

# Some Notes on Descriptions of Usage and Meaning in Learners' Dictionaries

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## 1. Introduction

The use of corpora has been the norm in the compilation of major English monolingual learners' dictionaries (henceforth, MLDs) for the last decade or so. The 'big five' on the market, *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (CALD), *The Collins COBUILD English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (COB3), *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 4th ed. (LDOCE4), *The Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. (MED), and *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 6th ed. (OALD6), are all corpus-based. Balanced or representative corpora have actually made numerous improvements possible in such areas as<sup>(1)</sup>:

- the selection of headwords
- the identification of more important and frequent senses/uses of a word, typical subjects and complements of verbs, adjectives and nouns, other typical word combinations and recurring spoken phrases or lexical phrases
- the provision of more typical and natural examples
- the identification of a particular country/region, situation or context in which a word or an expression tend to be used

The main reason behind the revision of Landau's well-known *Dictionaries* is the introduction of computer technology, especially corpora in the lexicographic

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(1) See for details, for example, Rundell (1998), Inoue (1998, 2003), Summers (1999), Akano (2000), Hunston (2002:96-99) and Kilgariff (2003).

scene, and he insists on the necessity of the use of corpora in dictionary making in various places (cf. pp. 77, 193, 286 and 339).

The improvements made in those MLDs have been no doubt incorporated into English-Japanese learners' dictionaries (henceforth, EJLDs). Both types of dictionaries, however, are not without descriptive or maybe presentational problems, four of which are pointed out in this note. Two are concerned with usage and the other two with meaning, both of which are essential elements in learners' dictionaries. These problems are specific details but fairly common in the MLDs and/or most recently published EJLDs, and therefore should be worth consideration.

The four problems to be considered are: (1) the explanation of the expressions of saying goodbye, (2) the treatment of the transitivity of *rummage*, (3) the description of the meanings of the nominal use of *pigeonhole* [*pigeon-hole*], and (4) the description of one of the meanings of the verb *produce*, i.e. 'show or present something'. They are each dealt with in Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. At the beginning of Section 2, the learners' dictionaries examined in the study are introduced. A brief conclusion is given in Section 6.

## **2. The treatment of parting expressions [usage]**

Before we get to the point, the following are learners' dictionaries examined in the study:

- the five MLDs mentioned in the introduction: CALD, COB3, LDOCE4, MED and OALD6
- six EJLDs either most recently published or supposedly widely used: *The Advanced Favorite English-Japanese Dictionary* (Tokyo Shoseki, 2002), *The Genius English-Japanese Dictionary* (3rd ed.) (*G3*) (Taishukan, 2001), *The Lexis English-Japanese Dictionary (Lexis)* (Ohbusha, 2003), *The Luminous English-Japanese Dictionary (Luminous)* (Kenkyusha, 2001), *The Super-Anchor English-Japanese Dictionary* (2nd ed.) (*SA2*) (Gakken, 2001)

and *The Wisdom English-Japanese Dictionary (Wisdom)* (Sanseido, 2003)

Now, let us see firstly a possible problem with the explanations of parting expressions often found in these dictionaries. In the survey we will concentrate on a series of expressions which are introduced by *nice* (e.g. *Nice meeting you*). This is because (1) they are the most commonly quoted formulae in the dictionaries, (2) while the ratio between those with gerunds and those with infinitives has turned out to be relevant in the survey, *pleased* or *glad* is always followed by infinitives anyway and therefore they do not matter in this respect. We examine the patterns of parting expressions with *nice* followed by *meet* in 2.1, and those with *nice* followed by *see* and *talk to* in 2.2.

