

# On Some Improvements in Accessibility of Lexical Items in the *Chambers Dictionary* (1867–2011)

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## 1. Introduction

The origins of the *Chambers Dictionary* date back to 1867 when the Edinburgh publishers issued a small dictionary for school use. Edited by James Donald, *Chambers's Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (henceforth *Ch-A*) appeared at a time of great ferment and rapid progress in provision of education in Britain.<sup>1</sup> With the spread of general literacy, the dictionary was a convenient educational tool not only for young students but also adults. Soon it was turned into a reference book for general use. This one, published in 1872 under the title *Chambers's English Dictionary* (henceforth *Ch-B*), offered “pronouncing, explanatory, and etymological” information “within reasonable limits, and at a moderate price” (*Ch-B*, v). Unlike expensive multivolume dictionaries, which were limited chiefly to a refined group of users, *Chambers* was a relatively cheap book available for everybody. These early publications mark the beginnings of the *Chambers Dictionary*, although it is the 1901 edition which figures as the first one on the imprint pages of the dictionary. As the twentieth century progressed, the dictionary grew in size, with the ambitious goal of recording the vocabulary of the present as well as of the past English. The dictionary has recently reached its twelfth edition.<sup>2</sup>

*Chambers* is famous for its wide coverage of vocabulary; hence it has become “a dictionary of choice” for word-game fans (*Ch-10*, ix). It is also known as a comprehensive record of the language of English literature. Yet, in a print version of any dictionary, what is gained in word-stock by addition of new lexical items is usually lost in space. It follows that with severe space constraints being at work, the data may be inaccessible to the user unless the editors take pains to improve this unfortunate situation. We may assume that the *Chambers* editors had to face the same problem, namely, how to meet the rigour of space constraints with the aim of intelligibility and accessibility of information.

Like many other dictionaries for native speakers, *Chambers* was designed chiefly as an aid in reading, and thus its practical utility should be considered in the context of text reception rather than text production. Typically dictionary users turn to their dictionaries in order to find the meaning of an unfamiliar item they have come across in a text (Béjoint, 2000, 142, Piotrowski, 2001, 46). Assuming that the reader has decided to look up a word in the dictionary, he should be able to follow an often complex path to the right entry. At best, the item sought figures as the entry itself but more frequently than not it is hidden in the entry. In the latter case, finding the item may be time consuming, especially when the entry is long. This problem is typical of compounds and any multiword lexical items<sup>3</sup> which represent a unity of meaning and form (Bogaards, 1996, 278; Cruse, 1991, 23).

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<sup>1</sup> One sign of the changing times was the introduction of the Elementary Education Act in England (1870) and Scotland (1872), which made schooling compulsory for children.

<sup>2</sup> The twelfth edition was published in 2011 but the publisher's count excludes all nineteenth-century editions (1867, 1872 and 1898) as well as the 2003 edition, which was issued as the “new 9<sup>th</sup>”.

<sup>3</sup> The union of the two elements, that is of a lexical form and a single sense, is what Cruse calls a lexical unit (1986, 23; also cited in Bogaards, 1996, 278). This concept roughly matches understanding of the term in lexicography. As Cruse points out, in practical dictionary making, lexical units are established by identifying a form syntagmatically and associating it with a single meaning (*ibidem*).

In a printed dictionary, a number of factors determine ease of access to lexical items. One of them is the arrangement of entries, which is critical to the speed of retrieval. As soon as the user finds the entry, other factors come into play, such as the order and the indication of meanings. These factors will be dealt with in the context of the developing *Chambers* dictionary. The question is whether *Chambers* editors made it easy for the user to find lexical items and whether successive editions brought any changes in this regard.

## 2. The arrangement of entries

Early editions of *Chambers* displayed quite diverse ways of organising entries. Let us take a closer look at the original edition, *Ch-A*, in order to see some potential problems that the dictionary user might have encountered. In line with the nineteenth-century interest in etymological study of words, *Ch-A* was published to “supply the want [...] of a Dictionary based on the etymological relations of words” (Preface, vi.). In order to meet the needs of etymologically-minded students, the editor arranged words in groups of items deriving from the same root (see the entry group below). Etymological groups were headed by root-words (e.g. *Olive* in the group below) or base words (such as *distrust*) that were the basis for deriving other words. As can be seen in the group below, some direct derivatives (e.g. *oiliness*) and compounds (e.g. *oil-cloth*, *oil-colour*, *oil-nut*) were nested to emphasise their etymological and semantic affinities.

