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Occupations in Two Editions of Webster's *Speller* as Evidence of Socio-Economic Changes in the Early Republic

Abstract

This article compares the professions listed in two editions of Webster's speller, The American Spelling Book (1829) and The Elementary Spelling Book (1832). Many occupations are recorded either in the American Spelling Book or in the Elementary Spelling Book, but not in both, which indicates that the spellers are describing different stages in the development of the country. Principally, the Elementary Spelling Book records occupations that evince the specialization and professionalization of the workers and demonstrate a reorganization of socioeconomic factors. The examination indicates that, in his desire to characterize the new nation, Webster ends up recording the socioeconomic changes that typified the industrial revolution and the bureaucratization of the state. Since Webster wanted to influence the youth and educate children to be good citizens, his spellers do not simply list words for plain linguistic reasons, but record words with social relevance. Therefore, the list of occupations that Webster presented in the spellers depicts different social circumstances and different stages in the country's development.

Keywords: American studies, lexicography, professions, spellers studies, Noah Webster

1. Introduction

Noah Webster (1758-1843) was an American author, also known as the “Father of American Scholarship and Education,” who famously published *An American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828 (henceforth *ADEL*). However, the first educational material he produced was his *speller*, which sold 70 million copies between 1783 and 1900 (Webster and Warfel 1953, xxxv).

In its 1783 first edition, the *speller* was named *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, but in 1787, Webster changed the name to *The American Spelling Book* (henceforth *American*), and in 1829, he renamed it *The Elementary Spelling Book* (henceforth *Elementary*). The *speller* underwent many revisions and corrections during Webster's lifetime, sometimes resulting in major revisions, as in 1787, 1804 and 1829. Notably, in all the revisions, “individual words in the ‘tables’ were particularly vulnerable to change” (Monaghan 1983, 52).

Although the *speller* was intended for mother language teaching, Webster always clarified that his aim was not only linguistic. On the one hand, all his instructional material (dictionaries, *spellers*, readers) aimed to promote the adoption of a common language to develop a feeling of national unity in the United States (henceforth the US). On the other hand, he wanted to preserve morality and promote industry (Webster 1790, 2-22).

Language textbooks represent the perspectives, ideologies, behavioral norms and cultural values of their times (Wang 2016; Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger 2015; Sajid 2015; Deumert 2000; van Brummelen 1990). Consequently, they “often aim to shape young learners’ national, cultural and political identities” (Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger 2015, 1-4). Since all teaching material is implicitly or explicitly ideologically oriented (Wang 2016; Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger 2015; Sajid 2015), the present investigation examines two editions of Webster's *Speller* (the *American* from 1829 and the *Elementary* from 1832) to understand how the implied social contexts reflect the American society of the time and reveal the author's beliefs. These two editions were chosen because, despite being chronologically close, the *Elementary* contains major revisions.

The following section presents *primers* and *spellers*. The third section describes the political and socio-economic situation of the US after Independence, explains Webster's reactions to those circumstances and discusses how textbooks are shaped by the ideology and the context in which they were produced. The methodology used to carry out the research is explained in the fourth section of the paper. Lastly, sections five and six present and discuss the investigation results.

2. School textbooks as a representation of society

In colonial times (17th and 18th centuries), in the US, the textbooks used were the Hornbook, the *Primer*, the Psalter (or Book of Psalms), the New Testament, and the Bible. Whatever the material used for the teaching of reading, the inhabitants of the colonies considered its instruction necessary for religious reasons.

A hornbook consisted of an alphabet tablet, which sometimes included letter combinations. Hornbooks were mainly imported from England and were used until the first quarter of the 19th century (Plimpton 1916). *Primers* and *spellers* followed the alphabet method, which involved learning the names of the letters of the alphabet and then learning to combine them into syllables and words.

Primers developed out of medieval religious prayer books to teach children to read. As such, the first *primers* (16th and 17th centuries) presented hymns, prayers, and the Catholic catechism. With time, their content became more secular by adding children's stories and English rhymes.

It was common for primers to include the alphabet, usually presented in lower and upper case and accompanied by an illustration of the letters in question (Ford 1897). Tables showing combinations of vowels and consonants, lists of words, and fairy tales could also be part of a primer. The first primer to be published in the American colonies was *The New England Primer* in the 18th century.

Spellers, which had been in use in England since the late 15th century, became widely accepted for children's literacy development in the colonies in the late 18th century (Monaghan and Barry 1999, 14-16). They were more significant in size than primers and presented tables and lessons alternately. Sometimes they contained grammar notions and lists of abbreviations of commonly mispronounced words and homophones. It is essential to emphasize that spellers were misnamed since the "primary purpose of a spelling book in Webster's time was, and always had been, to teach children to read" (Monaghan 1983, 31). It was only after 1820 that spelling books became useful only for teaching spelling (Altenbaugh 1999, 33).

The most famous *speller* in the US before Webster's was *A New Guide to the English Tongue*, written by Reverend Thomas Dilworth, an English author (Svobodny and Born 1985, 2). As mentioned before, Webster's *Speller* was published in 1783.

3. Webster and the Early Republic

3.1 Socio-economic context

After the American Revolution, the US population grew rapidly. In 1790, there were 4 million people; in 1830, there were almost 13 million (US Census Bureau 1832; 1793). However, the few existing cities were small, and until 1850 most of the inhabitants lived in rural areas (US Census Bureau 1853; 1832; 1821; 1801).

