

学习者视角的英语 词典插图研究

A Study of Pictorial Illustration
in English Dictionaries
from Learners' Perspective

冯春波 著

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Preface

Dictionaries are containers and transmitters of knowledge and they do not serve the user through language alone: pictures can be an aid since they provide information some of which may defy words.

Dictionary illustration has a history of almost two millennia, at least in China. English dictionary illustrating began nearly five centuries ago, English-Chinese dictionary illustrating is nearly one hundred years old, and even the youngest member of the dictionary world, the monolingual learner's dictionary, was illustrated when it came into being seventy years ago. In the seventeenth century, John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), a distinguished educator, advocated the use of pictorial illustrations in language learning and many of his principles and techniques are still in use today.

Although pictorial illustration enjoys such a long history and almost no encyclopedia goes without pictures and more and more dictionaries utilize them as a complement, pictorial illustration is only a peripheral topic in lexicographical literature and only a few scholars have discussed this issue by expending very little space. Pictorial illustration is even ignored in the front matters of most dictionaries in which it has fulfilled its functions. English and Chinese literature on pictorial illustration did not appear until the 1980s, which is far too late compared with the emergence of pictorial illustration itself.

Al-Kasimi (1983:97) bemoaned the fact that the use of pictorial

illustrations was rarely dealt with in the literature on lexicography. This situation has not changed considerably two decades later. Li and Zhou (2001:116) have the opinion that we not only have very little experience in illustrating but also have hardly done any research into it.

Not only is discussion of pictorial illustration sporadic, most of the scholars who touch upon this topic also have devoted scant space to a simple classification of illustrations and most of the functions of pictorial illustration have not been given due consideration. It is therefore necessary to pursue the topic of illustration from a theoretical point of view and improve upon the practical aspect that has been explored.

In chapter 2, the author explores language and picture. He first compares the characteristics and functions of language and pictures to prove that pictorial illustrations are necessary in dictionaries. Language is composed of discrete signs while pictures do not have distinct components. Language employs specific signs to represent entities and a finite number of signs to show the relationships between the entities they represent. Pictures do not have obvious signs to display the relationships between entities. Linguistic signs are governed by grammar and belong to different classes (such as noun, verb, adjective, etc.). Pictures are not governed by grammatical rules and do not have many signs of distinct classes. Linguistic representation is abstract while pictorial representation is concrete. Information represented by language may come from any sense, such as sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste, while information represented by pictures mainly comes from the sense of sight.

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Pictures can aptly capture concrete and spatial information very easily like the entities they represent while language can handily express abstract information and capture to a large extent concrete information about relevant entities. Pictures can display all features at the same time while language normally conveys information sequentially

according to arbitrary rules.

The weaknesses of language mainly lie in its fuzziness and generality. So, the author also considers linguistic fuzziness and picture and linguistic generality and picture. Fuzziness is not always a defect in language. It is usually a necessity or even a must in people's daily lives. Since precision is usually impossible, our senses can not produce accurate measurements of what is perceived in terms of figures, hence the failure to resort to precise language. If precision were required all the time, communication would break down. Therefore, fuzziness is allowed as long as communication functions well. However, even if fuzziness does not affect communication in most cases, accuracy is always an ideal in the writing of definitions because they are supposed to instruct those who are linguistically and/or factually insecure. Pictorial illustration is to make up for the fuzziness of language at least to some extent. Unlike fuzziness, which emphasizes the unclear edge of concepts, generality, a universal semantic phenomenon, refers to the linguistic character of inclusiveness, that is to say, a linguistic item may have a collection of referents.

Pictorial illustrations in dictionaries, especially group illustrations, may reflect polysemy, a universal semantic phenomenon. Since senses are seldom truly historically arranged, polysemous group illustrations can not mirror very well the semantic development of words although they complement definition and fulfill other functions. Common nouns denoting concrete objects are general, with myriad referents. When they are illustrated, group illustrations are usually needed for a better, more complete understanding of the words and the world.

For a better utilization of pictorial illustration, learners' dictionaries include some pictures for words other than nouns. Therefore, the author devotes some pages to the discussion of part of speech and pictorial illustration.

This thesis also elaborates on pictorial illustration from the viewpoints of psychology in Chapter 3; for example, how the human brain extracts knowledge of the world through our five senses, how the visual cortex transforms the signals from the eye into visual sensations of color, form, boundary, and movement, and how it manages to convert the two-dimensional images from each eye into three-dimensional world of depth, whether we think in pictures and spatial relationships or other sensory images, why some famous mnemonics utilize mental images to be effective.

