

**Yongwei Gao.** *A Dictionary of Contemporary English Neologisms and Trendy Words*. 2024, 406 pp. ISBN: 978-7-5213-5810-0 (Paperback). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. Price \$9.32.

## 1. Introduction

Dynamic evolution is one of the most captivating characteristics of a language, with the emergence and obsolescence of vocabulary serving as the most evident markers of this transformation. "New words enter the language every day, words acquire or lose meanings, and words cease to be used" (Minkova and Stockwell 2009: 5). In English, hundreds or even thousands of new words are coined each year, each reflecting distinct aspects of contemporary life and society. Published in October 2024, *A Dictionary of Contemporary English Neologisms and Trendy Words* (henceforth DCENTW) stands as a testament to this linguistic dynamism. The dictionary was compiled by Professor Gao Yongwei of Fudan University, a prominent figure in the field of English–Chinese lexicography. Professor Gao's scholarly contributions to the study and documentation of English neologisms are extensive. Prior to this publication, he played a key role in compiling five influential dictionaries dedicated to new English vocabulary: *A Supplement to the English–Chinese Dictionary* (《英汉大词典补编》, 1999), *A Dictionary of Contemporary English New Neologisms* (henceforth DCENN, 《当代英语新词语词典》, 2002), *A 21st Century English–Chinese Dictionary of Neologisms* (《21世纪英语新词语词典》, 2021), *A New Age Dictionary of English Neologisms* (《新时代英语新词语词典》, 2023b), and *An English–Chinese Dictionary of Neologisms in Present-day English* (《当代英语精选新词语词典》, 2023a). These works collectively showcase Professor Gao's commitment to capturing and analyzing the ever-evolving nature of the English lexicon, providing invaluable resources for linguistic scholars, translators, and language learners alike.

DCENTW includes approximately 17,000 newly emerged or frequently used terms in contemporary English, with the earliest words dating back to the 1970s. The dictionary includes nearly 200 idiomatic expressions and over 3,000 technical terms spanning a wide range of fields, including politics, economics, military affairs, sports, biology, and medicine. The selection of entries is the result of years of extensive research and compilation by Professor Gao, complemented by reference to usage frequency in news corpora. Each entry is carefully documented, featuring abundant examples, and a dedicated section on etymology and word-formation. This design not only illustrates the structural formation and historical context of the terms but also facilitates readers' comprehension and retention of the vocabulary.

Language manifests the changes in society, effectively documenting the complexities of social transformation and cultural shifts. In particular, "the new terminology of technological and scientific advance had an immediate impact on the language, adding tens of thousands of words to the English lexicon" (Crystal 2003: 78). DCENTW provides a multifaceted reflection of the dynamic

evolution of global language and culture over the past few decades. Serving as both a practical linguistic resource and a comprehensive academic reference, the dictionary offers invaluable insights for language learners and researchers alike, enabling them to explore the development of present-day English and its cultural significance in greater depth. This review seeks to critically evaluate the distinctive features of the dictionary's compilation, including its strengths and innovative aspects, while also addressing its limitations and areas for improvement.

## 2. Compilation features

DCENTW includes most new entries found in the aforementioned dictionaries (excluding DCENN), as well as thousands of newly coined terms that have yet to be included in major English–Chinese dictionaries, such as *The English–Chinese Dictionary* (Unabridged, second edition) by Lu and *New Century English–Chinese Dictionary* by Hu. As Gao (2024: III) mentions in DCENTW's preface, "From a compilation standpoint, DCENTW also marks a notable breakthrough by combining the objective recording of new words found in the aforementioned new word dictionaries with an editorial approach that incorporates illustrative examples to aid selection". This paper primarily analyzes the compilation features of DCENTW through its word selection and entry translations.