## 2.1 Parting expressions with *meet*

All the EJLDs have usage notes concerning the expressions, *nice to meet [meeting] you*, saying that we use (*It's*) *nice to meet you* as a (polite) way of saying hello to someone we have met for the first time and (*It was, It's been, It's*) *nice meeting you* as a way of saying goodbye to them. Many of them also give (*It was, It's been, It's*) *nice to have met you* and *Wisdom* lists *It was [It's been] nice to meet you*. The MLDs are usually less concerned with the distinction, but LDOCE4 presents *nice to meet you* and (*it was, it's been*) *nice meeting [talking to] you* as a contrastive pair with the same explanation. COB3 does not give an explicit explanation, but from the examples given, the users should infer that *Pleased to meet you* and *Nice to have met you* (see s.v. meet 4) are used contrastively<sup>(2)</sup>. To see whether this explanation reflects the real usage of parting expressions we examine data from various corpora.

The first thing we notice when we search for the relevant parting expressions is their rarity at least in balanced corpora. Therefore we have

(2) This is not an MLD, but the *Longman Essential Activator* (p.888f.) also gives *Nice [Pleased] to meet you* as a greeting and *It was nice meeting [talking to] you* as a parting expression. The treatment in the *Longman Activator* (2nd ed.) is, incidentally, different, which we will see later.

conducted searches into four different sets of corpora and here are their results<sup>(3)</sup>:

(1) the full Bank of English corpus, which consists of 45 million words at the time of Autumn 2002 (henceforth BoE): 37 examples were identified, most of which were found in fictions, conversations and interviews. (2) BNC: 14 examples were retrieved, also from fictions and conversations. (3) the Websites of BBC, PBS and CNN<sup>(4)</sup>: 13 examples were found mostly in the transcripts of the interview programmes. (4) a. the scripts (not transcripts) of 313 American movies (54.4Mb): The majority were produced in the 1990s but some were in the 1980s. b. scripts or texts captured through closed caption of 99 episodes of several American television serials, which were aired in the 1990s and 2000 (2.8Mb): 41 examples were collected from the (a) and (b) texts. A total of 105 examples of the relevant parting expressions were identified, with the distribution shown in Table 1, separated into British English (henceforth BrEg) and American English (henceforth AmEg)<sup>(5)</sup> (See the next page):

Before we come to the point, it might be interesting to notice a difference

- (3) It is often the case that a parting expression by the same speaker repeatedly appears in a corpus. In an extreme case, there are over 1,500 examples of *Nice [nice] to talk to you* by a single host of a radio phone-in in the Bank of English corpus. We have tried counting such tokens as one example as much as possible because otherwise linguistic behaviour of particular persons would be over-represented. Notice also that we have counted an expression of the same kind as single occurrence which is employed by two participants at a turn of conversation as in (i) (<F0X> and <F01> represent different speakers and <ZGY> an unclear part):

(i) <F0X> Do you want a hand to clear this up? <F01> Oh (sic) don't worry. I think we'll all we were <tc text=pause> <F0X> You sure? <F01> We'll perhaps have some more coffee in here and <F0X> Right. <F01> <ZGY> at the same time. <F0X> *Nice to meet you.* <F01> *Very nice to meet you as well.* <F0X> <ZGY> <F01> Thank you. <F0X> Bye.

(BoE: British spoken English)

- (4) They are the Websites of broadcasting stations and are not corpora. However, since a large amount of broadcasting data are stored and can be searched as if they were corpora, we call them 'corpora' for ease of reference.
- (5) Such intensifiers as *very*, *so* and *really* before *nice* in the examples are not represented in Tables 1-3.

between BrEg and AmEg. *Wisdom* gives the label, ((Mainly AmEg)) to (*It was nice meeting you* (s.v. meet [Expressions])). While the expressions are found in BrEg too, certainly they are found more often in AmEg. To put it in another way, while in BrEg the *to*-infinitive patterns are about three times more frequent than the gerundial patterns, in AmEg they are equally used.

