Online English Dictionaries: Friend or Foe?

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Abstract

The emergence of online English dictionaries in the past two decades has not only changed the lookup habit of many people and but also influenced the way dictionaries are compiled and presented. The traditional role played by paper dictionaries has been challenged, as witness the sharp decrease of the sales of the so-called "dead-tree" dictionaries and the steady diminishing in their readership. In consequence, many paper dictionaries have been gathering dust on bookshelves in bookstores, libraries or private studies. The ever-increasing popularity of online dictionaries has even made some alarmists suggest the possible demise of paper dictionaries. However, the future of dictionary-making and that of bilingual lexicography in particular is not as dismal as what people usually think. The lexicographical information presented in online dictionaries may prove to be a bonanza for bilingual lexicographers. This paper attempts to research into the major online English dictionaries that are available today, and their advantages and disadvantages will also be discussed. The scene of online English-Chinese dictionaries will also be investigated, and opportunities presented to English-Chinese dictionary-makers in the digital era will be explored.

According to most current English reference books, a dictionary is usually defined as "a book that gives a list of words in alphabetical order and explains what they mean". However, technological advances have already redefined what a dictionary is. Many dictionaries that are being used today are no longer "books" in the traditional sense of the word as they can be found in electronic devices (e.g. cell phones, tablet computers, etc.), in CD-ROMs or on the Internet. If Dr. Johnson were still alive today, he would definitely be at a loss in face of the plethora of dictionaries that are being used today and might even feel dismay at the gradual erosion of the dictionary-making tradition that he himself pioneered. The influx of online dictionaries in the past two decades has not only changed the lookup habit of many people and but also influenced the way dictionaries are compiled and presented. The traditional role played by paper dictionaries has been challenged, as witness the sharp decrease of the sales of the so-called "dead-tree" dictionaries and the steady diminishing in their readership. In consequence, many paper dictionaries, monolingual or bilingual, have been gathering dust on bookshelves in bookstores, libraries or private studies. The ever-increasing popularity of online dictionaries has even made some alarmists suggest the possible demise of paper dictionaries. Michael Rundell, for example, said in the opening plenary of "eLexicography in the 21st Century": "Two years ago, if you asked me whether paper dictionaries had a future, I responded confidently yes, for a good few years yet. But now I'm not at all sure." As a matter of fact, since the beginning of the noughties, much ink has been spilled over the rise of online dictionaries. For instance, Vincent J. Docherty provided an overview of the dictionaries on the Internet as early as 2000, and Li Lan presented an update of the world's newest online

lexicographical services in 2005. Now as I am adding one more paper to the growing body of cyberlexicographical literature, I will present it in a different way, namely from the perspective of a bilingual dictionary-maker. Therefore this paper will attempt to research into the major online English dictionaries that are available today, and the influences they exert on bilingual dictionary-making will also be delved into.

1. The typology of online dictionaries

Since the late 1990s, dictionary publishers made every effort to ride the Internet wave, and as a result many of their dictionaries were digitalized and put online. American dictionaries such as *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionaries, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,* and *Encarta World English Dictionary* were among the first batch of English-language dictionaries that had established online presence. The year 2000 witnessed a milestone in the history of English lexicography as *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) made its online appearance. Since then, virtually hundreds of online dictionaries have been launched. Most of such dictionaries fall into the following three types, namely "clicks-and-mortar" dictionaries, one-stop dictionary sites, and DIY dictionaries.

1.1. *"Clicks-and-mortar" dictionaries*

This type of dictionaries accounts for the majority of online dictionaries now available as they are simply the online versions of existing paper dictionaries. It is no exaggeration to say that most of the major English dictionaries (with the exception of OED) have their respective free online editions. Let's take learner's dictionaries for example. Four out of the five major monolingual learner's dictionaries[1], namely OALD (www.oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com), LDOCE (http://www.ldoceonline.com), Cambridge (http://dictionary.cambridge.org), and MacMillan (http://www.macmillandictionary.com), can be searched at their respective website. Even new kids on the lexicographic block, such as *Oxford Dictionary of English* (previously known as *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*), have been made fully searchable online. OED Online, though available on a subscription basis, also belongs to this category of online dictionaries, but it also represents a departure from standard online lexicography because OED, unlike its minor lexicographic siblings, updates its A to Z in every quarter and keeps the online version up-to-date. Such a practice may someday obliterate users' needs to update their paper dictionaries and the delay or even possible cancellation in the publication of the long-expected OED3 speaks volumes.

