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Samuel Who?

The Meeting Which Never Took Place

> [Portuguese] has the best of all languages: the pronunciation of Latin, its origins in Greek, the familiarity of Castilian, the grace of French, the elegance of Italian.
>
> *Dictionary of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences*, Preface, 1793

National Background

Lisbon, November 1st 1755. All Saints Day. At 9.40am, the Portuguese capital was devastated by an earthquake which reduced much of the city to ruins in just a few minutes: roads were wrought apart, the sky went dark and the air left unbreathable due to sulphuric gases and dust. With the epicentre of the earthquake out at sea, twenty minutes after it struck, the waters of the Tagus surged up and into the city. The waves reached 15 metres in height. The effects of the tsunami and fires were to cause further destruction throughout the following six days.

This earthquake was among the most violent known to history and calculated to have registered 8.75 on Richter scale. The total number of victims is estimated at between 40,000 and 80,000 people. In Lisbon alone, of the 200,000 inhabitants of that period, some 20,000 died. Of the 20,000 residences, only 3,000 survived. 32 churches, 60 chapels, 31 monasteries, 15 convents and 53 palaces were either totally destroyed or severely damaged by the earthquake and its aftermath.

In the very year that Samuel Johnson published his dictionary, Lisbon, the Portuguese national capital, was struggling for survival.

These were the circumstances in the period immediately proceeding the first ever Portuguese monolingual dictionary completed towards the end of the 18th century, some twenty eight years after Samuel Johnson's and almost two centuries on from Cawdrey. However, it was thus able to leapfrog the rudimentary early editions published in English and capitalise on the experience and example set by dictionaries from the *Accademia della Crusca* (almost two centuries earlier), the *Académie Française* (almost a century earlier) in addition to that of the *Academia Real Española* (around fifty years earlier). However, tardy in starting, would Portuguese language dictionaries prove able to benefit greatly from these precedents or would their example prove overbearing?

While it is impossible to be fully certain, there is every probability that Samuel Johnson was then totally unknown to Portugal. Literary and cultural influences were almost exclusively French and Italian and just as it may be ascertained beyond reasonable doubt that Johnson's dictionary was unknown so may it be affirmed as regards his literary writings. However, Melo Bacellar does refer to Bailey (and Furetière) in his prologue. Nevertheless, in the 18th century, Portugal also saw the publication of the first major monolingual dictionaries following on from the publication of *Vocabulário Português e Latino (Portuguese and Latin Vocabulary)*, a ten volume work completed by Father Rafael Bluteau and appearing between 1712 and 1727. Although this was a bilingual vocabulary — Portuguese / Latin — it formed the foundation stone for the major Portuguese monolingual dictionaries that were to follow: firstly from Melo Bacellar, published in 1783 before that of Morais Silva, published in 1789 [and actually still under the name of Rafael Bluteau].

In 1793, the *Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa* published the first volume of its dictionary covering the letter A. However, due to the prevailing political and economic instability of that period, the Academy proved unable to ensure the continuity of this project. Indeed, the second edition of this first volume — again exclusively covering the letter A — would only come out in 1976 and it was not until 2001 that a comprehensive dictionary would see the light of

day. Contrary to what took place at the French academy where the overriding objective was the perfection and defence of the French language, its Portuguese counterpart was founded with the purpose of "promoting and fostering scientific research, and publicising the results of such work", in addition to "stimulating the enrichment of thought, literature, language and other respective forms of national culture".

Combined with a lack of political interest, this merger of the Sciences and the Arts is the most commonly referred to causal factor in the delay in publication of a major Portuguese language dictionary.

Beyond the first volume of the Academia das Ciências dictionary, that was destined to remain contained to the letter A throughout over two centuries, the 18th century did see the publication of the first two Portuguese language dictionaries: by Melo Bacellar (1783) and Morais Silva (1789).

