

Book Review

B.T. Sue Atkins and Michael Rundell

The Oxford Guide to Practical Lexicography
(Oxford University Press, 2008)

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The second half of the 20th century saw a large number of publications on lexicography: Zgusta's *Manual of Lexicography* (1971), Landau's *Dictionaries: The Art and Craft of Lexicography* (1984), and the impressive *Dictionaries: An International Encyclopedia of Lexicography* (1989–91), to name only a few. The beginning few years in the present century saw Landau's revision (2001)¹, Hartmann's *Teaching and Researching Lexicography* (2001) and so forth.

Note that the last three decades saw a number of monolingual British dictionaries for foreign learners, followed by their family dictionaries including those of collocations, idioms or phrasal verbs. Most issued since the late 1980s are compiled based on corpora, whether they are the British National Corpus, the Bank of English², the Oxford English Corpus or the like, which is in stark contrast with dictionaries issued in the U.S.A.

2008 saw *The Oxford Guide to Practical Lexicography* (OGPL). The authors are experienced and active lexicographers: Ms. Atkins, who reminds the present writer of *Dictionary of English Phrasal Verbs and their Idioms* (1974), has been working on bilingual dictionaries, such as *Collins-Robert French-English, English-French Dictionary* (1978¹, 1995⁴)³. She has been fascinated in 'theoretical lexicography' or 'an enormous body of linguistic theory which has the potential to help lexicographers

to do their jobs more effectively and with greater confidence' (p. 4). Mr. Rundell, author of *The Dictionary of Cricket* (1985¹, 1995²), Managing Editor for *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1987², 1995³) and *Longman Language Activator* (1993¹), has been Editor-in-Chief of *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2002¹, 2007²) and one of the leading figures in corpus-based lexicography.

OGPL by the well qualified authors is to be recommended for those interested in state-of-the-art corpus-based lexicography, particularly dictionaries for foreign learners rather than those for native speakers, because of the writers' involvement with the former type dictionaries. In OGPL it looks as if lectures or talks were given in their Lexicom workshops in a fairly informal style: most of the contents seem to be based on, or derived from, the Lexicom classes for the past several years. OGPL is, therefore, not meant for beginners in lexicography, as readers are expected to possess basic knowledge of lexicography including some noted dictionary compilers and their works.

OGPL gives readers a fairly comprehensive account of how dictionaries are planned and created. Part I, Pre-lexicography, contains dictionary types and dictionary user; lexicographic evidence; methods and resources; linguistic theory meets lexicography; planning the dictionary; and planning the entry. Part II, Analysing the data, deals with building the database (1) word senses and (2) the lexical unit. Part III, Compiling the entry, is concerned with building the monolingual entry; the translation stage; and building the bilingual entry.

OGPL mainly deals with learners' dictionaries and general dictionaries. It is concerned with what is called microstructure that constitutes the core in (learners') dictionaries: headwords and senses as well as examples with syntactic or other information shown, to which the book persuasively shows lexicographic corpora, if not perfect, have provided and will provide plenty of new insights for improved description. The procedure for explanation with abundant authentic examples from corpora (though not all the sources are made explicit) makes it rather easy to follow the text. To comprehend gradual stages of development in lexicographic description offered by cutting-edge technology, it would

be more instructive to compare a few previous editions or other dictionaries of the same type.

Some topics, however, may not be quite familiar: frame semantics and Apresjan's or Mel'čuk's studies, for example. In Chapters 5 and 9 is provided an explanation of frame semantics and its application to language description to show how a dictionary taking account of the theory is likely to be improved. It remains to be seen whether or how the theory, however promising it may be, will contribute to dictionary description.

Others are fascinating: not only corpus query system and dictionary writing system, but also sense relationships and definition, for instance. Given prototype definition, full sentence definition, when-clause definition, and defining vocabulary, in addition to conventional types of definition, it is made clear that defining is one of the areas where lexicographers have struggled by a process of trial and error, especially in learners' dictionaries, because what users look up most frequently is word senses. They are expected to be always seeking a new lexicographic paradigm of definition for users.

What underlies this work is the authors' consistent and right statement that dictionaries should be compiled aimed at typical (or potential) users, which reflects that users' reference needs and skills have been gradually clarified as a result of user research including market research.

OGPL is a practical guide, and not a monograph on lexicography which deals with a specific theme in great detail, listing for further research at the end of each chapter Recommended readings, Further readings and related Websites as well as Bibliography at the end. Some papers in the bibliography are found in Fontenelle's companion *Practical Lexicography: A Reader*. Carefully read with additional reference to other studies, *OGPL* will help readers to develop a clearer understanding of what has been and still remains to be done in lexicography.

OGPL does not list explicitly all the dictionaries and the editions surveyed or referred to in the text, including all their publication years. It would be useful to enumerate them because they tend to change the

titles in the new editions. Despite a number of wrong or misleading descriptions (see de Schryver's review), particularly for those taking a keen interest in state-of-art lexicography for monolingual (learners') dictionaries, *OGPL* will no doubt make one of the standard reference books on corpus-based lexicography in the years ahead.

NOTES

- 1) A comparison of Landau's two editions makes it clear that since the late 1980s corpora have changed the compilation method and description in dictionaries.
- 2) Remember that *Looking Up: An account of the COBUILD Project in lexical computing* (1987) was published, which led to the publication of *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (1987). It is regarded as the first account in which the method of dictionary compilation by making good use of corpora was mentioned.
- 3) The superscripts show the edition numbers.

REFERENCES

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