

Features of the English-Chinese Dictionary (Second Edition) Edited by Prof. Lu Gusun

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Abstract: The features of The English-Chinese Dictionary (Second Edition) Edited by Prof. Lu Gusun are discussed in the paper which is composed of four parts. The first part explores the spirit of a craftsman of Prof. Lu as a lexicographer. The second part discusses the main features of the dictionary respectively. The third part talks about the significance of the dictionary in the present time as well as its shortcomings. The fourth part is about the future of large-size dictionary. The paper is not a simple demonstration of how great the dictionary is, but an attempt to make scholars to think over how to edit or compile a better large-size dictionary in the future.

1. Introduction

The English-Chinese Dictionary Edited by Prof. Lu Gusun is the first comprehensive bilingual dictionary completely compiled by Chinese scholars. 20,000 new words and meanings were supplemented to describe and record the latest linguistic trend. 240,000 typical examples are presented with beautiful translations and annotations. It provides grammatical and pragmatic information such as parts of speech, irregular inflections, usages or register labels. It has characteristics of learner's dictionaries and encyclopedic information with useful new appendixes. As a reference dictionary with academic and practical characteristics, ECD represents the achievements of China's academic research in the field of English language and level of bilingual dictionaries compilations, stressing on recording and describing objectively varieties of English and practical uses of all its forms and styles as well as collecting language materials.

2. The spirit of a craftsman of Prof. Lu as a lexicographer

2.1 The beginning of the making of ECD

Not long after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country needs an English-Chinese dictionary that is suitable for the Chinese readers. China is then in the difficult times because of the economic and especially political situations. As known for all, China is not so open at that time, so it is impossible to introduce a dictionary that is published in other countries from overseas.

In this situation, a well-known lexicographer, Professor Ge Chuangui signed a contract with the Commercial Press for a large-size English-Chinese dictionary in the early 1960s. The dictionary is the famous New English-Chinese Dictionary. Professor Lu was one of the editing staff then.

2.2 The Chinese Samuel Johnson

Professor Lu's spirit of a craftsman as a lexicographer stems from his respect and admiration of Dr. Samuel Johnson, the English lexicographer and man of letters. Samuel Johnson is used as the example for him as a lexicographer. Just as he said in the preface of the dictionary, "The Johnsonian lesson, as I see it, lies first and foremost in the lexicographer's fervor in reading." (Lu, 2007) Samuel Johnson read over 500 authors spanning more than 200 years, so much so that his own word list---especially in the latter letters---eventually was generated in a large part by illustrations he had gleaned from reading (Lu, 2007). Just like Dr. Samuel Johnson, Mr. Lu's wide-ranging interest

and unquenchable curiosity induced him to read vastly and variously.

3. The main features of the dictionary

3.1 Search rate

Mr. Lu Gusun himself set a standard for a good dictionary, that is, a high search rate. That means that if you want to look up a word in the dictionary, you are sure to get the result you want most of time. ECD is such a dictionary. For example, “make one’s case” is a phrase that you can not look it up in many large-size comprehensive dictionaries, but you can look it up in ECD. There are many English-Chinese dictionaries in the market which is larger than ECD but inferior to ECD in the aspect of search rate. The high search rate results from the 220,000 entries and 240,000 examples in the dictionary. From the reference books listed, we can see the efforts the editors had made. It is true that search rate is a really important standard if you have the experience of translating literature and books in a special field. Users in any field can get the word they are going to search. For example, “slide rule” has confused me for a long time, not knowing its meaning. Later I happened to know that the two words are a noun phrase, and looked up the phrase in the dictionary to know that “slide rule” is equivalent to “sliding rule”. At once, I felt a sense of relief. High search rate is an important reason why learners and scholars think highly of the dictionary.

3.2 Authority

In evaluating an English-Chinese dictionary, I personally think, its English part is one of the aspects, while its Chinese part is an even more important criterion. The Chinese annotation in ECD is authentic, concise and smooth. Numerous translators benefit from it. It has such reputations as “You cannot live without it in a single day” and “living essentials”. There is a Chinese saying that goes like this, “Don’t fear it won’t be appreciated; it stands up well to comparison.” In comparison, it is really the best English-Chinese dictionary so far in China and all over the world.

3.3 Independence

The major feature of ECD lies in its independent compilation. From the end of the 1970s, the planning of compiling ECD had begun. The fundamental principle for the compilation is set according to the then statement stressing its political significance, like “adapt foreign things for Chinese use” and “break through the patterns set by predecessors”. Actually what it means is “independent compilation”.

