

Quotations in the Dictionary: the Pros and Cons.

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Abstracts

Quotations have been employed by lexicography from time immemorial. Their forms and functions, however, have been subject to modification depending on the lexicographic tradition, purposes of the dictionary and intentions of its compilers. The present paper considers the phraseological features of quotations which underlie their use in dictionaries for natives and learners.

Background

The history of dictionary making for the English language goes as far back as the Old English period, where its first traces are found in the form of glosses of religious books with translations from Latin. In the 15-th century regular bilingual English-Latin and Latin-English dictionaries started to appear in order to enable the dictionary users to read scientific and religious books written in Latin. The compilers foresaw the necessity to include quotations in the dictionary and for a very long time they were implicitly presented there. The authors included some entries containing references to lexicographic and literary works in order to confirm the existence of the word in the language. A case in point is "Glossographia" (1656) by Thomas Blount. References to classical authors are presented in Thomas Cooper's "Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae" (1565).

"Implicit" quotations in these dictionaries proved to the user that the words in the wordlist had not been invented by the compiler but existed in the language of that period. Later quotations together with idioms, proverbs and catch phrases were introduced in the dictionary as examples.

In the 18th century quotations were more regularly used in the dictionary. Nathan Bailey's "Universal Etymological English Dictionary" (1721), one of the most popular of all dictionaries before Johnson, can serve as an example.

But the first dictionary in which quotations were employed as illustrative phraseology was "A Dictionary of the English Language in Which the Words are Deduced from Their Originals and Illustrated in Their General Significations by Examples from the Best Writers" (1775) by Dr.Samuel Johnson. His objective was to produce a normative dictionary, in which quotations would demonstrate the actual use of words for they were borrowed from the works of best writers whose language was considered to be immaculate.

In his dictionary S. Johnson did not cite writers prior to the 16-th c., public opinion in his days being that in the 17-th c. and early 18-th c. the English language had reached the highest mark of its perfection. Unfortunately Johnson did not date his quotations and in many cases did not give the title of the works from which they were taken.

About 11400 examples used in the dictionary perform the following important functions:

- a) they prove that the word is not a fiction of the lexicographer's brain but a fact of language;
- b) they reinforce sense distinctions;
- c) they help the user to gain a deeper insight into the collocational, colligational and stylistic peculiarities of the lexeme;
- d) they point to the chronological limits of the language period under discussion.

Samuel Johnson, however, only mentioned the authors whom he quoted, but never gave any specific references for his illustrative phrases.

It should be emphasised that if in monolingual normative dictionaries the function of illustrative phraseology is prescriptive, in historical ones, for example "Oxford English Dictionary" it is of documenting . In the latter case quotation enables us to trace the process of the word's semantic development and determine the historical relations between its meanings.

Quotations in Learners' Dictionaries

In the 20th century with the development of learner's lexicography the place and role of quotations in the dictionary changed drastically. In spite of the fact that the aim of learners' dictionaries is to provide the user with the models to follow they do not employ quotations in S. Johnson's sense (that is phrases borrowed from literary works of distinguished writers) as examples. A case in point is "(Oxford) Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Contemporary English" (or its prototype the "Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary" by A.S.Hornby, E.V.Gatenby, and H.Wakefield, 1942). All illustrative phrases are either what Palmer called "skeleton- type examples" or "sentence-sample examples" which were specially made up by the compilers to meet the needs of the foreign learner of the English language. Hornby had been opposed to the use of naturally occurring examples in learners' dictionaries on the grounds that made-up examples could be judiciously shaped for the learner's special needs or difficulties [Cowie,1990,201].

The "Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English"(1978) was less consistent in its illustrative phraseology but still it will not be an exaggeration to say that quotations as citations of authentic texts gradually disappeared from the learners' dictionary.

Citations were brought back to the learners' dictionary by corpus linguistics. The "Collins COBUILD English Dictionary" (1987) was exclusively based on examples which have genuinely occurred in the language. At present all learners' dictionaries borrow their examples from respective corpora, but neither of the authentic illustrative phrases can be classified as a quotation in the proper sense of the term. Corpora explicitly show that "individuals say particular things in a particular way because they have heard others say

similar things in the same or similar ways" [Tannen, 1987, 309], and these "others" do not necessarily have to be great writers, scientists, philosophers or politicians. Thus, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of illustrative phrases in modern learners' dictionaries are citations from authentic texts it is impossible to associate them with their authors and classify them as quotations because they are "public property".

