
In 1961, the publishers of Webster's unabridged issued a Third Edition of their "New International" Dictionary, as successor to the Second Edition, which had ruled as "the supreme authority" for 27 years—ever since it was first published in 1934. A storm of criticism followed, some of it positive, much of it adverse.

Seven years have passed, enough time in which to evaluate the new dictionary impartially, and to present the logological point of view, never before adequately set forth in print. The Second Edition contained 550,000 dictionary entries, plus another 50,000 entries in supplementary sections (mainly biographical and geographical), for a total of 600,000 entries—the largest number ever included in any dictionary of the English language. The Third Edition has reduced the total number of entries by 25%, to 450,000, mainly for financial reasons.

It is difficult to accept this reduction with equanimity. We live in a world in which increase in size is one of the indicators of progress. Such a significant reduction in the vocabulary offered to the public is clearly a step backward. The logologist's only recourse is to have copies of both the Second and the Third Editions always at hand, so as not to miss out on anything included in either one of the two works. For our part, we have just purchased a virtually new copy of the Second Edition, from a secondhand book dealer, to replace our own, rather worn, copy. Readers are advised to do the same, before copies of the Second Edition become very scarce and prohibitively expensive.

The Third Edition has eliminated all proper names, not merely those in the supplementary sections but those in the main part of the dictionary as well—entries such as Cotter's Saturday Night (a poem by Burns), or Land of the Mid-
night Sun (a nickname for Norway), or Timandra (a Shakespearean character). This, too, is a severe blow to logologists. Proper names, like ordinary words, need periodic updating and renewal. There is no other publication that can be regarded as a satisfactory substitute for the diversity of proper names formerly included in the body of Webster's unabridged. Of necessity, we must now try to get along with works such as The New Century Cyclopedia of Names, The Reader's Encyclopedia by William Rose Benet, and Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable. Of course, we can also continue to refer to those names given in the Second Edition, but we have been robbed of their updated version, and are being put to the inconvenience of having to consult a variety of reference works.

The loss of the biographical and geographical supplements can almost be compensated for by using two other Merriam publications: Webster's Biographical Dictionary and Webster's Geographical Dictionary. Each of these books is more comprehensive than the corresponding supplement in the Second Edition, and each is revised every two years or so. Unfortunately, the revisions are very minor, so that both works are actually out of date. Also, the supplements in the Second Edition included at least some names that have never appeared anywhere else; for example, NARIHIRA, a 9th-century Japanese poet and gallant. We miss Narihira, for the adjective relating to his style, NARIHIRAN, is a perfect 9-letter palindrome.

The main body of the Third Edition chooses not to capitalize any word, even if that word is always capitalized. Replacing capitals are little notes describing customary usage. Thus, PIMELOMETOPON is written in lower-case form. Because it is the name of a genus of fishes, it must always be capitalized, and that information is given separately, following the pronunciation. In the case of a name like IROQUOIS, also given in lower-case letters, we are informed that it is “usually capitalized.” There are thousands of these “usually capitalized” labels in the Third Edition. With all due respect for the wisdom of the Merriam editors, we cannot recall ever seeing one of the names in question written without being capitalized. Accordingly, it seems that the word “usually,” as applied to the capitalization problem, must be interpreted to mean “at least 99.99% of the time.” That is not what the word is normally taken to mean.

One exception has been made, for obvious reasons: the word GOD is capitalized. Editors so intent on not capitalizing words that ought to be capitalized should stick to their guns and make no exception, irrespective of whose feelings might be offended.

The main body of the Second Edition was split into two sections: the part “above the line” and the part “below the line,” the latter set in a smaller size of type. This division was a nuisance, compelling the user of the dictionary to look in two places for many words. The Third Edition has done away with the split, listing all entries in the body of the dictionary in one alphabetical order. This is a salutary improvement, for which the Merriam editors must be congratulated.

One of the worst features of the Third Edition is the set of symbols employed to describe the pronunciation of words. The symbols are very scientific and appeal to philologists and orthoepists (about 1% of the individuals consulting...
the dictionary). Unfortunately, they are almost incomprehensible to the public (about 99% of the individuals consulting the dictionary). This compels the ordinary dictionary user to go to another dictionary if he needs to know how a word is pronounced. Here is a case where the interests of a very large majority have been sacrificed for the benefit of a very small minority. It isn’t fair! The crime has been compounded by offering a substantial variety of pronunciations for some words. Again, this information is of value to orthoepists, but constitutes a disservice to the public. Someone consulting a dictionary wants to know how a word is normally pronounced; being offered three, four, or five alternative pronunciations simply doesn’t answer his question. Once again, he must turn to some other dictionary to find out what he needs to know.

