

PAPER DETAILS

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AUTHORS: Binnaz MELIN

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TWO MONOLINGUAL DICTIONARIES FOR THE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

I shall begin by stating some basic principles which should be observed in designing monolingual pedagogical dictionaries so far as definition and exemplification are concerned. My next step will be to give a brief outline of what the two EFL dictionaries, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* and the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (the former will be referred to as the ALD and the latter as the DCE have achieved.) I shall also be examining a number of definitions and exemplifications in both dictionaries, chosen essentially at random, so as to discover whether these items (a) comply with the basic principles of lexicography, (b) are in accordance with the claims of the designers of the two dictionaries in question. Although well aware of the difficulties which the lexicographer has to face, I shall maintain the point of view of the language teacher and the advanced learner rather than of the lexicographer both in my evaluation and criticism. I am also hoping that not having the competence and therefore the inherent preconceptions of a native speaker I shall be able to approach the field from a different perspective. I shall also be trying to assess how much, at which level and to what extent the EFL learner can benefit from the dictionaries in question.

Principles of Definition and Exemplification

The following are a number of principles which might well be observed by the lexicographer designing a monolingual EFL dictionary. Those related to monolingual aspects of the EFL dictionaries have been borrowed from Zgusta (1971 pp 254-270) and Weinreich (1967, p. 32), others have been devised while examining the definitions and examples in the ALD and the DCE in the course of identifying the infelicities observed.

Definitions

Lexicographers and linguists hold a number of largely varying views on how lexicographical definitions should be treated in a monolingual dictionary. While some argue that «language is metaphor» and therefore the metaphorical senses of the headword should also be included in the definition (Urdang, 1979, pp 47-52), the others suggest more systematic ways of defining the structured meaning of the word by bringing limitations to both the grammatical structures and number of words used in definitions. When it is EFL dictionaries in question, the problems involved in definitions no doubt increase in number. It becomes a very difficult task for the lexicographer to combine simplicity and accuracy in a reduced metalanguage on the one hand and to offer the learner information on the appropriate use, which hopefully will lead to production, on the other. No matter what the nature of the task is, there is very little doubt that the following principles should be observed:

i) Lexicographic definitions should be sufficiently specific but not overspecific:

TRIANGLE: a figure that has three sides and three angles, the sum of which is 180° is overspecific, since **TRIANGLE** is sufficiently defined by the number of sides. (Weinreich, 1967, p. 37). One may argue that unless the sides are specified as 'straight' and the figure as 'closed', the definition suggested by Weinreich suffers from not being sufficiently specific. The mathematical definition can be re-written as follows: **TRIANGLE** — A closed figure that has three straight sides.

CARROT: a biennial plant (*Daucus carota sativa*) with a usually orange-coloured, spindle-shaped edible root...» is again an example of an overspecific definition which can also be labelled as encyclopedic rather than lexical. 'Biennial' is overspecific for the monolingual dictionary as pointed out by Weinreich (1967, p. 37). In the case of an EFL dictionary 'spindle-shaped' will also have to be either left out or substituted by a more easily understood term. The definition in the DCE for 'CARROT' is a much more suitable one because it sends the user to 'VEGETABLE' as well as using more common word in its definition:

CARROT: i) a type of plant with a fairly long orangered pointed root and grown as a vegetable — see picture of **VEGETABLE** (DCE, 1978).

The word 'fairly' in the definition can be said to be redundant but it is a good example of the lexicographer's obsession with using markers like 'especially', 'usually', 'loosely', etc. all of which are labelled as «lexicographer's jargon to indicate doubtful criteriality» by Weinreich (1967, p. 33)

ii) They should be based on references most widely comprehensible and demanding the least possible specialized knowledge.

WHITE: of the colour of fresh snow or common table salt» is again a good definition which refers to the extra-linguistic world and which also takes the user's background into consideration as well. By adding 'common table salt' to the definition the lexicographer shows his concern for the user who may not have first hand knowledge 'of fresh snow'. (Zgusta. 1971, p. 256).

iii) They should consist of words which are explained in the dictionary and the lexicographer should avoid the use of rare, vulgar, slang, dialectal and archaic words. As a general rule, the headword should not be repeated in its definition.

«NEGRO: an individual of negro race». Such a definition would be acceptable only if the dictionary has an independent definition for the expression 'Negro race'.

