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Dictionary of American Society and Civilization: Scope and Issues *

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> General-purpose bilingual dictionaries contain very little extra--linguistic, civilizational, information. Consequently, they are quite inadequate aids for fully comprehending the civilizational content of a foreign-language text. Regular encyclopedias are also often surprisingly inadequate for the purpose, as illustrated by this paper on specific examples from American society. This argues for a special reference work: a Dictionary of American Society and Civilization (DASC). Scope of dictionary is then discussed and a comparative-culture approach stressed. Lexicographic issues, such as entry selection and presentation, are dealt with in some detail. Intra-entry lexicographic techniques are given special prominence. A three-block entry structure is suggested as most suitable for a DASC, made up of a factual-information block, a cultural-context block, and a block of comparative--culture comment. Some additions of civilizational matter and comment to standard bilingual dictionaries are suggested and illustrated as interim solutions until a proper DASC can be produced.

> > 1.

The average dictionary user, unquestioningly accepting his dictionary's 'authority', is as a rule happy with whatever lexicographical rubbish is dumped on him. The discriminating dictionary user (not quite a mythical species) is, on the other hand, often and acutely aware of the limits of lexicographic

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information. This is notably so when the user is not a native speaker of English, and when a bilingual dictionary is consulted. It is then that one quickly perceives the inadequacy or (the usual situation) a complete absence of extralinguistic, specifically civilizational, information. This inadequacy severely impairs a dictionary's usefulness as a tool for the full comprehension of a foreign-language text with inherent civilizational content such as fiction, to take the most obvious example.

To be fair, one should not expect a reference work to provide more than it is supposed to offer by its very definition. The shortest serviceable definition of a general-purpose dictionary (monolingual or bilingual) is something like "an alphabetic inventory of the lexical units of a language and all their linguistic properties". If a dictionary of this type (best termed a linguistic dictionary) is limited to lexical units and their linguistic properties, then an encyclopedic dictionary ought to prove a better tool for the retrieval of civilizational content from a foreign-language text. Beyond its obvious core of lexical units and their linguistic properties, it namely supplies "information about the extralinguistic world, physical or nonphysical" (Zgusta 1971: 198).

The extent of this extralinguistic information is impressively illustrated by the best English-language dictionary of this class, the Big Webster (more specifically the Webster's Third), with its more than 450,000 entries. With the pure lexical entries probably not exceeding 50,000, we are offered here some 400,000 extralinguistic items. However, since these are overwhelmingly scientific and technological, even such an impressive lexicographical tool will extend only limited assistance to the reader in need of civilizational explanation and comment. Though the largest available dictionary of American English, and of eminently encyclopedic character, it falls short of adequately explainig, or even listing, a great many items vital for understanding important aspects of American civilization. So, to quote only two examples, it has no entry on Western Union, the American approximate equivalent of the European government-operated national telegraph services; it also fails to inform the user that the President of the United States can be re-elected only once.

Now, of course, a legitimate answer to all this could simply be: you do not look for this kind of information in any type of dictionary, general-purpose or encyclopedic; you go to an encyclopedia for that. If we describe an encyclopedia as a

"compendium of all available knowledge" (a definition used by the Encyclopaedia Britannica itself), this certainly sounds like reasonable advice. So let us consult this same Britannica about those two items of information.

First, the Western Union. Not found in Webster's Third (as already noted), it is surprisingly, absent from the Britannica as well. There is no separate entry for it in the Micropaedia volumes, nor any section dealing with it in the long article "Telegraph" within Macropaedia (pp. 66—78, vol. 18). The only information offered by the article are two short historical references: "... the formation in 1851 of the Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Company, changed in 1856 to Western Telegraph Company". (p. 69); and "Murray sold his American rights to Western Union and Western Electric in 1912". (p. 72). A far cry, certainly, from the obviously important civilizational information:

In the United States, telegrams are not sent through the government-operated national postal service (as common in Europe), but through the services of Western Union, a private company. Western Union offices that used to be as common as post offices (which in the United States are operated by the government), with thousands of Western Union desks in many hotels, terminals and office buildings, are much less commonly seen now. This, of course, is because the telephone has replaced most telegraphic communication — and with it going down to the Western Union office to hand in the telegram, as well as receiving it through the Western Union messenger (immortalized by Norman Rockwell). The familiar geometric black-and-yellow Western Union sign — the company's logo — is however still sought by those who want to send some money by wire, which is the fastest way in the United States.