On the basis of the classifications of pictorial illustration of his predecessors, the author offers in Chapter 4 as complete a classification as possible of pictorial illustrations. Learners' dictionaries, original in their illustrating practice, include many associative illustrations, those that involve two or, more often, many words, to both facilitate defining and especially represent semantic relations to aid vocabulary learning since words are picked up associatively rather than atomically. One of the oldest methods psychologists used for studying semantic relations, the word association test, testifies to this since whether carried out among native speakers or foreign learners, it reveals different semantic relations between the stimulus word and responses.

Whether theoretically or practically, the functions of pictorial illustration have not been fully explored. In Chapter 5, besides discussing the function of complementing definition, the author also elaborates on those functions that have been ignored, such as representing culture, embodying semantic relations, differentiating between confusable words and expressions, discriminating between similar objects, establishing lexis-meaning links, and beautifying dictionaries and improving their readability. Furthermore, the author offers a comparison between the illustrating practices of learners' dictionaries and those for adult native speakers, the results of a survey of learners' opinions about

pictorial illustrations and how the learners use pictorial illustrations; he also explores the relationships between pictorial illustrations and learning strategies.

Pictorial illustration in electronic dictionaries should also be considered. Paper dictionaries and electronic dictionaries have their respective weaknesses and strengths, so they will coexist. Electronic dictionaries, because of their medium and space, have a revolutionary effect on pictorial illustration. The author offers a comparison of both kinds of dictionary, elaborates on the present situation and the future of pictorial illustration in electronic dictionaries.

This study is far from conclusive. Especially, more research will be done into the use of pictorial illustrations in both printed and electronic dictionaries and how the present situation of illustration can be improved. More challenging is what kinds of word need pictorial illustrations.

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June 10, 2010

Abbreviations of Dictionaries

AHD3: *The American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition*. Robert B. Costello (ed.). Houghton Mifflin Company. 1997.

AHCD3: *The American Heritage College Dictionary, Third Edition*. Robert B. Costello (ed.). Houghton Mifflin Company. 1997.

CALD: *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Cambridge University Press. 2003.

CIDE: *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. Paul Procter (ed.). Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. 1997.

CLD: *Cambridge Learner's Dictionary*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press & Cambridge University Press, 2002.

COD10: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, Tenth Edition*. Judy Pearsall (ed.). Oxford University Press, 1999.

DA: *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*. 1951.

LDAE: *Longman Dictionary of American English*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1992.

LDEL: *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*. Della Summers (ed.). Longman Group UK Limited. 1992.

LDOCE1: *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Paul Procter (ed.). Longman Group UK Limited. 1978.

LDOCE2: *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Second Edition*. Della Summers (ed.). Longman Group UK Limited, 1993.

LDOCE3: *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Third Edition*. Della Summers (ed.). Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press & Longman Group Limited. 1997.

LDOCE4: *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Fourth Edition*. Della Summers (ed.). Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. 2004.

MECD:《现代英汉词典》(新版),郭世英 主编,外语教学与研究出版社,2002。

MEDAL: *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2003.

MFECD:《多功能英汉词典》,简清国、林茂竹 主编,外语教学与研究出版社,建宏出版社,1997。

NACCD:《新时代汉英词典》,潘绍中 主编,商务印书馆, 2002。

NAECD:《新时代英汉大词典》,张柏然 主编,商务印书馆, 2004。

NECD:《新英汉词典(世纪版)》,吴莹 修订,主编上海译文出版社,2000。

NAECD:《新知识英汉辞典》,纪秋朗 主编,外文出版社,远东图书公司,1997。

NODE: *New Oxford Dictionary of English*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. 2001.

OACD: *Oxford American College Dictionary*. Christine A. Lindberg (ed.) Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Press. 2005.

OALD3: *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*

- with Chinese Translation, Third Edition.* Hornby, A. S. (ed.) Hong Kong: Oxford University Press. 1985.
- OALD4: *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, Fourth Edition.* A. P. Cowie (ed.). The Commercial Press & Oxford University Press. 1997.
- OALD6: *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, Sixth Edition.* Sally Wehmeier (ed.). The Commercial Press & Oxford University Press. 2003.
- OELECD2: *Oxford Elementary Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, Second Edition.* Beijing: The Commercial Press. 1999.
- OFLECD: *Oxford First Learner's English-Chinese Picture Dictionary.* Beijing: The Commercial Press. 2005.
- RHD: *Random House Dictionary of the English Language.* Jess Stein (ed.) Random House, Inc. 1966.
- RHWCD2: *Random House Webster's College Dictionary, Second Edition.* W. R. Nichols (ed.) New York: Random House. 1999.
- RHWDAE: *Random House Webster's Dictionary of American English.* Gerard M Dalgish (ed.) Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. 1997.
- WNWCD4: *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.* Michael Agnes (ed.) Liaoning Education Press, Hungry Minds, Inc. 2000.

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