

Werner Hüllen. *English Dictionaries 800–1700: The Topical Tradition.* 1999, 525 pp. ISBN 0-19-823796-0. Oxford: Clarendon.

Werner Hüllen. *A History of Roget's Thesaurus: Origins, Development, and Design.* 2004, 410 pp. ISBN 0-19-925472-9. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Under section **559. Word**, my edition of Roget's *Thesaurus* includes a sub-paragraph:

dictionary, lexicon, wordbook, word-stock, word list, glossary, vocabulary; gradus, thesaurus, wordhoard; compilation, concordance, index. (Roget 1984)

The semi-colons between *vocabulary* and *gradus* and between *wordhoard* and *compilation* are crucial. They indicate a relationship looser than synonymy. They signify that *dictionary* and *thesaurus* are not interchangeable.

Monographs attempting to treat the history of English dictionaries have to restrict their field in some way. They might do this by choosing to treat monolingual lexicography as if it developed in isolation from bilingual lexicography, for example, or by ignoring or underplaying the influence of lexicographical developments in the treatment of other languages. Specialist dictionaries are usually mentioned only in passing, and anything that departs too far from the linear history of dictionary development is set aside as aberrant and therefore irrelevant. It is rare that such histories treat thesauruses as anything other than a minor sideline, confirming the general feeling expressed in Roget's classification, that a thesaurus is not a dictionary. In his populist account of lexicographers and their dictionaries, Green makes only one reference to Roget's *Thesaurus*, and that serves to emphasize its marginality:

Paradoxically, it might be noted, the latest editions of Roget's *Thesaurus* — the supreme exemplar, outside an actual encyclopedia, of the thematic method — are being recast as alphabetical word-books. (Green 1996: 23)

Landau, unusually, does give a few pages to Roget, but does not distinguish between two types of work that preceded it: synonym dictionaries and synonym books (Landau 1984: 24). It is this gap that Hüllen seeks to fill, and these ambiguities that he seeks to clarify.

As Elizabeth Whately was to note in 1851, English is particularly rich in synonyms because its Germanic base has been supplemented by borrowings from Latin, French, and many other languages (Hüllen 2004: 269). This wealth of vocabulary has long created problems both for native speakers of English and for non-native learners. Their sales demonstrate that synonym dictionaries and thesauruses have long been seen as possible solutions. Across these two monographs, Hüllen traces the various traditions that culminated in Roget's *Thesaurus*. They are complementary volumes, in that they treat different aspects of the same tradition, though they cover little of the same ground. Both empha-

size the importance of treating their subjects as products of their intellectual and cultural contexts.

English Dictionaries begins by discussing the history of lexicography. Hüllen remarks that:

There never was *lexicography* without word-lists and/or dictionaries, but there were for a long time (and still are) word-lists and/or dictionaries without lexicography. Thus, lexicography has its *raison d'être* in a language-bound technique which preceded it in time and which may even today exist in its own right. (Hüllen 1999: 3)

His purpose, across these two books, is to explore the developments that led to the types of dictionaries and word-lists that contemporary users take for granted. Dictionaries do not just provide an account of the cultural activity known as language, they are also part of that general culture and, more specifically, of a dictionary culture. The study of the development of lexicography is, Hüllen argues, part of the general history of ideas, and he presents four main sources of information for modern lexicography: linguistics, research into the needs of dictionary users, the history and theory of lexicographical practice, and encyclopaedic knowledge. In topical dictionaries, this culturally determined encyclopaedic knowledge determines the very structure of the word-list.

Hüllen describes a 'forgotten' early twentieth-century discussion of the difference between dictionaries organized 'according to the alphabet' and those arranged 'according to nature' (Hüllen 1999: 16-17), and concedes that:

Alphabetical dictionaries have conquered the market. This fact will not change in the near future. One consequence of this is that they have also conquered the attention of scholars. Yet it seems high time that non-alphabetical dictionaries should at least regain their history. (Hüllen 1999: 21)

It is clear that onomasiological ordering of words formed an important part of language learning before alphabetical lists became widely available. Semantically linked groups of words were memorized as part of the process of mastering a foreign language. While scholarship was still conducted largely in Latin, memorization of such word-lists would have been an important stage in acquiring any body of knowledge.