The second item: re-election of the President of the United States. Looking it up under president in the Micropaedia, we find a 12-line entry with very general information, the only reference to the U. S. President being "the office is charged with great responsibilities and powers in such countries as the U. S." This short entry is followed by three references to long article sections of the Macropaedia. The only possibly relevant reference of the three ("U. S. powers and Cabinet leadership") directs the user to p. 937, vol. 18. There, one is offered, literally, six lines dealing with the President of the United States, with no information whatever about his reelection. Trying further on my own, I looked up the entry Amendment and the Macropaedia article "Constitutional Law", but they were equally silent on the subject. The relevant information, of course, is:

A long-standing tradition of a two-term limit, broken by F. D. Roosvelt who has been reelected three times, was constitutionally sanctioned by Amendment 22 to the U. S. Constitution (of 1951) that says "No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice..."

2.

This paper has, I hope, at this point clearly established the need for a reference work providing specific civilizational information, showing at the same time the inadequacy for that purpose of encyclopedic dictionaries on one hand and of straight encyclopedic texts on the other. We must, therefore, envisage a reference work expressly designed for the purpose, tailored as it were to meet these specific needs — a dictionary of (or a companion to, a handbook of) American society and its civilization. Mapping its scope might best be started by defining the two key words: society and civilization.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (1974) says: "Society ..., in the social sciences, is a group of human beings bound together for self-maintenance and self-perpetuation and sharing their own institutions and culture" (vol. IX, p. 315). Civilization is defined by the same authority as a "sociocultural system encompassing the language, traditions, customs and institutions of a group (society), including the motivating ideas, beliefs and values, and their embodiment in material instruments and artifacts" (vol. 4, p. 657). These two definitions are linked by the concept of culture defined — in relativist (not universalist) terms — as "the sociocultural system of a distinguishable and autonomous group (society) of human beings, such as a tribe or a modern nation" (ib., vol. 8, p. 1154).

Very simply then, retaining the taxonomy and terminology of these definitions, a dictionary of American society and civilization ought therefore to encompass the following areas:

- (1) American language
- (2) American tradition3
- (3) American customs
- (4) American institutions
- (5) American motivating ideas, beliefs and values
- (6) material instruments and artifacts embodying 5 (1-5?)

The obvious synonymy and overlaps present, as well as the fuzzy boundaries of the areas listed, call for considerable condensation and some elimination of the items, requiring at the same time a more specific breakdown and the use of well-established captions to designate and delimit individual areas.

These requirements are met by the following list of individual academic disciplines/fields currently taught in U. S. universities under the broad term of American Studies. The list has been derived from the survey Selected American Studies Courses, part of the American Studies Guidebook (compiled by the USIA in 1975). The list's applicability to our problem — defining the scope of a dictionary of American society and civilization — is defensible to the degree that we can accept the fact that the broad scope of American Studies is coextensive with the concept of American society and its civilizations as defined earlier in this paper.

