

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, New Edition. Longman, 1987. 1229 pp + 53 pp. front matter, 29 pp. end matter.

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A week, they say, is a long time in the world of politics, but a decade can seem like a lifetime in the world of lexicography. And from a lexicographer's point of view, there has never been a decade like this one, defined by the years 1977, when the first edition of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE 1) went to press, and 1987, which sees the appearance of the second edition (LDOCE 2). It is not just that English vocabulary has been rapidly changing during this period (due largely to the consequences of the electronic revolution). There have been other, more fundamental changes, which new dictionaries, or new editions of dictionaries, must now reflect. Much more information is routinely available about specialized areas of usage (in physics, medicine, linguistics, and other domains) and about major regional variations in the English language (the distinctive vocabulary of Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, and elsewhere). And there has been a corresponding growth in professional awareness and expertise in the field of lexicographic training and research. In particular, this has been the decade when the methods of dictionary production were fundamentally altered, as a result of the changes in data storage, analysis and retrieval that followed the computer revolution. The compilers of LDOCE 2 have had to cope with all of this, and they have done so brilliantly.

Coverage

The new edition is particularly impressive in the way it preserves the best features of the first edition, while incorporating fresh features that reflect contemporary opinion (both academic and pedagogical) about the kind of information that a good dictionary ought to contain. Weaknesses in the first edition are openly recognized and addressed in the introduction, as part of the rationale for revision. Indeed, one must commend the willingness of the publisher to take account of feedback from readers and critics, to make full use of an advisory board (on which the present reviewer has been privileged to sit), and to initiate research projects into dictionary construction and use, as a means of improving the quality of their product. The various prefaces to LDOCE 2 convey a real sense of the difficulties in lexical research, and the limitations of our current knowledge, as well as a pride in the present achievement as a result of a great deal of thought and hard work. There is, in short, an intellectual honesty about LDOCE 2 which is eminently desirable - and so often lacking - in this rapidly-developing field.

The main facts about LDOCE 2 are easy to summarise. It has 1229 pages of lexical entries, organized letter-by-letter, displaying 56,000 words and phrases, which are illustrated by about 75,000 examples and over 500 pictures. There is an extensive general introduction of nearly 50 pages, in which the dictionary's principles and conventions are clearly explained (there is both a 'quick' guide, if you're pressed for time, and a 'full' guide, if you aren't). At the back, there is a selection of ready reference tables, data on word-formation (including an alphabetical list of prefixes and suffixes), lists of irregular verbs and geographical names, and a checklist of the dictionary's defining vocabulary.

An important question, always asked of a new edition of a dictionary, is how many new words it has introduced. LDOCE 2 has added about 2,200 new headwords, the majority of which are fresh entries (the remainder are words which were not given headword status in LDOCE 1). Here is a third of the new headwords from letter A, chosen partly to illustrate the kind of lexical change that has taken place in the 1980s:

access time	AIDS	asap
acid rain	alphanumeric	ASCII
acoustic coupler	anchorperson	A/S level
across-the-board	anorexic	assembly language
acrylic	android	asset stripping
adult education	antinuclear	asshole
aerobics	antiperspirant	autocross
ageism	apolitical	autocue
AI	apparatchik	ayatollah

The selection certainly gives an up-to-date feel to the vocabulary - a feeling which is reinforced as one samples the later sections. The crucial contemporary areas of technical and economic development are particularly well represented - you will find black economy, becquerel, CD-ROM, compact disc, diskette, E-number, first strike, meltdown, passive smoking, upturn, and yuppie. Several of the new headwords are not new words in the language, of course (e.g. acerbic, addled, allude, animated): these reflect the compilers' intuitions about their contemporary importance (in the context of ELT), in part reflecting the large amount of feedback received since the appearance of the first edition. Meltdown is a good example - a word which has been in the public eye since the Chernobyl disaster.

But totting up the new words summarises only a small part of the changes which have taken place in LDOCE 2. There has been a major increase in coverage, certainly; but more important than this there have been dramatic developments in treatment.

Discursive features

There is a trend these days to make a dictionary a 'good read', by introducing panels, usage-notes, pictorial illustrations, and mini-essays, all of which make you want to carry on reading once you have looked a word up. The most noticeable development here is the introduction in LDOCE 2 of 20 large-panel Language Notes - a presentation (in length varying from half a page to three pages) of a well-known aspect of grammar or language use, such as forms of address, apologies, the articles, modals, phrasal verbs, and the expression of thanks. Inevitably, given the limitations of pragmatic research, the guidelines presented in such areas as the communication of politeness, thanks, and tentativeness tend to be rather general and selective. At times, I felt that rather too much space had been devoted to saying relatively little. But the basic idea is sound, and it will be interesting to see how much learners gain from this material.

The usage notes are invariably clear, succinct, and well chosen, and a very helpful part of the book. There are more of them than in LDOCE 1, and they seem to be more integrated and systematic in their coverage. They include brief discussions of points of grammatical usage (e.g. stay at vs stay with) as well as meaning comparisons (e.g. pair vs couple) and the use of idiomatic constructions (e.g. mind you).

