

For the assignment I will be comparing:

The New Oxford American Dictionary - 2nd Edition, 2005

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language - 3rd Edition, 1996

Random House Webster's Large Print Dictionary, 1998

1. Think of two terms that have taken on new meanings in recent years. How many of the dictionaries you consult include the new usage of these terms? How complete is the treatment?

First term: Hack

Because of computer hacking and the new possibilities of using the term hack in computer programs, I thought that this term may provide some interesting results.

Oxford American - gives three definitions: to cut, using a computer to gain unauthorized access, and an informal way to say manage, "lots of people leave because they can't hack it"

This dictionary is up to date with the term and gives a very broken down piece on the meaning of hacking in the modern computer age with use of modern terms as freeware. The direct definition I was looking for is provided "A piece of computer code that performs some function, an unofficial alternative or addition to a commercial program; freeware and shareware hacks."

Random House - does not provide definition of hack in the computer sense under the word hack, does provide the definition of "skilled computer enthusiast" under the term hacker, which is incorrect. Also the definitions under hack can be questioned. (To cut, cough sharply, cut or notch(repetitive), artistic drudge (?), vehicle for hire (?), and routine (?)) The last three provided don't really make sense as simply as the large print dictionary puts them, I'm unsure as to what they mean by artistic drudge and vehicle for hire, also I've never heard the term hack in reference to a routine.

The American Heritage Dictionary - alludes to the correct definition of hack under hack, as "to work or perform as a hacker" which then leads you to check out their definition for hacker which is "one who is proficient at using or programming a computer; a computer buff" which at the time this may have been correct, now it has come to take on the negative connotation that the Oxford uses. The next subset of the definition does go into someone "who illegally gains access to or enters another electronic system." So it's not all bad. Currently, this dictionary is out of date with the term and also provides another definition for hacker which is one who enthusiastically pursues game or sport" which could be offensive now or at least confusing to use that in the realm of sport.

Second term: Network

Networking is a word that has been around for a while in professional meeting terms, but has recently been updated to include a group of computers in an office that are connected, so I felt that this word could be interesting to compare.

Oxford American - Provides the correct definition "a number of interconnected computers, machines, or operations" No other troubles with the information that they provide under the term of network.

Random House - Not very up to date, with this information, actually rather dated. They provide the definitions of "netlike combination(?), group of associated radio or television stations (fine), any system of interconnected elements (vague), share information informally with others who have common interests. Seems just a bit off in the modern terms of networking even on the social level. I think they generally run into troubles because they have to print so large and have to cut out a lot of content for their large print edition.

American Heritage - Provides the definition I was looking for "A system of computers interconnected by telephone wires or other means in order to share information" - This is a little dated by the addition of the word telephone wires, computers very rarely now use telephone wires to be connected. Otherwise no problems with the definition under network.

2. Look up a word you never really understood and discuss the usefulness of each dictionary for both clarity and pronunciation.

Word - Benign

I have understood this word when it is used in terms of cancer, the cancer being benign which means that the cancer is not active and will not grow. But when people use the term outside of the cancer I am a bit confused, at first I will think that it is an insult, because calling something benign in a sense would mean that it's stuck or behind in some way, but this does not always apply with the connotations that are being used, so I'm curious as to what the dictionaries will provide for definition.

Oxford - 1. "Of a kind and gentle disposition" - This is enlightening about the term.
2. "Showing gentleness and mildness" - Also much more positive than I expected.
3. "Tending to exert a beneficial influence" - Not sure what this means, not helpful, but again positive. 4. "Of no danger to health" - The definition I'm familiar with.

Random House - 1. "kind" - Again positive 2. "favorable" - No mention of the medical definition here at all. This is surprising, also I assumed I would find the benign in a negative sense, such as "The slow tour guide is so benign" I really thought this was accurate.

American Heritage - 1. "kind and gentle disposition" 2. "showing gentleness and mildness" 3. Tending to exert a beneficial influence - same as Oxford thus far 4. "Of no danger to health" - Exactly the same as Oxford entirely.

Well that is very interesting, I always thought I heard the term benign outside of the medical sense to be a bit of an insult so this is quite interesting. Also I feel the

Random House not including the medical definition is fairly bad, considering large print editions are for the elderly frequently and they have to deal with the medical term, unfortunately much more than the young.

3. Look up a common word like “gun” or “dinner” and figure out the word’s origin and history as described in the various dictionaries.

Common word - Toy

Oxford American - Word origin - “late Middle English: of unknown origin. The word originally denoted a funny story or remark, later an antic or trick, or frivolous entertainment. The verb dates from the early 16th century.” - The most complete history and origin supplied by the dictionaries compared.

Random House - Only supplies basic definition “n. plaything, v. play”

American Heritage - Word origin - “Middle English toye, amorous play, a piece of fun” (No word history supplied)

4. Look up words very close in meaning - like “sad” and “melancholy” for example, to see how the dictionaries discriminate.

Two words - rich and wealthy

Oxford American - Rich - “having a great deal of money or assets, wealthy” - uses the word wealth or wealthy in the definition five times.

Wealthy - “having a great deal of money, resources, or assets, rich” - same definition with the addition of the word resources and switches the word wealthy to rich. This is very interesting you would imagine there would be some difference beyond resources defining the two in the monetarily sense.

Random House - Rich - “1. having great possessions 2. abounding 3. costly 4. containing butter, cream 5. strong 6. mellow 7. rich people” There should be some rule of using the word to define the word, I am sure there has to be this dictionary does not seem to follow that though.