Here, then, is the list:

History of the U.S. American social history American economic history American cultural history American system of government Politics in the U.S. American law American economy Sociology of American society American Labor American railroads American farmer Subcultures in America Ethnic studies Immigration to the U.S. Black studies Women's studies Social Welfare in the U.S. Urban studies Environmental studies

History of ideas in the U.S. Religion in the U.S. American English American folklore American literature American theater American dance American music Motion pictures in the U.S. American visual arts American architecture American education Radio in the U.S. American television American journalism Publishing in the U.S. American popular culture

Although the new list is a huge improvement over the modest basic one first proposed, it reveals shortcomings inherent in the pragmatic approach used in compiling it. American Studies may be defined as whatever is taught under that term in U.S. universities. The 200-plus programs offered there cannot all be completely wrong, and collectively they can be said to provide a consensus of what the field, at this stage, is. However commonsensical and however distributionally, quantitatively, true this list may be, it is hardly acceptable as a definition of American Studies as an academic discipline. A description of current practice, even a state-of-the-art report, cannot replace an analytical approach striving to define first the autonomous concepts of America and Americanness and

following it up with, ideally, an equally autonomous methodology. One should, perhaps, not feel too badly about all this, since this problem has dogged American Studies in the U.S. all along and is still the central issue of the field.

An additional weak point of the list is a disparity of item levels, at least in terms of their formal academic structure. Two items — History of the U.S. and American Literature are traditional academic disciplines well-established long before the proper beginnings of American Studies in the 1940's. They are self-contained, with a clear theory, method and subject of their own. Next below on the ladder of traditional academic status is the large group of most items qualified by 'American' or 'in the U.S.' or similar. What these qualifiers here do is narrow down an otherwise comprehensive and self-contained academic discipline (such as law, architecture, music, education), or an already specialized field (for instance social history, economic history, visual arts), or a single sector of a field, often the subject of one academic course (American Labor, American Dance, Radio in America and the like). Last, and lowest, on the grid of traditional academic values is the group of comparatively recent American Studies programs of a truly interdisciplinary character, programs indeed whose whole point almost is their multidisciplinary method and subject (Black Studies, Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, Popular Culture, Environmental Studies).

A not unimportant flaw of the list under discussion is its ethnocentrism, admittedly hard to avoid. Designed, as a rule, by American scholars for an overwhelmingly American undergraduate and graduate student body, the programs on the list are limited by an American awareness of what are the discrete sociocultural phenomena translatable into academic fields, and by an American approach to the analysis of these phenomena. An extra-American awareness of the issues would, no doubt, expand the list — by adding such various-level items as, possibly:

European Impact of American Values Common Man in Europe and America Cultural Study of American Fast Food American Comics and Cartoons Criminal Society in the United tSates

The express comparative-culture approach, observable in two of the above items, is an almost instinctive European response to American sociocultural phenomena. Whether its intrinsic academic value is inferior to that of non-comparatively perceiving and defining an American phenomenon worthy of academic investigation, but eluding native-born Americans, is a provocative issue which merits separate tretment.

Finally, one notices that geography as discipline is completely absent from the list of American Studies items taught in American universities (unless, of course, it is simply an oversight by me). Elementary knowledge of the physical geography of the United States seems to me an indispensable assumption in any approach to American society and its civilization. Specialized items are even more obvious desiderata for the list I have in mind here such fields as economic geography (of the U.S.), human geography (of the U.S.), American cultural geography, regional studies — all the way down to such specific subjects as Internal migrations in the U.S., Racial makeup of American population, Demography of the U.S., and the like.

3.

The length at which possible lists of items have so far been discussed is the best indication of their significance for a well-structured DASC. A dictionary, however, is made up of entries, and translating those items into individual entries raises a host of different, lexicographic, questions. These questions are best grouped around the major issues of: entry presentation, entry selection and intra-entry techniques.

Entry presentation involves first the complex process of breaking a large body of sociocultural data down to chunks manageable both conceptually and graphically. Most of the items from our second list could probably be retained as major (or background-information) entries. Individual expressions or short specific pieces of information related to these major entries could then be offered as lists within these entries.

This system — followed, for instance, by S. B. Flexner's "I Hear America Talking" — has the advantage of presenting sociocultural and historical information as an organic unity. Flexner's book, to quote a typical example, has a four-page major entry "Watergate", with eight sub-entries (bug, tap, coverup, dirty tricks, game plan, leak, the plumbers and stonewall/stonewalling) as well as 38 other items of information integrated into the text. These 38 include lexical items (such as wire-tap, deep-six, etc.), events (Watergate hearings, Saturday Night Massacre), legal expressions (executive privilege, executive clemency), names of persons (James McCord, John Dean

etc.) and names of institutions (Democratic National Committee, Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, to name only two). Lexical items and personal names were listed in the Index at the end of the book, other items were not.