**Table 1** Distribution of parting expressions with *meet* (BrEg/AmEg)

Expressions	BrEg	AmEg	Subtotal
Nice to meet you	14	15	29
It was nice to meet you	1	7	8
It's been nice to meet you	1	—	1
It's nice to meet you	1	2	3
(It's, It was) nice to have met you	13	6	19
<b>Expressions</b> Subtotal	30	30	60
Nice meeting you	7	17	24
It was nice meeting you	3	15	18
It's been nice meeting you	3	—	3
<b>Subtotal</b>	13	32	45
<b>Total</b>	43	62	105

To come to the point, if we ignore the difference between BrEg and AmEg, Table 1 shows that the most frequent parting expression is *Nice to meet you*. It is common along with the always or often quoted expressions, *Nice meeting you*, *It was nice meeting you* and *(It's, It was) nice to have met you* (see the shaded boxes in the table). If so, why is *Nice to meet you* as a parting expression ignored in learners' dictionaries? Of course, it is considered to be the shortened form of *It was nice to meet you* or maybe of *It's been nice to meet you*, and therefore users are expected to infer the existence of the elliptical variant. However, the problem is only one dictionary (*Wisdom*) gives *It was [It's*

been] *nice to meet you* among parting expressions in at least the relevant and therefore easily noticeable entries. Users probably infer that we use *Nice to meet you* when we meet someone, but not when we say goodbye.

A possible solution would be that we simply provide *Nice to meet you* among common parting expressions. If this is feared to confuse learners because the expression is far more frequently used as a greeting, we could just give such a short note as ((also used on parting))<sup>(6)</sup>. Or we could give *It was [It's been] nice to meet you* and put *It was* or *It's been* in parentheses as many of the dictionaries do in *(It was, It's been) nice meeting you*, although the 'complete' forms of the infinitive patterns are much less frequent in our corpora.

*Nice to meet you* happens to be commonly used both as a greeting and as a parting expression, which may be confusing but we should not be blind to the real usage. MED (s.v. nice) explains that *nice to meet you* and *nice to see you* are used as both a greeting and a parting expression. *Longman Activator* (2nd ed.) (p. 498) shows *nice to meet you* and *nice meeting you* as a way of saying goodbye. These treatments seem to be a step in the right direction.

## 2.2 Parting expressions with *see* and *talk to*

So far we have examined parting expressions with the verb *meet*. In this sub-section we briefly examine patterns with *see* and *talk to*. Two of the EJLDs point out a contrast in usage between *(It's) nice to see you* and *(It was, It's been) nice seeing you* which is similar to the one we have seen in the expressions with *meet*. Many of the other EJLDs give the latter expressions, but not the former, as a way of saying goodbye to someone we do not know well. The users will be guided into using *Nice seeing you* in such a situation

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(6) The expression is used as a greeting in around 85 per cent of cases in BoE, BBC/PBS/CNN and movie/drama corpora. So it is in about 75 per cent of cases in BNC.

and saving *Nice to see you* for greeting. A look at large corpora, however, reveals that the latter is actually more likely to be used as a parting expression. We have examined the same set of corpora, where a total of 51 examples were identified with roughly equal number of examples from each kind of corpus. One of the examples is shown in (1) (MX: an anonymous name):

- (1) <M02> Bye bye. <F02> Okay. Bye bye. Thank you. <M02> Can you get through all right? <F02> Yes (sic) thank you. <M02> Keep well. Bye bye. <F02> Thank you. Bye bye. <M02> Bye bye MX. *Nice to see you.* <F01> Bye. Thank you. <M02> Bye bye. <F01> Bye.

(BoE; British spoken English)

Since there is little difference in the way the data is distributed between BrEg and AmEg, we present the results by combining both varieties:

**Table 2 Distribution of parting expressions with *see***

Nice to see you	31	Nice seeing you	12
It's nice to see you	5	It was nice seeing you	1
Nice to have seen you	1	It's been nice seeing you	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>

Although, as with the case of *Nice to meet you*, *Nice to see you* is overwhelmingly (a. 85 per cent in our corpora) used as a greeting, it is far more common than *Nice seeing you* as a parting expression.

