
Gabriele Stein. *Better Words: Evaluating EFL Dictionaries.* 2002, x + 246 pp. ISBN 0 85989 719 2 (Hb.). Exeter: University of Exeter Press. Price: £39.50.

Gabriele Stein, a Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Heidelberg, is one of the most authoritative academics in the study of English as a foreign language, and has published a wide range of research in the field of English lexicography. This book which is a collection of reprinted articles and previously unprinted papers, forms a cornerstone in EFL lexicography. It is a useful reference book for both EFL teachers and students alike, as well as for lexicographers.

Stein shows how lexicography has evolved over a 25-year period, and how certain information (word definitions, grammar information, idiomaticity, collocations, phrasal verbs, registers and pictorial illustrations amongst others which dictionaries tend to incorporate) has been included to suit the needs and expectations of its users, whatever their skills and background. The section on the way dictionaries have made use of illustrations more or less successfully to help language learners grasp the meaning and the cultural component which words are often unable to express, often verging on stereotyping and caricaturing, is particularly fascinating.

Reviewing the major developments that have taken place in lexicography over the last decades, she focuses on the suitability and efficiency of both monolingual general-purpose and monolingual EFL dictionaries, as well as bilingual EFL dictionaries in a learning and teaching environment. Armed with a dictionary, lay learners of English, for lack of expertise in the handling of dictionaries and grammars and with little knowledge of the often abstruse terminology they use, do not always find the linguistic information they are looking for or a suitable tool adapted to their needs and skills. This book intends to give teachers and learners of English guidelines on how to find their way through the dictionaries on hand, to make the most of them and to select the most adequate ones. It not only contains research into the compiling of dictionaries and the growing intense competition among various publishers in quest of an ideal corpus-based dictionary with compact and clearer definitions, but it also furnishes valuable help and suggestions on what has worked and what has not, thus preparing the way for a future dictionary in the making, which would be more user-friendly and transparent to its users.

As Stein admits, there is still a great deal of work to be done, not only in the compiling of definitions, but also in the explicit reference to grammatical behaviour, the use of authentic data to establish a core vocabulary which would be selected as sub-entries and to illustrate meanings, and the use of illustrations to ease the understanding and retention process. Reference to pragmatic use of language is something on which dictionaries should lay more emphasis. Also, the treatment of archaisms is something that would need further investigation.

The language used in the book is not too academic and makes it accessible to a wide audience. Nevertheless, it may be regrettable to see papers already published elsewhere collected in this book without a proper introduction or conclusion, which would have enabled the author to synthesize the main issues addressed and the innovative solutions provided. Can there still be innovation in the compilation of EFL dictionaries? Certainly Stein's research enables us to reflect on new possibilities which would improve the content and layout of dictionaries, enhance our knowledge of dictionaries and enable lexicographers to develop new strategies. As such, the collection is a landmark in the field of EFL lexicography and its reading can be but highly recommended.

Michaël Abecassis
Department of Modern Languages
University of Oxford
Oxford, United Kingdom
(michael.abecassis@modern-languages.oxford.ac.uk)