Exemplification

Examples, which show how the headword functions in context, have especial importance in EFL dictionaries. The lexicographer aims through exemplification to offer the user guidance on the use of the target language as well as supplying him with semantic information on the headword. The following are the basic rules the lexicographers would seem to need to observe when they either devise or select their examples:

i) Examples should clarify the meanings and supply relevant information, additional to the one conveyed by the definition rather than merely repeating what has already been clarified. In other words, the lexicographer should avoid redundant examples.

«BEAUTIFUL: giving pleasure or delight to the mind or senses». (ALD) Zgusta (1971, p. 264) maintains that the examples which follow the definition in the ALD (beautiful face, flower, voice, weather, music) (a) give further information about the definition, (b) enable the user to make a distinction between things that may give pleasure or delight to the senses without being beautiful. Although his argument is true in the case of monolingual dictionaries, exemplification in a pedagogical one needs further attention. For instance, drawing a distinction between things that give pleasure on its own will not be sufficient mainly because it does not warn the user that there are pitfalls which should be avoided. It is very easy for the EFL learner to be misled by the examples and to use the word in a context which will not be appropriate, unless there is an indication of restriction on the use of the word. In this sense, the definition and exemplification in the DCE for the same headword, no doubt, offers more guidance.

BEATIFUL 1. having-compare HANDSOME, PRETTY 2. infml very good = a beautiful game. Your soup was beautiful, Maude! (DCE)

ii) The examples should be distributed according to the individual senses in the case of an entry which has more than one definition.

ATTACK: 1. to bring violence (on), esp. with weapons. The enemy attacked us at night. 2. to speak or write strongly against. The minister was attacked by ... 3. to harm, spoil, trouble, damage, etc...; The disease attacked his bones 4. to begin ... with eagerness and great interest. He attacked the difficulties at once. He attacked the food as if he had not eaten for a week. (DCE) The entry above as far as the distribution of examples are concerned can be said to be a suitable one. Yet the two examples for the last sense (4) somehow differ in respect of their referents and it is doubtful whether two examples instead of one is given in order to enable the user to arrive at the necessary generalisations in which case the second example should appear first.

iii) The examples should be an integral part of the entry as a whole and should comply with the «rule of economy». The following, for instance, is an example of an uneconomical which reflects a fairly improbable situation in a rather childish way and its information content has very little relevance to the headword:

SAY: 1. to pronounce (a sound, word, etc.): What did you say? I said «You're standing on my toe». (DCE)

iv) Information content of the examples in EFL dictionaries should preferably be universal, non-biased and not irrelevantly culture-specific unless the headword requires such treatment.

TELL: 1. to make (something) known in words to (someone) ... George Washington always told the truth.

The user who is not familiar with Anglo-American history may not grasp why the lexicographer has chosen the name George Washington in this context. It will be impossible for the user to benefit fully from the connotation of the example unless he is aware of the legendary link between the concept of truth and Washington. The denotative meaning of the word is undoubtedly well-known and acknowledged internationally but the particular connotation is culture-specific: «Similar problems are posed by certain proper names (Washington, Pickwick, Shylock). For such words, foreign student, even at a fairly advanced level, need to be given information about the connotative value (for a similar plea on behalf of native speakers, see Urdang 1979)» and (Bejoint, 1981, p. 210).

It is true that study of a language in one sense involves the study of the culture of its users as well and in order to understand native

users of English one must be aware of their constant use of habitual internally culture-specific references. What is being argued here is that the lexicographer should re-examine his examples from the point of the foreign learner and when necessary offer explicit information on the connotative meaning. Such an attempt, in exemplification, may lead to uneconomical examples and this is why I suggest that proper names and similar culture-specific items should be avoided unless the lexicographer is quite sure that the connotative meaning is completely clear as well as the denotative.

STAND 2 1. a strong effort or position of defence: In February 1916 the French army made a stand of 135 runs by the England cricketers Greig and Knott. (DCE).

