

## REVIEW

Atkins, B. T. Sue and Michael Rundell. 2008. *The Oxford guide to practical lexicography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. xii+540 pages. ISBN: 978-0-19-927771-1.

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### 1. Introduction

*The Oxford guide to practical lexicography* [OGPL] by B.T. Sue Atkins and Michael Rundell, being the first publication of this kind on the market, is a joy and a real revelation to several groups of readers. Firstly and obviously, the long-awaited book is a goldmine of information for aspiring lexicographers and their teachers. Secondly, it is of great value to practising lexicographers, who will have the rare opportunity to confront their experience with the vast experience of the authors – prominent (meta)lexicographers and organisers of LEXICOM workshops in lexicography and lexical computing that have attracted hundreds of participants around the world for the past seven years.<sup>1</sup> Last but not least, it makes a fascinating reading for all “naive” dictionary lovers tormented by the question “How do they actually do it?” The fact of revealing the so-far jealously guarded tricks of the specialised and hermetic trade, and delivering them in an unpretentious, accessible style matching the condensed textbook-like formula, makes OGPL a unique and valuable response to the growing worldwide interest in lexicography as a profession.

### 2. Structure and layout: General features

The main body of the bulky volume (514 pages excluding the bibliography and the subject index) divides into an introduction and three major parts: I. Pre-lexicography (chapters 2–7), II. Analysing the data (chapters 8–9), III. Compiling the entry (chapters 10–12). As befits true guides, the authors take great care to navigate the reader throughout the whole book. Each of the three parts is heralded by a general introduction. Every chapter is structured in an analogous way: a local table of contents, a neat diagram representing its structure and main points, followed by carefully numbered subsections and, finally, a list of “recommended reading” on the topic covered in the chapter. For particularly interested parties, there are “further reading” lists on related topics, as well as useful websites (if available). In some chapters, describing the practical tasks involved in creating a dictionary (chapters 6–12), the exercises that precede the reading

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<sup>1</sup> The official website of LEXICOM Workshops is [http://www.lexmasterclass.com/course\\_lexicom](http://www.lexmasterclass.com/course_lexicom).

lists may help readers to test and revise their knowledge. These sections will be particularly welcome by students attending lexicography seminars.

Some features of the layout are evocative of the characteristics of modern monolingual learners' dictionaries (MLDs): the use of shading (especially in entry excerpts) for highlighting certain pieces of information (e.g. Fig. 7.5, 7.14, 7.18, 12.20) or the blue-shaded boxes with informative mini-articles, which look like usage notes (e.g. Box 3.1, 4.2, 5.2, 7.3, 8.1, 9.6, 10.1). Apart from strictly lexicographic facts, they also cover aspects of the history of metalexicography and linguistics.

Another implicit parallelism between OGPL and MLDs is user-friendliness. The pages are chock full of graphics, often humorous, illustrations (e.g. Fig. 4.2, 4.3 on the process of writing a monolingual and bilingual dictionary; Fig. 7.20 on the adapted version of Ogden and Richards' triangle), charts, diagrams (e.g. Fig. 3.3, 3.6, 6.11), excellent synthetic tables (e.g. Fig. 4.6 listing the key features and benefits of a corpus query system; Fig. 4.10 exemplifying a template entry), and entry excerpts (e.g. Fig. 2.5, 12.10). The reader can get as close as possible to the hands-on lexicographer's experience thanks to the photographs of the lexicographer's interface (Fig. 4.9), sample concordances (e.g. Fig. 4.4) or of inputting a query (Fig. 4.5).

The didactic value of OGPL is enhanced by lists of advantages and disadvantages of a particular solution or a dictionary component, e.g. the pros and cons of citations (pp. 51–53), grammar-based or meaning-based microstructure organisation (pp. 248–249), the pluses and minuses of giving multiword expressions the headword status (pp. 254–255), defining by synonyms (pp. 420–422), or using a translation corpus (p. 478). The typographic feature of a blue arrow precedes brilliant rules-of-thumb, offering solutions to concrete problems in the form of common-sense advice, such as: "Give careful thought to your template entries: days spent on creating a comprehensive set can save literally months of editing time in the long run" (p. 490); "People will love your dictionary if it's easy and quick to use [...]" (p. 244); or "When you're compiling a database entry, the slogan is (unlike in exams) *When in doubt don't leave it out*" (p. 324). If anything could spoil the pleasure of reading OGPL, it would probably be the numerous cross-references.

