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## Webster's 1793 *speller*: not yet a portrait of America

### Webster's 1793 *speller*: non ancora un ritratto dell'America

VIRGINIA MEIRELLES<sup>1</sup>, LINDA MITCHELL<sup>2</sup>, MARIA REVUELTA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Universidade de Brasilia*

<sup>2</sup> *San Jose State University*

vmeirelles@unb.br; linda.mitchell@sjsu.edu; maria.revuelta@sjsu.edu

**Abstract.** The many different authors that have examined Webster's *speller* agree on its influence in establishing American English. However, this examination seeks to accomplish something different from these works: to further explore the author's linguistic and political concerns to reveal how they influenced the design of the *speller*. For that reason, this article compares Webster's *American Spelling Book* of 1793 to Thomas Dilworth's American edition of *A New Guide to the English Tongue* (1796). The essay identifies the changes that Webster introduces in his *speller*, set apart from Dilworth's, and reveals how they were determined by his nationalistic beliefs and how the alterations might have contributed, from the author's perspective, to the creation of a national character in the United States. Still, the investigation concludes that this edition of the *speller* does not, yet, define what it is to be American.

**Keywords:** authentication, standardization, *speller*, uniformation, Nationalism.

**Riassunto.** I molti autori che hanno esaminato l'ortografia di Webster concordano sulla sua influenza nello stabilire l'inglese americano. Tuttavia, questo esame cerca di realizzare qualcosa di diverso da questi lavori: esplorare ulteriormente le preoccupazioni linguistiche e politiche dell'autore per rivelare come hanno influenzato il design dello *speller*. Per questo motivo, questo articolo confronta l'*American Spelling Book* di Webster del 1793 con l'edizione americana di *A New Guide to the English Tongue* di Thomas Dilworth (1796). Il saggio identifica i cambiamenti che Webster introduce nella sua grafia, distinti da quelli di Dilworth, e rivela come siano stati determinati dalle sue convinzioni nazionalistiche e come le alterazioni potrebbero aver contribuito, dal punto di vista dell'autore, alla creazione di un carattere nazionale negli Stati Uniti. Tuttavia, l'indagine conclude che questa edizione dello *speller* non definisce ancora cosa significhi essere americani.

**Parole chiave:** autenticazione, standardizzazione, ortografo, uniformità, nazionalismo.

## INTRODUCTION

It has been claimed Webster's speller has contributed to the standardization of the English language in the North American variety and that it promoted the development of the American character and society in opposition to the British (Svobodny & Born 1985). Webster's speller was the most popular instructional material of its time, selling 70 million copies between 1783 and 1900 (Webster & Warfel 1953, XXXV). Through his speller, Webster maintained that the adoption of a common language after independence could help develop a feeling of national unity in the United States (henceforth, the "us" in the US) because the «political harmony» of the country depended upon the elimination of differences in pronunciation that could stimulate social «ridicule and disrespect» (Webster 1790, 20). He stressed that an «approximation of dialects [could] be certain», but the «establishment of schools» and «uniformity in the use of books» could also «annihilate differences in speaking and preserve the purity of the American tongue» (Webster 1790, 19). Hence, he promoted the use of a uniform variety, intending to provide an identity to the new nation and prevent civil disorder. With that in mind, in 1783, he published *The First Part of the Grammatical Institute of the English Language* to present not only «a new plan of reducing the pronunciation of our language to an easy standard» but to «abolish ignorance» (Webster 1783).

Prior to the American Revolution, many British spellers were being reproduced in the US. Yet, the first speller to be based on American English was *A New Guide to the English Tongue*, written by the Reverend Thomas Dilworth of England. The speller was first published in England in 1740 and later reprinted in the United States in 1747 where it became the most accepted speller (Lyman 1922, 33; Monaghan 1983). However, after the Declaration of Independence, spellers authored by British writers were no longer appreciated, and therefore, several spellers by American authors appeared. One of these included Webster.

