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# Declarations of Linguistic Independence: The Postcolonial Dictionary

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a people to improvise new words to catch and crystallize the realities of a new land; to give birth to a vocabulary endowed with its creators' irrepressible shapes, textures, and flavors; to tell tales taller and funnier than anyone else ever had thought to before; to establish a body of literature in a national grain; and to harmonize a raucous chorus of immigrant voices and regional lingoes – then this truth becomes self-evident, that a nation possesses the unalienable right to declare its linguistic independence and to spend its life and liberty in the pursuit of a voice to sing of itself in its own words.

Richard Lederer, 'A Declaration of Linguistic Independence'

## Introduction

Crack open the pages of *The Coford Singlish Dictionary* (2002) or browse the rather different pages of *TalkingCock.com*, specifically its dictionary section, and you enter a world of proudly if (to non-Singaporeans) frequently opaque cultural identity and satire. Arguably, these two sources amount to one dictionary, available in print but more accessible online, and standing as an amalgamation of satirical comment on Singaporean society and a source of linguistic data. There you can learn the proper pronunciation of the world's premier fast food restaurant ('Macnoner' or 'Mehnoner'), the nature of the advice, 'Don'ch play-play' (a warning against hubris, derived from Hokkien), or perhaps just remind yourself of the meaning of 'kiasu'. Of course, this is 'Singapore's premier satirical humour website!', and, as a colleague suggested to me, it is accordingly 'for fun', and perhaps should not be taken too seriously. Indeed, before you click through to the main site, you are encouraged to

note the following: '1. WE MAKE STUFF UP ... 2. WE ARE NOT A POLITICAL SITE ... 3. WE USE SOME STRONG LANGUAGE ... 4. IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN FREE EXPRESSION OR OPINION, GO SOMEWHERE ELSE'. The warning not to be too serious serves its own function, and numbers 1 and 4 tend to undermine number 2; it all rather depends on how you define 'political'. In addition, as has been widely argued, one of the key components of ownership of a language, particularly perhaps in the context of World Englishes, is the capacity precisely to take it *unseriously*, to be playful, in short to be *ludic* in its use (see Y. Kachru 2006). In fact, this satirical dictionary indicates one of the ways in which speech-linked writing increasingly cuts across our distinctions concerning traditional authorities, literary or otherwise. Now, of course, in one sense this book recommends focusing attention on non-written culture. In particular, it explores the sense in which looking at World Englishes forces postcolonial approaches to move beyond specifically literary culture. Indeed, much of the research on World Englishes requires focus on many different forms of evidence. It may be assumed that literary culture is not a particularly good guide to the ways in which World Englishes are evolving, partly because of the startlingly rapid pace of that evolution. That being said, there are many ways in which written culture is obviously still key to understanding the worldwide spread of English, some of which relate precisely to that speed; writing, as is well known, is argued to be increasingly speech-linked, most notably perhaps in online discourse.

This chapter focuses on a rather different written object as a source of authority (see Wells 1973) and 'violence'; it focuses on the 'postcolonial dictionary'. On one level, World Englishes constitute challenges that have been taken up by traditional authoritative dictionaries, with at least some success. If English is truly the world's lingua franca, then, as Susan Kermas argues in relation to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, 'lexicographers need to address the culture-specific dimension of knowledge sharing in today's global village and broaden their cultural viewpoint' (2012, 75). As Sarah Ogilvie (2012) has suggested, also in relation to the *OED*, there is a reasonably long but actually rather complex history of such broadening. At the same time, these traditional authorities have been joined by more recent projects which can be interpreted as declarations of linguistic independence. This chapter broadly explores the complexities involved in claiming that World Englishes are independent of the authority vested in British, American, and other forms of native speaker English, including an existing or projected Global English. In particular, this chapter considers the role of dictionaries as constituting declarations of such independence. Dictionaries appear authoritative in describing what has been or what is rather than what ought to be, yet their authoritative status is often translated in order to make claims about the latter. Accordingly, this chapter will explore the implications of this unavoidable tendency to what might be called 'violence' in the context of World Englishes. One case study it considers is the *Macquarie Dictionary*, first published in 1981, which on one level challenged more entrenched authorities but which inevitably (and

presumably *desirably*) has evolved its own form of authority. The chapter also touches on Samuel Johnson, Noah Webster, the *OED*, and others. Each has something to teach us about how independence is declared, how violence is done, and how expressiveness is authorized. In juxtaposing them, this chapter puts in communication their forms of authority and symbolic value, considering, for example, what they indicate concerning influence between Englishes. Indeed, this chapter argues that postcolonial dictionaries force us to rethink relations between Englishes.

