

## REVIEWS ON THE OXFORD ADVANCED DICTIONARY

### TWO REVIEWS OF:

A.S. Hornby with A.P. Cowie, eds. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 3rd Edition. Oxford, 1974; revised, reset and updated, 1980. xiii + 1037pp. Boards R8.75.

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### 1. A SHORT APPRAISAL

The updating and resetting of this excellent reference work includes not only the introduction and explanation of modern colloquial usages (such as 'into' to indicate an involvement in some idea or activity - 'she's heavily into vegetarianism' is the very apt example given), but a revision of the phonetic system, bringing it into line with A.C. Gimson's standard IPA transcription. The use of the jacket flaps and end covers for the keys to phonetic symbols, verb patterns, abbreviations and specialist English registers facilitates reference, and the new Introduction is clearly expressed, giving helpful guidance on such difficult matters as division of words in writing or typing, pronunciation, stress, use of idioms, prepositions and, most importantly, style. For, as the editors point out, speaking and writing correct English is 'not only a matter of pronunciation, spelling or grammar. You must also know the kinds of context in which the headword is normally used'.

And it is in this respect that the Dictionary succeeds in being more than a manual of usage to become a truly invaluable guide to the formal, colloquial and technical use of English. As in earlier editions, the present Dictionary is practical in its approach, giving not simply meanings, but illustrative phrases and sentences. So, to choose an example at random, in the case of 'different', each possible usage is illustrated by a sentence, and the use of 'than' in conjunction with the word is not only explained ('may be used when "different" is not immediately followed by its prep. '), but lucidly illustrated in the sentence, 'How different life today is than it was fifty years ago'. Such illuminating assistance is further supplemented by the thousand illustrations since, in the words of the Introduction, 'a drawing is often a more useful way of showing a meaning than a written explanation'.

Further supplementary help is offered by the wide range of information presented in the Appendices which include a valuable new section on punctuation. This, like the volume as a whole, is practical in approach, giving working examples under each entry. As a reference work the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* is exemplary, and its claim to be 'the indispensable practical reference book for those studying or teaching English as a second or foreign language' could justifiably, I think, be extended to all users of English interested in the language.

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2. *A TEACHER' VIEW, INCLUDING AN APPRAISAL OF:*  
Adrian Underhill. *Use Your Dictionary.* Oxford, 1980.  
56pp. Paperback R2.70.

'Every other author may aspire to praise; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach, and even this negative recompence has been yet granted to very few.' Samuel Johnson has surely moved over to allow room on the platform for A S Hornby. Dictionaries have always needed to be 'revised and updated' as new words bud and old ones fall away. To this process the cynic would add the necessity to compete with budding rivals.

The revised dictionary has a new companion. Adrian Underhill's *Use your Dictionary* is a practice book which can be bought for ready money. In this respect it contrasts with its predecessor, Hornby's *Using the OALDCE with Practice Tests*, which used to be marked 'not for sale'.

In this article, I shall be looking at the new dictionary and its workbook in the light of their effectiveness in the teaching of English. I shall look at their usefulness in the classroom, for homework and for learning at a distance from the teacher. I shall also refer to their contribution to the teaching of pronunciation.

In my years of walking round classrooms, I have noticed that many students are very inaccurate at noting new words even from the printed page, the board or the OHP. For this reason I began to encourage the use of monolingual dictionaries for checking spelling. Students report that they no longer suffer the frustration of taking down collections of letters they cannot later decipher or learning their own wrongly noted words.

Long stretches of my lessons have been devoted to my giving an old-fashioned finger clicking good cabaret to illustrate some words or phrases. I enjoyed it, but wonder how effective it was as language teaching. While not wishing to efface myself from classroom activities, students can play a more active part by looking up new items themselves. With vocabulary which is new to the whole class, one student can be asked to read out the entry from the dictionary. The teacher checks what he says. Other students who may still feel unsure of the meaning are encouraged to put their questions to this student. In this context, the dictionary's example sentences help understanding. It is good to see that these have been retained and some of them modernized in the new impression.

