A Sociolinguistic History of British English Lexicography

_A Sociolinguistic History of British English Lexicography_ traces the evolution of British English dictionaries from their earliest roots to the end of the 20th century by adopting both sociolinguistic and lexicographical perspectives. It attempts to break out of the limits of the dictionary-ontology paradigm and set British English dictionary-making and research against a broader background of socio-cultural observations, thus relating the development of English lexicography to changes in English, accomplishments in English linguistics, social and cultural progress, and advances in science and technology.

It unfolds a vivid, coherent and complete picture of how English dictionary-making developed from its archetype to the prescriptive, the historical, the descriptive and finally to the cognitive model, how it interrelates to the course of the development of a nation’s culture and the historical growth of its lexicographical culture, as well as how English lexicography spreads from British English to other major regional varieties through inheritance, innovation and self-perfection.

This volume will be of interest to students and academics of English lexicography, English linguistics and world English lexicography.

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A Sociolinguistic History of British English Lexicography

Heming Yong and Jing Peng
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Modern English dictionaries have their direct and remotest sources in the glossaries compiled in Britain between the 7th and 8th centuries, and those glossaries created the precedent of arranging entries on the alphabetical and topical bases, which, together with the annotative modes of defining words, became the archetype of English dictionary compilation.

0.1 Latin beginnings and paradigms of British English lexicography

Starting from its inception, British English lexicography has undergone four distinctive paradigms of dictionary production. Its earliest theoretical roots grew out of Latin grammar and traditions of making Latin glossaries and dictionaries. Its first systematically established approach is prescriptivism, which is grounded on the assumption that, like all other things, language use should be conducted in the “correct” way. Classic linguists claim that rules should be made for the best or the “most correct” use of language. Prescriptive grammar is based on their views of the best language usage rather than on the description of actual language use. It adopts such criteria as purity, logic and historical and literary superiority to pass judgment upon the best language use and make norms for it. Any deviation from or violation of language norms is treated as language decay and corruption and should be avoided, purified and put right in the light of logic and literary supremacy, just to prevent linguistic pollution and decay. Signs of prescriptivism in early English dictionary compilation were the manifestation of Latin lexicographical traditions, which continued to exert gradual yet visible impacts upon the shaping of the prescriptive paradigm of English lexicography. Prescriptivism became firmly established with the publication of Samuel Johnson’s (1709–1784) *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

Towards the late part of the 18th century, historical comparative linguistics, which had its roots in European philology, came into vogue in the linguistic circles of Germany, Austria, Hungary and the Scandinavian region. Through its evolution in the 19th and the early 20th centuries, a
set of historical linguistic principles and methods were developed, and they started to be employed in English dictionary-making. The ideas of comparison and internal reconstruction, together with the explorations in word origins from phonological, morphological and semantic aspects and in the tracing of etymologies and the compilation of etymological dictionaries, inspired theoretical thinking and methodological construction. Those inspirations developed over time into the historical paradigm for English lexicography, which adopts historical principles and comparative approaches as its basic methodology, with focus on the evolution and representation of words of the same language source over different periods of time with a view to reconstructing the pronunciation, spelling, morphology, syntax and sense relations of words from the perspective of language development and exploring the evolutilional traces of words and diachronic relatedness of linguistic variations in the light of historical literature and linguistic data.

The making of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (hereinafter abbreviated as *OED*) is a good example of consistent, comprehensive, systematic and scientific implementation of the historical principles and an unparalleled signifier of their firm establishment in English lexicography and adequate application of the historical paradigm to English dictionary-making.

From the late 19th to the early 20th centuries, the conceptualization of linguistics underwent radical changes in approaches and dimensions, marking a significant transformation in methodology from prescriptivism to descriptivism. Language description, which developed on the basis of structuralism, was widely recognized as the mainstream approach of the 20th-century linguistic research, and descriptivism became the dominating school of linguistics in the century. It has exerted profound and extensive impacts upon language study and dictionary compilation in terms of notions, principles, methods and theoretical generalization. Compilers who were accustomed to designing dictionary policies from prescriptive dimensions started to adapt themselves to changes in the trends of linguistic study and turn their dictionaries into language recorders and describers rather than authorities and arbitrators.

This transformation stems chiefly from the following core notions of descriptivism: all languages are socially conventionalized systems rather than systems formed through natural laws; the primary step for language research is observing what really happens when native speakers use the language and making a faithful record of how it is actually used; all languages are dynamic instead of static and are in constant change as long as they are in use by their speakers. Therefore, the so-called rules are merely an agreement concerning their current use, and all language use is relative and not absolute. The judgment on whether language use is right or not can only be based on the actual use of language, not on the rules laid down by authorities.

These notions, which are the guidelines Philip Babcock Gove (1902–1972) and his team adopted in shaping their monumental work *Webster's*
Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged (commonly known as Webster’s Third, or W3, 1961), have become the theoretical foundation for the descriptive paradigm of English lexicography. Ever since, the descriptive paradigm has been dominating English dictionary-making and research. Descriptivism has played a leading role in the development of English lexicography and has become one of the fundamental principles of modern lexicography. The seeds of descriptivism are deeply sowed in the minds of present-day linguists and lexicographers, thanks to Gove’s innovative efforts in Webster’s Third.