From a socio-political point of view, the first years of the Republic were characterized by an agrarian majority opposing an aristocratic minority and by a deep gap between the rich and the poor, which was more significant in cities than in rural areas (Pessen 1982, 1303; Lemon and Nash 1968, 23). After the 1780 depression, the yeomen farmers came to be regarded as the ideal Americans (Main 1965, 119). However, the succeeding spread of commerce resulted in changes in the social structure (Wood 1988, 18) when "commercial ambition seemed to have infected everyone" (Zakim 2006, 565). It was then that artisans and small merchants consolidated as a stable group, and the upper-class colonial merchants formed an industrial capitalist elite.

3.2 Webster's ideals

The many disruptions that characterized the Early Republic (1780-1830) made Webster fear for the future of the US (Webster 1790, 84). He was fearful that social unrest could spread in the US as it had happened in France after the French Revolution (Webster 1800, 5). Moreover, Webster was a Federalist who defended national unity and adhered to the proposal of a strong Federal constitution (Webster 1800). However, since the antifederalists opposed the creation of a stronger federal government, the negotiations over the ratification of the Constitution lasted several years. Those circumstances made him consider that the country's socio-political situation could be improved only through education. Furthermore, he believed instruction would promote good qualities and industry in the citizens (Wakefield 1998, 18).

3.3 Webster's Spelling Book

Webster's *Speller* was the most popular of his works. Indeed, it is considered the most popular American textbook of its time, with 385 editions during Webster's lifetime (Monaghan 1983). The original *speller* of 1783 sold out its first edition of 5,000 copies; by 1804, more than a million copies of the second *speller* had been sold.

The success of the *speller* may be attributed to the fact that Webster believed that it had to give a simple presentation of pronunciation, spelling rules, and words. Since he argued that students needed to overcome one difficulty at a time, he organized the *speller* beginning with the alphabet and slowly moving to the different sounds of vowels and consonants, syllables, simple words, more complex words, and sentences. Only after those did he introduce the texts (in the versions before 1829). Also, the syllables and words were presented in tables organized by difficulty.

The compendium *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* consisted of the *speller* (first published in 1783), a grammar textbook (published in 1784), and a reader (published in 1785). For the first edition, Webster took Dilworth's spelling book as a model but changed the religious content of the texts and revised the syllabification of words (si-ster became sis-ter). However, he maintained British orthography and form of instruction.

Every fourteen years, when the copyright expired, Webster took the opportunity to make adjustments, often profound, to the *speller* (Monaghan 1983, 51-53). In the 1820s, textbook writers began to eliminate the long list of words from textbooks because they had become a central object of criticism (Monaghan and Barry 1999, 16). Under those circumstances and because Webster wanted to adapt the orthography of the *speller* to that in the *ADEL*, he decided to start working on a new version even before the copyright expiration (Skeel 1958, 74; 85).

However, since, at the time, he was also working on the *ADEL*, Webster employed Aaron Ely to work on the final revision of the speller.

As Webster employed someone else to write the *speller*, great debate among rival publishers arose who accused Webster of not writing his own books. Webster answered Lyman Cobb's criticism (1828, 33-34) by asserting that the *Elementary* and the *Dictionary for Primary Schools* (1833) were "compilations entirely my own. I employed a person to write for me; but every part of these works was corrected, arranged, and the works marked for pronunciation by my own hand" (Webster and Warfel 1953, 431).

The *Elementary*, the last revision of the *speller* prepared by Webster, was published in New York in 1829. It is not only the first edition to introduce his latest spelling proposals; it is an entirely different version of the *speller* in which he modified tables, eliminated all the texts and made changes in content to adjust to the *ADEL* in terms of pronunciation.

Since the *speller* fostered a unique pronunciation to unify the nation, Svobodny and Born (1985, 5) consider it "another form of declaration of independence." Furthermore, Webster believed that education was more than just learning to read. School should "form the characters of individuals" and contribute to building the nation (Webster 1790, 26). For that reason he criticized textbooks in use in the US that described England. Principally, he wanted his speller to enable the "teacher to instil¹ in their minds, with the first rudiments of language, some just ideas of religion, morals and domestic economy" (Webster 1807a, vi).

Indeed, language takes an active part in shaping social relations (Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger 2015, 2), which implies that "learning a language involves learning different aspects of cultural values over certain sociolinguistic, cultural and ideological dimensions" (Wang 2016, 2). Additionally, studies show that textbooks "are not unbiased texts" (van Brummelen 1990, 135). Conversely, they accompany the socio-cultural circumstances of the community that uses them, and "language textbooks are model representatives of behavioral norms and cultural values" (Wang 2016, 2). For those reasons, textbooks for first language teaching are "one of the strongest weapons to shape public opinion and reflect ideology and worldview of a nation" (Sajid 2015, 576). They are relevant in constructing national identities because they build "on the emphasis on a common history" and shared characteristics (Wang 2016, 4).

Under those circumstances, the adoption of textbooks becomes convenient because they present values related to identity and social conceptions (Sajid 2015, 575; van Brummelen 1990, 135)

¹ Webster's spelling and punctuation has been maintained throughout even when they do not comply with current standards.

even when manipulative intentions are not consciously involved (Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger 2015, 3). Since “language teaching and learning are not ideologically neutral practices” (Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger, 2015, 1), it follows that “linguistic choices are made for purposes other than narrowly linguistic ones” (Deumert 2000, 394). Considering that Webster recognized that his teaching materials promoted national identity, an analysis of the changes in his spellers would reveal his cultural and societal understanding.