3.4 Usefulness

Trying to include as many words as possible is still another feature of the dictionary. It collects names of people and places, organizations, historical events, religious terms, scientific terms, trademarks of products and so on. ECD made great efforts to keep up with the times. There is an anecdote that an editor suggested that the proper name “George Bush” who is supposed to be the new president should be included as an entry in 1988 when the dictionary is about to finish. Finally, George Bush was elected president of the United States as expected.

3.5 Allusion

In addition to enlarging new words that advance with the times, another feature is the trend of literary taste. To be specific, Professor Lu likes to quote authoritative works. He prefers the sentences with a source of quotation or allusion (both foreign and Chinese) as example sentences. His dictionary was praised by the public readers because he likes selecting example sentences from literary works, thus making the example sentences in the dictionary quite unique. Apposite illustrative examples can be achieved by quoting literary giants. Like Dr. Samuel Johnson, “he was careful to use only the ‘best writers’.”(Bragg, 2003) Whenever he came across an appropriate use of words, he would jot it down in case they will be useful in the work of supplementing the dictionary. Beautiful translation should also be mentioned. He himself is a good translator. His good grounding in Chinese adds quality of the translation of example words and sentences. The example phrases

and sentences are so refined as to take delight in. And extremely common are aphorisms and epigrams, most of which are applauded. It is no exaggeration that the dictionary can be taken as an excellent translation course book.

3.6 Commonness

It is said that the dictionary is the first choice for those who take part in CATTI (China Aptitude Test for Translators and Interpreters). Many candidates will take it with them. Names of people and places that are rarely used in the test papers can be found, which is practical and effective and most importantly, can help meet an urgent need. That's because it is very important to get the proper translation in a short time in the examination since it is impossible to spend too much time to ponder if the translation is equivalent between English and Chinese.

Furthermore, Mr. Lu set an example for translation work by compiling the dictionary. For example, about how to translate names of people, different translators take different transliteration. However, the readers may feel confused. By looking up the words in the dictionary, translators can use the more standardized translation.

3.7 Perfection

It is said that ECD may be the perfect one compiled by Chinese scholars. Compared with Collins and Webster, the dictionary provides Chinese interpretation. Even those who do not specialize in English can understand easily. Although I can do most of the task by depending on online dictionaries, sometimes the interpretations are limited after all, the interpretation given being too simple. Therefore, in some cases of my practical translation, I still have to depend on the dictionary to finish my task. Its perfection also lies in its appendixes. In the dictionary there are 13 appendixes which almost include all the general knowledge.

4. The significance of the dictionary as well as its shortcomings

4.1 The significance of the dictionary

It can be said that it is a very great work in that it is a landmark of "cultural infrastructure". First, it is a large-scale project. When the compilation of the dictionary started, more than 300,000 quotation cards were made and the number was increased to more than 500,000. They were all gleaned independently. Second, it meets the needs of readers of the time. It has epochal character that it collects words and phrases in an encyclopedic way. Because the reference books at the time used to be hard to be gotten and their effectiveness for a given period of time is limited, translators need a practical encyclopedic dictionary to solve the problems they meet. Third, it is applauded by the readers and experts. Since its publication it has exerted great influence on the learners of English in China and has been one of the reference books in the United Nations. The dictionary is said by American and British dictionary experts to be the best and also one of the better bilingual dictionaries in the world. Last, it is a comprehensive linguistic record of the English words in the world which is a contribution to the linguistic study.

4.2 The shortcomings of the dictionary

First, in the number of entries, ECD is less than The English-Chinese Word-Ocean edited by Wang Tongyi. Secondly, in the collection of phrases, it is inferior to A New English-Chinese Dictionary revised by Zheng Yili (Second Revised Edition). Thirdly, in effectiveness (effective illustration of usage), it is not as good as the example sentences in Dictionary of Modern English Usage which is, of course, a dictionary for special purpose. Fourthly, in illustration, no color pictures are given in the dictionary to help the reader understand the meaning of the words. Furthermore, the accuracy, richness and practical application of usages seem to be absent, which may have something to do with the orientation of the dictionary.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned above, The English-Chinese Dictionary collects words and phrases in an encyclopedic way. It should be its strong points, but still it is questioned by some people.

Samuel Johnson commented on the widespread rural illiteracy in Scotland in his time (Vincent, 1989:48), suggesting that those who know nothing of written language were doomed to live only in the present tense. Lu said in the preface to The English-Chinese Dictionary, “In the field of lexicography we therefore write, using a double entendre, in the past as well as the present and the future tenses.”

Using Lu’s words, “Therefore, it is hardly an overstatement to say that from now on practitioners of lexicographical art and craft will primarily “write in the future tense” and it is predicted with assurance that the dictionary market for tomorrow will teem with works like the OED Online.”

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