A Checklist for Reviewers of EFL Dictionaries

— Checkpoints about the Review —

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Nakamoto (1994) has provided a checklist for reviewers which consists of four parts: (a) checkpoints about the dictionary's macro-structure and micro-structure, (b) those about the review, (c) those about the critic(s), and (d) those about the influence. Nakamoto (forthcoming) has re-considered the first of these, i.e. the checkpoints about the dictionary.

Here I shall review the second, i.e. the checkpoints about the review (to be abbreviated [R]), which are all given in question form. This checklist will be particularly useful for the critics as well as the metacritics to reconsider how to write a dictionary review in a more objective fashion.

I.　Review date.
[R-1] When was the review published?

Is there any 'best before date' of reviews, i.e. the deadline for dictionaries to be reviewed? The answer is obviously "No". Theoretically, we could review any dictionary at any time. Ideally speaking, however, new dictionaries (including new editions of older dictionaries) should be reviewed within, say, one or two years after they have been released. It would be of no use if we were to review a dictionary the next edition of which is about to be published, say, next month, or is already available, unless that (old) dictionary is considered to be worth reviewing from a historic point of view (cf. [R-15]).

II. Medium of publication.

[R-2] In which medium is the review published?

Dictionary reviews are most often published in linguistic or lexico-graphic journals, (foreign) language teachers' magazines, library or librar-ians' magazines, or public newspapers (cf. Landau 1984: 304). However, one may happen to find a review in a specialist magazine for gardeners, for instance, if it is a specialised dictionary for gardeners that is reviewed.

[R-3] Where is the medium published?

It would be surprising to find a review published in a country where the reviewed dictionary is hardly expected to be used (e.g. the case where a review of an Italian-Russian dictionary for Italian and/or Russian users is published in Japan). We would be equally surprised if we find no review published in the country at which the dictionary is targeted (e.g. the case where no review of an EFL dictionary were to be published in Japan where dictionaries of this type sell well).

[R-4] How widely is the review circulated?

A review published in a public newspaper will be read by more people than a review in a specialist journal. By checking the range of circulation of the medium, we can guess how widely a review published there might be read.

The reviewer should choose the right medium and metalanguage (see [R-8]) so that his review can be read by the intended readers (see [R-5]). If he wants to have his review read by dictionary experts, for instance, a lexicographers' journal is a better medium than a public newspaper.

III. Readership.

[R-5] Who are the intended readers of the review?

As the compilers should bear in mind the audience of their dictionary, the critic should take into consideration the audience of his review. Doing this would help him to determine how to review the dictionary. For ex-ample, if the intended readers are dictionary experts, he could use techni-cal terms from lexicography and linguistics. If lay-users are the intended

readers, on the other hand, he should definitely avoid using such jargon.

The intended readers are in most cases identical to those of the medium in which the review is published (Fig. 1).
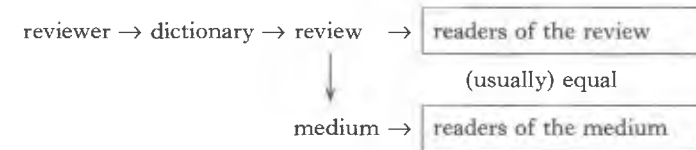

Fig. 1

However, the intended audience does not necessarily have to be in-tended users of the dictionary reviewed. Nor does the reviewer have to be an intended user (Fig. 2).
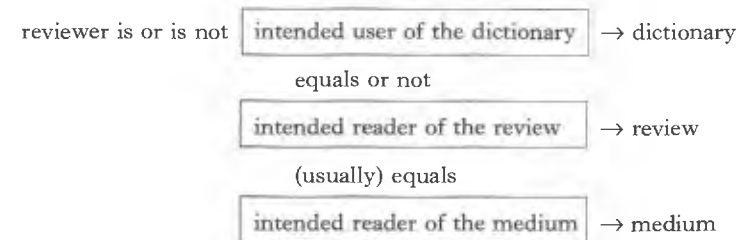

Fig. 2

IV. Perspective.

[R-6] From which perspective is the dictionary reviewed?

The perspective is usually determined, or at least influenced, by the reviewer's occupation (Fig. 3).

