, the pronouncing dictionary exerted "a great influence" on Walker (Crystal 406), who had also turned to a career in education after an unsuccessful stint as an actor and theatre manager. While Sheridan first made his name as a lecturer, though, Walker wrote a series of popular books on elocution, including his two dictionaries: *A Rhyming Dictionary of the English Language* and his *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language*. Together, these two lexicons extended

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Sheridan's project, imprinting print technology in English pronunciation in a way still evident today.

Published in 1775, *A Rhyming Dictionary of the English Language*[30] begins by both placing Walker in the tradition of Johnson and criticizing Johnson's great *Dictionary*. One the one hand, Johnson's *Dictionary* catalogs the written lexicon, offering prose writers "a more easy and extensive view of the powers of the language, than can possibly be suggested by the memory alone"; in doing so, it centers words on their Lockean semantic primitive, moving outward toward linguistic incidentals such as pronunciation, which Johnson may not include. Therefore definitions – some quite lengthy, tracing "the various and almost vanishing shades of the same word" (Walker v) – form the bulk of Johnson's work. Walker, however, argues that this approach only shows the English language "through but one end of the perspective" (Walker vi), writing that

> without the vanity of pretending to a parallel, it may naturally be presumed, that an arrangement, which is perfectly new, may possibly produce advantages which were entirely unnoticed before this arrangement was actually drawn out; for experience furnishes us with a variety of instances of unexpected improvements arising form new, and perhaps fortuitous combinations, which were never suspected by theorists, until a discovery has been made. (Walker vi)

Walker's plan is to, quite literally, show language from the other end: as he outlines in his preface, his goal is to "mak[e] a dictionary of terminations subservient to the art of spelling and pronouncing," alphabetically arranged by word endings (Walker v). In other words, instead of moving from words beginning with *aa*, to *ab*, to *ac*, Walker's Rhyming *Dictionary* begins with words ending in *aa*, then *ba*, then *ca*. The ultimate goal is not

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[30] Full title: *A Rhyming Dictionary answering at the same time, the purposes of spelling and pronouncing the English language on a Plan not hitherto attempted.*

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simply a "resource for poetasters," but to "poin[t] out the analogy of orthography and

pronunciation," eliminating any discord between the two (Walker v).

A list of "Orthographical Aphorisms" follows his preface, outlining the various

ways a scheme based on terminations may root out and eradicate discrepancy.

Duplicating consonants when adding a suffix to a word – such as the extra *p* in

'worshipping,' which remains acceptable in British spelling – "has embarrassed the most

correct and accurate writers," as has maintaining a final *e* in roots suffixed with *–able*, as

in 'saleable' (Walker vii). And just as Walker contemns retaining (or adding) letters that

are not pronounced, he argues that syllables that should be pronounced must not be

disregarded; "for the common terminations of verbs, verbal nouns, participles, &c. never

occasion any contraction in the radical word" (Walker viii). He concludes, the word

'wondrous' "ought to be written with the *e*, as well as 'slanderous', and if we write

'dexterous', why should we see 'sinistrous'?" (Walker viii). In nearly every instance,

Walker blames "either slips of the pen, or errors of the press" – either the writers

themselves, or the technological apparatus that lacks standardization and freezes

linguistic incongruities.

In 1791, John Walker published a more conventional dictionary: his *Critical*

Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language. Described by Landau as

"one of the most popular and influential dictionaries ever published" (Landau 57), it

proposes to employ the work of previous lexicographers – in particular, the diacritic

system of Kenrick and the syllabic division of Sheridan – with one critical addition:

"where words are subject to different pronunciations," Walker shows "the reasons from

analogy for each, produces authorities for one side and the other, and points out the

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pronunciation which is preferable" (Walker 11). As Esther Sheldon points out, for

Walker, "consistency and analogy" – Walker's greatest contributions to lexicography –

are "at least as important as custom" in determining proper pronunciation. For instance,

although 'gold' would have been commonly pronounced with the closed, back, rounded

vowel /u/ in late eighteenth-century England, Walker argues that it "ought always to

rhyme" with words such as 'old' and 'fold', which are orthographically analogical. Thus

in determining proper pronunciation, language, Walker assumes, must follow an internal

logic reflected in both writing and speech, which then mirror each other. As David

Crystal points out, Walker's *Dictionary* did "for pronunciation what Murray and Johnson

had done for grammar and the lexicon: provide a polite public, hungry for prescriptions

to guarantee the social safety of all aspects of their language, with a recognized

authority" (Crystal 407).