In order to understand the structures at work in such shifts in authority, this chapter again develops implications of Jacques Derrida's work, particularly relating to the idea of the performative. 'Addressing' the editors of Chambers, concerning its definition of 'deconstruction', Nicholas Royle makes the following observation: 'Constative language is language when it is supposedly simply stating something: your language, the discourse of the dictionary, is a conventional and very powerful example of this' (2000, 9). Of course, Royle is concerned to question the distinction between constative and performative, and this questioning (drawing on both Derrida and J.L. Austin) is developed in one direction in this chapter. Dictionaries are indeed some of the most conventional and powerful examples of what is essentially linguistic authority. They are representative of what Deborah Cameron describes as verbal hygiene, an unavoidable tendency towards norms and values, found even (or perhaps especially) in avowedly descriptivist linguistics; Cameron illustrates this normativity through the specific example of the *OED*, arguing that 'most revered authorities are those that claim most unequivocally to be "descriptive", and therefore disinterested' (1995, 8). Of course, the linguistic authority is, in all cases, a kind of more general cultural authority, and that is obviously the case when we begin to think about English worldwide. That authority, as regards English, is something that has been challenged by historical and political developments, but those developments intertwine with more philosophical considerations, as we will see. Whether or not we subscribe to the philosophy and politics of the postcolonial paradigm, it is evident that on a descriptive level there has been a measure of what Kachru (1985) calls the 'decontrol' of English in the postcolonial period, which is of course a primary motivation for description and discussion of World Englishes. At the same time, in terms of stability, many of these Englishes appear wanting, their codification a work in progress at best; for example, until (and even perhaps after) the intervention of Cummings and Wolf (2011), it seemed that much attested Hong Kong English vocabulary was specific to the pre-1997 period (for example, 'astronaut' as a specifically Hong Kong usage, which also appeared in the *Encarta World English Dictionary (EWED)*). Accordingly, codification through dictionaries becomes a focus for World Englishes research, while lexicographers have often framed their studies in relevant ways. Henri Béjoint, for example, argues that cultural identity *depends* on the creation of local forms of linguistic authority: 'the compilation of a native dictionary is a symbolical act of independence' (1994, 83). More

directly working in the terms of this chapter, Edgar Schneider, in his study of postcolonial Englishes, refers to the *Macquarie Dictionary* as 'an explicit declaration of linguistic independence' (2007, 125). While many dictionaries may well be at most unofficial sources of authority, they nonetheless do become and are received as authoritative; institutions like the *OED* have prescribed despite themselves, specifically despite their impossible statement of their pure descriptiveness. Accordingly, it can be argued that, in the same way as similar projects, the *Macquarie* intervenes as both a description and declaration of independence, working through what Derrida, famously writing on the American colonies' declaration of independence, calls a 'fabulous retroactivity' (1986, 10). On the one hand, these independent Englishes already existed, and on the other, they required the dictionary itself to make them happen; or, to put it another way, these Englishes both already *were* and yet also *ought to be*. The dictionary is a performative through which, as Les Murray has written (reviewing the *Macquarie*), 'our entire language is henceforth centred for us, not thousands of miles away, but here where we live' (1981). However, Murray's language explicitly raises the question of a newly centred English, a re-centring (although one among many, perhaps; elsewhere he specifically refers to, 'the wide acceptance of a polycentric view of the language' (1991, 8)). What is interesting about this re-centring is that aspects of the *Macquarie* itself appear to undermine centred-ness in general. There is a form of tension in the project, which is exaggerated by the incorporation of vocabulary from World Englishes. This chapter will later consider the codifying role of the *Macquarie Dictionary*, and raise the question of the relationship between the Australian declaration of linguistic independence, and the other declarations (for example, Singaporean) that became a widely discussed but perhaps uneasy aspect of the project.

### Dictionaries: A Postcolonial Approach

In order to introduce this chapter's argument in terms of World Englishes, it is useful to begin with documents of forms of English most usually considered authoritative, traditional, and associated with 'native speakers'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* and the Declaration of Independence, in their different ways, provide a framework for understanding processes of codification in World Englishes, and to that extent the latter seems to be still in thrall to assumptions about which Englishes truly *count*. However, the two are not necessarily touchstones, against which other projects and documents are measured; instead, they offer hints about how to approach developments in World Englishes. For this chapter, the significance of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the Declaration lies in their meaning to people at the time of their publication, more recently, and potentially into the future. We can think about these books as objects meaningful to individuals and broader societies, just as we can in the case of potentially or already authoritative documents

of World Englishes. In their introduction to the field, David Finkelstein and Alistair Mcleery make the following observation about the practice of book history:

Book historians try to understand what place books and reading had in the lives of people and society in the past, in the present, and even in the future. Grand projects like the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the *Encyclopédie*, and *The Oxford English Dictionary* have all had tremendous social and cultural effects, acting as guardians of accuracy, setters of standards, summarisers of important intellectual material. Equally, there are manuscripts and iconic documents that have become emblematic symbols for entire generations, cultures, and communities – witness the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, or New Zealand’s Treaty of Waitangi. (Finkelstein and Mcleery 2005, 4)

These two lists fascinatingly collide the two kinds of text that this chapter wishes to consider: grand projects like dictionaries, and iconic documents such as constitutional declarations. Revealingly, the political documents immediately direct us towards a postcolonial approach.

Many scholars have already developed our understanding in this direction. For example, in her study of the *OED*, Charlotte Brewer quotes Robert Burchfield (channelling Crusoe, and echoing Samuel Johnson) recalling his sense of the editorial task as one of colonial pioneering. Brewer observes that, ‘Reading the *OED* in terms of such imagery – that of imperialism, conquest, and subjection – is the task of a separate book’ (2007, 288 n. 1). That book has yet to be written, but there have of course been other attempts to understand dictionaries in these terms, and Brewer cites John Willinsky (1994) and Phil Benson (2001). Willinsky argues that ‘The *OED* has taken up a new sense of World English, not [...] as an expression of empire and an extension of Christianity, but as part of a redefined role for the United Kingdom and its venerable institutions in a postcolonial world’ (1994, 175). He suggests that this role is one of authority and discrimination, with the potential meanings of authoritative discrimination, or discriminating authority, being exactly what is at issue in his book. The following questions arise: what kind of authority does the *OED* exemplify in a postcolonial world, and what kind *should* it develop? The ethical and political commitments of postcolonial studies are evident here. Alongside Willinsky’s focused study of the *OED*, Benson more generally explores ethnocentrism in dictionaries, suggesting that, ‘ethnocentrism is often most apparent in the bringing of the periphery to light as a reflection of the knowledge of the centre’ (2001, 7). In particular, he considers the ways in which the *OED* incorporates ‘China’ as an example of this ethnocentrism, functioning according to a kind of orientalism. Additionally, there are other studies that use an explicitly postcolonial framework to position other dictionaries, such as Bill Ashcroft’s comments on Samuel Johnson’s preface to his famous dictionary. Drawing on Martin Wechselblatt (1996), Ashcroft argues that, ‘almost before the English language had begun