It should be noted that a review by a language teacher from a learner's perspective, for instance, is not necessarily identical to a review written by his student (Fig. 4).

In (2) the dictionary will be looked at directly by the learner-user, while in (1) it is after all reviewed by the teacher, who is probably a more ad-vanced and experienced learner of the language and who is a more skilled dictionary user than his student.
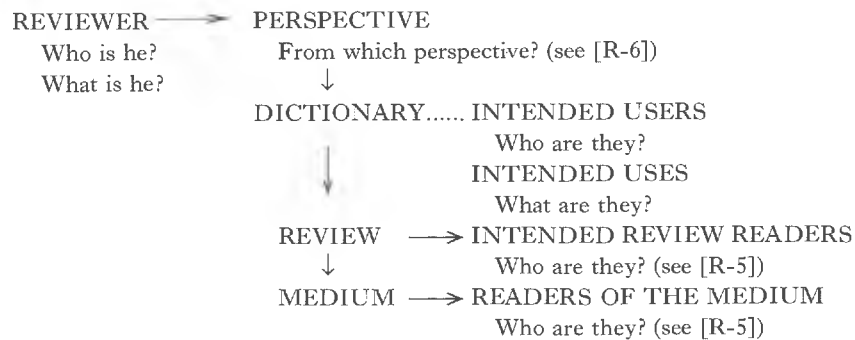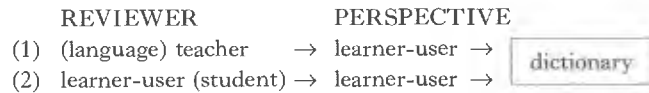
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REVIEWER ─────▶ PERSPECTIVE
  Who is he?        From which perspective? (see [R-6])
  What is he?              ↓
                    DICTIONARY...... INTENDED USERS
                        │             Who are they?
                        ▼             INTENDED USES
                                      What are they?
                    REVIEW ──────▶ INTENDED REVIEW READERS
                        ↓             Who are they? (see [R-5])
                    MEDIUM ──────▶ READERS OF THE MEDIUM
                                      Who are they? (see [R-5])
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Fig. 3

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    REVIEWER                    PERSPECTIVE
(1) (language) teacher     →  learner-user  →  ┌───────────┐
(2) learner-user (student) →  learner-user  →  │ dictionary │
                                               └───────────┘
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Fig. 4

V. The number of reviewers.

[R-7] Is the review written by a single reviewer or by a team of reviewers?

Some reviews are written by a single author ('single-author' reviews) and some by more than one person ('team' reviews; cf. Chapman 1977: 158).

There are two forms of team review. The same dictionary can be reviewed by all the contributors at the same time, or each contributor may review one or more of the aspects of the dictionary. In the latter case, a critic who is interested, and an expert, in word history, for instance, should review the etymological information presented in the dictionary. It is important that all contributors look at the dictionary from the same perspective (see [R-6]). The same team could review the next edition of the same dictionary.

VI. Metalanguage.

[R-8] Which language is used as a metalanguage in the review?

Needless to say, the metalanguage chosen does not have to be the language covered by the dictionary under review. For instance, monolingual English dictionaries have often been reviewed in Japanese (and published in Japan). The critic should choose a right metalanguage, bearing in mind the intended readers (see [R-5]) on the one hand, and the medium in which his review will be published (see [R-2]) on the other.

VII. The length of the review?

[R-9] How long is the review?

The same dictionary could be reviewed either extensively or briefly, irrespective of the dictionary's size. It is not necessarily the case that large dictionaries have to be reviewed extensively and small ones briefly. However, the more comprehensive the dictionary is, the more extensive its review tends to be. It goes without saying that there is no correlation between length and quality of the review. Concise reviews could be better than only verbose ones.

Length is often predetermined by the medium. The reviewer should consider how to allocate the space available (see [R-17]), i.e. he should decide on which aspect(s) of the dictionary he will focus.

VIII. Genre and title.

[R-10] What heading is the review given?