**Olive**  
**olivaceous**  
**oil, ... oil-cloth, ... oil-colour, ... oil-nut**  
**oil-bag**  
**oil-cake**  
**oil-painting**  
**oily, ... oiliness**  
**oleaginous, ... oleaginousness**  
**oleaster**  
**oleiferous**

However, etymological groups were not easily distinguishable on a page, and there were two reasons for this. Firstly, spaces between entry groups were very similar to spaces between entries, which in effect made group boundaries difficult to discern. Secondly, most items in a group were placed on new lines, giving the impression of being unrelated. As a matter of fact, each entry in the group was self-contained, with its own pronunciation, definitional and grammatical part, but it certainly was not the editor’s intention to show that entries were independent of each other. Such a presentation ran counter to the very purpose of the dictionary, obscuring etymological relatedness of words. The only clue as to where a group began was the typography of the first headword, which was printed with a capital initial (e.g. *Olive*). Nevertheless, because of the fact that etymologically related words figured as part of the central word-list, with many of them being thrown out of their alphabetical place, the whole process of retrieval of vocabulary was quite complicated.

Furthermore, although the overall word-list was alphabetically arranged, an obvious consequence of etymological grouping was that alphabetisation was often disturbed; for example, in the group above, *olivaceous* was followed by *oil*, and *oil-nut* by *oil-bag*. Such deviations are well-known to contemporary lexicographers who attempt to reconcile alphabetisation with morpho-semantic grouping. In order to make up for these shortcomings, the editor added extra entries cross-referring the user to the entries proper<sup>4</sup>, like “**Oil**. See under **Olive**”. Hence, *oil* was not only entered under *olive* but also appeared as an independent entry in its alphabetical place, after *Oh* and before *Ointment*. Yet, a major pitfall of cross-referencing is that it leads to a double look-up. To a certain extent, the problem was

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<sup>4</sup> This strategy actually persisted in most editions of *Chambers* as a way of handling the side-effects of nesting.

alleviated by a relatively small coverage of vocabulary (about 25,000 entries) and the fact that many cross-referring entries were almost on the same page as their target entries.

Incidentally, items that appeared in groups included, apart from morphologically simple words, derivatives and compounds written with a hyphen. With the exception of few phrasal verbs, the editor rather excluded multiword expressions written with a space (e.g. *fall from grace*, *hard money*). This shows that the lexicographic description hardly went beyond the word level, which is not surprising given the nineteenth-century interest in the internal structure of words.

Compared to *Webster* (1864) and *Worcester* (1860), which served Donald as source material for *Chambers*, Donald's arrangement of entries was extraordinary. While Donald combined the alphabetical principle with etymological grouping, both Webster and Worcester followed only the former principle, with the result that etymologically related items were sometimes far away from each other. However, this is not to say that Donald's arrangement was original. By the time *Ch-A* was brought out in 1867, the idea of arranging entries into etymological groups had already been implemented by Reid in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1844), a work of a similar structure and pedagogical function as that of *Ch-A*. Although Reid used somewhat different typography from Donald,<sup>5</sup> his dictionary suffered from the same disadvantage, the retrieval process not being easy.

Let us turn to the following edition. *Ch-B* showed probably the most convenient arrangement of entries for reading audience. Following the tradition of *Webster*, *Worcester*, and *Imperial*, entries were arranged in strict alphabetical order. Simple, complex or compound words figured as separate entries, with only a few exceptions of multiword lexical items that were embedded in the microstructure. For a reader who was looking for the meaning of a particular form, the arrangement of words in the form of the A–Z list was straightforward and easy-to-use. Entries were short, with eye-catching headwords typed in capitals (e.g. **MAN**).

However, the arrangement of entries adopted in *Ch-B* had its drawbacks. It allowed for the coverage of a limited section of vocabulary. The dictionary was deficient in particular in compounds written with a space. The limitations of the selection of vocabulary affected the accessibility of lexical items, as only those items which were selected for inclusion could be accessed by the dictionary user. It soon became apparent that if the dictionary was to achieve a wider readership, it had to become more inclusive. The depth of coverage of vocabulary became an important factor determining the shape of subsequent editions of the *Chambers* dictionary, which targeted a wider and wider audience.

