

Who needs dictionaries?

How dictionaries are dissolving into the larger world of 'Search'

- and what that means for language users

Michael Rundell
Lexicography MasterClass and Macmillan Dictionaries

The joy of books

1. 'The book is like the spoon, the hammer, the wheel. Once invented, it cannot be improved' Umberto Eco, 2012
2. 'I confess I still get a psychic satisfaction from fumbling with a balky dust jacket wrapped around a real 'live' book, while taking in that distinctive new-book fragrance, and experiencing the subtle, yet futile resistance of the book spine on its very first opening' Review of new edition of *American Heritage Dictionary*, 2011

Reality check

- ‘The three things no young person owns or uses and often don't realise exist: an alarm clock, an address book **and a dictionary**. At university i didn't meet a single person who owned any of them.’

(Comment posted on Jonathan Green's *Guardian* article on crowdsourcing)

The world we live in now

1. 'I have selected a container-grown **Fagus sylvatica Purpurea** from the nursery that supplies the City Council with trees'
2. 'How do I get my iPhone ringtones onto my new Android phone?'
3. 'Hello Michael, Amazon has recommendations for you...'

The world we live in now: features

1. Fagus sylvatica Purpurea: just Google it: from 'look it up' to **'search'**
2. How to do it: user forums, YouTube videos, **crowd-sourcing**
3. Amazon's recommendations: 'adaptive technology', getting to know the user, **personalization**

The world we live in now: implications

- Will paper dictionaries survive? (clue: look what happened to encyclopedias)
- Dictionaries aren't like other books
 - 'People typically consult maps, encyclopedias and dictionaries while they are doing something else' (Nesi, in press)
- For reference, digital is better:
 - dictionaries have found their ideal medium
- But will they survive at all?

Outline

- Two revolutions in dictionaries
- Digitisation: Pros and cons
 - what we lose
 - what we gain
- Emerging trends in 'Search'
- What do users really need?
 - opportunities and outlook

Two revolutions in dictionaries

- The 'Corpus revolution' (1981 →)
 - John Sinclair, COBUILD project, first lexicographic corpus
 - steady, linear development: bigger data, smarter search tools, corpus lexicography the norm
 - COBUILD corpus 7m. words, current corpora 2bn.+
 - effects are profound, but mostly 'internal' (lexicographers' working methods)
 - leads to better dictionaries...but they're still dictionaries

The second revolution: print to digital

- A slow start, from early 1990s
 - dictionaries on CD-ROMs, handheld devices
 - changes are mostly cosmetic ('books in digital form')
- Then: rapid acceleration since about 2008
 - central role of the Web, rise of mobile devices
 - effects are 'external': how information is produced, published, and used
 - completely new paradigm (still emerging)

What do we lose? (1) Publishers

- Reliable business model
 - one-size-fits-all dictionaries, big global market
 - we used to know our competitors
- 'Gatekeeper' role
 - e.g. OUP flowchart: how words get into the dictionary, Merriam-Webster video
- Time to think
 - 5-year publishing cycle
- Degree of 'control' over users' behaviour

What do we lose? (2) Users

- Dictionary as ‘authority’
 - the popular image: lexicographers are ‘white-haired, cardiganed index-carded old duffers ... boffinish, pedantic and obsessed; for them the words *disinterested* and *uninterested* are as distinct as lions and tigers’ (Allan Brown on the closure of Chambers dictionary department)
- Too much information? Needs careful management

What do we gain?

(1) the obvious things

- Space
 - from: very limited
 - most dictionary conventions driven by requirement to get maximum information into limited space
 - to: unlimited
- Multimedia
 - e.g. audio pronunciation, sound effects, games, animation, video clips, links to Web content
- Currency
 - staying really up to date (not once in 5 years)

Space and currency: two examples

1. Linguistic fallout of:

- financial crisis of 2008, e.g. *credit default swap*, *quantitative easing*, *bad bank*, *subprime*
- social networking revolution, e.g. *unfollow*, *defriend*, *tweetup*, *retweet*, *twitterholic*
- all new since last edition of Macmillan (2007)

2. Topical issues: rapid responses

- the *pleb* saga: blog post discusses
- *Higgs boson*: added to crowd-sourced dictionary, longer article in Buzzwords

Implications include...

