Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus

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Preface

WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE THESAURUS is a wholly new book resulting from long study and planning and differing from existent thesauruses in a number of significant respects. It may be worth mentioning that the idea of a thesaurus has been a viable notion in the Merriam offices since at least 1898 — in which year one of the responsibilities assigned the late Dr. William Torrey Harris when he was appointed Editor in Chief was to do preliminary planning for an improved thesaurus. Over the years that have passed since then, much testing has been done and much information accumulated. Now we are able to issue a thesaurus which, we are satisfied, eliminates many of the defects that impair both past and still existent books of this character.

What does the user look for in a thesaurus? The consensus agrees that he is seeking a more appropriate term than the one he has in mind. This very broad concept is scarcely consonant with the typical thesaurus presentation of "synonyms" and sometimes "antonyms". In point of fact, the user may be seeking a synonym, a word stronger or weaker in force, one of slightly different meaning, a more starchy or more folksy word, an idiomatic phrase that conveys the same idea, or a word that to a greater or less degree contrasts with his starting point. Patently, all these possible uses cannot be subsumed reasonably under the rather unitary notions of "synonym" and "antonym". Perhaps the longevity of

Roget's *Thesaurus* rests on the simple fact that in spite of its complexity and lack of guidance, it does spread before the user a greater body of material to browse through than any comparable book heretofore available. Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus is designed to present a similar range of material but in a readily available and highly structured form that minimizes the consultant's need to grope and guess.

In earlier Merriam-Webster publications the pattern of supplementing synonym lists with lists of related and contrasted words, words that were relevant to the group under study yet not quite synonyms or antonyms respectively, was extensively tested. This favorably received feature not only allowed more precise delineation of synonyms and antonyms but provided the user with much additional significant and pertinent assistance. The same plan of supplementing synonyms and antonyms with genuinely germane collateral material has been made a feature of this new thesaurus.

Additional features of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus designed to facilitate its use are the provision at each main entry of a concise statement of the segment of denotation in which a group of words can be construed as synonyms, a strictly alphabetical organization, and the entry at its own alphabetical place of each word that appears as a synonym at a main entry. The absence or inadequate handling of the first of these features is a major flaw in most existent thesauruses. Though many justifications have been offered for avoiding the second, they all boil down to the implausible notion that the members of a group of words are synonymous but some are more synonymous than others! Perhaps unfairly, one can't help feeling that the only valid explanation for non-alphabetical listing of properly chosen synonyms appears in one specialized dictionary of synonyms whose author comments, "Apologies are in order, however, for my inability to maintain alphabetical order within the categories, the plea being of course lack of time." Finally, since no one can anticipate where the user's search may start, it seems only logical to enter each synonym in such a way that it can serve as a convenient starting point in his searching.

The material in Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus has been drawn primarily from Webster's Third New International Dictionary. the Merriam-Webster

unabridged dictionary containing more than 460,000 entries. This basic lexicographic reference has been reviewed page by page, entry by entry, and sense by sense in selecting the groups of terms to be entered in the thesaurus. The editors have not restricted themselves, however, to this one source but have freely consulted existent thesauruses and Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary and have not hesitated to draw on the resources of the more than 12,000,000 citations of the massive Merriam-Webster file of English usage to settle doubtful points. Entries of multisense words ordinarily follow the sequence of senses in, though not necessarily the identical numbering of, Webster's Third.

The editor of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus has been assisted by Michael G. Belanger, William P. Black, Kathleen M. Doherty, Kathryn K. Flynn, Kerry W. Metz, Anne H. Soukhanov, and Raymond R. Wilson, assistant editors. Cross-referencing has been done under the supervision of Grace A. Kellogg, associate editor. The Merriam clerical and typing staff under the supervision of Evelyn G. Summers provided invaluable support in the preparation of this work.

Mairé Weir Kay, Editor

Introduction

Evolution of the Thesaurus

With its intricate interweaving of strands of Celtic, earlier Roman and later ecclesiastical Latin, northern and western Germanic tongues, and, through Norman-French, the whole body of Romance languages, it is scarcely surprising that English is a language peculiarly rich in synonyms. Equally, it is scarcely strange that with so much to work with, users of this language have long been interested in synonyms as an element both in precision and in elegance of expression. Though the word *synonym* had certainly been in use at least a century earlier, its first appearance with essentially its modern meaning seems to be that in the dedicatory epistle of John Palsgrave's translation of the Latin *Comedye of Acolasius* (1540) in which he castigates self-important and incompetent masters who

... do oppress and overlaye the tender wyttes, the whiche they wold so fayne further, with their multitude of sondry interpretations, confusedly by them uttered. So that fynally theyr yong scholers, ... be forced to falle a glosynge ... and as their chyldyshe judgement dothe for the time serve them, of dyvers englishe werdes in our tongue beinge synonymes ... they chuse moste commonly the very worste, and therewith scryble the bokes of theyr latyne auctours.