Traditionally, all lexicographically related activities and issues were basically conjured up by compilers. They would be organized and resolved in the light of subjective judgments without taking into account dictionary design, function, compilation and use from both compilers’ and users’ perspective and adopting empirical approaches. Consequently, dictionary compilation was separated from dictionary use and language cognition. That situation was changed by another significant transformation and shift of focuses in English lexicography from compilers and dictionaries proper to users and user behaviour, which was marked by the ground-breaking publication of Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (hereinafter abbreviated as LDCE) in 1978. Users’ behaviours of language cognition and lexical information retrieval are of immediate relevance and essence to cognitivism in lexicography. Learners’ dictionaries, with their origins from the early 20th century and in the wake of LDCE, started to mushroom in different forms and in close succession. Their thriving and prosperity pushed dictionary-making and research into the era of cognitivism and brought about the perfect integration of dictionary-making with language research, cognitive science, language pedagogy, electronic technology etc.

Dictionary users are the best critics. They give life to dictionaries and extend it into eternality. User needs and language cognition are of vital significance to dictionary design and compilation. Dictionary compilation and research are bound to be seriously defective without taking the user perspective into consideration. Owing to the enormous success of LDCE on the market worldwide, learners dictionaries, which made their debut in the early 20th century, developed with increasingly strong momentum, ushering in an era of cognitivism characterized by unique focuses on users in dictionary compilation and research and an era of seamless integration of dictionary design and dictionary use, dictionary function and language cognition and dictionary-making and electronic technology.

The cognitive paradigm of English lexicography is a natural outcome of integrated developments in theorization of cognitive science, cognitive linguistics, lexicography and foreign language pedagogy. It is based on such cognitive linguistic notions: language is not a self-contained vacuum system, linguistic competence is part of human cognitive capabilities and language description must draw inferences from cognitive processes; linguistic structure has something to do with the conceptual structure, knowledge
structure, discourse function and practical experience of the humanity and uses them as motivation to frame; syntax is not a self-perfecting system and is intertwined with vocabulary and semantics – vocabulary, morphology and syntax are continuums constituting a semiotic body; semantics is not merely objective truth conditions but is closely associated with the subjective mind and the infinite knowledge system of humankind; dictionary-making and use are socio-cultural activities that highlight the natural process of linguistic cognition and the mental representation of vocabulary acquisition.

In practice, the cognitive paradigm of English lexicography starts from the links and processes of users’ linguistic cognition. It adopts cognitive approaches and examines such dimensions as formal structure, categorical structure, valence structure and distributional structure to expound head-words in the dictionary and how they are acquired by users. It attempts to decipher the flow-process diagram of cognition, explore the lexical mental representation of potential dictionary users, the cognitive process of dictionary consultation, the needs and skills of information look-up, the learning strategies of dictionary use etc. so as to enhance the efficiency of lexical acquisition. All this entails the shift in dictionary-making from compiler-centred to user-centred, from decoding-focused to encoding-focused and from consultative look-up to productive association. WordNet, which is produced by Princeton University and available at wordnet.princeton.edu, brings the cognitive paradigm into a new phase of dictionary-making and marks the culmination and climax of the compilation of dictionaries on cognitive principles.

0.2 Deficiencies in previous diachronic studies in British English lexicography

A general review of diachronic studies on British English lexicography demonstrates some obvious drawbacks.

First, British lexicographical culture may be traced back to the Anglo-Saxon times, and British English dictionary compilation, in the strict sense, took place around 400 years ago. However, the existing diachronic researches in British English lexicography can hardly be considered comprehensive or systematic, for they are mostly limited to individual lexicographical works of ancient times and make light of or simply neglect contemporary works, thus lacking in historical continuity and short of subject coverage. They fail to fully demonstrate the evolutional characteristics and regularities of British English lexicography over different periods of time and provide a complete panorama of how it has evolved from the remote times to the present day.

Second, thanks to the in-depth research findings in dictionary user cognition and the perfect combination of dictionary compilation and electronic technology, fundamental changes have taken place in dictionary functions and typology since the first half of the 20th century. Works on diachronic
lexicography must explore such changes and reflect lexicographical transformations thus caused. Functionally, previous researches tend to focus on the language functions, especially definitions, of English dictionaries and neglect their social and cultural functions. They fail to look at the development of British English lexicography from the integrated dimensions of compilers, dictionaries themselves and users. Typologically, they tend to regard English monolingual dictionaries as their sole object of study, pay limited attention to English bilingual learners and encyclopaedic dictionaries and give almost no consideration to other types like electronic and specialized dictionaries. Any serious work on the history of English lexicography without covering major dictionary types is doomed to be incomplete and should be discounted.