4. Method

The analyzed *spellers* were *The American Spelling Book* (the revised impression, with the latest corrections, published by Terhune & Letson in 1829) and *The Elementary Spelling Book* (published by Moses G. Atwood in 1832).

The analysis began with a classification of the occupations recorded in each edition based on the *International Standard Classification of Occupations*—ISCO (ILO, 2007) that were reorganized to match the professions and occupations existing in the 18th century. The resulting classification consisted of the groups and subgroups below:

1. Professions:
 - a. arts (author, minstrel);
 - b. education (teacher);
 - c. information (editor);
 - d. science (doctor, astronomer);
 - e. legal professionals (lawyer, solicitor);
 - f. religion (priest, archbishop);
2. Service and sales sector:
 - a. trade (merchant);
 - b. retail (baker, clerk, cook, cashier);
3. Agricultural sector (farmer, thresher);
4. Craft sector:
 - a. building workers (carpenter);
 - b. garment workers (hatter);
 - c. metal workers (smith);
5. Primary sector (cleaner, laborer, miner);
6. Government sector:
 - a. armed forces and protection (colonel, fireman);

- b. management (fiscal);
- c. politics (president, legislator).

To assign the occupations to the correct group, the descriptions were checked in the *spellers* or, in case the *spellers* did not bring any description or illustration, in the *ADEL*. Particular attention was given to words that do not have the same referents as in the past (e.g. *clown* is defined as a countryman in Webster 1828). After the occupations were classified, the two resulting lists (one for each *speller*) were compared to explore the differences and identify whether occupations appeared in one *speller* but not in the other. Also, the study sought to identify which occupations were more frequently referred to.

Finally, the “significant sentences” in the *Elementary* (1832, Preface 6) were examined as they model the cultural values that guided Webster. The study considered all the “significant sentences” given as illustrations for the occupation in question to establish whether there were elements in the texts that indicated a change in the evaluation of the occupation and uncover elements that would reveal the sociocultural values guiding the author.

5. The occupations in both versions

The examination considered that *spellers* taught reading, not just spelling, and that language textbooks represent ideologies and cultural contexts. Consequently, if a word is listed in a *speller* it does not only mean that it is difficult to pronounce, but that it has sociocultural value. This is particularly important in the case of the occupations listed in Webster's *speller* because of the importance he gave to being engaged in earning one's living.

Concerning content, both editions of the *speller* present the alphabet, syllables, and words, but, as the *Elementary* went through comprehensive adjustments, there are differences between the two versions. Even though both *spellers* carry tables, they are differently organized and not present in the same number—the *American* includes 54 tables and the *Elementary* 147. The *American* includes tables “intended to exhibit the manner in which derivative words and the variations of nouns, adjectives and verbs are formed” (Webster 1829, iv), but also nests, under the title “table,” lessons which are intended “to teach children to read and to know their duty” by fostering morals, religion, good manners, and obedience (Webster 1829, 43). On the other hand, the *Elementary* presents tables to teach “the manner of forming the various derivatives” (Webster 1832, 5) but does not provide reading texts, only “significant sentences” as illustrations of some of the words in the tables. It is important to mention that both versions bring a list of

words of similar or the same pronunciation that includes six occupations accompanied by their meanings, as follows:

- (1) *Augur*, one who foretells
- (2) *Dyer*, one who colors
- (3) *Miner*, one who works in a mine
- (4) *Rigger*, one who rigs vessels
- (5) *Seller*, one who sells
- (6) *Wright*, a workman

All in all, the *American* records 137 occupations while the *Elementary* presents 192, 95 of which are listed in both editions (see Table 1). As such, there are 42 occupations in the *American* that do not appear in the *Elementary*, while there are 97 occupations in the *Elementary* that the *American* does not record. That difference is initial evidence that, in the two editions, Webster was describing different social contexts.

	Professions in the American	Professions in the Elementary
Total occupations	137	192
Not shared	42	97
Shared	95	

Tab. 1: Shared and not shared occupations

In the following sections, each group of professions is analyzed separately.

5.1 Foreign societies

Both *spellers* present a group of words that do not represent American society. The words *baron*, *cavalier/chevalier*, *count*, *duke*, *earl*, *king*, *knight*, *marquis*, *minion*, and *queen* apply only to the British context. Only *queen* and *king* are included in the “significant sentences” in the *Elementary*. For example, the sentences “many kings have been thrown from their thrones” or “a kingdom is a country ruled by a king” do not mention the US. Actually, the last sentence

implies that the US is not a kingdom, which is confirmed by the “significant sentence” that describes *president* (see Section 6). The word *farmer* is the only one with more repetitions than *king* in the “significant sentences” (see Table 1).

5.2 Agricultural sector

The repetition of the word *farmer* exposes Webster's conceptualization of society. He always held that the US was an agrarian society and claimed that “agriculture is the most important occupation in society” (Webster 1818, 542), so it is explicable that *farmer* has a prominent place in his *speller*. The number of sentences in the *Elementary* mentioning the occupation is evidence of Webster's respect for the agricultural sector. Only some occupations appear more than once in the “significant sentences” (see Table 2).

Occupation	Significant sentences
author	2
beggar	2
doctor	3
farmer	18
king	6
general	2
judge	2
legislator	3
merchant	4
officer	2
president	2
sailor	4
teacher	3

Tab. 2: Occupations and significant sentences

Significantly, the word *farmer* appears in eighteen sentences (transcribed *ipsis litteris* below). That number evinces the relevance Webster attributed to the activity, while the content of the sentences indicates that the author wanted to describe the occupation accurately and highlight the status and relevance he assigned to *farmers*. Of all the sentences, the last one overtly expresses the prestige Webster ascribed to them as he asserted that *farmers, merchants, and mechanics* were responsible for protecting the nation and preserving liberty.

