

There is an old Irish story, which probably has its equivalent in French, of a drunk seen searching for a five-pound note under a lamp-post, late at night. A passer-by asks him where he dropped it. "Over there in the bushes", says the drunk. "But why are you looking over here?", asks the surprised passer-by. "Because it's easier to see under this lamp-post", replies the drunk.

I often feel that the history of linguistic science recapitulates this story. For decades, the focus of linguistic concern has been on those areas of language which are relatively easy to see — the phonology, morphology, and syntax. The contrasts of semantics are less discrete, less determinate, and their analysis has been neglected. We continue to affirm their critical significance for the theory of language or the practice of language teaching — and then quietly continue our researches bathed in the light of phonology and grammar. Even vocabulary, the most visible aspect of semantics, has largely been left to itself — the province of lexicographers, with their penchant for the convenient but linguistically irrelevant straightjacket of alphabetical order.

Any study of lexicology is therefore a move in the right direction. For lexicology makes the student get to grips with the realities of language use in a way that no other linguistic topic can. Vocabulary brings us face to face with the whole of society and the forces of change which affect us daily. A brief glance through the pages of Jean Tournier's book quickly confirms this: we are immediately faced with a world that is above all real and recognisable — a lexical world of *watergate* and *loansharks*, of *twin-towns* and *test-drives*, of *emcees* and *happenstance*. It is a world that is changing rapidly, reflecting the way society changes, and where it is difficult to keep up, even as a native-speaker. We desperately need principles of organisation, strategies of analysis. These are admirably presented in this succinct yet comprehensive book.

If only a fraction of the time that is devoted to the learning of lists of new words by heart were devoted to learning the principles underlying lexical formation, what progress there might be in foreign language teaching! How many English words do you know? Whatever the total, it can be immediately and dramatically increased, as soon as you become aware of the range of prefixes and suffixes that is available, and of the main constraints governing their use. Take just one example — a single suffix, such as *-ness*. The value of this tiny morpheme is incalculable. Once learned,

it provides an opportunity for lexical creation that is immediately meaningful, even if not standard. *Nobleness*, *evilness*, and thousands more words are all now within your competence, even though they may never have passed your lips in performance. An excellent return for a small outlay of effort.

My 10-year-old son and his friend are very much "into" *-ness* at the moment: they add it to almost every word, as part of the "playing with language" which is so typical of children at that age. Just today I have heard *bookness* (said in mock horror at the size of a book — "Look at the bookness of it!") and *upstairsness* (in the context of not wanting to go upstairs again — "Upstairsness is boring!", i.e. "the quality of being upstairs") — and even a double affix, *rednessness* (which in context seemed to mean "a really distinctive redness"). All fun and games — nonce-formations that will never enter the language — but all perfectly intelligible, and illustrative of the creative power we all have over a language, once we have grasped a simple lexical principle.

Native-speakers are permitted such license. But foreign-learners cannot ignore it. If you hear someone say *kissletoe*, *fantabulous*, or any of the other neologisms brought together in this book, it is no good ignoring them, simply because they are not yet "in the dictionary", or well-recognised words in standard English. There is no room for ostrichness in the domain of vocabulary comprehension. Neologisms will not go away. Nor are they to be feared, simply because they look strange and are so numerous. From the point of view of their construction, as this book makes perfectly clear, they are not really new at all. Even the weirdest neologisms are based on a small set of established principles.

This book is the clearest account of the principles governing English word formation that I have read, particularly to be commended for its accurate observations of contemporary usage. Unlike most accounts of English lexicology it looks to the future, not to the past, and emphasises the directions in which the language is moving. It will surely provide a solid foundation for anyone seriously interested in lexical study.

David Crystal