A closer examination of some of these prescriptions elucidates an elocutionary

philosophy that employs print as the standard of speech, or Johnson's orthography for a

new orthoepy. In her article "Walker's Influence on the Pronunciation of English," Esther

Sheldon reads Sheridan's dictionary alongside Walker's, devising three categories in

which the two dictionaries differ: syllabication, pronunciation of unstressed vowels, and

treatment of assimilations. In the syllabication of most three-syllable words, Sheridan

reduces unstressed sounds in words such as *arsenal*, *fealty*, *mackerel*, *mantua*, *medicine*

and *porcelain* to generate a two-syllable pronunciation; Walker, however, maintains

three-syllables in most cases, adding under his entry for 'medicine,' marked *med'-de-sin*,

> All our orthoepists tell us that this word is generally pronounced in two syllables,
> as if written *medcine*. That so gross a vulgarism should gain ground in our
> language, is an imputation on our national taste. Our poets, who, when tortured
> for a word to ease themselves, are generally guilty of one part only of the cruelty

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> of Procrustes, and that is, of shortening such words as are too long for their verse;
> and these mutilations too often slide into our prosaic pronunciation: but against
> this abuse every accurate speaker ought to be on his guard. … Mr. Elphinston
> adopts the dissyllable pronunciation as more agreeable to its immediate origin, the
> French *medicine*: but as we preserve the *i* in this word, the Latin *medicina* seems
> its more authentic original, and demands the sound of the *i* in medicine, as much
> as in ominous, mutinous, and original, which Shakespeare and Milton sink in the
> same manner as the word in question. (Walker 323)

Despite his lengthy explanation, representative of many such explanations throughout his

dictionary, Walker's pronunciation is in the minority. As Sheldon notes, although

contemporary lexicographers agree with a three-syllable definition of 'porcelain' and

'mackerel', "there is no unanimity on the other words" (Sheldon 134) – some dictionaries

include both two- and three-syllable pronunciations, but on a few only include Walker's.

His strict adherence to orthography in pronunciation is most evident in words such as

ticklish, *tumbler* and *wrangler*, which, although no evidence exists for his syllabications,

he separates into three distinct sounds.

In a similar manner, Walker differs from Sheridan's syncopations. Sheridan

syncopates the '-iate' ending (e.g. *-yate*) in words such as *abbreviate*, *alleviate*, and

appropriate; the '-ciate' ending (e.g. *-shate*) in words such as *associate*, *depreciate*, and

enunciate; the '-i/eous' ending (e.g. *-yus*) in words such as *egregious*, *envious*, *genius* and

hideous; and similarly syncopates the endings '-ian', '-ion', '-ium', '-ient', '-ial', '-ia', '-

io', and '-iable'. Walker, however, demands pronunciation of every vowel in a

diphthong, writing, for example, *-ee-ate* for '-iate' (Sheldon 134-35). Again, Walker

resides in the minority. As Henry Alexander writes, "the leveling of diphthongs … was

common in English speech in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and survives to

some extent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries"; indeed, an "overreaction against

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this pronunciation has given us the forms *boil* (n.) and *groin* instead of the normal forms

bile and *grine,*" which Shakespeare rhymes with 'swine' (Alexander 145-46).

Walker similarly attacks the reduction of vowel sounds to a schwa. As Sheldon

points out, "resentful at having vowels 'sunk' or not given their 'true' sound, Walker

often enters, for unstressed sounds, pronunciations that do not reflect the actual speech of

his time" (Sheldon 138). Endings such as '-une', '-ume' and '-ure', given with short

vowels in Sheridan, are lengthened to -*yoon*, -*yoom* and -*yoor* in Walker; the *a* in words

such as *defendant*, *dignitary* or *privacy* are given a distinct *a* quality; the *com-* prefix is

pronounced with a full *o* sound; -*most* endings in, for instance, *hindmost* or *endmost* –

-*must* in Sheridan – are pronounced with equal weight on both vowels; and Walker insists

that the first sound in words such as *enchant* or *enclosure* – often raised and reduced such

that, as Alexander notes, the "fluctuation between the vowels *e* and *i*" is a "striking and

consistent feature" of early modern English (Alexander 114) – be distinguished in words

such as *envelope* and *inquisition*. Walker writes under his entry for 'embalm',