This essay acknowledges Webster's changes and edits in his 1793 speller as an important part in his developing of ideas regarding how to describe the English language as spoken in the US. Additionally, it compares Webster's speller to Dilworth's to determine how the processes of teaching and learning to read in an institution permanently linked to the oral domain may contribute, from Webster's perspective, to the formation of the national character. In other words, this study presents an evaluation of Webster's ideology and showcases how it affected the elements he modified as well as the

ones he incorporated into his speller.

As such, the article discusses how, for Webster, the question of adopting a national language is a question of state, with a policy of invasion and annulment of differences. Indeed, Wakefield identifies the success of Webster's speller with the fact that it presented content that did not portray any particular region in the US (Wakefield 1998, 18-19). Moreover, his language teaching model follows a political project according to which the selection of the national language is rather idiosyncratic and its configuration takes place through literacy and usage.

The paper demonstrates that the changes that Webster introduced in the speller are in line with the sociopolitical needs of the time. The first section describes how the political and social context in different periods of the history of the US influenced children's instruction. The second section presents a comparison of the two spellers. Then, the article discusses the relation between nation and language. The following section explains how linguistic description and prescription relate to the need to foster a common language in Webster's work, while the fifth section presents his vision of education. And lastly, the paper evaluates whether the speller really presents a description of the new country.

## SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT AND EDUCATION

The North American education system was described by Francis Bellamy in 1892 as «the most characteristic product of the four centuries of American life» upon which «the foundation of the greatness of this Republic» is based (United States 1892, 65). Actually, since the first settlers belonged to a homogeneous group of people fleeing religious persecution in England, they created compact communities (Scofield 1938, 652-663) that promoted the development of strong bonds. In those communities, encouraging the teaching of reading was associated with the *Protestant Reformation* and with public speech. Consequently, some of the motivations for demanding the vernacular were to prepare individuals to read the Bible (Lyman 1922, 11, 17, 63), to encourage citizens to be part of the government system, and to prepare them for leadership (Lyman 1922, 64; Culbertson 2012, 8).

Notwithstanding, the political and social transformations after 1750 had an impact on education. First, the relevance of religion diminished, and an involvement with trade, shipping, and commerce arose (Culbertson 1919, 37-40). Those changes affected the North American view of education. Secondly, after the Revolu-

tionary War, the interest in the education of the young declined for several reasons: lack of economic demand for education, independence of towns, and lack of cities (Cubberley 1919, 655; Cubberley 1920, 77). Third, the government started to provide economic support to schools after Independence and especially after the *Continental Congress Ordinance* of 1785, but education continued to be controlled by the church or remained a private matter (Cubberley 1919, 45–52). It was only in 1791 that education changed from church control to state control (Cubberley 1920, 653).

Since any kind of text represents the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the writer (Fairclough, 2003), the educational material created or chosen to teach in colonial times, represents the ethical, moral, and religious values of the time. The textbooks, written by “Protestant and New Englanders” who believed that education was necessary to correct the mind and establish a good government, reflected those beliefs (Svobodny & Born 1985, 4).

In colonial times, the books used in school were the *Hornbook*, the *Primer*, the *psalter* (or book of psalms), the *New Testament*, and the *Bible*. The *primer* was a book that presented material taken from the *Bible*. A *speller* presented tables and “lessons” that may have consisted of sentences or texts. Spellers had been in use in England since the late 15th century, yet they were only adopted in the colonies in the late 18th century (Monaghan & Barry 1999, 14–16).

After the Revolutionary War, textbooks began to show standardized language, to describe social customs in America (Svobodny & Born 1985, 1), and question the accuracy of the English language as used in the US. They also showed a more secular content (Cubberley 1919, 41) because of the diminishing importance of religion in public matters during the 18th century (Wakefield 1998, 10). Consequently, the Puritan catechism gave place to fables.

The teaching methods also changed. In colonial times, teaching English consisted of the recitation of sequences, learning rules by rote, and using question-and-answer techniques (Lyman 1922, 103, 135). In teaching spelling, the *primers* and *spellers* followed the alphabet method, which involved learning the order and the names of the letters of the alphabet and their classifications as consonants, vowels, and diphthongs. The students learned that each letter represented particular sounds. Then, the letters were combined to form words and presented in tables that were organized by the number of syllables. The readings (called “lessons”) only included words with the same number of syllables as studied in the previous tables. However, by the mid

18th century, when comprehension became important, the textbooks needed to adapt to the new circumstances (Wakefield 1998, 7).

