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"Appropriate" Meanings and American Traits in Webster's 1828 Dictionary

Abstract: During the eighteenth century, many philosophers were attempting to determine the origin of language and to develop a universal theory of linguistics, but a debate at the Prussian Royal Academy questioned the endeavour by claiming that languages have different origins and that it is impossible to explain the progress of human thought by studying them because national languages influence the way their speakers see the world. In answer to that, Webster proposes that all modern languages have a common divine origin and that the universal truth could be accessed by studying etymology. He claims that words have an "absolute" significance, which, due to the development of the different languages, assumed meanings that are "appropriate" to each individual language. This article proposes that nationalism in the *American Dictionary of the English Language* is not represented by a substantial number of Americanisms, but by giving "appropriate" meaning that evidences how "absolute" significances evolved and came to characterize the United States. The article provides evidence to support that Webster's lexicographic contribution is constituted by the new organization he gives to the entries and by definitions that show how old terms came to represent new concepts when compared to those in Samuel Johnson's dictionary.

Keywords: absolute, appropriate, definitions, order, senses, Webster

1. Introduction

Johann Michaelis's essay "A Dissertation on the Influence of Opinions on Language and of Language on Opinions", written for the competition at the Prussian Royal Academy, frustrated Webster's project to investigate the relationship between human thought and the world by examining etymology because it claimed that national languages influence their speakers' ideas (Webster, *Compendious* xvii, xix). Notwithstanding, when in 1808 Webster converts to Calvinism and approaches his studies from a theological perspective, he concludes that God created language and that, since all modern languages have a common divine origin, words have both

a genuine pronunciation and a genuine signification (Webster, "Strictures" 213). Hence, words have a "primary", or original, significance and "appropriate" meanings, which developed when the languages differentiated (Webster, *American* 20[1]).

In *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, Webster intends to follow the "primary/appropriate" approach and give the "primary signification of the English words" and "accurate and discriminating definitions" (Webster, *American* Title page). Also, since the United States (US) is different from other countries in government, laws, institutions and customs, old terms were adapted and some terms became obsolete, so Webster insists that it is necessary for people in the US to have a dictionary that describes their language and that provides them with a national identity.

Considering that in the *American*, Webster intends to provide "primary" and "appropriate" significations, this article examines Webster's ordering of definitions within an entry to determine if he accomplishes his purpose and if the senses include *American* characteristics. As such, the article presents, first, Webster's theory for the significance of words. Next, it examines the definitions and illustrations given by Webster to the words *congress, constitution, federal, government, legislature, republic,* and *senate*. The words were chosen because, in the Preface to the dictionary, Webster claims that two of the words (*congress, senate*) have different meanings in the US and in Britain (Webster, *American* 5) and because they name institutions or concepts, that were fundamental in the creation of the US. Given that the article investigates how Webster defines *American*, it closes with the consideration of the words *English* and *American,* to develop the final impressions of the investigation.

Since many scholars agree that Webster's primary source was Johnson's 1799 edition of the *Dictionary of the English Language* (DEL, see Miyoshi 29–30; Reed 95), the definitions in the *American* are compared to those given by Johnson to determine if they are enhanced by Webster. The comparison includes explanations and the implied cultural context so as to establish Webster's contribution in describing the United States. The study assumes that "the process of composing entries is essentially an ideological act" and that "ideology is where dictionaries collide with the social world" (Moon 85). Consequently, dictionary definitions have social and political connotations and the author's beliefs may be identified in the definitions they write (Adamska-Salaciak 323; Moon 85; Lew, "Users" 1–9) and in how they compare one country or culture to a foreign country or culture (Bergenholtz and Tarp 175). The investigation shows that Webster's reorganization and additions are essential in characterizing *American*.

[1] The dictionary is not paginated, so page number is page count.

2. Webster's Political and Linguistic Ideas

Due to the social agitation of the first years of the Early Republic (1776–1861), Webster becomes fearful that major upheavals could materialize in the US as they did in France after the French Revolution (Webster, *Ten Letters* 5). Ultimately, Webster's concern with the fragility of the republic makes him conclude that people "who have so little property, education or principle, that they are liable to yield their own opinions to the guidance of unprincipled leaders" should not be allowed to vote (Webster, *Ten Letters* 28). To prevent social unrest and promote stability, Webster was determined to improve the character of the citizens by creating a national culture through language, so that the nation would remain politically stable and viable (Webster, *Fugitiv* 2, 3; *Ten Letters* 22, 23).