> This affinity [between *e* and *i*] is no where more remarkable than in those words
> where the *e* is follow by *m* or *n*. This has induced Mr. Sheridan to spell *embrace*,
> *endow*, &c. *imbrace*, *indow*, &c. and this spelling may, perhaps, sufficiently
> convey the cursory or colloquial pronunciation; but my observation greatly fails
> me if correct publick speaking does not preserve the *e* in its true sound, when
> followed by *m* or *n*. The difference is delicate, but, in my opinion, real. (Walker
> 173)

Similarly, most English speakers of the eighteenth century assimilated sounds such as the

initial *su-* or *tu-*; thus the prefix *super-* would be pronounced *shuper-*, tube, *tshube*, and so

on. (This assimilation is preserved in our pronunciation of 'sugar' and 'sure'.) Although

Sheridan recorded many of this assimilation in many words, such as 'suicide', Walker

eschews assimilation in nearly all cases.

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Underpinning each of Walker's "corrections" is a Platonic belief about the structure of language. In his preface, Walker again strongly criticizes Johnson for his distinction between "cursory" and "solemn" pronunciation, writing

> that colloquial pronunciation which is perfect, is so much the language of solemn speaking, [and] that, perhaps, there is no more difference than between the same picture painted to be viewed near and at a distance. The symmetry in both is exactly the same; and the distinction lies only in the colouring. (Walker 12)

In other words, while the first half of the eighteenth century distinguished learned or "polite" pronunciation, which hinges upon the speaker's literacy, from vulgar speech, Walker deflates this distinction. To him, both colloquial and educated dialects reflect the same linguistic ideal; the former is merely a corruption of latter, the result of "hasty pronunciation" (Walker 12). Moreover, these corruptions are inherent to the English language, not the lower or uneducated classes. By stressing strong syllables, or those "pronounced with greater force," the English system of accentuation allows unaccented vowels "to slide into an obscurity of sound" (Walker 12), facilitating its own decay. Walker – who, like Sheridan, was born into a lower middle-class family and who, like Sheridan sold his books to a public anxious for social prescriptions – believes that correcting one's pronunciation (and thereby climbing the social ladder) involves simply revealing the ideal English pronunciation hidden beneath the layers of elision, syncopation and syllabication.

For Walker, the printed word represents this ideal. By the end of the eighteenth century – a century that saw the creation of Johnson's metaphysical empire of written language – standardized orthography was a transparent reality for written English, such that, as Sheridan points out, it was "a disgrace to a gentleman, to be guilty of false spelling, either by omitting, changing, or adding letters contrary to custom" (Sheridan *CL*

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20). As is argued above, the establishment of a written standard underscored the lack of any spoken standard and, furthermore, offered a model for fixing pronunciation. Like Sheridan before him, Walker turns to print to anchor language, inscribing its rules upon speech; unlike Sheridan, however, Walker extends the power of typography to become not merely a verbal/visual super-English, but the very Platonic ideal of any language. Preserving syllables elided in speech, or the distinction between pronunciations of an initial *i-* and *e-*, a typographic standard evinces the quintessential sound inherent in even the most obscured and rapid pronunciations. Thus Walker's pronouncing dictionaries meld (with the dual definition of both merging and making known by speech) sound and letter – not in the drastic manner of Wilkins or, later, George Bernard Shaw, but through a more subtle normalization of a print, so that a word's natural manifestation is laid out neatly, ideally, on a page.

As should be evident from the examples above, Walker's modified relationship between orthography and orthoepy has left deep imprints on the pronunciation of Standard English, particularly Standard American English. Because Stephen Jones and, later, Noah Webster import Walker's pronunciations into their own dictionaries,[31] Walker's syllabication of three-syllable words and his artificially stilted diphthongs remain in many English words, particularly American: for example, the fourth edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*, published in 2000, records ə-prō'prē-ĭt for

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[31] The story of Walker's influence is an odd one. In the late eighteenth century, Stephen Jones published a new edition of Sheridan's *General Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language*, which, in later editions, came to be known as *Sheridan Improved*. In it, he retains Sheridan's definitions but replaces his pronunciations with Walker's – indeed, in her side-by-side comparison of the three works, Sheldon notes that Jones revised almost over a thousand entries and that, "in almost every instance, the revised pronunciation corresponds to Walker's entry" (Sheldon 145). Noah Webster – who strongly disapproved of Walker – praises Jones for, ironically, correcting Walker's vulgarities and corruptions. Due to his admiration for Jones, borne in part from his hatred for Walker, Webster later imports Jones' (that is, unwittingly, Walker's) pronunciations into his American dictionary. See Letter III of Webster's *Letters to a Young Gentleman* for Webster's complete discussion of Sheridan, Walker and Jones; Webster 38-47.

