

BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

The response to the first issue of the newsletter was very pleasing, and it looks as if the third issue should be able to follow very closely upon the heels of this, the second. A number of surveys of literature in various fields are in active preparation, as well as several contributions of other kinds. The editor's task is made much easier, however, if BAAL members with notes or handouts which they feel to be appropriate for a wider, but still private, audience could offer them rather than wait to be approached. It is not envisaged that the newsletter should aim to appear on a predictable basis; rather, an issue will be sent out when enough material has been received by the editor to justify a new issue - although, of course, potential contributors will be asked to submit their contributions with reasonable rapidity. The newsletter will not thrive on false modesty, however, and in view of the excellent response so far it seems likely that many members are sitting on useful information or productive suggestions which would be of wide interest within the association.

A.P. Cowie & R. Mackin - OXFORD DICTIONARY OF CURRENT IDIOMATIC ENGLISH
Volume 1: Verbs with Prepositions & Particles OUP 1975 pp. 396 £5.00

There have been many attempts to deal with the amorphous and slippery field of idioms in contemporary English. In England, Pythian 1973 revised the rapidly ageing Freeman 1951. In America, Boatner and Gates 1966 produced perhaps the best dictionary of idioms available to date, despite strong competition from Kenkyusha 1964 in Japan. In the more restricted area of phrasal verbs and their idioms, a fairly recent offering for the foreign student is McArthur and Atkins 1974. These are of course a selection of the many works produced on idioms. At least 50 other compilations of English idioms from 1848 onwards have been listed and annotated in Bibliography Two of Flavell 1972. There is no doubt that the Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English (ODCIE) far surpasses any of its predecessors in its scope of entries and in the comprehensiveness of their treatments. Special features include: simple definitions; a code referring to a long-awaited and valuable analysis of the idioms' grammatical patterns; permitted transformations; style and register marking; collocations; cross-referencing of related meanings; usage notes; illustrative made-up examples and quotations; supplementary index of nouns, etc. and nominalized forms, to aid reference to the Dictionary itself. In other words, a very thorough lexicographic treatment.

The whole field of idiomatic expressions is quite immense - since 1959 the authors have collected some 20,000 phrases to be dealt with. Obviously not all could easily go into one volume, given the space-consuming comprehensive

treatment of each headphrase and the need to be not too unwieldy in practical use by the student. Hence it was decided to devote Volume One to verbs with Prepositions and Particles and the forthcoming Volume Two to General Expressions. Grouping all phrases comprising verbs plus particles or prepositions has the advantage that a uniformity of treatment (e.g. grammatical analysis of the patterns they form) is possible. A certain homogeneity is achieved in a very diverse and anomalous area.

Inclusion/exclusion boundaries are notoriously difficult to draw, and this is especially true in the case of idioms. Volume one includes verbs with Prepositions and Particles, a major subject of which is the phrasal verb. However, not all phrasal verbs need be included, since by no means all phrasal verbs are idiomatic. In deciding whether a given phrase is idiomatic, editorial policy has been, in this case and in others, to err on the side of accommodating the marginal case rather than excluding it. It is expected that the non-native speaker will be a principal user of the Dictionary. He generally has considerable trouble with the simple phrasal verb, especially with the idiomatic phrasal, and with the fixed collocation which is not technically an idiom, so it makes good sense to bring into the volume these peripherally idiomatic expressions, even if, as is often the case, it proves possible to make a list, without much difficulty, of expressions which turn out to be non-idiomatic under anything but the loosest definition of idiomaticity.

It is possible to quibble with other inclusions and exclusions. These are straightforward omissions - for instance, the following are not found: cut in on (of traffic); get in/out of (a car) - (though not strictly idioms, are at least as idiomatic as other phrases included in ODCIE) keep in! (= don't run in the road!); look at (with/^{out}the implication of looking at particularly closely); make it with; play havoc with/wreak havoc on; rub out (= erase); sit up (= be in an upright position, not move to it); turn up (= increase volume, but 'turn down' is included). Omissions of this type throw some doubt on the comprehensiveness of the sources secured for the entries. In particular, there are very few spoken sources referred to (just BBC TV, ITV and BBC Radio, much of which is scripted anyway). One wonders, indeed, how our four-letter friends, the taboo words, received such full treatment from these staid sources. Introspection of the authors, maybe! However, it remains true that a corpus gleaned also from spoken sources would be more representative of the whole range of contemporary English, and particularly of idiom which is largely informal and spoken rather than formal and written. The written sources represent a catholic range (a translation of Maurois, to Eynsenck, to Honey magazine), predominantly of the period 1945-1965 and mainly consulted in the early 60s. With this now somewhat dated selection, one loses a certain spontaneity and modernity in a very fast-changing area of language, but the ephemera are more surely weeded out. It would be interesting to know how much material the most modern sources - the Times and Sunday Times, consulted up to 1974 - provided in relation to sources written virtually a generation earlier. A final minor quibble on the possibly too far-flung boundary of inclusion is concerned with such expressions as 'spare the rod and spoil the child', and 'pride goes before a fall'.

