

## CHAPTER I

*Introduction*

**‘Nous nous étonnâmes, de voir l’Abada’: a dictionary  
reader at work**

‘Nous nous étonnâmes, de voir l’Abada’, wrote Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz in 1696: ‘We were astonished to see the rhinoceros’. What was astonishing about this rhinoceros was its place in Thomas Corneille’s *Dictionnaire des arts et des sciences* of 1694, and the manner of its treatment:

A friend being with me very recently, we looked together at the Dictionary [i.e. Corneille’s], together with that of the academy [i.e. the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* of the same year]. We were astonished to see the rhinoceros and certain other exotic animals extensively described, although they are objects which are never brought into conversation. Or if they are, the person who mentions them explains directly what they are. That is how all the sciences must always be introduced.<sup>1</sup>

Leibniz and his friend evidently expected that even a dictionary of the arts and sciences – in other words, of relatively technical vocabulary – would leave lengthy factual accounts to specialist works: the encyclopedic entry for *abada* stands out on the first page of Corneille’s *Dictionnaire*, being longer than the other eight put together. They also commented on what they perceived to be the inadequacies of the main dictionary’s status marking – ‘one would often be very glad to know whether a word can be used without reservation, or whether it is old, low, provincial ...’ – on the imprecision of definitions such as that for *canapé*, and on the calumnies to be detected in Corneille’s entry *Lutheriens*.<sup>2</sup>

Leibniz and his friend were living in a period in which lexicography was more active than it had ever been before. Antoine Furetière, writing in 1685, remarked that ‘the whole literary world agrees that there cannot be too many dictionaries’.<sup>3</sup> Five years later, Pierre Bayle wrote that it would be difficult to count all the dictionaries, republished and original,

which had appeared in the last fifteen to twenty years.<sup>4</sup> A correspondent of the *Bibliothèque germanique* wrote from Leipzig in 1720 that ‘an innumerable number of dictionaries’ had been appearing in Germany; a writer in The Hague observed in 1754 that ‘We are in the age of dictionaries.’<sup>5</sup> The German lexicographer Johann Leonhard Frisch wrote in the preface to his dictionary of 1741 of ‘the lexicophilia, or love of lexicon-writing of so many learned people, indeed the lexicomania ... of this age’.<sup>6</sup> Samuel Johnson, writing to the novelist and printer Samuel Richardson in 1754, the year before the publication of his own *Dictionary of the English Language*, referred to ‘this age of dictionaries’.<sup>7</sup> The systematization of knowledge which was such an important activity from the sixteenth century onwards had by the beginning of the eighteenth century been finding expression not only in vast encyclopedic compilations such as Johann Jacob Hofmann’s *Lexicon universale* of 1677 and Louis Moréri’s *Grand dictionnaire historique* of 1674, but in a profusion of lexical dictionaries of ancient and modern languages.<sup>8</sup> The dictionaries were perhaps on a less magnificent scale than the encyclopedic works; a few years before his reading of Corneille’s dictionary, Leibniz had remarked to Daniel Georg Morhof, in a survey of the desiderata of the world of learning, that we had no comprehensive dictionary, no *dictionarium absolutum*, of any living language.<sup>9</sup>

In his expression of the desire for such a comprehensive dictionary, and in his surprise at finding encyclopedic information in a work which was identified as *Dictionnaire* on its title page, Leibniz can be seen working out what large dictionaries of living languages might be expected to achieve. Many other learned Europeans of the two centuries in which he lived were doing likewise. The most spectacular dictionaries of sixteenth-century Europe had been of Latin and Greek; they provided a model for seventeenth-century lexicographers to register the vocabularies of their own languages far more amply than ever before. The most important early tradition of making dictionaries of living languages to develop from this model began in Tuscany towards the end of the sixteenth century, and had offshoots across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This may be called the academy tradition, because the dictionaries which constituted it were often the work of learned bodies called academies: the Académie française is now the best known of these bodies.