1.2. *One-stop dictionary sites*

On the Internet, there are a considerable number of dictionary sites which offer "one-stop shopping" experience for users who intend to look up words there. It will be better if we call

them "dictionary aggregators". Dictionary.com is one of such popular dictionary sites. Launched in 1995 under the name of Lexico Publishing, LLC, the site now attracts more than 50 million users across the globe every month to its online English dictionary and thesaurus. As Dictionary.com claims on its website, it has become the world's largest and most authoritative free online dictionary and mobile reference resource. Inspired by its goal of "to empower word discovery and learning", Dictionary.com has teamed up with dictionary publishers such as HarperCollins and Random House to provide content for global users and so far it has got 15 licenses from proprietary reference sources, such as *Collins English Dictionary*, *The American Heritage Science Dictionary*, *The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, and *The Free On-line Dictionary of Computing*, etc. For example, the new word *sexting* can be found in Dictionary.com and it originally comes from the *Random House Dictionary*:

> **sext·ing** [**seks**-ting] ***noun*** *Digital Technology*. the sending of sexually explicit photos, images, text messages, or e-mails by using a <u>cell</u> phone or other mobile device.
> ***Origin:*** 2005-10; blend of <u>sex</u> + <u>text</u>; see <u>-ing</u>[1]

OneLook.com, one of Dictionary.com's rivals, was founded in April, 1996 and it is a kind of search engine for words and phrases. To be more precise, it is a potpourri of dictionaries as it has so far indexed more than one thousand dictionaries that cover a wide range of different languages and a great variety of subjects (e.g. computing, medicine, religion, science, sports, tech, etc.) as well. Among its English dictionaries, there are not only online versions of existing paper dictionaries (e.g. *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 11th Edition*, *Encarta World English Dictionary*, and *Webster's New World College Dictionary, 4th Ed.*, etc.) but also online dictionaries, wordlists and glossaries such as *The Word Spy, Wiktionary, Wordnik*, and *Online Etymology Dictionary*. If we look up *sexting* at OneLook.com, we will find that the neologism has been recorded by six dictionaries the site has indexed, namely *The Word Spy, Macmillan Dictionary, Wordnik, Wikipedia, Stammtisch Beau Fleuve Acronyms*, and *Netlingo*.

TheFreeDictionary.com, another dictionary aggregator, claims to be the world's most comprehensive dictionary as it records the world's major languages such as English, Spanish, German, French, Italian, and Chinese, and at the same time covers subjects ranging from medicine to finance. Besides, it also includes a thesaurus, dictionaries for acronyms, abbreviations, and idioms, an encyclopedia, and a search engine. The English dictionaries on this dictionary site include *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Collins English Dictionary*, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, and *The American Heritage Science Dictionary, etc.*

Wordnik, a newcomer in the world of online dictionaries, was not founded until early 2009. Some of its co-founders of the site are serious lexicographers such as Erin McKean, Grant Barrett, and Orion Montoya. Like other dictionary sites, Wordnik also bases its definitions on existing dictionaries such as *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*, *The Century Dictionary*, *WordNet*, and the GNU version of *The Collaborative International Dictionary of English*. The dictionary site now boasts "billions of words, 984,433,066 example sentences, 6,898,870 unique words, 232,414 comments, 179,268

tags, 121,454 pronunciations, 79,170 favorites and 1,044,091 words in 33,387 lists created by 84,667 Wordniks" as is stated in the "Community" section of its website. As an advanced tool, Wordnik is characterized by many unique features like suggested use and examples, latest related updates from Twitter, related images from Flickr, word frequency and use patterns, explanations and definitions from popular online dictionaries on the same page, etc. As is reported in *San Francisco Business Times* on July 25, 2011, Wordnik got $8 million in its third financing round and is on track to become the heavyweight in online lexicography.

Besides the above-mentioned four dictionary sites, there are also several other websites that provide comprehensive reference services, such as YourDictionary.com, WordReference.com, MyDictionary.com, babylon.com, hyperdictionary.com, etc.