Now let us look at the pattern of the parting expressions with *talk to* because they are quoted in some dictionaries. A total of 156 examples were found in four sets of corpora, 128 of which came from BoE. Most of them are found in radio phone-ins and interviews, and fewer examples in ordinary conversations, fictions and so on. *Nice to talk to you* is usually used as a sort

of parting expression at the end of a talk. (2) is an example from a radio phone-in in BoE:

(2) <M01> Okay FX. <F06> Yes. <M01> Thank you very much. <F06> Bye bye dear. <M01> *Nice to talk to you.* <F06> Lovely programme. <M01> Thank you ever so much. <F06> Thank you. <M01> Bye bye.

(BoE; British spoken English)

Table 3 shows the distribution of the examples divided between BrEg and AmEg:

**Table 3 Distribution of parting expressions with *talk to* (BrEg/AmEg)**

Expressions	BrEg	AmEg	Subtotal
Nice to talk to you	48	9	57
It was nice to talk to you	3	1	4
It's been nice to talk to you	2	1	3
It's nice to talk to you	6	—	6
It's nice to have talked to you	—	1	1
<b>Expressions</b> <span style="float:right"><b>Subtotal</b></span>	59	12	71
Nice talking to you	30	23	53
It was nice talking to you	4	9	13
(It's) been nice talking to you	11	4	15
It's nice talking to you	4	—	4
<b>Subtotal</b>	49	36	85
<b>Total</b>	108	48	156

Although the number of examples from AmEg is fewer, it is suspected that the gerundial forms are preferred in AmEg as in the case of *meet*. The point, however, is again that the total numbers of the infinitival forms and the



gerundial forms are about the same.

Concluding this section, in whatever way we interpret the facts, *Nice to meet* [*see, talk to*] *you* as parting words are as common as or more common than *Nice meeting* [*seeing, talking to*] *you* or *Nice to have met you*, which should be reflected in learners' dictionaries so that users will not shy away from using the former group as a way of saying goodbye in conversation<sup>(7)</sup>.

### 3. The description/presentation of the transitivity of *rummage* [usage]

An interesting difference can be found between the MLDs and the EJLDs regarding the description about the verbal use of *rummage*. While the MLDs show only its intransitive use as in (3a), the EJLDs show transitive uses as well as in (3b,c):

- (3) a. She *rummaged in* a drawer for some aspirin. (MED)  
b. She *rummaged* a drawer for some aspirin.  
c. She *rummaged* (out, up) some aspirin from a drawer.

The verbs in (3a,b) have virtually the same meaning, i.e. 'to make a thorough search' whereas that in (3c) means 'find something (by searching)'. Thus (3a,b) can be followed by *but she couldn't find any* but (3c) cannot. The use of the verb in (3b) is given in all of the EJLDs and that in (3c) in four of them. Does this mean that the transitive uses are less frequent and left out of the MLDs? An examination of corpora, however, tells us that the ratio of the

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(7) Interestingly, parting expressions which begin with *good*, a synonym of *nice*, show distributional patterns somewhat different from those we have seen. *Good* is much less likely to collocate with *to meet/meeting* and more likely to combine with *to*-infinitives than with *-ing* forms. The latter can be seen in the following contrasts (the numbers in parentheses show those of the occurrences): *Good to see you* (32)-*Good seeing you* (2); *Good to talk to you* (31)-*Good talking to you* (12). The numbers of *Good to talk to you* and overall infinitival forms are larger than those of the corresponding gerundial forms in AmEg as well.

transitive uses to the intransitive use is so low that users must be informed in some way if they are included in learners' dictionaries.

Firstly, let us see the result of an examination of 400 random examples of *rummage* as a verb (any conjugational form) in BoE. In 390 examples, the verb was used intransitively almost always with either such adverbs as *about* or *around* or such prepositions as *through*, *in*, *around* or *for*<sup>(8)</sup>. Among 10 transitive examples, four examples were each used as in (3b) and (3c). One example was used as *rummage up (the man)* with the sense of (3c). A last example was used with the sense of '(of a customs officer) make a thorough search of (a vessel)' (NODE), which is a rather specialised meaning and does not concern us here. In conclusion, the rarity of the transitive uses of *rummage* is striking.