## THE TWO SPELLERS

The more popular *spellers* were Dilworth and Webster (Smith 1979, 36). The edition of Dilworth's *speller* that will be examined in this place is the 1796 American edition. The American edition is the revamp of his English *speller* and may be considered the first textbook that “described” American English (Lyman 1922, 23). It follows the alphabet method. It has a moral-religious approach and includes basic grammatical notions. As was customary, it presented the tables into groups. After the tables, there are lessons, all mentioning “God”. Some interpretations of the fables included in Dilworth's *speller* are:

*Of the dog and the ox*: Envy torments both the body and the mind and is deservedly its own Punisher. Thus, we see some men are content to lose a blessing themselves, that others may not enjoy it (page 146).

*Of the dove and the bee*: Be helpful to thy friend and always return thanks to those who deserve them (page 147).

The first version of Webster's *speller*, *The First Part of the Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (1783), sold out its first edition in nine months (Rollins 1980, 34). The *speller* had more than 400 editions (Rollins 1980, 35) and underwent three major revisions during Webster's lifetime (1787, 1804 and 1818).

In the introduction to the first edition (1783), the author claims that his intention is to promote republican principles and religious beliefs (Jernegan 1918, 731–749). Webster holds that he intends to offer a better education to his fellow countrymen (Webster & Warfel 1953, 30) by making Dilworth's tables and lessons suitable for children and by including names of places that will be useful for children in the US (Webster 1793; Webster & Warfel 1953, 1). Webster also wants children to be familiar with the spelling and pronunciation of American names and with the country's geography. He holds that the *speller* aims at «demolishing those odious distinctions of provincial dialects which are the subject of reciprocal ridicule in different states» (Webster & Warfel 1953, 6). He suggests that the situation arises because of the lack of a writing and pronunciation guide and recognizes, as others have, that the English spelling system is defective and inefficient. In summary, Webster wanted to standardize spelling and pronunciation.

In the edition examined here (and in all editions after 1783), Webster replaces the 1783 introduction – of a socio-political nature – with a preface dealing only with linguistic issues and focuses on the need to adopt a system of acquiring knowledge based on parameters which appear to be scientific. The fact that Webster replaces the introduction with a preface that focuses on linguistic justifications could be associated with the publication, in 1789, of his *Dissertations on the English Language*. In the *Dissertations*, the author advocates, at length, the adoption of an American language because of social and political issues. Furthermore, since he permanently made corrections to improve the *speller*, it is probable that he decided to exclude socio-political issues from it because he considered that they did not fit in a book aimed at the education of the young.

The reading material he incorporated reflects the established codes or the accepted notions of right and wrong. For example, on page 55, the lesson reads:

Do as well as you can, and do no harm  
 Mark the man that doth well, and do so too  
 Help such as want help, and be kind  
 Let your sins past, put you in mind to mend  
 I will not walk with bad men; that I may be cast off with  
 chem  
 I will love the law and keep it  
 I will walk with the just and do good

Some of the proverbs and maxims on page 63, say that

The tree is known by its fruit  
 The new broom sweeps clean  
 When the storm is past then comes a calm  
 Look not a gift horse in the mouth

Additionally, there are texts that provide descriptions of good boys and of bad boys, which introduce Webster's ethical and moral views. There are also eight fables. The texts still promoted religious values, but his *speller* included more secular content. Actually, Webster held that he did not oppose the use of the Bible in schools; what he opposed was the use of the Bible as a school book because it could diminish its effect as «a system of religion and morality» (Webster 1790, 8-9). His intention with the fables, proverbs, and advice was to inspire «horror to vice», «indolence to avarice», and «love of virtue, work, and good manners» (Webster 1793, preface).

Table 1 below presents the main similarities and differences between the *spellers*.