A review may variously be called 'review', 'review article', 'short notice', 'analysis', etc. What is the difference between 'review' and 'review article' on the one hand, and between 'review' and an article with no special heading on the other? It seems that there is no agreement among critics, editors of journals, and metalexicographers about the definitions of this set of terms. Steiner (1984: 167) states that "If the reviewer is given the opportunity to use enough space, the review may turn out to be an essay on lexicographical matters". This is likely to be true.

[R-11] What is the title of the review?

Some reviews are merely entitled "Review", but others have a fully formulated title (and subtitle).

Marello (forthcoming) divides the discursive titles of dictionary reviews

into three main groups: (1) titles named after famous films, novels, songs, idioms, or proverbs, (2) playful titles, and (3) titles made up from specific expressions (e.g. neologisms or striking metaphors). She points out that it is often the editor of the medium rather than the reviewer who gives a name to the review. Strange titles are preferred by some critics and/or magazine editors. This is probably because such titles are believed to draw readers' attention more successfully. However, irrelevant titles should be avoided.

IX.   Objects of the reviews.

[R-12] How many dictionaries are 'reviewed' in the review?

In most cases a single dictionary is reviewed ('single' reviews). However, two or more dictionaries can be reviewed at a time, whether or not they belong to the same dictionary type ('multiple' reviews).

It is important not to confuse the dictionaries 'reviewed' and those only 'mentioned' (see [R-14]).

[R-13] (If multiple) Does the reviewer compare the dictionaries or review them separately?

The reviewer may compare the dictionaries to be reviewed ('comparative' reviews (Type A or B)), or simply look at them separately ('separate' reviews) (Fig. 5).
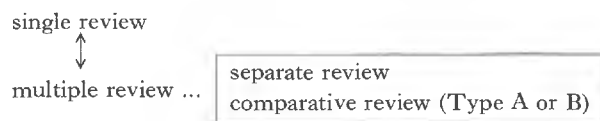
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single review
      ↕
multiple review ...   ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                      │ separate review                 │
                      │ comparative review (Type A or B)│
                      └─────────────────────────────────┘
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Fig. 5

[R-14] How many dictionaries (other than those under review) are mentioned in the review?

Comparison is a popular method many dictionary reviewers employ. By comparing similar and/or different dictionaries, the distinctive features of each dictionary could be more easily described and more effectively stressed.

The term 'comparative review' is a little ambiguous. It can further be categorised (Table 1).

Table 1

review type		dictionary/-ies reviewed	dictionary/-ies compared (but not reviewed)
(1)	single review		
(1–1)	single, non-comparative review	A	nil
(1–2)	single, comparative review	A	X, Y, Z, ...
(2)	multiple separate review		
(2–1)	separate, non-comparative review	A	nil
		B	nil
		⋮	nil
(2–2)	separate, comparative review	A	X, Y, Z, ...
		B	X, Y, Z, ... or S, T, U, ... or S, Y, Z, ...
		⋮	⋮
(3)	multiple comparative review		
(3–1)	Type A	A, B, C, ...	nil
(3–2)	Type B	A, B, C, ...	X, Y, Z, ...

The term 'comparative review' has a narrower sense in (3–1) and (3–2) than in the other four. Dictionaries are comparatively reviewed in both, but in Type A (3–1) several dictionaries (i.e. A, B, C, ...) are reviewed together in a comparative fashion, while in Type B (3–2) they are jointly compared to other dictionaries (i.e. X, Y, Z, ...).

It is not always the case in (2–2) that the same dictionaries are compared. For example, when the dictionary A is compared with the dictionaries X, Y and Z, the dictionary B may be compared with the same set of the dictionaries (i.e. X, Y and Z), or with other set (e.g. S, T and U, or S, Y and Z, etc.).

[R-14-a]   (If separate = (2–1) or (2–2)) Does the reviewer allocate

the space equally to each dictionary?

[R-14-b]   **(If multiple comparative (Type A or B) = (3–1) or (3–2))**
Does the reviewer compare the dictionaries under re-
view in a well-balanced way, or does he stress one (or
more) of them more than the others?

It is possible for the critic to make his review ill-balanced, deliberately or not. He might allocate more space to the dictionary he considers more important. Thus, we cannot say that 'well-balanced' reviews are better than those which are not, and vice versa.

[R-15] (If comparative = (1–2), (2–2), (3–1), or (3–2)) Is it a synchronic or diachronic review, or both?

