

User-Friendliness in Making Dictionaries with English as the Source Language

英语为源语言词典编纂中的 用户友善问题

● 吴晓真 著

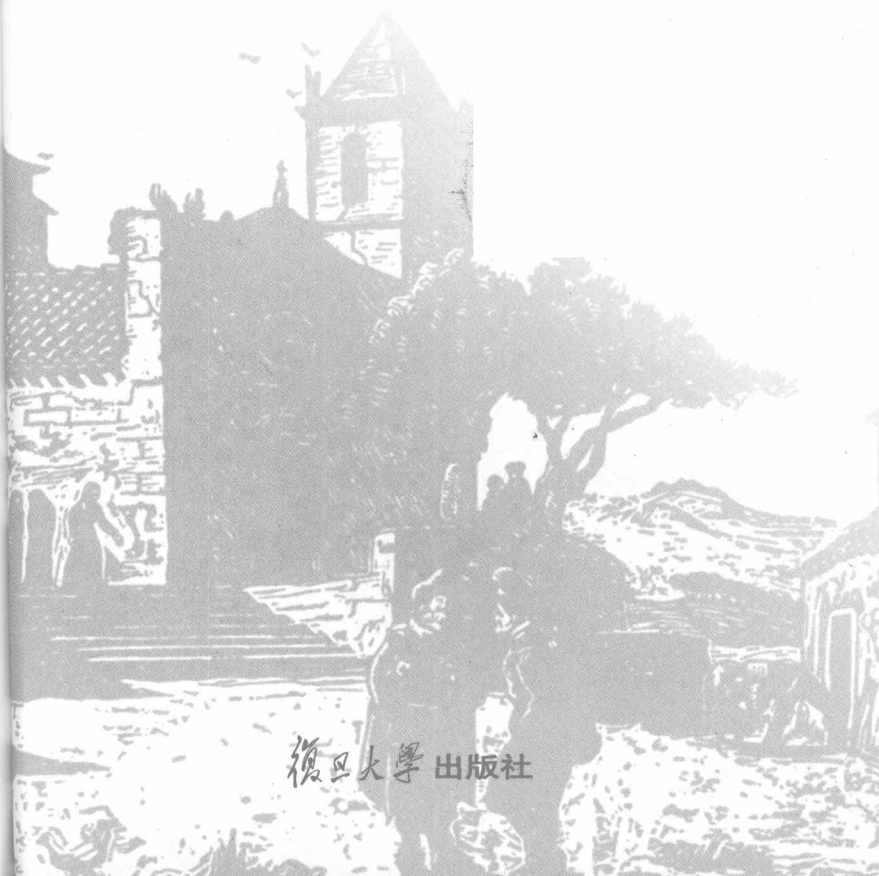




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吴晓真 著

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内容提要

英语词典研究历来较为偏重从编纂者视角来评判一本词典的好坏,本书则将计算机技术中的“用户友善”概念运用到双语词典编纂中,认为读者/用户视角在实现词典价值方面同样重要。本书还为“词典编纂”这门实践性很强的学科找到了接受理论、交际理论、二语习得理论、认知科学和市场营销理论中可以借鉴的理论依据,并全面总结了英语为源语言词典迄今为止在“用户友善”方面的“最佳实践(best practice)”及电子媒介英语为源语言词典在“用户友善”方面的独到之处。

Abstract

This dissertation defines “user-friendliness” in making dictionaries with English as the source language as efforts at presenting intended dictionary users with information they need in the easiest way and in the most readable format.

This dissertation focuses on dictionaries with English as the source language, or dictionaries whose entries are provided in English. In the Chinese context, they may be bilingual dictionaries.

An accurate understanding of the information dimension of a dictionary is possible only when the reader dimension is adequately considered. The history of English dictionary compiling has seen the swing of pendulum from users’ perspective to editors’ perspective, then back to users’ perspective, as demonstrated by a review of prefaces to English dictionaries.

User-friendliness in making dictionaries with English as the source language started gaining momentum in the late 1970s thanks to research findings in reception theory, communication theory, second language acquisition, cognitive sciences, and marketing theories. But it has hitherto remained a field that is far from being fully explored. This dissertation strives to arouse interest,

discussion and further research into this aspect.