### 2.1 Coverage of entries in DCENTW

Firstly, the new words included in DCENTW cover a wide range of fields, including politics, economics, science, and computing. It includes nearly 17,000 new and frequently used terms that have emerged in English since the 1970s, including AI (人工智能), big data (大数据), COVID (新型冠状病毒感染), goblin mode (摆烂模式), MOOC (慕课), permacrisis (长久危机), taikonaut (中国航天员), and vlog (视频博客). "Fundamental properties of language design indicate that a rich tradition is correct in regarding language as essentially an instrument of thought" (Chomsky 2015: 16). And significant social changes over time often lead to corresponding shifts in the forms of linguistic expression, particularly in vocabulary usage. This expansive inclusion of new words in DCENTW illustrates the dictionary's comprehensive approach to documenting contemporary language. By incorporating neologisms from diverse areas such as technology, global crises, education, and cultural trends, DCENTW offers a broad snapshot of how language evolves in response to societal changes. For instance, terms like "permacrisis" depicts the global political and environmental instability, while "MOOC" mirrors the growing influence of digital education. The inclusion of specialized terms like "taikonaut" also indicates the dictionary's ability to capture emerging language in fields like space exploration. Overall, DCENTW serves as

a valuable resource for understanding the intersection of language and the rapidly changing world.

Secondly, DCENTW includes over 3,000 terms from various fields, categorized under 66 subject labels, covering areas such as computer science, medicine, sociology, law, architecture, and oceanography. Specific examples can be found in Table 1. By assigning specific labels to each entry, such as "computer science", "medical science", or "astronomy", the dictionary not only enhances the organization and accessibility of specialized vocabulary but also indicates the growing interdisciplinary nature of contemporary language. For example, terms like "abandonware" (弃件) and "cloud mining" (云采矿) are clearly marked under computer science, allowing users to quickly identify technical jargon related to this field. Similarly, terms such as "keratomileusis" (角膜磨镶术) and "long COVID" (新冠长期症状) are grouped under medical science, helping users distinguish between terms related to healthcare and those from other domains. The inclusion of subject labels thus facilitates the efficient retrieval of relevant information, especially for those seeking expertise in a particular discipline. Moreover, this practice underscores the specialized nature of modern terminologies, ensuring that users understand the context and precise meaning of the terms within their respective fields. For instance, terms from fields like military science, such as "asymmetric warfare" (不对称战争) and "bunker buster" (掩体炸弹), are categorized separately, ensuring that users interested in defense studies can easily locate and comprehend these terms. In addition, the use of subject labels enhances the dictionary's capacity to reflect the rapid development and expansion of knowledge in various areas, from the emerging field of "cryptolect" (隐蔽语言) in linguistics to the complex concepts of "astroparticle" (天体粒子) in astronomy.

**Table 1:** The entries recorded in DCENTW

Subject label	Entry
计算机 (computer science)	abandonware (弃件), abend (异常终止), cloud mining (云采矿, 云挖矿), IVR (interactive voice response, 交互式语音应答)
医学 (medical science)	keratomileusis (角膜磨镶术), liposuction (脂肪抽吸), locked-in syndrome (闭锁综合征), long COVID (新冠长期症状)
化学 (chemistry)	curcumin (姜黄素), dicamba (麦草畏, 除草剂), fluoroelastomer (氟橡胶), gel permeation chromatography (凝胶渗透色谱法)
军事 (military)	asymmetric warfare (不对称战争), bunker buster (掩体炸弹), kill vehicle (击杀载具), soft bomb (石墨炸弹)
心理学 (psychology)	acrotomophilia (慕残), alien hand syndrome (异手症, 异己手综合征), dark triad (黑暗三联征), enclotted cognition (具衣认知)

语言学 (linguistics)	cryptoclect (隐蔽语言), semantic bleaching (语义漂白), translanguaging (超语), uptalk (升调结尾)
天体学 (uranology)	astroparticle (天体粒子), baby universe (婴儿宇宙), brown dwarf (棕矮星), cannibal galaxy (食人者星系)