to be transported to British colonies, its vulnerability to change had already been described in terms of *the imagery of colonial contact*' (2008, 7). Johnson's language indicates his concern about the need to fix the language, but also the impossibility of doing so. The preface discusses the difficulties through a language of colonial contact, and, accordingly, Ashcroft suggests, 'the conflict between cannily recognizing the fluidity of linguistic meaning on one hand and protecting those meanings sent down from posterity by the greatest of English writers on the other, resolves itself in the colonial imagery of contamination and miscegenation' (2008, 8). Of course, that is actually a resolution without resolution, so to speak, and, as we will see, this is necessarily the case. Indeed, Ashcroft concludes that, 'The "Preface" is a deeply ambivalent moment in the institutionalization of the English language' (2008, 9). One might almost say, the preface is the first of many necessarily and even *constitutively* ambivalent moments of institutionalization or codification. Consider Johnson's comment about the necessary failure of his enterprise, but also the necessity of making the attempt, from his preface (1755):

If the changes that we fear be [...] irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? It remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. Life may be lengthened by care, though death cannot be ultimately defeated: tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration; we have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language. (Johnson 2009, 253–254)

Johnson brings together his attempt to preserve the English language with preservation of the constitution, and the connection is extremely suggestive.

A rather different example is that of Noah Webster, who in his linguistic declaration of self-determination appears to be such a 'good patriot' that he has been presented as a kind of unofficial signatory of the Declaration of Independence (see Kemp 1925). (Interestingly, Les Murray argues that Susan Butler is far more attracted to Johnson's rhetoric than she is to the polemical Webster; indeed, something like Johnson's concern underlies but also undermines Webster's apparent certainty.) Of course, Webster had two principal goals in his approach to the English language: helping to produce political uniformity via linguistic uniformity, and gaining linguistic independence. The first of the goals is outlined clearly in 'Dissertations on the English Language', when he writes that 'Small causes, such as a nick-name, or a vulgar tone in speaking, have actually created a dissocial spirit between the inhabitants of the different states, which is often discoverable in private business and public deliberations. Our political harmony is therefore concerned in a uniformity of language' (1789, 20). For Webster, political unity, apparently partly imperiled by miscommunication, implies the goal of linguistic unity. The second goal follows soon after:

As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children

we are, and whose language we speak, should no longer be *our* standard; for the taste of her writers is already corrupted, and her language on the decline. But if it were not so, she is at too great a distance to be our model, and to instruct us in the principles of our own tongue. (Webster 1789, 20–21)

Here Webster emphasizes something that I will discuss later: the question of distance and relative influence between varieties of English. In addition, Webster also focuses on the limits of English in Europe, compared to endless possibilities in America, where he argues it will be spoken by a quarter of the world's population: 'Compare this prospect, which is not visionary, with the state of the English language in Europe, almost confined to an Island and to a few millions of people; then let reason and reputation decide, how far America should be dependent on a transatlantic nation, for her standard and improvements in language' (1789, 21–22). Vast distances are no longer an impediment to influence, if they ever were; indeed, Webster's concern indicates a clear anxiety that this influence is to some extent unavoidable.

In terms of his first goal, it can be argued, Webster's concerns about linguistic influence imply an ongoing anxiety about potential political harmony. Returning to the second goal, that of independence, Webster expresses the desire in terms of an inevitability:

Let me add, that whatever predilection the Americans may have for their native European tongues, and particularly the British descendants for the English, yet several circumstances render a future separation of the American tongue from the English, necessary and unavoidable. The vicinity of the European nations, with the uninterrupted communication in peace, and the changes of dominion in war, are gradually assimilating their respective languages. The English with others is suffering continual alterations. America, placed at a distance from those nations, will feel, in a much less degree, the influence of the assimilating causes; at the same time, numerous local causes, such as a new country, new associations of people, new combinations of ideas in arts and science, and some intercourse with tribes wholly unknown in Europe, will introduce new words into the American tongue. These causes will produce, in a course of time, a language in North America as different from the future language of England, as the modern Dutch, Danish and Swedish are from the German, or from one another: Like remote branches of a tree spring from the same stock; or rays of light, shot from the same center, and diverging from each other, in proportion to their distance from the point of separation. (Webster 1789, 22–23)

There is simply no doubt, according to this view, that 'natural' political and historical developments will lead to an independent language. English in contact with Europe will head in one or more directions, while in America it will, under pressure from local natural and cultural causes, head in other directions. This already is the case, or at least already *will be* the case. What,

then, would be the point in *not* declaring it to be the case, or *not* making it happen? Such a logic can be found elsewhere, but for this chapter Webster is the most unavoidable example, precisely because the issue is the American language's connection with the constitution of the American people. That the more 'British' version of Webster's work which eventually became standard owed much to its conflict with Joseph Worcester's rival *Anglophile* dictionary tells us a great deal about how different the perception of a dictionary might be from its reality, and in this case it was and is perceived as a parallel declaration of independence (see Green 1999). Interestingly, as Martin Kayman notes, such declarations of independence as Webster's are also found for British English itself, although Kayman gives a later example, and perhaps all such examples do come later, it requiring the first modern declaration of linguistic independence to enable other comparable declarations. Kayman quotes Edwin A. Abbot's 'On Teaching the English Language' from 1871, in which Abbot addresses his audience on the need for English to be independent from 'foreign influence' such as Latin: 'I will ask you to consider this Lecture as a kind of declaration of independence on the part of our mother tongue, a protest that the English language ought to be recognized as requiring and enjoying laws of its own, independent of any foreign jurisdiction' (2004, 4). Developing Cameron's notion of verbal hygiene, Kayman continues to argue that linguistics itself functions, as a theory of language, to *legislate*: indeed, it performs 'the imagining of linguistic constitutions' (2004, 4). Kayman's choice of words here is highly suggestive, as we will explore later, and he is developing the explicit intention of a central figure like Webster.