Hüllen begins his account of the history of the onomasiological tradition with word-lists in Egyptian, Chinese, and Sanskrit, and also covers Graeco-Coptic and Arabic-Syriac lists. Rather than arguing that these form part of the same tradition as later English lists, he suggests that they reveal instead universal features of language and of the uses to which humanity puts language. Although in some cases it is possible to demonstrate links both between these works and also with the later onomasiological lists, Hüllen prefers to consider his material as an *autonomous tradition*: a tradition that comes about 'simply because the nature of the phenomenon makes it natural to behave in this way' (Hüllen 1999: 36). This is a sensible decision, not least because it protects

against the inclination to base assertions of influence on the grounds of similarity of content or structure that might have arisen by chance. It leaves the way open to consider these works as texts belonging to a genre rather than, necessarily, to an unbroken tradition.

The English onomasiological tradition, Hüllen argues, can be traced back to classical roots, where it belongs to the field of *ars memorativa*, by which ideas and words are stored in the memory to be retrieved in a given order, by organizing them in a spatial arrangement. Memory was, and is, central to language learning, but contemporary learners have printed books and note-paper to supplement their powers of recall; before the Renaissance only the teacher (if anyone) would have possessed a book, and pupils would have been able to make only temporary notes on tablets of wax or slate. Language had to pass from the memory of the teacher into the memory of the pupils more or less directly.

The English lexicographical tradition begins with glosses providing Old English translations between the lines of Latin texts. Such glosses 'allow a glimpse into the medieval classroom' (Hüllen 1999: 55) in that they would clearly have served as aids to both teaching and learning. These interlinear glosses were collected into glossaries: lists of Latin terms defined by their English glosses. If the ordering principle is the sequence of words in the text, these glossaries still serve a text-dependent purpose, but adopting an alphabetical or topical approach renders them valuable to a wider audience. Even within a text-dependent glossary, there will sometimes be topical nests of vocabulary, where terms belonging to the same semantic area cluster because they are found together in the source text. The glossary appended to Ælfric's grammar receives particular attention, not only because it is the first of its kind, but also because it aims 'to cover the whole word with words' (Hüllen 1999: 65) and because of its clear and obvious debts to Isidore. The organizational principles underlying the fifteenth-century *Mayer Nominale* are also described in some detail.

Given that many early, topically arranged word-lists were designed for use in language teaching, it is fitting that Hüllen should also discuss contemporary colloquies and dialogues used in the same setting. He pays particular attention to Caxton's *Dialogues in French and English*, which is actually a monologue with role-playing dialogues inserted. There were, of course, many similar works providing dialogues in various combinations of continental European languages, some covering up to eight languages. The order in which these languages were added as the tradition developed is an interesting indication of their contemporary importance. These works were clearly intended as aids to commercial and political interaction, though many of the dialogues are domestic in nature.

The onomasiological word-lists also share features with treatises on terminology, and Hüllen looks in detail at those dealing with four specializations: husbandry, rhetoric, geometry, and seafaring. These works sometimes merely

translate Latin materials into the vernacular, but sometimes involve original writing. Of the 133 such works printed between 1480 and 1640, fifty-two are arranged topically (Hüllen 1999: 141). They are, of course, closer to encyclopaedias than more general onomasiological dictionaries.

John Withals' *Short Dictionary for Young Beginners* (1553) is designed to help learners of Latin, but does so by presenting its bilingual entries with the English term first. Its many editions, gradually growing in size, demonstrate how popular the work was, and Hüllen contends that its contribution to the tradition, earlier than is normally accepted, is the idea of learning words as names for things, rather than merely as words: of the idea that one learns a language by learning reality.

James Howell's *Lexicon Tetraglotton, An English–French–Italian–Spanish Dictionary* (1660) included an onomasiological section, entitled *A Particular Vocabulary, or Nomenclature*. The appearance of only one edition suggests that this was less successful than Withals' work, which may indicate that its slightly greater emphasis on English than the other languages included was not what the market was looking for at this time.

Topical dictionaries were not merely designed as aids in learning foreign languages or perfecting one's mastery of English. They were also motivated by the philosophy of universal language: the idea that there was (or could be) a language used by all, which would be based on the underlying structures believed to be common to all languages. Proponents of universal language argued from theological but also from practical standpoints. For John Wilkins:

[The] world was identical to the sum of all physical and mental objects ... Lexemes were names for these. Thus, the universal lexicon of a universal language was nothing other than a list of words arranged 'philosophically'. (Hüllen 1999: 246)

Wilkins was not the first to arrange language 'philosophically', but he was the most important in the seventeenth century, and probably because of the complexity of the task he set himself, still does not receive the attention he deserves. Roget certainly used the *Essay* as the model for his *Thesaurus*, and Hüllen discusses a number of less important works that were also influenced by it.

