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## JOHN PICKERING'S REFERENCE MATERIALS FOR HIS VOCABULARY (1816)

### Transcending the Bounds of Dictionaries

**Abstract** John Pickering's *Vocabulary* is judged to have been scarcely analyzed in detail, in spite of the fact that it is the first dictionary of Americanisms. (In this respect, the situation seems to be greatly different from the case of Robert Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall* (1604), the first English monolingual dictionary in England.) In this situation, it has been found recently that Pickering utilized wide range of dictionaries in the compilation process of the *Vocabulary* and that he may be worthy to be called an originator of comparative lexicography in America. However, there is another historically significant aspect concerning the dictionary. That is, Pickering exercised his ingenuity in providing abundant linguistic information by utilizing quite a few materials other than dictionaries. In this paper, I will deal with the aspect, aiming to further clarify the first stage of American lexicography.

**Keywords** Pickering; Americanisms; reference materials other than dictionaries; lexicographical practice

### 1. Introduction

John Pickering, whom I am to deal with in this paper, is the lexicographer who compiled the first dictionary of Americanisms at the beginning of the nineteenth century under the long title *Vocabulary, or Collection of Words and Phrases Which have been Supposed to Be Peculiar to the United States of America* (1816). Read (2002, p. 114), a masterly scholar of Americanisms, acclaims the dictionary as “an important landmark in the study of the English language in America” and Mencken (1982, p. 48), the legendary authority who compiled the historic volume *The American Language* (1919–1948), regards it as the “first really competent treatise on the subject [Americanisms].”

However, as far as I can judge, the content of Pickering's *Vocabulary* has only been slightly analyzed for two centuries since its publication. Actually, the journal *American Speech*, for instance, has carried only five articles that discuss Pickering's *Vocabulary* since its initial issue published in 1925. One of them is Allen Read's *The Collections for Pickering's 'Vocabulary'* (1947). The other four, namely those by Southard (1979), Anderson (1992), Haugen (1992) and Montgomery & Mishoe (1999), merely incidentally touch upon the *Vocabulary* in discussing other topics, respectively.

With regard to books, Julie Andresen's *Linguistics in America, 1769–1924* (1990) is thought to be one of very few ones which are noteworthy. In this book, Andresen seems to make full use of linguistic information provided in the *Vocabulary*, but does not go into the details of the lexicographical practice of its author, Pickering.

Against this backdrop, Miyoshi (2021) has claimed to the effect that Pickering wonderfully utilized a wide range of dictionaries in the *Vocabulary*, and that he can even be seen as an originator of comparative lexicography. In relation to this point, the following is a passage in the entry on **to legislate** of the *Vocabulary*, which I cite to show one aspect of such a situation:

*Walker* has inserted it [*legislate*] in his dictionary, but (as he remarks) it is “neither in *Johnson* nor *Sheridan*,” nor is it in *Mason’s* Supplement to *Johnson*. It was noticed, however, several years ago in *Entick’s* dictionary, (edition 1795); and, more lately, in an edition of *Sheridan*, “corrected and improved by *Salmon*,” and also in the octavo edition of *Perry’s* dictionary, published in 1805. Mr. Webster adopts it from *Entick*.

It may safely be said that this passage indicates that my assertion on Pickering’s *Glossary* to be not unreasonable. At the same time, however, there is another fact associated with Pickering’s use of dictionaries. The fact is that Pickering, having profound knowledge on various types of dictionaries, was far from solely based on them in exploring language facts.

For instance, he, referring to descriptions in dictionaries, very frequently goes further than them. The following passage, which is from the entry on **mush**, is one such example; here, he provides information on a dialect which is more detailed than the descriptions in the dictionary he refers to:

“Food of *maiz*, flower and water boiled. (local).” *Webst. Dict.* [Noah Webster’s *Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (1806)] Used in some of the Southern States, for the same thing that in Northern States is called *Hasty-pudding*.

For one thing, such a fact is thought to have resulted from Pickering’s extensive reading of literature. The passage in the following, which is from the entry on **perk**, will be regarded as supporting the possibility, where he points out Samuel Johnson’s oversight, based on the description in an article in a magazine:

This word [*perk*] is in *Johnson* [*Johnson’s Dictionary of the English Language* (edition unknown)], but is marked “*obsolete*.” It is, however, *provincial* at this day, in England: “*Perk*; lively.” *Specimens of the Essex Dialect, in the Monthly Magazine, for July* 1814, p. 498.