1.3. *DIY dictionaries*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that dictionaries are compiled by lexicographers who are, in most cases, experts worth their salt, thus making dictionaries a reliable source of reference. Traditional dictionary-making usually involves an editorial team that consists of a considerable number of such experts. However, for a certain category of online dictionaries, almost no editorial team is needed as virtually anyone who visits the website can contribute their own entries or edit existing ones. This practice has given rise to a few DIY dictionaries such as *Wiktionary* and *Urban Dictionary*. This new trend in online lexicography originated from the novel practice of contributing entries for free online encyclopedias. The success of Wikipedia has popularized this new way of compiling reference works. As a matter of fact, some of the "clicks-and-mortar" dictionary sites also offer a feature called "open dictionary" on their website, as a way to encourage users to contribute new or novel entries. Let's take Merriam-Webster for example. The dictionary site set up its "Open Dictionary" as early as 2005 and so far it has received thousands of user-contributed entries. And its latest submissions include newly coined words such as *detangle* (to remove tangles from), *wombmates* (twins), *outcastic* (having the qualities of an outcast; esp. having unusual or abstruse taste), *environut* (an enthusiastic environmentalist), *manny* (a male child care provider; a male nanny), etc. MacMillan has also launched its Open Dictionary which features not only coinages but also neologisms that might or might not have been included by major English dictionaries. Its most recent entries include *bint*[2] (an offensive word for a girl or woman, used mostly in British English), *plothole* (a serious inconsistency in the plot of a book or film or TV show, such as an impossible event happening, or an event that contradicts something else that has taken place), *mocktail*[3] (a cocktail which doesn't contain any alcohol), *Twitterversary* (the anniversary of the day somebody started using the microblogging site Twitter), etc.

Urban Dictionary, started in 1999 by Aaron Peckham, then a freshman at Cal, Poly, San Luis Obispo, can be considered as one of the few pure DIY online dictionaries available today. All the definitions, which now have amounted to more than six million, are written by people who visit urbandictionary.com. Peckham once wrote that "*Urban Dictionary* started as the anti-dictionary, a parody of dictionary.com. Today it's not just a parody: Parents and teachers use it to understand the next generation, and you can use it to decode the newest hip-hop

lyrics or laugh at 'podestrians[4]' and 'bluetools[5]'." (Peckham VI) *Urban Dictionary* is by nature a slang dictionary with most of its definitions related to the pop culture. The style in which many of its definitions are written differs to some extent from that in standard dictionaries. For example, one of the words contributed by visitors on October 5, 2011 was *shitload* which is defined as "more than an assload but still less than a fuckton". As a matter of fact, most of definitions on the website are more witticisms than the result of professional knowledge or expertise. Therefore the dictionary might be said to be the online answer to Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*. The year 2007 saw the publication of a paper dictionary entitled *Mo' Urban Dictionary: Ridonkulous Street Slang Defined* on the basis of amateurish lexicographical contributions online, which, to some extent, represents a new direction in modern lexicography.

The year 2002 witnessed the creation of *Wiktionary* which, as a sister project of Wikipedia, is in essence a wiki-based open dictionary. As a multilingual, web-based project to create a free content dictionary, *Wiktionary* is now available in 158 languages. Unlike standard dictionaries, it is written collaboratively by volunteers, using wiki software, allowing entries to be changed by almost anyone with access to the website. However, *Wiktionary* can not be regarded as a pure DIY online dictionary because a considerable number of its entries in the English edition also include entries culled from standard dictionaries. So far *Wiktionary* has grown beyond a standard dictionary and now includes a thesaurus, a rhyme guide, phrase books, language statistics and extensive appendices. Because it is not limited by print space considerations, *Wiktionary* aims to include not only the definition of a word, but also enough information to understand it. As a result, etymological information, pronunciations, illustrative examples, synonyms, antonyms and translations are also included in most of its entries.

2. The pros & cons of online dictionaries

As most online dictionaries are simply the virtual representations of their paper editions and few updates or changes are made to them once they are put online, the discussion in this section will mainly focus on those online dictionaries that have been created ex nihilo, namely the third type of online dictionaries. The advantages and disadvantages of DIY dictionaries are quite obvious so far as the inclusion of entries, the provision of definitions, the choice of illustrative examples, and the overall consistency are concerned.