### To Constitute and to Prescribe

Already my comments on Webster give an indication of how this chapter will develop. In particular, there is in Webster a clear sense that the American language already *was* but also *ought to be*. This chapter approaches the roles of dictionaries through a framework based on analysis of a political constitution. That analysis is no doubt familiar, but will be introduced here as necessary context. Constitutions, in brief, seem simultaneously to describe a pre-existing state of affairs and produce it. In suggestive and familiar terms borrowed from J.L. Austin, constitutions are, then, both constative and performative. Writing about the 'travels' of the theory of the performative, Jonathan Culler writes that 'the act of constitution, like that of literature, depends on a complex and paradoxical combination of the performative and constative, where in order to succeed, the act must convince by referring to states of affairs but where success consists of bringing into being the condition to which it refers' (2007, 152). In fact, this appears to be a form of impossibility. Fundamentally, the same structure is at work in Bhabha's previously mentioned postcolonial analysis of 'the people' as both pedagogical and performative, objects and subjects of the narration of their history and identity. Culler, of course, is

discussing Jacques Derrida's brief but challenging and extremely suggestive discussion of the American Declaration of Independence. Derrida's analysis of the Declaration invites us to think about any act of constitution in a comparable way, even a constitutive 'act' such as the accumulative codifying acts leading to the event of a dictionary's publication (although the acts and events are not easy to differentiate, and 'event' as it features in Derrida's work is not a thing that happens at one time, then being over and done). Some of the explicit and important themes of Derrida's brief essay include the performative, the other, responsibility, the promise, the event, and the signature. It is also the case that the entire essay presumes an understanding of Austin's 'theory' of the performative, although that theory (which never aims to be and never becomes a theory) is not discussed, and so it is necessary to cross-reference the essay with some of Derrida's other works, particularly 'Signature Event Context' (in Derrida 1988) and other works relating to the performative.

No doubt Derrida's discussion of the Declaration was counter-intuitive on its initial presentation. Nonetheless, particularly in its analysis of the famous *are and ought to be* moment ('these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States'), Derrida's reading has proven fertile. However, given the kind of constitutional document at issue in Derrida's essay, it might seem difficult to 'apply' it to the dictionary's own institutive and constitutive acts, even if such an application has intuitive plausibility. The difficulty is that a written document that enables the people as origin of political power to define the nature of their self-government is superficially unlike a dictionary. Nonetheless, if we follow the intuitive plausibility through to some logical conclusions, the beginnings of a case become evident. Other aspects of political constitution include the possibility that they give expression to already existing forms of identity, cultural in addition to political desires, and so on. These broader aspects of constitution imply the intersection of political and linguistic constitution given expression by Webster. In each case, however, we find the implicit distinction between the pre-existing content and its form given by the constitution or dictionary itself. A slightly different way of expressing this logic is to say that language is used as a tool to assert or describe a state of affairs (e.g., this language exists, *here* we collect and categorize it). Yet this apparently common-sense understanding of the distinction is one that cannot hold, and Derrida's introduction of speech act theory complicates matters immediately. Austin, as is well known, rejects the *assertionalist* or descriptivist paradigm in language philosophy; when he focuses on declarative statements, he argues that in their expression of states of affairs they are but one aspect of language use. Of course, Austin is interested in theorizing the ways in which language is constituted by acts, successful or otherwise. Such acts include promising, betting, and so on, and are something that language philosophy for a long time tended to ignore. Indeed, declarative statements are ultimately not only statements of affairs but also acts themselves. Taking this sense of language

as performative and 'applying' it to a political constitution, Derrida makes a striking argument about the Declaration of Independence as both statement and action. Instead of being 'merely' supplementary, and an expression of a pre-existing foundational identity as well as political and cultural desires, the written constitution becomes the 'foundation' itself. 'The people' is not a foundation given expression by the constitution, but instead is an effect. As Derrida argues, 'The signature invents the signer [...] in a sort of fabulous retroactivity. [...] This happens every day, but it is fabulous' (1986, 10). This signing creating the signer cannot happen; it is impossible in one sense, which is why it is fabulous. Yet of course this impossibility takes place on a daily basis. And, as Culler suggests, the impossibility is a necessary part of the happening. There is a necessary non-presence involved in the apparent act of making happen.