The meaning of the second example is opaque for the learner who is not familiar with cricket and the proper names mentioned do not add any further information. Neither the number '135' nor the word 'run' signify anything or create any image in the mind of the user who has no knowledge of cricket although the very same example no doubt will produce crystal-clear images in the minds of many. If the lexicographer's aim is to imply that 'stand' is a term used in cricket, it would surely be a better strategy to mention it in the definition rather than trying to suggest it through exemplification. (e.b. stand-a term used in cricket...) The ALD's treatment of the same sense of the word 'STAND' is more adequate and also gives more information on the use of the word by stating clearly that when used in this sense the word is accompanied by 'make':

STAND 1 ... 2. make a stand, be ready to resist or fight: make a stand against the enemy; make a stand for one's principles. (ALD)

THE TWO DICTIONARIES COMPARED

The ALD and the DCE are both elaborate and sophisticated tools of reference for the learner who has a mastery of English. The common features of the two dictionaries like the information on pronunciation and stress, syntax, the type of language used in definition and exemplification, the selection of entries and the emphasis on present day written and spoken English provide the advanced learner with almost all the information he may need for *decoding* activities. The learner can identify a word from its various forms by using the information on grammatical irregularities and indications of connotative meaning as well as being given the meanings of quite a wide range of vocabulary items. Yet it has to be pointed out at the same time that neither of them can be used with complete safety for *encoding* activities.

Both dictionaries display a good deal of rather poorly formulated definitions and exemplification.

WHINE: vi, vt I make such cries; utter complaints, esp about trivial things: The dog was whining outside the door/whining to come into the room. If that child doesn't stop whining, I'll clobber it! 2 utter with a or = beggars whining (out) request for alms (ALD) The vocabulary of the examples is rather difficult for the learner. To request for alms and 'clobber' are both rather uncommon phrases which could have been easily avoided. WALLFLOWER = b.a. *person* who sits by the wall at a dance because no one has asked *them* to dance (DCE)

The most striking thing in the definition is the lack of agreement between the subject of the first sentence and the object of the second which refers to it. A *person* being substituted by *them* in the second sentence can be puzzling for the EFL learner although it reflects the common use. Probably not noly purists would feel that the usage is somewhat awkward in the rather formal context of lexicographical definition.

The use of restricted vocabulary in exemplification and definition in the DCE does not necessarily make it more suitable or easier to use for the EFL learner. In various cases the attempt has led to inadequate definitions and examples.

JUMPER = n. I. Br E a garment for the upper half of the body... (DCE)

The DCE has chosen the awkward phrase 'for the upper part of the body' apparently because the word 'hip' is not one of the words used in definitions.

VALVE = n I a doorlike part of a pipe (or of a pipelike part inside the body), which opens and shuts so as to control the flow of liquid, air, gas, etc., through the pipe, (DCE)

The definition has a number of unidiomatic expressions like «door like part of a pipe» and pipelike part inside the body». in this context is rather ambiguous. The DCE's effort to reduce the number of words used in definition results in lack of important information. The term 'mechanical device' used in the ALD'S definition no doubt adds a lot to the meaning.

The gap between the intermediate lexicon which is covered by textbooks, and the advanced lexicon still exists. The EFL dictionary which reflects the changes in language learning theories of the last twenty years and which can be used as an active tool in the clossroom has not yet been produced. Unless intermediate dictionaries of a different type which set out to cover a limited range of vocabulary in a

more exhaustive way at different levels are designed, the learners will find it difficult to develop their semantic accuracy and sensitiveness in the target language. Such intermediate dictionaries will also provide the EFL teacher with systematic and scientific tools in vocabulary teaching, as they approach it today. Designing such dictionaries, the lexicographer should take into account related developments in sociolinguistics, semantics, psycholinguistics and applied linguistics, and studies in error analysis, contrastive analysis, second/foreign language teaching and language acquisition will certainly offer him invaluable guidance. He should not feel afraid to resort to the native language of the learner or any other type of nontechnical way of presentation. As Béjoint (1981, p. 211) well remarks: «Given that the natural reference skills of any category of users are necessarily limited, lexicographers are faced an alternative: either to tune their dictionary to the existing skills of the user, thus producing a simple, easy-to-use book, with obvious advantages and disadvantages; or to market a beautifully contrived reference work, requiring skills that are far beyond what can be expected of the average user... What is clear is that ... any effort of the lexicographer to be complete, detailed or subtle, runs the risk of outwitting the user».

Foreign teachers of English should think twice before recommending *this* dictionary other than *that* one, examining the reference skills required very carefully. They should also be prepared to offer thorough and systematic guidance to their students until they can use their dictionaries with remarkable competence. In the meantime, they should also try to convince foreign language policy makers that the introduction of bilingual pedagogical dictionaries designed for the learners of a specific language will constitute a step forward in that field of language teaching.

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