Thirdly, the inclusion of nearly 200 idioms in DCENTW, labeled with "idiom", underscores the dictionary's comprehensive approach to documenting not only technical and formal vocabulary but also the rich, figurative expressions that shape everyday language. By incorporating idioms like "Netflix and chill (边看电影边亲热)", "open a can of whoop ass (给予致命一击;使遭受惨败)", and "take a bullet (替某人挡子弹,挨枪子)", the dictionary accentuates the playful, culturally specific ways language evolves in popular discourse. These expressions are deeply embedded in contemporary social and cultural contexts, showcasing attitudes toward relationships, gender, and humor, as seen in idioms such as "play the gender card (打性别牌)". Their inclusion broadens the dictionary's scope, making it a valuable resource for understanding both the literal and figurative meanings of modern English. Idiomatic expressions are particularly useful in conveying the nuances of natural conversation. Native speakers often use idiomatic expressions naturally, without consciously considering their figurative meanings. Non-native speakers often struggle to understand idioms, as "they (idiomatic and fixed expressions) form collocations with other items in the text as single units and enter into lexical sets which are different from those of their individual words" (Baker 2018: 73). By offering clear translations and contextual examples, DCENTW facilitates a deeper understanding of these expressions, helping learners navigate the complexities of everyday language. Moreover, the inclusion of idioms illustrates the ever-evolving characteristic of language, as these phrases often arise in response to shifting cultural, social, or technological trends, exposing the ongoing interaction between language and society.

Fourthly, the inclusion of combining forms in DCENTW reflects the dictionary's proactive approach to documenting emerging word formation patterns, thereby providing valuable insights into contemporary morphological innovation. By including highly productive morphemes in Table 2 like "-flation" "-fluencer" "-geddon" and "-preneur", the dictionary embodies the inventive and malleable qualities of present-day English, where new terms are frequently coined by attaching these combining forms to existing words. These combining forms are particularly significant because they represent linguistic trends that are not only prevalent in popular discourse but also play a pivotal role in shaping the evolving lexicon. For example, terms such as "Biden-flation" "mom-fluencer" and "foodpreneur" display contemporary social, political, and technological phenomena, and demonstrate the ability of language to adapt rapidly to changing cultural contexts. Through the documentation of these forms, DCENTW provides a comprehensive resource for understanding the processes by which new words are formed, emphasizing the role of productivity and abbreviation in the expansion of the lexicon. This inclusion not only enhances the dictionary's cov-

erage of current language use but also ensures that it remains relevant to users seeking to understand both the meaning and formation of newly emerging expressions. Moreover, the entry of such combining forms into the dictionary marks a shift toward recognizing the importance of morphological creativity in language development, a trend that portrays broader shifts in how language interacts with technological advancements, media culture, and societal changes.

**Table 2:** The entries recorded in DCENTW

Combining form	Entry
anarcha-	表示 "无政府主义" (亦作anarcho-) : anarcha-feminists无政府女性主义者
cyber-	表示 "网络的": cyber-operations网络行动 / cyber-surveillance网络监控
-flation	表示 "通货膨胀": Biden-flation拜登通胀 ▲inflation的缩略
-fluencer	表示 "网红": mom-fluencer网红妈妈 ▲influencer的缩略
-geddon	表示 "灾难事件" (亦作-mageddon) : eco-geddon 生态灾难 ▲Armageddon的缩略
-pocalypse	表示 "灾难性事件": bee-pocalypse 蜂灾 / snow-pocalypse 大雪灾 ▲apocalypse的缩略
-preneur	表示 "企业家": foodpreneur食品企业家 ▲entrepreneur的缩略
-tacular	表示 "非常棒的" "精彩的": pec-tacular胸肌发达的 ▲spectacular的缩略

## 2.2 Translation in CEDU in DCENTW

Translation in DCENTW focuses on accurately conveying headwords and example sentences. Headwords are expressed to display their precise subject-specific meanings, while example sentences illustrate their practical use in context.