The phrase *academy tradition* does not seem to be much used by historians of lexicography, though isolated instances can be found in electronic searches. Slightly better established, especially in studies of Scandinavian lexicography, is *academy principle*. The Danish form *akademiprincip* was

used as early as 1907 by Verner Dahlerup, in an article setting out the principles for what would become the Danish national dictionary, *Ordbog over det danske sprog*. There, he wrote of the *akademiprincip* that:

The principle is that which takes its most typical expression in the French Academy dictionary, namely that the dictionary will contain only good words: it must, so to speak, be an honour for a word to find a place in the dictionary, just as it is an honour for a work of art to find a place in the national art collections.<sup>10</sup>

The corresponding English form *academy principle* seems to be more recent as a term of metalexicography. The linguist Einar Haugen said of Matthias Moth's great unpublished Danish dictionary (discussed in Chapter 5 below) that it included 'words from the folk dialects, thereby violating the "Academy principle"'.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, a recent study of a nineteenth-century Danish lexicographer explains neatly that 'Molbech's dictionary is organized according to the normative academy principle. In other words, it includes only those forms which the editor thinks can be contained within the realm of *decorum*, that is, words which do not strike one as disagreeable in relation to a cultivated literary disposition.'<sup>12</sup> In practice, dictionaries made by academies might include words which disagreed at least with the cultivated literary dispositions of some readers: we shall see some examples when we look at the reception of the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* in Chapter 4. So, rather than starting out by taking the stable existence of an academy principle for granted, this book will tell the story of the dictionaries which were produced by academies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and of the major learned dictionaries which responded to them.

These dictionaries constitute a tradition. All of them depended on the belief that the languages or language varieties which they treated were sufficiently unified and stable to be coherent objects of study, and some of them sought to promote the continuing coherence and stability of a language. All of them registered a wide, though not comprehensive, inventory of the vocabulary in general use among people of the middling and upper social ranks. All of them were to some extent alphabetized. All of them drew to some extent on a circumscribed body of usage, as defined either by good texts or by the good judgement of lexicographers. All of them were large books or sets of books, and those which reached print were always produced with marked typographical dignity. The reader may decide whether these common features, or a subset of them, add up to an 'academy principle'. For my own part, I have come to feel considerably

more cautious about the phrase than I was when I began to write this book, although I think that the phrase ‘academy tradition’ is defensible.

No previous study has examined the academy tradition of lexicography as a whole, although a number of early academy dictionaries are discussed in an excellent collection of essays published in 1985, *The Fairest Flower: The Emergence of Linguistic National Consciousness in Renaissance Europe*. As the subtitle suggests, this collection was not primarily about dictionaries, and did not attempt to cover the post-Renaissance period. A recent collection, *Große Lexika und Wörterbücher Europas*, edited by Ulrike Haß, includes articles on a number of academy dictionaries, and is chronologically deeper. Neither of these very useful books, however, offers anything like a unified narrative. So, the literary historian Paul Korshin has observed, with reference to the achievement of Samuel Johnson, ‘there is no comparative study about the makings of the dictionaries of the Académie française or the Accademia della Crusca or the single-scholar enterprises like the Hebrew lexicon of Johannes Buxtorf and the Greek dictionary of Henry Estienne’.<sup>13</sup> I have discussed the work of Henri Estienne elsewhere, and Buxtorf is beyond my scope, but this book does offer a comparative discussion of the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie*, and Johnson’s *Dictionary*, together with the other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dictionaries in the tradition in which those three are landmarks.

Giving a picture of the development of such a large group of dictionaries and dictionary projects over two centuries has inevitably meant leaving much material lightly sketched or altogether unexplored. It has also meant working in languages of which I do not have a native-speaker command; for Russian (but only for Russian) I have had to rely on sources in other languages. On the other hand, a view of the whole academy tradition at once is worth having. It can only really be offered in a story which is told in a single voice, and which is short enough to be read from beginning to end: hence this book.