When it comes to the entries in *Wiktionary* and *Urban Dictionary*, one of their most prominent advantages is their unlimited ability in including new entries and providing several illustrative examples or other relevant information (e.g. etymological information). Goaded by its goal to define all words in all languages, *Wiktionary* has included more than 2,882,000[6] entries in its English edition. Likewise, *Urban Dictionary* is growing at a rapid pace, as attested by the fact that it now boasts a total of 55,485 entries with headwords starting with the letter A. Similarly, unlimited space has made it possible to online dictionaries put as many examples as possible to better illustrate the uses of its headwords. Any reader will definitely be impressed by the four examples provided for the entry *celebutante* as each of the four examples, with dates ranging from 1985 to 2007, are quoted directly from English newspapers.

Besides, online dictionaries can update or add dictionary entries at any moment, which has made such dictionaries bonanzas for new words and expressions. For example, *Wiktionary* has not only included *sexting* but also listed *sext* as a separate entry meaning "a sexual text message" and "to send a sext message". Another upside of online dictionaries is their ability to include words or meanings that might have escaped other dictionary compilers' attention or have failed to be included in standard dictionaries. With hundreds or even thousands of contributors on the lookout for possible candidates for inclusion, online dictionaries are in a better position to provide a panoramic view of the English language. Take the Canadianism *joe job* for example. ODE and the American edition of *MacMillan English Dictionary* are the few dictionaries that have included this word, but they only record its usual sense--a menial or monotonous task. *Wiktionary*, however, provides two definitions for the word, the other being "(US, idiomatic, computing) An act of e-mail spamming where the sender's identity and address are those of an innocent third party, intended either to tarnish that person's reputation or to flood that person's e-mail with bounces". Moreover, the multimedia nature of the Web has enabled online dictionaries to present their microstructures in a multimedia way through the hyperlinks to audio, graphic, or video files. The use of hyperlinks has also made cross-referencing a much easier task. In *Wiktionary*, for example, there is a feature called "Derived terms" that deserves a mention. One can list all the words related to the headword on one page and each of such words is hyperlinked to their respective entries, which will definitely benefit one's browsing experience. In the entry *food*, sixteen derived terms are listed, such as *fast food, food for thought, food pyramid, food stamp, foodstuff, foody, junk food*, and *soul food*.

The main disadvantage of online dictionaries may be attributed to the amateurish lexicographical contributions. The lack of expertise in dictionary-making results in the emergence of the following problems:

2.1. *Loose criteria in the inclusion of headwords*

As most of contributors are amateurs who might lack certain qualifications (e.g. profound linguistic knowledge) usually required of a dictionary-maker, they may be unable to make distinctions between a compound word and a free combination of words. This might be the reason that can account for the inclusion of many free combinations in *Wiktionary*, such as *basketball court, soccer field, made in Japan, personal online desktop*, etc. The inclusion of nonce words and topical terms can be deemed to be another downside of online dictionaries. *Wiktionary*, for example, has included half a dozen terms related to the U.S. President Barack Obama, namely *Obamamania* (fervent admiration of Barack Obama), *Obamanomics* (the economic policies of Barack Obama), *Obamunism* (economic or political measures of the Obama administration endorsing socialism, communism, or the joining of statist and corporate powers, as alleged by its critics), *ObamaCare* (any of various healthcare plans seen as associated with Barack Obama before or during his tenure as U.S. President), *Obamacrat* (a democratic supporter of Barrack Obama), and *Obamania* (same as Obamamania). Proper names[7] that paper dictionaries or even encyclopedias normally exclude may sometimes find their way into online dictionaries. *Wiktionary*'s inclusion of *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* which

is furnished with two definitions (namely the residence and offices of the President and certain members of his staff and the current President and the closest members of his administration) is a case in point. As individual contributors are only concerned with those entries which they are interested in, they may fail to see the whole picture. This results in the failure to include common words[8] or the imbalanced inclusion of related words. For instance, *Wiktionary* fails to include words such as *confidence trick, cross-trainer*, *electronic music*, *high commission*, and *peace-loving*.