The translation of headwords in DCENTW strikes a careful balance between linguistic accuracy and contextual adaptability, which shows the diversity and specificity of the terms included. The dictionary consistently provides precise translations that align with the semantic nuances of each headword, ensuring clarity for users across various domains. For instance, technical terms such as "atrial natriuretic factor (心房肽)" and "atomic force microscope (原子力显微镜)"<sup>1</sup> are rendered with their exact scientific equivalents in Chinese, maintaining their terminological integrity. Conversely, colloquial expressions like "atomic wedge (扯内裤套头)", "Covidiot (新冠憨憨)" and "bucketload (许多, 大量)" are translated in a manner that reveals their idiomatic flavor and cultural connotations, bridging linguistic and cultural gaps effectively. Furthermore, the dictionary addresses contemporary linguistic phenomena by incorporating transliterations or hybrid translations for novel constructs like "bug-out bag (应急包)", "centennial (Z世代)", "chia (奇雅, 苋欧鼠尾草)" and "at sign (@符号)", thereby exhibiting ongoing linguistic

evolution while preserving the original meaning. This comprehensive and adaptable approach underscores DCENTW's commitment to fostering an inclusive and practical lexicon.

DCENTW includes over 1,300 example sentences, which plays a crucial role in enhancing the understanding of newly introduced terms by providing contextually rich and accurate translations. By offering clear, practical examples for each entry, the dictionary ensures that readers can grasp both the meaning and application of these terms in everyday language. This approach not only bridges linguistic gaps but also reflects the dynamic process of language as it adapts to new phenomena, such as the emergence of "Covidiot" or "Generation Z". The provision of these sentence examples allows for a deeper comprehension of how specific terms, often rooted in cultural or technological shifts, function in real-world discourse. Additionally, the use of such contextualized translations as shown in Table 3 aids non-native speakers in navigating the complexities of modern lexicon, making it more accessible and relevant to diverse audiences. The integration of sentence exemplifications, therefore, extends beyond mere vocabulary listing, offering a more practical understanding of contemporary English usage in both domestic and global contexts.

**Table 3:** The example sentences recorded in DCENTW

Example Sentence	Translation
Please don't be fooled by this spring-like London weather as it is 100% going to <i>chuck it down</i> tomorrow.	请不要被像春季般的伦敦天气所愚弄，因为明天百分之一百会下大雨。
As the <i>climate crisis</i> has worsened, experts have put forth numerous solutions to curb greenhouse gas emissions.	随着气候危机的恶化，专家们提出了许多控制温室气体排放的解决方案。
<i>Gen Z</i> are consumers born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s; they number 260 million digital natives in China.	Z世代是1990年代中期到本世纪10年代初出生的消费者；中国的这批数字原住民数量达2.6亿。
New technology will arrive sooner, domestic firms will outcompete foreigners, and steady employment will ensure a <i>chicken in every pot</i> .	新技术将更快出现，国内公司在竞争中会胜出外国公司，稳定的就业将确保家家都有肉吃。

### 3. Room for improvement in DCENTW

Despite the editor's tireless efforts, this lexicographic work still leaves room for further development, particularly in terms of entry inclusion, translation accuracy, and example selection.

### 3.1 Problems with the entry inclusion

In DCENTW, certain newly coined terms have been inadvertently omitted, such as *aforenoted*, *African massage*, *Bafumbira*, *Calennig*, *content creator*, *dagginess*, *elf-shot*, *grief tourism*, *GPT*, *Generation Alpha* and *hash collision*. Furthermore, several established English words with newly emerging meanings have not been included. For example, *argument* as a noun in the domain of music refers to "a unifying theme, idea, or melody within a musical work, particularly a symphony", or "the cohesiveness of a piece of music"; *blow job* in the military context denotes "a jet aeroplane"; and *scrimmage* is used to describe "a disorderly crowd of people or things". A dictionary will inevitably overlook new words or new meanings to some extent because language is constantly evolving, and dictionaries can only take a snapshot of the language at a given time. The process of word inclusion involves criteria such as frequency of use, established meaning, and broad acceptance, which means that newly coined terms or emerging meanings may not meet these thresholds immediately. Additionally, the lag between the coinage of a term and its official recognition or widespread usage further contributes to this gap.