The Preface

Not one of these two dictionaries features either any of the preparatory work or refers to how any of the difficulties encountered were actually overcome. Neither of these two works gained the insights of something like the *Plan of a Dictionary* that Johnson set out to Philip Dormer*,* nor did they gain any preface detailing the main areas of difficulty encountered by the lexicographer. However, the authors do take the opportunity presented by their preface to make some complaints as to the hardships of their scholarly labours and to provide vague references to some of the options taken. Nevertheless, absolutely nothing is known as to who actually consulted these dictionaries or as to the scope of their readership. The Melo Bacellar dictionary includes a Prologue followed by a Philosophic Grammar designed to enable readers to understand and apply all the words to be found in the dictionary. It is a 61 page long study that explains just how consultation of the grammar complemented that of a dictionary. Bacellar invoked the "system of desired brevity" that did not enable him to contain within the dictionary what readers would be able to clarify by referring to a grammar

manual while explaining that many vocabularies do not feature grammatical specifications given that:

> the qualities of names, verbs and adverbs are dealt with well by the Grammar with explanations provided of their respective roots and I suppose that no further definitions are needed by those wishing to ponder upon them.

The first Portuguese language dictionary was therefore structured according to a "system of desired brevity" and thus spurning any grammatical explanations to closely resemble a glossary. It should however be noted that Melo Bacellar set out words along with their respective derivatives and very often their etymology. For instance:

> *Dissua-dir (Dissuade), dido, são, sor, sório* (dissuadere), despersuadir (discourage)
>
> *Disput-ar (Dispute), a, ado, ador, ável,* argumentar (argue), altercar (altercate)

This derived out of a rising tide of interest generated by contact between Portuguese and other languages, in particular French and Italian. The dictionary now began to be presented in a new light and shedding the encyclopaedia component then very much in vogue:

> Those left unsatisfied by them [the explanations] should consult an Encyclopaedia, and not a language Dictionary, which is under no obligation to provide scientific definitions.

Johnson would later take a similar position.

The Corpus

Although innovative in its morphemic referencing and, given the period, with a broad corpus awareness as well as being innovative in the eradication of grammar and encyclopaedia, the explanations given by Melo Bacellar do

nevertheless remain highly primitive. Take for example, Melo Bacellar's entries in comparison with the already mature explanations set out by Johnson. According to Johnson, and for example, the abdomen is:

> a cavity commonly called the lower venter or belly: it contains the stomach, guts, liver, spleen, bladder, and is within lined as a membrane called the peritoneum; the lower part is called the hypogastrium [hip1Ugaestrium]; the foremost part is divided into the epigastrium, the right and left hypochondria and the navel; 'tis bounded above by the cartilago ensiformis and the diaphragm, sideways by the short or lower ribs and behind by the vertebrae of the loins, the bones from the coxendrix, that of the pube and os sacrum. It is covered with several muscles, that of whose alternate relaxations and contractions in respiration, digestion is forwarded, and the due motions of all the parts therein contained promoted, both for secretion and expulsion.

While Melo Bacellar limits his definition of the abdomen to: "part of the bellybutton"

For electricity, Johnson provides the following description:

> a property in some bodies, whereby, when rubbed so as to grow warm, they draw little bits of paper, or such like substances, to them.
>
> Such was the account given a few years ago of electricity; but the industry of the present age, first excited by the experiments of Gray, has discovered in electricity a multitude of philosophical wonders. Bodies electrified by a sphere of glass, turned nimbly round, not only emit flame, but may be fitted with such quantity of the electrical vapour, as, if discharged at once upon a human body, would endanger life. The force of this vapour has hitherto appeared instantaneous, persons at both ends of a long chain seeming to be struch at once. The philosophers are now endeavouring to intercept the stroles of lighting.

Melo Bacellar limits his ambitions to associating the word with amber.