Third, “dictionaries are the product of the evolution of human civilization and the development of human society. The needs from society and culture are the catalyst for the inception and development of lexicography” (Yong and Peng, 2008). Lexicographical culture is an essential part of national culture, and from the development of dictionaries can be reflected the historical traces of advancements in civilization and the ups and downs of a nation. Owing to the prolonged influence of ontological studies of language, previous studies are to a great extent defective in methodology, as they are mainly confined to dictionaries proper and tend to be compiler-centric. They fail to conduct socio-cultural analyses of the development of British English lexicography from interdisciplinary perspectives, resulting in their separation from the socio-cultural context without which British English lexicography could never emerge and evolve. Diachronic studies in British English lexicography must be conducted from societal, cultural and interdisciplinary dimensions, without which they could not reveal the basic traits and regularities of English dictionary development. In addition, the comparative approach must be adopted to set the historical picture of British English lexicography against a larger scene of the history of world lexicography, particularly setting it against the European cultural background so as to highlight the uniqueness of diachronic lexicography of British English.

Finally, previous researches fail to make historical segments of the development of British English lexicography and eventually incorporate them into a coherent unified framework of theoretical generalization. Generally, they follow a well-beaten path: subsequent to a brief survey of the development of ancient wordbooks, the whole text is almost exclusively devoted to the evaluation of specific and representative lexicographical works. More emphasis is laid on the parts than on the whole, on the isolated analysis of cases than on systematic generalization and on accumulation of practical experiences than on formulation of lexicographical theories. No attempt has been made to historically segment the development of British English lexicography on the basis of distinctive features of different periods and establish a theoretically coherent framework incorporating all the findings concerning the holistic history of British English lexicography. It must be
noted that individual case studies and analytical evaluations of ancient dictionaries are necessary and fundamental, but their separate treatment will reduce and even impair the continuity of history, the relatedness of theory and the integrity of research.

0.3 Methodology, approaches and historical segmentation

Since its earliest beginnings, British English lexicography has been developing for over 1,200 years. A sound framework that incorporates all its theories and practices should be established to reflect the trajectory of its whole evolution. Only when all the findings and accomplishments are collated, evaluated, analysed and integrated can we embrace the whole picture of the history of British English lexicography and put them under one umbrella. Only then can we further portray the evolutional trajectory and patterns of the development of British English lexicography against the background of the socio-cultural development in the UK and against an even larger European socio-cultural scene.

The basic methodology in the study of the history of lexicography should be a combination of sequence, evaluation, and generalization, following the diachronic sequence as the main thread of inquiry and exploration, making objective assessment of major lexicographical works, formulating theoretical generalizations, and eventually establishing a coherent framework to incorporate all the findings of such research.

(Yong and Peng, 2008:7–8)

This general methodology also applies to the study of the history of British English lexicography. Diachronically, focus must not be given to only the ancient period, leaving modern and contemporary periods untouched or little discussed. The ancient, modern and contemporary periods should all be treated in good proportions to cover all major works and periods.

First, typologically, consideration should be given not only to monolingual dictionaries but bilingual (multilingual) and encyclopaedic dictionaries, learners dictionaries, electronic dictionaries, specialized dictionaries and other types as well, certainly with more prominence being given to monolingual language dictionaries. An appropriate balance should be kept between the ancient heritage and modern and contemporary innovations. Emphasis should be given not only to the evaluation and analysis of representative dictionaries but also to the historical continuity, the systematicity of theoretical investigation and the comprehensiveness and unity of diachronic explorations. Only by so doing can we present a coherent historical picture of British English lexicography, covering its development from ancient times to the present day and from monolingual types to all other major types.

Second, diachronic studies of British English lexicography should not be confined within the limits of the traditional dictionary-ontology paradigm.
The two interwoven threads of socio-cultural evolution and English lexicographical development in Britain will have to run in parallel throughout the diachronic research of British English lexicography so as to set relevant studies against Britain’s grand socio-cultural background and relate the historical development of British English lexicography from the sociolinguistic perspective to language evolution, language education, social reform, civilization advancement, national rise and fall, religious transmission, scientific and technological progress etc. Prominence must be given to the interactive relationships between socio-cultural advancement and dictionary production and development and between socio-cultural demands and dictionary compilation and use. Meanwhile, comparison should be made to put the historical development of British English lexicography under the general context of world lexicographical culture to highlight the features and regularities of the historical trajectory of the development of British English lexicography.

Third, the practice of separate case study and isolated theoretical generalization must be reviewed and refined in the whole trajectory of the evolution of British English lexicography so that lexicographical products and culture can be approached, evaluated and elevated under a more consistent, coherent, integrated and interrelated framework. “The practical implication and historical value of specific dictionaries will be better appreciated when they are taken into the picture of the whole historical process in which they have evolved and developed”. “In so doing, the diachronic inheritance in history, the systematic formulation in theory, and the integration of sequence, evaluation, and generalization will become conspicuous throughout the presentation” (Yong and Peng, 2008:9). As English has become a medium of international communication, the development of British English lexicography must be examined and analysed against the broad background of the advancement of civilization in the English-speaking world and the evolution of world lexicography so as to pinpoint the unique status and national traits of British English lexicography in world dictionary families.