### 3.2 Problems with the translation

In DCENTW, some of the translations of entries are inaccurate or could benefit from further clarification. For instance, *adultescent* does not simply refer to middle-aged individuals who dress young, but rather to middle-aged people whose clothing, interests, and activities generally align with the lifestyle habits and cultural norms of younger generations. As such, the content in parentheses should be revised to "衣着、兴趣和活动通常与年轻人的生活习俗一致的中年人", providing a clearer description. Similarly, *advergaming* refers specifically to "the use of computer games to advertise products", and so the appropriate Chinese translation should be "广告嵌入式游戏", rather than "广告游戏的制作", which could misleadingly imply the process of creating such games, rather than their use as a marketing tool. Additionally, some supplementary information provided within parentheses is redundant. For example, the translation of *A&E* as "(医院的) 急诊部·急诊室" is sufficient, as both of these Chinese terms already imply departments within hospitals that are responsible for providing emergency medical care. Therefore, the explanatory content in parentheses should be omitted to avoid unnecessary repetition. On the other hand, some definitions are overly simplified, which may lead to misunderstandings for readers unfamiliar with the term. For example, *dark triad* refers to three distinct yet interrelated personality traits, all of which are considered antisocial personality traits within Western psychological frameworks. These traits are collectively known as the "black triad of personality". The traits that constitute the dark triad include *Machiavellianism*, *narcissism*, and *psychopathy*. To provide a more comprehensive explanation, the content in parentheses should be expanded to in-

clude: "三联征是指马基雅维利主义、自恋和精神病态", ensuring that readers gain a fuller understanding of the term's meaning and its significance in psychological contexts.

### 3.3 Problems with example selection

There are over 1,300 example sentences in DCENTW, but the selection of which headwords are provided with example sentences seems somewhat inconsistent and random. For instance, example sentences are given for terms like "boy band" and "global warming", with sentences such as: "It has been nearly three decades since Backstreet Boys made its debut, but the legacy of the American 90s boy band strongly lives on" and "The world's biggest ice sheet is more vulnerable to global warming than scientists previously thought". However, both "boy band" and "global warming" are terms whose meanings are relatively intuitive and easily understood by most readers, making the inclusion of example sentences unnecessary in these cases. These words are commonly known, and their definitions are self-explanatory in context, meaning additional examples do not add much value to the reader's understanding. Conversely, headwords like "gouch out", which may be less familiar or whose meaning could be more ambiguous, would greatly benefit from the inclusion of example sentences. For terms like these, providing context through examples is essential to help readers understand their correct usage in various scenarios. Including examples for such words would not only clarify their meaning but also guide readers on how to incorporate them appropriately into their own speech or writing. More selective and thoughtful inclusion of examples, especially for less commonly understood or more complex terms, would significantly enhance the dictionary's practical value and make it a more effective resource for learners.

## 4. Conclusion

Compiling a dictionary of new words presents inherent challenges as it involves not only capturing the rapid evolution of language but also distinguishing between transient fads and lasting linguistic trends. The inclusion of a new word requires careful consideration of its widespread use, cultural relevance, and potential to endure over time. Moreover, the process of defining and contextualizing these words demands expertise in various fields, including linguistics, culture, and technology. Balancing the need for accuracy with the desire to remain current can be difficult, especially when words emerge from specialized or niche areas that may not yet have broad recognition. DCENTW exemplifies how technology has transformed the efficiency of modern dictionary compilation. Beginning on June 9, 2022, Prof. Gao completed crucial tasks — new word selection, headword translation, example sentence selection and translation, and etymological information gathering — in just six months. This rapid progress was

facilitated by using advanced dictionary compilation software, online technologies, and corpus-based methods. These tools enabled him to process large volumes of language data quickly, ensuring the dictionary remains up to date with current linguistic trends. By incorporating these technologies, the project not only achieved a high level of precision but also a remarkably fast completion time, showcasing how modern tools can streamline traditionally time-consuming tasks in lexicography.

## Endnote

1. The Chinese translations of "atrial natriuretic factor" and "atomic force microscope" are consistent with those provided by Term Online: <https://www.termonline.cn/search?searchText=atrial+natriuretic+factor> and <https://www.termonline.cn/search?searchText=atomic+force+microscope>. Term Online has become a comprehensive knowledge service platform, offering the most extensive global Chinese terminology resources, the highest data quality, and the most systematic functionality.

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