Are these better seen as idioms, or as quotations or proverbs?

A more significant criticism lies in the guidance the user is given in using the text of the Dictionary. The problem lies in the too exhaustive guidelines of the 81 pages of the preliminary matter. One wonders if the introduction to the Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English has ever been much used by the foreign students whom it is meant to guide. It is seriously to be doubted, for instance, whether any student will ever plough his way through the 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ pages of lexicographically immaculate justification and explanation on the headphrase alone. / ^{in ODCIE:} If he does not, how will he learn to use the dictionary and properly benefit from its riches except by trial and error? He will not, since there is no handy, simplified guide 'How to use this Dictionary'. Even the subsection 'The dictionary and the practical needs of the learner' comes after the General Introduction followed by 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ pages containing a clearly-written yet still difficult, for the linguistically unsophisticated foreign learner at least, definition of idiomatlicity, etc. There is the further problem that the complexity and difficulty of the authors' language in the Introduction is greater than that of the entries in the body of the work - another reason for the non-native to give up after two pages and go back to trial and error in making use of the book. However, it is greatly to the ODCIE's credit that one of the most serious criticisms that can be made of it is

no more profound than to bemoan the lack of a simple guide to its use in addition to the elaborate survey provided.

Indeed the ODCIE has many virtues at both the theoretical and practical level. The authors have made very sound assessments and choices. An essential instance of this is in the definition of 'idiomaticity' itself. The authors several times state (VIII, IX, XII) that an idiom is ultimately to be defined as such on semantic grounds. There are, and have been, other claimants, as the discussion in Flavell 1973 shows, the authors rightly reject the primacy of syntactic criteria, as found principally in the TG treatments of idioms (e.g. Fraser 1970) and follow a line shared by Chafe 1968 and 1970 and the generative semanticists.

Equally important from a theoretical standpoint is the wise rejection of the binary, discrete approach to idioms propagated by TG in the 60s. The question cannot be phrased realistically 'Is this, or is this not, an idiom?' but, rather, 'How idiomatic is this expression?' Bolinger's 'Generality, Gradience and the All-or-None' (1961), the 'squishy' thinking of J.R. Ross and Makkai's (1972) suggestion of idiomaticity indices are directly in line with the authors' resolve to 'think in terms of a scale of idiomaticity' (x) The doctoral thesis of Akimoto will give further theoretical support to this position, when completed.

Another excellent feature is the attention paid to collocation. This is of great importance for idioms, for by one definition at least, an idiom is a unique collocation of two or more words. Typical collocations are given under each entry to foster skill in producing new and acceptable sentences. Where collocations are restricted, the text given is marked with a special symbol to indicate this is the case. If, for instance, an adjective is to be inserted in 'Keep an/one's eye on', the entry shows it is likely to be one of : careful, professional, sharp, watchful or weather. This feature is of great help to the overseas student.

Similarly helpful is the detailed grammatical analysis of the patterns the idioms allow. An analysis in depth has been needed for a long time. It will be fascinating to see if Volume Two can make an equally good job of ordering the idiosyncracies and quirks of the of the General Expressions. There are blemishes to be corrected in future editions (entry 'get over¹' allows pattern (A1); 'get up to' is surely (A3) rather than (A2); etc), and possibly areas for extension. Vagaries in the usage of nominalizations are not comprehensively dealt with, on the whole, for example.

As for the lexicographic side of things, there is little to be said, except in praise. It is good to see strict alphabetic ordering was not adhered to (this can cause enormous problems in consultation where idioms are concerned. Pradež 1951 is a prime example of this). The general aim has been to try to bring together mutually illuminating entries, although one can find occasional minor slips (e.g. 'make out²' and 'makeout⁵' have a causative relationship, but are not listed consecutively, whereas the entry for 'show up' lists both the causative and non-causative under the same head). It would have been fascinating, space permitting, to have had a historical dimension with the addition of selected etymologies. There is nothing more captivating than the origin and development of idioms. A stronger case can be

made for the inclusion of more guidance on connotation, especially for the non-native. Occasionally, implications of expressions are drawn out in the usage section, but this aspect merits more central treatment than it receives. The layout of the entries is generally clear and inviting, and the variation in type face facilitates rather than obscures consultation. The proof-reading is very good, leaving few typographical misplacements (Butnote XXXVII) or misprints (but up² is repeated).

Despite the detailed criticisms, there is no doubt at all that the ODCIE is a very good dictionary indeed. It is a worthy companion to the ALDCE and deserves equal success. One can only await Volume 2 with impatience, to see whether the authors pick their way as skillfully and competently through the minefields of General Expressions as they have through those containing verbs with Propositions and Particles.