- (1) The *farmer* when he plants seeds, buries them in the ground.
- (2) *Farmers* are sellers of apples and cider, which fill our cellars.
- (3) *Farmers* are raisers of grain.
- (4) *Farmers* rejoice when their farms teem with fruits.
- (5) The *farmer* splits rails with a wadge.
- (6) The *farmer* likes to have a plenty of hay [*sic*] for his cattle and oats for his horses.
- (7) The *farmer* sows his grains by handfuls.
- (8) The *farmer* feeds his horse in a manger.
- (9) *Farmers* put manure on their fields, to enrich the land and obtain good crops.
- (10) The *farmer* eats his dinner at noon.
- (11) The *farmer* cuts his grass to make hay.
- (12) The *farmer* hatchels flax; he sells corn by the bushel, and butter by the firkin.
- (13) The *farmer* foddors his cattle in winter.
- (14) Wise *farmers* contrive to procure a good living, by honest labor, and commonly succeed.
- (15) The *farmer* puts his cider in barrels.
- (16) The *farmer* puts his bridle and saddle upon his horse.
- (17) The *farmer* winnows chaff from the grain.

- (18) Our *farmers*, mechanics, and merchants, compose the strength of our nation. Let them be wise and virtuous and watchful of our liberties. Let them trust no man to legislate them, if he lives in the habitual violation of laws of his country.

The number of repetitions and the social values the sentences convey reveal that Webster viewed early American society as agrarian and idealized the yeoman farmer as independent, hardworking, and having a relevant position in society. Indeed, when depicting the yeomanry, Webster noted that “nothing like a well defined [*sic*] national character exists in the middle states; and in no part of America, to the same degree as in New England” (Webster 1800, 25). In connection to the *agricultural* sector in general, the words *farmer*, *jocky* (jockey), *millor*, *raker*, *sawyer*, and *yeoman* are listed in both editions. On the other hand, the words *clown* (as rustic), *country maid*, *rider* (one who manages horses), and *shepherd* are recorded only in the *American*, while *countryman*, *grazier*, *husbandman*, *mountaineer*, *pioneer*, *swain* (one employed in husbandry), *thresher*, *hunter* are only present in the *Elementary* (see Table 3). Hence, the occupations listed in the *Elementary* show that Webster noticed a type of specialization concerning the different activities performed when caring for a farm. Still, they are not a final confirmation of the country's transformations.

Professions in the <i>American</i>	Professions in the <i>Elementary</i>
<i>farmer, jocky, miller, raker, sawyer, yeoman</i>	
<i>clown, country maid, rider, shepherd</i>	<i>countryman, grazier, husbandman, mountaineer, pioneer, swain, thresher, hunter</i>

Tab. 3: Occupations in the agricultural sector

The number of words that refer to the *agricultural* sector may not be an attestation that the country had changed, but it shows Webster's interpretation of farmers' prestige at the time and indicates that his representation of *farmers* was overvalued and obsolete. In reality, the agrarian society had been more “a tool for building the republican social order in general” (Zakim 2006, 565) since “in most parts of the country there was no clear distinction between subsistence and commercial farming” (Lemon and Nash 1968, 17) and farming had usually been practiced alongside with other trades (Faragher 1981, 546). Furthermore, with the “new emphasis on buying and selling” (Zakim 2006, 567), the structure of society was inverted and rural work left room for commercial relations (Zakim 2006, 571). Consequently, in the new

commercial society, "property ceased to function as the static foundation of agrarian life and became the fungible object of commodity exchange," while manual labor gradually lost prestige (Zakim 2006, 570). All those changes resulted in an enormous expansion in business because buying and selling to locals greatly intensified (Main 1965, 7; 18).

5.3 Craft and service and sales sectors

In the *Elementary*, those changes are evident in the long list of occupations related to the *craft*, *service*, and *sales* sectors. The occupations recorded in both *spellers* are *carpenter*, *baker*, *brasier*, *glazier*, *laborer*, *mason*, *mechanic smith*, *tanner*, and *wright*, distinguishing manual and traditional occupations. On the other hand, the *Elementary* lists twenty-three occupations which belong to the *craft* group (*bleacher*, *brewer*, *cartman*, *carter*, *dresser*, *rigger*, *saddler*, *sewer*, and *weaver*), to the *elementary* occupations² (*collier*, *workman*) and to the *service and sales* group (*barber*, *butcher*, *cashier*, *clerk*, *driver*, *grocer*, *hosier*, *mercier*, *monger*, *pedler*, *salesman* (see table 4). The addition of occupations in those sectors does not mean that they were of recent origin but reveals the professionalization and spread of commerce that was taking place at the time. If most of the occupations included in the *Elementary* were activities performed for a long time, they should have also been included in the *American*. The very fact that they were not is in itself revealing of the changes.