In relation to this example, a passage in the entry on **to notice** may be worth citing, in which Pickering closely compares the descriptions in dictionaries and the language facts:

It [*notice*] is a modern word, and is not in *Johnson’s* dictionary. *Mason* [George Mason’s *Supplement to Johnson’s Dictionary* (1803)] says, it is “a word imported into English *conversation* from *Ireland*,” but it is now used in *England*, both in conversation and in writing: “This work, which we really thought we had *noticed* long ago.” *British Critic*, vol. xxxiv. p. 537. “The fourth, which we lately *noticed*, &c.” vol. xxxv. p. 18. The only English dictionary in which I find it, is *Ash’s* [John Ash’s *New and Complete Dictionary* (1775 edition)]; where it is said to be “*not much used*.” But that work was published forty years ago.

After seeing the examples above, it may safely be said that we are ready to analyze in what ways Pickering used his reference materials other than dictionaries, a subject which is judged to have been almost entirely neglected until today.

For my analysis of the reference materials in this paper, I will adopt a sampling method, treating 113 entries in the *Vocabulary* whose head-words and head-phrases begin with the letters *J, K, L, M, N, O* and *P*, which comprise approximately 18% of all its entries. Within this range, Pickering cites his reference materials, with the exception of dictionaries, 146 times in 70 entries, which account for 61.9% of all entries. And the materials can be divided into seven categories: (1) the English Bible, (2) state papers, (3) private letters, (4) the record of lectures and sermons, (5) newspapers, (6) periodicals and (7) other books.

On the premises as above, I will divide my analysis into three sections, dealing with Pickering's way of using the reference materials of categories (1) to (4) at first, determining them as "type 1", that of the categories (5) and (6) as "type 2" after that and, thirdly, the category (7) as "type 3", which is due to the difference of his way of treating the reference materials. By adopting such an inductive method (or "seeing trees"), I aim to clarify Pickering's intention to have referred to a wide range of literature in the concluding section (or "discerning the entire picture of a forest").<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Use of Reference Materials Type 1: The English Bible, State Papers, Private Letters and the Record of Lectures and Sermon

If I am to show the specific of each of the materials, indicating how often Pickering refers to it, the situation is as the following table shows.

**Table 1:** Pickering's reference materials type 1

Categories (Frequency)	Specifics
<b>The English Bible (3 times in all in 1 entry)</b>	-----
<b>State Papers (8 times in all in 8 entries): 8 such papers</b>	<i>Debates in Parliament</i> (1 time), <i>Debates on the Judiciary</i> (1 time), <i>Duke of York's General Orders</i> (1 time), <i>List of Candidates at Election in Rhode Island</i> (1 time), <i>Massachusetts Colony Laws</i> (1 time), <i>Massachusetts Provincial Statutes</i> (1 time), <i>Massachusetts Statutes</i> (1 time), and <i>Report of the Secretary of State on Commercial Restrictions</i> (1 time).
<b>Private Letters (6 times in all in 4 entries): those of 5 persons</b>	Edmund Burke (1 time), Lord Chesterfield's (1 time), Thomas Jefferson's (1 time), Junius's (2 times in all in 2 entries), and John Adams's (1 time).
<b>The Record of Lectures and Sermons (4 times in all in 3 entries): those of 4 persons</b>	Benjamin Waterhouse's "Lecture on the evil tendency of the use of Tobacco", George Hill's "Institutes of theology" (1 time), George Whitfield's sermons (1 time), and Steven MacGill's "Considerations addressed to a young clergyman" (1 time).

<sup>1</sup> Apart from the above, at the end of this introductory section, it should be clarified that this paper is to follow up my three previous papers on Pickering (Miyoshi, 2016; 2021a; 2021b). As to the general pictures of Pickering and his *Vocabulary*, I hope these papers would be referred to.

At this first stage of my analysis, it will already be inferred that Pickering's *Vocabulary* is not simply a collection of Americanisms, he referring to *Duke of York's General Orders* and Lord Chesterfield's letter which are materials published outside of America; this is because Pickering aimed to reveal the facts of Americanisms by using materials published in Britain, as well, which will be more noticeable in the following sections.