### The shape of this book

The story of the academy dictionaries has a clear beginning, namely the making of the first dictionary of a European vernacular to appear under the sponsorship of, and as the work of, an academy. Its end is nearly as clear: at the end of the eighteenth century, a new kind of lexicography, conducted on historical principles and increasingly attuned to the new science of the comparative philology of the Indo-European languages,

emerged; and although dictionaries in the eighteenth-century genres continued to be compiled, the intellectual context in which they were read had changed. Given these chronological limits, the geographical scope of the story is likewise clear: academy dictionaries or dictionaries which responded to them were made or projected in France, Italy, Spain, Germany, England, Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, and Sweden. They were largely a western and central European phenomenon, with Russia as an outlier, and it is therefore western and central Europe which is the heartland of this book. *Academy Dictionaries 1600–1800* is not a sequel to *Dictionaries in Early Modern Europe*, the book in which I told the story of Henri Estienne's Greek dictionary and of some of the other learned dictionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but its story does follow on from that told by its predecessor. One consequence of this is that a number of endnotes in the following chapters refer back to the earlier book rather than retelling stories which were already told there.

The second chapter of this book begins in territory which overlaps with that of *Dictionaries in Early Modern Europe*. It discusses the origins of the modern European concept of the academy, and the development of the first academies to go by that name, those of Renaissance Italy. It then turns briefly to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian debate over language, the *questione della lingua*, which led to the resolution of the members of one academy to compile a dictionary. The academy was the Accademia della Crusca in Florence, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany; its dictionary, the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, was published in 1612. It registered the vocabulary of the Tuscan topolect as used in literature, with particular attention to the major Florentine authors of the fourteenth century. After telling the story of the making of the *Vocabolario* and discussing its content, the chapter concludes with an overview of the three further editions which appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The third and fourth chapters turn to the foundation of the Académie française in 1635, and to the long-running project which finally led to the publication of the first edition of its dictionary in 1694. This work was undertaken with the *Vocabolario* as a model, but not one to be followed slavishly: a drastic difference between the two dictionaries was the French academicians' decision to draw on their sense of good contemporary usage rather than on evidence quoted from literary authors of the recent or even the more distant past. Chapter 3 describes the making of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* and also gives an account of the two

major dictionaries of French which preceded it, those of Pierre Richelet (1680) and Antoine Furetière (1690). Chapter 4 discusses the published dictionary, with attention both to its content and to its early reception, which was not uniformly enthusiastic. It then turns to the *Dictionnaire des arts et sciences* by Thomas Corneille which accompanied it, and then to the eighteenth-century editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* – the last of which took into account the changes in French vocabulary and society which were experienced immediately after the French Revolution – and to two remarkable dictionary projects discussed in the Académie française in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

The fifth chapter turns back in time, to discuss the first learned dictionary projects which responded to the *Vocabolario* and to the work of the Académie française. These took place in Germany, where the work of the pre-eminent German language academy, the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft, which was founded in 1617, led to a series of plans for German dictionaries. These plans originated in personal contact with the Accademia della Crusca and were subsequently influenced by news from the Académie française. In 1691, a member of the Gesellschaft, Kaspar Stieler, published his *Der Teutschen Sprache Stammbaum und Fortwachs*, and although the metalanguage of this dictionary was Latin, it was the fullest and most sophisticated analysis of the vocabulary of German of the seventeenth century. By this time, the Danish ballad-collector and writer on grammar Peder Syv had begun work on a dictionary project inspired by writings from the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft, and his work is commented on, as is the much greater project for a union dictionary of Danish which was undertaken by the civil servant Matthias Moth around the end of the seventeenth century. Moth's dictionary project never resulted in a publication; nor did the last to be discussed in this chapter, which was directed by Leibniz and was intended to shed light on the origins and history of the German language. Leibniz's project was probably abandoned in the second or third decade of the eighteenth century.

The sixth chapter falls into four sections. The first discusses the plans for something like an academy dictionary which were floated in England from 1660 to 1744, by persons as diverse as the virtuosi Robert Hooke and John Evelyn, and the poets Ambrose Philips and Alexander Pope. All of these appear to have been directly or indirectly inspired by the *Vocabolario della Crusca* and the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*. The second section gives a brief account of an English dictionary in the tradition of Corneille's *Dictionnaire des arts et des sciences*, the *Cyclopaedia; or, An universal dictionary of arts and sciences* of Ephraim Chambers, published in

1728. The third turns, again briefly, to Brandenburg, where the Societät der Wissenschaften, founded in Berlin in 1700 under the inspiration of Leibniz, promoted more than one abortive dictionary project in the first two decades of the century. The last section of the chapter discusses a project which was actually realized, turning to Spain, where the Real Academia Española was founded in 1713 and produced a major dictionary between 1726 and 1739, rich in quotations from canonical authors. This was the third academy dictionary to see the light of day. The chapter ends by taking stock of the academy tradition at mid-century.