To pass from awareness of synonyms as a usage problem to organized consideration of them as an organic factor in rhetorical excellence is no very long stride. This

is demonstrated by Henry Cockeram's *English Dictionarie* (1623). This engaging little work, though the first English dictionary in name, comes closer in some respects to being a thesaurus in fact. Its first book purports to define difficult words, but a good half of the "definitions" are simple lists of equivalents (as at *condigne* — worthy, due, deserved; at *luxurie* — lecherie, riotousnesse; at *sordid* — base, filthy). The second book contains in its author's words

The vulgar words, which whensoever any desirous of a more curious explanation by a more refined and elegant speech shall looke into, he shall there receive the exact and ample word to express the same.

Entries such as "to Behead one, *Decollate*, Obtruncate", "to put Over, *Adiourne*, Prorogue, Procrastine", "Youth, *Puerilitie*, Infancie, Adolescentie, Juvenilitie, Minoritie" are typical of this section. At some stretch of credibility one might suggest that Cockeram here anticipated Roget in assembling word lists matched to ideas rather than to other words.

After this vigorous beginning, English synonymy languished until the eighteenth century. It then was given a new impetus by the appearance in 1719 of the Abbé Gabriel Girard's book of discriminative synonymies of the French language. This was translated and adapted to English use, apparently by John Trusler, who brought out a book *The Distinction between Words esteemed Synonymous in the English Language* (1766) which is patently based on Girard and which unquestionably influenced the later discriminative synonymies of Mrs. Piozzi (1794) and George Crabb (1816). Thus, the discriminative or descriptive or prescriptive synonymy became established as an accepted literary and didactic form by the early years of the nineteenth century.

Slower in blooming in spite of its head start in Cockeram's work was the essentially mnemonic approach to synonymy, the *Thesaurus* of modern usage. The first book that undertook the orderly presentation of synonyms as a primary function was William Perry's *Synonymous, Etymological, and Pronouncing English Dictionary* (1805). With respect to the assembling of synonyms in readily available lists the author notes:

It is a matter of no small astonishment that a work of this kind, one among the desiderata *of literature, should have been so long neglected. Every person accustomed to write,*

*whether on private concerns, or for public instruction, must
have felt the want of such an assistant, not only to guard
him against the tiresome repetition of the same words, but
to enable him to select terms to express his ideas with
greater clearness and precision.*

This first "thesaurus", produced nearly half a century
before Peter Mark Roget gave that word its current
meaning, offers a clear and concise explication of the
purpose of such a volume as distinguished from the
·discriminative synonymy, which seeks to impose to
varying degrees an author's notions of appropriateness,
propriety, and correctitude on a user.

During succeeding years several synonym-listing books
appeared, some of greater and some of less worth and
degree of popular appeal. Formally organized
word-finding lists became a feature of the general
dictionary with the publication in 1847 under the
editorship of Chauncey A. Goodrich of the royal octavo
abridgment of Noah Webster's American Dictionary of
the English Language (1828). Finally, with the
publication of Peter Mark Roget's *Thesaurus of English
Words and Phrases* in 1852, a new force entered the field.

This last was and remains a unique work. The product
of nearly fifty years of collecting and testing to meet the
author's own needs, it is organized primarily in terms of
words related to concepts. For the scholarly user it opens
a very real treasury of language, but Roget's impression,
expressed in his introduction, that the user

*scarcely ever need engage in any critical or elaborate study
of the subtile distinctions existing between synonymous
terms; for if the materials set before him be sufficiently
abundant, an instinctive tact will rarely fail to lead him to
the proper choice*

is probably far too optimistic with regard to the person
who needs guidance most — the person of average or
limited vocabulary. In fact, Barnas Sears, editor of the
first American edition of *The Thesaurus of English Words*
(1854) makes the point in his "Editor's Preface" that

*apprehending that many who may consult this work would
regard the plan of the author for the distribution of his
topics as too obscure for ordinary reference, the editor has
caused* the index to be greatly enlarged.

It has long been recognized that Roget is far more often

recommended by instructors than it is used by students. Nonetheless, *The Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* is the only word-finding book to remain viable in various editions for well over a century, and one cannot help feeling that in spite of its complexity and elaborate structural plan the sheer wealth of relevant material that it offers a sophisticated user is the explanation of its survival.

