Latha Menon (Executive Editor). *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia Deluxe 2000.* Microsoft Corporation. Price R399.

In the highly competitive world of CD-ROM encyclopaedias, Microsoft has consistently outperformed its competitors with products for the whole family. *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia Deluxe 2000* (henceforth Encarta 2000) is the latest flagship of this line of products. The millennium edition is said to be "a modern reference resource that provides a richness of learning experience for people of all ages that extends far beyond what was possible with traditional reference works" (Letter from the editor). This claim reflects the feature which sets CD-ROM encyclopaedias apart from their printed equivalents — their accessibility. The executive editor emphasizes accessibility as one of the central values of the editorial staff of Encarta 2000.

Louw (1999: 283-293) presented a detailed critical analysis of the accessibility of *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia Deluxe 1999* (henceforth Encarta 99). In this review the focus will be on changes the editors have made to the outer and inner access structures in order to improve the encyclopaedia's accessibility for the millenium edition. It will be shown that most of these changes have succeeded in this goal, but that there is still some room for improvement.

The first change is visible immediately. In Encarta 99, the opening screen was largely aesthetic in design. It provided links to the main macrostructure, the dictionary, online updating facilities, help files and the inserted media texts. In Encarta 2000, some of the aesthetic design has been sacrificed for added functionality. As the user's primary need would be to extract information from the articles, the editors have included a search aid called the *pinpointer* in a fixed position on the left side on the opening screen.

The pinpointer can search both the rapid and standard outer access structures of the encyclopedia. It is normally used for a type of search that encompasses both these substructures by providing rapid access to the desired lemma when it is entered as a search term in the "Find"-input box. In this regard it can be used to search only the articles, any of the multimedia features, or all the features. The editors have retained the pinpointer's form and have also opted for the same initial-alphabetical listing of lemmas in the main display window of the pinpointer. This maintains the continuity in this line of products and addresses the needs of the encyclopaedia's target users. The position of the pinpointer has, however, been changed. It is no longer presented as "a floating help text" (Louw 1999: 288), but has moved to a fixed position on the left side of the screen. This makes for a less cluttered display on the article screen than was the case in Encarta 99 and once again underlines the editors' commitment to user-friendliness.

Encarta 2000 has also retained the capacity for advanced searches. The search filters have been modified somewhat and have evolved into an effective

and easy-to-use element of the outer access structure, while managing to be stylistically pleasing at the same time.

In the outer access structure there is a definite move towards a more direct and immediate presentation of information, but in the inner access structure the process seems to be in the opposite direction regarding verbally presented encyclopaedic information in longer, more complex articles. Both Encarta 99 and 2000 have *outlines* for subdivided articles. Encarta 99 offered great freedom to the user to customise the "view" functions. The point of departure on the inner search path would always be the article itself. One could choose whether to read the article by scrolling down or to engage the outline and click on the relevant subheading to go to that point in the main text. Encarta 2000, on the other hand, makes the decision for the user. Only the outline is present when the article is activated and not the main text. See for example the article on the Second World War, where the user has to select a subheading from the outline, e.g. "Military Operations", before embarking on the main text. The outline then moves to the left side where it still allows rapid access to subsections of the article by means of active cross-references.

The multimedia elements are initially included in a neat, easily accessible cluster next to the outline. Should the user wish to access these elements first, a click on the appropriate icon will transport the user to that text or to a further grouping of relevant audio or visual clips. If the main text is accessed, icons that act as active cross-references to these multimedia elements are inserted at the appropriate points.

In theory this search path should be sufficient for the needs of any user, but once one has become accustomed to the option of customisation, it is difficult to adapt to such a rigid search pattern. In this case Encarta 99 is certainly a more flexible reference tool than its successor.

The use of the multimedia elements also bears witness to a lack of customisation. Whereas videos and pictures could be resized according to the preference of the user in Encarta 99, this option is not available in Encarta 2000. There is some improvement in the accessibility of multimedia items, though. One of the most important points of criticism levelled against Encarta 99 was that the changing of CDs was an obstacle to the smooth transfer of information. In Encarta 2000 the information is still spread over two CDs, but in general the organisation of information on each CD is much better. One can soon deduce that all the video files are stored on CD 1. The result is that the changing of CDs, if unavoidable, is at least predictable.

Smaller versions of pictures also allow the user to decide before changing the CD. These smaller pictures act as active cross-references to the comprehensive items and maintain the cohesion of the encyclopaedia as a whole.

In shorter articles such as **panpipe**, not much has changed. The colouring and layout is slightly different and the option of customisation is not given. Yet the combination of text plus multimedia is still presented as an effective, cohe-

sive, uncluttered whole which provides optimal access to the target users of the dictionary.

Encarta 2000 is a smooth, cohesive entity, which promises and generally delivers an easy and pleasurable transfer of encyclopaedic information. Hopefully it will continue evolving, with some older elements brought back and some exciting innovations brought in. It will have to do so not only to stay ahead of the pack, but also to stave off the challenges posed by its greatest rival: the Internet. As search engines become more advanced, the Internet is growing closer to fulfilling its potential of becoming a huge encyclopaedia. Until it reaches that point, users of electronic encyclopaedias will have to recognise the Encarta family as state of the art CD-ROM encyclopedias.

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