Since Webster's work is influenced by the idea that languages define nations, it is comprehensible that he tries to build the nation by creating a national language. Indeed, by the nineteenth century, the emergence of nationalism promoted the adoption of national languages, anthems, flags, and symbols to provide cultural identity and unify people into new nations. However, Webster was not only trying to develop a national community and foster social harmony, but as Bynack observes, Webster was trying to establish the American culture "on the true order of things" which "raised issues of epistemology" (104).

Actually, Webster's ideas indicate a relation between language, the external world, and the concept of truth, where he sees language as directly representing the objective world. Webster holds that "the grammar of a particular language is a system of general principles derived from natural distinctions of words, and of particular rules deduced from the customary forms of speech in the nation using that language" (Webster, *Philosophical* 6). Additionally, he states that language developed from a "few simple terms expressive of natural objects … to express new ideas, growing with the growth of the human mind" (Webster and Warfel 273). Eventually, Webster assumes that language is not a human construct "fabricated to express truths that are external to language" (Bynack 112), and that it is possible to demonstrate "the universal character of human knowledge and its progressive development" by studying etymology (Bynack 107).

Webster infers from the Bible that "language was bestowed on Adam, in the same manner as all his other faculties and knowledge" by God (Webster, *American* 19). However, the original language, Chaldee, is not identical to modern languages because at Babel, the original language was differentiated, although "languages entirely different did not form" (Webster and Warfel 320). However, since languages improve as men acquire more knowledge, modern languages have changed continuously, and thus, words were lost, retained, or changed their pronunciation (Webster, *American* 19).

The *American* brings a lengthy explanation of the principles of his "absolute" and "appropriate" theory. He observes that the "primary" (general, real, universal) level of signification reflects a "single, absolute, primary sense to which all words were reducible" and the "appropriate" (particular, national, figurative) level expresses the cultural and social differences between nations (Bynack 111). He claims that "appropriate" meanings account for the varying connotations of words in different languages and that the obscurity in affinities is a consequence of changes in meaning, pronunciation, and orthography. As such, to apprehend the "primary" sense of a word, it is necessary to find the original one; however, many times, the "primary" sense is lost and only the "figurative" one is retained. Nevertheless, Webster postulates that by comparing different uses of a word, it is possible to detect its original signification.

Therefore, Webster's beliefs imply that language is subject to cultural and social processes and that individual languages affect their speakers' perspective, which means that perceptions are relative to each language. In other words, a language shapes its speaker's thinking and behaviour (Cassedy 240).

The following section presents a detailed description of the changes incorporated by Webster and a discussion of how those changes promoted patriotism.

3. The Words in the Two Dictionaries

As stated by Webster, the words *congress* and *senate* designate institutions in the US that do not exist in the same form in Britain (Webster, *American* 3). In the US, the Legislative Branch consists of the *House of Representatives* and the *Senate*. In Britain, the two chambers are the *House of Commons*—directly elected—and the *House of Lords*—appointed. The *House of Lords* reviews and amends Bills from the *House of Commons* but is unable to prevent them from passing into law.

Webster's entry for the word *senate* states that "the primary sense is to extend, to advance or to wear", explains that a "senate was originally a council of elders", and provides examples: ancient Rome, Swiss cantons. Only afterwards does Webster explicitly refer to the US in the form of a prepositional phrase that is repeated three times and which promotes American culture.

> **SEN**ˈ**ATE**, n. [Fr. senat; It. senato; Sp. senado; L. senatus, from senex, old; Ir. sean, W. hen; Ar. sanna or sanah, to be advanced in years. Under the former verb is the Arabic word signifying a tooth, showing that this is only a dialectical variation of the Heb. The primary sense is to extend, to advance or to wear. A senate was originally a council of elders]
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> 1. An assembly or council of senators; a body of the principal inhabitants of the city or state, with a share in the government. The *senate* of ancient Rome was one of the most illustrious bodies of men that ever bore this name. Some of the Swiss cantons have a *senate*, either legislative or executive.
>
> 2. In the United States, senate denotes the higher branch or house of legislature. Such is the senate of the United States, or upper house of the congress; and in most of the states, the higher

and least numerous branch of the legislature, is called the *senate*. In the U. States, the senate is an elective body.
3. In a looser sense, any legislative or deliberative body of men; as the eloquence of the senate. (*American* 2: 557)—the *American* and *DEL* are not paginated, so page number is page count.