The two *spellers* have been compared by several authors and different reasons for the success of Webster's

**Table 1.** Comparison between spellers.

	Dilworth 1796	Webster 1793
Number of pages	132	144
States in the US	Yes	Yes, including the capital city and inhabitants.
Prayers	Yes	No
Fables	12	8
Grammar	extensive	age-appropriate
Proper names & places	Mostly European	European but also includes names like... Montauk, Choptank, Setaket, Watoga...
General information	no	yes
Homonyms	yes	yes
Abbreviations	yes	yes
Numbers	yes	yes
Alphabet	yes	yes
Tables	yes	yes
Analysis of the sounds of English	no	yes
Key to the sounds of letters	no	yes
First text (lesson)	Page 7	Page 54

*speller* have been proposed (see Table 2).

As Scudder (1886) and Monaghan (1983) mention, Webster follows Dilworth when presenting the tables. However, unlike Dilworth's *speller*, Webster's *speller* presents monosyllabic words before more difficult words and organizes the tables by similarity of pronunciation. In Webster's *speller*, the alphabet list includes the names of the letters and explains the sounds they have. Moreover, the *speller* presents an analysis of the sounds of the English language which includes articulatory and auditory considerations. Like Dilworth, Webster divides the vowels into long and short and includes examples for each. Yet, unlike Dilworth, who uses marks to indicate vowel quality, Webster uses numbers. Consequently, Webster improves Dilworth's *speller* by indicating how words should be pronounced, introducing a system of numerical superscripts with more auditory consideration to indicate vowel pronunciation and the altering of the syllabification.

Furthermore, Webster's *speller* (1793) presents some other advantages over Dilworth's *speller* (1796):

- (1) It is logically organized;
- (2) It promotes quality education;
- (3) It indicates mute letters;
- (4) It presents phonemic value of letters;
- (5) It is adapted to children's interests;

**Table 2.** Reasons for success as described by other authors.

Author	Reason
Scudder (1886)	Satisfied the great demand for American textbooks (Scudder 1886: 72).
Jernegan (1918)	Preoccupation with quality education.
Krapp (1925)	Better organization and systematic guide to English spelling.
Shoemaker (1966)	Illustrations; Adherence to the alphabet method; Only some proposals for reformed spelling were introduced.
Monaghan (1983)	Identification of mute letters; Separate <i>speller</i> and <i>grammar</i> books; Organization of tables; Phonemic values; Inclusion of American towns.
Svobodny and Born (1985)	Names of the Kingdoms of Europe, counties, principal towns and rivers in states in the US; Ease of use in comparison to other <i>spellers</i> .
Martin (2019).	Short dialogues.

- (6) It brings more secular content;
- (7) It presents general information;
- (8) It brings more references to the US.

Those qualities could explain the wide acceptance and the popularity that the *speller* came to have, but they do not make this version of the *speller* (1793) a portrait of the American character.

#### DISCUSSION. LANGUAGE AND NATIONS, NATIONS AND LANGUAGE

The conception of the American Vernacular as “good”, “uniform” and “pure” was common amongst linguists, scholars, and citizens prior to the Revolution, but this changed after the war: some began to catalog the vernacular as a corruption of the English language (Frulla 2018) while others continued to describe it as uniform (Twining 1894; Read 2015, 20). Indeed, some scholars mention that «although there were regional accents, there was not a significant enough difference in pronunciation to impede effective communication» (Frulla 2018), a situation that contrasted with that in England, where people from different regions often had difficulties communicating despite geographical proximity.

These claims reveal the relationship that exists between language and nation-building because a nation is a community of people that is formed on the basis of a combination of shared features such as ancestry, lan-

guage, or territory. Incidentally, individuals identify better with a community with which they share a language than with one with which they share a residence, religion, or ancestry (Pool 1979, 19). If the vernacular in the pre-independence US was perceived as “good”, it was because it was subjectively connected with the vernacular in England; both belonging to the same nation. When the US became independent, the socio-political rupture attributed different characteristics to each nation. Thus, the existence of two different nations becomes vital and entails the existence of two varieties of language since nations are believed to be unthinkable without a language (Pool 1990, 242). From that point onward, the English language in both countries follows different paths (Nevalainen 2003, 136).

