Up to a point, Umberto
-- the (digital) future of dictionaries

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Topics

☐ The world we live in now
  ■ the inevitability of going digital

☐ Why this is not a bad thing
  ■ addressing objections

☐ Why this is a good thing
  ■ dictionaries find their ‘ideal medium’

☐ What next: future prospects

☐ Talk, handout, and links available at
  http://www.macmillanenglish.com/events/iatefl-2013/
Are books finished?

- ‘When students travel, they don’t carry grammar books, they carry dictionaries’
  Steven Krashen, 1987

- ‘The book is like the spoon, the hammer, the wheel. Once invented, it cannot be improved’
  Umberto Eco, 2012
But reference resources aren’t like other books

- ‘People typically consult maps, encyclopedias and dictionaries while they are doing something else’ (Hilary Nesi, in press)
The world we live in now


· ‘The three things no young person owns or uses and often don't realise exist: an alarm clock, an address book and a dictionary. At university I didn't meet a single person who owned any of them.’ (Comment posted on a Guardian article on crowdsourcing, 2012)

· http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2012/sep/13/dictionaries-democratic-crowdsourcing
The world we live in now

- ‘Ah, this brings back memories!’
  (Student at Hiroshima University, leafing through a dictionary which his professor had brought into the class)
- [http://www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/no-more-print-dictionaries](http://www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/no-more-print-dictionaries)
50 Things
We don't do anymore because of technological advancements

1. Software to go anywhere, as needed.
2. Rent instead of own a membership, a Cinemas.
3. Read your favorite programs on a home network.
4. Read the latest news on a digital screen.
5. Use public transportation.
6. Buy a new car or a second car.
7. Print photographs.
8. Print a calendar on a home printer.
9. Leave the TV when everyone is ready.
10. Even possible grants in a learning.
11. A handwritten letter.
13. We pay for language use.
14. Pay bills at the post office.
15. Scan a friend from a photo.
17. Get a business card.
18. Read a newspaper or a magazine.
20. Get a new job.
21. Have an encyclopedia.
22. Name your own organization.
23. Use Bimbo as the DB.
24. Develop new emf of the future.
25. Buy a new computer.
26. Look up something in a dictionary.
50 things we don’t do anymore…
Number 25
It’s no news that technology is transforming our lives, but the speed and impact is rather overwhelming. Take, for example, what has happened to me in the past 15 years. I’m just 36 and started my career as a newspaper reporter.
10 things we never thought we could live without: # 8 paper dictionaries

- When Oxford University Press announced that it would cease printing the venerable OED, headlines screamed the end of the English language. In 2012, publishing giant Macmillan said it would cease printing dictionaries. Last year also marked the first time in its 244-year history that Encyclopedia Britannica didn’t publish its iconic multivolume sets.
Why this is not a bad thing

- Two recurrent objections

1. Browseability:
   - ‘You lose the pleasure of idly leafing through a dictionary and making unexpected discoveries’

2. Connectivity
   - ‘Hang on! Not everyone is connected to the Internet’
Browseability

- Hyperlinking
  - every word clickable
  - ‘related words’ panel
  - from dictionary to thesaurus

- Online dictionaries offer more opportunities for time-wasting browsing (ever used Wikipedia?)
Browseability: related words

Menu
1. subject/activity
2. part of town/building
3. part of surface
4. size of surface
5. in football

Related dictionary definitions
area code NOUN
grey area NOUN
rest area NOUN
safe area NOUN
picnic area NOUN
disaster area NOUN
no-go area NOUN
penalty area NOUN

[COUNTABLE] a particular subject, type of activity etc
Mathematics is a subject which has links with all other curriculum areas.
Browseability: thesaurus

Scouser - thesaurus entry

NOUN  BRITISH  INFORMAL

someone from Liverpool in northern England

Synonyms or related words for this sense of Scouser

From specific towns or cities: Aberdonian, Angeleno, Brummie, cockney, Geordie, Glaswegian, Liverpoolian, Londoner, Mancunian, Mumbaikan... more

View dictionary entry for Scouser

What are red words?
Connectivity: a rapidly improving picture

- ‘Over 75% of EU27 households have internet access … up from 30% in 2006’
  Source: Eurostat (statistical office of EU) 2012

- East Asia: even higher

- Less affluent countries: digital divide?
  - E.g. Africa: massive infrastructure growth
  - compare like with like: not everyone in Africa could afford a £25 dictionary either
Apart from desktops and laptops...