A search on BNC also produced a similar result: while a total of 145 intransitive examples were found, only five transitive examples were identified. Among them, two examples were used as in (3b) and three as in (3c), one of which being from a poem<sup>(9)</sup>.

EJLDs are probably more often used for reception purposes than for production purposes and therefore it may be reasonable that they give the transitive uses (including the 'searching a vessel' sense) as well in order to be more comprehensive. This, however, does pose problems for text production in that there is no (clear) indication in almost all of them that the transitive uses are extremely rare and that (3a) is definitely preferable to (3b). This seems to be especially the case where half of the EJLDs, i.e. *G3*, *SA2* and *Wisdom* show the transitive uses first, and *Lexis*, though it shows the intransitive use first,

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(8) LDOCE4 and OALD6 give a grammar code to the intransitive use indicating that it is always followed by an adverb or a prepositional phrase. *Luminous* also gives a (grammar) note 'with an adverbial phrase'. The information should be helpful for learners of English.

(9) Again there were two other transitive examples with the sense of 'searching a vessel'.

equally gives an example to each of the intransitive and transitive uses so that the rarity of the latter use may not be clear to the users.

There seem to be two options to better guide learners to the real use of the verb *rummage*. One is to give the intransitive use only as the MLDs do because the verb is almost always used intransitively. The other option is to present the transitive use(s) as well as the intransitive use, but in the way that users are clearly informed that the latter is normally used. To ensure this, it would be necessary at least to present the intransitive use before the transitive use(s). Furthermore, we should give more space to the former with an example or two, but much less space to the latter so that users can guess which the central use is. It may also be a good idea to add a usage note informing users that (3a) is preferable to or more natural than (3b)<sup>(10)</sup>.

Boggaards (1996:307f.) says that ‘if they [learners] are to write texts that are as “natural” as possible, they need to be informed about the frequency of use of words in certain constructions’. In this particular case, dictionary users should be informed that the verb is normally used intransitively. Many learners’ dictionaries provide information concerning particular constructions, e.g. passives and negative sentences, in which some verbs (with a particular sense) tend to be employed. This sort of information would also come in handy where there is a striking imbalance of transitivity.

#### **4. The description/presentation of the meanings of *pigeonhole* [meaning]**

In this section two problems will be pointed out regarding the description and presentation of the meanings of *pigeonhole/pigeon-hole* as a noun. Firstly, the following three kinds of meaning are found in the EJLDs. Examples are shown from BoE and BNC that are supposed to represent the senses (b) and (c):

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(10) Levin (1993:71) points out that the transitive uses as in (3b, c) are not acceptable. Some speakers may even find them unnatural.

- (a) one of the small holes in a structure for pigeons to live (the definition from MED; given in all the EJLDs except one)
- (b) one of small open boxes which documents or other things are sorted into and kept in (given in all the EJLDs with such definitions as *Bunrui-dana*, *Seiri-dana*, *Shikiri-dana* or *Shorui-dana*)
- The higher shelves held plastic containers of the sort a do-it-yourself handiman (sic) would keep screws and nails in so the effect was of a dozen or so *pigeonholes*. (BNC; HWL 1842)
  - For instance, she has not opened the desk until now because in the upper left-hand *pigeonhole*, held together tidily by an elastic band, is the bundle of letters he was sending her in September and October; (BoE; The Strathy (Canada))
- (c) a rough category to which someone or something is assigned (with the addition of *rough* to the definition in NODE; given in three of the EJLDs, the other two show the use as a part of an idiom, *put something/someone into a pigeonhole*)
- You reduce people by trying to define them. Just occasionally in life there are people who escape exact *pigeonholes*. She is one. (BoE; British magazine)
  - The majority of Rottweilers are kept as pets: this is a *pigeon-hole* Rottweilers do not fit into with ease; there has to be something else. (BNC; AR5 1293)