In current lexicographic practice, the different senses in a given entry may be organized following various dispositions: chronology, logic, frequency (Lew, "Senses" 286). Still, as mentioned before, Webster believed that words had a "primary" signification and an "appropriate" level, which reflected cultural differences between nations. The entry for *senate* demonstrates that he, in fact, uses the "primary" and "appropriate" approach since, even though he is writing an American dictionary, he is not placing the meanings that refer to the country before other, more general, meanings.

For the word *senate*, the DEL brings one sense that does not clarify the attributions a *senate* has, even when it mentions "consult for the publick good". Furthermore, the four literary illustrations do not help the reader comprehend what a *senate* is.

SE'NATE n.s. [senatus, Latin; senat, French.] An assembly of counsellors, a body of men set apart to consult for the publick good.
We debate
The nature of our seats, which will in time break ope
the locks o'th' *senate*, and bring in the crows
to peck the eagles. Shakespeare
There they shall found
Their government, and their great *senate* chuse. Milton
He had not us'd excursions, spears or darts,
but counsel, order, and such aged arts;
which, if our ancestors had not retain'd
the senate's name our council had not gain'd. Denham.
Gallus was welcome'd to the sacred strand,
the senate rising to salute their guest. Dryden. (Johnson 2: 556)

For the word *congress*, Webster presents, first, the "primary" signification and then five "appropriate" senses: three that describe the three congressional bodies in the history of the US. The second sense describes the *First Continental Congress*, a meeting of representatives of American colonies in 1774. The third sense describes the *Second Continental Congress*, which functioned until the adoption of the Constitution in 1789. The fourth sense characterizes the US *Congress* after the adoption of the Constitution.

CON'GRESS, noun [L. congressus, from congredior, to come together; con and gredior, to go or step; gradus, a step. See Grade and Degree.]
1. A meeting of individuals; an assembly of envoys, commissioners, deputies, &c., particularly a meeting of the representatives of several courts, to concert measures for their common good, or to adjust their mutual concerns. Europe.
2. The assembly of delegates of the several British Colonies in America, which united to resist the claims of Great Britain in 1774, and which declared the colonies independent.

3. The assembly of the delegates of the several United States, after the declaration of Independence, and until the adoption of the present constitution, and the organization of the government in 1789. During these periods, the congress consisted of one house only.
4. The assembly of senators and representatives of the several states of North America, according to the present constitution, or political compact, by which they are united in a federal republic; the legislature of the United States, consisting of two houses, a senate and a house of representatives. Members of the senate are elected for six years, but the members of the House of Representatives are chosen for two years only. Hence the united body of senators and representatives for the two years, during which the representatives hold their seats is called one congress. Thus we say the first or second session of the sixteenth congress.
5. A meeting of two or more persons in a contest; an encounter; a conflict. Dryden.
6. The meeting of the sexes in sexual commerce. (*American* 1: 448)

Webster's intention to forge the American character is noticeable when he examines each of the three congressional bodies separately. For that reason, the fourth sense is the one that receives more attention. Indeed, those three senses present more information than a dictionary definition would require.

Johnson's entry brings literary illustrations and, even though the first sense mentions *a meeting*, it does not describe the meeting of representatives for legislative purposes. It is visible that Webster's fifth sense was "adapted" from Johnson's first.

CO'NGRESS. n.s. [congressus. Latin]
1. A meeting; a shock; a conflict.
Here Pallas urges on, and Lausus there;
Their *congress* in the field great Jove withstand
Both doom'd to fall, but fall by greater hands. Dryd. Æ
From these laws may be deduced the rules of the congresses and reflections on two bodies. *Cheyne's Philosophical Principles*
2. An appointed meeting for settlement of affairs between different nations: as the congress of Cambray. (Johnson 1: 455)

After comparing the definitions of *senate* and *congress*, it may be concluded with Reed (66) that Webster improves Johnson's definitions by selecting and reorganizing the senses. Since the reorganization follows Webster's "primary" and "appropriate" proposal, the senses are listed in an order that follows a chronological sequence and, many times, puts the references to the US in lower-level senses.