Wealthy - “1. great possessions or riches. 2. profusion.” The two use the same definition for both words, in wealthy they add riches at the end of the term but overall the same. To me this shows inherently how dictionaries are created they build off of the same words and copy and paste the definitions throughout.

American Heritage - Rich - “1. possessing great material wealth, 2. having great worth or value” - Interesting that they did not combine these into the same definition part.

Wealthy - 1. “Having wealth, rich.” 2. “marked by abundance” - Wealth - “an abundance of valuable material possessions or resources, riches.”

American Heritage is the only dictionary that provided separately worded definitions for both terms, Oxford just inverted the definitions and Random House just added the other word on to the end of the previous definition. American

Heritage seems to be more valuable because of this care for the details within a definition and dictionary.

5. How easy is it to understand the phonetic (pronunciation) system and its explanation in each dictionary?

Oxford American - Provides a pronunciation key that is thorough on the inside of the front cover of the book, however at the library they have glued the exterior cover of the book to this guide, which makes it useless for those in the library. Later in the beginning pieces of the dictionary it does provide a "How to use this dictionary" which is helpful for understanding where the pronunciation is located in a definition. After this it again provides a "Key to the Pronunciations" which is more detailed than the cover so the gluing of the cover to the front inside was not lost information. This pronunciation guide is very helpful and very useful. Also provides an alphabet guide and a proofreaders mark guide which could be useful for grasping some of the definitions in the book for people who English is not their primary language or for those who are working on writing using the book.

Random House - Provides a Pronunciation Key in the back of the book, which is fairly confusing actually. They explain the stress mark, and provide examples using the symbols, but some of them are just letters that do not need to be explained, such as "J" - just, tragic, fudge - this is a bit confusing. Also there is a break down of "Non-English" sounds which just gives examples such as "A as in French ami" which would not be helpful if you didn't know how to pronounce ami and so on. The book does not provide any further pronunciation tools.

American Heritage - Provides a break down of roots in the appendix in the back of the book, of Indo-European Roots. This is very interesting because within it it provides a general analysis of word origins along with a deeper understanding of the pronunciation of the words. This is because of the title of the dictionary "American Heritage" of course the focus of this heritage being in European countries, but it is interesting because of the mixture of our language that developed from these European countries. Also prior to the dictionary it provides a break down of the pronunciation symbols and the explanation of the schwa, it doesn't detail the symbols however beyond the schwa, so could be confusing to some, at this point in the dictionary. On the page prior to the beginning of the dictionary it provides a Pronunciation Key, detailing all of the symbols used for pronunciation through the book, with examples of basic words and how they are used within. Overall, very clear pronunciation guide.

6. Locate the online version of one or two of these dictionaries. Is the content the same? Is it easier or more cumbersome to use?

Oxford American - Does not offer an online version - Oxford has their English dictionary online but not the American dictionary.

Random House Large Print - Does not offer an online version

Random House offers this dictionary page -

<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/rhwebsters/> but this is more of a fun dictionary trivia page with some game basis, you cannot search for specific words.

American Heritage - Their page is under bartleby.com and you can search for words in the book. The content is the same, but more expanded with links to other words and antonyms and synonyms. The website is a bit confusing because it is under this other book search header, so the search results include more than just the single word look up and also in the look up it is not entirely clear that you are going to look at the definition of the word. My search example:

Search Results for “rich”

- 1) Rich, Adrienne. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000. ...American poet and essayist whose works, notably *Diving Into the Wreck* (1973), concern radical feminism, lesbianism, and political activism....
- 2) rich. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000. ...Possessing great material wealth: Now that he was rich he was not thought ignorant any more, but simply eccentric (Mavis Gallant). 2. Having great worth or value:...

7. Look up one of these words in the Oxford English Diction. How does it differ from the other dictionaries you have looked at? When might I be useful?
Relooking up the word - Toy

The OED provides two options on the initial search of toy in their database, noun or verb. When noun is selected it provides III large subsets of definitions and the texts in which you can see the usage of the word all the way back to 1303. This could be useful if you were trying to find out the true etymology of a word. The actually definitions are not what you would expect as you would expect the first subset of definitions is “Abstract senses, meaning action, act, notion, feeling.” The second is “concret senses” and the third is the object of a toy that one would expect initially in a search. The OED breaks down the words and provides great sources to understand the usage and also the spread of a word throughout the world and literature. Would be a good tool for students and scholars.

8. Compare information given in the abridged dictionaries for words looked up in questions 1-4 with that giving in an unabridged dictionary. What are the primary differences?

Unabridged Dictionary - Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 1996.

There are more definitions for every word given above. It seems as if the abridged dictionaries cut off the total definitions at around 8-10 total definitions but there is no limit in the unabridged version. Also it does provide a long list of antonyms and synonyms for adjectives and adverbs mainly. Unabridged also provides more pronunciation options than the abridged. In general it seems there are more versions of words and past usages of words explored, even if out-dated words and terms are included.

9. Which major abridged dictionary would you buy for yourself if you could only have one? Why? Would your choice differ if you were buying for a particular library?

From the dictionaries above I would purchase for myself the New Oxford American Dictionary, it is the most up to date and thorough. It uses modern language and terminology and is easy to use. It also has a lot of great reference guides in the back and great history of word origins.

If I was buying for a library, I would also buy this dictionary, I would also buy the American Heritage dictionary, I would skip the Large Print Dictionary by Random House and look for another large print dictionary if there is one available, because the content is so weak in this version.