The descriptions in the MLDs are somewhat different. Firstly, in CALD, COB3 and LDOCE4 (but not LDOCE3) another meaning, (d), is explicitly given:

- (d) one of a set of small boxes, open at the front, in which letters and messages are left for different people, esp. in an office or hotel (the definition from CIDE)

Two examples from the corpora are:

- (4) a. A pile of letters is waiting to be opened and more, no doubt, have accumulated in her *pigeonhole* at the House of Lords.

(BoE; British book)

- b. The next day there was a note from Hargreaves in my *pigeon-hole*...

(BNC; FR3 1585)

It may be difficult to understand that the word has the (d) meaning from the definition in OALD6, but the given example, 'If you can't come, leave a note in my pigeon-hole.' makes it clear that it does. The (b) meaning, on the other hand, is not clearly presented in two of the MLDs, and (a) is given only in MED. Finally, (c) is not given as an independent sense but instead as a part of the idiom mentioned earlier in four MLDs.

Let us now examine how the word is used in balanced corpora. Table 4 shows with which sense a total of 117 examples of pigeonhole(s) and pigeon-hole(s) in BoE and BNC are used. The number of examples used as a part of an idiom, *put \_ in a pigeonhole* and its variants (for instance, its passivised version or those in which *force* or *box* is used instead of *put*) is also added in brackets in (c):

**Table 4** Distribution of the senses of *pigeonhole*, *pigeon-hole*

Senses	No. of examples
(a)	1
(b)	16
(c) [the number of examples used in idioms]	44 [19]
(d)	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>

As can be guessed, (a) is rarely used. Even the only example in Table 4 is employed as a simile, introduced with *like*. A point we should note in the table is that (d) is the second most common sense, but nevertheless it does not seem to be well represented in the EJLDs. *Shorui-dana* given for the sense (b) in most EJLDs is not likely to conjure up the meaning; such a supplementary note as '(for putting letters or notes for someone)' should be added. Indeed, for actual receptive purposes, the translation may help users read through the sentence, but it is essential that dictionaries give definitions that better reflect the real uses of words. Another thing worth noticing is the frequency of the sense (c), apart from examples used as a part of the idiom and its variants. This would require an independent presentation of the sense (c), especially in the MLDs. This is because not only such examples as are given in (c) look different from the idiom, but also it would be difficult for learners to infer this sense from the other definitions given<sup>(11)</sup>.

##### 5. The description/presentation of a meaning of *produce* [meaning]

The last point we would like to consider is concerned with the description and presentation of a meaning of the verb *produce*, 'to show or offer something'. All the MLDs and the EJLDs in some way indicate that it carries the meaning '(bring out something) so that it can be seen' as a part of its meaning. They, probably except CALD, also show the use 'to present something to be considered or examined' usually with a (part of) definition or otherwise with an example. MED is unique in that it explicitly mentions '(to bring out something) so that it can be used (by someone else)' as a part of the

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(11) The fact that most of the EJLDs give the least frequent sense of (a) even as the first sense does not seem to pose a serious problem. This is because the more frequent uses can be conceptually derived from the sense, and giving it at the beginning of the entry would show users the path of its metaphorical extensions. However, in order to inform learners of the real use of the word, it may be desirable to give the sense (a) the label of ((rare)).

relevant definition. This meaning is hidden in about half of the MLDs by the fact that they give '(bring out something) so that it can be seen (or considered)' as a part of the definition. Some EJLDs also show the latter meaning 'so that it can be seen' in parentheses as a supplementary meaning, which hides that meaning. To conclude, three sub-senses can be recognised by examining the definitions and examples of the dictionaries. In the rest of the section, we will see that this is indeed the case and that the third sense is actually more frequent than the first one in BNC so that it deserves due attention.