While the entry given by Johnson is not especially thorough, even by the standards of the time, it does unquestionably demonstrate his efforts to develop it. The word electricity derives from the Latin *electricus*, which literally means "produced by amber subject to friction" and hence the information that Melo Bacellar opts to convey. This term does in fact have its origins in the Greek word for amber, *elektron*. However, Johnson shows that he was informed of the studies undertaken by Stephen Gray, who was no older than 26 years of age at the time (1729). Melo Bacellar may perhaps have considered that such explanations belonged to the field of encyclopaedias.

The extent to which Johnson strove for accuracy is truly impressive. Compare the explanations for *elixir*:

> a medicine made by strong infusion, where the ingredients are almost dissolved in the menstruum, and give it a thicker consistence than a tincture.

He then went onto provide three more entries while Melo Bacellar defines *elixir* as a:

> bebida toda saudável
>
> (very healthy drink)

This sparse approach to explanations borders on the vacuous on occasion. Such is the case with *cabra* [goat], for example, described by Melo Bacellar as:

> animal de pêlo
>
> (hairy animal)

Johnson is somewhat more precise:

> a ruminant animal that seems a middle species between deer and sheep.

Johnson explains *green* as:

> having a colour formed commonly by compounding blue and yellow; of the colour of the leaves of trees or herbs.

And then goes onto provide 5 more subentries while Melo Bacellar merely gets round to:

> cor de erva sem secar; cor sobre o alegre, branco e dourado. (colour of undried grass, colour from happiness, white and gold)

For *monkey,* Johnson details:

> an ape, a baboon, a jackanapes. An animal bearing some resemblance of men; a word of contempt, or slight kindness.

The Portuguese lexicographer restricts himself to:

> animal de trejeitos delirantes
>
> (an animal with delirious features)

Johnson defines a *wheel* as:

> a circular body that turns round upon an axis

The Portuguese explanation does come up with a powerful image but very simplistically defining a wheel as:

> uma bola chata
>
> a flat ball

We do not know how much of this may be attributed to the "system of desired brevity" and how much was deemed more appropriate for encyclopaedias. The truth is also that Johnson is not consistent in his distinction consequently impacting on his concept of what constitutes a Language Dictionary and an encyclopaedia. The fact is, in the 18th century, attempts at drafting encyclopaedias predated dictionaries. Even while very limited and

frequently considered to have been a failure in practice, Melo Bacellar does manage to be more coherent on many occasions.

Furthermore, the thoroughness of Johnson frequently leads down strange avenues and sometimes rigorous to a fault. We may draw attention to the entries for *etch, minnock, skilt* and *stammel,* for example, Johnson states:

> Of this word I know not the meaning

and for *dogbolt,* he posits an explanation:

> Of this word I know not the meaning, unless it be […]

Indeed, this thoroughness of Johnson frequently turns out to be more image than actual substance. Melo Bacellar demonstrates greater coherence, never ventures opinions and is closer in line to the image that we today share as to the role of a lexicographer.

The Melo Bacellar dictionary came out 176 years after that of Cawdrey and 26 years after the publication of Johnson's work. We have already stated that it is all but certain that they never met and it is important not to forget that this dictionary is the very first in the Portuguese language.

Furthermore, the concerns raised by Johnson in his letter to Philip Dormer are repeated in Portugal with particular attention paid to orthographic questions and the prescriptive character of a dictionary.

Patriotism and Disinterest in the Nation

There are an additional two constant concerns common to 18th century Europe in general and Johnson in particular: enriching the patriotic spirit and complaining of the lack of public interest.

The first Portuguese dictionaries were very much the work of individuals with little detail given as to the underlying assumptions. A dictionary, they defended, had to make a stand in defence of the dignity of a language as a form

of national identity. Morais Silva, author of the second Portuguese dictionary, for example, compared language to a faithful set of scales on which the progress of national civilisation could be fairly judged. He then proceeded to explain any defects that his work might contain as due only to the difficulty and loneliness of his endeavours before adding that the dictionary he had produced had been considered “if not absolutely perfect, at least the best of the several existing and in any case capable of meeting the highly important ends for which it was designed”. Furthermore, he then defined these ends as “public utility, the glory and reputation of Portuguese”.