'Synchronic' reviews are reviews where dictionaries published in the same year or within, say, five years are compared. 'Diachronic' reviews, on the other hand, are reviews of the dictionaries published more than, say, years apart.

Revised dictionaries are often compared with their previous edition(s) diachronically. However, they could also be compared synchronically with their competitors. It is of course possible to review a revised dictionary
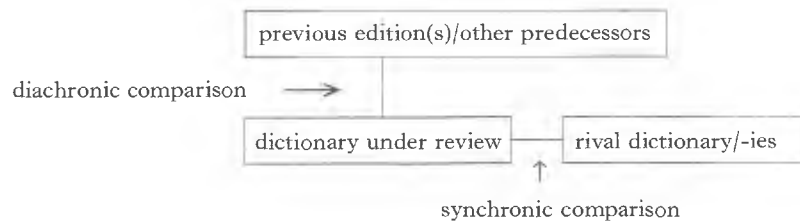

Fig. 6

both diachronically and synchronically at the same time (or to review with-out any comparison) (Fig. 6).

The terms 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' should not be confused with 'contemporary' and 'obsolete'. For instance, we could review two dictio-naries published in the 16th century by synchronically comparing them with each other, or by diachronically comparing them with other dictio-

naries published in the 17th century, for instance, even though they are all now 'obsolete'. These could be called 'historical' reviews.

X.   Features reviewed.
[R-16] Which features of the dictionary are reviewed?

The reviewer could examine all the features of the dictionary, or cover some of them selectively (cf. Nakamoto 1994 and forthcoming).

Since this checklist is designed to be applied to only a particular type of dictionaries (i.e. EFL dictionaries), we will need different checklists, or need to revise the present checklist so that we can use it when we review other type of dictionary (e.g. monolingual native-speaker dictionaries). For instance, as Jehle (1990: 302) points out, the lexicographical topics such as 'grammar,' 'definition,' 'collocation,' 'examples' and 'usage' are particu-larly important for judging EFL dictionaries.

[R-17] (When two or more features are examined,) Which fea-tures are discussed more extensively?

The critic should consider the balance. He may review the dictionary comprehensively ('comprehensive' reviews), dealing with each topic equally, or discuss one or more of the features in greater detail, while mentioning the others only in passing. 'Well-balanced' reviews are not necessarily better than reviews which are not. If, for example, the dictio-nary under review is different from other dictionaries only in the manner of semantic explanations, the reviewer could, or perhaps should, pay more attention to semantic information supplied by the dictionary.

An etymologist, on the other hand, might prefer to discuss etymological issues. He might only superficially look at other features of the dictionary and mention nothing at all about the art of dictionary making. Such a review will be read by rather a restricted number of specialists (in this case linguists; for intended readers see [R-5]). Reviews of this type can be called 'academic' reviews and come closer to a linguistic essay than a review per se (cf. [R-10]).

XI.   Critical vantagepoint.

[R-18] Is it an objective or subjective review?

Hartmann (1992: 65) has taken a pessimistic view of dictionary criticism:

> objective standards are still rare, and consequently critical reviews
> are very often symptoms of the personal opinions of the evaluator
> rather than genuine attempts at measuring quality in terms either of
> the compiler's own principles or of degrees of user satisfaction.

What should the critic do to make his review more objective?

Three steps are proposed to achieve an objective critical stance:

(1)   Understand the policy of the dictionary, especially on its intended users and uses;

(2)   Carry out random sampling tests that cover the whole book to see whether or not the policy is realised (cf. Chapman 1977: 158);

(3)   Conduct surveys among the users (e.g. questionnaires) to establish their needs for, and complaints about, the dictionary.

The data gained from such tests and/or surveys are of great value. A review based on such data would be more objective and convincing than that based merely on the reviewer's opinions and/or 'impressions' of the dictionary.

Even if it is a purely 'descriptive' review (see [R-19]), the critic should not copy the publisher's claims which may be found on the back cover or dust jacket. He should ask whether the claims are realised in the dictionary.

[R-19] Is it a descriptive or evaluative review?