In the following editions, from *Ch-C* onwards, entries were arranged in such a way as to record as many lexical items as possible within relatively little space. Davidson was the first *Chambers* editor who attempted to achieve the aim of comprehensiveness by employing extensive nesting of entries. However, from the user's perspective, clustering of etymologically related items under the shared form is not user-friendly, as it requires an often time-consuming perusal of entries. The task of finding lexical items in *Ch-C* was especially difficult in some longer entries, such as *sand*, which occupied almost the whole page.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, nesting turned out to be extremely convenient for publishers, producing concise versions of dictionaries for a popular audience at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The trend towards conciseness and density of the text accompanied by clear typography had emerged in Annandale's *Concise Dictionary of the English Language* (1886) and Cassell's *English Dictionary* (1891) (Simpson, 1990, 1960). These features were also observed in *Ch-I* (1901), a prototypical representative of the genre. Extensive nesting was also employed in the famous *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1911, henceforth *COD*), though with the use of a less distinguishable italic typeface for subheads.

As soon as the editor of *Ch-C* adopted nesting, a problem with a consistent arrangement of subheads appeared. While it is obvious that in the nested type of structure, items are clustered according

<sup>5</sup> In Reid's dictionary each headword in an etymological group was printed with a capital initial, the first headword being printed with a somewhat larger typeface, while all other headwords with a much smaller one. Reid's dictionary was an extremely popular book, reaching the 17<sup>th</sup> edition in 1863, the edition which could serve Donald as a model for his dictionary.

<sup>6</sup> At this stage of the development of the dictionary, the length of entries was yet not as extensive as that observed in the following editions; for example, in *Ch-9* the entry for the prefix *un-* spread over 24 pages.

to their morpho-semantic relations with rough preservation of alphabetisation, in quite many entries the *Chambers* editor violated the alphabetical order of subheads for no obvious reason. For example, while alphabetisation was preserved in the following sequence: *man-at-arms*, *man child*, .. *man-of-war*, *man-of-war's-man*, ... *manstealer*, *mantrap*, etc., the order was suddenly ignored at the end of the entry by the addition of items of similar compound structure and of similar meaning as those just mentioned with the meaning "a kind of person": *man in the moon*, *man of business*, *man of his hands*, *man of letters*. It should be noted that in this edition, the presence or absence of hyphens had nothing to do with the way subheads were arranged. The entry for *mad* provides another instance of violation of alphabetical order: in the sequence *mad-doctor*, *madden*, *madhouse*, the word *madden* is out of alphabetical order. This inconsistency was corrected in *Ch-1*.

Arranging subheads, the editor of *Ch-C* tended to list in the first place items beginning with the headword (e.g. *man-at-arms* under *man*), and then subheads beginning with a word other than the headword (e.g. *to go mad* under *mad*). However, there were entries in which subheads were arranged the other way around, for example, in the entry for *go*, the items *great go*, *little go*, *no go* were listed first, and then they were followed by *go-ahead*, *go-between*, *goer-between*. In addition, the situation was complicated by clustering of items according to word-class. For example at *get*, the nouns *getter*, *getting*, *get-up* (in the nominal sense) were followed by the verbs *get ahead*, *get along*, *get at*, *get off*, *get on*. Again this principle was not executed systematically. Thus, the editor of the early *Chambers* was far from consistent with organising subheads within entries.

Some inconsistencies observed in *Ch-C* were eradicated in the following editions. Many changes in this regard took place in *Ch-1*. For example, apart from correcting the position of *madden* mentioned above, Davidson shifted *great go*, *little go*, *no go* from the beginning to the end of the entry, complying with one of the aforementioned principles. Furthermore, the presence of hyphens became a criterion for word arrangement. The editor drew a line between items written with a hyphen (e.g. *man-at-arms*, *man-child*, etc) and those with a space (e.g. *man in the moon*, *man of business*) by listing the former first in the entry, together with orthographic words (e.g. *mandom*, *manful*, *manhood*). Unfortunately, the rule was based on a flimsy and changeable convention of hyphenation, as a result of which the user could have problems with locating spelling variants, in particular of compounds written either with or without a hyphen. What further contributed to the difficult process of look-up was lack of explanation in the preface of the way sub-entries were arranged.