Derrida's short piece, which is an 'introduction' to a longer very different talk, opens many possibilities for development, and not everything relevant to dictionaries can be covered here. There are, however, other points that are highly suggestive; for example, Derrida suggests that the act of signature cannot be reduced in a constitution, and is not to be dismissed as a simple 'empirical accident'. However, other kinds of text, like dictionaries no doubt (numerous anecdotes about the history of the *OED* notwithstanding) at least must pretend to perform this reduction. Derrida writes the following about the act of signing: 'This attachment does not let itself be reduced, not as easily in any case as it does in a scientific text, where the value of the utterance is separated or cuts itself off from the name of its author without essential risk and, indeed, even has to be able to do so in order for it to pretend to objectivity' (1986, 8). Institutions, like scientific discourses, must become independent of the empirical individuals who produce them. However, instituting language structurally indicates that institutions keep the signature within themselves. Can we understand the general editor of a dictionary as a representative? And, if we can, a representative of whom – the other editors, the contributors, or of the community of users whose usage is apparently recorded, but whose usage is also and unavoidably thus prescribed? Derrida's essay puts in question representation as such (Jefferson, the others, the people, God). The people's independence is neither simply stated nor simply declared by the declaration. Are they already free, and simply stating this state of freedom, or are they making themselves free via the declaration? This series of questions does not indicate a set of problems that could be resolved, in order fully to comprehend the apparent impossibility that Culler summarizes so concisely; instead, the impossibility is itself constitutive. As Derrida continues: 'It is not a question of a difficult analysis which would fail in the fact of the structure of the acts involved and the overdetermined temporality of the events. This obscurity, this undecidability between, let's say, a performative structure and a constative structure, is *required* in order to produce the sought-after effect' (1986, 9). Again, the repeatability that we would casually say is introduced

here is what enables the people who are yet not exactly there, not exactly present, and always in a sense to come.

Derrida's reflections must seem very abstract; the question for this chapter is partly what this non-presence indicates about dictionaries in general, and partly how exactly postcolonial dictionaries are exemplary of the kinds of structure Derrida analyses. In terms of the first issue, there is a danger of formalism in applying Derrida's analysis. According to Benhabib (1994), discussing Derrida alongside Jean-François Lyotard, it appears that in thinking about the limit cases of political constitutions the two thinkers have become stuck in a kind of linguistic formalism. According to Benhabib, they show little interest in the content of the constitutions in question. Indeed, she argues that in focusing on limit cases they neglect the extent to which mere routine politics is not mere or routine at all, but is instead an endless contestation and potential expansion of the political identity (the 'we') that is initially constituted. Benhabib's criticism is significant for this chapter, because while it may appear strange to apply such a criticism to a specifically linguistic context there is clearly a danger that such an analysis as this one may remain stuck in a kind of linguistic formalism, without discussion of specific examples. Meanwhile, the second issue can be refined in terms of how we might rethink the authority of dictionaries in the age of World Englishes, but might better be framed in terms of what should be called a post-varieties approach (something gaining prominence in World Englishes studies). There is a kind of 'illegitimacy' to foundational acts as there is no preceding state of existence to which they refer back. But that is not to suggest that the Declaration of Independence is illegitimate. Nor should we imagine it to be, when applied to this chapter's focus, an attack on the authority of dictionaries as such. Following Cameron's idea of a *necessary* verbal hygiene, a more fundamental level of 'violent' prescription, we should then be seeking the lesser violence. What would that mean in the context of the postcolonial dictionary and World Englishes? It seems at least arguable that the act of constitution inherent in something like the *Macquarie Dictionary*, drawing in vocabulary from across Asian Englishes, is appropriate for the development of World Englishes, which are increasingly clearly not discrete varieties. At the same time, such an approach holds off the moment at which a general global English is apparently described or declared, a declaration evident in the example of *EWED*. Holding on to these two levels of description, capturing both connectedness and separateness, is to seek the lesser violence. To explore this on a less abstract level, we can return to Edgar Schneider's work on the development of postcolonial Englishes.

### Authority and Epicentre: Postcolonial Declarations

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Schneider formulates an important model for the development of postcolonial Englishes (PCEs). He warns that the developmental process does not account for every instance

in every context, but nonetheless suggests that 'there is a shared underlying process which drives their formation, accounts for many similarities between them, and appears to operate whenever a language is transplanted' (2007, 29). This complex process involves five diachronic stages: 1. foundation; 2. exonor-mative stabilization; 3. nativization; 4. endonor-mative stabilization; and 5. differentiation. In each stage Schneider focuses on each side in the communi-cative situation, i.e., both colonizer and colonized. This complicates the process through four different factors in each stage: 1. extralinguistic factors leading to; 2. identities forming on each side, leading to; 3. sociolinguistic constraints that cause; 4. specific linguistic structures. We can summarize this process in the following way. The settlers begin by considering themselves part of the 'us' of their origin, and so separate from the 'other' of the indigenous population they live alongside. Over time bonds with origin weaken, and that origin itself becomes an 'other'. Accordingly, a new 'us' begins to evolve, an identity incorporating the indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, that process occurs 'in reverse' for the indigenous peoples. Schneider explains the significance of his model as follows: 'to a considerable extent the emergence of PCEs is an identity-driven process of linguistic convergence (which [...] is followed by renewed divergence only in the end, once a certain level of homogeneity and stability has been reached)' (2007, 30). In short, linguistic developments follow a drive towards convergence which is led by pressures relating to identity. Once convergence has been achieved, the space for divergence is opened. Authority prescribes convergence followed by divergence, once certain conditions have been met.

However useful or accurate this developmental model may be for specific instances (and Schneider is surely right that it is more useful for some than others), it is clear that it works to understand changes within a particular context for individual postcolonial Englishes. This perhaps necessary or at least strategic limitation raises the question of what we might discover if we lifted it. Indeed, lifting this limitation is inherent to World Englishes studies, particularly perhaps in its post-varieties developments. In any case, a specific historical example with continued relevance and effects is useful here: Australia as a 'regional epicentre' of developments in World Englishes. Discussing Australian English as an epicentre, Pam Peters cites Schneider's model for the evolution of these Englishes, taking in fully fledged varieties, early stage nativizations, temporary fossilizations, and so on (Peters 2009). Peters continues to claim that little attention has been given to the *interaction* between these Englishes. Her focus is on the influence of Australian English (AusE) on New Zealand English (NZE). Peters builds her case through reference to several accounts of English that utilize related terminology. If, after Clyne (1992) and many other commentators, we utilize pluricentricity to understand English today, we can then think about distributed regional centres, which can be outposts of a primary centre or instead can be independent centres. Again, like many other commentators, Clyne thinks of English as centrifugal.