The disadvantage of this system of concentrating sociocultural and historical information is that one has to know where to look for specific information. Knowing that, of course, is half the information already. Where, for instance, is one to look up the meaning of the famous 18-minute gap if an exhaustive index is not provided? It is, therefore, much simpler to have the many thousands of such items of information in the form of short entries alphabetically arranged and cross-referenced whenever necessary. In short, traditional dictionary structure is probably the most efficient way of entry presentation.

As to entry selection, one important point should be made immediately. A DASC will have to contain names of persons and institutions, since historical and much of sociocultural information is simply impossible to present without those. A number of personal names are also linked with common figurative expressions, slang and the like, which are not clear unless historical explanation is provided. John Hancock, an American slang term meaning "one's signature", is impossible to understand without knowing that John Hancock's signature (as president of the Continental Congress) is prominent on the Declaration of Independence. Now if DASC selects and includes the entry John Hancock, the decision will have been made either because of John Hancock's importance for American history, or because of the expressiveness and pure American color of the slang expression John Hancock (as in put your John Hancock on the dotted line), or because of both.

Whatever the reason, the entry will embody the cultural dichotomy not infrequent in items of sociocultural information: a high-level and a popular-level meaning (content). The Watergate affair provides another "split-level" example: the expression *Deep Throat*. It has been used on two levels: as a figurative reference to the deep-voiced anonymous source who provided two Washington Post reporters with some important early information on a coverup taking shape in the White House; also, as the title of a contemporary hard-core movie whose explicit treatment of sexual techniques evocative of its title was the obvious inspiration for the flippant code name given by those reporters to their nameless source. Deep Throat, by the way, is alive and well as a lexical item, having acquired a general (though, of course, still figurative) meaning of any

anonymous source of a leak to the media, deep-voiced or otherwise. Let me quote from Jimmy Carter's memoirs "Keeping Faith", as presented very recently by Time Magazine (Oct. 11, 1982, p. 54): "We could not solve the problem of deliberate leaks. After Watergate, it seemed that every subordinate functionary in government wanted to be Deep Throat".

To be sure, the intra-entry cultural dichotomy is not an excessively frequent occurrence. Entry selection for the DASC should be envisaged as a continuous process of retrieval from several cultural levels — presumably: high, popular and (to coin a term) level-neutral — with the individual entry assignable in most cases to one of these levels according to its sociocultural content.

Easiest to define, probably, is the high-culture level, with "high culture" meaning the traditional, academic, upper-middle-class, elite culture. A reference work calling itself a DASC, stressing, that is, the social, institutional and civilizational aspects of its subject, could conceivably dispense completely with information about American literature and arts, leaving these areas to specialized reference works. On the other hand, one of the possible definitions of "popular culture" can certainly be based on: whatever is used, enjoyed, practiced by most or a large number of people. Accordingly, and in that sense, a number of traditional works of American literature, functioning as mainstays of high-school set-book reading, leave their trace in American popular culture through a set of universally shared characters, such as Leatherstocking, Rip Van Winkle and Tom Sawyer, to name only a few. These characters, I believe, have to be given entries in any DASC. Whether Tom Sawyer's fussy aunt Polly, his sweetheart Becky Thatcher, the evil Injun Joe, and so forth, are included or not is almost entirely a question of space.

Entries to be selected from a popular-culture level are hard to define and even harder to limit downward (How Low Can You Go?). Of the many meanings of the word popular, the collocation with culture singles out two: "commonly liked or found pleasant" and "having a wide or general currency, esp. among the rank and file". More warmth and some welcome wit is offered by Cantor and Wertham in their "History of Popular Culture" (1968):

Popular culture may be seen as all those things man does and all those artifacts he creates for their own sake, all that diverts his mind and body from the sad business of life. Popular culture is really what people do when they are not working.