For decades the length of entries increased, as new vocabulary was added in subsequent editions, making perusal of entries more difficult. Until *Ch-4* (1972), derivatives and compounds had often appeared interchangeably within entries according to alphabetical order. In *Ch-4* in order to ease the process of retrieval, Macdonald revised the order by placing "direct derivatives" first in the sequence of subheads, "compound words beginning with the headword" second, and "phrases containing the headword" last. Within each group, items were arranged alphabetically, though the group boundaries were not highlighted in any way. For example, under *man* one could find the following sequence: *manfully*, *manfulness*, ... *man-child*, ... *man-eater*, ... *man-of-war*, *man-of-war's-man*, ... *man alive*, *Man Friday*, ... *old man of the sea*. This change seems to have been a step in the right direction, although it presupposed some familiarity with the concepts of derivatives, compounds and phrases. Nevertheless, the rule was explained in the "Notes to the user of the dictionary". What is more, it broke with the dependence on hyphenation.

It is worth noting that a few years later access to subheads became a major concern for editors of another popular dictionary, *COD* (1976). In this edition, entries were reorganised by bringing together a number of (but not all) subheads in a block of alphabetically arranged items at the end of the entry (Kamińska, 2010, 84). In the following editions, *COD* editors departed further from the tradition of allocating subheads to particular meanings of the headword they were related to.

Recently, in *Chambers* there have been further changes in the internal entry structure with a view to clarity and ease of access. In *Ch-9new* (2003), the editor employed iconographic devices in the form of square-shaped symbols, like ■, □, ◻. The symbols introduced three categories of subheads: "direct derivatives", "compounds", and "phrases", respectively. Squares had already been used in *COD* in 1990, though they were typographically less prominent, and were used to mark fewer levels of division: a single one (◻) introduced the section with set expressions, and a double one (◻◻) the section with direct derivatives (Kamińska, 2010, 84).

Quite apart from these changes, in the earlier edition (*Ch-8*, published in 1993), Catherine Schwarz had somewhat reduced nesting by shifting certain derivatives and compounds from the micro- to the macrostructure. For example, among the items given main entry status were *intention*, *personal*, *shutter*, and *waitress*, which had earlier been nested under *intense*, *person*, *shut*, and *waiter*, respectively. As seen, some of them are fairly transparent. However, changes of this type were made on a small scale, unlike in *COD*, published three years earlier, where the macrostructure had been greatly extended by de-nesting of numerous compound nouns (Kamińska, 2010, 85). The succeeding *Chambers* editors were reluctant to abandon this space-saving policy, and severe nesting has remained a distinctive feature of the dictionary down to the present day.

### 3. The location of multiword lexical items

The section above has already outlined some problems related to the position of multiword lexical items within entries. However, the problem of finding these items is more complicated than it may seem to be because it depends not only on the question of where the item is located within the entry but also which entry it can be found in.

It should be stressed that finding a multiword lexical item in *Ch-A* and *Ch-B* was not as difficult as in later editions. However, in the original edition (*Ch-A*), the relative ease of access to multiword items was due to limited coverage of vocabulary, rather than to any principled way of arranging it. In this edition, such items could be found in various places, which could impede their retrieval: they figured either as headwords in their alphabetical place (e.g. *bride-maid*), or headwords thrown out of alphabetical order (e.g. *paper-credit*, which appeared after *papyrus*<sup>7</sup>), or subheads placed in the entry for the first element (e.g. *part of speech*, which was under *part* but not under *speech*), or subheads in the entry for the word other than the headword (e.g. *bird of paradise*, which was placed under *paradise* but not under *bird*). In addition, the front matter did not provide the user with an explanation of the principles of the arrangement of multiword items.

As regards *Ch-B*, strict alphabetical order of entries made the task of locating multiword items easier than before. Thus, such items as *paper-credit* and *bird of paradise* appeared as headwords in their own alphabetical positions. Quite apart from the policy of strict alphabetisation, the latter item was also added as a subhead in the entry for *paradise*, increasing the chances of finding the item at a first look-up. Nevertheless, at times the user had to deal with the problem of where to find such items as *in good-part* or *in bad-part*. These were not under the first element, *in*, nor under the second, *good*, but the last one, *part*. The question of where such items could be found was not explained in the preface.

