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## Resensies / Reviews

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### Woordeboeke en Woordelyste / Dictionaries and Word-lists

*Chambers Schoolbag Dictionary including Southern African usage and pronunciation*, 1st edition 1986, 2nd impression 1990, 134 pp. ISBN 0 86486 046 3. Cape Town, Johannesburg: David Philip Publishers. Price R14,85.

Most dictionaries are small, bulky books. This one is not. It has large pages and is light and slim enough to fit into a schoolbag, so that it can be ready to hand both at school and at home. There is a strong likelihood that it will be used often.

It is practical for other reasons. First, there is an obvious economic advantage to producing a dictionary on cheaper paper. Better paper would have made the dictionary more attractive, but this way the costs are kept low. The paper and the binding are good enough to withstand average use during the middle and secondary school years of a particular user. The second clear advantage is that a low budget dictionary of this kind can be updated, adapted or expanded on a regular basis.

The claim in the preface that this dictionary will serve the needs of "all middle and secondary schools in Southern Africa", appears to indicate that the compilers had second-language users in mind. Bill Holderness and others associated with the University of Bophuthatswana are well-placed to provide informed opinions on the needs, motives, expectations and performance limitations of such users. It should also be said that, although it is a school dictionary, it is not narrowly classroom-orientated. There are more than 39 000 entries, 1 500 of which may be described as "South African".

A number of strategies are used for economy. There are the obvious ones of providing only irregular past tense and past participle forms of the verb, a pronunciation guide only where the spelling of the word does not give a clear indication of pronunciation, and plurals only when these are not formed by adding -s. These are sound decisions. The introductory section is also kept as short as possible. As Lemmens and Wekker (1986) have shown, users of a dictionary are unlikely to consult detailed discussion in an introduction. In this case, "How to use this dictionary" is clear and crisply presented, and users should find it most accessible.

Other strategies seem less wise. One such is the unduly prescriptive decision to use the -ize form only of words that can be spelt either -ize or -ise. The other form has strong support, and is officially preferred by the English Acade-

my of Southern Africa. As a result, the desire to simplify and give a firm lead may well issue in confusion and the creation of a new shibboleth.

Another less happy strategy relates to vocabulary. Since the 1920s vocabulary building has generally been viewed as one of the most important elements in foreign and second language learning (Richards and Rogers 1986). In line with the view that foreign and second language learners need simple, accessible definitions, this dictionary clearly and economically defines a great number of words. I checked *cousin*, *technology*, *definition*, *memory*, *drive*, *assault*, *negotiate*, *economic*, *consequence* and *imperialism*, and found the definitions clear and helpful.

However, the potential users of the book will not always easily find the explanations they most need. Generally, one headword is used for words which have more than one meaning or grammatical function, and semicolons, italics and parentheses are used to distinguish these meanings. This can be confusing. For example:

**sound** *n* anything that can be heard, a noise; a distance from which something may be heard: *within the sound of the sea*; a narrow passage of water, esp one connecting two seas. — *v* to strike one as being. *That sounds awful*; (with *like*) to resemble in sound. *That sounds like Henry's voice*; to cause to make a noise. *He sounded his hooter*; to examine by listening carefully to: *to sound the patient's chest*; ....

The difficulties are compounded by having a full stop before an example, which in turn is separated from the next definition by a semicolon.

Another difficulty concerns the use of quotations. The compilers of the *Chambers Schoolbag Dictionary* (CSD) are aware of the value of illustrations. They make some use of short invented phrases to support definitions in providing basic meaning. But they stop there. Burchfield (1986: 19) suggests the larger possibilities when he says that while "quotations support and confirm the definitions", they also add "contextual dimensions of their own". Some of these are specified by Landau (1984: 166):

Illustrative quotations can convey a great deal of information about collocation, variety of usage (degree of formality, humorous text or sedate context), connotation (affective implications), grammatical context (if verb, does it take an indirect object?) and, of course, designative meaning.

It is worth examining the usefulness of the CSD in these terms.

Since it does not illustrate the collocation of words, the CSD is not able to clarify the differences between words like *react* and *respond*:

**react** *v.* to act or behave in response to something which is done or said; to undergo a chemical change

**respond** *v.* to answer; to act or react in response to (something or an action). *The baby responded to her new toy with a smile. I smiled but she did not respond;* to show a reaction to *esp* as a sign of improvement. *He responded to treatment.*

Here the problem is exacerbated by the fact that each of the words is defined as if it were synonymous with the other. The same tendency to define one word in terms of another can be seen in the definitions of *pile* and *heap*.

Variety of usage is not addressed either. For instance, there is no reference to the degree of formality of a word. Affective implications are largely ignored. And the compilers have not included any slang or colloquial terms. These omissions obviously limit the usefulness of a dictionary that claims to offer "comprehensive coverage of words pupils are likely to encounter in readings for school and in wider reading". A few examples will suggest the nature of these weaknesses. The entry for *miscegenation* makes no reference to offensive or judgemental flavour. The one for *fellow* does not indicate that the word may be dismissive ("that fellow") or reveal a close relationship ("my fellow" = boyfriend). And the one for *student* makes no reference to its being the preferred term to *pupil* in the South African black community. Finally, there is no indication in the entry for *adorable* that it may have a trivial flavour when it is used informally in sentences like "O, what adorable curtains."

There are also troubling deficiencies in the treatment of grammatical and idiomatic aspects. For example, learners are given no way of checking such basics as which preposition would normally follow a particular verb.

In many cases, illustrative examples are not used at all. This arises from the obvious and laudable desire to keep this dictionary as slim as possible. However, while it can be argued that most of the entries of this kind provide clear, economical definitions, there are instances where this is not the case, as in the entry for *fellow* below.

**fellow** *n* an equal; one of a pair; a member of a learned society, a college *etc.*; a man, boy. — *n* **fellowship** state of being on equal terms; friendship; an award to a university graduate.

Here, apart from the obvious comment that it would have been better to place the most common of the meanings (the fourth one given) first, the various meanings of *fellow* are not clearly delineated. The first two meanings apply only in certain idiomatic phrases which are not even hinted at here. The third definition is simply wrong: most members of colleges are not Fellows, and learned societies usually distinguish between Members and Fellows (e.g. MRCS and FRCS). Finally, it seems a serious limitation that the definition of *fellowship* makes no reference to shared interest or activity, nor to the common religious meaning.

These criticisms are substantial. Nevertheless, CSD represents a sensible and useful reference tool. Its claim to be the "perfect reference companion" cannot be sustained, but it does offer easy access to simple definitions of a large number of words. While other dictionaries such as the *Collins COBUILD Dictionary* and the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* may more justifiably be described as "comprehensive reference works", this dictionary is more likely to be widely used. Its slim-format and inexpensive pricing make it a realistic choice for the majority of pupils.

## References

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**G.R. Dent (Compiler) and C.L.S. Nyembezi (Editor).** *Compact Zulu Dictionary. Eng.-Zulu; Zulu-Eng.*, 5th edition 1990, 2nd impression 1992, 152 pp. ISBN 0 7960 0265 7. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter. Price R13,65.

### 1. Introduction

The dictionary is small, condensed and portable. One can keep it in one's back pocket. This makes it a very handy publication for quick reference by a learner of Zulu or English as the case may be.

The dictionary appears to have been compiled for the purpose of assisting non-Zulu speakers to learn Zulu.

The main title *Compact Zulu Dictionary* is somewhat misleading. This is a bilingual dictionary as the sub-title *English-Zulu/Zulu-English* shows.