In the *American*, Webster intended to quote American authors (Webster, *American* 4). Lepore (127) and Scudder (274) corroborate that fact; however, Reed observes that Webster takes most of his illustrations and authorities from Johnson (Reed 104). The selected entries show that the illustrations are less frequent than in Johnson and they are not, as a rule, taken from American authors. Yet, Webster gives a lengthy description of the different *congresses* that were summoned and explains how *senators* are elected. The decision indicates that the author preferred a detailed explanation over a literary illustration.

According to current practice, definitions are the principal elements in dictionaries for native speakers, but illustrations may complement them if the definition is not sufficient (Lew, "Users" 2). Indeed, if the illustrations for *congress* and

senate, in the *American*, had been taken from literary works (as Johnson's were), they would not have been as clarifying as Webster's own explanations. At the same time, since Webster's intention is to provide civic education, it follows that he presents information that helps the user understand the importance of American institutions. In fact, Webster Americanizes conventional meanings (Reed 103) by writing definitions specifically for the American reader (Lepore 126; Scudder 243).

In the case of *constitution*, Webster bases his definition in Johnson's, but he improves it by reorganizing the senses, by providing additional details and by specifying that "in the United States, the legislature is created, and its powers designated, by the constitution" (sense four). Some senses are exactly copied (sense one) or partially copied (senses two, three, four, five) from the DEL.

CONSTITUTION n.s. [from constitute]
1. The act of constituting; enacting; deputing; establishing; producing.
2. State of being, particular texture of parts; natural qualities.
This is more beneficial to us than any other constitution. Bentley´s
The light being trajected through the parallel prisms, if it suffered any change by refraction of one, it lost that impression to pristine constitution, became of the same condition as at first. Newton´s Opticks
3. Corporeal frame.
Amongst many bad effects of this oily constitution, there is one advantage; such who arrive to age, are not subject to stricture of fibres. Arbuthnot on Ailments
4. Temper of body, with respect to health or disease.
If such men happen, by their native constitutions, to fall into a gout, either they mind it not at all, having no leisure to be sick, or they use it as a dog. Temple
Beauty is nothing else but just accord and mutual harmony of the members, animated by a healthful constitution. Dryden
5. Temper of the mind.
Dametas, according to the constitution of a dull head, thinks no better way to shew himself wise than by suspecting everything in his way. Sidney
Of any
Some dear friend dead; else nothing in the world
Could turn so much the constitution
Of any constant man. Shakespeare
He defended himself with undaunted courage, and less passion than was expected from his constitution. Clarendon
6. Established form of government; system of laws and custom.
The Normans conqu´ring all by might,
Mixing our customs, and the form of right,
With foreign constitutions he had brought. Daniel
7. Particular law; established usage; establishment; institution.
We lawfully may observe the positive constitution of our own churches. Hooker
Constitution, properly speaking in the sense of the civil law, is that law which is made and ordained by some king or emperor; yet the canonist; by adding the word sacred to it, make it to signify the same as any ecclesiastical canon. Ayliffe (Johnson 1: 464)

The definition of *constitution* given by both authors is different because Webster organizes the senses from less to more "appropriate" and, fundamentally, be-

cause Webster provides details that explain what a constitution is, who writes it, and what function it has (sense four). As such, the meaning that refers to the US does not come first, but as an explanation in sense four.

CONSTITUTION, *noun*
1. The act of constituting, enacting, establishing, or appointing.
2. The state of being; that form of being or peculiar structure and connection of parts which makes or characterizes a system or body. Hence the particular frame or temperament of the human body is called its *constitution.* We speak of a robust or feeble constitution; a cold, phlegmatic, sanguine or irritable *constitution* We speak of the *constitution* of the air, or other substance; the *constitution* of the solar system; the *constitution* of things.
3. The frame or temper of mind, affections or passions.
4. The established form of government in a state, kingdom or country; a system of fundamental rules, principles and ordinances for the government of a state or nation. In free states, the *constitution* is paramount to the statutes or laws enacted by the legislature, limiting and controlling its power; and in the United States, the legislature is created, and its powers designated, by the *constitution.*
5. A particular law, ordinance, or regulation, made by the authority of any superior, civil or ecclesiastical; as the constitutions of Justinian and his successors.
6. A system of fundamental principles for the government of rational and social beings.
The New Testament is the moral *constitution* of modern society. (*American* 2: 457)

In the case of the word *government*, the *American* copies three senses from the DEL, while one is explained in a more technical way. Also, there are fewer illustrations and the senses are reorganized following Webster's proposal. The second sense explains that the public authorities act "according to established constitution", but there is no overt reference to the US.