Fourth, lexicography has been traditionally discussed from a single perspective, i.e. the compiler’s perspective. That single-perspective mode in the study of lexicographical development must be re-evaluated and modified. The communicative theory of lexicography (Yong and Peng, 2007) can thus be adopted to establish a theoretical model for the study of lexicography: integrating the compiler, the dictionary, and the user into a trinity so that the dictionaries and their development can be examined from a threefold perspective — the dictionary, its compilation, and its use. Such an approach can help free us from the confinements of the conventional practice of looking at dictionaries only from the perspective of dictionary itself.

(Yong and Peng, 2008:9)
and create natural associations between user demand and dictionary compilation, between user study and dictionary use and between dictionary use and language pedagogy. Eventually a unified research framework consisting of three different but interdependent standpoints, i.e. from the position of compiler, from the position of user and from the position of dictionary context, is called forth to observe and analyse the evolution of British English lexicography.

Finally,

the segmentation of historical periods is considered one of the most fundamental theoretical issues in the study of the history of lexicography in any language and it is essential that the division of the history of the development of lexicography into periods is made upon a scientific, distinctive, and objective basis.

(Yong and Peng, 2008:10)

Breakthroughs will have to be made in the traditional practice of focusing on case studies of individual works and the parts of the history and making light of theoretical systematization so as to incorporate findings in separate studies, particularly in analytical studies of individual cases and specific parts, into a clear, comprehensive and coherent framework that fits in with the evolitional patterns and the entire trajectory of the history of British English lexicography. Such attempts have not been made so far in previous studies.

A scientific and feasible way to divide history into periods will help readers to gain a better understanding of how English lexicography has evolved from one phase to another in the British and the general European cultural setting, how they distinguish themselves via distinctive features and how various phases are interrelated to demonstrate the trajectory of their development, thus portraying a complete picture of the history of British English lexicography. The historical segmentation of British English lexicography will have to be approached from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives, taking into account the entire progress over different periods and the distinctive features at given points of time and pinpointing material differences and distinctive features in different phases, particularly those great-leap-forward accomplishments in the theory and practice of English dictionary-making.

English dictionary-making can trace its earliest beginnings to the Anglo-Saxon period and has lasted for about 1,200 years, even counting from The Leiden Glossary, which is based on an Anglo-Saxon exemplar and was prepared around 800 AD. Through refining the findings in English lexicographical research, exploring the regularities and distinctive features in English lexicographical evolution and examining different views in relevant discussions, we arrive at a five-period segmentation, following the basic theoretical line of dictionary paradigm evolution in English lexicography:
the pioneering and foundation-laying period (prior to the 16th century), the period of Latin traditions (the 16th century), the prescriptive period (the 17th and 18th centuries), the historical period (the 19th century) and the descriptive and cognitive period (the 20th century and beyond). These periods are distinctive in features but evolutionally interrelated, as history always progresses in an accumulative fashion, drawing on achievements from previous periods.

The pioneering and foundation-laying period is typically marked by the making of glossaries or *glossae collectae* that explain words and expressions from texts used in the classroom. The period of Latin traditions is chiefly featured by the making of Latin-English and English-Latin bilingual dictionaries that capitalized on Latin traditional heritage. The prescriptive period started with the appearance of the first English monolingual dictionary and reached its climax with the publication of Johnson’s dictionary in 1755, characterized by its deviation from Latin norms and its adherence to prescriptive principles for linguistic codification and purity in terms of pronunciation, orthography and grammar. The historical period showed its early signs in the conceptual preparation and configuration of *OED* and was conspicuously marked by its more sophisticated functional design and splendid printed publication. The historical dictionary paradigm employed historical linguistics and historical comparative linguistics as its theoretical underpinning and the historical comparative approach to trace word origins in pronunciation, form and meaning. The descriptive and cognitive period, highlighted by *Webster’s Third* and *LDCE*, adopts descriptivism as the dominating principle to guide dictionary compilation, coupled with the spirit of learners dictionaries that originated in the early 20th century, from which the cognitive ideas of userism were derived. Only by such historical segmentations can they be pieced together to form a complete historical trajectory of British English lexicography.

After over 1,500 years of evolution, English has become a truly globalized language. Thanks to its rapid expansion into the international community in the past centuries and the strengthened status in the international arena today, English dictionaries have consolidated their ever-increasing influences upon both theory and practice of world lexicography. In less than 500 years, English dictionaries have completed their travels from prescriptivism to historicism, to descriptivism and then to cognitivism, which amply demonstrate the social, cultural and interdisciplinary nature of dictionary research; the inheritance, interactivity and integrality between language and dictionary, dictionary and social communities and dictionaries and culture; and the organic association between user demand and dictionary-making, user research and dictionary use and dictionary use and language pedagogy. All this combines to present the evolotional paths of English dictionary paradigms, which are coherent, complete and in conformity with the true images of the development of British English lexicography up to the present times.
1 The Latin roots in English dictionaries and the inception of English lexicographical culture

Owing to its surprisingly rapid growth over different periods of time, particularly subsequent to the Industrial Revolution, Britain turned itself from an isolated island nation to the northwest of European continent into a magnificent empire that dominated territories over 140 times larger than itself for around 300 years. For almost 200 years, it remained the world’s first super power from the 18th century to the early 20th century and exerted such long-term unparalleled impacts upon political, economic, cultural, scientific and military aspects of world life. The magic rise of America in the New World enabled it to share and eventually supersede Britain’s leading role in the international arena after the Second World War.