Retrieval of multiword items in *Ch-C* became more difficult, owing to nesting. However, in this edition, unlike the earlier ones, the preface provided the user with a hint as to where multiword items were to be found in the main body. The preface instructed the user that the items were placed “under the head of the significant word” (*Ch-C*, iv). Nevertheless, the decision as to which word is more significant always raises doubts and inconsistencies. In many cases of expressions that include two content words, the user has only a fifty percent chance of locating the right entry at a first look-up (Bogaards, 1996, 287). For example, in *Ch-C* the phrasal expression *know the ropes* was entered under *know* but not under *rope*. Likewise, *lie in wait* was under *lie* but not under *wait*, *tip the scale* was under *tip* but not under *scale*, *walk the plank* was under *plank* but not *walk*. Ideally, the dictionary should enter such items under both content words, but in reality this is not easy to match with space constraints. However, what can in a way reduce the problem is the use of cross-references. The point is that, in the entries above, *Ch-C* failed to direct the user from one entry to another by means of cross-references, which could confirm inexperienced users in the belief that the items were not in the dictionary.

Tracing the treatment of the expressions above in the following editions of *Chambers*, we can notice some improvement in their accessibility. In *Ch-1* (1901) *lie in wait* appeared under both *lie* as well as *wait*, together with a definition in each case. In *Ch-2* (1952) the editor added a cross-reference from *rope* to *know* under which he placed *know the ropes*. In *Ch-6* (1983) *walk the plank* was cross-

<sup>7</sup> The entry for *paper-credit* belonged to the etymological group headed by *papyrus*.

referred from *walk* to *plank*, and in *Ch-8* (1993), *tip the scales* was cross-referred from *scale* to *tip*. Thus, it is a system of cross-referencing that *Chambers* editors developed in order to help the user locate multiword items.

#### 4. The order of senses

The order of senses is another factor which may either speed up or impede retrieval of lexical items. It is particularly important in long entries, in which the search procedure takes time. By displaying current meanings at the beginning of the entry, the lexicographer ensures easier access to items that are most likely to be searched for. On the other hand, accessibility of current meanings may not be the lexicographer's aim. It may be that the lexicographer wishes to show various relationships among lexical items, be they of historical or semantic (or both) type, so as to provide the user with an account of the word history.

For decades, senses in the *Chambers Dictionary* were ordered in such a way as to show the evolution of meanings rather than to aid the user in their retrieval. In the spirit of the nineteenth-century historicism, the early editions placed the etymological meaning first, and other, secondary meanings in such a way as to "exhibit their growth and history" (*Ch-B*). While arranging meanings, Donald, the editor of *Ch-A* and *Ch-B*, claimed to have relied on his own logic. He maintained that "The primary meaning is given first (in italics), and the secondary meanings in the order of their logical connection with the primary one" (*Ch-A*, v). Whatever logical principle he followed, he arranged senses in roughly chronological order as it came close to the order followed in *OED*. Below are a handful of entries from *Ch-A* with senses sorted in logico-historical order:

- cyclopædia** ... lit. *a circle of learning* ; the circle or compass of human knowledge; a work containing information on every department, or on a particular department of knowledge
- fee** ... lit. *cattle or money; a grant of land for feudal service* : an estate inherited : recompense ; price paid for services, as to a lawyer
- husband** ... lit. *the master of a house*, the male head of a household; a married man : in *B.*, a man to whom a woman is betrothed : one who manages affairs with prudence
- ill** ... *evil, bad*; contrary to good; wicked : producing evil : unfortunate; unfavourable: sick; diseased
- November** ... the *ninth* month of the Roman year; the eleventh month of our year
- pencil** ... lit. *a little tail*; a small hair-brush for laying on colours; any pointed instrument for writing or drawing, without ink
- pink** ... lit. *small eye* : a plant with beautiful flowers, sometimes marked like an eye : a colour like that of the flower
- plate** ... *something flat*; a thin piece of metal: wrought gold and silver; household utensils in gold and silver : a flat dish; an engraved plate of metal

In *Ch-C*, Davidson appreciated the value of displaying current meanings at the beginning of the entry, and made the first attempts to change the order of senses in favour of the usage principle. In the preface, he declared that the "current and most important meaning of a word is usually given first" but in some cases "where the force of the word can be made much clearer by tracing its history, the original meaning is also given, and the successive variations of its usage defined" (*Ch-C*, v–vi). However, in spite of the editor's claims, changes in the order of senses were rather sporadic (Kamiński, 2009). This can also be seen in the entries above, where most of them retained the original order, except for *husband* and *November*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In some other entries for the names of the months, the current meaning appears as the only one, as in *February* "the second month of the year", but in other entries the current and etymological meanings are conflated into a single sense, as in *January* "the first month of the year, dedicated by the Romans to Janus, the god of opening, with a double head that looked both ways" (*Ch-C*).