Reception theory has made it clear that it is readers, not authors/editors, who make a text truly meaningful. According to the dictionary-as-communication model, there are three parties involved in dictionary communication: the dictionary maker, the dictionary text, and the dictionary user. Second language acquisition theories recommend the separation of dictionaries for L1 learners from those for L2 learners, dictionaries for comprehension from those for production. Besides, dictionaries must cater to learners' needs for grammar and word power as they proceed from the beginning level to a higher level. The Affective Filter hypothesis has it that dictionary makers should not artificially raise users' affective filter by continuously inflating the dictionary both in size and in price, by presenting information in a barely readable format, or by forcing unsolicited information on readers. Learning style research points out the inadequacy of traditional paper-and-ink dictionaries in meeting the needs of either audio or kinetic learners. The constructivist school of cognitive psychology views dictionary consulting as a process in which the dictionary user actively seeks out information, connects the new piece with an already existing schema, and builds up his/her understanding of the language. As a result, it is unwise for dictionary makers to regard users as passive receptacles of whatever information is given; instead they should start from what users already know and go on to provide what they want to know further. Cognitive linguistics helps us realize that an easier way for learners to master a language is to master language items in Gestalts. Therefore, user-friendly

dictionaries would draw their attention to the relatedness among senses within a single entry as well as the differences between any pair of senses. From the standpoint of marketing, the only way for a dictionary to differentiate itself from others, and thereby to succeed in the competitive market, is to target at a selected user segment instead of the whole market, introducing dictionaries of unique product benefits that appeal to users.

This dissertation then proceeds to summarize the current best practices in making user-friendly dictionaries with English as the source language. Such practices cover reader-oriented features in the outside matter (such as the preface, user guide, illustrations, and appendices), macrostructure (including selection of the word list based on frequency or on the theory of semantic fields, factors considered in inclusion of neologisms, and access structure), and microstructure (e. g. , pronunciation, sense ordering, definition, illustrative examples, grammatical and pragmatic information). A short paragraph or two on best practices in each of the above aspect is to be found at the beginning of each subsection.

However, user-friendly features tend to get English dictionaries inflated in both size and price, which is not user-friendly at all; whereas electronic English dictionaries, such as dictionaries in CD-ROM form, online dictionaries, and handheld electronic dictionaries, are capable of an extensive coverage without any apparent impact on dictionary size or price. Moreover, they are capable of presenting information solicited by the reader in formats most agreeable to him/her. Besides, they offer user-friendly features other than those seen in hardcopy dictionaries, including multiple

accesses, transparency of the information in need, up-to-dateness, more interaction with dictionary users, and so on, as illustrated by a close examination of *OED Online*. This dissertation has great expectations for lexicographers who are accustomed to the traditional medium of paper and ink to work hand in hand with computer experts (or even better, to become computer-savvy themselves) to produce the next generation of user-friendly dictionaries with English as the source language.

User-friendliness in English dictionary making extends to user research with a view to understanding user needs better, and to user education with a view to helping the latter get the most out of a dictionary.

Key words: user-friendliness, dictionaries with English as the source language, compiling

中 文 摘 要

本文将词典编纂中的“用户友善”定义为以最便捷易读的方式向目标读者提供所需信息。

本文着重讨论的是以英语为源语言的词典,即首词以英语形式出现的词典。在中国,此类词典可能是双语词典。

词典的读者维度和知识维度相辅相成,缺一不可。历史上英语词典的编纂经历了从偏重用户视角到偏重编者视角,又从编者视角回归用户视角的历程。这一点从历年出版的英语词典的前言中就可见一斑。

自 20 世纪 70 年代以来,随着接受理论、交际理论、二语习得理论、认知科学和营销理论研究的深入,以英语为源语言的词典编纂越来越强调“用户友善”。但此方面的研究尚有待深入。本文意在抛砖引玉,希望能激起同行的研究兴趣。

接受理论把读者,而非作者或编者,看成是文本意义的创造者。词典读者同词典编者和词典文本一样,都是词典交际模型中的组成部分。二语习得理论认为,母语词典跟二语词典应有所不同,理解用词典跟产出用词典也应有所不同。此外,英语词典必须根据英语学习者的不同水平分级。根据情感滤网理论,词典规模的膨胀、价格的上涨、密密麻麻的字体,以及不问读者是否需要就将某一词条的所有信息都呈现在后者面前等做法都会人为地升高读者的情感滤网,减少后者获得的可理解性输入。