The continuous strengthening of power and prosperity of America and Britain over the past centuries has endowed English with its international prestige and its unshakable status as an effective medium of international communication and has transformed it into the world’s genuinely globalized language for international trade and commerce and for transmission and communication in science and technology. It has also given English lexicography the cutting edge in both theoretical and practical explorations. English lexicography boasts a history of over 1,200 years, counting approximately from the appearance of *The Leiden Glossary*, but it has its deep roots in the Latin language and the making of Latin glossaries and dictionaries as well as Old English and the making of Old English glossaries and wordbooks.

1.1 The origin and development of the English language – from Old English to Middle English

English, which has its deepest roots in Anglo-Frisian dialects spoken by the Germanic peoples of Northern Europe from the mid-5th to the 7th centuries, was developed from Old English and spread far and wide with the gradual shaping of the sun-never-setting British empire, initially through territorial expansion and colonization, and in modern times through reinforcement and consolidation of Britain and America’s international importance in political, economic, cultural and military arenas.
As a modern international language, English has reached out to different parts of the world, unprecedented and unparalleled in the scope of its use, in the areas of its penetration, in the profoundness of its impacts and in the number of speakers. Present-day English boasts 375 million speakers who use it as the first language, second to Chinese and Spanish when viewed from the number of native speakers and only next to Chinese when the number of non-native speakers is taken into account. A look-back survey upon the English language around 1,500 years ago gives a completely different picture presenting its evolution from a mixture of British isle vernaculars and northwest Germanic dialects to a modern powerful medium of international communication.

Almost nothing can be found in ancient English literature in relation to the languages used in the British Isles prior to the Anglo-Saxon invasion, and the earliest known reference to the inhabitants of Britain might have come from the records Pytheas, a Greek geographer, kept about his voyage of exploration around the British Isles in the 4th century BC. Recent findings from the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain, known as the AHOB project, have revealed that humans lived in Britain over 800,000 years ago. However, the first occupants the ancient literature now available suggests are probably the Celts, who migrated to the British Isles from the northern part of continental Europe around 500 BC. They spoke the Celtic language, with their initial settlements in Ireland, and they later migrated to Scotland. This is known as the first “intrusion” by the Indo-Europeans.

In 55 BC, the Romans started to invade the British Isles, with their domination lasting for almost five centuries. The collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century caused their withdrawal from the Isles. What fell upon the Celts following the withdrawal of the Roman army was relentless plunder and occupation by the Picts in northern Scotland and the Scots in Ireland. As can be inferred from the Ogham inscriptions that came down from the 4th century, the Picts and the Scots spoke the Celtic language. According to Ecclesiastical History of the English People, in his fight against the Picts and the Scots, Vortigern, probably a king of the Britons and the “superbus tyrannus”, asked his continental relatives Hengist and Horsa for assistance but ended up by taking refuge in North Wales. Around 499, three Germanic tribes – the Jutes, the Angles and the Saxons from northwest Europe – started their conquest in the British Isles and established their kingdom with their own cultural and economic centres. This situation lasted until the early 11th century.

Between the 9th and 11th centuries, Great Britain did not become peaceful as a result of foreign occupation and continued, on the contrary, to suffer from continual plundering assaults by its north European neighbours. Though they came from different parts of north Europe, there were no significant differences between the languages they spoke. After their settlement in the Isles, the Jutes, Angles and Saxons became by and large a
The Latin roots in English dictionaries

The Latin roots in English dictionaries

united nation generally known as Angles. The dialects and vernaculars they used gradually converged into a new language – the Anglo-Saxon language, i.e. Old English (449–1100). Owing to several centuries’ intensive Roman and north European contacts, Old English borrowed considerably from Latin and the Scandinavian languages. Part of the borrowings have already become the core vocabulary in modern English, for example, words of Latin origin such as street, kitchen, kettle, cup, cheese and wine and words of Scandinavian origin such as anger, cake, call, can, come, die, egg, fellow, folk, get, give, hear, house, leg, man, mine, mother, odd, over, raise, ride, see, skill, sky, summer, take, they, thing, think, ugly, under, wife, will, window and winter.

Old English is by nature a synthetic language rather than an analytic language. Nouns, verbs, adjectives and pronouns were all highly inflected word classes, with the first three classes distinguishing between the strong and weak forms. A large proportion of Old English words originated from the Germanic languages, but only about 15 percent remain as present-day English vocabulary, chiefly formed through compounding, prefixing and suffixing. Word classes were mainly distinguished by grammatical means, and sentence meanings were largely determined by inflections instead of word order in the sentence so that word order was not so rigid as it is in modern English (Fennell, 2005:59).

