

LIN 200 : Assignment 1

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“One who writes dictionary and shit”. That’s how Urban Dictionary defines the term ‘Lexicographers’. Their own definition of the term is damaging to them. Sure, Urban dictionary is a “Dictionary” by name, but it is crowd-sourced and not written by professionals. I can talk about news on reddit, but that does not make me a news reporter or a journalist. Similarly, anyone who contributes to Urban dictionary cannot be considered a lexicographer.

The job of a lexicographer is complicated and it takes years of studying for them to be able to do what they do. One of their tasks is to profile for the intended users. Urban dictionary fails at that. Sure, a lot of the words on their are slang and not part of the Oxford English Dictionary but it also contains a lot of official definitions as well. The website and the people who contribute to it know their target is not linguists so there is no need for definitions like that. Similarly, Urban Dictionary contributors fail at many other tasks a lexicographer needs to perform such as defining the pronunciation of the words and others. As a result, I don’t think contributors to the Urban Dictionary should be given any authority as a lexicographer. While some of them do know the meaning behinds the words that their entering on the website, they haven’t studied the language as deeply as they need to be considered a lexicographer. At the same time, since so many people contribute to the website, it is impossible to define a common standard or structure throughout the website which is something every dictionary needs.

While writers of the Urban Dictionary cannot be considered as lexicographers, I don't think what they are doing is detrimental to the english language. Urban Dictionary is an

excellent source for people to keep track of what phrases and words are currently popular or figuring out the meaning behind certain phrases that were used in conversation with friends and informal situations. Words like “Handcestors” or “Instagram Bae” are ones that will probably never be added into the Oxford English Dictionary, but it might possibly (but very unlikely) pop up in a random conversation. If people start using urban dictionary as a source of meanings for words that are in the actual english language then we might be in trouble, but using it as a source of meanings for slangs is perfectly fine. Use of slang does not lead to the demise of a language, instead it does quite the opposite. Slangs tend to develop culture, and if they stand long enough and used by enough people then it might even get added to the Oxford English Dictionary and other, more official sources. For example, the phrase “On a more serious note” is on that is used fairly frequently, even in a formal situation. So it's possible that it might get added to the Oxford English Dictionary one day. Words that were recently popular, such “Bormance”, “Jeggings” and “Mankini” have already been added to the Oxford dictionary. As a result, Urban dictionary is contributing towards the evolution of the language and not the demise of it.