- The **tablet** market (IDC sales forecasts)
  - 2013: 191 million
  - 2017: over 350 million

- The **smartphone** market (BI intelligence)
  - 2013: 900 million

- Macmillan’s new ‘mobile-optimized’ versions
  - reflects growth in mobile usage
  - why pay for expensive apps?
Mobile-optimized version

- Website detects what device you’re using (desktop, tablet, iPhone, Android phone etc)
- Adjusts screen layout for a perfect fit
optimize - definition

VERB ➤ Pronunciation

to make something such as a method or process as good or as effective as possible
changes designed to optimize the efficiency of the organization
Thesaurus entry for this meaning of optimize

DERIVED WORD

optimization ➤ Pronunciation NOUN

This is the British English definition of optimize. View American English definition of optimize.
Change your default dictionary and thesaurus to American English.
Why this is a good thing

- It’s free
- Space
  - printed dictionaries bursting at the seams
- Multimedia
  - e.g. audio pronunciations, sound effects, links to Web content, video clips, etc
- Currency
  - staying really up to date (not once every 5 years)
New words and meanings: not all ‘froth’

1. Changes in core vocabulary
   - ‘small words’: who or whom, around, ahead of, up to, so, across, try and or try to, everyone or every one… [links to relevant blog posts in handout]

2. Meanings alter, reflecting social change
   - marriage, dictionary, (next update) meeting

3. Social networking revolution
   - 19 new items in main Macmillan dictionary
   - 25 new items in crowdsourced ‘Open Dictionary’
   - all new since 2007 [list in handout]
Wake up at the back!

tweet and like at every entry – but no definitions
What ‘dictionary’ means now

- Extra resources, including:
  - Thesaurus
  - Games
  - Buzzwords
  - Open Dictionary: built by users
  - Blog
    - 4 or 5 new posts every week, 114 authors so far
    - good basis for exercises, discussion
Buzzwords: tracking language change

- Weekly articles by Kerry Maxwell on emerging trends


- Kerry’s free booklet on Macmillan stand or at [http://issuu.com/macmillaneducation/docs/our-favourite-buzzwords/1](http://issuu.com/macmillaneducation/docs/our-favourite-buzzwords/1)
Crowdsourcing: does it work?

- ‘Do we believe this farrago of misinformation, theorising, one-off terms and a level of "definition" based on a count of thumbs up and down?’ Jonathon Green, *Guardian* 2012

- ‘Each contributor has a certain field of expertise… [this] fosters the encoding of a vast amount of domain-specific knowledge’ Meyer & Gurevych on Wiktionary and LSPs, 2012
Crowdsourcing: part of the Zeitgeist
Crowdsourcing examples

- Bird populations and their distribution
  - ‘BirdVis’: http://www.birdvis.org/

- Crowdsourcing the cosmos
  - the Andromeda Project: using ‘citizen scientists’ to find star clusters: www.andromedaproject.org

- Audiobooks for blind and partially-sighted people
  - read by thousands of volunteers: http://librivox.org/
Macmillan’s *Open Dictionary*: user-generated content

- Good for ‘long tail’ vocabulary, e.g.
- Technical
  - *epigenetics, cachexia, monopsony, Veblen goods*
- Regional
  - *kuringi, puja, lobat, shoogle, otaku*
- Slang
  - *bank of mum and dad, ROFL, totes, boo*
- General new vocabulary
  - *bitcoin, troll, cyberloafing, Generation C/Y/R*
What next: more and better

- More complete vocabulary coverage
  - especially LSPs
- Better integration of lexical resources
  - single search route for all vocabulary
- More opportunities for personalization, ‘adaptive’ content
- New range of ‘value-added’ apps
  - dictionary plus other resources
Back to Umberto Eco

- ‘The book is like the spoon, the hammer, the wheel. Once invented, it cannot be improved’

- It can if it’s a dictionary: online is the ideal medium

- Thank you!

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