The seventh turns to two single-authored dictionaries in the academy tradition. The first of these is the *Dictionary of the English Language* of Samuel Johnson, published in 1755. A specimen entry from the dictionary is presented and commented on, after which Johnson's preliminary statements of lexicographical principles are discussed, followed by the making, structure, and reception of the dictionary itself. The emphasis throughout is on Johnson's relationship with the *Vocabolario della Crusca* and the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*. Two German dictionaries, those of Matthias Kramer and Johann Leonhard Frisch, are then discussed as predecessors to the second single-authored dictionary in the academy tradition, that of J. C. Adelung. The chapter ends by turning full circle, with an overview of Adelung's criticisms of Johnson's *Dictionary*.

The eighth chapter takes up the story of the eighteenth-century academy dictionaries, beginning with the Netherlands, where abortive dictionary projects associated with the Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde, on which work took place between the 1760s and the 1790s, were succeeded at the very end of the century by a single-authored dictionary like those of Johnson and Adelung. It proceeds to Russia, where a grand polyglot dictionary project of the 1780s took place against the background of the founding of the Russian Academy in 1783 and its production of a dictionary between 1789 and 1794; to Portugal, where the Academia Real das Ciências was founded in 1779 and produced the first volume of a dictionary in 1793; to Denmark, where an academy was founded in 1742 and likewise produced the first volume of a dictionary in 1793; and to Sweden, where the Swedish Academy was founded in 1786 and immediately undertook a dictionary project, which soon lapsed. The chapter concludes with an overview of the academy tradition as it stood at the end of the eighteenth century.

The ninth and final chapter gives a brief sketch of the later fortunes of the main dictionary projects surveyed in this book, and explains why the book ends where it does.



Broken down like this, this book inevitably looks rather bibliographical. So it must: dictionaries are books, and a story about dictionaries is a story about books. The ones discussed here were often big, heavy, and expensive, and an account which treated them as weightless texts rather than as weighty things would be impoverished. Not the least notable of the tensions in Johnson's *Dictionary* was that between its own weight as paper and its integrity as a book: 'few copies', Johnson's bibliographer remarks, 'survive in booksellers' boards, and all such have restored spines, for when standing upright, the contents are too heavy for the binding cords'.<sup>14</sup> Thinking about dictionaries as books is part of thinking about their place in the human hands of their readers and their makers. And thinking of them in human hands is part of thinking of them in human lives. The dictionaries which I discuss expressed the ideas of their sponsors and their makers, and although some of them were presented as impersonal authorities, the works of academies rather than of people, they were all personal documents. If we hold the handsome pages of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* up to the light, we can see people moving behind them, the makers of the dictionary, perhaps in one of the unpleasant meetings of the early 1680s:

He who shouts the loudest is right; each makes a long speech over the smallest trifle. One man repeats like an echo what the last speaker has said, and most often, three or four of them talk together. When a subcommittee is made up of five or six people, one of them reads the entry out, one gives his opinion, two converse, one sleeps, and one passes the time by reading some dictionary which is on the table ...<sup>15</sup>

A story about dictionaries is a story about books, but it is also, most importantly, a story about people.



## CHAPTER 2

*The beginnings of the academy tradition*  
*The Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*

## A remarkable dictionary entry

In 1612, the members of a Florentine society called the Accademia della Crusca undertook a risky publication. This was a dictionary on a very large scale, normative in tone, and richly illustrated with quotations from canonical literary authors of the past, pre-eminent among whom were the so-called *Tre corone*: Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. The dictionary was not therefore a dictionary of all Italian, but of the Tuscan topolect as used in Florentine literature of the fourteenth century. Its title was *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*. A sample entry gives a sense of what its makers achieved; this one stands at the mid-point of the dictionary, at the end of page 480 of the 960 pages of entries:

LENTO. Tardo, agiato, pigro. Lat. *lentus*, *tardus*. Bocc. n. 27. 43. La donna, che altro non desideraua, non fu lenta, in questo, ad ubbidire il marito. E introd. n. 36. Perchè più pigre, e lente alla nostra salute, ec. E g. 6. p.1. Alquanto, con lento passo, dal bel poggio, su per la rugiada spaziandosi. Dan. Par. c. 13. Per farsi muouer lento, com' huom lasso. E Inf. 17. Ella sen ua notando lenta lenta. Petr. Son. 178. Caccio con un bue zoppo, infermo, e lento. E canz. 16. Quando cade dal Ciel più lenta pioggia (cioè piccola, e leggieri) ¶ Per metaf. Cr. 9. 104. 4. Si ponga a fuoco lento, in un paiulo, e, senza bollire, si scaldi. E LENTO contrario di TIRATO.

The headword of this entry is set off typographically, in small capitals. Three vernacular equivalents follow: *lento* 'slow' may be equivalent to *tardo* 'slow', *agiato* 'at ease', or *pigro* 'slow, unwilling'. Next come two Latin equivalents, *lentus* and *tardus*. A series of quotations from the *Tre corone* and others follows.<sup>1</sup> Three are from Boccaccio's *Decameron*: 'The lady, who desired nothing better, was in this not slow to obey her husband' (Day Three, Story Seven); 'why are we more sluggish, and slow to provide for our own safety?' (Day One, Introduction); 'gently sauntering, across the dewy mead some distance from the beautiful hill' (Day

Six, Introduction). Then comes one from Dante's *Paradiso* 13.113, 'to make thee slow in motion, as a weary man', and one from the *Inferno* 17.115, 'onward he goeth, swimming slowly, slowly'. Then there are two quotations from Petrarch: *Rime* 212.8, 'I pursue with a lame, sick, slow ox' and 66.12, 'When there falls from the sky the gentlest rain'. A quotation from the agricultural writer Piero de' Crescenzi illustrates a metaphorical sense: a *fuoco lento* is a slow fire, on which one can warm something without boiling it. Finally, the antonym *tirato* is given.

The richness of this entry in the *Vocabolario* can be appreciated by comparing it with the entry closest to it in the alphabetical sequence of the only monolingual general-purpose dictionary of English to have been published by 1612, Robert Cawdrey's *Table alphabeticall* of 1604: 'lenitie, gentleness, mildnes'. More elaborate than Cawdrey's *Table* was the Dutch–Latin *Etymologicum* of Cornelis Kiliaan, of which the third edition was published in 1599. Its first entry in the range *len-* was '*Lende*. Lumbus. *ger*, *lende*: *ang*. *loyné*'. Likewise, in the leading French dictionary of the day, Jean Nicot's *Thresor de la langue francoyse* of 1606, the entry for the French cognate of *lento* is '*Qui est Lent de nature*, Cunctans, Lentus'. The leading Spanish dictionary, the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* of Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, published in 1611, did not register Spanish *lenta*, the cognate of Italian *lento* and French *lent*: the nearest entry in its alphabetical sequence was:

LENTEJA, legumbre conocida del nombre latino lens, tis. En su pasto y comida se figura la virtud de la templança, por quanto los pobres se contentauan antiguamente con el puchero delas lentejas. Delas calidades desta legumbre, veras a Dioscorides, libr. 2. cap. 98, y alli a Laguna. Huuo en Roma vn linage de los Lentulos, dichos assi porque los antiguos criauan en sus campos las lentejas.

This is an encyclopedic entry, giving us the Latin name for the lentil, its connection with temperance (it was food for the poor), a reference to Dioscorides' treatment of its qualities, and the remark that the Roman family of the Lentuli took their name from the growing of lentils.

The *Vocabolario della Crusca* seems almost to come from another world than the encyclopedic work of Covarrubias, focussed away from vernacular usage as the latter is, let alone from the style of its terse French and Germanic contemporaries. Why was Italian monolingual lexicography so much further advanced in the first quarter of the seventeenth century than that of English, Dutch, French, or Spanish, and why, in particular, was the *Vocabolario* such a sophisticated dictionary? An answer to the first question is that the study of the vernacular in sixteenth-century Italy had