<i>American</i>	<i>Elementary</i>
<i>carpenter, baker, brasier, glazier, laborer, mason, mechanic, smith, tanner, wright</i>	<i>barber, bleacher, brewer, butcher, carman, carter, cashier, clerk, collier, dresser, driver, grocer, hosier, mercer, monger, pedler, rigger, saddler, salesman, sewer, weaver, workman</i>

Tab. 4: Craft and Service and Sales sectors

Moreover, when Webster defined the activities in the *ADEL*, he used the expressions *artificer*, *occupation*, *employ* (or *employment*), *trade*, *one who*, and *an officer who*. The dictionary defines *artificer* as "[a]n artist; a mechanic or manufacturer; one whose occupation requires skill or knowledge of a particular kind; as a silversmith, or sadler." Of the words listed in the *spellers*,

² Elementary occupations require a minimal level of education or none at all.

only *carpenters, brasiers, smiths, sadlers, and wrights* are characterized as *artificers* in the *ADEL*.

According to the *ADEL* an *occupation* is “[t]he principal business of one’s life; vocation; calling; trade; the business which a man follows to procure a living or obtain wealth.” The activities characterized as *occupations* in the *ADEL* are *baker, barber, bleacher, brewer, butcher, carter, mason, mechanic, rigger, sewer, tanner, and weaver*.

The noun *employment* is defined as “[o]ccupation; business; that which engages the head or hands; as agricultural employments; mechanical employments” while *employ* (n) is the “[o]ccupation, as art, mystery, trade, profession.” The words *carman, glazier, workman* are associated with *employment* in the *ADEL*.

Finally, the definition for *trade* indicates that it is “the act or business of exchanging commodities” that may include the “purchase and sale of goods, wares and merchandise.” *Trade* is also “the business which a person has learned and carries on for procuring subsistence or profit.” The examples that Webster provided in the *ADEL* are *smith, carpenter, and mason*. He added that *trade* is “distinguished from the liberal arts and learned professions, and from agriculture.”

Therefore, it seems that Webster considered *occupation* to be a hypernym to *artificer, employment, and trade* since they refer to ‘the principal business of one’s life’ while *trade* was a way to earn a living by exchanging goods or services. Consequently, *artificers* were involved in trading since they exchanged goods to make a living. For those reasons, the activities in table 4 were distributed to match the classifications offered in the *ADEL* (see table 5 below). Accordingly, *artificers and occupations* have been joined under *trade* since the activities listed in the *Elementary* refer to earning a living by exchanging the products they manufacture or the services they provide. The resulting organization reveals that most activities connected to the *craft and service and sales sector* that Webster chose to include in the *Elementary* describe “the act or business of exchanging commodities.”

According to Zakim (2006, 57), the emergence of a more commercial society resulted in manual labor losing prestige, which may have contributed to their addition to the *speller*. Also, the fact that Webster characterized traditional occupations as *trade* could demonstrate that he understood the activities had become more commercial than manual.

Hence, the activities listed in the *craft and service and sales* categories in the *Elementary* demonstrate that Webster was aware that the country was becoming a commercial nation and that citizens “imbibed a love and a spirit of commerce; their habits are commercial” (Webster

1800, 21). Moreover, the list reveals Webster's evaluation of commerce as "favorable to freedom" and of trade as "almost fatal to despotism" (Webster 1790, 327).

Characterization	Professions in the <i>American</i>	Professions in the <i>Elementary</i>
Trade	<i>carpenter, brasier, smith, wright</i> <i>baker, mason, mechanic, tanner, weaver</i>	
		<i>barber, bleacher, brewer,</i> <i>butcher, carter, rigger, collier,</i> <i>grocer, hosier, mercer,</i> <i>monger, pedler, saddler,</i> <i>salesman</i>
Employment		<i>glazier</i>
		<i>carman, workman</i>
One who... An officer who ...		<i>laborer</i>
		<i>cashier, clerk, collier, dresser,</i> <i>driver, sewer</i>

Tab. 5: Distribution of activities

Another evidence that the subsistence economy pre-dating the industrial revolution was being transformed by a growing class of merchants and more skilled artisans is that the *American* presents a reduced list of occupations related to *trade* (*banker, dealer*), which appear in the tables that catalog words created by {-er} derivation. On the other hand, the *Elementary* brings an extensive list (*grocer, hosier, mercer, merchant, monger, pedler, salesman*). Furthermore, the number of repetitions of the word *merchant* shows that Webster recognized it as a vital occupation since, as mentioned before, only some occupations are mentioned more than once in the *Elementary*.

However, the definite indication of Webster's consideration for *merchants* is represented by the sentence mentioned before that "*farmers, mechanics, and merchants*" are responsible for guarding the Republic against the corrupt. When contemplating the changes the country was going through, Webster's claim that "our farmers, mechanics, and merchants, compose the strength of our nation" becomes relevant. He had great esteem for "the labouring men" and he

wanted to foster industry in children. However, from his perspective, some new occupations could promote laziness and were unproductive. Hence, they put at risk the balance Webster considered essential “in every trading nation” where “there ought to be a due proportion between the commercial interest, the agricultural and the manufacturing” (Webster 1790, 119).

In the collection of essays published in 1790, Webster exposed his perceptions regarding some kinds of occupation. For example, he mentioned that as part of their education, children should be “directed to pursue those branches which are connected more immediately with the business for which they are destined” (Webster 1790, 13), insisting that the strength of a nation depends on “the number of its industrious inhabitants” (Webster 1790, 42) and that manual labor was “the only permanent source of wealth” (Webster 1790, 106). Moreover, he held that commerce, agriculture, and “the mechanic arts” were equally important because they kept the young from idleness.

Nevertheless, in 1829 the socio-economic organization of the country had changed from an agrarian society to a commercial one. In the past, Americans had not been “confined to single lines of industry” because “various occupations [would] meet in one man” (Scudder 1890, 121). However, the new system, centered around the accumulation of money, fostered the emergence of professions like business clerk, which “did not produce anything” (Zakim 2006, 571).