The reason I lump together the four categories of reference materials is that Pickering used them in one single way, that is, he, in the *Vocabulary*, always illustrates the actual use of words and phrases with them; this is different from the case of newspapers, periodicals and other books which I will deal with later. To cite one instance from each of the four types of materials, it is as the following; here, we can see that Pickering usually gave full attention to making clear the sources of his materials:

1. The English Bible: [from the entry on **plead or pled for pleaded**] “There I will plead with you [...] like as I *pleaded* with your fathers [...]’ *Ezek. xx. 35, 36* [...].”
2. State Papers: [from the entry on **kental**] “Our whale-oils pay six livres the *kental*.’ *Report of the Secretary of State* (Mr. Jefferson) *on Commercial Restrictions &c.* Dec. 16, 1793 [...].”
3. Private Letters: [from the entry on **occlusion**] “The *occlusion* of the port of New Orleans [...]’ *Letter of President Jefferson to Gov. Garrard, Dec.*”

### 3. Use of Reference Materials Type 2: Newspapers and Periodicals

As to the specific of the materials type 2, it is as shown in the following table.

**Table 2:** Pickering's reference materials type 2

Categories (Frequency)	Specifics
<b>Newspapers (4 times in all in 3 entries): 2 newspapers</b>	Connecticut newspaper (title not mentioned) (1 time), <i>New York Evening Post</i> (2 times in all in 2 entries) and <i>Salem Gazette</i> (1 time).
<b>Periodicals (58 times in all in 38 entries): 15 periodicals</b>	<i>Annual Review</i> (2 times in all in 2 entries), <i>British Critic</i> (22 times in all in 14 entries), <i>Cambridge Literary Miscellany</i> (1 time), <i>Christian Observer</i> (3 times in all in 3 entries), <i>Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society</i> (1 time), <i>Edinburgh Reviewers</i> (4 times in all in 4 entries), <i>European Magazine</i> (1 time), <i>London Monthly Magazine</i> (1 time), <i>Missionary Magazine</i> (1 time), <i>Monthly Anthology</i> (9 times in all in 9 entries), <i>Monthly Magazine</i> (1 time), <i>Port Folio</i> (2 times in all in 2 entries), <i>Quarterly Review</i> (7 times in all in 7 entries), <i>Spectator</i> (2 times in all in 2 entries) and <i>Tatler</i> (1 time).

Here we see Pickering refer to various kinds of periodicals, in addition to a few newspapers, such as those on religion, literature and politics; he also refers to the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*, renowned periodicals in the history of English literature. Besides, it is to be noted that the *British Critic*, a conservative and high church review journal established in 1793, is by far the most frequently cited periodical, an American one the *Monthly Anthology*, a miscellaneous magazine which was first issued in 1804,

being cited next to it in terms of frequency; he also refers to *The Edinburgh Review*, a periodical in Scotland.

With regard to the materials of this type, Pickering used them for two purposes. The one is to illustrate the use of words and phrases, as we have seen in the case of the type 1, and the other to show opinions and views on it by authorities and commentators, which he sometimes supports and sometimes criticizes. Specifically, within the range of our current scope, Pickering refers to the materials 22 times for the former purpose and 40 times for the latter.

Here, to cite a few examples, focusing on the case where the materials are used to show authorities' and commentators' opinions and views, they are as the followings. As to the use of newspapers, in the entry on **over for under** of the *Vocabulary* reads like this:

*In these expressions:* "He wrote *over* the signature of Junius. He published some papers *over* his own signature." / A few of our writers still countenance this unwarrantable innovation [...]. The use of the word *under*, is as well established as any English idiom. [...]. / Mr. Coleman, the able editor of the New York Evening Post, has repeatedly exposed this "piece of affectation," (as he justly calls it,) and produced the following authorities [...].

Then, Pickering places a footnote for the passage as the following:

See the *New York Evening Post* of March 15, and Nov. 22, 1803. A writer in another newspaper, who adopts the signature of *The Good Old Way*, ironically closes his remarks upon this "awkward and absurd term," as he styles it, by thus employing it --- "Given *over* my hand and seal," &c. *Salem Gazette*, Apr. 2, 1813.

As for the use of periodicals, Pickering, for instance, uses them to clarify the origins of Americanisms from the perspective of dialectology, as seen in the two examples below:

From the entry on **kelter or kilter**:

Good condition, order. *Ex.* This cart, or plough, is out of *kilter*. / This is very common among the farmers of New England. It is also one of *provincial* words of Great Britain [...] in the *Monthly Magazine* (Mar. 1815) it is given among specimens of the *Essex* Dialect.

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From the entry on **old for stale**:

[...] in this expression, *old bread*. *New England*. From the following extract, this seems also to be a *Scotticism*: "The *Scotticism old bread* seems no way inferior to the *Anglicism stale bread*." *London Monthly Magazine*, Apr. 1800, p. 239 ago.