The choice of language is instructive, and hardly accidental or clumsy, no matter what some commentators may believe. Likewise, in her reference to Gerhard Leitner (2004), who proposes the term 'epicentre' for a regional standard, Peters is concerned to pursue the implications of such words. Epicentre implies the possibility of the variety (endonormative and stabilized) influencing other varieties, and this is what Peters calls 'epicentric influence', referring specifically to semantically transferred usages found in NZE based on convict settlement, and accordingly necessarily deriving from AusE. As has obvious plausibility, parallel political and cultural developments in the two countries have led to a range of linguistic connections. Peters argues that AusE and NZE have also developed in parallel, but with AusE providing the ground, through such texts as Edward Ellis Morris's *Austral English* (1898); as Peters suggests, there is, 'varietal difference, grounded in Australia' (Peters 2009, 115). Tracing later developments, Peters suggests that NZE often shows evidence of a tension between AusE informality and BrE formality, concluding that perhaps AusE is reinforcing NZE's evolution in the direction of greater informality (the divide between speech and writing still being much stronger than in AusE). Drawing broader conclusions, Peters argues that 'Mutual influence among emergent regional varieties should be factored into the evolutionary model for pluricentric languages, though it is more likely to come from settler than indigenized varieties of English' (Peters 2009, 122). That may well remain the case, and it will be a difficult violence to avoid, although one that World Englishes studies is already questioning.

It is revealing, I would argue, that Morris is one of Peters's examples, as it suggests the significance of such authoritative texts. Further, in spite of her suggestion (plausible enough in itself) that such mutual influence is more likely to *come from* settler varieties, the authority exerted by Australian English or the mutual influence could well be directed towards indigenized varieties, given a certain set of codifying contexts. That is where the *Macquarie Dictionary* is an interesting example, as we will consider later; for now, let us focus on Morris's contribution to the history of codification. Morris relates that the accumulation of material began as a response to James Murray's call for *OED* contributions, but that 'when my parcel of quotations had grown into a considerable heap, it occurred to me that the collection, if a little further trouble were expended upon it, might first enjoy an independent existence' (1898, x). His explanation of just how Australasian English differs from American English is instructive, and fits well a familiar framework for understanding the former's wealth of vocabulary items. Morris notes that the difference between the North and South Temperate Zones meant that users of English in Australia needed that much more new vocabulary to describe new flora and fauna: 'It is probably not too much to say that there never was an instance in history when so many new names were needed, and that there never will be such an occasion again, for never did settlers come nor can they ever again come, upon Flora and Fauna so completely different from anything seen by them before' (1898, xii).

American English is certainly distinct, with the American climate and animal life requiring English's adaptation; as Whitman's 'An American Primer' (1904) famously suggests, a 'new tongue' is required for 'new vistas'. However, according to Morris, the independence this new tongue apparently demonstrates is not as ample or even complete as that which arises from encountering kangaroos and other radically unfamiliar fauna as well as flora. Giving a twist to the familiar connection between climate and language, Morris suggests that the different 'zones' lead to quite different demands on languages, and accordingly that English was less 'stretched' in North America than it had to be in Australia. Furthermore, this stretching is entirely appropriate and worthy of being recorded. Morris does acknowledge the possibility that the usages recorded by his dictionary might well be dismissed: 'It may be thought by some precisians that all Australasian English is a corruption of the language' (1898, xvi). However, he is of course not prepared to accept such dismissiveness. At the same time, there are elements of embarrassment and condescension in his own reflections. For example, Morris sadly says that 'the man in the bush' has ended up naming many things. Bush dwellers' pidgin English (which Morris insists on calling 'pigeon' English, apparently as a way of resisting the very processes that led to it) is dismissed as obviously 'a falling away from the language of Bacon and Shakespeare' (1898, xv). This process is distinguished from what Morris calls, referring to Yule and Burnell's famous Anglo-Indian glossary, 'the law of Hobson-Jobson', which he defines in the following way: 'When a word comes from a foreign language, those who use it, not understanding it properly, give a twist to the word or to some part of it, from the hospitable desire to make the word at home in its new quarters, no regard, however, being paid to the sense' (1898, xv). *Hospitality* is an intriguing term here, fitting a long discursive tradition of linguisticism in which English is more open than other languages. Morris analyses this apparent hospitality, and identifies two principal sources of new vocabulary, the first being altered English, meaning kinds of re-application. The second source is Aboriginal languages (including Maori, which Morris notes is much better studied than the Aboriginal languages of Australia). The hospitality he identifies implicitly foregrounds the second source. This becomes clear in the following passage, which expresses very concisely several aspects of the ideology of English uniqueness: 'English has certainly a richer vocabulary, a finer variety of words to express delicate distinctions of meaning, than any language that is or that ever was spoken: and this is because it has always been hospitable in the reception of new words. It is too late a day to close the doors against new words. This *Austral English Dictionary* merely catalogues and records those which at certain doors have already come in' (1898, xvi). In claiming that he is merely recording, Morris sidesteps the question of the connotations of his project, and the possible influence it might have. The connotations and broader influence are what Peters explores; perhaps we can explore them still further here, and take them in a rather different direction.

