
SAMUEL JOHNSON'S *DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE*

Selected entries from the Appendix to the edition of 1755.

corpus. (1) A dead body. (2) A multitudinous collection of texts which some rascals claim represents the whole tongue, whereas others, of a more rational persuasion, admit that it allows only the frequency of words in those very texts to be arithmetically calculated. Its proper plural is *corpora*; any other reveals only the ignorance of its perpetrator.

dialect. An inferior or corrupted form of speech employed by those of low birth or character and by those born in Scotland.

lecture. High-sounding extended discourse, delivered from a lectern by a wise man to his uneducated disciples. Valuable when it connects distant propositions by regular consequences, using appropriate rhetorickal devices, and conveying moral content. But of little value when merely read aloud insolently and dogmatically in the French fashion (where *lecture* means but reading) and unsupported by dignity of original thought (and, by my faith, is it not better to read the books from which the lectures are taken?).

linguistics. A modern fashion regarded by some as revealing universal knowledge about human tongues, but in truth a farnifanckle which adds little to what is contained in a great dictionary.

phoneme. A term of art. A unit of the spoken tongue, whereof the selection of one, in preference to another, changes the sense of the word wherein it occurs.

professor emeritus. An expression of contempt for a slothful loiterer earlier employed for dubious gain in a house of learning, but now retired from public view. An idle knave. A sorry worthless fellow.

speech. A mode of vocal communication employed by men, and thereby distinguishing men from apes. When skilfully employed it can convey great thoughts, but it may also allow men to hear only the sound of their own gibberish.

vowel. A sound produced by pushing the air from the lungs through the mouth and expelling it at the lips, and given its quality only by the position of the tongue and by the shape of the lips, straight or curlicued. It is by his negligent and capricious vowels that a Scotchman reveals his vulgarity and a French monsieur his peculiar nasality.