In this regard, Read (2002) has once commended Pickering as an “astute philologist”, with reference to his paper in 1828, remarking the following:

Their (of speakers from Scotland and Ireland) influence on American speech was suggested in 1828 by the astute philologist John Pickering: “We have already had in this country great numbers of Scottish and Irish teachers; and they, together with Scottish Dictionaries and Spelling Books, have had no inconsiderable influence in the Middle States, upon our pronunciation and language” (*American Quarterly Review*, Sept. 1828, 208). (Read, 2002, pp. 88–89)

Back to Pickering’s reference to periodicals, he was not necessarily obedient to descriptions in them, as the following example indicates:

From the entry on **pending**:

In the review of *Marshall’s Life of Washington* in *the Monthly Anthology* (vol. v. p. 438.) this word is criticised as *obsolete*. But it is certainly used by the English in *legal* and *parliamentary* language; and it is, accordingly, to be found in the Reviews of works on those subjects: “At the period when the American treaty with this country was *pending*,” &c. *Briti. Crit.* vol. vi. p. 594

#### 4. Use of Reference Materials Type 3: Other Books

The following table shows the specifics of materials type 3, other books; differently from the cases of other types of materials, Pickering basically does not indicate the year of publication concerning them, the reason for which may be ascribed to the possibility that he thought his readers could find a book of this type by author and title.



Table 3: Pickering's reference materials type 3

<b>Other Books (63 times in all in 44 entries): 28 books</b>	
American Academy of Arts and Sciences, <i>Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences</i> (1 time).	-----, <i>Rural Economy of Norfolk</i> (2 times in all in 2 entries).
Barnes, Thomas, <i>Parliamentary Portraits</i> (1 time).	-----, <i>Rural Economy of the Midland Counties</i> (1 time).
Burke, Edmund, <i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i> (American edition) (4 times in all in 2 entries).	-----, <i>Rural Economy of Yorkshire</i> (American edition) (1 time).
Campbell, George, <i>The Philosophy of Rhetoric</i> (Boston edition) (2 times in all in 2 entries).	-----, <i>Rural Economy of Yorkshire</i> (British edition) (1 time).
Edgeworth, Maria, <i>Castle Rackrent</i> (1 time).	
Franklin, Benjamin, <i>Franklin's Essays</i> (3 times in all in 3 entries).	Pegge, Samuel, <i>Anecdotes of the English Language</i> (1 time).
Hargrave, Francis (ed.) <i>A Collection of Tracts Relative to the Law of England</i> (1 time).	Priestley, Joseph, his grammar (title not specified) (1 time).
Imlay, Gilbert, <i>Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America</i> (1 time).	Ramsay, David, <i>History of the American Revolution</i> (American edition) (2 times in all in 2 entries).
Kendal, Augustus, <i>Travels through the Northern Parts of the United States</i> (11 times in all in 11 entries).	-----, <i>History of the American Revolution</i> (British edition) (2 times in all in 2 entries).
Lambert, John, <i>Travels through Lower Canada, and the United States of America</i> (1 time).	-----, <i>History of the Revolution of South Carolina</i> (British edition) (1 time).
Lowth, Robert, his grammar (title not specified) (2 times in all in 2 entries).	Tooke, Horne, <i>Diversions of Purley</i> (American edition) (1 time).
Marshall, John, <i>The Life of Washington</i> (American edition) (12 times in all in 10 entries).	Webster, Noah, <i>Dissertations on the English Language</i> (2 times in all in 2 entries).
-----, <i>The Life of Washington</i> (British edition) (1 time).	Williams, Roger, <i>A Key into the Language of America</i> (1 time).
Marshall, William, <i>Rural Economy of Gloucestershire</i> (1 time).	Witherspoon, John, <i>Druid</i> (5 times in all in 4 entries).
	Woodfall, Henry (ed.), <i>Miscellaneous Letters of Junius</i> (Woodfall's "Advertisement" prefixed to its body) (1 time).

Within this range, Pickering is seen to refer to the books 24 times to illustrate the actual use of words and phrases and 39 times to cite opinions and views on it by authorities and commentators.

When browsing through Pickering's *Vocabulary* with reference to the books shown in the table above, we can find several notable facts. For instance, he uses authoritative reference materials on Americanisms as John Witherspoon's *Druid*, as well as refers to descriptions about the relevant language information in such books as Gilbert Imlay's *Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* and Augustus Kendal's *Travels through the Northern Parts of the United States*, giving the impression that the *Vocabulary* is a collection of essential information on the language before Pickering.