The difference between dialect and language is not structural, but political. Accordingly, they are defined by their degree of functionality. A dialect is not used in higher contexts of interaction because that place is reserved for language (Haugen 1966, 927). In essence, before the revolution, there was no need to think of the American dialects as different from those spoken in England, as all were associated with the same nation. However, after Independence, the opposition between internal cohesion (we) and external distinction (them) (cf. Haugen 1966, 927) becomes relevant and with it, the need to define and oppose the vernaculars spoken in each country. Since linguistic differentiation contributes to establishing a separate identity, «attempts to make one language or dialect diverge from another is common in history» (Pool 1979, 11). Therefore, the English feel the need to rescue what is “pure” and contrast it with what is seen as a corruption by the Americans while in the US, as American nationalism emerged after the Revolution (Wood 1988), the discussions over a national language also arise. From that moment on, language variety in the US, which had been considered “good”, starts to be seen as a corruption of the English language.

Fishman claims that nationalism is a response to modernity (1971, 4) and that it aims at recovering «the authentic uniqueness of the nationality [...] and, thereby, to recover for the present as well as establish for the future the greatness that had existed in the past» (Fishman 1971, 9). Webster's nationalism follows those lines since he claims that the yeomanry are the direct heirs of the Elizabethan English (Webster 1789, 288) and envisions an everlasting grandeur based on the qualities of the institutions that were being created, which could guarantee growth towards modernization and away from the old paradigms.

For those reasons, language standardization is a political project (Carter & Sealey 2007, 24) that arises

with nationalism. As such, Webster's intuition that the political harmony of the country relies on the uniformity of language (Webster 1789, 20) is pertinent. Certainly, countries that have low linguistic diversity have more chances of prosperity than those with higher diversity (Pool 1990, 250), of which Webster was evidently aware. His plan of action showed that he understood that the essential ingredients of nationalism are: unification, authentication, and modernization, exactly as proposed by Fishman (1971, 3). Unification seeks to forge wider bonds that extend beyond family and locality, and to unite «the rural, the urban, and the regional into a broader unity» (Fishman 1971, 3-6). Authentication emphasizes «the ethnic uniqueness and cultural greatness of the nationality» and works to make it everlasting. And lastly, Modernization is seen as the route to conquering political independence and to «enhancing the position of the nationality».

Rollins mentions that between 1789 and 1793, Webster urged the country towards humanistic reform and national development in all fields, from politics and education to economics and language, but holds that Webster's ideas are a synthesis of an idealized past and utopian dreams for the future that were influenced by J. J. Rousseau and R. Price (Rollins 1980, 24-28). In fact, Webster's incongruities may be explained because the requirements of modernization and those of authentication are opposed. Modernization moves «toward newer, more rational, more efficient solutions» while authentication stresses the «continuity based on socio-cultural integration and is constantly straining towards purer, more genuine expressions of the heritage» (Fishman 1971, 5).

Webster faces an unprecedented task since it is difficult to authenticate and unify that which was built on the transposition of traits. In the case of authentication, a problem arises because Webster needs pure and genuine expressions of past glory, which would take him to the past in England. At the same time, his project includes standardizing (or unifying) the language.

Therefore, his project was complex because the English language belongs to and represents another nation. Under those circumstances, Webster faces a dilemma: the model for his standard language cannot be the current English spoken in England, but at the same time, it is impossible to break with the English grammatical tradition. His solution includes the removal of the contamination that came from England and the discovery of the authentic American vernacular. His quest involved finding older versions of the English language and discovering the «true principles of language» in the English spoken by ordinary people (Webster 1789).

## LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION AND LANGUAGE PLANNING

Webster was embarking upon what seems to be a linguistic search, but most of his evaluations deny a scientific approach and indicate a more prescriptive view of language. By emphasizing the need to uniformize language, Webster is implying language may be accommodated to the demands of the circumstances. On the other hand, he maintains that languages obey «true principles». Hence, Webster's conception of language involves the notion of unchanging principles that apply to the language but incorporates the idea that only the grammarian can advise on the use of language.