Roger H. Flavell

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Note: I am grateful to Ann Brumfit for many of the practical examples in this review.

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ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES - SOME REFLECTIONS ON AN EARLY COURSE

1. Introduction

In September 1972 I was sent to the Language Centre in the University of Ghana to run what was then called a 'Remedial English' course. It had been felt that students' English (both undergraduate and non-degree, but especially the latter) was not of a sufficiently high standard to enable them to benefit from or to produce the necessary standard of university work. The Language Centre had, in fact, been set up partly to take care of this course, although its main function was to exploit and continue research into Ghanaian languages.

2. The Course

2.1 Students. The course was open to all first year students of the university. Admission to it was, it had been decided, to be determined by the results of an examination in the English Language (subsequently discontinued); students not reaching a desired standard would be 'invited' to take part in the course. Naturally enough, this approach did not prove to be productive as, firstly, less than 50% of the total number of students available actually took the exam, and in any case the course was so limited in teaching staff and so beset by time-tabling problems that only a comparatively small proportion of the students apparently needing assistance could actually be invited to take the course. These were problems that remained with the course throughout my four years in the post. They were, in turn, related to the fact that the course had not been made an obligatory part of the degree course of the university. The problems reflected in the course content, since we were, except in a very few cases, unable to teach groups belonging to the same discipline. This resulted in a course entitled 'Language and Study Skills' which could be classified as a kind of 'EA(G)P'. (This situation improved during my four years, but only as regards the non-degree students.) The major problem in connection with the students was that since the course was not compulsory, freshman timetables were already over-crowded. The very most we could expect was 2 hours per week, and this would not normally be workable until the third week of term, giving us a total of around twenty weeks in all.

2.2 Materials. These were partly at least determined by the constraints mentioned above. We also felt that, since the type of English exam experienced by students at GCE 'O' Level was strictly structural, we could not teach more of the same overt type of language material. We decided that, as time was so limited, we needed a list of priorities, based on some kind of research into the study activities of students at Legon. At the same time a questionnaire was distributed to the teaching staff and students asking where the main areas of difficulty were to be experienced. Our hypotheses, based partly on observation and partly on the Hale Report on University Teaching Methods and quoted in Peter Wingard's report of his work in the University of Zambia, were built into the questionnaire and proved to be correct. The areas which we decided to cover were Note Taking (from both oral and written sources and thus including some listening skills), Discussion Skills, Reading Skills, 'Style' and Reference Skills. We would also, if time allowed, attempt to help them with some Writing Skills. We would attempt to use texts which would have some face validity for students' particular interests where this was practicable.

2.3 Some approaches used on the course. Note Taking/Listening Skills opened the course. This was because students, immediately upon their attending university lectures and tutorials discovered that their skills in these areas were in many cases woefully inadequate. We used a variety of techniques from the discussion of

the abbreviation of words to the layout of notes on a page. At one stage we used parallels between successful notes and good newspaper headlines; we also indicated the differences. Specially recorded talks were used to discuss factors like staging markers, anaphora, cataphora and other indicators as to the structure of the discourse. Practice in Note Taking continued throughout the rest of the course as we introduced new topics with short lecturettes. Skeleton sets of notes with gaps and omissions were given to students; the information given decreased as the course progressed. Reconstruction exercises were also included in this component.

Our next component was Discussion Skills. In many cases, again, students felt unused to and shy of venturing into discussion of their study topics with an 'authority figure' present. We devised a list of the most common formulae (and accepted in the subsequent exercises Ghanaian English variants or versions) of 'interruptors'. These were practised in large and small groups, using student talk and specially prepared mock tutorials.

Reference Skills followed this, and was mainly concerned with the possibilities of the university library; information seeking exercises were held in the library. We also dealt with information retrieval from books, using indexes, tables of contents, paragraph headings, etc.

Our Reading Skills component touched on such areas as skimming and scanning for information - this related to the previous component - judging the appropriate pace for reading and practice in faster reading; this last involved the use of short passages, some of them from Fry's Faster Reading, and continued for the rest of the course, parallel with other components. What was stressed in this section of the course was the variation of pace and approach to reading which is essential for anyone involved in independent study.

Our final two components consisted of some fairly informal analysis of different types of English prose, with reference to the rhetorical devices that made them texts. This led on to a short final section on Writing Skills, opening with some work on transferring information presented in a non-verbal form (for example graphs) to a verbal one (say, a verbal report). This, in its turn, led on to work on paragraphing.