Still, Webster insisted that if a country was “supplied with every article of consumption by the labor of its own citizens” (1843, 263), it would be independent and influential, and recommended that “if you are not under the necessity of laboring for subsistence, let your time be occupied in something which shall do good [*sic*] to yourselves and your fellow men. Idleness tends to lead men into vicious pleasures” (Webster 1835, 229). Thus, the flourishing unproductive activities probably disturbed Webster, who decided to provide a long list of productive activities in his textbook.

5.4 Legal and government sectors

Another difference between the *spellers* is represented by words connected to professions in the *legal* and *government* sectors (see Table 6). The words present in both editions are *agent*, *embassador* (1829)/*ambassador* (1832), *financier* (a treasurer), *judge*, *lawyer*, *magistrate*, *governor*, *minister*, *president*, *senator*, *supervisor*, and *mayor*. The occupations only listed in the *American* are *barrister*, *notary*, *consul*, *controller*, and *politician*. At the same time, only the *Elementary* records *advocate*, *attorney*, *auctioneer*, *auditor*, *executive*, *dictator*, *emissary*, *foreman* (in a jury), *fiscal*, *juror*, *juryman*, *overseer* (a supervisor), *legislator*, *solicitor* (an advocate or counselor), and *statesman*. As such, the diversification of *legal* activities such as

providing advice, assistance, representation, and making decisions is illustrated by the various occupations added to the *Elementary* (fifteen). Moreover, the number of “significant sentences” for *legislator* (three), *judge* (two), and *president* (two) reveals that Webster considered these occupations relevant. The exclusion of *politician* in the *Elementary* demonstrates Webster's growing despise for politics.

<i>American</i>	<i>Elementary</i>
<i>agent, ambassador, financier, judge, lawyer, magistrate, governor, minister, president, senator, supervisor, mayor</i>	<i>advocate, attorney, auctioneer, auditor, executive, dictator, emissary, foreman, fiscal, juror, juryman, overseer, legislator, solicitor, statesman</i>
<i>barrister, notary, consul, controller, politician</i>	<i>advocate, attorney, auctioneer, auditor, executive, dictator, emissary, foreman, fiscal, juror, juryman, overseer, legislator, solicitor, statesman</i>

Tab. 6: Legal and government sectors

5.5 *Instructors and teachers*

A salient difference between the *spellers* is that the *American* systematically refers to *children* and *instructor* (the word *student* appears only once), while the *Elementary* always mentions *pupil* and *teacher*. For instance, when advising on how to use the *speller*, in the *American* he mentions “the instructor should” (1829, 32), while in the *Elementary* he says “the teacher; may ask the pupil” (1832, 16). The systematic use of the word *teacher* in the *Elementary* may indicate a change of reference.

Webster's definitions in the *ADEL* do not suggest a notable difference between *instructor* and *teacher*. The definition is circular (*teacher* ←→ *instructor*). A *teacher* is “one who teaches or instructs,” while an *instructor* is “a teacher.” The dictionary also claims that a *teacher* “instructs others in religion,” whereas an *instructor* “imparts knowledge to another by precept or information.” Moreover, an *instructor* may be a “preceptor of a school or seminary of learning” but, at the same time, may be “any professional man who teaches the principles of his profession.” A reference provided in the dictionary —1 Corinthians 4:15—makes the reader realize that “ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ.” In essence, although the difference between the definitions is not substantial, there seems to be a tendency for *instructor* to have a more extensive use than *teacher*, which would be restricted to schooling and religious education.

The way Webster used the words in some of his works may also help to understand the meaning of each one in the context of the author's production. In *A Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings* (1790), Webster used the word *teacher* twelve times, referring to schooling on ten occasions. Conversely, the word *instructor* appears ten times, in seven cases referring to education in general and only three times related to schooling. In *Elements of Useful Knowledge* (Webster 1806), he employs *teacher* twice, once when referring to the school context and once to a religious context, but uses *instructor* only once when referring to college. Webster used the word *instructor* neither in *A Plea for a Miserable World* (Webster 1820) nor in *Observations on Language and the Errors of Classbooks* (Webster 1838). However, in the first work, he used the word *teacher* four times when referring to religious contexts; in the second, he used the word *teacher* twice to refer to the school context. Lastly, in *A Collection of Papers on Political, Literary, and Moral Subjects* (Webster 1843), he employed the word *teacher* seven times when referring to the school context, while the word *instructor* was used five times in a college or a religious context. Considering all the instances, it may be assumed that the author developed a preference for using the word *teacher* when mentioning the school context.

Webster was a firm proponent of universal education because a republic needed an educated electorate (Snyder 2002, 490), and good citizenship and civic participation would only be possible through universal childhood education (Webster 1800; 1828). Consequently, in the final version of his speller, Webster distinguished between training and educating since an *instructor* performs a task-oriented job while a *teacher* is involved in the educational process and should monitor and assist rather than only impart skills. Additionally, *teachers* usually have some certification or special preparation, while *instructors* do not. The same interpretation would apply to the words *children* and *pupil*; that is, *pupils* are *children* receiving education or are students in a school. The three "significant sentences" that Webster provided in the *Elementary* support that Webster noticed the difference between *teachers* and *instructors*.

- (1) *Teachers* like to see their pupils polite to each other.
- (2) *Teachers* should try to implant good ideas in the minds of their pupils.
- (3) *Teachers* teach their pupils, and pupils learn.