2.2. *Poor defining quality*

When it comes to defining in a dictionary, a lexicographer should abide by several principles such as the avoidance of circularity, the provision of a definition for each word used in defining, etc. However, such principles are not followed at all for user-contributed entries in online dictionaries. Let's take *zombie process* for example. The computer term is defined by *Wiktionary* as "A child process that has terminated but is still listed in the process table, having not yet been reaped by its parent process". In this definition, two other terms—*child process* and *parent process*—are not included in the dictionary. Bad defining style can also be found in many entries in *Wiktionary* and it is shown in several ways, such as the discrepancy in the figure of speech for the word defined and the definition (as in "that have a similar relationship" for *corresponding*[9]), the use of more difficult defining words (as in "a personification of bankers as criminally irresponsible" for *bankster*), vague definitions (as in "an economical notebook computer" for *netbook*[10]), wordy definitions (as in "a person who commits multiple [more than two] murders, especially similar ones with no obvious motive over a period of time with a 'cooling-off' period between each murder" for *serial killer*[11] and "leisure time, at least a whole day but usually longer [typical are one to three weeks], away from work or duty and devoted to rest or pleasure" for *vacation*[12]), etc. Another manifestation of poor definitions in online dictionaries is the listing of senses that, at bottom, refer to the same thing. For example, *Wiktionary* defines *cover charge* as "an amount of money to be paid for entering a bar or restaurant where entertainment is provided" and "an amount of money added to a restaurant bill in lieu of tips, and to pay for uncharged items such as bread and water". However, all the paper dictionaries that I have access to provide only one definition, namely a sum of money charged in a restaurant for each customer in addition to the cost of food and drink. The same problem can also be found in the entry *backpacking* which has been furnished with two definitions—"hiking and camping overnight in backcountry with one's gear carried in a backpack" and "low-cost, generally urban, travel with minimal luggage and frugal accommodations". This kind of problem is caused by the over-interpretation on the part of the contributor or different interpretations from different contributors.

2.3. *Lack of consistency*

The absence of an editorial team is to blame for the lack of consistency that can be found in the macrostructure and microstructure of online dictionaries. Inconsistencies can be found in

the treatment of related entries or same category of words, the use of usage labels, the provision of illustrative examples, etc. When writing a dictionary, lexicographers on the same team usually follow certain rules or principles as regards the treatment of related entries or same category of words. However, for user-contributed entries in online dictionaries, the treatment of related entries may vary greatly especially when it comes to their definitions. For instance, the second definitions of *basketball* and *volleyball* are "the particular kind of ball used in the sport of basketball" and "the inflated ball used in such a game" respectively; *Americanism* is defined as "A word, phrase or linguistic feature originating from or specific to American language usage" while *Briticism* is explained as "A word or figure of speech used in Britain exclusively or primarily". *Wiktionary*'s treatment of China's provinces, as listed in the following table, can also illustrate inconsistencies in defining.

Table 1. Chinese provinces in *Wiktionary*.

Name of Provinces	Definitions in Wiktionary	Name of Provinces	Definitions in Wiktionary
Hainan	Chinese province on Hainan island	**Jiangsu**	A province in eastern China.
Hunan	A province of the People's Republic of China, located in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River and south of Lake Dongting.	**Liaoning**	A province in China.
Hubei	A central province of the People's Republic of China. The capital of Hubei is Wuhan.	**Zhejiang**	a province in southeastern China

Inconsistency can also be found with the provision of illustrative examples. For some entries or senses, several examples are furnished while there might be no examples at all for other entries or senses. For example, *Wiktionary* has recorded the noun and verb uses of the neologism *microblog* and each use has been provided with one example (namely "For Dorsey, creating this community of linked microblogs has been 'endearing, because you know what everyone you know is doing'" and "I started microblogging last week.). However, in the entry *blog* from which *microblog* is derived, the dictionary has failed to provide any example for the four definitions it records.

The indication for labels in online dictionaries is also problematic. *Wiktionary* has collected more than six thousands abbreviations, initialisms, and acronyms, but it sometimes provides wrong labels for some initialisms. For example, the initalism *WHO* has been regarded as an acronym.

Other minor problems also abound in online dictionaries. The provision of wrong lexical information is one. For instance, several related terms (e.g. *Chinean, Chinish, Chinesian*) are listed in the entry *Chinese*, but these terms are actually non-words and do not have entry status. Bad cross-referencing is another. For example, in the entry *glamping* (which is a form

of camping in which participants enjoy physical comforts associated with more luxurious types of holiday), one synonym has been provided, namely *boutique camping* which, however, is not included in the dictionary.

