FURTHER WEBSTERIAN ERRORS

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There is an old saying 'Even Homer nods'. In other words, even the best of us can make mistakes. However diligent we may be, it is still always possible to make mistakes. For the purpose of this article we are going to put the Webster dictionaries in Homer's place, and see if we can catch them nodding, or making mistakes.

A number of errors in the Second and Third Editions of Webster's New International have already been brought to the attention of Word Ways readers (see Word Ways for November 1968, February 1969, February 1970 and February 1971). In this article we shall bring further Websterian errors, omissions and quirks to the attention of the reader.

Since there are various printings of each of the dictionaries, some errors may occur in one printing and yet not in another. Since we can only write authoritatively of the errors in the actual copies of the Second and Third Editions which we possess, it is necessary to indicate their printing and copyright dates. Our copy of the Second Edition carries the date 1958 on its title page but is covered by a 1957 copyright, and our Third Edition, while carrying no date at all on the title page, is covered by a 1961 copyright.

The Second Edition contains several misspellings, the very very last thing a dictionary can afford to do if it is to maintain its standing in the lexicographic world. Our Second Edition gives DACRYOBLENORRHEA in a list of words under the prefix entry DACRYO-. Since this word is formed by the conjugation of DACRYO- and the word BLENORRHEA (note the two N's), and since the dictionary gives no indication at all of the spelling with one N, we cannot do otherwise but assume that DACRYOBLENORRHEA is a misspelling. The correct spelling should of course be DACRYOBLENORRHEA.

A second spelling error occurs in the H section of the Second Edition. Listed under the prefix HISTORICO- are several words formed by joining HISTORICO- to some adjective. One of the entries in this list is HISTORICOPHILOSOPHICA. Since the Second Edition does not
list PHILOSOPHICA, we shall have to assume that HISTORICOPHIL-
OSOPHICA is a dud word. Obviously, it is a misprint, but for what?
The Second Edition lists the two adjectives PHILOSOPHIC and PHIL-
OSOPHICAL. Thus, it could be HISTORICOPHILosophical with
the last letter missing; or it could be HISTORICOPHILosophic with
an extra letter tacked on at the end. Since other words given in the
list at HISTORICO- end in both -IC and -ICAL, it would seem that
either one could be the word that should have been printed. If we
had to bet on one or the other, though, we would be inclined to put
our money on HISTORICOPHILosophical.

A third spelling error crops up in the L section of the Second Ed-
tion. Between LYMPHANGIAL and LYMPHANGIOLOGY is given the
combining form LYMPHANGIO- (as well as the variant form LYMPH-
ANGI-). As with DACRYO- and HISTORICO-
I
there is given a list
of words formed by adding this combining form to some other word.
One of the 'words' shown in this list is LYMPHANGIOPHLEBITIS.
We can see automatically that the printer has reversed the PH di-
agram to read HP. The word should of course be spelled LYMPH-
ANGIOPHLEBITIS.

Spelling error number four in the Second Edition is in the O sec-
tion. Yet again the error appears in a list of words given under a
combining form. The combining form concerned is OVER-. The
list accompanying this entry contains well over a thousand words,
one of which is OVERLUBRICATION. Since Webster's does not list
LUBRICATION, but does mention LUBRICATION, we shall as sume
that this is nothing more than a misspelling of OVERLUBRICATION.

The next spelling mistake in the Second Edition turns up in the
gazetteer section of the dictionary. Under the entry BREST is given,
in boldface type the Polish form of this name: BRZESC NAD BUGI-
EM. On the opposite page, beneath the line, we find the entry
BRZESZ NAD BUGIEM with the exhortation 'see BREST'. Since
one entry uses C as the sixth letter and the other a Z, obviously
one or other of these two entries is in error. But which? Since
Webster's Geographical Dictionary uses the C form, we shall con-
sider that BRZESZ NAD BUGIEM is the erroneous form.

Apart from misspelling words, Webster's Second seems to have
a predilection for misalphabetizing them -- i.e., not putting them in
their strictly correct alphabetical order. We have found several ex-
amples of misalphabetisations.

A misalphabetisation occurs beneath the line in the R section in
the Second Edition. REASSENT has been listed after REASSES and
REASSESSMENT; it should of course come before both of these words.
There is another error on exactly the same page in the Second Edition. The two words REAUDIT and REATTRIBUTION have got into the wrong order. Our dictionary shows REAUDIT preceding REATTRIBUTION.