The closing sentence certainly implies watching TV, listening to one's radio or stereo and reading newspapers, so the important mass-media dimension of popular culture has not been overlooked. Hobbies, amateur activities, sports, parlor games, even fads, must by all means be included among pastimes assignable to popular culture. Simple snoozing, eating, taking walks and straight sex, though time-honored sparetime activities, do not qualify. However, if socialized and carried out in a manner typically, or at least originally, American, they can all qualify, resulting in such entries as clambake, backpacking, sex clubs etc.

With material instruments and artifacts as embodiments of traditions, customs and institutions of a society (to quote backward the definition of culture underlying this paper), a major share of popular-culture entries will have to be set aside for quite lowly, everyday American physical things. Just a few illustrations, grouped by areas of use: crackerjack, jellybeans, hershey bar (candy); chinos, levis, jogging outfit, funky clothes, preppie fashion (clothes); the shag, the cornrow, the afro (hair styles).

The third major class of entries, based on cultural levels used in entry selection, is made up of what I termed level-neutral entries. This class is meant to convey items of historical, political, biographical, geographical, economic and social information, free (or practically so) of popular-culture or high-culture connotations. In addition to such obvious entries as George Washington, Democratic Party, Alabama, free enterprise and Medicare (in the order of areas listed), the DASC may have to stretch mightily into the reaches of quite special information. To illustrate the latter, here are a few such special historical entries having to do with the military history of World War 2: turkey shoot, leap-frogging, Battle of the Bulge (with the current humorous meaning added, of course), Enola Gay and — fittingly final — Fat Boy.

Many of the third-class entries will have to be kept down to the barest minimum of information. This is to avoid doing a cut-rate encyclopedia's job on one hand, and on the other to generate space for the kind of figurative, anecdotal knowledge automatically shared by all Americans, but not by others. The entry on George Washington will thus have to contain the cherry-tree episode, and possibly inform about his badly fitting dentures and what they did to his temper; the one on Alabama will have to relate the state to both the Black Belt and the Deep South. And so forth. This formula of straight factual and beyond-the-fact information reflects the dual char-

acter of the DASC, which fills the typological gap between the established genres of linguistic dictionary and encyclopedia.

The same formula, of course, brings us to the third major lexicographical issue raised by this paper, that of **intra-entry techniques**. In entry structure terms, even typographically, the formula translates into two-block entries. The first block, a thumb-nail factual sketch or capsule; the second, a widely-shared anecdote or two, some human-interest points or a few telling generally-known figurative expressions.

A third block, however, will be needed in a number of entries to offset the effect of ethnocentrism — defined, of course, as the tendency to interpret and evaluate other cultures in terms of one's own, and recognized as a hazard earlier in this paper.

A dictionary of a particular national or a major ethnic culture presumes a systematic conceptualized inventory as its methodology. With two cultures so visualized and inventoried — in our case American and Croatian — contrasting them will reveal areas of conceptual identity (rather of near-identity) and divergence. The latter can be expected to break down into areas of (1) complete lack of counterpart, (2) partial correspondence (overlap), and (3) deceptive equivalence. This, of course, makes it possible to predict specific areas of cultural interference. An inventory of such areas can, clearly, be useful in a more efficient planning of work on a dictionary as specific as the DASC. On a more theoretical level, the contrasting of two cultures in terms of conceptual identity or divergence has undoubted methodological potential in defining the scope of American Studies through cultural comparison.

We must, however, go back to our entry and its third block. Preceded by a first block, factual and free of cultural context, and a second culture-specific one, already comparative (indirectly) in content and intent — this third block is reserved for comparative cultural comment in the form of express, concise comparative statements. The resulting trinity of entry structure as presented here has not, to my knowledge, been formulated or attempted before, so it may be viewed as an innovation in lexicographical technique and a possible contribution to the theory of lexicography.