Understandably enough, most thesaurists of the post-Roget period have sought an approach that would combine the wealth of material available in Roget's work with the indubitably simpler alphabetical organization of a dictionary. While differing levels of success have been attained, the underlying problem — that a dictionary dealing in synonyms and antonyms of specific words cannot honestly cover the same ground as a thesaurus devoted to the presentation of all pertinent terms about specific concepts — can scarcely be said to have been solved in an entirely satisfactory manner. It is the hope and belief of the editors of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus that, by pinpointing the exact segment of meaning in which word groups are synonymous and by supplementing synonym and antonym lists in this book with lists of related and contrasted words and of pertinent idiomatic equivalents, they have gone far toward solving the problem without doing violence to the basic concepts of *synonym* and *antonym.*

The Synonym

The early lexicographers had a clear and precise awareness of the concept *synonym.* Thus, Johnson enters in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) "SYNONYMA ... Names which signify the same thing," George Mason in his *Supplement to Johnson's English Dictionary* (1803) adds "SYNONYME ... A word of the same meaning as some other word" (an entry taken over verbatim in Todd's 1818 revision of *Johnson's English Dictionary*), and Webster (1828) includes "SYNONYM ... a name, noun or other word having the same signification as another is its *synonym.* Two words containing the same idea are *synonyms.*" Similarly, the eighteenth century discriminative synonymists implicitly followed the lead of Abbé Girard, whose title *La Justesse de la langue françoise ou les différentes significations des mots qui*

passent pour être synonymes makes it clear that he was discriminating "words reputed to be synonyms" rather than words that are precisely such. His imitator Trusler refers in like manner to "Words esteemed Synonymous in the English Language," while Mrs. Piozzi in her *British Synonymy* (1794) almost routinely qualifies her discriminations with such statements about her "synonym" groups as that the words "are verbs very nearly yet not strictly synonymous," or "are not I believe exactly synonymous." There can be no doubt that the early discriminators were perfectly aware that they were not dealing with synonyms in the then generally accepted meaning of that word.

In course of time, the distinction between the synonymous words of the early lexicographers and the nearly synonymous words of the discriminative synonymists, appropriately called *pseudosynonyms* by Miss Whately (1851), gradually became eroded. As early as 1864 we find in Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language the entry "SYNONYM . . . One of two or more words in the same language which are the precise equivalents of each other or which have very nearly the same signification and therefore are liable to be confounded together." The trend toward a broad and loose definition of *synonym* has continued, especially as synonymists have striven for ever longer lists of ever more remotely related "synonyms." Indeed, there are those who compile "synonym" lists while denying the existence of synonyms.

All the varied definitions, both narrow and broad, somehow pass over what seems to the editors of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus a fundamental point: *synonymy is a relation between meanings.* True, it can only be expressed in terms of words since meaning is an attribute of words. Nonetheless, synonymy must be thought of as a property of meanings and it must be identified through careful analysis of these meanings. With this in mind, it early became apparent that a fresh approach to the study of synonyms was essential if Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus was to be more than another compilation of vaguely related terms.

One lead was offered by Alfred Dwight Sheffield in his introductory discussion in the third edition of Soule's *Dictionary of English Synonyms* (1938), where he makes the point that

words can be displayed together in a synonym cluster to be chosen from when they share a basic meaning such that each synonym can be felt as offering this "core-sense" expressively enriched by further distinctions of sense, feeling, or tone.

Unfortunately, in his revision of Soule, Sheffield failed to carry over his eminently sound approach and did not make such core-senses available to the users of the book. Nor is it always apparent that his synonym lists consistently share such a basic meaning. Nonetheless, his approach pointed to the need for more thorough analysis in identifying synonyms for use in Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus.

For practical purposes of analysis it became necessary to view synonymy as a relationship not between words nor even between lexicographic senses of words. It was essential to seek out discrete objective denotations uncolored by such peripheral aspects of meaning as connotations, implications, or quirks of idiomatic usage. Only by dissecting senses is it possible to isolate ultimate meanings and reach something which goes a little beyond Sheffield's core-sense and which for simplicity's sake will be here designated *elementary meaning.* Perhaps this approach needs to be examined more specifically to clarify the object in view. For example, there is a sense of the noun *input* in Webster's Third New International Dictionary that reads

> : power or energy put into a machine or system for storage (as into a storage battery) or for conversion in kind (as into a mechanically driven electric generator or a radio receiver) or conversion of characteristics (as into a transformer or electric amplifier) usu. with the intent of sizable recovery in the form of output

Obviously much of this definition is, as it should be from the lexicographic point of view, peripheral matter designed to guide and orient the consultant of the dictionary rather than a fundamental part of the denotation of the word in the sense in question. Stripped of this peripheral matter the sense can be restated denotationally as

> power or energy put into a machine or system for storage
> or for conversion in kind
> or conversion of characteristics.