Pictorial illustrations

The new line drawings are an excellent idea, but they vary greatly in quality and relevance. At one extreme we have ingenious and effective illustrations, such as those showing the relationship between metrical and imperial measures (e.g. an acre is shown within the outline of a hectare), or the time scale interpretation of ago. At the other, we have the crudeness of avalanche and crocodile, and the questionable value of including drawings of such notions as abstract painting, anchor, erratic heartbeat, and ink-blot (this last almost an archaism, nowadays, surely?). Pictures are best when they show constituent features, and there are some excellent examples in LDOCE 2 (as with aerplane, baseball, bicycle, car, church, cricket, place setting), contrasting items (as with types of axe, bed, container, shoe), or related senses - the occasional Lexicon-type grouping of words, as at damage, piece and walk, is excellent, and could usefully be made a more prominent feature of the book. In some cases, the pictures neatly focus the understanding in a way a longhand description cannot do (as with bevel, contraflow, domino effect, dovetail, overall). Hardly any of the pictures are actually misleading - an exception is the curious pair of pictures at passive, which doesn't make clear the voice contrast, and which seem to emphasise the locative sense of by; another is the shy, unisex referral to both male and female genitalia as crotch. Overall, the illustrations enhance the book, and are one of its most attractive pedagogical features.

Continuing features

The strengths of LDOCE 1 still remain, as one would hope. But there have been several important developments - some immediately noticeable, some less so.

* The widely acclaimed use of a defining vocabulary remains with little alteration. Some effort has been given to reducing the syntactic awkwardness of the longer definitions, and a few of the defining words have been changed. About 50 words of limited usefulness have been omitted (e.g. camel, inn, mosquito, scold), and a corresponding number of new items introduced (e.g. computer, equipment, legal, process, structure).

* The new edition continues to emphasise the importance of examples of usage, and adds a great deal of new information about the pragmatic factors governing the use of lexical items. Much of the information in this domain comes from the current trend to make maximum use of computer corpora, which are a means of improving the naturalness and realism of citations. Since LDOCE 1, the Longman Citation Corpus has been increased by a 2 million word corpus of text taken from 1985 editions of UK and US newspapers; and by a corpus of about half a million words of text taken from a wide range of contemporary sources which has been scanned for neologisms. The beneficial effects of this are obvious both in coverage and treatment.

* A notable feature of contemporary approaches, both to linguistic theory as well as to lexicography, is to break down the dividing line between grammar and lexicon, mainly by adding information about the former into descriptions of the latter. LDOCE 1 was widely acclaimed for the attention it paid to the grammatical properties of words, especially about the range of post-verb complement constructions in English; but it was soon discovered that its use of numerical codes presented a major problem for learners, who found them difficult to recall and interpret. As a result, LDOCE 2 contains a new grammatical coding system which is much more transparent and accessible, while retaining the depth of descriptive detail of the original. Two features in particular should be noted. First, numbers have been replaced by words or widely recognised abbreviations; for example, [+ wh-] shows that a word can be followed by a wh-word, such as where, as in He knew what to do; [the] shows that the definite article cannot be used with a noun, as in watch ITV - this is a particularly helpful device. Secondly, in cases where a word permits several grammatical patterns, the relevant code is now shown immediately before an example, rather than all codes being given together in a list at the beginning of the entry. There is also a movable card insert, which contains a summary of the grammatical features (and also of the pronunciation guide), and this, alongside the new symbols, should surely remove the difficulties students have had with this aspect of the work.

* Much has been said in recent years of the importance of collocation - the relatively predictable combinatorial properties of words. LDOCE 2 reflects this interest. It provides much more collocational data than LDOCE 1, approaching the task rather more systematically (partly through the use of the citational database, and partly by applying insights from lexical functional analysis). Also, in LDOCE 2, the increased significance attached to collocations is symbolized by showing them in bold type (often with a gloss), e.g. under means, 'I gave him a bicycle as a means to an end (= a way of getting a result).' A distinction is drawn between collocations, seen as unpredictable instances of familiar words, handled in the body of the entry, and idioms, where the meaning of the whole bears no obvious relation to the sum of the parts, handled (as in LDOCE 1) at the end of an entry. The distinction is ultimately an arbitrary one, but it has considerable pedagogical utility.

* LDOCE 2 also aims to reflect the semantic structure of vocabulary more clearly than LDOCE 1, by increasing the numbers of synonym essays and usage notes that discuss semantic differences, and by incorporating more systematically the use of cross references to show related items, using the indications of 'opposite', 'compare' and 'see also'. Synonyms from outside the defining vocabulary are also more routinely used at the end of definitions, e.g. 'departure: a change from a usual or former course of action, etc.: DIVERGENCE'.

* One of the most important strengths of the new edition is its coverage of the differences between British and American English. LDOCE 2 has taken this area very seriously, and the result is an unsurpassed coverage of UK/US lexical usage at a pedagogical level. The differences are prominent in the usage notes, language notes, and diagrams (as in the illustrations for car and kitchen), and they permeate the main text. There are still odd gaps: for instance, waste bin (in the picture for kitchen) might have been related to trash and/or garbage. But the overall impression is that the common areas of the lexicon have been most comprehensively treated.

A new book

The first edition of this dictionary was very well received, and quickly established itself as a primary reference work in EFL circles and beyond (it has been used in speech pathology, for example, where controlled definitions are also helpful). The second edition should be no less well received. It does everything a new edition of a dictionary ought to do, and more. It is, in effect, a new book, and EFL teachers and students should lose no time in making sure that their first edition is replaced by LDOCE 2. I have no doubt at all about the importance of replacement, when it comes to dictionary revision. But I have always found it curious that people who wouldn't hesitate to change their

car every three years or so are much less ready to buy the latest model of their favourite dictionary.

Reviews of the first edition of LDOCE in 1978 were full of superlatives; many expressed the view that LDOCE 1 was an invaluable - some said an essential - feature of any EFL student's personal library. It is good to be able to report, 10 years on, that this judgment should stand.