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'appropriate', ĕn'vē-əs for 'envious', and, of course, ĭ-nŭn'sē-āt' for 'enunciate'. And, as

Landau points out, although the difficult full pronunciation of interconsonantal vowels

(demanded by Walker) has dropped from colloquial conversation, it is still common to

hear words such as 'juror' or 'defendant' pronounced with a full final *o* or *a* (e.g. dĭ-

fĕn'dānt'), "as though equal stress on every syllable were somehow suitable for dignified

and solemn occasions as befit a court of law" (Landau 58). Indeed, the latest editions of

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and *AHD* both cite Walker's pronunciations – which had

no reality prior to his inscribing them in print – as a variant, and in the case of words such

as *hindmost*, his pronunciation is the only one given. Sheldon concludes: "We can

assume, I think, that it was mainly the efforts of the grammarians and othoepists of the

eighteenth century which kept these more natural forms from being standard then and

today" (Sheldon 139). Without prescriptivist lexicographers such as Walker, we may be

saying sōōg'ər for 'sugar'; with him, certain groups still awkwardly pronounce 'mature'

as mə-tyŏŏr' and 'literature' as lĭt'ər-ə-tyŏŏr'.

Beyond his immediate effect on the pronunciation of English – and he is not the

only lexicographer, rhetorician or elocutionist to have such an effect – Walker's melding

of sound and printed letter challenges some modern claims about English linguistics,

particularly phonology. For instance, Noam Chomsky and Halle's argument that "English

orthography … comes remarkably close to being an optimal orthographic system for

English" begs the question when one incorporates the effects of media into their analysis

(Chomsky and Halle 49), for the underlying generative rules they identify may only exist

because early prescriptivists such as Walker matched pronunciation to orthography, or

orthography to pronunciation. Indeed, Chomsky's famed competence/performance (or I-

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language/E-language) distinction reflects the kind of linguistic Platonism that Walker

proposes – competence being a speaker's innate capacities for language, performance

referring to the inevitable corruptions. And, not to criticize only one field of linguistics,

sociolinguistics is riddled with a written bias. As Ralph Emerson points out,

dialectologists render features of different speech styles "into orthographic terms," such

as "*h*-dropping," "*r*-dropping" or "*g*-dropping" (Emerson 265) – as if 'goin' is a

reduction of the more linguistically "real" 'going', even though 'goin' is easier to form

for native English speakers.

Ironically, then, Sheridan's and Walker's naturalization of print in speech has

itself become standard – a new reality that frames our relationship with language. Ong

describes the reemergence of "residual orality" in electronic media as a form of

"secondary orality" in which new technologies – the television, radio, and now the

internet – mediate primary orality, reflecting many of the characteristics of preliterate

culture. Setting aside the relationship between electronic communications and secondary

orality in Ong's literature, one might aptly apply this term to the elocution project. By

"formaliz[ing] speech into a written system of rules, treating public speaking as reading

aloud and inscribing the rules of oral discourse in 'rhetorical grammars' for the reading

public" (Miller 141), the elocutionists and, in particular, Thomas Sheridan and John

Walker filter speech through print, reviving the art of rhetoric as a mechanized offspring

of typography. Through authoritative dictionaries and new notational systems, they

contributed to the transparency of print in a culture which already assumed the

technology as its written standard, fusing sound and letter through print

Epilogue

At the end of his chapter on John Wilkins's universal language, Eco asks an

intriguing question: "What if we regard the defect in Wilkins' system as its prophetic

virtue? What if we treated Wilkins as if he were obscurely groping towards a notion for

which we have only recently invented a name – *hypertext*?" (Eco 258-59). On the one

hand, as Bolter points out, "there is nothing in an electronic book that quite corresponds

to the print table of contents":

> Menus in an electronic book can indicate a hierarchy of topics, but there is no
> single, linear order of pages to determine how the reader should move through the
> hierarchy. In this sense, the electronic book reflects a different natural world, in
> which relationships are multiple and evolving: there is no great chain of being in
> an electronic world-book. (Bolter 105)

While print anchors words to a three-dimensional structure, digital media translates

language into manipulable bits of information such that, as Nicholas Negroponte points

out, "an expression of an idea or train of thought can include a multidimensional network

of pointers to further elaborations or arguments, which can be invoked or ignored"

(Negroponte 70). Put another way, hypermedia reestablishes the scholastic "open text" –

described by Derrida as "a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to

something other than itself, to other differential traces" (Derrida 84) – in an elastic,

interactive environment, so that, in hypermedia, 'tiger' occupies not one slot in an

hierarchy but a flexible space that shifts to meet the user's demands. Clearly, in this

sense, Wilkins' table is not hypertextual, since it presents the world rigidly *in toto*, with

no room for innovation or addition – its greatest flaw, according to most scholars.

