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Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English

A S Hornby

Seventh edition

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- Professor H. W. Fowler** *inside front cover* Abbreviations, symbols and labels used in the dictionary
 It happens that the publication of the seventh edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, some ten years after the first comprehensive dictionary of the English language, compiled by Dr. Samuel Johnson, had changed since then. Most, but not all, of the words he defined, still essentially those of the British Isles, have been adopted as conventional means of communication all over the world. The same is true of many words of different usages. This calls for a problem of selection for the learner which words are to be included and thus granted recognition, and which are to be left out?
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- It is not enough that a dictionary delights the learner; unless at the same time it instructs the learner about its value, as with any learner's dictionary, estimated by its use, that it is to say its usefulness for learning. This is something that recent developments in language description might distract us into forgetting. Computers now revolutionized the collection and analysis of language data, and the information about words that Johnson spent years of dedicated drudgery to compile is now made available in matter of seconds: information in precise detail about word frequencies, for example, common patterns of collocation, and so on. Now that all these new descriptive facts could be recorded in the dictionary, they are, after all, 'naturalized', parts of the properties of actually occurring, 'real' English. But if the value of the work is to be estimated by its use, we need to consider how far this information about usage is relevant to the learner's purposes.
- The importance of words and meanings for the learner of English cannot simply be measured by their frequency in current native-speaker usage. For one thing, infrequent words are always likely to make an unexpected appearance, and to pose problems of receptive understanding. And there are words which may not show up as being of very common occurrence overall, but which are prominent in certain domains of use which learners will need to engage with, or have become current in communities of users of English as an international language. We also need to bear in mind that a corpus of contemporary written texts will only tell us about what has been correctly written, not what is currently read. Learners of English will often need to read texts which are not recent, where they will encounter words of literary or outdated usage. They will, reasonably enough, expect to find infrequent words of this kind in a dictionary that claims to be designed to meet their needs. They will find most of them in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (*OALD*).
- Descriptive facts have to be related to pedagogic factors. This applies not only to what information about words and meanings it is appropriate to include, but also how it is to be presented. *OALD*, like other dictionaries,