It takes little time in the classroom to encourage the habit of using a monolingual dictionary. This is beneficial if it does no more than wean students from their often inaccurate, invariably minute, bilingual dictionaries. By getting students to look up a few already familiar words in the OALDCE they will find out how it works. I feel the dictionary can stand on its own, but *Use your Dictionary* gives a wide selection of exercises, with answers, and some hints for classroom use. It gives a methodical approach to finding words,

understanding their meaning and how to use them. Some of the exercises may look easy, obvious or unnecessary, but it helps open up to students a wide variety of information. The far smaller Hornby forerunner to this has proved popular and useful especially in filling a slot in the study skills programme of the E.F.L. Department where I work.

Some of the benefit of written homework may be wasted by the discouragement that can come from making mistakes. By using the dictionary to check their own work, before marking by the teacher, students can reduce the number of mistakes in such areas as:- irregular verb forms, transitive/intransitive, doubled consonants, countable and uncountable nouns, comparatives and superlatives and the use of the correct preposition or adverbial particle. The new introduction to the dictionary gives clear and simple rules for regular cases and pit-falls. Students can be encouraged to look up a given number of words per day as homework, a target which they can set themselves to achieve. Ideally, I feel, they should be words, phrases or expressions which have been the barriers to their understanding of the context in which they were found. Personally kept vocabulary lists are particularly helpful for revision. Adrian Underhill suggests a 'Call my Bluff' type of game for the classroom, the definitions having been prepared as homework.

The teacher is becoming increasingly aware of the need to build up good language study habits so that after students have left him they will be able to converse or build on their knowledge. The teacher clearly will not be on hand to say which word is more usual or suitable in a given context; to advise on idiomatic usages, pronunciation or stress. The dictionary can fulfil most of these needs. It contains information on fifty specialist registers and about half this number of stylistic values from archaic to vulgar. I shall later comment on its contribution to pronunciation and stress. Valuable grammatical reference information is included in the tables at the beginning of the dictionary. The appendices contain an irregular verb table and a variety of factual information. A useful section on punctuation, Appendix 9 in the revised impression, replaces the former 'Ranks in the Armed Forces'. In view of its restricted interest it is surprising to note that this still features in the OALDCE's most obvious rival. Appendix 10 in the revised OALDCE remains 'The Books of the Bible'. Though

of marginal interest, perhaps this lends a quaintly family-bible flavour.

The pronunciation and stress systems of the dictionary will be particularly useful to the student and non-native teacher of English working on his own. The revised impression uses a phonetic transcription that brings it into line with the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* among others. An agreed, uniform representation of English sounds is vital for the learner and teacher and it will do something for international understanding. For this reason I welcome the introduction of length marks in i:u: a:ɔ: and ʒ:. A C Gimson's substitution of /I/ for J Windsor-Lewis' /Y/ in such terminations as -ness -less and -let means that he cannot be accused of /Keθlrs/ speech, but some might find this last example rather over /Keθfl/. With twenty vowels and diphthongs and twenty four consonants to teach, I am glad to see the back of /ō/. This was used for both French back nasalized vowels in certain words in the last edition. /erddəkō/ has now become /erddəkom/, which could remove a possible confusion to a French ear depending on which way the English speaker chose to pronounce the /ō/. A further possible confusion has been removed by replacing the slant ` to denote primary stress by '. ` could have been confused with a falling intonation pattern.

In general, without giving unnatural pronunciations, A C Gimson seems to have come down on the side of intelligibility rather than reproducing Englishness. This seems to be in keeping with the developing character of the international language. The changes in the revised impression represent progress towards a uniform system of phonetic transcription. The teacher can feel less hesitation in recommending students to use phonetic symbols, knowing they will be unlikely then to be thrown by meeting different systems in other English reference works.

With flying pickets, punks, male chauvinists and transexuals walking the updated pages, the superstitious will take little comfort from the inclusion of detente /dei'ta=nt/, because the last word in the last Appendix in this, as in the last edition, is apocalypse.

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