GOVERNMENT n.s. [government, French]
1. Form of community with respect to the disposition of the supreme authority.
There seem to be but two general kinds of government in the world; the one exercised according to the arbitrary commands and will of some single person; and other according to certain orders or laws introduced by agreement of custom, and not to be changed without the consent of many. Temple.
No government can do any act to limit itself: the supreme legislative power cannot make itself not to be absolute. Lefley
2. An establishment of legal authority.
There they shall found
Their government, and their great senate chuse
Through the twelve tribes, to rule by laws ordain´d. Milton
While he survives, in concord and content
The commons live, by no divisions rent;
But the great monarch's death dissolves the government. Dryd.
Every one knows, who has considered the nature of government, that there must be in each particular form of it an absolute unlimited power. Addison
Where any person or body of men size into their hands the power in the last resort, there is properly no longer a government, but what Aristotle and his followers call the abuse or corruption of one. Swift
3. Administration of publick affairs.
Safety and equal government are things

Which subjects make as happy as their kings. Waller
Those governments which curb not evil, cause:
And a rich knave's a libel on our laws. Young
4. Regularity of behaviour.
You needs must learn, lord, to amend this fault;
Though sometimes is shews greatness, courage, blood,
Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,
Defect of manners, want of government,
Pride, haughtiness, opinion and disdain. Shakespeare
'Tis government that makes them seem divine;
The want thereof makes thee abominable. Shakespeare
5. Manegeableness; compliance; obsequiousness.
Thy eyes windows fall,
Like death, when he shuts up the day of life,
Each part depriv´d of supple government.
Shall stiff and stark, and cold, appear like death. Shakespeare
6. Management of the limbs or body. Obsolete.
Their god
Shot many a dart at me with fierce intent;
But I them warded all with wary government. Spencer
7. [In grammar] Influence with regard to construction. (Johnson 1: 913)

Webster indicates that it is the *government*, acting according to the established constitution, that defines the duties and rights of the citizens and public officers (sense four). Additionally, he elucidates that a *constitution* is a system of fundamental laws "paramount to the statues enacted by the legislature" that creates, gives powers and limits to the *legislature–constitution*, sense four. As such, Webster is, once more, providing civic education (Webster, *Fugitiv* 1).

GOV'ERNMENT, *noun* Direction; regulation. These precepts will serve for the *government* of our conduct.
1. Control; restraint. Men are apt to neglect the *government* of their temper and passions.
2. The exercise of authority; direction and restraint exercised over the actions of men in communities, societies or states; the administration of public affairs, according to established constitution, laws and usages, or by arbitrary edicts. Prussia rose to importance under the *government* of Frederick II.
3. The exercise of authority by a parent or householder. Children are often ruined by a neglect of *government* in parents.
Let family *government* be like that of our heavenly Father, mild, gentle and affectionate.
4. The system of polity in a state; that form of fundamental rules and principles by which a nation or state is governed, or by which individual members of a body politic are to regulate their social actions; a constitution, either written or unwritten, by which the rights and duties of citizens and public officers are prescribed and defined; as a monarchial *government* or a republican *government.*
Thirteen governments thus founded on the natural authority of the people alone, without the pretence of miracle or mystery, are a great point gained in favor of the rights of mankind.
5. An empire, kingdom or state; any territory over which the right of sovereignty is extended.
6. The right of governing or administering the laws. The king of England vested the *government* of Ireland in the lord lieutenant.
7. The persons or council which administer the laws of a kingdom or state; executive power.

8. Manageableness; compliance; obsequiousness.
9. Regularity of behavior. [Not in use.]
10. Management of the limbs or body. [Not in use.]
11. In grammar, the influence of a word in regard to construction, as when established usage required that one word should cause another to be in particular case or mode. (*American* 1: 840)

The DEL defines *legislature* as the "power that makes laws". The information regarding who makes or repeals the laws comes in the form of illustrations taken from different authorities.