Quotations as a Specific Type of Set-expressions

To determine the place of quotations in illustrative phraseology it is necessary to consider them against the background of other phrases that are regularly included into the entry, that is idioms and free combinations. The different and common features of quotations, idioms and free combinations used in learners' dictionaries become obvious if we apply the method of the categorial analysis. It has been proved that any word-combinations can be considered in terms of the following categories: idiomaticity, reproducibility, connotativeness, conceptual integrity and sociolinguistic determination. In every single case the categorial meaning of the category in question can be realised to a greater or lesser extent [Alexandrova Olga, Ter-Minasova Svetlana. 1987].

From the very outset it should be pointed out, that there is no Chinese wall between idioms and quotations. For example, the idiom *the world is one's oyster* is registered in the "Longman Dictionary of Idioms" with Shakespeare indicated as the source (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, act II, sc.2). The idiom *be no chicken* is registered in the dictionary as a quotation of John Swift's "Polite Conversation". The idiom *fit like a glove* belongs to T.Smollett ("The Expedition Of Humphery Clinker", a letter to sir Walkin Phillips).

To become an idiom a quotation, or its part, has to undergo a certain process, during which it may lose its authorship. It can no longer provoke steady associations with the literary work, from which it was borrowed. Moreover, it is no longer necessary, because in order to understand it one does not need to know the whole literary work or even the passage, in which the phrase in question occurs. For a quotation to become an idiom it should be:

- aphoristic
- solid
- stable

However, it should be emphasised that quotations proper, that is those phrases which have not become idioms, share many qualities with other set-expressions. They are reproducible and fairly stable too (partly due to such formal devices as the use of quotation marks and the indication of the author). Many of them are connotative and this is the reason why we turn to them when we want to make our speech more colourful.

These properties differ quotations from free combinations, anonymous phrases. Whether a quotation has absolute indisputable authorship is the main criterion that distinguishes it from a free combination. In our minds a quotation is linked to a certain person or source. Its value is that it is a reference to an authoritative opinion. We perceive the quotation as exact reproduction of the text, belonging to another person, we know this person and want to lean upon his authority.

Quotation may demonstrate language idiomaticity and represent restricted and open collocations typical of the language in question. This is the reason why they have been used as illustrative examples in dictionaries for natives over the years.

At the same time we have to admit that many quotations are connotative and culture specific. There is very much in them that learners have to disentangle before they can focus on the lexical unit itself and the way it should be used in speech. This makes the use of quotations as illustrative phrases in learners' dictionaries impractical. The purpose of a learner's dictionary is to give universal illustrative phrases, that will not be overloaded with cultural information and at the same time will represent "regular phraseology" which is well familiar to the native speaker but is often quite unpredictable to the learner [Rundell 1999]. The illustrative phrases should be understood by the learner who does not possess a considerable amount of background knowledge. The user should not be an expert in science, literature, music, etc. to understand them [Minaeva 1992]. If the illustrative phrase is overloaded with extralinguistic information, which is irrelevant for decoding the word's meaning, it will lead to a false understanding and interpretation of this very meaning, and as a result the learner will not be able to use this phrase correctly in speech of his/her own.

This is the reason why many critics of authentic examples insist that quotations should be eliminated from the illustrative phraseology of a learner's dictionary, because when a phrase is borrowed from a literary text, it can, on the one hand, be connotative and, on the other, socio-linguistically determined, which in any case will distract the user from the meaning of the word to illustrate which it is summoned.

Of course, the most important feature of quotations is their sociolinguistic nature. Any quotation is associated, if not directly connected, with the text it belongs to and its author, his or her knowledge, wisdom or wit. This is irrelevant if what we are after is an illustration of the word use to be imitated by the learner in speech of his/her own.

But the sociolinguistic determination of quotations makes it possible to use them as part of the cultural component of the language. They provide the user with encyclopaedic knowledge, that is "knowledge associated with the word but which is not immediately relevant to linguistic structure" (Kiefer, 1990). Quotations in dictionary, therefore, enable the user to recognise quotations in texts and trace them back to their sources. Viewed under this angle quotations can be included in the learner's dictionary provided they are neatly separated from illustrative phrases. This is how quotations are registered by the "Cambridge Dictionary of International Language" (1995). The overall objective of this is to allow the learner to understand and enjoy the text containing quotations, to expand their philological thesaurus.

Conclusion

One should distinguish between citations and quotations as part of illustrative phraseology in the dictionary. Citations, that is lines taken from an authentic text which are not associated with a certain author, can be widely used in learners' lexicography provided they illustrate generally recognized collocability of words. Quotations, that is phrases borrowed from a book, play or speech and repeated because they display their authors wit or wisdom, should

be supplied in a learners' dictionary with a special label. They are useful only as a means of broadening the encyclopaedic knowledge of the learner, bringing it nearer to the background knowledge of the native speaker.

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