Anna Dziemianko. *User-friendliness of Verb Syntax in Pedagogical Dictionaries of English.* 2006, XII + 229 pp. ISBN-13: 978-3-484-39130-7. ISBN-10: 3-484-39130-8. Lexicographica. Series Maior 130. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer. Price: €124.

To be user-friendly, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries for foreign users must be both easy to use and easy to read. They are designed to help prospective users both encode and decode, and to facilitate the comprehension of some vocabulary items or particular grammatical constructions. However, it often happens in practice that dictionaries are not used fully because some users are not aware of the richness of their contents. In carrying out the redesign of their dictionaries, lexicographers have been helped greatly by the views, needs, and preferences of a wide range of language users, many of them, of course, from schools and universities as well as general language learners. Further adaptations always follow, based on the experience of using a new dictionary and for this purpose feedback is always of great importance. In the process of establishing a user-friendly dictionary, the changes, though extensive, remain modest but in the much longer term, more complex changes take place to incorporate revisions and give them new clarity and coherence across the many and expanding contexts in which they are used. Whether this redesign actually helps users is the subject of much research. Both traditional and electronic dictionaries have now included a large number of tools in the definition, such as IPA pronunciation, examples and syntactic information, often presented in the shape of codes which will enable users not only to understand a particular structure, but to be able to reuse it.

Anna Dziemianko, the author of *User-friendliness of Verb Syntax in Pedagogical Dictionaries of English*, is Assistant Professor at the Instytut Filologii Angielskiej UAM in Poznan (Poland). This rigorous and meticulously documented monograph provides extensive research on the way modern, currently available English dictionaries have conveyed the syntactic behaviour of verbs and collocations, and have tried to ascertain whether their use of formal and functional-formal code labels is actually effective. There is a large gap in this area of research on verb syntax. Dziemianko questions the benefits of often oversophisticated and heavy code systems, especially for language users with limited dictionary skills. Statistical research has shown how cryptic the syntactic patterns presented by dictionaries can appear for the common user. The lack of standardisation between dictionaries is a further issue. After a trend that consisted in cumulating alphabetical or numerical combinations to such an extent that the definition might sometimes have six consecutive mnemonic codes which would have lost even the most dedicated students, the trend has been for dictionaries to attain a certain degree of simplification as well as uniformity between dictionaries. Full-sentence definitions in verb entries have now been incorporated to facilitate students' understanding of syntactic patterns and, although this will mean the lexicographer can dispense from using codes, certain information such as the transitiveness or intransitiveness of the

actual verb could prove to be not precise enough or be partly lost. With the advent of language corpora and masses of data extracted from the media, literature and the Internet, among other sources, contemporary monolingual and bilingual English dictionaries have sought a complete picture of the syntactic behaviour of verbs rather than an accurate description.

As the basis of her experiment, Dziemianko focuses on a selection of fifteen verbs, some more complex than others (like 'to anoint', 'to yank', and 'to subpoena') and identifies a certain number of variables (analytical versus contextual definitions, use of formal versus functional codes and localization of codes whether they are incorporated in the verb entry or stand out in an extra column) to measure the usability and user-friendliness of modern language learner's dictionaries† and gauge language users' strategies. Informants were asked to complete a multiple-choice test and to underline the part of the information they found useful to complete the exercise. The experiment was conducted on two groups of 300 students: high school Polish students and EFL students from Poznan University. Chapter 3 highlights the main findings of the experiments. Students with a higher proficiency standard tend to use multiple components of the entry, while the less proficient high school group does not. The higher level of proficiency in English undoubtedly makes the subjects' reading of syntactic patterns easier. The examples in the verb entry constituted for both groups the favoured piece of information, to the detriment of the actual definitions which were deemed to be the least useful. The physical location of codes did not seem to make any difference at all to the number of times they were consulted. Indeed, codes were consulted very often, though mostly by university students. The preference was shown to be for functional codes. On the whole, pattern illustrations in entries were frequently used, most particularly by university students. However, it transpires that their consultation could distract dictionary users from their main focus. The author brings to the fore interesting gender differences with female less advanced users resorting overall to codes more frequently than men, but more research would need to be conducted in order to corroborate these results. Dziemianko notes that 'a user-friendly verb entry should contain examples, a contextual definition and functional codes, interspersed with examples' (p. 188). The question, however, remains as to how to create a complete and accurate account of verb behaviour (considering some verbs having a whole range of patterns), without overloading the content of the verb entry and making it both opaque and abstract. A choice will have to be made between minimal information for the sake of clarity and transparency, and the more complex information for highly-proficient students. As she says, quoting Barone (1978: 188), 'even the most perfect dictionary is bound to remain a partial and inadequate instrument' (p. 190). In addition, there are still some points of grammar that dictionaries overlook and there is still much to be done to arrive at a complete and intelligible description. Perhaps electronic dictionaries permanently redesigned by lexicographers will allow, in their microstructure of entry, clarity and ease of use, and will not

require considerable familiarity with grammatical terminology and elaborate skills and training.

Unfortunately, for a book on user-friendliness this volume is not always easy to read. There is no index or glossary to guide the reader. Furthermore, the reader easily becomes lost amongst the use of acronyms, complex figures and tables interspersed throughout the book.

On the whole, Dziemianko provides some very valuable data and this is undoubtedly an important contribution to help us understand students' lookup behaviour and their success or failure in retrieving the information. Making the pedagogical dictionary more explicit will certainly help both language learners and their teachers.

Endnote

†   These include all editions of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (1948, 1963, 1974, 1989, 1995, 2000) and of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978, 1987, 1995, 2003), the three editions of the dictionaries published by Collins and based on the Collins Birmingham University International Language Database (COBUILD), the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (1987), the *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary* (1995) and the *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, the two editions of the Cambridge dictionaries, the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (1995) and the *Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary* (2003), and lastly the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2002).

Reference

Barone, Rosangela. 1978. On the Use of the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*: From Theory to Practice. *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata* 11: 187-194.

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