Start with words and pictures
Shirley Burridge
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. 94 pp.

This is a 500-word alphabetical picture dictionary that aims to explain the meaning of a word by contrasting it with other words—an admirable linguistic principle, and one which much improves on the purely alphabetical arrangement of traditional dictionaries (so that, for example, *aunt* and *uncle* are separated by many pages). Each page is divided into five vertical columns. At the top of each column is a brightly coloured downwards-pointing arrow, and resting on the arrow is a thematic picture to show which section of the alphabet you are in (e.g. all A-words have an apple, all B-words have different kinds of bread, etc.). The word then appears beneath the arrow in bold black type. Beneath the word is a full-colour picture showing a relevant contrastive situation and an associated phrase or sentence. For example, under *across* we have two pictures, one showing *across the road*, the other showing *along the road*; under *ago* we have a picture of an old man (*Bob Smith—now*) and a young man (*Bob Smith—50 years ago*) and a baby (*Bob Smith—70 years ago*).

Of course the contrastive principle won't work easily with sets of incompatible terms (see Crystal, 1987), and thus we find *aeroplane*, *airport*, *ankle*, *apple*, and several more without any contrasting item. Sometimes, there is a pictorial but no linguistic contrast, e.g. *bird* is shown with pictures of three kinds of bird, all labelled simply *bird*. Sometimes, no contrast is given even when one exists, e.g. *afternoon* isn't contrasted with *morning*. Also, some of the contrasts might mislead: under *angry*, we have an unlabelled happy face, with the angry face given at the bottom. There are several antonyms given (e.g. *above* vs *below*), but this isn't done consistently (e.g. *behind* is shown by *The bus is behind the car* and *The car is behind the bus*, with no reference to *in front of*).

There is rather too much straight repetition, for my liking. Thus, under *wall*, we have a picture of a house, with a wall, roof, and window labelled; under *window*, we have exactly the same picture and labels, as we do under *roof*. Surely a simple cross-reference would have been better here, with the space used for fresh words? This happens several times.

I can't detect a principle for the selection of words. Inevitably, whether they were drawable or not must have loomed large—which is hardly an auspicious linguistic criterion. But, despite the various linguistic criticisms it is possible to make, I must say I like this book. It is a step in the right direction of showing children that words work TOGETHER. It is delightfully illustrated, with a tempting full-colour presentation. I can imagine children WANTING to look words up in this little dictionary, and that is surely the test.

Reference

Crystal, D. 1987: Teaching vocabulary: the case for a semantic curriculum. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* **3**, 41–56.

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Shorter notices

Each year, CLTT receives several books for review which are only indirectly related to the field of language handicap, but which nonetheless may be of interest to readers, because of their language content. A selection of these books is made below, with accompanying notes by the editor.