Hüllen states that 'the historical development of foreign-language teaching and learning can hardly be adequately treated in historiography according to nations' (1999: 361), but he treats 'the European scene' of the fifteenth century after considering English publications of the seventeenth. There is a mass of information in this volume, and it must have been hard to decide how to structure it, but for this reader it felt like a step backwards, especially since some of the main points had necessarily already been made in setting the scene for the English tradition. However, this all provides a useful introduction to Hüllen's analysis of the work of Comenius, and since most histories of English dictionaries do tend to define their field 'according to nations', it was certainly useful material for me. Twenty-five editions of Comenius's *Janua linguarum in-*

cluded English and were published in England, and it appeared in various editions, covering various languages, throughout Europe. Comenius was motivated by his philosophical and pedagogical ideals: not only would his students acquire an understanding of reality through language, but their minds would be structured in harmony with it, which would have a positive influence on the future structure of society. This, in turn, would strengthen the harmony between the individual and reality:

The harmony between all the members of this chain is grounded in the essential analogy of all the domains of the world, which for Comenius was a fact guaranteed by God. (Hüllen 1999: 373)

An interesting feature of Hüllen's treatment of topical dictionaries are his remarks on how they present 'the world of women'. The *Mayer Nominale*, for example, treats menstruation among the diseases of women. Withals tends to provide terms in their masculine form, so the provision of feminine forms indicates activities in which women would have been involved. It is perhaps understandable, in a text for schoolboys, that Withals treats men's clothing in great detail, from underwear outwards, but concentrates on outer clothing for women. Apparently aimed at a more adult audience, Howell's organization of terms for female clothing gives 'the image ... of a woman undressing in order to attend to her toilet' (Hüllen 1999: 242-243).

Despite the long tradition of topical dictionaries treated in *English Dictionaries*, Hüllen begins his *History of Roget's Thesaurus* by saying that 'when it appeared (Roget 1852), it was the first of its kind' (Hüllen 2004: 1). This monograph builds on *English Dictionaries* to demonstrate that although Roget was by no means the first to attempt to arrange the lexis of English by meaning, he did so in new ways and for new reasons. He was influenced by earlier thinkers (rather more than by earlier linguists), but his innovations are what set him apart. What made Roget's *Thesaurus* unique, Hüllen argues, is that it brought together two separate traditions: the synonym dictionary and the topical dictionary.

Hüllen argues that Roget's work is a product both of naïve 'word-centred language awareness' (Hüllen 2004: 30) and of philosophical traditions long since forgotten. We can only understand the structure of and motivation behind the *Thesaurus* by examining these two strands. This is why Hüllen explores classical treatments of synonymy and considers that way that synonyms are used in literature, including *Beowulf* and *Love's Labour's Lost* to demonstrate 'that synonymy lies at the heart of many profound philosophical deliberations and language-bound projects of the human mind and that it is one of the most powerful resources for creative language use in literature and in ordinary discourse' (Hüllen 2004: 75). Almost any literary texts could have been chosen to make the same point, but I am not convinced that it was necessary to make it at such length. It was harder to see the relevance of his overview of recent develop-

ments in semantics until later in the book, and it would have been useful to have had more explicit explanations for some of the inclusions.

Hüllen's account of early English hard-word dictionaries demonstrates that synonymy was an important part of their method: terms borrowed from Latin, Greek and French are explained, where possible, by providing more accessible synonyms rather than through definitions. Thus the conventional division between semasiological and onomasiological dictionaries is shown to be less clear-cut than it might seem to be.

The account of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) compares Locke's work with those of present-day semanticists to see whether they deal with similar problems and find related solutions. Locke's ideas mark the turning point between referential or speculative lexicography and mental lexicography:

i.e. where the assumption that vocabulary follows reality in the way in which a name follows a thing turns into the assumption that vocabulary identifies and gives order to reality because it provides the inalienable signs for the expression of ideas. (Hüllen 2004: 170)

Hüllen goes on to demonstrate the influence of Lockean ideas on the thinking behind Johnson's dictionary, expressed in the *Plan* and the preface, and also within individual entries. In the end, though, Johnson had a practical task to complete, and appears to have 'accepted the notion that, if no perfect definition was possible, an imperfect one would do' (Hüllen 2004: 186). Johnson used many such imperfect definitions from Isaac Watts' Lockean-influenced writings to illustrate terms included in the dictionary. Moreover, like the hard-word lexicographers, Johnson often included lists of synonyms along with his definitions.