'Descriptive' reviews are reviews in which the critic simply describes the dictionary under review and passes no personal judgment on it. Even simple adjectives like *new, simple, comprehensive, user-friendly*, etc. are not used, unless they are cited directly from the dictionary compiler's or publisher's statements.

Reviews which evaluate the dictionary in some way or other are called 'evaluative' reviews. Needless to say, it makes no sense if we say 'evalua-

tive' reviews are better than 'descriptive' ones, and vice versa.

No matter how the critic may evaluate the dictionary, whether favourably or negatively, he should give his reasons — convincing reasons. Compare the following answers to the question "Why do you recommend the dictionary?":

— because I like it;
— because it was compiled by a famous scholar;
— because it was published by a well-known company;
— because it contains more entries than other similar works;
— because it has adopted the IPA.

Are these answers able to satisfy the reader? The important thing is, after all, to give reasons why he likes it, why a dictionary which was compiled by a famous scholar, which was published by a well-known company, which contains more entries, or which has adopted the IPA is recommendable.

In order to make the reasons more convincing, the critic should, here too, bear in mind the following points:

(1)   the intended users of the dictionary;
(2)   the intended uses of the dictionary;
(3)   the intended readers of the review (see [R-5]).

In other words, he should consider the dictionary users' needs, the compilers' intentions, and the review readers' demands.

[R-20]   Does the reviewer evaluate the dictionary favourably or negatively?

The term 'criticism' is ambliguous; it has a neutral and (strongly) negative sense (see McArthur, ed. 1992, s.v. criticism). Here it is used in the neutral sense.

The critic can evaluate the dictionary positively ('positive' reviews) or negatively ('negative' reviews). It is of course possible to evaluate some aspects of the dictionary positively but others negatively. It makes no sense to say that 'positive' reviews are better than 'negative' ones, and vice versa.

When the reviewer criticises the dictionary (negatively), does he offer

any suggestion to improve the dictionary he criticised? If he does, his review can be called a 'constructive' review (see [R-21]).

[R-21] Is it constructive or destructive criticism?

What underlies 'destructive' criticism is an intention something like "Let the dictionary vanish from the world!" Such criticism is unfair and even derogatory.[2]

'Constructive' criticism is much more popular and far better than the 'destructive' type. Nevertheless, they do not necessarily please the dictionary makers, because they might contain excessively idealised standards that could never be applied to the dictionary reviewed. Such irresponsible suggestions are often due to lack of knowledge about dictionary making (cf. Landau 1984: 305).

To sum up, my recommendations for future reviewers are as follows:

(1)   Always consider the intended users and uses of the dictionary, and the intended readers of your review (see [R-5]);
(2)   Be honest in your appraisal of the dictionary (see [R-20]);
(3)   Don't be afraid to evaluate the dictionary negatively (see [R-20]);
(4)   Give convincing reasons for the evaluation, whether favourable or negative. They should be supported by data gained from surveys (see [R-18]);
(5)   Don't hesitate to make suggestions if you believe they could

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2) I know one example of 'destructive' type of review. Takahiko Soejima and his colleagues severely criticised two Kenkyusha's leading dictionaries in their book entitled *Kekkan Eiwa-jiten no Kenkyu* (*A Study of the 'defective' English-Japanese Dictionaries*; Tokyo: JICC-shuppankyoku, 1989). They condemned "poor quality" of the two dictionaries, particularly their "incorrect and unsuitable translations", and concluded that they "should disappear from the world at once!" This book exerted profound influence not only on lexicographers, publishers, English teachers, but on learner-users (especially high school pupils) in Japan. However, the critics of *their* book found in it a great deal of misunderstanding of dictionary making. The authors were severely criticised by the reviewers, particularly for the manner of their criticism. Their criticism was not considered fair, for similar "mistakes" were also found in other dictionaries published by the companies other than Kenkyusha. Besides, they used a large number of swearwords. The photographs on the front and back covers were very aggressive and disgusting, where the two dictionaries were seen torn into pieces. They were sued by Kenkyusha.

improve the dictionary (see [R-21]);
(6)   Don't be destructive in your criticism (see [R-21]);
(7)   Consider the balance of your review taking available space into consideration (see [R-14-a], [R-14-b], and [R-17]).

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