**husband** ... a married man : (*B.*) a man to whom a woman is betrothed : one who manages affairs with prudence  
**November** ... the eleventh month of our year

For almost the whole of the twentieth century, the order of senses remained unchanged, though reading the prefaces one might get the impression that the two principles were given equal status by the editors. In *Ch-2*, Geddie gave the following explanation for the choice of the principle:

The meanings have been arranged on two different principles according to convenience or usefulness. Sometimes the current or most important is given first; sometimes the original or at least an early meaning, with others branching out and diverging from it. (*Ch-2*, vii).

On the other hand, Kirkpatrick, the editor of *Ch-6*, preferred the historical principle because it is “perhaps more logical since it shows at a glance the historical development of the word, each entry providing a potted history of the word.” (*Ch-6*, ix). Perhaps the usefulness of the historical order lies in its mnemonic value by raising awareness of semantic changes that a word undergoes, but it is doubtful whether ordinary users can see such changes “at a glance”, especially when the entry structure does not show explicitly that one meaning derives from another. The use of colons separating meanings can hardly be of help in this regard.

With the publication of *Ch-8*, we can see a gradual shift towards the usage principle. This is noticeable in the following entries:

**ill** ... ailing, sick  
**fee** ... the price paid for services, such as to a lawyer or physician  
**pencil** ... a writing or drawing instrument that leaves a streak of graphite, chalk, slate, or other solid matter, *esp* (*lead-pencil*) one of graphite enclosed in wood and sharpened as required

Brookes, the editor of *Ch-9new*, continued revisions initiated in the previous edition. Compared to all the previous editions, he executed the usage principle in perhaps the most systematic way. Below are the remaining entries in which priority was given to current meanings:

**pink** ... a light red colour  
**plate** ... a shallow dish of any of various sizes according to purpose, eg *dessert plate, dinner plate, side plate, a plateful*  
**encyclopedia** ... a work containing information on every branch, or on a particular branch, of knowledge, generally alphabetically arranged

All in all, for over a century, *Chambers* displayed meanings in the way that was more convenient for readers of literature of the past rather than for readers of contemporary texts. The needs of the latter group of users have only recently been catered for by placing current meanings at the beginning of the entry. The reverse in the order of senses has probably resulted from different preferences of the general reading public as well as from the tendency to make the dictionary less puzzling for the common user (Hanks, 2006, 193).

The tendency to place obsolete meanings first can also be observed in the editions of *COD* published from 1911 to 1982 (Allen, 1986, 2; Hanks, 2006, 192; Kamińska, 2010). Editors of *COD* followed the historical principle for so long, even though the title of the dictionary suggested otherwise: “Dictionary of Current English”. This historical bias in *COD* as well as in *Chambers* was apparently inherited from the common source, *OED*.

## 5. The indication of meanings

Accessibility of lexical items also depends on the way meanings are distinguished within entries. Displaying meanings on new lines and indicating senses with numerals or other graphic devices are well-known techniques of improving clarity of the entry layout.

Throughout *Chambers's* history, meanings were separated from each other by means of punctuation marks. Colons were used from the start until *Ch-7*, and semicolons in the editions that followed. In *Ch-A*, both marks were employed, but colons were used to distinguish “different classes of meanings” (*Ch-A*, v). This is the only edition in which the lexicographer divided meanings into groups, the practice which was discontinued in *Ch-B* probably on the grounds that it was too difficult to follow in a systematic way. From the user’s perspective, these two punctuation marks are rather poor visual signs. Since they make definition boundaries barely noticeable at first glance, the user has to go through the whole entry in order to find the meaning he wants.