Abbé Gabriel Girard's *La justesse de la langue française* was published in 1718, and 'almost created a new text genre' (Hüllen 2004: 206), part way between the synonym dictionary and the treatise on synonymy. Girard worked on the assumption that there were no semantically identical terms in the French language, which enabled speakers to differentiate between closely related objects or ideas with great precision, but that semantically similar lexemes could be used to avoid repetition in a text. His influence is seen in the books on synonymy and synonym dictionaries published in many European countries. As time passed, these works moved away from the discussion of selected examples found in Girard's work towards increasingly comprehensive treatment of entire lexicons. Among these European works, which Hüllen lists but does not discuss in detail, he detects a group-identity which, even after the publication of the *Thesaurus*, excludes Roget.

Girard's imitators in Britain were John Trusler, Hester Lynch Piozzi, and William Taylor. Trusler's oddly punctuated *The Difference, Between Words, esteemed Synonymous* (1766) made clear its debt to Girard, and in some cases merely translated articles from its French source. Interestingly, unlike the topi-

cal dictionaries discussed in *English Dictionaries*, this work steered clear of the physical world and concentrated instead on mental and emotional phenomena in conversation. Piozzi's *British Synonymy* (1794) emphasized that synonymy — selecting the appropriate word or phrase in polite conversation — is a study more appropriate to women than to men (who should instead concern themselves with grammar and logic). She mentioned in particular the help that her work would offer to foreigners learning English. Although she probably knew Trusler's book, and certainly knew Girard's, her far more discursive work appears to be an independent compilation. Taylor's *English Synonyms Discriminated* (1813) is a more self-consciously erudite work, but not necessarily any the better for that. It is heavily dependent on Girard. These English synonymists do not adapt Girard's nationalistic sentiments about French to their discussion of the English language.

Hüllen provides a detailed account of English synonym dictionaries preceding Roget's *Thesaurus*, and identifies James Barclay's *Complete and Universal English Dictionary* (1774) as the first. Barclay wrote:

The Synonymous part of our Dictionary we modestly assert to be entirely new; the use of which, both in speaking and writing, must at first view appear to every intelligent Reader; and we have endeavoured to execute it without running into whimsical notions, or fantastic, affected niceties. (quoted in Hüllen 2004: 237)

Although Barclay's dictionary arranged its entries alphabetically, the content of those entries is clearly influenced by the earlier synonym books. Like many of the topical dictionaries discussed in Hüllen (1999), some of the early synonym dictionaries were designed for didactic purposes, including Ellin Devis' *Miscellaneous Lessons, Designed for the Use of Young Ladies* (1782).

William Perry's *The Synonymous, Etymological and Pronouncing English Dictionary* (1805) is based on Johnson's dictionary with the quotations taken out. Its important innovation is the idea of a *radical synonym*. These are highlighted by capitalization, which indicates that the word's various meanings are listed in its own alphabetically placed entry. What this demonstrates is that Perry's book is on the threshold of seeing synonymy not as a question for isolated exposition of tricky examples of usage, but as a fundamental part of word meaning. George Crabb's *English Synonyms Explained* (1816) 'is different from Perry's ... because it combines the expositions of meanings, modelled on the early books by Trusler, Piozzi, and Taylor, with the perfection of a dictionary' (Hüllen 2004: 254). His 'scientific' principle was to include all the synonyms in the language in alphabetical order, moving within entries from the more general to the most specific. Crabb also included definitions and information about etymology and word-formation. John Platts' *Dictionary of English Synonymes* (1825) was a short version of Crabb's work, designed for use in schools. One of the ways in which he compressed Crabb's material was to conflate articles on synonymous terms.

Hüllen's account of the continued production of synonym dictionaries throughout the nineteenth century demonstrates that some of the features familiar to us from Roget's *Thesaurus* were already well established in this genre, particularly some of the typographical features used to show relationships between terms.