All in all, with its transparent structure and user-friendly layout, OGPL undoubtedly delivers the goods as a textbook.

### 3. Contents

The introductory chapter announces that the purpose of the book is to provide "a step-by-step guide to all the tasks involved in the planning, resourcing, and compilation of reference materials for human users" (p. 1). The authors state the practical purpose of their undertaking, and explain the descriptive, empiricist nature of the lexicographic profession. As opposed to publications "about dictionaries", OGPL is "about how to write dictionaries" (p. 1). Whether it is always possible to draw a clear-cut distinction

between the former and the latter is debatable. Academic disputes on the denotation of *(meta)lexicography* notwithstanding,<sup>2</sup> the need to make readers – potential novices – aware of the character of the book in simple, unequivocal terms is understandable. Right from the beginning, emphasis is placed on the issue of utmost importance in lexicography – user needs and skills. “Know your user” is reiterated in various forms throughout the book so often that the authors themselves liken it to a mantra, for which they “make no apology” (p. 5). Apparently, there is method in this madness, as concern for user needs stays with you for ever. Apart from dictionary users, linguistic theory and advanced technology are announced as the pillars of modern lexicography. Finally, we are acquainted with the overall layout and contents of the book. Chapter 1 finishes with acknowledgements.

Part I, “Pre-lexicography”, concerns the preparatory stages of a dictionary project. Its length reflects the multiplicity of decisions that need to be taken before one gets down to work proper. Chapter 2 sketches out the entire process of dictionary writing from its conception to publication, and then moves on to types of dictionaries and dictionary users’ needs and skills, the latter to be stated in the user profile – a primary determinant of the content and presentation of a dictionary. A comparison of monolingual and bilingual material in 2.4 illustrates how dictionary entries should reflect the profile of their target users.

Chapter 3 concentrates on lexicographic evidence, especially on the central role of corpora in providing lexicographers with objective data – a prerequisite for a reliable dictionary. The consecutive subsections are devoted to the issues of corpus size, content and data collection. There is a chance that the uninitiated lexicographer-to-be (who may never actually participate in the creation of a corpus) may feel a bit overwhelmed with the amount of detail (including, e.g., the legal aspects of creating corpora such as copyright permissions). However, the whole description of the process drives the message home: there is no reliable dictionary without a large, diverse and well-annotated corpus.

The crucial element of both the mono- and bilingual dictionary-writing process is the solid database, the advantages of which and principles of compilation are thoroughly spelt out in the first part of Chapter 4. The ensuing pages treat of the state-of-the-art technologies facilitating lexicographer’s work: software for corpus data analysis (corpus query system) and for writing entries (dictionary writing system). Beginners, who need to learn the basic skills of generating concordances and forming queries, receive great help in the form of the synthetic table in Fig. 4.6, which lists the most important features of the corpus query system, together with its functions and benefits. The penultimate issue to be pointed out as one of the “methods and resources” is the Style Guide – the dictionary policy statement. It deserves attention as lexicographers’ primary reference document, and its significance can never be overrated. Nevertheless, as OGPL repeatedly warns, the Style Guide “is not set in stone” (p. 123), so those ex-

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<sup>2</sup> For an informative critical discussion of the lexicography versus metalexicography distinction, see Adam-ska-Sałaciak (2006: 11–15).

cessively bound by the printed word should not forget that, in solving atypical cases, the ultimate responsibility rests with the lexicographer. The final point made in Chapter 4 are template entries: a time-saving device ensuring consistent treatment of words from the same lexical set, also recommended as an excellent tool for cutting your lexicographic teeth on (p. 127).

Despite the fact that OGPL has adopted an explicit, common-sense approach, it does not keep us in the dark about linguistic findings that have already found their application in lexicography, or may potentially speed up and perfect the processes of data analysis and entry writing. As the authors put it, “a good lexicographer will become a much better one with an understanding of relevant theoretical ideas” (p. 130). Accordingly, Chapter 5, which can be viewed as bridging the gap between lexicography and metalexicography, briefs the reader on the differences and similarities between the major sense relationships, and makes their on-the-spot identification possible by introducing the succinct “rules of thumb”. Next, it is demonstrated how the concepts of Igor Mel’čuk’s lexical functions and Charles J. Fillmore’s Frame Semantics, in particular corpus analysis leading to valency descriptions, can contribute to a more comprehensive and consistent treatment of collocations and complementation patterns. The contextual features of the lexical unit thus discovered, combined with its inherent properties, plus the properties of the source text, constitute, according to the authors, a triad of lexicographically relevant pieces of information, lexicographic relevance being a highly salient concept lying “at the heart of all good lexicography, whether mono- or bilingual” (p. 150).