- Challenge to older conventions
 - what goes in the dictionary – just anything?
 - is ‘up-to-date-ness’ more important than ‘authority’?
- Before
 - ‘It’s not in the dictionary, so it can’t be a proper word’
- Now
 - ‘It’s not in this dictionary, so it can’t be a good dictionary’

What do we gain?

(2) Crowdsourcing/UGC

- Part of the Zeitgeist
 - blogs, forums, citizen journalism...
 - end of 'top-down' model (few providers, many consumers)
- It worked for encyclopedias: can it work for dictionaries?
- Already happening

Crowdsourcing examples

- Malaysian national dictionary:
 - lexicographers propose Malaysian translations for new technical terms
 - users vote: which one is preferred?
- Wordnik.com
 - users can supply new entries, record their own pronunciations, create lists
- ABBYY Lingvo, Wiktionary
 - users can provide translation equivalents

Macmillan's (crowd-sourced) *Open Dictionary*

- Works well for 'long tail' items, e.g.
- New vocabulary
 - *unfollow, gender reveal, troll*
- Technical vocabulary
 - *epigenetics, macroprudential, abiogenesis*
- Regional vocabulary
 - *kuringi, adipoli, lobat, mither, keitai shosetsu*

Crowd-sourcing: objections

□ *Urban Dictionary*

- subjective, scatological, random
- 260 'definitions' of *Republican*
- a weak example

□ 'Do we believe this farrago of misinformation, theorising, one-off terms and a level of "definition" based on a count of thumbs up and down?.. if reference is to remain useful then it cannot become amateur hour.' Jonathan Green, *Guardian*

Crowd-sourcing: advantages

- Core vocabulary is already well covered in ‘proper’ dictionaries
 - you go to Urban Dictionary for entertainment – not to look up *advice* or *clarify* or *imminent*
- Good for LSPs (mono- and multilingual terms)
 - ‘Each contributor has a certain field of expertise... [this] fosters the encoding of a vast amount of domain-specific knowledge’ (Meyer & Gurevych)
 - may make possible what was formerly impracticable

Emerging trends

(1) The 'self-updating dictionary'

- New dictionary entries created by software
- Several stages, all (more or less) doable
 - software detects emerging words and senses
 - e.g. Cook 2012 finding new lexical blends in Twittersphere
 - 'needles in haystacks': computational techniques make this feasible
 - using corpus data, create and populate entries automatically, find good examples

Emerging trends

(2) The 'adaptive dictionary'

- What Amazon does: software learns about the user, 'adaptively selects and prioritises the items which are most relevant ' (Kwary 2012.35)
 - 'adaptively' the key word: as users' needs change, dictionary continually resets, reconfigures
 - big Web research area
 - already used in e-learning systems

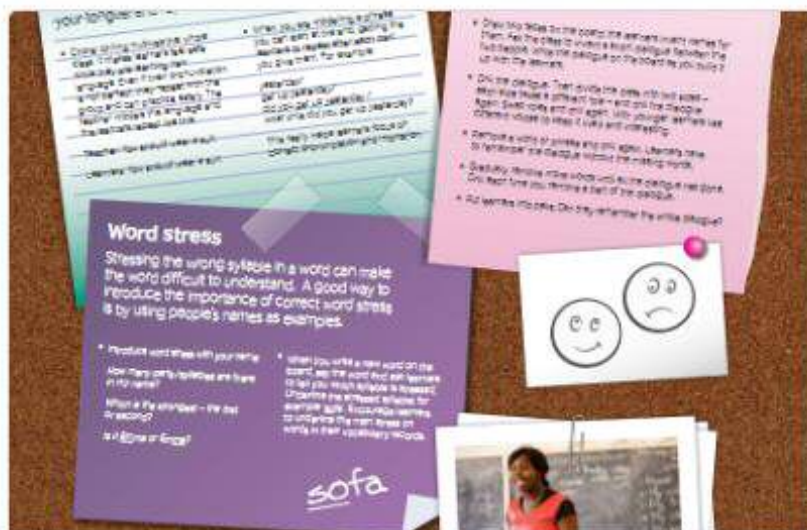
Emerging trends

(3) The 'disappearing dictionary'

- Dictionary embedded on other sites, in other devices. e.g.
 - Kindle
 - news websites
 - widgets, double-click tools (Macmillan and other dictionary publishers)
 - British Council [TeachingEnglish](#)

The 'disappearing dictionary' (contd)

- Alternative resources
 - User forums
 - [Word Reference](#), TeachingEnglish etc
 - Translation tools
 - Google Translate, www.linguee.com, Eijiro Pro
 - 'Text remediation' tools, text analysers
 - paste in your text, system corrects errors, offers suggestions
 - many under development, but it's very hard
- If users' needs can be met by other means...