Besides, he has collected extensive dialectal data in Britain to explore the background of Americanisms, using books such as Thomas Barnes's *Parliamentary portraits*, Francis Hargrave's *Collection of Tracts Relative to the Law of England* and William Marshall's four titles on Gloucestershire, Norfolk, Yorkshire and midland counties in England. Furthermore, Pickering even uses Roger Williams's *Key into the Language of America*, a seventeenth-century description of the Native American language Narragansett.<sup>2</sup>

However, if I take up the characteristics peculiar to Pickering's use of reference materials type 3, other books, which are not seen in the case of other types of materials, he uses the American and British versions of the same title and refers to classic books on the English language. The situations of the two points are, respectively, as the followings.

As to the former case, Pickering's use of the American and British versions of the same title, in the entry on **to originate**, for instance, he, after commenting on the objection by general British people about the use of the word *originate* as the transitive verb, cites two phrases from John Marshall's work, the one from the American edition and the other from the London edition, as shown below:

[...] in *Marshall's Life of Washington* (vol. i. p. 33) where the *American* edition has this expression --- "Bartholomew Gosnold, who *originated* the expedition" --- the *London* edition has --- "who had *planned* the expedition."

To cite another similar example, in the entry for the word **occlusion**, which is defined as 'a shutting up, closing', Pickering refers to a sentence from David Ramsay's work, as:

It [*occlusion*] was used [...] in Dr. Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution*, (published in 1789) vol. i. p. 103: "He had also hoped, that the prospect of advantage to the town of Salem, from its being made the seat of the custom-house, and from the *occlusion* of the port of Boston, would detach them from the interest of the latter," &c.

Then, under this citation, he says:

In the *London* edition of the work, this word [*occlusion*], being doubtless new to the English editor, was probably supposed to be an error of the press in the *American* copy, and it is accordingly changed into a word resembling it in sound, and would occupy the same space in the page, the word *ex-clusion*.

Concerning Pickering's reference to classic books on the English language, the entry on **mean for means**, one of the longest entries in his *Vocabulary*, being comprised of 71 lines in 3 pages, begins with these words: "Many American writers, following the Scottish models, make use of *mean* instead of *means*. *Ex.* 'It was the best *mean* of bringing the negotiation to a happy issue.' *Marsh. Life of Washington*, vol. v. p.

<sup>2</sup> In association with this point, Witherspoon's *Druid* which I have cited is originally a periodical, but here I treat it as one of "other books" for the reason that it exclusively provides the analysis of Americanisms, being different from other periodicals which I have treated as belonging to type 2 in Section 3.



546.” In this entry, for the purpose of examining the correctness of the use of *mean* as a synonym of *measure* and *way*, Pickering goes into detail on various opinions and views of historically famous authorities on the language, minutely indicating the respective sources of their relevant books, apart from the year of publication, as the following:

Robert Lowth's "Grammar, ch. on Sentences, note 1", Joseph Priestley's "Grammar, Notes, sect. 1", George Campbell's "Philos. of Rhet [Philosophy of Rhetoric]. B. ii. ch. 2. sect. 2. p. 216, Boston edit." and Horn Tooke's "Diversion of Purley, part 2.47. Amer. edit."

The situation similar to this is also seen in the entries on **lit or light, plenty for plentiful, etc.**

## 5. Conclusion

To summarize my analysis in this paper, Pickering used his reference materials for three purposes in his *Vocabulary*: (1) for illustrating the use of words and phrases; (2) for showing opinions and views on words and phrases by authorities and commentators; and (3) for indicating the differences of American and British ways of using words and phrases, providing abundant dialectal information.

For these purposes, he, within the range of approximate 18% of entries in the *Vocabulary*, has greatly made use of the English Bible, 8 state papers, the private letters of 5 historical persons, the records of lectures and sermons by 4 persons, 2 newspapers, 15 periodicals and 28 books, and this has all been done, filling up the deficiency of dictionaries which had been published before him.

After having known the amount of background information on Americanisms which Pickering revealed in the 1810's, using such reference materials, Read's words of acclaim that the *Vocabulary* is "an important landmark in the study of the English language in America" (Read, 1947, p. 271), which I cited at the beginning of this paper, seem to be still insufficient.

Here, we may remember Samuel Johnson's famous saying on many people's lips: "Dictionaries are like watches; the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true". Pickering, who has crossed the bounds of dictionaries, may be one of very few persons that fully recognized the meaning of this saying.

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