A few pages further on in the Second Edition we find that the words REEIGN, RE-REITERATE and RE-REITERATION have been listed between REREGISTRATION and REREGULATE. The three words concerned should appear between RE-REHEARSAL and RE-REJECT.

The S section of the Second Edition also boasts a misalphabetization. The two words SHAVABLE and SHAVEABLE are listed before SHAUWE instead of after it.

Another field in which the Second Edition perpetrates errors is that of cross-referencing to words which are no longer, or never have been, in the dictionary. Under the entry NAKOMGILISALA we are told 'see NAWITI'. But there is no word NAWITI in our Second Edition. Undoubtedly the word was in the dictionary at one time, but was probably removed to make way for the entries, or additional information at the entries, of NAZI, NAZISM, etc. Dmitri Borgmann informs us that NAWITI was probably deleted around 1948 along with the word NCHEGA (a synonym for 'chimpanzee'). Unfortunately, when the editors of the Second Edition cast out NAWITI they did not modify in some way the entry at NAKOMGILISALA. These two words, by the way, are both names of American Indian tribes -- information that can be ascertained from various other dictionaries.

Webster's Second must have something against the Indian, for under the entry SIXTOWNS it says 'see CHOCTAW'. Reference to CHOCTAW enables us to obtain certain information about a number of Indian tribes, but no mention at all is made of SIXTOWNS. We have to consult other dictionaries to find out that SIXTOWNS were certain Indians of the Choctaw group.

Another cross-referencing error in our Second Edition concerns COROPO. On looking up that word we are immediately referred to GOYATACAN. Hey-ho and fiddle-de-dee! Our Second Edition has no such word as GOYATACAN. It goes from GOYANA to GOYAZITE. Anyone turning to our particular printing of the Second Edition to find out the meaning of COROPO comes away still ignorant of its meaning and ignorant also of the meaning of yet another word.

Prior to leaving the Second Edition, and going to the Third, we should mention one other slightly puzzling entry. The Second Edition lists UNSCARB, and indicates it to be a verb. We are informed, by
a cross-reference, that UN- conjoined to a verb means the reversal of the action achieved by the original verb. Consequently, if we knew what SCARB means, we ought to be able to figure out what UNSCARB means. However, there’s a fly in the ointment, for the Second Edition lists no word SCARB. Anyone care to tell us what SCARB (If it exists) and UNSCARB mean? Or, if UNSCARB is an error, what should it be?

Now for the Third Edition. All the misspellings in the Third of which we are aware have been discussed in previous issues of Word Ways -- but there are still errors of definition in the Third.

One of the definitions of COWICHAN is just ‘STALO’. The type used for STALO indicates that the definition given for it is also a perfectly valid definition for COWICHAN. Unfortunately, our Third Edition has no word STALO in it. Since our copy of the Third Edition hasn’t been around long enough for certain words to be removed (as was the case with our Second Edition), we contend that the word STALO was never in the dictionary to begin with.

If we wanted to find out what CORABECA meant, the Third Edition would be fairly helpful -- but not as helpful as it could be. One definition of CORABECA runs as follows: ‘the language of the Corabeca people considered by some Americanists as an independent linguistic family and by others as Otoquian or uncertain’. Since we know that the Corabeca people are an extinct Bolivian people, the only part of this definition which we hesitate over is the word OTOQUIAN. Unfortunately the Third Edition is unable to enlighten us as to the word’s meaning, because it doesn’t list the word.

In the L section of the Third Edition we find the word LAMA. Among other things, this is a yellowy-brown color, also called ELK and GOOSE. Now, if we look up ELK, we find a cross-reference to LAMA -- which is all well and good. However if we look up GOOSE, we find no such cross-reference. We suggest that this inconsistency, and others like it, be corrected in the next dictionary printing.

If we investigate yet another color, LEEK, in the Third Edition, we find that this color, which is a yellowy-green, is also called PORRET and PRASINE. Turning first to PORRET, we do indeed see that this noun carries a cross-reference to LEEK. But on turning to PRASINE, expecting to find such a noun with a cross-reference to LEEK, all we find is an adjective meaning ‘of the color leek’. Not by any stretch of the imagination can the adjective PRASINE be equated with the expected noun PRASINE.

Undoubtedly many more Websterian errors and quirks remain to be discovered. We urge the reader to send them to the editor of Word Ways.