3. Conclusions

The main conclusion I have formed about this type of course, now becoming more and more common in this type of institution, is that the institution itself needs to be genuinely prepared to take it; there must be a genuine demand for it and, secondly, some rather detailed administration must take place before the course is expected to get under way. An institution must, for example, decide whether this type of course is needed for all or most students, and if the majority are expected to take it, then provision must be made for it on the main timetable. An informally based course, such as the one at Legon, has certain advantages as far as student motivation goes, in that students will only come if they want to; but even then, pressure from 'exam subjects' frequently proved too strong towards the end of the second term.

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The Hale Report on University Teaching Methods in the UK (UGC 1964, HMSO).
Peter Wingard - English for Scientists at the University of Zambia (in CILT Reports & Papers 7: Science & Technology in a Second Language, report on a BAAL seminar held at the University of Birmingham, 1971).

SHORT REVIEW

Michael Stubbs - LANGUAGE, SCHOOLS & CLASSROOMS, Methuen 1976. PB £1.40

The last few years have seen a number of books (Doughty & Doughty 1974, Trudgill 1975) which aim to explain basic sociolinguistic concepts to prospective teachers. It has also been noticeable that a number of the criticisms of the work of Bernstein, and especially of his more simplistic interpreters, have at last begun to appear in print in a form easily accessible to teachers in training (in addition to Trudgill 1975, Rogers 1976 section 1). This new book by Michael Stubbs, one of a most promising-looking series on Contemporary Sociology of the School, continues this work and takes it further into an area with which it has not normally been linked specifically, though the link is entirely obvious: the analysis of classroom language.

Having established, clearly and sensibly, the basic concepts on which sociolinguistics rests, Stubbs discusses specifically the work of Bernstein and Labov in some detail, examines the notion of linguistic deprivation and dismisses it as mythical, and moves on to the studies of classroom language, commenting on among others Barnes, Bellack et al, Gumperz & Herasimchuk, Mishler, Sinclair & Coulthard, Walker & Adelman as well as his own studies. From here he moves on to discuss 'the hidden curriculum' and the relationship between language and the transmission of cultural values. This is the least satisfactory part of the book, but it is so primarily because - as he points out - we really know very little empirically about how educational knowledge is transmitted. Indeed, we know very little about what actually goes on in a normal classroom at all. There is, however, a risk that - as people become more aware of linguists' and others' uncertainties over the popular view of Bernstein's early linguistic claims - a new myth will develop in which the argument is carried back a stage further and instead of a linguistic mis-match a cultural mis-match will be accepted. This position is already widely held, with varying degrees of sophistication, and it might not have been unfair to ask the author to explore this direction more fully with the clarity and the charity which makes the discussion of the directly linguistic work so effective.

There has been a tendency among linguists for a note of irritation, almost peevishness, to creep in when attacking the more confident pronouncements of Bernstein's followers. This book avoids such a temptation, and by putting the linguistic deficit/deprivation arguments into a wider educational setting performs a most useful service for all those concerned with language in education - and that should include all those concerned with education. It is a book to be highly recommended.

CJB

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RECENT BOOKS NOTED

Academic Press:

- ed. G. Fant & M. A. A. Tatham - Auditory Analysis of the Perception of Speech. £12.00
 ed. Eric H. Lenneberg & Elizabeth Lenneberg - Foundations of Language Development
 (2.vols.) £11.55 each
- ed. Chas. N. Li - Subject & Topic. £11.20
 Patricia Marks Greenfield & Joshua H. Smith - The Structure of Communication in
 Early Language Development. £8.00
 ed. D. Raj Reddy - Speech Recognition. £8.85

Edward Arnold:

- Norbert Dittmar - Sociolinguistics. £9.95

Cambridge University Press:

- Frank Palmer - Semantics. PB £1.65

Collins, Fontana:

- N. Chomsky - Reflections on Language. £1.50 PB
 Jonathon Culler - Saussure. 80p. PB

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich:

- Peter Ladefoged - A Course in Phonetics. £2.90

Holt, Rinehart & Winston:

- Frank Smith - Comprehension and Learning. £3.25 PB

Longman:

- M. A. K. Halliday & Ruqaiya Hasan - Cohesion in English. £5.00 PB
 R. Leeson - Fluency & Language Teaching. £2.25 PB

Methuen:

- Judith Greene - Thinking & Language. 65p. PB
 David Hill - Teaching in Multi-Racial Schools. £1.60 PB

Oxford University Press:

- David Wilkins - Notional Syllabuses. PB no price given.

Penguin:

- Douglas Barnes - From Communication to Curriculum. 90p. PB
 Nancy Martin et al - Understanding Children Talking. 90p. PB

Research Publications Services (Victoria Hall, Fingal Street, London SE10 ORF):

- Klaus Bung - A Theoretical Model for Programmed Language Instruction. £6.00 PB

Ward Lock:

- Nancy Martin et al - Writing & Learning across the Curriculum 11-16. £1.35 PB

Comments, please, on these or any other recent books will be gratefully received.

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