### Regional and Global: Competing Authorities

As has already been mentioned, the *Macquarie Dictionary* is cited by Schneider as itself a form of declaration of linguistic independence. Such a description of the dictionary implies that the dictionary itself was not quite descriptive, or rather was not received as being descriptive. While it might embody a kind of democratizing spirit, challenging sources of 'imperial' linguistic authority, it also seems to have been received as, and intended to be, a prescription that such a form of English *ought to be*. Furthermore, as is well known, the *Macquarie* pays attention to other varieties of English, in particular Asian Englishes. Susan Butler makes the following claim in her discussion of the dictionary's geographical and cultural range:

Our Australian experience has given us a sympathy for other varieties which have, as we have had, to make elbow room for themselves between the prestige forms of American and British English. It is our aim to give some account of these Englishes as faithfully as we can while acknowledging that our efforts can only produce an interim record and that we must await the definitive account undertaken by the speakers of these varieties. (Butler 1997, 285)

It is, then, not just a question of adding 'exotic' vocabulary; indeed, putting it like *that* is to voice exactly the sort of attitude against which the dictionary argues. While acknowledging the simple interest in vocabulary, Butler suggests that many terms were previously only covered from an imperialist perspective, but gradually lost their place. Echoing Robert Phillipson, Butler suggests that the older imperialism has been replaced by that of English as a second language (ESL), which fears recognition of such vocabulary. But Australian English itself is here imagined to be similar to various Asian Englishes, and the *Macquarie* is then a sympathetic form of linguistic authority. Indeed, Butler suggests that these Englishes are oriented towards American English in much the same way as Australian English, particularly through borrowing and redefinition. While there may be an inevitable re-centring involved (as Les Murray suggests), the dictionary is also concerned to think regionally about English, as well as maintaining an emphasis on local context: 'We hope to promote discussion of the role of English in the region, not focussing, just as so often happens, on its utilitarian purpose, but on the role that each regional variety of English has in reflecting the culture of the language community which speaks it' (1997, 285). While this is no doubt a more difficult balance to maintain than it sounds, it is surely preferable to these Englishes being swallowed up by either American English or a monolithic Global English.

Focusing on these Asian Englishes draws our attention to the fact that, in many ways, the Australian declaration of linguistic independence has been immensely successful. The 1988 publication of the first edition of the *Australian National Dictionary: A Dictionary of Australianisms on Historical Principles*, would appear to be confirmation of that independence. Indeed, for Bruce Moore,

the battle to make Australian English independent has been long won, and this victory was one part of the end of the 'Cultural Cringe'. However, for Moore, the focus on independence has meant that all energy was expended on declaring that independence, with surprisingly little vocabulary deriving from more recent transformations in Australian identity: 'just as in the nineteenth century the babel of voices produced few borrowings into Australian English, the massive post-war migrations have produced no borrowings from migrant languages into Australian English' (2001, 55). The English makes happen a kind of Australian identity, a fundamentally white male identity that no longer exists. In terms of how Australian English makes Australian identity happen, there is a kind of lag here, or even a crisis, according to Moore: 'The irony is that while nationalism gave the language its confidence, the language now voices a crisis of identity. *Currency* no longer needs to define itself in relation to *sterling*. That is the end of the cultural cringe for Australian English, but perhaps only the beginning of the "re-casting" of the currency of national identity' (2001, 57). One way of addressing this crisis, and re-casting that identity, is of course to extend that identity across different varieties of English around Asia, and to orient Australia towards that continent instead; that, as is evident in Butler's formulations, is something the *Macquarie* was already addressing or perhaps helping to make happen.

A very different kind of project aiming to incorporate vocabulary from a range of Englishes is *EWED*. Published as part of a complex collaborative enterprise, and famously involving Microsoft (which published the *Encarta Encyclopedia* until 2009), *EWED* was announced as a radical break; as Tom McArthur writes, 'In a serious sense, and whatever its fate as both an electronic and a paper dictionary, *EWED* changed the rules of the game' (2004, 7). His comparison with the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (NODE) and other projects suggests that *EWED* is part of a broader development that recognizes the possibility of a standard core that will enable a general worldwide competence. As he notes,

We have never had uniformity and/or neutrality in English, and it would be perverse to expect it to emerge in the rough and tumble of today's eclectic usage. Yet, as CNN, the BBC, and even Microsoft suggest, the community of English users may have fewer problems at the world, international, or global level than in past national levels. There may now indeed be more conformity than less. (McArthur 2004, 15)

While McArthur may well be correct, that does not mean that *EWED* is without its problems. Some of those problems are practical, as diagnosed by Sidney I. Landau: 'If *EWED* had somehow managed the feat of using a form of international English for its defining vocabulary that worked equally well in the U.S. and Canada, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, we should be amazed and have to confess that a world perspective had been achieved. But no such effort has been made' (2000, 12). Instead, Landau notes that the dictionary has coverage of restricted terms, and essentially is published in two different forms, the British edition being significantly longer. These problems

would tend to undermine claims to global coverage. Other problems are more political, but remain connected with the practical level. For example, Kayman (2004) notes that *EWED* specifically cites the symbolic value of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and accordingly we are invited to put it in the context of the so-called New World Order. For him, this is a salutary reminder of the ongoing connection between English and specific cultural forms. Meanwhile, Benson thinks critically about the supposedly post-imperial version of English the dictionary contains. He writes of a 'tendency to submerge the imperial origins of English as an international language within post-imperialist notions of "overlapping standards" and English as "the language of the world"' (2001, 121). For Benson, this tendency does not leave behind the imperial vision of English, as is evident in the failure to revise words from earlier dictionaries that were perceived as part of the periphery being 'discovered' by the centre (to illustrate, he gives definitions of 'durian' that betray an earlier imperial perspective). But perhaps the other limits to any such project, limits that extend beyond these seemingly empirical 'accidents', are the more significant. Re-centring may well be an unavoidable aspect of codification, even in the context of dictionaries that are avowedly regional, but dictionaries of global English mask this re-centring, disclaiming their hegemonic effects. *Macquarie* has been alive to these hegemonic effects, and so represents a far better authoritative practice than *EWED*.