The Norman Conquest, which took place in the ending period of Old English, exerted unprecedented influences upon the English language and culture in both depth and breadth and marked the transition of Old English into Middle English (1100–1500). Unlike the invasions by the Vikings, what the Norman Conquest brought to the British Isles was, rather than advanced culture, predominating power, tight control and the French gentry. The Norman French dialect they spoke gradually developed into an English-style Norman French. Over a considerably long period of time subsequent to the Norman Conquest, English, Latin and French were in simultaneous circulation. Latin was mainly the Church language, Norman French was the language used by government and English conceded to become the language of the majority of native inhabitants.

From the early 13th century, the British gradually got over the tight Norman French control, and in the 14th century a series of events expedited the heightening of the social status of English and its readoption in political and religious affairs. By the end of the 14th century, poems written in English came out in large numbers, which laid the solid foundation for English to become the literary language. Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400), the greatest Middle English poet, composed most of his works in English, though he continued to write in both French and English. Official documents and minute records started to be produced in English, and Henry VI spoke in English when he ascended the throne in 1399. By the early 15th century, English got firmly established as the general language of all walks of life in the British society.
The Latin roots in English dictionaries

A textual comparison between Old English and Middle English demonstrates significant transformation in the latter, chiefly reflected in the gradual simplification and even disappearance of inflections, the more stabilized word order and the obvious intensification of language contact and borrowing. All this indicates that Middle English was undergoing a transformation from the synthetic type of language into the analytic type.

1.2 The socio-cultural background of Britain prior to the 16th century

A review of English evolution over the past 1,500 years or so shows that it has never existed independently of itself and has maintained its intimate contact with the languages of continental Europe. As indicated in 1.1, throughout its transformation from Old English into Middle English, English was influenced by all major socio-cultural British events, of which foreign invasions constituted the principal part. Those events brought with them not merely deplorable occupations but led Britain on the way to the glory of today. What follows is a rough scuttle through those major historical events that have exerted direct impacts upon the formation and evolution of the English language and the inception and development of English lexicographical culture so as to trace the interactive links of British English lexicography to the English language, culture and society.

The Roman Invasion

Latin, a classic language that was originally a dialect spoken in Latium in the Italian Peninsula, developed through the power of the Roman Republic into the dominating language first within the Italian territories and then beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire. With the waning power and influence of the Roman Empire around the 5th century, Latin was losing ground as a dominant medium of oral communication in its neighbouring countries but continued to be used only in the central regions of the European continent and evolved into varieties and branches, hence the modern Roman language family. It must be noted that Latin was then still the general language for academic communication in Europe for well over 1,000 years, though it was not spoken in the neighbouring territories.

Latin influence upon English may be traced to 55 BC, when Julius Caesar led his troops and conquered the British Isles. Subsequently, for several hundred years, the Romans annexed two-thirds of southern Britain into their empire. Latin, as the language of the conquerors, was introduced into the British Isles and became spread in the regions where the Roman forces were stationed. In 50 AD, Claudius (10 BC–AD 54), the Roman emperor, led his troops into the Isles. They slaughtered the Celts, drove them to remote regions and made Great Britain part of their empire until the Roman troops retreated in 410. The Roman domination continued for several hundred years but the Celtic language persisted in its use by the Romans, their descendants and a small number of Celts. In addition, the Roman troops came from various regions and spoke languages that differed from each
other in some aspects, which explains why Latin influence upon Old English over that period was limited to only a few Latin borrowings.

**The Anglo-Saxon Invasion** The withdrawal of the Roman troops from the British Isles left Britain with a great deal of power vacuum, and the internal and external factors of the British Isles, as indicated previously, triggered off the Anglo-Saxon invasion.

Around 449, the Jutes, the Angles and the Saxons landed on the British Isles. They expelled the native inhabitants to remote areas and forced their languages and ways of life upon the conquered people. The Jutes were the first group of invaders among the Germanic tribes, and they settled down in Kent. They were followed by the Saxons, who occupied Wessex and Sussex on the south of the Thames River and the Angles, who occupied the vast land from the north of the Thames River to the Scottish highland. Consequently, there emerged in the history of Britain the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – Northumbria, Mercia, Essex, East Anglia, Wessex, Sussex and Kent.

It can be inferred from the names of the seven kingdoms that Essex, Wessex and Sussex were Saxon settlements, that East Anglia, Northumbria and Mercia were Anglo settlements and that Kent was the settlements of the Jutes. Among them, Kent was originally the major cultural and economic centre, but by the 7th and 8th centuries, Northumbria replaced Kent as the centre because of its academic prosperity. The central role was later shifted to Mercia and eventually to Wessex, which lasted until the early 11th century. The Anglo-Saxon invasion exerted prolonged, profound and extensive influence upon the shaping of British nation and Old English. The Germanic tribal languages merged to form Old English in the end.

**The introduction of Christianity into the British Isles** The introduction of Christianity into the British Isles is an event of paramount importance in the Anglo-Saxon cultural history. In 596, Pope Gregory I (c. 540–604) sent St Augustine (?–c. 604), together with his missionary delegation, to the British Isles, with the intention of preaching Christianity. Four years later, St Augustine was appointed the first Archbishop of Canterbury, and there ensued Christian churches, Celtic churches, monasteries and numerous followers. By the end of the 7th century, England had become a major force of the Christian family.