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on planning the dictionary macrostructure and microstructure, respectively. The first subsections of Chapter 6 acquaint the reader with terminology: *lemma*, *token*, *lexical unit*, the categories of lexical items, including types of multiword expressions, and the component parts of most dictionaries: front and back matter and the A–Z entries. There follows a discussion of the factors that lexicographers need to consider when including a given lexical unit into the headword list, among them: wordclass, lexical form (e.g. variant or derived), lexical structure (e.g. simple words, partial words, multiword expressions), vocabulary types (sociolinguistically conditioned varieties identified via linguistic labels such as *formal*, *archaic*, *pejorative*, etc.). In problematic cases, lexicographers are advised to take into account the item’s corpus frequency, its psychological salience among users, possible translations (for bilingual dictionaries), and additional meanings or connotations. As far as the organisation of the headword list is concerned, OGPL enumerates criteria for the identification and treatment of homographs, singled out as a frequent source of confusion. Chapter 6 rounds off with basic information on the nature of the main entry types: lexical entry, abbreviation entry, grammatical word entry and encyclopaedic entry.

Dictionary microstructure is dissected in Chapter 7. The individual elements are highlighted in sample entries and discussed one by one. The order of presentation reflects the natural process of looking words up. Accordingly, it begins with components such as headword, homograph number, menu, subsection – collectively called “naviga-

tion aids" (p. 204). Next, all the components pertaining to the headword are in focus, namely pronunciation, variant form, frequency marker, inflected form and etymology. Subsequently, we delve deeper into the entry and look at entry components characteristic of a given lexical unit, or dictionary sense. Meaning being one of the most frequent reasons for dictionary consultations, OGPL discusses the methods of its transmission in monolingual dictionaries (three types of definitions, glosses, pragmatic force glosses and graphic illustrations) and in bilingual ones (direct translation, near-equivalent, TL gloss and contextual translation), as well as sense indicators (specifiers, collocators and domain labels) guiding users to the right meaning. Other aspects of dictionary entry under consideration are the grammar components (wordclass markers, syntax patterns and grammar labels) and context components in the form of multiword expressions and sentences or phrases in which the headword typically appears. Future lexicographers are also clued in on the complexities of labelling; in particular, they are warned against the inadvertent labelling of concepts and referents instead of expressions (p. 226). Next, two types of usage notes are illustrated: subject-oriented and local usage notes. The final remarks on dictionary entry components again refer to the headword, or, rather, words related to the headword, indicated by means of secondary headwords, run-ons and cross-references. The ensuing section is taken up by remarks on the electronic dictionary entry. It offers basic information, useful for complete novices, who have been shying away from e-dictionaries so far,<sup>3</sup> not so much perhaps for e-lexicographers-to-be. The subject is so technical that it probably deserves a separate follow-up volume: an introduction to practical e-lexicography. The final part of Chapter 7 is more informative in pointing out the pros and cons of two ways of entry organisation: grammar-based vs. meaning-based and "flat" versus "tiered" structure. Moreover, it draws attention to possible types of ordering word meanings (the historical, frequency and "core-meaning-first" order) as well as the alternative ways of placing multiword units within the entry.