LEGISLATURE n. s. [from legislator Latin.] The power that makes laws.
Without the concurrent content of all three parts of the legislature, no law is, or can be made. Hale
In the notion of a legislature is implied a power to change, repeal, and suspend laws in being as well as to make new laws. Adison
By the supreme magistrate is properly understood the legislative power; but the word magistrate seeming to denote a single person, and to express the executive power, it came to pass that the obedience due to the legislature was, for want of considering this easy distinction, misapplied to the administration. Swift (Johnson 2: 48)

In the *American*, Webster explains that it is "a body of men in a state or kingdom" that makes the laws and explains who sanctions them and discriminates between the legislature in Britain and in the US. Once more, Webster places the meaning in Great Britain first, probably, because he considers that the meaning in the US "evolved" from the meaning in British English.

LEG'ISLATURE, *noun* the body of men in a state or kingdom, invested with power to make and repeal laws; the supreme power of a state. The *legislature* of Great Britain consists of the House of Lords and the House of Commons with the king, whose sanction is necessary to every bill before it becomes a law. The legislatures of most of the states in America, consist of two houses or branches, but the sanction of the governor is required to give their acts the force of law, or a concurrence of two thirds of the two houses, after he has declined and assigned his objections. (*American* 1: 42)

The definitions of *republican* (noun) and *republic* in the *American* are taken from the definition in the *DEL*.

REPUBLICAN adj [from republick] Placing the government in the people.
REPUBLICAN n. s. [from republick] One who thinks a commonwealth without monarchy the best government.
These people are more happy in imagination than the rest of their neighbours, because they think themselves so; though such a chimerical happiness is not peculiar to republicans Addison
REPUBLICK n. s. [respublica, Lat. republique Fr.]
1. Commonwealth; state in which the power is lodged in more than one.
They are indebted many millions more than their whole republick is worth. Addison
2. Common interest; the publick.
Those that by their deeds will make it knows;
Whose dignity they do sustain;
And life, state, glory, all they gain
Count the republick´s not their own. Ben Jonson (Johnson 2: 462)

However, Webster's definition of *republic* is more informative, since it states that in a *republic* the power "is lodged in representatives elected by the people", whereas Johnson only mentions that it is "lodged in more than one". Additionally, the first sense addresses the difference between *democracy* and *republic*, which the DEL does not. Moreover, since Webster's definition of *republican* (adjective) differentiates between the form of government—sense one—and beliefs—sense two—it indicates that *republican* is more than "placing the government in the people".

REPUB'LICAN, adjective
1. Pertaining to a republic; consisting of a commonwealth; as a *republican* constitution or government.
2. Consonant to the principles of a republic; as *republican* sentiments or opinions; *republican* manners.
REPUB'LICAN, noun One who favors or prefers a *republican* form of government
REPUB'LIC, noun [Latin respublica; res and publica; public affairs.]
1. A commonwealth; a state in which the exercise of the sovereign power is lodged in representatives elected by the people. In modern usage, it differs from a democracy or democratic state, in which the people exercise the powers of sovereignty in person. Yet the democracies of Greece are often called republics.
2. Common interest; the public. [Not in use.]
Republic of letters, the collective body of learned men. (*American* 2: 461)

The first sense for *federal* in the *American* is taken from Johnson. Yet, Webster includes two senses organized from more to less "appropriate". Additionally, Webster characterizes a *federalist* as a supporter of the constitution and of the party that favoured George Washington. The definition is straightforward in indicating that the meaning is relevant only in the US. The word *federalist* is not listed in the DEL.

FEDERAL. Adj. [from fædus, Latin.] Relating to a league or contract.
It is a federal rite betwixt God and us, as eating and drinking, both among the Jews Heathens, was wont to be. Hammond
The Romans compe´led them, contrary to federal right and justice, both to part with Sardinia, their lawful territory, and also to pay them for the future double tribute. Grew. (Johnson 1: 781)
FED'ERAL, adjective [from Latin faedus, a league, allied perhaps to Eng. wed. Latin vas, vadis, vador, vadimonium. See Heb. to pledge.]
1. Pertaining to a league or contract; derived from an agreement or covenant between parties, particularly between nations.
The Romans, contrary to federal right, compelled them to part with Sardinia.
2. Consisting I n a compact between parties, particularly and chiefly between states or nations; founded on alliance by contract or mutual agreement; as a *federal* government, such as that of the United States.
3. Friendly to the constitution of the United States. [See the Noun.]
FED'ERALIST, noun an appellation in America, given to the friends of the constitution of the United States, at its formation and adoption, and to the political party which favored the administration of President Washington. (*American* 1: 734)