When this in turn is expressed graphically

power	machine		storage
put into a		for	conversion in kind
energy	system		conversion of
			characteristics

it becomes plain that there are twelve simple statements of denotation or individual elementary meanings associated in this single sense. Of these twelve only one, "energy put into a system for storage," could reasonably be considered as a synonym of *charge* as applied to a storage battery. For the purposes of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus a word is construed as a synonym if and only if it or one of its senses shares with another word or sense of a word one or more elementary meanings.

When the synonymous relationship is viewed in terms of elementary meanings, the process of selecting synonyms is both simplified and facilitated. For example, it is immediately apparent that no term narrower in scope than the pertinent meaning of the headword can be its synonym, i.e., *sedan* cannot be a synonym of *automobile*, *biceps* cannot be a synonym of *muscle*, and *imply* cannot be a synonym of *communicate*, even though a very definite relation exists between the members of each pair. On the other hand, a term (such as *input* above) more broadly defined than another by the lexicographers is nonetheless a valid synonym of the latter if the two share one or more elementary meanings. In order to pin down the area of synonymity for the user, each main entry in Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus prefixes to its synonym list a *meaning core* (see pp. 22a) which states the elementary meaning or meanings and any peripheral notions common to all the members of the synonym group.

The Antonym

The term *antonym* was introduced by C. J. Smith in *Synonyms and Antonyms* (1867) as a term correlative to *synonym*. He identified the word somewhat ambiguously in his preface by stating that

words which agree in expressing one or more characteristic ideas in common he [the author] has regarded as Synonyms, those that negative one or more such ideas he has called Antonyms.

However, in his discussion of the etymology of the word *antonym* he elaborates the idea that though basically

expressing the notion of a word used *in substitution for another*, this can be construed practically as one used *in opposition to another*. The idea of opposition is further stressed by his suggestion of *counterterm* as an alternative to *antonym*. The evidence clearly indicates that Smith in presenting the concept of *antonym* had in mind words that constitute the *negative opposite* of a term toward which they are antonymous. Unfortunately, the vagueness of his presentation and the looseness of his own usage within the body of his book have allowed great variation in subsequent application of the term. As a result, many synonymists have come to view antonyms as in some vague way converse to or contradictory of words toward which they are antonymous rather than as sharply, exactly, and completely opposed to such words in a manner that negates the implications of the latter.

In one collection or another various classes of terms have been construed as antonyms. Among these are several that, though of questionable validity, merit some consideration.

1 *Relative terms* have such a relationship one to the other that one can scarcely be used without suggesting the other (as *husband* and *wife, father* and *son, buyer* and *seller*), yet there is neither real opposition nor real negation between such pairs. Their relation is reciprocal or correlative rather than antonymous under any reasonably strict interpretation of the antonymous relationship.

2 *Complementary terms* in a similar way are normally paired and exhibit a reciprocal relationship such that one is likely to seem incomplete without its mate (as in such pairs as *question* and *answer, seek* and *find*). This reciprocal relation which involves no negation is better viewed as sequential than antonymous.

3 *Contrastive terms* differ sharply from their "opposites" only in some parts of their meaning. They neither oppose nor negate full force, since they differ significantly in range of meaning and applicability, in emphasis, and in the peripheral suggestions they convey. For example, *destitute* (an emphatic term carrying strong suggestions of misery and distress) is contrastive rather than antonymous with respect to *rieh* (a rather neutral and matter-of-fact term), and *poor* (another neutral and matter-of-fact term) is the appropriate antonym of *rich*. Essentially, contrastive words are only tangentially opposed.

There can be no question that the inclusion of words like those just discussed whittles away at the basic notion of the antonym as an antithetical negative correlative of a term and that such whittling is undesirable. Certainly the treatment in dictionaries and manuals which indulge in this practice has become increasingly haphazard, uninformative, and unhelpful to the user of these works.

The editors of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus feel that a reappraisal of the antonym concept is long overdue. As in the case of synonyms, the relation needs to be viewed as one between isolable segments of meaning rather than between words or lexicographic senses of words. For the purposes of this book, a word which in one or more of its elementary meanings precisely opposes a corresponding area of meaning of another word and which through its implications negates each implication that gives its individuality to its opposite is an antonym of the latter word.