Part II, "Analysing the data", consists of two chapters describing the process of building the database, a preliminary stage when appropriate corpus material is collected and structured so as to be ready for use during the construction of the dictionary. Chapter 8 emphasises the role of clear word sense identification (WSD) rules in the thankless task of extracting neatly numbered senses out of the infinitely diverse contextual meanings. Help also arrives for lexicographers in the form of prototype theory, the notions of polysemy and homonymy, lexical semantics and "motivated" polysemy (specialization, regular polysemy, metaphor and metonymy). Finally, a set of practical WSD strategies is presented, all relating to the context in which a given lexical unit (LU) appears. They are the so-called "external" indicators of meaning (domain, dialect and setting), and the "internal" indicators (syntax and lexico-grammatical behaviour, collocation and selectional restrictions, colligational preferences) (pp. 296–309). Section 8.6, headed as "Conclusion", stresses that dictionary senses are "generalizations (or abstractions) from the mass of available language data" and "their purpose is to enable dictionary users to

<sup>3</sup> One might wonder whether such people are to be found among readers of OGPL at all.

associate what they have encountered in a specific context with a particular area of meaning” (p. 311). It adds value to the discussion by listing the steps of finding word senses (the final stage of which may consist in lumping or splitting) and warning lexicographers against the pitfalls of overspecification and blind preoccupation with consistency.

Chapter 9 deals with the structure of the database for a single sense, or the LU. Table 9.1 lists 23 fields of a dictionary entry (among others: headword, variant form, wordclass, meaning, example, multiword expression, collocate, linguistic label, cross-references) to be discussed in subsequent subsections. The longest one (9.25) covers grammar. Lexicographically relevant co-constituents for four wordclasses (verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs) are presented in tables. We are instructed how to find these constructions in the corpus, e.g. with the aid of the Word Sketch lexical profiling program, and how to select illustrating examples. There follows a case study for the verb *cook*. The analysis of concordances of *cook* in the light of frame semantics results in complementation patterns for the senses of the headword. In the description of recording complementation, particular attention is drawn to types of “null instantiation” – the omission of the direct object. It is implied that its proper dictionary treatment should considerably benefit language learners.

OGPL reaches its climax with Part III, “Compiling the entry”. Chapter 10 looks at the third stage in the dictionary writing process: synthesis, i.e. distilling facts assembled in the database into a monolingual entry. The selection and presentation of information will be influenced by the user profile and the Style Guide. Consistency is ensured by the latter as well as the third resource – template entries. The next set of decisions concerns the distribution of information: the treatment of multiword expressions, run-ons, number, type and order of senses, grammar and labelling systems. The lexicographer’s task is to filter out the database-only information (too rare or too specific to find its way into the dictionary). At last, we can get down to the business of definition writing, covered in subsections 10.4–10.7 (pp. 405–452). As OGPL observes, variability in the content and form of definitions of the same LU across different dictionaries often stems from their function (encoding, decoding), the target user’s linguistic skills, background, and familiarity with dictionary conventions, and therefore does not have to be viewed as a flaw. The ultimate objective of a dictionary definition must be intelligibility, because “if somebody with enough knowledge and ability uses the dictionary carefully, and yet gets things wrong, that is our fault, not theirs” (p. 383). In the ensuing subsections Chapter 10 looks at the respective merits and drawbacks of alternative approaches to defining, ways of presenting elusive aspects of meaning, attitude, offensive language, connotation and cultural associations. It also broaches the subject of lexicographic neutrality. As for the form of definition, a historical overview and traditional defining strategies are supplemented with alternatives: full-sentence definitions, “when” definitions and short definitions. Also, solutions are offered to cases especially resilient to defining. In general, OGPL seems to advocate an eclectic approach to defining. The discussion of definition form and content finishes with down-to-earth practical hints and sobering

thoughts for those who tend to get carried away during the task, e.g. “[r]emember that there is an inverse correlation between the time it takes you to write a definition and the time it takes the user to process it” (p. 452) and “less is more” (p. 451). The remainder of the chapter covers the issue of selecting examples and lists their three basic functions: (1) attesting to the existence of the word; (2) complementing the definition in explaining meaning; (3) illustrating syntactic patterns, collocational behaviour, register, style, etc. It is suggested that the argument between advocates of invented versus authentic examples is blown out of proportion because the two positions are not incompatible in everyday lexicographic practice. The advice that OGPL gives lexicographers is straightforward: go for natural and typical, informative and intelligible examples.

Chapters 11 and 12 cover, respectively, the second and third stage in the production of a bilingual dictionary, that is, translation (transfer stage) and synthesis. The former consists in adding target language (TL) translations to each LU. Lexicographic context-free translation is contrasted with context-sensitive translation (p. 467). The former aims at “direct translation” of the headword – finding the most useful TL equivalent of the source language (SL) headword, i.e. one that suits as many contexts as possible (p. 211). In their search for equivalents, lexicographers are advised to take into account the semantic content, the collocational context, the vocabulary type, the message (in the case of idioms, sayings) and the function (of grammatical words). TL corpora and parallel corpora (the translation corpus and the comparable corpus) are the recommended tools of modern bilingual lexicography. The recording of translations in the database is illustrated with the example of the first LU of *bargain*.