Furthermore, the changes in designation might be related to the recent improvements in the educational system. Since colonial times, many have advocated for public schools to provide universal education because it was the key to individual opportunity and the creation of

responsible citizens. However, for a long time, children would only learn to read in informal schools because formal schooling was limited to wealthier families who could afford it. In the 19th century, the northern states established tuition-free public schools in cities and rural towns, though finding good teachers for these schools remained a problem. Up to that time, teachers had minimal training and kept their jobs until they found a better one, but, to provide quality education, teachers needed to be better qualified. The changes in society had brought more stability and a need for education of “a higher order than reading and writing” (Lyman 1921, 67), which, in turn, required more qualified teachers. Webster viewed education as “not merely the institution of schools. But the furnishing of them with the best men for teachers” (Webster 1790, 22). That was the biggest problem in America because there was a “want of good teachers,” mainly in the middle and southern states. After all, keeping a school there was a “means of employment, fit only for persons of low character” (Webster 1790, 15; 338). Therefore, it is probable that the change in the denomination in the *Elementary* is related to how he perceived the changes the educational system had experienced.

5.6 *The armed forces*

The armed forces category lists many words in both spellers: *bombardier*, *brigadier*, *canonnier*, *carbinier*, *centurion*, *colonel*, *general*, *grenadier*, *marine*, *officer*, and *soldier* (see Table 7). This fact alone indicates Webster's admiration and respect for the armed forces (see Snyder 2002, 62). As a matter of fact, in a letter to Daniel Webster, Noah Webster recalled his beginnings as a political writer in 1783, when he endorsed “the measures of the Old Congress in favor of the army,” an action he still justified in 1834 because the soldiers were “brave men who hazarded their lives and property to defend their country, and to whom, under providence, the slanderers were indebted for their liberties and to whom we owe the independence of the United States” (Webster and Warfel 1953, 434).

<i>American</i>	<i>Elementary</i>
<i>bombardier, brigadier, canonnier, carbinier, centurion, colonel, general, grenadier, marine, officer, soldier</i>	
<i>cockswain, sentinel</i>	<i>mariner, engineer, warrior, commodore, sargeant</i>

Tab. 7: Armed forces

Adding words related to the armed forces may also be connected to bellicose events in antebellum and Post-Independence America that greatly distressed Webster. Indeed, Webster's fear of upheavals made him observe that governments should rely on a military force to "suppress insurrections and repel invasions [...] otherwise laws are nugatory and life and property insecure" (Webster 1787, 37). At the same time, he argued that an army was necessary to guard the frontiers, garrison forts, and protect the citizens (Webster 1790, 52; 147).

However, some words only appear in the *American: cockswain* and *sentinel*; others only appear in the *Elementary: mariner, engineer, warrior, commodore, and sargeant* (see Table 6). The difference in number is not substantial, but the additional words may be the result of the profound impact on the professionalization of the American Army after the 1812 War. During that war, the American government noticed the deficiencies of the army and tried to transform it (Heiss 2012, 2-3). Some changes included incorporating well-prepared officers by offering a lifelong career, a full-time position, and better training, which Webster considered fundamental. The definitions that Webster provided in the *ADEL* demonstrate a perception of the specialization and professionalization of the armed forces. Namely, the definition of *engineer* is "a person skilled in mathematics and mechanics, who forms plans of works for offense or defense, and marks out the ground for fortifications." At the same time, *commodore* is defined as "the officer who commands a squadron or detachment of ships, destined on a particular enterprise," and *sergeant* is "a non-commissioned officer in a company of infantry or troop of dragoons, armed with halbert, whose duty is to see discipline is observed, to order and form the ranks, etc."

5.7 Vagrancy

A final indication of the social changes is that only the *Elementary* records *beggar, vagrant, and pauper*. From 1819 to 1837, it was difficult for unskilled laborers to find jobs, so many itinerant poor wandered across the country, which created an intolerance towards vagrancy. That fact triggered the creation of laws for policing vagrants, which at the time were "the poor, wanderers, beggars and those lacking 'legal settlement'" (O'Brassill-Kulfan 2019, 2-4).

Since Webster abhorred idleness, it was his preoccupation to provide the necessary instruction so that citizens could engage in an occupation. He even proposed that "academic education should have time for apprenticeship" (Webster 1790, 15). Interestingly, *beggar* and *vagrant* are mentioned more than once in the "significant sentences." Undeniably, the *Elementary* displayed Webster's discrimination against vagrancy in sentences like:

- (1) *A vagrant* is a wandering lazy fellow.
- (2) Parents should provide useful employment for their children.
- (3) When unemployed, the mind seeks for amusement.
- (4) *Beggars* will beg rather than work.
- (5) Labor makes us strong and healthy.

Many occupations do not appear in both *spellers*. However, to consider that this is due only to the difficulty in pronouncing or spelling the words is to deny that textbooks reflect the sociocultural values of the context in which they are produced. Moreover, if that were true, the lists would not have changed or included only newly created words. However, this is not the case. Chiefly, the inclusion and exclusion of occupations in Webster's *spellers* need to be considered necessary because of the relevance the author gave to being industrious. For those reasons, it is appropriate to propose that the occupations included in the *Elementary* represent a new socioeconomic structure.