3. Online English-Chinese dictionaries

The online scene for English-Chinese dictionaries differs greatly from that in English-speaking countries. The most salient difference lies in the fact that the English-Chinese dictionaries that have been put online are not those major English-Chinese dictionaries frequently used by Chinese students of English or have been cobbled together by some start-up IT companies. For various reasons, none of the traditional publishers of English-Chinese dictionaries, such as The Commercial Press, Shanghai Yiwen Publishing House, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, and Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, has put their dictionaries online although they might have already digitized some of their bilingual dictionaries.

Due to the factor that Chinese students of English prefer handheld electronic dictionaries, mobile dictionaries, or "desktop" dictionaries[13] such as Kingsoft PowerWord and Lingoes, online English-Chinese dictionaries do not fare very well with Chinese students. However, the number of users of online English-Chinese dictionaries is on a steady rise as most dictionary sites are providing other services besides dictionary lookup, such as online translation, language learning, etc. Let's take Dict.cn for example. Established in November, 2003, the dictionary site offers a wide range of services, such as dictionary lookup, sentence and paragraph translation, online sources, dictionary software download, etc. Unlike their monolingual counterparts that are more or less based on name-brand general dictionaries, China's bilingual dictionary sites usually base themselves on a considerable number of minor dictionaries, mostly technical ones. iciba.com, for example, is created by Kingsoft, a software company, and its collection of English-Chinese dictionaries includes *English-Chinese & Chinese-English Dictionary*[14], *A Glossary of Physiological Terms, A Glossary of Electronic Terms, A Glossary of Terms in Chemical Engineering, A Glossary of Computing Terms*, etc.

As most English-Chinese dictionary sites are a hodgepodge of entries culling from different sources, they are deficient in many ways. First, they do not a large collection of the English vocabulary. Relatively new words are always absent from some of the dictionaries. For example, if we look up the word *blog* on Dict.cn, we may fail to find its Chinese equivalent 博客 although other reference books such as *Hudong Encyclopedia* that have been hyperlinked on the site provide information such as its equivalent and English definitions as well. Second, awkward or bad translations abound in online English-Chinese dictionaries. The above search at Dict.cn also comes up with information of BLOG as an initialism and the translations provided for the two definitions seem to be typical examples of online machine translation, namely "BLOG: Big Load of Gossip 大负荷的流言蜚语" and "BLOG: Boring Lesson On Galaxy 无聊的课上的星系". The Chinese explanations for *bromance* (commonly known in Chinese as 男漫) in iciba.com—"1.兄弟罗曼史，也可以理解为'兄弟情' 2.两个关系特别好但又不涉及同性恋的男人"--are inappropriate, awkward, and superfluous as well. Third, the provision of faulty information also plagues online

English-Chinese dictionaries. For example, iciba.com has included *bankster*, but the dictionary treats it as an abbreviation rather than a blend and provides a misleading Chinese equivalent and a problematic explanation--银行歹徒(以银行管理为名侵夺存款的不法分子). Fourth, various kinds of inconsistencies exist in this category of dictionaries.

In recent years, to make up for the deficiency of incomplete coverage of the English vocabulary and other downsides, China's online English-Chinese dictionaries have begun to adopt features typical of the new-generation of online English dictionaries. To allow users to edit or add entries is one feature that has become common among these dictionaries. Dict.cn, for example, allows users to improve on existing entries and submit queries concerning words that are not included. The ability to trawl through the Web for English definitions and Chinese equivalents can be said to be a plus. One may fail to find *glamping* at iciba.com, but the "Definitions from the Internet" section contains the following useful (and misleading) information—"1. 刺激野营 基于显而易见的原因，glamping（刺激野营）一词在目前也就不那么流行了".