4

In order to illustrate what this comparative cultural comment, this third block, should or might look like, here are three examples from a college-size Croatian-English general purpose dictionary being compiled by me. The entries accompanied by such illustrative comment, and selected for their sociocultural content, are: akademija, asistent and celer.

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The fact that these illustrations come from a 'straight' bilingual dictionary is indicative of probable future development. Compiling a DASC, especially if it is to meet all requirements listed in this paper, is a very tall order. Until it can be filled, therefore, bilingual dictionary will have to intensify and refine their function as linguistic interpreters between two societies, and make an effort to include and offer sociocultural information as well.

This need not always to be done on the scale just illustrated. Simple one-line or half-a-line comment can be worked into many entries of smaller-sized dictionaries of either direction (foreign-to-native as well as native-to-foreign). Cross-referencing can also be used with significant effect. Similar attempts have already been made as part of my extensive revision of the medium-sized English-Croatian and Croatian-English dictionaries by M. Drvodelić. The first half of the entry ministar from Drvodelić's revised Croatian-English dictionary (of 1982) can be used to illustrate this technique:

ministar m minister (specif secretary) | ~ predsjednik B (i drugdje) Prime Minister premier (u SAD ne postoji: njegovu funkciju vrši predsjednik SAD); ~ vanjskih poslova foreign minister; B Foreign Secretary; A Secretary of State; ~ unutrašnjih poslova minister of interior; B Home Secretary; A Attorney General (Secretary of the Interior u SAD je ~ rudarstva, šumarstva i energetike); ~ financija finance minister; B Chancellor of the Exchequer; A Secretary of the Treasury; ~ pravosuđa minister of justice; B Lord Chancellor (otprilike); (u SAD ~ pravosuđa ne postoji /ustavom je pravosuđe odvojeno od vlade/);

However, now that the bilingual aspect of lexicography is involved, we must anticipate a number of related pertinent questions. The most relevant among them probably: is the envisaged DASC to be a bilingual (read: English-Croatian) dictionary, or monolingual (only Croatian, only English)? This, of course, depends on who it is meant for. A general, though obviously restricted, audience? A Croatian (or Yugoslav) general audience? The learners and students of English in Croatia (Yugoslavia)?

A very different, though equally significant, question is: does the DASC stand by itself, or should it be coupled with an

American-English — Croatian dictionary? In this fashion, most of the lexical content would be removed from the DASC, but the resulting two-volume set might prove to be a more efficient reference work.

Finally, why not visualize a Dictionary of Croatian Society and Civilization for American readers?

But all that, as the Americans say, is a totally different ball game.

RJEČNIK AMERIČKOG DRUŠTVA I CIVILIZACIJE: GRANICE I PROBLEMI

Dvojezični rječnici opće namjene sadrže vrlo malo izvanjezičnih, civilizacijskih, podataka. Oni su stoga vrlo manjkava pomagala za potpuno razumijevanje civilizacijskog sadržaja tekstova na stranom jeziku. I standardne enciklopedije tu često zakazuju u iznenađujućoj mjeri, što ovaj rad pokazuje na određenim primjerima iz američkog društva. Sve to govori u prilog posebnom priručniku: Rječniku američkog društva i civilizacije (RADC). Zatim se razmatraju granice takvog rječnika, uz naglašavanje komparativno-kulturnog pristupa. Podrobnije se raspravljaju i leksikografska pitanja poput izbora i prezentacije natuknica-članaka. Rad se posebno osvrće na leksikografske postupke unutar natuknice. Predlaže se trojna struktura natuknice-članka kao najpodobnija za RADC — s faktografskim blokom, blokom kulturnog konteksta i blokom komparativno-kulturnog komentara. Konačno, predlažu se, i ilustriraju, dodaci civilizacijske građe i komentara konvencionalnim dvojezičnim rječnicima, kao privremeno rješenje do izrade pravog RADC.