On the other hand, the underlying goal of Wilkins' philosophical language does,

for twenty-first-century readers, seem to gesture at hypermedia, in which words have the

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power to display the objects they name, blurring the boundary between the signifier and

the signified. For instance, an internet user could, were such a website available, click on

the word 'tiger' to see an image of it, or its genus, or other animals related to it; she could

learn the concept 'tiger' and its attendant symbols directly, empirically, without

employing alphabetic writing to broker her understanding. As Eco writes, in hypertext,

"many of [Wilkins'] system's contradictions would disappear, and Wilkins could be

considered as a pioneer in the idea of a flexible and multiple organization of complex

data" (Eco 259). Thus, just as Martin Foys argues that virtual, immersive gaming

environments shed light on Anselm's devotional practices, so might a comparative study

of hypermedia elucidate the goals of Wilkins and other lexicographers in print culture,

highlighting, in particular, how the constrains of print shaped their quest for a fusion of

sound and printed letter.

Wilkins' tables have already made their digital debut at the site

reliant.teknowledge.com, which has scanned, transcribed, and posted Wilkins' entire folio

on the internet.[32] Anyone with internet access can flip through JPEG images of Wilkins'

pages, reading them alongside a Times New Roman transcription, or can download the

entire transcribed text and perform a search. In many ways, the site still operates under

the logic of print, laying out pages in folio-style and itemizing them by their original

numbers, and the webmaster does not utilize intertextual links to generate a hypertext of

Wilkins' table. Thus, aside from facilitating research or antiquarian curiosities, this

digitized Wilkins remains an Enlightenment, not a New Media, Book of Nature, as Bolter

---

[32] This is not the only internet transcription of Wilkins' work, which seems to attract cyberspace projects. The website Light-of-Truth.com – which hopes to "open your eyes to the hidden and mystical world of Shakespeare's sonnets" by decoding the encrypted poems using John Dee's mathematical tables – has scanned and posted the entire text of John Wilkins' "Mercury, or the Secret and Swift Messenger," an essay on cryptography, while various scanned illustrations from "The Discovery of a World in the Moone" are scattered across the web.

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hopes to see (Bolter 106). Yet its very presence in electronic space signals a

redistribution of control – a shift from sound back to image, or the pictogram. Reading

and writing in a phonetic alphabet requires, as many have pointed out (Ong 91, Bolter

49), a detour through spoken language; in the logograms of both Wilkins and

hypermedia, however, speech is secondary. In cyberspace, Wilkins' print page loses its

linear, linguistic immediacy and becomes an icon, while the discreteness of its

information shifts from alphabetic letters to manipulable, nonlinguistic black-and-white

pixels that compose it.

Understanding the intersection between new media and the projects of Wilkins,

Johnson, Sheridan or Walker – each, in their own way, a product and producer of print

culture – illuminates the relationship between language, communications technologies

and individuals, particularly during a technological shift. For instance, Jay David Bolter

and Richard Grusin's term "remediation"– which describes the way digital media

refashion traditional technologies in times of transition – provides a useful tool for

understanding the differences between manuscript and print culture; indeed, as this paper

argues, eighteenth-century dictionaries "remediate" oral culture, reshaping verbal

discourse by the standards of typography. Hence by constructing a literary canon, as in

Johnson's *Dictionary*, or disseminating a standard orthoepy, as in the pronouncing

dictionaries, the work of Johnson, Sheridan and Walker "fills a lack or repairs a fault in

its predecessor" (Bolter and Grusin 60) – namely, the absence of a national language,

requisite for colonialism – and thereby renders print "immediate," coaxing readers to

"forget the presence of the medium … and believe that he is in the presence of the objects

of representation" (Bolter and Grusin 272). However, following Bolter and Grusin's

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"double logic of remediation," the printed standard only gains authority by filling a lack

which the media itself creates, engendering a hypermediate environment that continually

"remind[s] the viewer of the medium" (Bolter and Grusin 272). In other words,

dictionaries only render print transparent by proliferating the very medium they seek to

eliminate. While, as Beach points out, "the reading public will need access to the great

works of the past unmediated by a dictionary or a grammar" in order to "celebrate its

Britishness and its literary tradition" (Beach 128), first they need to construct a mediating

dictionary.

