

Getting down to Business: Monolingual Learners' Dictionaries and Business English

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Abstract

This paper sets out to explore the coverage of words and combinations of words that have been shown to be typically used in Business English (e.g. Nelson 2000) in five general purpose advanced monolingual learners' dictionaries (MLDs): CALD 2003, COBUILD 2003, LDOCE 2003, MED 2002, and OALD 2000. The lexicographic treatment of these items in the general purpose MLDs is then compared with their treatment in two specialised Business English dictionaries for learners of English, namely the *Oxford Business English Dictionary for Learners of English* (2005) and the *Longman Business English Dictionary* (2000). The paper is rounded off with a discussion of whether or not it is desirable for Business English and other ESP (English for Specific Purposes) words and phrases to be included in general purpose MLDs.

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore what general purpose advanced monolingual learners' dictionaries (MLDs) have to offer to the ever-growing number of non-native Business English students and users worldwide. The first section sets out to investigate the coverage of 17 single words and combinations of words containing words that have been shown by Nelson's corpus-based empirical study of Business English (Nelson 2000) to be typically used in Business English (i.e. the English used to talk about and do business) in the following five general purpose MLDs: CALD 2003, COBUILD 2003, LDOCE 2003, MED 2002, and OALD 2000. The analysis focuses not only on whether or not the words and combinations under scrutiny have been included in the dictionaries, but also where and how they have been recorded. Beside coverage the first section also concentrates on labelling and examines the presence of Business English elsewhere in the dictionaries in so-called 'study pages' or 'language awareness sections'. The second section compares the lexicographic treatment of the 17 items under study in the general purpose MLDs with their treatment in two specialised Business English dictionaries for learners of English, namely the *Oxford Business English Dictionary for Learners of English* 2005 (henceforth OBED) and the *Longman Business English Dictionary* 2000 (henceforth LBED). The paper is rounded off with a discussion of whether or not it is desirable for Business English and other ESP (English for Specific Purposes) words and phrases to be included in general purpose MLDs.

2 Business English words and phrases in 'general purpose' MLDs

As Table 1 shows, coverage of the 17 items under study is on the whole rather good as it ranges from 12 (CALD) to 15 (MED and OALD). Eleven items are recorded in all five MLDs (i.e. *CEO*, *turnover*, *dividend*, *cash flow*, *shareholder*, *corporate*, *merger*, *interest rate*, *distributor*, *takeover*, and *budget*). While there is relative agreement on the inclusion of *market share* (in all MLDs except CALD), there is much less agreement on the inclusion of *USP*, *market-driven*, *bear market*, and especially *earnings per share*, and the item *profit(s) warning* cannot be found in any of the MLDs. *Profit(s) warning*, *USP*, *market-driven*, *bear market* and *earnings per share* may have been deemed too specialized by lexicographers to be systematically included in general purpose MLDs. A more comprehensive analysis is required to assess the true extent of the coverage of Business English items in general purpose MLDs.

	CALD	COBUILD	LDOCE	MED	OALD
CEO	✓	✓ -@ chief executive officer	✓	✓	✓
USP	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
earnings per share	✗	✗	✗	✓	@ earnings, EX
profit(s) warning	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
turnover ¹	✓ @ turn (turn over sth)	✓	✓	✓	✓
dividend ²	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
market share	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
market-driven	✗	✗	✓	✓	@ market, EX
bear market	✗	✓	✓	✗	@ bear, EX (=)
cash flow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
shareholder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
corporate ³	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
merger	✓ @ merge	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interest rate	@ interest, EX	✓	✓	✓	@ interest, EX
distributor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
takeover	✓ @ take (take sth over)	✓	✓	✓	✓
budget	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
TOTAL	12	14	14	15	15

Legend: ✓ included in an entry (the item under study = the headword)

@ included in an entry under the headword... (the item under study ≠ the headword)

✓ @ nested entry under the headword... (the item under study ≠ the headword)

✗ not included

EX. included in an example sentence

EX. included in bold in an example sentence

EX.(=) included in bold in an example sentence followed by a word of explanation in brackets

Table 1. Coverage of the 17 items under study in the five general purpose MLDs.

¹ *Turnover* in the sense "the amount of business done in a particular period of time" (LBED).