词典用户可能偏爱视觉输入,但也可能青睐听觉输入,也可能喜欢从动手中学。但传统纸质词典很少迎合后两个群体的需要。建构主义理论认为,词典用户不是被动地接受信息,而是出于需要主动地寻求信息,然后在新知识和原有知识之间建立联系,最后扩大自己的知识库。因此,词典编者必须在调查读者已有知识的基础之上提供后者想进一步了解的信息。认知语言学则认为,传统词典过于强调某一词条下各义项之间的区别,却忽视了其间的联系,而义项之间的联系能帮助词典读者记忆。从词典营销角度来看,英语为源语言词典出版业竞争激烈,只有那些瞄准特定细分市场、提供独家特色的词典才能从中胜出。

本文随后总结了以英语为源语言词典迄今为止在“用户友善”方面的较好做法,内容涵盖词典正文之外部分(前言、使用说明、图解和附录等)、词典宏观结构(根据词频选定词表、根据语义场理论选定词表、收录新词的标准和检索路径等)和词典微观结构(发音、义项排列、定义、例句、语法和语用信息等)。

然而,采用以上各方面的最佳实践极可能导致词典规模的膨胀和价格的上涨,这就有违“用户友善”的初衷。与此相反,光盘词典、网络词典和掌上电子词典可以收录巨量信息却不显著影响词典的规模 and 价格。它们根据用户指令调出特定信息,屏蔽其他词条内虽然也有、但用户此时此刻不需要的内容。它们呈现信息的格式清晰易懂。它们还拥有传统纸质词典所不具备的“用户友善”特色,如多种检索路径、信息的“透明”性、信息的及时更新性和词典—用户间的更多互动等。网络版《牛津英语词典》是一个很好的例证。本文寄希望于词典编纂专业人士和计算机专业人士的通力合作,以创造出具有更多“用户友善”特色的以英语为源语言的新一代词典。

英语词典编纂中的“用户友善”还涉及用户研究和使用者

教育。前者的目的是为了更好地了解词典读者需求,后者意在帮助读者最大限度地利用词典。

关键词: 用户友善,英语为源语言词典,编纂

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Introduction

I. From user to editor, and then back to user

The question “What is a dictionary for?” has been asked many a time in the long history of lexicography. At present the dictionary maker is seen as being mainly concerned with two factors: the dictionary and its users. The former is what he works at, and the latter, whom he aims to serve (Li, 1993). The law of the unity of opposites dictates that an accurate understanding of the information dimension of the dictionary is only possible when the reader dimension is adequately considered (Zhang, 2000). Samuel Johnson was well aware of these two dimensions as he proclaimed in 1747: “The value of a work must be estimated by its use: It is not enough that a dictionary delights the critic, unless at the same time it instructs the learner” (quoted in Hartmann, 1983: p.9), as critics are usually more concerned with the information dimension of a dictionary.

This dissertation focuses on dictionaries with English as the source language, or dictionaries whose entries are provided in English. In the Chinese context, they may be bilingual English-Chinese dictionaries.

After a review of the history of dictionaries, this author finds that dictionaries with English as the source language first came into being in response to very practical user needs. The earliest ones followed a “hard word” tradition started by Robert Cawdrey’s *A Table Alphabeticall* in 1604, i. e. , they were to enable a wider reading public not versed in Latin to understand and learn to use the new technical and abstract vocabulary of learned words (Osseton, 1983). Or, in the words of Charlton Laird (1982: xv), the earliest dictionaries were “limited and practical dictionaries conceived to be helpful little books, useful to persons ignorant of language in one way or another, including children, foreigners, and underprivileged adults”. With time people realized that all important words and all of the most important material about these words should be included in the dictionary, even though much of the resulting work would be familiar to many people (ibid.). A great need was felt for a normative dictionary to standardize spelling, pronunciation and meaning, as well as to help the linguistically insecure in their choice of words. Hence the wide acclaim won by Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language*.

However, editors of dictionaries with English as the source language from the 1850s on shifted their focus away from users to the dictionary itself. *The Oxford English Dictionary* proclaimed in its preface that it was based “on historical principles”, and that its aim “is to present in alphabetical series the words that have formed the English vocabulary from the time of the earliest records down to the present day, with all the relevant facts concerning