Chapter 12 – the synthesis stage of building the bilingual entry mirrors Chapter 10 in many respects. Again, resources for entry building and the distribution of information are considered before the actual entry writing. OGPL highlights the difference between sense division in a bilingual dictionary and a monolingual one: bilingual dictionary “senses” do not reflect the polysemy of SL headword, but are “the most user-friendly way to structure the material” (p. 500), i.e., the TL equivalents. Near-equivalents, glosses and usage notes are presented as viable alternatives to direct translations. The chapter closes with the role of examples and types of meaning indicators in a bilingual entry.

#### 4. Style

The fact that OGPL has adopted an informal, conversational, almost chatty style should come as no surprise. The stilted register of academic writing would be out of sync with the practical, down-to-earth perspective. Like a good tutor, OGPL takes on admonitory tones from time to time, recognizable in the use of imperatives, exclamation marks (e.g. “No project should be without them! [template entries – R.S.]” p. 127), dos and don’ts turning occasionally into maxims (“*When in doubt don’t leave it out*”, p. 324). As in the classroom, questions are asked and addressed, e.g. “What makes a dictionary ‘reliable’?”

(p. 45), “What kinds of information does a Style Guide include?” (p. 118), “What is a headword?” (p. 324), or “What makes a good definition?” (p. 450). When “hard” terms come up, they are patiently explained and contrasted with similar ones, so as to forestall potential confusion (e.g. entry template versus template entry, p. 123; collocator versus collocate, p. 218). Countless examples support instruction and show how to precisely implement a recommended procedure. Some repetition is inevitable (e.g. pp. 414–416 and 436–437 on genus and differentia; pp. 123, 490 on template entries; relentless reminders of the role of users’ needs and the Style Guide). Nonetheless, the lesson is never dull, because of the lively language interspersed with witty anecdotes (e.g. footnote 8, p. 170), linguistic jokes (e.g. about a panda who “eats shoots and leaves”, p. 89), and colourful idioms (*horses for courses*, p. 450; *rare as hen’s teeth*, p. 480).

## 5. Final remarks

OGPL can be viewed as the first successful attempt to bring state-of-the art lexicographic workshop into focus.<sup>4</sup> Thanks to its informal style and a coursebook format, the book is accessible to both specialists and outsiders, which may contribute to the worldwide popularization of lexicography as a profession. What readers receive is a feel for dictionary-making and a unique sense of a hands-on experience, as close to the real thing as possible through reading a book. The outlook on dictionary-making represented in OGPL is extremely balanced and realistic: we are constantly reminded that a dictionary is a trade-off between the market forces and theoretically feasible, often very appealing solutions.

Naturally, as in any book of this length, some features could be improved upon. For instance, a handful of specialist terms lack an explanation or the explanation is postponed (e.g. *metonymic force*, p. 187; *cooperative principle*, p. 310). The treatment of *homograph*, *homonym* (pp. 192–193, p. 281) is misleading.<sup>5</sup> It would have been useful if all references from the footnotes had appeared in the final bibliography section (see, e.g., footnote 3, p. 48; footnote 10, p. 55; p. 67; p. 401). These, however, are minor quibbles, which do not diminish the great merit of the project.

Indeed, OGPL is an impressive achievement. Although Atkins and Rundell make it clear that theirs is just one of many ways of producing a dictionary, not necessarily the only “right” way (p. 2), OGPL (and, hopefully, its future editions) stands a fair chance of becoming a lexicographers’ bible for years to come.

<sup>4</sup> The publications of Landau (2001) and Hartmann (2001) are more theory (i.e. metalexicography)-oriented.

<sup>5</sup> Apparently, items traditionally considered to be homonyms (e.g. *bear*, *bank*) are treated as homographs in OGPL (pp. 192–193). The use of the term *homophony* in the context of the homographs *bow* ‘weapon’, *bow* ‘act of bending’ is confusing; so is the sentence: “In most dictionaries, homophones [...] are dealt with as separate entries, or homographs” (p. 281).



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