

S. JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY GUIDE AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE DICTIONARY IDEA

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Abstract:

This article is based on the materials of the famous American lexicographer Samuel Johnson's dictionary. In this article "Plan of the English dictionary" was analyzed. This "Plan" was written in 1746, served as the basis for "A Brief Prospectus for the Construction of a New Dictionary of the English Language".

Keywords: Plan, US lexicography, academia, mistakes, prospectus, language refinement.

Introduction

The demand for a guidebook dictionary had become so widespread and numerous in England by the middle of the 18th century that five leading London publishers, realizing that the situation could be successfully exploited for profit, approached the fairly well-known critic and writer Samuel Johnson in 1746 with the task of compiling a dictionary of the English language. S. Johnson agreed to this proposal and in 1747 published the "Plan" of the future dictionary in the press. In it, the author expressed his ideas about what an English dictionary should be like. "In 1755, eight years after the publication of the Plan, Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language itself was published in two volumes". This dictionary was destined to be the legislator of the standard of the English language for decades to come.

MAIN PARTS

Demands for the creation of a guide English grammar also did not go unanswered. The most influential textbook of its kind, Robert Lowth's "A Short Introduction to English Grammar" was published [4] in 1762 and was reprinted ten times [3]. It was followed by Lindley Murray's English Grammar in 1795, which was reprinted ten times. The flow of guiding grammars did not stop until the end of the 19th century, or rather until 1892, when Henry Sweet's first truly scientific grammar appeared [6].

Before proceeding directly to work on the dictionary, Johnson published his "Plan of an English Dictionary" in the press (1747). In it, he expressed his thoughts on the goals and objectives of the future dictionary [1]. "The plan was based on Johnson's earlier "A Short Prospectus for the Construction of a New Dictionary of the English Language" written in April 1746. However, this prospectus was not published at that time [5. 46].

The “Plan” of the Dictionary is one of Johnson's notable works. This work was the focus of his attention for many years (from 1746 to 1755). In it, Johnson develops in considerable detail his ideas about what the future dictionary of the English language should be like. It consistently discusses important lexicographic problems such as the vocabulary of a dictionary and the principles of selecting words of various types, issues of orthography and orthoepy, issues of etymology, the problem of analogy in language, issues of syntax and phraseology, principles of explaining the meanings of words, the system of giving meanings in dictionary articles, issues of synonymy, and others.

Before we move on to examining this problem, it is important to keep one important consideration in mind. The “Plan” of the dictionary was drawn up by Johnson long before the work on the dictionary began, that is, long before any lexicographic work on the material of the language in general. In it, Johnson expresses his thoughts and assumptions about the normativity he wants to embody in the future dictionary. This is precisely why the basic provisions of the “Plan” are little or completely unsupported by concrete linguistic material.

First of all, as Johnson notes in “The Plan”, “its (the planned dictionary's) main purpose is to preserve the purity and strengthen the importance of our own English language” [1]. Here, Johnson is not like the others. In essence, it repeats the same goal that English lexicographers have expressed many times before in the prefaces of their dictionaries. According to C. Fries, it was repeatedly and clearly expressed by the authors of 18th-century English grammars. Fries shows a surprising unanimity among English grammarians about the purpose of works. “Usually they would announce one or two of the following tasks:

a) to bring the language into line with the rules, to “bring order into it”

б) to improve the habit of the English to suit his level of “point of view” [2. 228].

Johnson believes that the dictionary was built for the above purpose. It serves to “stabilize” the language and, finally, responds to the demand for the creation of a guiding dictionary that has been voiced by the public for a long time [1. 167]. It seems that Johnson is hinting that he alone could compile a dictionary similar to those previously compiled by the European academies.

Johnson then argues that words, “those fundamental atoms of our speech”, “preserve their original state in matter, and acquire stability and immutability, like their constituent parts”. He believes that words change. Because Johnson, “language is the work of man” and man is “such a creature that immutability and stability are alien to him”. However, despite the fact that the language (especially its vocabulary) changes, according to the lexicographer Johnson, this development is forced to stop. Johnson wrote, “The general rule I intend to follow is, that no new regulations be made without a necessary justification, and such justifications, I think, will be few”. Moreover, he openly claims to be opposed to any changes in the language in general. “Any change is a bad thing, it can be allowed only when there is a clear reason for it. Because instability is always considered a sign of weakness, it adds nothing to the true glory of our language” [1. 173].