The editors take pride in the fact that all definitions are one-sentence definitions. Why this should be so desirable is difficult to understand, as it makes for some very long sentences. These must be read with a high degree of concentration fully to be absorbed. Breaking the information up into several shorter sentences, as did the Second Edition, makes the information much more easily understood and retained.

For the sake of economy, all definitions of a particular entry follow each other successively, without a break, so that there is no unused white space within the area allotted to the entry. In the case of a word with many definitions, occupying half a column, a whole column, or even more space, this arrangement makes it appreciably more difficult to find a particular definition or group of definitions than was the case in the Second Edition. We deplore this change for the worse.

The number of plates and full-page illustrations has been reduced by almost 50%, compared with the Second Edition. This seems like a regrettable economy. Institutional purchasers of the dictionary probably don’t care, one way or another, but the individual owner of a reference work as expensive as is the Third Edition likes to have something to look at as well as to read, and pretty color plates do much to enhance the value of a dictionary in the eyes of the average person.

Much valuable information has been deleted from the Third Edition. Our knowledge about hummingbirds must surely have increased between 1934 and 1961, or at least stood still. The user of the Second Edition found a 229-word definition of the word HUMMINGBIRD awaiting him. By contrast, the user of the Third Edition finds a definition of only 65 words provided for him. This is a reduction of about 75% in the amount of information made available to the dictionary consultant, typical of the brevity of many definitions in the Third Edition. Yes, we can consult both dictionaries, but it’s twice as much work.

The etymologies in the Third Edition have also been abbreviated. What invariably happens is that the consultant is referred to some other word for additional etymological information. Look up HUMAN and you are given some information, followed by the intelligence “more at HOMAGE”; look up that word, and you are given further information, with the notation “more at HUMBLE.”. We have not attempted to determine the largest chain of cross-references that needs to be followed through to get to the bottom of an etymology, but whatever it is, the system is very inefficient from the user’s viewpoint—it takes too much time and effort.

WORD WAYS
The number of descriptive labels attached to words has been reduced. In particular, the category of "colloquial" words has been eliminated, and words formerly branded "colloquial" now appear as standard dictionary entries. This is in line with the general policy of giving the dictionary user less information about the words defined. For logologists, it does have an advantage, however; it increases the word stock available in all sorts of word games and other word pursuits, where labeled words are usually considered objectionable and excluded.

The Third Edition features a large slang vocabulary, including many terms previously excluded from most dictionaries as too vulgar or obscene. Only one, rather obvious, four-letter word remains tabooed in the Third Edition.

The justification for including much slang and vulgarity is that underlying quite a few of the changes that have been made in the style of the dictionary: that the function of a dictionary is to record the language as it is actually used, rather than to lay down the rules that ought to be followed in using it. The dictionary is a faithful observer, not an authoritarian teacher.

We are inclined to agree with this basic philosophy, but most of the objections that we have raised in this review to the Third Edition revolve around other issues, unconnected with the new lexical outlook.

In any event, the Third Edition is there, and we must learn to live with it until such future time as a Fourth Edition appears. Let us hope that the Fourth Edition will do away with the objectionable features of the present one.

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**ALPHA AND OMEGA**

Among the many classes of intrinsically interesting words is one that includes words beginning and ending with the same letter combination. Examples of words ending with the same two letters with which they start: ARREAR, CHAFFINCH, DESUETUDE, ESSENCE, GEORGE, HEADACHE, MIAMI, NEPTUNE, and VERVE.

Less common, and therefore more prized, are words ending with the same three letters with which they commence. A few examples: BLEACHABLE, ENTERTAINMENT, ESSENTIALNESS, UNDERGROUND.

"Who will be the first with a word beginning and ending with the same four letters? Tautonyms and reduplications such as HOTSHOTS are excluded from consideration, of course.

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**THE IMPROBABLE**

Statistically, the six least frequently used letters in our alphabet are B, K, J, Q, X, and Z.

The 1965 Edition of The Times Index-Gazetteer of the World lists the name of a town in Albania that includes five of these six letters: KOCJAJ-BULQIZE. Remember that!