Again, without ever being able to be completely certain, all the evidence does suggest that the first Portuguese dictionary makers were aware of the works produced by the major European Academies, but not of the English dictionaries from Cawdrey or Johnson, with the exception of Bailey. And the late arrival of the first Portuguese dictionaries meant they never **only** expressed concern about focusing on difficult words, although Melo Bacellar still felt the need to justify the study of any Portuguese word "even those of the least importance". This need for justification had already been encountered among those responsible for the English dictionaries of the same period such as Nathan Bailey, Joseph Scott and Samuel Johnson, for example. As Johnson stated in his *Preface*:

> Some of the examples have been taken from writers who were never mentioned as masters of elegance or models of stile; but words must be sought where they are used.
>
> […]
>
> Some words, indeed, stand unsupported by any authority […] seldom occurring in books, or words of which I have no reason to doubt the existence.

Correspondingly, the corpus of a dictionary had still to be fully defined. On the one hand, consensus began to be built up around the idea that a dictionary

should contain all the words within a particular language, all registries and all styles. However, on the other hand, there remained those sweeping patriotic ideas so common to the 18th century. The objective of a dictionary was all about ennobling the nation and defending the purity of its language. However, this purity and the inclusion of ALL words are not easily reconcilable concepts. How then to achieve this apparently contradictory feat?

For the good of nation, there was deemed the need to teach, to regulate, to stabilise. We continually encounter this duty to purify the language, but this was now accompanied by the concept of "fixing" the language. Johnson, himself, during the course of producing his dictionary, came to defend this idea of fixing a language that seemed on the verge of being overwhelmed by successive corruptions. One of the sources identified as bringing about this corruption was (bad) foreign influences. Language, Johnson maintained, should be set down and remain intact and untouchable:

> The words which our authors have introduced by their knowledge of foreign languages, or ignorance of their own, by vanity or wantonness, by compliance registered as they occurred, though commonly only to censure them, and warn others with fashion, or lust of innovation, I have against the folly of naturalizing useless foreigners to the injury of the natives.
>
> *Preface,* 1755

Only the 1793 Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa dictionary would later express concern as to how such a project cannot be left to a single individual and how a balance had to be struck between the many issues posed in order to ensure coherent development. Indeed, this work is the first to include, in addition to the prologue, the *Planta para se Formar um Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa (Plan to Establish a Portuguese Language Dictionary).* The Prologue further reflects the prescriptive approach particular to those times:

> It is not the intention of this Academy to merely draw up some simple Vocabulary of Portuguese Words but rather to generally establish the national idiom.

This objective of *fixing the national language* was deeply rooted in the spirit of the 18th century. Johnson also did not prove immune to this dream having proposed in his letter written to Philip Dormer "to fix the English Language". Nine years later, nevertheless, Johnson would go onto to state in the preface of his dictionary:

> When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, from century to century, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided, who being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power to change sublunary nature, or clear the world at once from folly, vanity and affection.

Also in keeping with the tradition set by the first English lexicographers and by writers such as Jonathan Swift for example, the first Portuguese lexicographers reveal how they understood that the objective of the lexicographer is to render (or aim at rendering) the language pure and eloquent, as is indeed stated in the objectives of the French Academy. This was thus coherent with the practice of choosing the "best writers" and "the choicest words". Johnson had, however, already abandoned this utopian ideal, declaring in his Preface:

> Some of the examples have been taken from writers who were never mentioned as masters of elegance or models of stile; but words must be sought where they are used […] Some words, indeed, stand unsupported by any authority […]

The Portuguese Academy, however, believed it would be able to, not only establish the national idiom, but achieve this through recourse to the "authority of our best writers".