Of course, electronic dictionaries and digital lexicography now remediate the

printed lexicons of Wilkins, Johnson, Sheridan and Walker. *Dictionary.com* employs the

layout of its print predecessors although, slowly, it is beginning to utilize digital tools to

"enhance" – that is, to repair the deficiencies of – a printed lexicon. A basic search culls

entries from multiple dictionaries to offer a broader view of a word's various uses, and

premium users can access illustrations and sound clips of pronunciations, introducing

new questions about orthoepy, prescription and the social status of a dialect. Academic

lexicographical projects, such as the *Middle English Dictionary* and the construction of

the *Dictionary of Early Middle Dutch Online*, allow scholars around the world to search

their databases, facilitating research on both languages and texts. Perhaps most

interesting, however, is the phenomenon of the indiscriminate and often crude website

UrbanDictionary.com, with the slogan "Define your world." Any user can post a

definition, along with an illustrative quote: for example, '49ers fan' is (1) "a person who

is affiliated in a positive way with the football team the San Francisco 49ers"; (2)

"doesn't have to be gay" (as in, "i love the 49ers and im not gay!!"); and (3) "a raider-

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hating person from San Francisco, that eats wine and cheese at tail gait parties" while

wearing "butterscotch colored pants" (UrbanDictionary.com). As language often is

outside the discreet, sanitized pages of printed dictionaries, entries at

UrbanDictionary.com become battlegrounds in wars over linguistic authority,

appropriation and the politics of words. After the user *da origanal playa* of Ireland

defined 'Orangeman' as "a member of a secret women beating catholic killing society

founded in the north of Ireland," *PatrickLangille* of Canada asked, "Can we please have a

non-biased definition?" His plea only incited a slew of more virulent definitions

describing Orangemen as "inbred bigoted fat bowler hat wearing protestant bastards"

who are "slightly to the right of the Ku Klux Klan with a propensity for the behinds of

pimply faced schoolboys" – although, in the defense of the Orangemen, *Richy 2*, from

Northern Ireland, entered the last definition: "kings among men, … willing to stand up

for what they believe in" (UrbanDictionary.com). Accessible at all times in cyberspace,

the *Urban Dictionary* challenges the authority of the language guardians, questioning

who owns the right to language and for what purposes.

As I sat down to finish my conclusion, my companion beside me muttered, "What

do you mean 'catalyzation' isn't a word!" As he was writing a paper on biological

mechanisms, Microsoft Word underlined 'catalyzation' in red, suggesting, in its place,

'canalization', 'actualization', or 'cartelization'. Neither *Dictionary.com* nor (the ultimate

authority) the *Oxford English Dictionary* include entries for 'catalyzation', although a

quick search of any scientific database catches hundreds, even thousands of journal

articles and scientific websites that use the term. With a sigh, my friend concluded, "If

the *OED* doesn't have it, I guess I'd better find another word."

In spite of *UrbanDictionary.com* (home to far more unintelligible terms than 'catalyzation') twenty-first-century students are still accustomed to accepting the authority of language guardians – grammar books and vocabulary tests when we are young, dictionaries and the Modern Language Association as we grow older. Without our notice, they construct our linguistic reality, telling us what is acceptable for both usage and pronunciation. As in the case of 'catalyzation' – a term perfectly understandable to any English speaker who knows the verb 'catalyze' – these prescriptions do not credit the complex linguistic capacities of the average human speaker, who can, without ever having heard the word before, understand the noun form of a verb as young as three years old.

The prospect of a hypertext Wilkins or a remediated Johnson intrigues, in part, because it offers a means of mending some of the philosophies rent apart in Bacon's empiricism or Lockean linguistics. As Bolter writes, "if scientists are studying the interdependencies of nature, while humanists are reading hypertexts, then our vision of nature can be reunited with our technology of writing in a way that we have not seen since the Middle Ages" (Bolter 106). Understood through hypermedia, the projects of manuscript and print culture need not be opposed; rather, they both elucidate the diachronic changes of our language in its media environment.

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