6. "Significant sentences" in the *Elementary*

Only some of the occupations were exemplified with "significant sentences;" generally, the occupations were mentioned only once. The list below presents the following words:

- Agriculture – *sower, miller, raker, thresher*;
- Crafts – *builder, carpenter, joiner, mason, clothier, sewer, mechanic, wright*;
- Government – *emperor, governor, mayor, vicegerent, juror, lawyer, emissary, major, queen*;
- Professionals – *actor, artist, advocate, writer, archbishop, monk, pastor, preacher, astronomer, librarian, translator*;
- Service and sales – *baker, barber, bleacher, druggist, dyer, hatter, mercer, seller, secretary, scribe, weaver*;
- Others – *boatswain, beggar, pirate, robber, mariner, driver, spy, orator, vagrant*.

Words like *author, beggar, doctor, king, general, judge, legislator, merchant, officer, president, sailor, and teacher* occur more than once. Due to space limitations, and since the illustrations provided for the words *beggar, king, farmer, merchant, and teacher* have already been analyzed,

this section does not present an exhaustive list of illustrative sentences. The list below transcribes some of them (copied *ipsis litteris*):

- (1) *Bakers* bake bread and cakes.
- (2) *Bleachers* bleach linen and thus make it white.
- (3) *Carpenters* bore holes with an auger.
- (4) The *doctor* tries to cure the sick.
- (5) The *doctor* bleeds his patients with a lancet.
- (6) We should not trust our lives to unskillful *doctors* or drunken *sailors*.
- (7) *Firemen* have ladders to climb upon houses.
- (8) *Hatters* make hats of fur and lamb's wool.
- (9) *Kings* are men of high renown.
- (10) A *king* and a *queen* wear crowns of gold.
- (11) The *joiner* rabbets boards.
- (12) A *judge* must not be a bad man.
- (13) *Merchants* often deposit money in the bank for safe keeping.
- (14) An *officer* enjoys the grade of a *captain*.
- (15) A *major* is an officer next above a *captain*.
- (16) A *librarian* is a person who has charge of a library.
- (17) The *preacher* is to preach the gospel.
- (18) The *president* of the United States is elective once every four years. He is chosen by electors who are elected by people of the different states. The *president* of the United States is the chief executive officer of the government.
- (19) *Mariners* are *sailors* who navigate ships on the high seas.
- (20) The *sailor* steers a vessel with a rudder.

(21) The brave *sailors* embark on board of ships, and sail over the great deep sea.

(22) A *secretary* is a writer, or a scribe.

The examination of the sentences focused on the cultural context implied to identify Webster's representation of the social relations and values attributed to each activity. It was expected that his illustrations would indicate that the chosen words were difficult to understand or, considering that Webster's priority was to foster industry, that Webster deemed them relevant. After examining the sentences, it may be observed that Webster described what he considered the most relevant aspects of each occupation. Sometimes, there is just an identification of the tasks that must be performed. Activities described this way are *baker*, *bleacher*, *carpenter*, *fireman*, *hatter*, *joiner*, *librarian*, *preacher*, *secretary*, and *sailor* (two sentences). However, for other occupations Webster provided evaluative information. For example, the activities that show some social evaluation are *doctor*, *king*, *judge*, *merchant*, *officer*, *president*, and *sailor*. With the illustrative sentences, Webster foregrounded occupations that require a high degree of knowledge or experience (for example, if the *doctor* is not skillful, he will not cure the sick) and reproduced beliefs or principles present in the American society of the time. For instance, in the *speller*, the students learn that *kings* are people of prominence, *judges* are probably upright citizens, *merchants* are wealthy, and *sailors* are brave, but they drink.

Children also learn how *presidents* are elected and their function in government, a commentary that fits the Republican aspirations of the author. Besides, Webster's appreciation for the armed forces is evident in the illustrations for *officer*. Moreover, with the explanations, children become acquainted (if they are not yet) with ranking in the army.

Since Webster believed that English was not "a static language" (Snyder 2002, 76) and to improve education it was necessary to improve "the books we have" (Webster 1807b, 28), it was expected that the changes to his *speller* would depict social values. However, the examination revealed that the "significant sentences" and the additions and exclusions of occupations in the *Elementary* are an indication that Webster noticed and, at the same time, was daunted by the changes the American society was undergoing.

7. Final remarks

Webster never hid that he wanted to influence the youth. He always clarified that he intended to educate children to be good citizens. Therefore, his *spellers* do not simply list words for plain linguistic reasons, but record words with social relevance. For example, Webster had always been against idleness; he even mentioned that the rich are "strongly tempted to be lazy"

(Webster 1790, 402) because they do not need to labor to have money. Indeed, he considered that “labouring men are the support of a nation” (Webster 1790, 42), so he wanted to promote diligence in the young. Therefore, the list of occupations that Webster presented in the *spellers* is relevant because each has different social circumstances. The *spellers* are not describing the same scene but different stages in the country's development.

The differences reflect the specialization and diversification of occupations related to most sectors—*agricultural, craft and service and sales, legal and government, and the armed forces*. Concerning the *agricultural* sector, Webster took special care in describing *farmer*, which he believed to be the most relevant profession for the country. Regarding the education context, the study identified that Webster distinguished between instructors and tutors implicitly and that the two words took different usage, where *instructor* came to refer to education in general, while *teacher* referred to the school context.

These findings open up new research paths. On the one hand, it would be relevant to examine, in several works by the author, if there is consistency in the use of the words *instructor* and *teacher*, as pointed out in this study. At the same time, since Webster considers that working had a fundamental role in society, it would be interesting to verify whether the author overtly comments on the process of specialization and diversification that occupations were undergoing in any of his works.

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