The apparently conflicting concepts may be explained by the practice of grammar prescription that was common in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, grammar books became a publishing phenomenon. Their writers intended to teach language users to express themselves accurately by supplying prescriptive rules while insisting on the idea that using «incorrect grammar» was a social stigma. Accordingly, the traditional grammarians' task was to prepare normative orthography and grammar texts by «adapting» the structure of English to match that of classical Greek and Latin.

As yet, Webster advances in a different direction from traditional grammarians, but he cannot detach from what was conventional in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He understood that prescribing grammar rules is unnatural and that languages have principles that are not under the grammarian's supervision. Nonetheless, that idea was incompatible with his intention to provide a uniform language to the new nation, so his linguistic ideas collided with his socio-political motivations.

Therefore, with his speller Webster is undertaking a prescriptive trajectory that does not correspond to his intention of describing language. His argumentation becomes inconsistent, his linguistic ideas are not plain, and he frequently gets lost in his explanations. On the one hand, he insists on finding the «true principles» of the English language by examining how the language is used. On the other hand, he claims that authorities should provide a pattern to end ignorance and corruption in language and design a *speller* with the purpose of introducing uniformity and precision in pronunciation. Moreover, to legitimize his speller, he bases his ideas on «the observations of the most prominent authorities in the US and in England». The result is a proposal that is contradictory in itself. That is, his nationalistic ideals pointed towards uniformation and authentication, which depend on the establishment of a standard language, while his linguistic proposal moved away from prescriptivism.

It is claimed that «linguistic choices are made for purposes other than narrowly linguistic ones, and language planning becomes central to the attainment of more general political goals» (Deumert 2000, 394). To be sure, when selecting, developing, and laying down a model for standard language usage, Webster made a political decision regarding language. He was involved in language planning, which is the effort to promote the use of a particular variety of language or dialect by making changes to their structure – an essentially ideological act (Haugen 1966, 1983).

#### THE GOALS OF EDUCATION

The teaching of reading had been predominant in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for religious reasons, yet, there were also practical reasons for the universal instruction in reading. In colonial times, teaching was focused on reading out loud because reading material was cheaper and easier to obtain (Monaghan 1988, 34). Moreover, only after 1837 would there be an established educational system, so in colonial times, many teachers were, in actuality, poorly educated. Since many times, teachers were almost illiterate, Webster saw the inclusion of the key to pronunciation in his *speller* as an improvement and an advantage over other spellers (Webster & Warfel 1953, 33).

Nonetheless, Webster considers that education is more than just learning to read; it is the only way “to reform mankind” because the «impressions received in early life usually form the characters of individuals» and together they form the character of a nation (Webster 1790, 26). He believed that the stability of the nation might only be guaranteed by having a system of education that encourages the youth to obey the laws (Webster 1790, 2-5, 24). For those reasons, it was essential that children be taught ethical conduct and political procedure (Webster & Warfel 1953, XXXVI) and that they be kept away from people of improper behavior (Webster 1790, 22). Indeed, Webster claimed that it is more difficult to correct bad habits than to provide good models (Webster 1790, 15). Hence, schools should be institutions of control where children «who have been accustomed to disobedience and licentious behavior at home» are taught obedience (Webster 1790, 24). Webster also wanted the poor to have access to education, so he advocated in favor of public schools (Webster 1790, 24-25) and prepared a plan of instruction with merchants, mechanics, and farmers in mind (Webster 1790, 4).

With this, the new country needed a cultural revolution (Bynack 1984, 99), so changes in textbooks were needed. Most texts, Webster said, were not adequate

because they included information that characterized other nations or that was not interesting to children. He claimed that for poor individuals to be properly informed, textbooks in America should provide information on the history and geography of the country, its heroes and statesmen, and ideas that would be useful in life (Webster 1790, 23). Also, textbooks had to teach good qualities and praise liberty (Webster 1790, 21). Precisely, teaching good qualities is permanent in Webster *speller* because it would promote kindness, morals, and industry (Wakefield 1998, 18).