Lastly, the DEL lists *English*, but does not mention *American.* It presents *English* (adj.) as "belonging to England" and as the "language of England". The *Amer-*

ican breaks the definition into adjective and noun. The noun refers to "the people of England" and to "the language of England" and descendant countries. In other words, Webster is recognizing that *English* is spoken in America, claiming that the language is shared by different countries and indicating that the *English* people were responsible for spreading the *English* language to other places.

> **ENGLISH** adj. [engler, Saxon] Belonging to England; thence English is the language of England.
> He hath neither Latin, French nor Italian; and you may come into the court, and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the English. Shakespeare
> Of English tale, the coarser sort is called plaister, or parget, the finer, spoad. Woodward. (Johnson 1: 702)
> **ENGLISH**, *adjective* ing'glish. [Latin ango, from the sense of pressing, depression, laying, which gives the sense of level.]
> Belonging to England, or to its inhabitants.
> **ENGLISH**, *noun* The people of England.
> 1. The language of England or of the *English* nation, and of their descendants in India, America and other countries. (*American* 1: 666)

However, when Webster defines *American*, he does not refer to the language. In fact, Rollins observes that, when writing the *American*, Webster "did not advocate the development of a new language, or even a new dialect" (420). As such, his dictionary is not a dictionary of *American* English, but *An American Dictionary of the English Language* because "the body of the language is the same as in England and it is desirable to perpetuate the sameness" (Webster, *American* 3). That way, *American* defines the inhabitants of the US, Native Americans and European descendants. It is important to notice that Webster includes an illustration that demonstrates his intention to promote nationalism and reveals who he wants *Americans* to take as a model.

> **AMER'ICAN**, noun A native of America; originally applied to the aboriginals, or copper-colored races, found here by the Europeans; but now applied to the descendants of Europeans born in America.
> The name American must always exalt the pride of patriotism.—*Washington* (*American* 1: 148)

According to Shoemaker, "of the five lines of endeavour that go to make up a dictionary …, Webster excelled in definition" while etymology was the least developed field in the *American* (241). Indeed, this examination reveals that Webster improves Johnson's definitions in several aspects. First, he reorganizes Johnson's definitions following his "absolute/appropriate" proposal. Second, by using the "absolute/appropriate" system, Webster indicates that there is a semantic relationship between the senses. Third, Webster determines the order of the senses within an entry by the historical and cultural construction of concepts. In theory, then, each "appropriate" sense of a multisense word developed from others.

The investigation also reveals that the definitions are intellectually and morally driven (Snyder 14) and that they have a social objective, in that they intend to inform and educate. The examination indicates that Webster's intention to foster an American culture explains "the wording of the definitions and the quotations he

chooses for examples" (Snyder 14) and that Webster's decisions as a lexicographer were guided by his beliefs and aspirations. Particularly, even when he does not list many Americanisms, Webster's definitions indicate he recognized that "declaring linguistic independence … was essential to allowing Americans to be American" (Cassedy 235) and that "by constant reference to American usage, Webster made the title to his Dictionary good in every part of it" (Scudder 274).

4. Conclusions

Webster's proposal implies that as languages shape the speakers' behaviour, they define nations. In the *American*, Webster intends to give definitions that would emphasize the difference in meaning between the US and Britain. This examination showed that his intention was accomplished and that Webster organizes the senses following a general to specific organization based on his postulation that words had "primary" and "appropriate" meanings and which, in most cases, represents the historical sequence of events.

Additionally, Webster provides social and historical information that is relevant to the reader and includes references to the US even when he does not provide many illustrations taken from American authors. The amount of information he gives could be considered out of place for a dictionary; nonetheless, his intention to establish a national consciousness explains his choice to provide more information than a lexicographic entry would require and evidences his beliefs that language could help establish a nation.

Hence, the examination of the selected words indicates that Webster's nationalism is not represented by listing a considerable number of words that represent the American scene but by providing meaning that would educate the citizens and would reveal how old terms came to characterize different concepts in the US. Thus, since the senses are not organized from more to less important, referring to other countries before the US does not minimize the importance of the country.

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