However, the transmission of Christianity in England did not go smoothly. Rather, it met with occasional frictions and even conflicts between the St Augustine faction and the Celtic Church faction. With the wider spread of Christianity, the struggle between the two factions for the dominating position became inevitable and fierce. In 664, the church convention was held to determine the Easter and baptizing rituals to be practiced in conformity with the Roman customs, which suggested that the British churches would follow the Roman and European continental practices. The introduction of Christianity into Britain produced immeasurable effects upon the British social life, morals and values and English language and culture.
The intrusion by the Vikings did not completely come with the Germanic occupation of the British Isles, which were instead plundered from time to time by the Vikings. From 787 to the 11th century, the Vikings, who were treated as heretics, started their continual intrusions upon the churches and monasteries in the British Isles, and two of them left profound impacts upon Old English.

In 865, a Scandinavian named Ragnar Lothbrok sent his two sons, together with their armed forces, to land on East Anglia. In just a few years, the Vikings conquered almost the whole of east England. In the several dozen of years that followed, the invasions by the Vikings increased, including the Danes, the Norwegians and the Swedish. By about 990, East Anglia was still under the British control, but the Danish had made inextirpable imprints upon the British life in both biological and social terms. From the end of the 10th century onwards, new waves of invasions were launched by the Norwegian King Olaf Tryggvason and the Danish King Svein Forkbeard. The Danish domination of England did not end until 1042. The early Vikings invaded England chiefly for the purpose of plundering and looting, but their intention changed in the 10th and early 11th century to assimilation and colonial ruling. The over 200 years of Scandinavian occupation and ruling of the British Isles infused a considerable number of Scandinavian lexical elements into the Old English vocabulary, in particular common everyday words, which is an indication of their willingness to merge with the local people and an outcome of intimate linguistic contacts between the invaders and the invaded.

The Norman Conquest In 1066, King Edward, who ruled England for 24 years, died without heirs to the throne. Harold was chosen as the heir, which directly led to the fight for the throne and the conquest on England by the Norwegian King Harald Hardrada (c. 1015–1066) and Duke William (1028–1087). Shortly after his victory against the Norwegian forces, Harold had no choice but to fight the well–schemed Norman Conquest by the strong French troops. Harold died in battle, and the British troops were defeated. William became the King of England on Christmas of that year, and the French began their rule of England that lasted for over 300 years.

The Norman Conquest is of paramount significance in the British history and has extensive and profound influence upon the British political, social, cultural and religious life. To a very large extent, it brought the French–speaking Normans into the historical scene in the British administration and made them the ruling class in place of the native British, which meant closer ties with the European continent but the waning of the traditional Scandinavian influence. The Norman Conquest also brought about serious consequences to other parts of the British Isles, for, subsequent to the conquest, Wales, Ireland and Scotland became the targets by the Normans and other French–speaking peoples, and the European impacts upon political, social, cultural and linguistic aspects of the British society ensued.
The Norman Conquest radically transformed the British language and culture and brought about subversive effects upon the political status of the English language, its functional mapping, its internal systems and even the whole English linguistic ecology. French became the language of the upper class, and English yielded to become the language of the lower class. Latin was the traditional medium through which to record the major historical events and pass down the British socio-cultural legacies, but, from the mid-13th century, French developed itself into a major supplementary written language and was not replaced by English until the late 14th century. Between the early 11th century and the late 14th century, English completed its transition from Old English to Middle English, which is chiefly reflected in the gradual disappearance of inflections, the gradual stabilization of word order and a huge number of French borrowings as a result of language contacts, which was unprecedented in the history of the English language.

The reestablishment of English as the official language Over a long period of time subsequent to the Norman Conquest, Britain remained a multilingual society. Latin was used for church services, French for government and English by the great majority of ordinary people. Starting from the early 13th century when King John (1166–1216) lost Normandy, the ties between Britain and France became weakened, which was worsened by the outbreak of the Hundred Years’ War in 1337, a serious blow to the dominant position of the French in Britain. The awakened common folks used their collective strength to promote the use of English, which restrained to some degree the expansion of French in government.

Some other factors proved more important to the reestablishment of English as the official language. For example, the Bible was translated into English, and great literary masters, such as Richard Rolle (1290–1349), Walter Hilton (1340–1396), William Langland (c. 1332–c. 1400), Thomas Malory (c. 1405–1471) and Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400) started to write in English, which immensely enhanced the position and image of English. From 1362 onwards, English became the language used by the court to adjudicate, though the court records were not kept entirely in English until the 18th century. In 1363, the British Parliament officially announced its opening in English, and towards the end of the 14th century, English was already used in official documents and minute records. In 1399, Henry VI’s accession to the throne was announced in English. By 1400, when Chaucer died, English was basically re-established as the literary language and as the language for other major fields. (See Algeo and Pyles, 2009:126.)