Melo Bacellar accepts the concept that Portuguese derives from Greek and that Greek is the language closest to perfection:

> Le plus beau de tous les langages doit être celui qui est à la fois le plus complet, le plus sonore, le plus varié dans ses tours, et le plus régulier dans sa marche; celui qui a le plus de mots composés, celui qui, par sa Prosodie, exprime le mieux les movements lents et impetueux de l' ame, celui qui ressemble le plus à la Musique. Le Grec a tous ses avantages.

And very similar to Greek is Portuguese, its descendent, adds Melo Bacellar..

in Melo Bacellar, *Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa*

In fact, Melo Bacellar takes this for granted. However, it unfortunately was only in the 1948 re-edited preface to the Morais Silva dictionary that the question of etymology and true vernacular would be raised.

Morais Silva further felt the need to turn against the long literary tradition of resorting to words of Greco-Latin formation justifying his discarding of so many Latinate terms: "these I leave to the Latin reader as my intent is to explain only that which appears to be pure Portuguese".

The debate remained ongoing, seeking out terms either of classical inspiration, that is, Greek and Latin and those difficult words so fashionable among intellectuals of that period, or words of intrinsically Portuguese origin. This controversy had been carried over from the 15th and 16th centuries with some authors maintaining that imports were imports irrespective of whether they came from Latin or some more modern language. However, others held that words

derived from or “recreated” based on Latin or Greek could not be considered true neologisms given the historic origins of the Portuguese language. Still others declared it unacceptable that a language with strong cultural traditions, such as Portuguese, did not contain within it the mechanisms necessary for creation ending up having to resort to other languages to meet eventual requirements.

The Life of a Lexicographer

The first major difficulty mentioned, and common to all authors, is rather the seemingly immense scale and loneliness of the project. All the aforementioned dictionary makers express how they feel misunderstood in their efforts given the lack of public recognition of their Herculean tasks. Throughout, Melo Bacellar sounds a similar note to Johnson. He tells us of “the excruciating labours" and the “difficulties of the work” before affirming that he has worked “more than he should have and beyond his physical capacities” before reminding us that:

> The enlightened France, wishing to complete a similar [task] set up an Academy of 40 experts, all carefully selected, provided with support and continuously working throughout 148 years. Meeting three times a week to discuss doubts, the fruit of their labours has been a French language dictionary that is now into its fourth printing after having undergone so many amendments and still they work on to correct it still further. I, who work alone, share fewer principles than I can afford not having been selected, supported and without those in whom I could confide, not yet 48 years of age, the fruit of my labours is this Dictionary of the Portuguese Language.

In effect, Johnson also complained of his work that could not have been completed “without any higher quality than that of bearing burthens with dull patience, and beating the track of the alphabet with sluggish resolution” while also comparing his work with that of the French Academy. Johnson declared how his dictionary would be put together in three years while pointing out that the

Academy took 40 years to come up with its dictionary. Hence, and taking into account that that institution was made up of 40 men, Johnson bragged:

> This is the proportion. Let me see: forty times forty is sixteen hundred. As three to sixteen hundred, so is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman.

The preface from Morais Silva also refers to this "laborious and arduous task, and how it could only be completed through incessant, and often highly tedious, study", stating that such difficulty was compounded by the "harmful dearth of good writings". The Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa, in the prologue to its first edition (1793), makes further reference to how its work went "beyond due diligence and application beyond the norm" mentioning "the human fatigue and wearisome readings". And all in service of national development and ennoblement.

Johnson had already resorted to taking refuge behind the sheer difficulties involved and, in the letter written to Philip Dormer, he confessed he felt:

> frighted at its extent, and, like the soldiers of Caesar, look on Britain as a new world, which is almost madness to invade. But I hope, that though I should not complete the conquest, I shall at least discover the coast, civilize part of the inhabitants, and make it easy for some other adventurer to proceed farther, to reduce them wholly to subjection, and settle them under laws.

Recognising the difficulties, Johnson stated:

> A perfect performance of any kind is not to be expected.

Before adding:

> Dictionaries are like watches, the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to be quite true.

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