This definition effectively excludes from consideration those classes of words previously discussed which either imperfectly oppose or incompletely negate their "opposites". There remain, however, three classes of words from which antonyms may reasonably be drawn. These are:

1 *Opposites without intermediates.* Such words are so opposed as to be mutually exclusive and to admit of no middle ground between them. They deny, point by point and item by item, whatever their opposites affirm. Thus, what is *perfect* can be in no way *imperfect* and what is *imperfect,* to however slight a degree, by no shift or twist can be viewed as *perfect;* one cannot in any way at once *accept* and *reject* or *agree* and *disagree.*

2 *Opposites with intermediates.* Such words constitute the terminal elements in a range of divergence and are so genuinely and diametrically opposed that the language admits of no wider divergence. Thus, a scale of excellence might include *superiority, adequacy, mediocrity,* and *inferiority,* but only the first and last are so totally opposed that each precisely negates what its opposite affirms. Similarly, in the sequence *prodigal, extravagant, careless, careful, frugal, parsimonious* there are three antonymous pairs. *Prodigal* (stressing excessive extravagance) and *parsimonious* (stressing excessive frugality) effectively cancel one another, as do *extravagant* (stressing disregard of conservation) and *frugal* (stressing

attention to conservation), or *careless* (stressing imprudence in expenditure) and *careful* (stressing prudence in expenditure). In such sequences the antonymous relation exists only between those members that are genuinely and precisely opposed. Other members (as *prodigal* and *frugal* or *careless* and *parsimonious*) may contrast sharply, but they do not clash full force; they are contrastive rather than antonymous.

3 *Reverse opposites.* These are terms that are opposed in such a way that each expresses the undoing or nullification of what the other affirms. Perhaps it is technically questionable practice to accept *nullification* as the equivalent of *negation;* yet the words overlap significantly in their range of meaning. Is it unreasonable, then, to accept two kinds of negation, one of which connotes privation (as, *bad* is the negation, or privation, of *good*) and the other of which connotes undoing or nullification (as, *reclamation* is the negation, or nullification, of *abandonment*)? Surely, these reverse opposites are entitled equally to consideration as antonyms when they precisely oppose and fully negate the special features of their opposites. Thus, *disprove* and its close synonym *refute* so perfectly oppose and so clearly negate the implications of *prove* that they fit the character of antonyms as effectively as does *unkind* with respect to *kind* or *come* with respect to *go.*

So, then, for the purposes of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus, words that are opposites without intermediates, opposites with intermediates, or reverse opposites, and only these will be construed as antonymous.

Related and Contrasted Words

Though the editors of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus are committed to a rigorous policy in the identification of synonyms and antonyms, they have no intention of evading their responsibility to those interested in a wider range of material for use in word finding or vocabulary building. In order to make relevant additional matter available without doing violence to reasonably restricted concepts of synonymity and antonymity, the book features lists of related and contrasted words wherever these seem appropriate and likely to be helpful. *Related words* (often misdescribed as synonyms) and *contrasted words* (often misdescribed as antonyms) are actually

near-synonyms and near-antonyms respectively. They are words which do not quite qualify as synonyms or antonyms under a strict definition of these terms but which are so closely related to or so clearly contrastable with the members of a synonym group that the user of the book has a right to have them brought to his attention under appropriate headings.

Phrases and Idiomatic Equivalents

In the search for ever longer synonym lists thesaurists increasingly have included phrases among their synonyms. These phrases fall into three classes:

1 *word equivalents.* These are phrases that function as if they were single words. More often than not they are combinations of noun and attributive noun (as *county agent*) or noun and adjective (as *hard sell*) or of verb and adverb (as *make up*). However, such phrases may be made up of any kinds of verbal elements and may perform the function of any part of speech (as *with one accord,* adverb; *except for,* preposition; *Near Eastern,* adjective; *insofar as,* conjunction). These firmly fixed combinations that act as if they were single words and fulfill the grammatical functions of single words can scarcely be entirely excluded from synonym lists. The editors of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus have taken a conservative position and only include such combinations when they are so firmly fixed in usage as to be accorded part-of-speech labels in major modern dictionaries.

2 *glosses.* These are phrases that restate the meaning of a word. Essentially, they are brief, sometimes cryptic definitions. There is no definition of *synonym* that reasonably can be construed to justify the inclusion of restatements or definitions in synonym lists. Thus, "do heavy menial service" is a gloss rather than a synonym of *drudge,* "have an opinion" is a gloss of *opine,* and "in a state of inferiority to" is a gloss of *under.* In the opinion of the editors of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus, there is no place in a synonym list for such phrases since they contribute nothing useful to the vocabulary of the user of a thesaurus.

3 *idioms.* These are phrases that have a collective meaning other than the additive meaning of the constituent words. For example, there are no literal meanings of *compare* and *note* that allow the phrase