I began this chapter by discussing the *Coxford Singlish Dictionary*, and in closing I would like to return to issues that arise from thinking about that dictionary seriously. Those issues are to do with technology, but not the kind of technology that drives something like the idea of global English encountered in the *EWED*. Of course, codification has its locations, institutional and otherwise. The fact that writing is increasingly speech-linked focuses our attention on the mechanisms and motivations for this relative shift. It becomes clear that the same technological shifts leading to speech-linking also enable accelerated attention and access to codification. Codification is, therefore, shifting according to the same set of factors that is making its target move with increasing speed. Codification might be expected to reduce complexity and standardize the non-standard, in this scenario, yet the *OED* just as much as other repositories of authority is edited on the basis of lexicographic democracy and objectivity implicit in the very idea of descriptiveness. Accordingly, while fluid authority is still authority, we must qualify this statement with the observation that codifiers increasingly seek the lesser violence in recognizing the diversity of Englishes. The technology involved points us towards an essential aspect of this lesser violence: that it recognize a certain post-varieties reality to Englishes, a recognition that must retain an understanding of the importance of national varieties while also building upon a supranational understanding that carefully resists Englishes being subsumed by a hegemonic global English. This balance already appears a most difficult one to achieve, yet the reality of World Englishes is increasingly forcing it upon our understanding.

## Conclusion

It is impossible for dictionaries, or any other form of codification, to avoid doing a certain kind of violence to that which they record, and in turn to those who consult them as authorities. That has not stopped some commentators attempting to celebrate an apparently innate hospitality demonstrated by the English language, which presumably accompanies its lack of authoritative academy, allowing its adoption and adaptation throughout the world. Writing with a breezy optimism about the power and potential of Global English, McCrum describes the difference between the grand projects that codified English and French:

In France, an authorised process of writing a national dictionary codified, solidified and ultimately fossilized the language. For English, the dictionary process achieved the exact opposite: it gave expression to its contagious adaptability, catchy populism and innate subversiveness. French might be the language of international relations, but its potential as a world language would remain circumscribed by custom, temperament and philosophical preference. (McCrums 2010, 145)

McCrums is summarizing the state of affairs in which Johnson's work intervened, and also the distinctly national achievement for which it was celebrated by Garrick and others. But, of course, as Mugglestone demonstrates, even the context for the *OED*'s specifically historical and scientific method was one in which so-called national honour was at stake (2000, 4). These contrasting histories seem to have led us to our current situation, according to McCrum, with *Francophonie* becoming an apparently ever more 'minor' aspect of international linguistic relations, and English seemingly unassailable as the lingua franca of globalization. Of course, dictionaries are somewhat more complex than they seem, and codifying efforts for English are hardly limited to the UK and the US. McCrum presents us with a 'Globish' that remains tied to histories and controversies remarkably distant from many of our concerns. Questions about the codification of Englishes are now questions that involve varieties and speakers across the world, acting to declare their independence, however uneasily or incompletely. These other acts of linguistic self-determination demand our attention, as this chapter has explored.

What this chapter has shown is that in the context of World Englishes dictionaries have exaggerated the tendencies identified by Webster's approach to American English. As commentators such as Cameron (1995) have pointed out, there will be a necessary element of 'prescription' to dictionaries; as she suggests, 'there is no escape from normativity' (1995, 10). However, what the dictionary prescribes is not only usage, but also that something exists, whether 'English' in general, or 'American English', or some other variety of English, including indeed a 'World English' as found in *EWED*. That is a strange way to phrase it, of course, and necessarily so; to prescribe that something exists, rather than to describe that it exists, captures the sense that it both

*should* and somehow already *does* exist. As Royle suggests, some dictionaries, perhaps those associated with established, native speaker Englishes, simply say that *this language exists*. The postcolonial dictionary, meanwhile, goes further in declaring, through a ‘fabulous retroactivity’, both that *this language exists*, and that *this language ought to be*. Yet that is not quite the full story, for the postcolonial dictionary also says that this language exists *and therefore its speakers ought to be*. That is explicit in Webster’s discussion of the need for American English, which is a need both to be independent from British English and to be aligned to a common American English, thereby to a common American identity. Yet, as Webster astutely observes, the danger of being influenced from afar (from Britain and Europe more generally) is both a possibility and a kind of absurdity. That distance seems too great, to Webster, for any real influence on American English to continue for any length of time, and he thinks it inevitable that future divergence would be significant. However, as the example of Australia and New Zealand indicates, once you have one break, you can obviously have more, perhaps indeed many more, and then there arises once again that question of influence. As Peters argues, Australian English may well have functioned as a kind of regional epicentre. The implications of that example, in the context of World Englishes, are hinted at by the incorporation of Asian English vocabulary in a project such as the *Macquarie Dictionary*. However noble the motivations, the move to re-centre is always possible in such an undertaking, and reinstates a varieties-based paradigm. But influence is far more far-reaching and interconnected in the world of World Englishes, meaning that dictionaries need to come to terms with a post-varieties context, and act within a post-varieties paradigm. However, that does not necessarily lead us to something like a dictionary of global English, as might be found in the example of *EWED*, which, however well-meaning its conception, really might be described in terms of linguistic imperialism. It appears that a proliferation of dictionaries, postcolonial and otherwise, is both *what ought to be* and, of course, *what is*.