² *Dividend* in the sense "part of the profits of a company for a particular period of time that is paid to shareholders for each share that they own" (LBED).

³ *Corporate* "connected with a company or a group, or with business in general" (OBED).

As is clear from Table 1, headword status is given to most items in all 5 MLDs. This also applies to the items that are made up of more than one word, which are thereby granted compound status. It is noteworthy that when they are not recorded as headwords, the items *market-driven*, *bear market* and *interest rate* are highlighted in bold type in examples under the headwords **market**, **bear**, and **interest** respectively (in OALD and CALD). This means that, somewhat surprisingly, *market-driven*, *bear market* and *interest rate* are considered not as compounds but as ‘common phrases’ in OALD and that *interest rate* is seen as a ‘collocation’ in CALD.

The fact that the items *turnover*, *takeover* and *merger* are not headwords in CALD directly reflects the CALD dictionary policy of recording derived words as nested subentries under the headwords they are derived from. In the case of *takeover* and *turnover*, this decision can however be seen to compromise ease of access as they are recorded as subentries under **take sth over (get control)** and **turn over sth (produce)** in the long phrasal verbs sections after the various entries for **turn** and **take**.

Two MLDs, namely MED and COBUILD, include a special ‘business’ label in their list of subject (MED) or style (COBUILD) labels. Interestingly, although the label ‘business’ does not appear in the list of labels in the front matter in the OALD, the item *market share* is given this label. As shown in Table 2, there is little overlap between MED and COBUILD when it comes to labelling the items under study as ‘business’. While MED labels as specifically ‘business’ six out of the 15 items included in the dictionary (i.e. 40%), COBUILD labels twice as many items as such (12 out of the 14 items included in COBUILD, i.e. over 85%). Only four out of the 13 items recorded in the two dictionaries are labelled as ‘business’ in both MED and COBUILD (*USP*, *market share*, *cash flow*, *merger*). This lack of consensus can be seen to reflect how difficult it is to draw the line between ‘terms’, i.e. specialised lexical items, and general everyday ‘words’ (Bowker 2003). This task is especially tricky since “[c]oncepts that may once have been part of a highly specialized domain can filter down into our everyday lives, and the terms used to describe them also become part of our general vocabulary” (Bowker 2003: 156).

MED only	COBUILD and MED	COBUILD only
Earnings per share, market-driven	USP, market share, cash flow, merger	CEO, turnover, dividend, bear market, shareholder, corporate, distributor, turnover

Table 2. Items labelled as ‘business’ in COBUILD and/or MED.⁴

Business English is to some extent also present in additional material sections included in the middle or at the back of the five MLDs under scrutiny: ‘Study sections’ (CALD), ‘Access to English’ (COBUILD), full-page illustrations (LDOCE), ‘Language awareness sections’

⁴ The items that have been recorded in either MED or COBUILD only are marked in bold type.

(MED), 'Language study pages' (OALD). The focus is essentially on major types of business correspondence. It is worth pointing out that the term 'business' is specifically used in these sections in three MLDs, namely MED, COBUILD and CALD. While four MLDs include examples of CVs and/or résumés (in COBUILD, LDOCE, MED, and OALD), only two MLDs include examples of cover(ing) letters (in COBUILD and OALD). In addition, three MLDs contain examples of business/commercial letters (in CALD, COBUILD, and MED) and two MLDs contain examples of memos (in COBUILD and OALD), faxes (in COBUILD and OALD) and e-mails (in COBUILD and MED). Besides providing learners with typical examples of several types of business correspondence some MLDs also include useful phrases and advice (in COBUILD, MED, and OALD) when writing CVs, memos, etc. The widespread inclusion of sections dealing with CVs/resumés and other 'business' correspondence is far from surprising as they are arguably of use to a considerable number of non-native speakers who use English in their work, be it in a specifically business work environment or not. Other additional material sections which are not labelled as Business English in any of the 5 MLDs but which can nevertheless be seen as potentially useful in a Business English or in a work context include the sections on telephoning and giving presentations in COBUILD, the full-page illustrations 'in the office' in LDOCE and MED, and possibly the 'work and jobs' and 'money' vocabulary pages in CALD.