Having discussed the synonym dictionary in some detail, Hüllen turns to the other tradition that fed into Roget's *Thesaurus*: the topical dictionary. 'Only a few other works in the onomasiological tradition were published between Wilkins and Roget ... and none of them would be so closely related to Roget's *Thesaurus* as Wilkins's "Tables" ' (Hüllen 2004: 285). Unfortunately, in order to avoid going over the same ground as in Hüllen (1999), this discussion of Wilkins's work is rather briefer than might be helpful, especially given its complexity.

Peter Mark Roget was a doctor rather than a linguist by training, with interests in public health and physiology. He was, therefore, influenced by taxonomical classifications of the natural world in the construction of the *Thesaurus* as well as by publications in linguistics, although Hüllen carefully asserts that he does 'not assume that similarities with Roget's work are due to his knowledge of such ideas' (Hüllen 2004: 324). As a scientist, Roget made some minor discoveries of his own, but his main concern was to make scientific knowledge available and useful to the general population. The *Thesaurus* is similarly motivated. He appears to have been working on 'a compilation' of words for almost fifty years, but concentrated on it after his retirement. It was, of course, to outshine and outlast all of his earlier scientific work. Early comments, belied by the evidence of sales, were generally rather negative.

Hüllen identifies three perspectives from which Roget wished his book to be seen: that it moves from the idea to the word, that it is intended to be of practical value (including, possibly, in the development of a 'strictly Philosophical Language' which could be used for communication between nations), and that the creativity of the human mind is revealed in the varieties of word meaning. What Roget does not do is to discuss synonymy in his introduction: he is writing for native speakers and assumes that such a discussion is unnecessary. In the structure of Roget's classification, Hüllen finds 'a world-view typical of post-Cartesian philosophy and the post-Newtonian sciences' (Hüllen 2004: 334). He characterizes the difference between Wilkins and Roget thus:

John Wilkins presents a world of experience ordered according to the abstract ideas of traditional philosophy. Peter Mark Roget presents a world of human ideas. Whereas Wilkins, as a lexicographer, faced the world and attached names to its items, Roget, as a lexicographer, entered the human mind and unpacked what he found there. (Hüllen 2004: 334)

Roget's work could be seen as a forerunner of contemporary cognitive semantics, in which the structures of language are seen as expressions of the structures of the human mind. It also presents semantic fields a hundred years before the concept was introduced to linguistics.

Although Hüllen emphasizes the practical intentions behind Roget's work, he does not appear to address Landau's observation that:

However ingenious the hierarchy of concepts, it was pure fantasy to suppose that any conceptual arrangement of the vocabulary of English was natural to most native speakers. It cannot be doubted that few readers could have found the meaning sought without recourse to the index, which has been expanded greatly through the work's many editions. (Landau 1984: 107)

It is a pity in a monograph on Roget's *Thesaurus*, that Hüllen did not spend more time discussing its reception and use. Given that the structure of the classification is of little practical value to the thesaurus-user, who has first to look in the index in order to find the appropriate place in the classification, why did Roget's work eclipse earlier synonym dictionaries in which synonyms could be located with half the labour?

Taken together, these two volumes provide an impressive account of the English onomasiological and synonym dictionary traditions and their background. Hüllen writes with great authority across a wide range of texts, and scholars in the field will be grateful for his contribution. However, *English Dictionaries* is printed in a small font with tightly spaced lines. For this reason, I found it rather difficult to read. It uses an odd form of the Anglo-Saxon letter þ (e.g. p. 65), which was not immediately recognizable.

The division of material between the two books must have presented a number of difficult decisions. *English Dictionaries* is densely argued and packed full of information. It clearly would not have been practical to cover Roget's *Thesaurus* in this work as well. 'There was no space to draw parallels between the topical tradition and that of synonymy, and the philosophical changes after 1700, mainly instigated by the works of John Locke, could not be dealt with adequately in the onomasiological context, either' (Hüllen 2004: viii). Having discussed the earlier topical dictionaries in the first of these two monographs, it was unnecessary to cover them again in *A History of Roget's Thesaurus*. However, that left the question of what to cover, and it was not always immediately apparent why Hüllen had chosen to include some sections. As a result, the second of these two monographs seemed somewhat disjointed at times. Perhaps because this work will be of interest across a number of academic fields, I sometimes felt that the background information was more extensive than I needed. Readers in other fields will no doubt have the same feeling about completely different parts of the text. *A History of Roget's Thesaurus* ended rather abruptly. I wanted conclusions or a summary to help me process everything that I had learnt.

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