

*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 3rd edition 1995, xxii + 1668 + B18 pp. ISBN 0-582-23750-5. Harlow: Longman Group Ltd. Price R49,95.

This is the third edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, the first having appeared in 1978. The project continues to be guided by the sagacious, practical and indefatigable Professor Sir Randolph Quirk, who visited South Africa recently. He chairs the British National Corpus, as he did the previous survey of English Usage based at University College, London, and he points out in his Preface that the Spoken English Corpus "has been put to prominent use for the first time in this new edition".

The first edition introduced a number of valuable innovations designed to assist the learner of the language, since it was "intended primarily for the foreign student". Most significant among these was the usage in definitions of a core vocabulary of approximately 2 000 words based on frequency of usage, implementing the axiomatic principle that "the definitions are always written using simpler terms than the words they describe". It also used diagrams to illustrate technical items, such as the vocabulary of the castle, the laboratory and aircraft, as well as the varieties of fruit, birds, animals, etc. It had a fairly formidable introductory guide of 39 pages explaining the conventions of the typeface, abbreviations, pronunciation and a potted grammar. In all it consisted of 1303 pages containing 55 000 entries.

This third edition of the *LDOCE* (as it calls itself) uses the same devices and follows the same pattern, but the introduction is simplified and made more user-friendly, as the opening sentence (from the Director of Dictionaries) shows: "Welcome to the third, completely new, edition of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English!". The introduction is reduced to 22 pages, with certain sections moved to the Appendix, together with the core vocabulary and a few other items of general information. Overall the work has expanded to 1668 pages.

In keeping with the general shift in nomenclature, *syntax* is now used for grammatical inflections (which was the preferred term in the first edition). This change could be problematic for students who have learnt the terminology of grammar and syntax in their traditional senses. The grammar is now divided between the Introduction and the Appendix. The Introduction has sections headed "Syntax — verbs", "Syntax — nouns", etc., whereas the Appendix deals with "word formation", "irregular verbs" and so on, an arrangement which could also be confusing.

There are, as promised, various new features. The visual aspect has been greatly expanded. Now over 2 300 words are illustrated, and there are 24 pages in full colour, illustrating various categories. Some of these presuppose a fairly low level of competence: one has twenty pictorial representations of various sounds. For instance, "crunch" is exemplified by a girl crunching into an apple, "crackle" by a brightly burning fire, and "splash" by someone diving

into water. Such a strategy is only partly helpful, and could be misleading, since it necessarily can show only one example of the particular sound.

Other colour pictures show direction and position, varieties of some notion (e.g. "broken"), sporting terms from American football, baseball and basketball, soccer and golf, patterns and fabrics, the gadgets of the modern affluent kitchen, British and American terms for the components of the car/automobile and the varieties of fruit and vegetables (but not cuts of meat).

These examples demonstrate the stress on contemporary usage, which as Saussure reminded us, is the primary reality for most users of the language, and the dominant one for most learners. The obverse of this emphasis is that there are no etymologies, which naturally saddens lexicographers and academics, but is a necessary sacrifice.

Frequencies of usage in spoken and written usage are shown by means of graphs based on the British National Corpus and the Longman Lancaster Corpus. Many provide interesting information, for example, that setting *rubbish*, *garbage* and *trash* against each other. (The source-base for the American usage is not mentioned.) In addition, some 3 000 individual words are graded on a frequency scale of 1 to 3.

Pronunciation policy for the *LDOCE* has traditionally favoured the IPA system in a fairly narrow form, even to the extent of using double symbols to show, for example, variations in the last vowel sounded in *desperate*. As is well known, this alphabet can present a formidable challenge for learners, although the long-term benefits are great. Spelling accommodates American forms to a greater extent than is usual in standard English dictionaries, revealing the shift in the balance of power between British and American varieties.

Definitions, which form the heart of a dictionary, also have several innovations to help the learner. Key words are marked off by different formatting and the various principal meanings and idiomatic uses are covered within the boundary by means of signposts and menus. This is obviously preferable to the traditional practice of setting out the meanings seriatim. As Lord Quirk trenchantly insists in his Preface, "It will not do to regard language as comprising simply a host of separate items called 'words'".

Obviously the use of the core vocabulary has great practical advantages, but it can inhibit definition and occasionally make for undue simplicity. Thus a horse is "a large strong animal that people ride on and use for pulling heavy things", while irony is no more than "the use of words that are the opposite of what you really mean, in order to be amusing or to show that you are annoyed". There is no reference to *dramatic* or *Socratic irony*, as in the *COD*. However, the lexicographers have sensibly gone for a policy of copious instances illustrating usages. There are also extensive and helpful usage notes for problematic terms, such as *negro*.

Overall, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* is a useful, practical and appealing guide for the student of the language. For it provides not

only atomised information, but a good sense of how the building blocks of the language fit together to produce meanings.

Geoffrey Hughes  
Department of English  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Johannesburg  
South Africa