In the survey, 207 relevant examples were identified among 1,800 random examples of *produced* and eight examples among 700 random examples of *produce* in BNC. The three uses mentioned earlier were confirmed, which are given below as (a), (b) and (c) along with an example or two from the corpus:

(a) bring out something so that it can be seen

- He felt in his top pocket and *produced* a blue card. 'Here you are. I'm a paid-up member... .' (GUD 197)

(b) present something such as a report or evidence so that it can be considered or examined

- Mr McIntosh was largely responsible for marshalling and co-ordinating the various local authority departments involved in the huge recovery operation after the disaster [plane crash]. He later *produced* a detailed report from which evolved a blueprint for emergency planning which was sent to all local authorities throughout Britain. (K5D 2722)

(c) bring out or offer something so that it can be used (for someone else)

- From one of the voluminous pockets he *produced* a bottle of Scotch and put it down on the table. 'Drinks --- as ordered. I take it you are in need.' (BMW 661)

- We knocked, but there was no sound of movement inside the flat. Seddon

*produced* a bunch of skeleton keys. ‘Unless it’s bolted on the inside we ought to be able to get in with these,’ he said. He fiddled for a moment or two, listening to the tumblers in the lock. (HOD 1776)

In the corpus such words as *card*, *gun*, *photograph* and *letter* are often used as the object of *produce(d)* in the sense of (a). Some kind of drink, *coin*, *cigarette* and *key* are often found in the examples with the sense (c). With the sense (b) common object nouns are *report*, *documents*, *paper*, *evidence*, *leaflet* and so on. The senses of (a) and (c) are often found in imaginative writing whereas the sense (b) is usually found in journalistic writing or books on social sciences/affairs.

Table 5 shows how 215 examples of *produce(d)* are distributed across the three senses. In the table, the sense (c) is further divided into three sub-senses/uses: ‘bring out or offer something so that’ 1. ‘someone else can use it’ (cf. the first example given in (c) above), 2. ‘the speaker him/herself can use it’ (cf. the second example given in (c)), 3. ‘someone else and the speaker can use it’:

**Table 5 The distribution of the three senses of *produce***

Senses	Number of examples	
(a)	47	
(b)	95	
(c.1)	33	(Subtotal) 73
(c.2)	28	
(c.3)	12	
<b>Total</b>	215	

The most frequent use, (b), and (a) are both covered by (almost) all the dictionaries. However, it is known that (c), which is often hidden by (a) (and (b)) in the dictionaries, is also common. There are three kinds of senses and it is



not a good move to give users an impression that the word is mainly used with the senses of (a) and (b). Such a ‘comprehensive’ definition as in MED should be a better guide to the usage, or even better would be that of NODE because it covers the uses of (c.2, 3), though the dictionary is not a learner’s dictionary and the definition may be too difficult:

MED: to show or offer something so that it can be examined or used by someone else

NODE: show or provide (something) for consideration, inspection, or use

## 6. Conclusion

In this note we have seen four specific problems with the explanations and descriptions of usage and meaning often found in learners’ dictionaries and possible suggestions have been made. The points covered in the note might be specific details, but (learners’) dictionaries need to provide users with as accurate information as possible about how words are used. The use of large balanced corpora along with ingenious analysing software has made descriptions of words and phrases in recent learners’ dictionaries more accurate than ever and they are reliable guides for learners of English. However, there are still some areas that may escape corpus analyses: infrequent words and phrases (in a corpus on which a dictionary is based) or the fine distinction of word senses or uses and so on. The intention of the note has been to explore a few of those areas<sup>(12)</sup>.

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(12) Landau (2001: 322) writes: “Every dictionary is done under tight time pressures. No one will have the time to sort through thousands of hits or even many hundreds, in order to find a particular usage that has to be included.” This should indeed be a fact of life for lexicographers and the intention of this paper is in no way to criticise those wonderful products.

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