#### A REPRESENTATION OF A NATION?

While Fodde (2015) stresses Webster's contribution to the constitution of an American identity, Cassedy concludes that Webster's role in forging American identity is incidental; since Webster's ideas are questionable, they induced others to try to define America (Cassedy 2014, 232-233). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was no «widely acknowledged American character» (Wakefield 1998, 18). Webster, himself, recognizes that in 1790 the «national character [was] not yet formed» but that it needed to be shaped (Webster 1790, 3). On that account, the 1793 edition of the *speller* does not present a characterization of “American”.

In 1793, Webster was still laying the foundations of his project, which included uniformation, authentication, and modernization. For those reasons, this investigation holds that the *speller* is not exactly defining an American character, but is signaling where to find it and how to establish it. Webster understood that times were changing and that the spellers that were in use were not defensible anymore. Therefore, to make them more “American”, a series of changes needed to be made. It took him more than 30 years and hundreds of editions of the *speller* to complete the changes in it and discover the characteristics of the American nation. Yet, in 1793, he already knew what he was looking for.

First, a change from a religious to a secular focus was needed. As the present analysis shows, the 1793 edition of Webster's *Speller* contributes to the alteration of the consideration of the pedagogical material from a material that adheres to the theological order to a material that shows incipient traces of secularism. His conceptions of religion and of science appear to be based on the selection of certain aspects (literary models, uniformity, and freedom) and the rejection of others (corruption, diversity, and old paradigms). Interestingly, with Webster, the *speller* begins to gain autonomy and moves on towards becoming a separate material from

the one used in religious instruction. In that way, it promotes the transformation of the school text, allowing it to become secular and to acquire its own identity.

Second, more modern spellers were needed. The examination shows that Webster's speller was successful because he was skillful in determining what kind of speller the new nation needed. He takes other spellers as models and proceeds to organize the tables and lessons by age. This includes the methodology of presenting unconnected sentences and making slow progress. Most importantly, he sees the need to move towards modernization by educating the poor and by changing the focus of education from memorization to comprehension. Promoting respect to law and obedience was another means of unifying the country. Hence, he was in tune with the proposals of modern mass nationalism.

Third, his nationalism demanded a standard language. Webster had identified, like many authors in his time, the central issue in language planning: the conflicting norms (Haugen 1983, 274). His contribution resides in trying to define a standard and in using that standard in writing textbooks. As a consequence, Webster's ideas not only satisfied the requirements of the language-in-education policies of the time, but also revealed that the author perceived the significance of linguistic standardization and of implementing language policies in the forging of a new nation. Principally, this examination observed that, with the speller, Webster embarks on obtaining and presenting an organized body of knowledge acquired through research.

Finally, a national character needs to be shaped. Webster's scheme characterizes a nationalistic discourse and distinguishes structural elements of the values of American society (confederation, harmony, and civil and religious freedom). Indeed, Webster attributes to the *speller* the possibility of teaching certain models of classification of knowledge in themes and cultural contents. Indeed, Webster attributes to the *speller* the possibility of teaching certain models of knowledge classification in themes and cultural content.

#### CONCLUSION

In fine, both spellers seek to define the idea of self in the child in relation to the authority (be it God, their parents or the national government). Both encourage the cultural aspects of reading practices that were still adequate for the demands of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Webster's dictionary, there are fewer religious texts extracted from the sacred scriptures and there are no prayers. Besides, the speller exposes an ideology that is based on centralizing,

unifying, and homogenizing. For those reasons, it may be understood why this speller, with time, became representative of the new nation. Thus, Webster's speller and his need to advance the idea of nation were born simultaneously and were often placed side by side. He envisions that his American speller would create what would be the American Legacy, one built through language.

Since the teaching material represents the community's ethical, moral, and religious values (Monaghan & Barry 1999), they depict the ideology and the expectations of their time. Accordingly, the schooling of a language, its didacticization, and the creation of linguistic material are determined by the social structures. In the case of this speller, its design is representative of the post-Independence United States for which reason, Webster's ideas regarding language and nation matched the socio-political needs of the time.

In fine, the 1793 edition does not depict the American character, as yet. Nonetheless, it shows the way to identifying and establishing the characteristics of the new nation while defining a new model of speller that will be improved by the author over time.

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