Compared to *Chambers*, other native speaker’s dictionaries use a wider range of symbols, indicating levels of hierarchy of meanings. For example, *COD* (currently known as *COED*) uses bold Arabic numerals (**1**, **2**, **3**) to indicate major groups of meanings, and arrows (➤) to mark subsenses (Kamińska, 2010, 123–4). The former were first introduced in *COD* in 1951 and the latter in 1999. Arrows replaced bold letters (**a**, **b**, **c**), which had been used in the editions from 1990 to 1995 (*ibidem*). What is more, in these editions semicolons were used along with numerals and letters (*ibidem*). The most recent edition of the *Collegiate* (2004) also employs numerals, letters, and colons to separate sense groups, subsenses and “definitions of a single sense” respectively (*Collegiate*, 2004, 20a). That the *Chambers* editors have been reluctant to extend the range of symbols is in part due to severe space constraints. The lack of clear visual boundaries between senses is the price that has to be paid for the high degree of inclusiveness.

Definition boundaries can also be identified by other visual signs, such as labels (Bogaards, 1996, 287). What is more, the fact that labels serve as indicators of the subject field or the type of text in which a given meaning appears makes them useful guides in the search process (*ibidem*).<sup>9</sup> Following Bogaards (*ibidem*), it seems reasonable to assume that the reader’s awareness of the type of text which is being read can be helpful in finding the right meaning of a polysemous word in the entry on the basis of the label attached. For example, when a reader of Shakespeare is confronted with an unfamiliar word and decides to look it up in a dictionary, as soon as he finds the right entry, he may take a shortcut to the relevant meaning by looking for the label “*Shakespeare*” or any of its abbreviated form, e.g., “*Shak.*”. For the same purpose of locating the definition, grammatical labels, such as *n.*, *v.* and *adj.*, may also be used (*ibidem*). How useful this strategy is depends not only on the user’s skills and his knowledge of language but also on the inventory of labels employed in the dictionary and its presentation. Thus, let us briefly consider these points.

Comparing successive editions of *Chambers*, one can observe a considerable growth in the number of usage labels (Kamiński, 2009). The system of labels in early editions, especially *Ch-B* (and to a lesser degree *Ch-C* and *Ch-1*), was dominated by source labels, such as *Shak(espeare)*, *Spenser*, *B(ible)* (*ibidem*). It is likely that such labels enhanced the speed of reference for readers of English literature. Over years the editors built up the system by adding new types of labels and using them more frequently. For example, in the sample of 300 entries<sup>10</sup> taken from *Ch-A* there were only 3 field labels, in *Ch-B* the number increased to 16, in *Ch-7* to 64, in *Ch-8* to 128, and in *Ch-12* the number reached 145 (*ibidem*).

However, for the purpose of finding a meaning, labels are useful as long as they are eye-catching and transparent. With respect to the former, little has changed over time in *Chambers*, with all labels being typed with thin italics. As regards the latter, abbreviations were extended in *Ch-8* to ensure greater intelligibility, for example: *archaic* instead of *arch.* *Bible* instead of *B.*, *colloq.* instead of *coll.*, *Shakesp.* instead of *Shak.*

<sup>9</sup> Although Bogaards writes about utility of labels in the context of EFL students, his suggestions are relevant to native speaker’s dictionaries as well.

<sup>10</sup> The sample was taken from six different letters, covering entries from the following parts of the word-list: *bourne* – *brandish*, *gestation* – *gin*, *Mab* – *magic*, *person* – *pestilent*, *sand* – *sarcenet*, *waist* – *warfare* (Kamiński, 2009)



## 6. Conclusions

Looking at the early stage of the development of *Chambers*, one may recall McArthur's remark about popular dictionaries that emerged in the nineteenth century: "... publishers did not normally give thought to either ease of consultation or whether a user was not native to some kind of English. A dictionary was a dictionary, and that was that" (McArthur, 1998, 136). Early editors of *Chambers* experimented with various conventions in the entry layout, which were not always easy to use. When they began to strive for comprehensiveness of coverage, the dictionary showed a number of inconsistencies in the arrangement of entries, which impeded access to lexical items. The problem was aggravated by lack of explicit declaration in the preface of the principle followed. The succeeding editors were more successful in achieving a unified and principled organisation of entries.

For over a century, *Chambers* editors favoured the historical order of senses, catering to the needs of readers of the English literature of the past. The policy of all-inclusiveness was difficult to match with ease of access to information, though some attempts have been made to help the user locate lexical items. Certainly, the aims of comprehensiveness and accessibility can be pursued more successfully in the electronic format of the dictionary, which the *Chambers* has recently been turned into.

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