4. Online dictionaries and English-Chinese lexicography

Jill Lepore, a professor of American history at Harvard University, wrote in the Nov. 6, 2006 issue of *The New Yorker*: "There's no show of hands at Wiktionary. There's not even an editorial staff. 'Be your own lexicographer!' might be Wiktionary's motto. Who needs experts? Why pay good money for a dictionary written by lexicographers when we can cobble one together ourselves?" Though deficient in many ways, online dictionaries, besides depriving users the pleasure of reading dictionaries, are indeed challenging the traditional role of paper dictionaries and they are also partly responsible for the declining readership of paper dictionaries. It is an undeniable fact that fewer people are willing to pay good money for paper dictionaries as they can easily have access to hundreds of them online for free. The chances are like that they will pose a greater threat if they are overseen by a qualified editorial team and better quality control is enforced. For both dictionary compilers and publishers, there is no need for alarm. Instead, getting ready to embrace them or becoming part of them is what dictionary-makers can do. For Chinese lexicographers, online dictionaries present new opportunities.

First, they can make good use of what online dictionaries are offering. In the past, lexicographers in China had limited access to existing English dictionaries and the scarcity of lexicographical information such as new words or illustrative examples tied them hand and foot. Now, they are spoilt for choice in face of hundreds of online dictionaries now available. Dictionary sites such as *Wiktionary* and Dictionary.com have already become a bonanza of information on new words and phrases. Moreover, *Urban Dictionary* has also been proved extremely useful in providing edifying (and sometimes more confusing) information on colloquial and slang expressions. As a matter of fact, the definitions for dozens of new words that were included in the fourth edition of *A New English-Chinese Dictionary* (hereinafter abbreviated to NECD) come from the above-mentioned sites. For example, the Chinese equivalent for the idiomatic phrase *connect the dots* is more or less based on the definition from thefreedictionary.com--"to understand the relationship between different ideas or

experiences". In short, Chinese lexicographers are in a better position to record the English language, as attested by the fact that NECD boasts a large collection of English neologisms, some of which have been just included or have not been included at all in monolingual English dictionaries. The past few months have witnessed the publication of the updated editions of British dictionaries such as *Concise Oxford Dictionary, The Chambers Dictionary* and *The Collins English Dictionary*, and among the new words they included, a considerable number of them were already included in NECD published two years ago or even *The English-Chinese Dictionary* published four years ago, such as *meh*, *season creep, sexting, toxic asset*, *Zumba*, etc.

Second, Chinese dictionary-makers and publishers should diversify the ways in which their dictionary content is presented. Besides developing dictionary apps for smartphones, tablets like iPads or even for e-readers like Kindle, they can also follow the footsteps of their counterparts in English-speaking world and launch their online dictionary sites that incorporate not only the online editions of their paper dictionaries and wiki-like features, but also translation services, glossaries of terms in various subjects, reading materials for English learners, etc.

Finally, to answer the question in the title, I should say online dictionaries should be viewed more as friends than foes.

Notes

[1] A free version of Cobuild's learner's dictionary is also available online, but that is *Collins Cobuild Student's Dictionary*.

[2] This word has already been recorded by major English dictionaries such as *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* and *Collins English Dictionary*.

[3] According to *Oxford Dictionary of English*, mocktail is a blend of mock and cocktail and was first used as early as in the 1930s.

[4] It is defined by the dictionary as "A person who can be spotted with the iconic white standard iPod earbuds in their ears".

[5] It is defined by the dictionary as "A person who wears a bluetooth wireless earpiece everywhere they go to seem trendy and important".

[6] This figure, as listed on the dictionary site, may not hold water as the total entries included in OED have just exceeded 600,000.

[7] According to a recent count, *Wiktionary* has a total of 16,274 proper names.

[8] Similarly, the failure to record common senses is another problem with online dictionaries. For example, bankrupt is defined as "having been legally declared insolvent" in *Wiktionary*, and the other meaning the word has (namely "completely lacking a particular good quality") is absent.

[9] This word is defined as "caused by or connected with something you have already mentioned" by *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

[10] Dictionary.com provides a much better definition--a small, lightweight laptop computer used especially for Internet access and e-mail.

[11] This word is defined as "someone who kills several people one after the other, often in the same way" by

MacMillan English Dictionary.

[12] This word is defined as "a period spent away from home or business in travel or recreation" by *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th Edition.

[13] These dictionaries are dictionary programs that can be downloaded online and get installed like CD-ROM dictionaries.

[14] Its English-Chinese part is based on a dictionary entitled *Concise English-Chinese Dictionary*.

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