3 Business English in 'general purpose' MLDs and Business English MLDs

It is important to point out at the outset that all 17 items under study have been recorded as headwords in both LBED and OBED (vs. an average of 14 items in the general purpose MLDs), which is ideal in terms of findability. For lack of space, a detailed comparison of the lexicographic treatment of these items in the five general purpose MLDs and in OBED and LBED is beyond the scope of this paper and the focus is on some of the major and most striking differences between the two types of MLDs. Table 3 gives an overall picture of the information that is included at microstructural level in the general purpose MLDs and in OBED and LBED. As is clear from the table, not only do OBED and LBED exhibit the main key features of MLDs (Bogaards 1996), they also display greater depth of lexicographic treatment in terms of definitions, examples and collocations and various combinations of words containing the items under study. Unlike general purpose MLDs, OBED and LBED systematically and carefully define the 17 items and provide (several) examples of their use in context. What is particularly striking in the two specialized MLDs is the number of collocations and combinations of words that are either cross-referred to or included as subentries, in bold type in examples phrases, or as part of special collocations sections (in OBED only). By way of illustration, while LBED and OBED include an average of 10 combinations for the item *cash flow* and 16 combinations for *merger*, the 5 MLDs include on average 1 and 2 respectively. It is important to stress that findability appears to have been a major concern when compiling the two specialized MLDs. In short, the two specialized Business English MLDs can be seen to offer Business English students valuable information when decoding (coverage, enhanced findability, definitions) and encoding texts (examples, collocations) in specific business contexts.

	LBED	OBED	MLDs
Pronunciation	✓	✓	✓
Frequency	✗	✓	✓ LDOCE, COBUILD, MED
Definitions	✓	✓	(✓) ⁵
Examples	✓	✓	(✓)
Collocations and combinations of words	✓	✓	(✓)
Grammatical information (e.g. C or U)	✓	✓	✓
Labels	✓ specific subject labels (e.g. finance, marketing, etc.)	✓ specific subject labels	✓ 'business' COBUILD, MED
Synonyms/antonyms, cross-references	✓	✓	✓

Table 3. Information included at microstructural level in LBED and OBED and in the five general purpose MLDs.

4 Conclusion

In our ever-changing world, learners of general English and of English for specific purposes regularly come into contact with specialized terms from a variety of specialized domains or from specialized domains they are not familiar with. It is therefore essential for a number of basic and frequently used ESP terms to be included and dealt with in general purpose MLDs. Another reason why ESP terms ought to be recorded in general purpose MLDs is because the latter are an essential reference tool for ESP learners. Non-native students and users of Business English and of other specialized varieties of English are a very heterogeneous group both in terms of their proficiency level and knowledge of English and in terms of their level of expertise in the specialized (business) domain (ranging from true experts in various areas of the domain or in only some areas of the domain to semi-experts and non-experts). In spite of this heterogeneity and besides their strong interest in a given specialized domain, they all share the fact that they are learners of English. As Campoy Cubillo's (2002) study into the dictionary use and needs of non-native chemistry students demonstrates and as other dictionary use and needs of non-native ESP learners would undoubtedly also show, as learners of English, ESP students and users need to look up a considerable number of 'everyday', 'General English' items when decoding and encoding ESP texts. These items are not recorded in specialized MLDs but are given excellent treatment in general purpose MLDs. As rightly suggested by Campoy Cubillo (2002: 223), the ideal MLD for ESP students would be "a (paper) dictionary which includes both general and either specialised or semi-technical

⁵ The symbol () means that the feature in question is not present for all the items.

English.” In view of the flexibility of electronic dictionaries, an electronic general purpose MLD with an integrated ESP (e.g. Business English or computing) MLD component which would give an in-depth treatment of both General English and ESP items would be a highly desirable and feasible development. However, until such a dictionary becomes available, ESP learners would arguably benefit more from a general purpose MLD which contains ESP items than from a specialized MLD which does not include General English.

5. References

A. Dictionaries

CALD = *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. (2003) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

COBUILD = *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary*. (2003) Glasgow, Harper-Collins.

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LDOCE = *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. (2003) Harlow, Pearson Education.

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OALD = *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. (2000) Oxford, Oxford University Press.

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B. Other literature

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