The application of printing technology in Britain The printing technology is recognized as one of the four major inventions in ancient China and can be traced back to the woodblock printing techniques in the Sui Dynasty (581–618). In the Tang Dynasty (618–907), the great demand for books stimulated its extensive use. The techniques were modified to the more optimized movable type printing by Bi Sheng in the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and were transmitted to Europe via the Mongolians. The widespread
nature of printing technology substantially facilitated social advancement in Europe, enhanced national literacy education and literary development and created necessary the technological conditions for the Renaissance.

William Caxton, who went to study printing technology in Germany in the 1470s, is the first Englishman to have learned printing techniques and to have established a printing workshop. In 1472, Caxton set up, through joint efforts, a printing and publishing establishment, and, four years later, he applied the printing techniques acquired in Germany and began to print books in large numbers in Britain. He wrote quite a lot in English and translated a considerable number of works from French, Latin and Dutch into English. The number of works he wrote, translated and published amounted to 108 in 87 varieties. His translation of *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye* (c. 1473–1475) is the first English book printed in Britain. The transmission and wide application of the printing technology in Britain turned out to be of special significance to the standardization of English against the background where spellings were chaotic, dialects were extremely varied, and English was undergoing rapid changes. However, the printing technology did not have immediate obvious effects upon dictionary-making, and the printing of large numbers of dictionaries did not actually happen before the advent of the 16th century, due to economic, technological, cultural and social constraints and the limitations of the printing technology itself.

**The Tudor Dynasty** After his accession to the throne, Henry Tudor II (157–1509) put an end to the chaos caused by the Wars of the Roses and started to rule the Kingdom of England and its realms from 1485 to 1603. Henry II launched a series of social transformations. He reclaimed land from the churches and confiscated land from the gentry who lost in wars. He recruited key government officials from the grassroots level, concluded trade deals and attempted to set up the British navy so as to reinforce its strong trade and military strength. The Tudors extended their power beyond modern England, achieving the full union of England and the Principal-ity of Wales in 1542 and successfully asserting English authority over the Kingdom of Ireland. All this substantially consolidated Britain’s transformation into a strong kingdom, paving the way for Britain to become a world superpower.

**The rehearsal of overseas expansion** In 1497, John Cabot (1450–1499), who was born in Italy and moved to settle in Britain, helped his family with spice dealings. Inspired by Bartholomeu Dias’ (c. 1451–1500) voyage to Southern Africa in 1488 and Christopher Columbus’ (c. 1451–1506) adventurous discovery of the New World in 1492, Cabot conjured up the idea of exploring the road to spice trade in India and China. With Henry II’s patronage and authorization, he set out on his transoceanic voyage in 1497. After 50 days’ voyage, Cabot reached the northern American continent. This discovery later became the testimony for British claim to the North American territories and the prelude to Britain’s overseas expansion and the
creation of a sun-never-setting empire, hence a historical opportunity for England to start its journey to globalization.

1.3 The tradition of Latin lexicography and the earliest beginnings of English lexicographical culture

The earliest dictionary compilation, according to historical literature, can be traced back to the Sumerian language spoken by the tribes in south Mesopotamia, which approximates to modern Iraq, between 5000 BC and 2000 BC. About 4000 BC, the Sumerians created their civilization, and their representative achievement is undoubtedly the writing system they created and used – cuneiform. Around 3000 BC, the Sumerians started to make a record of their major events via graphics, which developed into the ideographic writing system – cuneiform. Over 2,000 years or so after its formation, the cuneiform writing was the only writing system used in the Mesopotamian region and proved to be significant to the shaping and development of the languages and characters in West Asia.

By 2500 BC, the first libraries in the history of mankind were built in the Mesopotamian region. They collected clay tablets filled with cuneiform characters, which are found to involve the Sumerian glossaries. As a non-Semitic tribe, the Sumerians had as their major opponents the Semitic tribes from their northern neighbour – Akkad. Around 2340 BC, the Akkadians conquered the Sumerians. History demonstrates that successful conquests are most likely accompanied by linguistic and cultural assimilation. The Akkadians accepted and absorbed the most fundamental cultural form of the conquered Sumerians – the cuneiform and compiled glossaries of extensive coverage of lexical items, with a view to further narrowing down their linguistic and cultural distances.

The now-extant Sumerian-Akkadian glossary consists of 24 clay tablets, with 9,700 separately written entries covering a wide range of terms regarding law, administration, wood and wood products, weed and weed products, pottery utensils, leather products, copperware and other metal products, domesticated and wild animals, parts of the human body, botanical plants, birds, fishes, textiles, geography, food, beverage etc. These clay tablets are ascribable as the origins of world lexicography, and the tradition of compiling such glossaries continued in the ancient Mideast until about 1750 B.C., when Sumer and Akkad were annexed into the Babylonian Empire.

There was a period of silence for glossary writing or dictionary-making between 1750 BC and 400 BC, and that silence was broken when the Greek city state system and the Roman Empire came into shape. Around the 5th century BC, Protagoras (c. 490 BC – 420 BC) collected the so-called hard words from Homer’s works – The Iliad and The Odyssey – into a glossary. As remarked by Plato, Homer “educated Greece”. It was for the sake of such literacy education that it became necessary for words in Homer’s works to be accumulated under one cover, for most of them had become