Johnson was primarily concerned with changes in the pronunciation of words because “consistency in pronunciation is too important to the longevity of a language”. If “the first changes begin spontaneously with errors in a living language”, then one of the main tasks of a dictionary should be the “stability” of pronunciation. Johnson writes that this task is accomplished by “showing the stress in all polysyllabic words” in the dictionary. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen the pronunciation of monosyllabic words. This way, Johnson believes, it will be possible to avoid the dangerous variations (minor changes) that occur in many words that everyone knows now [1. 175].

In addition to the variable pronunciation that Johnson was seriously concerned about, he was also deeply concerned about the “instability” of syntax. “The syntax of this language (that is, English) is so unstable that it is difficult to embody it in a rule” [1. 180] says Johnson. This is precisely why, he believes, “our syntax should be taught not by general rules, but rather by specific precedents” which should be sought, of course, from the “best authors” [1. 180].

The variations in pronunciation and syntax that are so common in English, according to Johnson, justify the following description of English: “our language that does not reckon with rules”. This sentence is repeated several times in the text of “The Plan”.

Thus, Johnson faces the most difficult problem. What needs to be done to ensure that the future dictionary is truly a collection of “correct” words and phrases, because “bad” words are found even in the works of the “best” writers? To resolve this dilemma, Johnson first intends to include in the future dictionary only those words that are “used in the works of those we usually call subtle writers”. All the rest, “ungentle words” should not be included in the dictionary because they allow for “the corruption of the language”.

Johnson also attempted to solve the problem of creating a model dictionary that would provide guidance, intending to mark with a special sign those words that, in his opinion, were “unsuitable” for use in the language. “Crude or sufficiently inappropriate words and phrases may be marked with a special sign of censure, because they should be eradicated wherever they occur. And they are too frequent even in writers like Paul” [1. 188]. Johnson thought of putting foreign words in italics. Thus, there can be no doubt that Johnson, in his dictionary, began to adhere strictly to the practice of distinguishing and condemning certain groups of lexicon.

Concluding the goals of the future dictionary, Johnson once again emphasizes its tasks of “purifying” and “strengthening” the language. He writes: “My ideas about an English dictionary are that with the help of this dictionary the pronunciation of our language will be strengthened and its acquisition will be facilitated. With its help, the purity of the language can be preserved, its habit can be stabilized, the period of its existence can be increased”. “With its help, it is possible to preserve the purity of the language, stabilize its habits, and increase its lifespan” [1. 174].

At the end of the “Plan” Johnson, apparently worried about being accused of arrogance, perhaps panicked by the enormity of the task of “correcting” and “strengthening” the entire English language. He had once doubted his ability to carry out such a responsible task. To

be honest, he is still afraid of his enormity, especially when, with the support of his patron Lord Chesterfield, he will have the right and reason to “pass his own judgment” on words, phrases and constructions.

Thus, the main task set by Johnson for the dictionary was to create a dictionary that would provide guidance. Firstly, to cleanse the language of “inaccuracies” and “errors”, secondly, to “stop” its development and even “deterioration” as much as possible, and thirdly, to help Johnson “improve” modern custom. The selection of vocabulary for the dictionary, the use of derogatory signs in it, the exclusion of words from certain categories from the dictionary, the introduction of order, consistency, logic, understanding, and strict grammatical rules into the language - all of this was aimed at achieving the stated goals.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that it was in 1747, that is, 8 years before work on the dictionary began. His ideas about normativity could be implemented in a future dictionary, and in this way he believed that a guide dictionary of the English language would be created similar to the dictionaries previously published by the European academies. In “The Plan” Johnson thus appears as a son of his time, keenly aware of the purist demands of his time regarding vocabulary and burning with a desire to fully satisfy them. This is precisely why “The Plan” was received with joy by most of Johnson's contemporaries.

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