

**Thomas Herbst and Kerstin Popp (Editors).** *The Perfect Learners' Dictionary (?)*. 1999, XII + 320 pp. ISBN 3-484-30995-4. Lexicographica. Series Maior 95. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer. Price: €88.

This collection of articles originates from a 1997 symposium in which participated some of the most eminent scholars researching lexicography and linguistics, that, since the 1970s, have widely developed to the extent of becoming a thriving market for publishers. Looking back at the evolution of EFL dictionaries for learners and ahead to the use of corpus linguistics for the compilation of a new generation of dictionaries, this volume is of particular interest to lexicographers, although some of its references may now appear slightly outdated.

Straight from the introduction, Herbst, who has published widely in the field of lexicography, indicates that the concept of a perfect dictionary is, of course, not to be taken for granted, as there is no such thing. This volume questions what the aims and targets for lexicographers and dictionary compilers should be, discussing the merits and demerits of dictionaries and how they can be improved. The main focus of this collection, connecting the articles, is the assessment of four major dictionaries published in 1995, which have since been re-edited: the fifth edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, the third edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, the second edition of the *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* and the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. It may be argued that focusing on four dictionaries is restrictive, but judging by the size of the dictionaries reviewed in detail, the analysis of the contents of a bigger corpus of dictionaries would be quite a complex undertaking.

The initial paper by Cowie looks at the pioneering works produced in English lexicography in Japan and East Asia in the 1920s which left their mark and initiated the gradual emergence of EFL dictionaries, establishing the historical background for the collection as a whole. There are very few extensive and detailed investigations of this kind, comparing particular aspects of English learners' dictionaries as regards phonological, syntactic, morphological or lexical issues, using a qualitative approach as well as quantitative analyses, such as Aarts's article on the syntax of verbs or Klotz's study of adjectives and substantives in the four dictionaries investigated. Leech and Nesi's article which concludes the volume deals with the potential of the first generation of electronic dictionaries and other interactive tools or applications available to language learners and sets out perspectives for the future.

It would have been particularly useful had greater emphasis been laid not only on the contents and structures of the dictionaries, but also on their users. Although much of the material and many of the references in this book would certainly need to be updated (the *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* is now being published in its sixth revised edition), it is particularly comprehensive and as a reference book, this research is mostly destined for lexicographers and dictionary compilers. Both teachers and learners

are also targeted. A great deal of research still needs to be done in the development of electronic dictionaries, for which there is a growing demand, and on the suitability of such dictionaries. Lexicographers' dreams (see De Schryver 2003) for the 'perfect' dictionary of tomorrow should benefit greatly from a contribution of this type to English lexicography. It is hoped that similar work would be conducted in other foreign languages, as studies are scarce in French, Italian, Spanish, German or Russian learners' dictionaries. Besides, there is a growing demand for bilingual dictionaries such as a wide range of newly published Japanese–English dictionaries, which might be worth comparing. As the market of EFL dictionaries is continuously expanding, language learners are in constant need of guidance, and such research is always in need of revision, although it provides invaluable help for the compilation of the next generation of dictionaries.

### Reference

- De Schryver, G.-M. 2003. Lexicographers' Dreams in the Electronic-Dictionary Age. *International Journal of Lexicography* 16(2): 143-199.

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