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Dear Rob,

Is there a way to get colour flashcards? If I choose an image from the image...
[read comment](#)

shweta
jhamnani
India



another question concerning the topic of the article. I give private lessons to a teenage

English for the Games

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Cambridge Dictionary

wordreference.com forums

Thread: **To GO ON FOR**

Like Sign Up to see what your friends like.

Thread Tools Search Thread

Today, 1:14 PM

#1



XIMAE78
Member

Join Date: Jun 2010
Location: Spain
Native language: Spanish
Posts: 39

HI THERE!

What´s the difference between the following questions?

- How long did the film last?.....¿Cuánto duró la película?
- How long did the film go on for?.....

Thanks.

Ads by Google

Today, 1:28 PM

#2

simonitov
Member

Join Date: Aug 2012
Location: Hampshire, UK
Native language: English - British
Posts: 51

They do both mean the same thing but the second could imply that maybe the film was tedious and you were suffering having to watch it because it 'went on' for ages.

BC TeachingEnglish Forum

TeachingEnglish

Difference between 'good at 'and 'good in'.

Submitted by divakar3368 on 11 August, 2010 - 20:10

Dear friends ,

Can anybody help me by explaining the difference between the usage 'good at and good in'.

Thanking you in advance,



Heath

good at + verb ???!

Submitted on 3 July, 2012 - 16:33

I wouldn't focus on it as a difference of form.

That is, it is NOT true that 'good at' is followed by a verb and that 'good in' is followed by a noun - as the following examples demonstrate:

- He is good at football.
- He is good at maths.
- He is good at almost everything he does.

All of these are nouns or nominal groups. In fact, the 'verb' examples are in 'gerund' form specifically because they need to act like a noun:

- He is good at swimming.
- He is good at riding a motorbike.

The distinction seems to be more of a contrast between "good at" as a sort of fixed expression to do with ability, and between "good" followed by any additional circumstance, time, etc. For example, here are several other "good + prep" examples:

- He is good in the field of science.
- He is good in his role as guidance counsellor.

Some conclusions

- Tentative: we're still in the middle of a sea change
- New rules of thumb for the digital age
 - everything happens faster than you expect
 - your competitors can come from anywhere
 - adapt or die, manage change (cf. the music industry)
 - e.g. crowd-sourcing: provide good templates, guidelines, oversight

The place of dictionaries now

□ Producers

- part of (much larger) 'language engineering' (NLP) community
- benefit from major, global research efforts
- e.g. automation of (many parts of) dictionary creation, lowers cost of corpus lexicography

□ Consumers

- part of (much larger) world of Search
- vast range of language resources, instant access, search skills of digital natives

Reasons to be cheerful

- Good niche products thrive
 - *Financial Times, Nature journal, OED*
- Big opportunities for ESP and EAP – language *users* rather than language learners
 - specialised corpora: inexpensive
 - wordlists for specialised domains
 - definitions, collocations, corpus examples etc

Teething troubles

- Lots of trial and error
- Technologies still developing
- e.g. Wordnik
 - grabs example sentences from contemporary sources (blogs, tweets, news sites)
 - definitions are from older dictionaries
 - the two don't always match up, e.g. *traction*

Teething troubles...

□ Diccionario de la Real Academia Española

entendido, da.

(Del part. de *entender*).

1. adj. Sabio, docto, perito, diestro. U. t. c. s.

no darse alguien **por** ~.

1. loc. verb. Hacerse el sordo, aparentar que no se ha **entendido** algo que le atañe.

□ V.

abbreviations, tildes, concise definitions, no hyperlinks....
an e-dictionary that's just like a book

'The future is already here ...

- ...it is just not very evenly distributed'
- William Gibson

- Thank you!
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