Bottom-up Editing and More: The E-forum of *The English-Chinese Dictionary*

Jun Ding

Fudan University

"Computer assistance may enable the lexicographer to prepare and revise dictionaries more quickly"—Barbara Kipfer's prediction made 20 years ago has already become a reality in our age of advanced information technology. Yet how much more quickly can the revision of dictionaries be carried out today? The envelope is now being pushed by the editors of The English-Chinese Dictionary (Unabridged) *(ECD) through bottom-up editing, a new form of online lexicography. Following the launch of the second revised edition of ECD (April 2007), an electronic forum was introduced, linked to the website of Shanghai Yiwen Press, the publisher of the dictionary. For the time being, this e-ECD-forum is attracting more and more of its users to take part in bottom-up editing, i.e., pointing out errors and other problems detected in the dictionary directly to its editors through the Net. Three editors including the editor-in-chief participate in the e-forum discussion on a daily basis. Once the problems identified by the users are checked and properly edited by the editors, they will be listed in the e-newsletter linked to the e-forum. This paper will first explain the functioning of the e-ECD-forum and how such direct interaction between users and editors of ECD proves rewarding to both parties, and secondly, illustrate the mistakes and deficiencies published on the e-forum. Lastly it will explore the potential benefits and problems of online collaborative lexicography in the near future.*

Introduction

More than 20 years ago Oitana (1982: 48) pointed out "the ability of modern information retrieval systems to use the dialogue with the user as feedback for improvements" in dictionary-making. Ten years ago Carr (1997: 214) suggested the so-called "bottom-up editing" in which "new types of references are evolving upward from readers directly onto the Net." An online forum discussing *The English-Chinese Dictionary (Unabridged)*[1] （《英汉大词典》） was established on 10th April 2007, the day after the official launch of its second revised edition. Through this forum dictionary editors are engaging in dialogue with users, and "bottom-up editing" is taking place. The users of ECD have been visiting the forum every day to point out errors in the dictionary, entries missing from it, and other usage problems. This paper examines the positive effects of the direct, real-time interaction between users and editors of ECD on the e-forum, illustrates the various problems detected by the former and revised by the latter, and explores the potential benefits and problems of online collaborative lexicography.

The e-ECD-Forum: Win-Win Online Interaction between Editors and Users

ECD's e-forum[2] of is a kind of electronic conference, a form of "online intellectual communit[y]" according to Kovacs (1993). Indeed the e-ECD-forum creates an online community of those with an immediate interest in ECD. The number of forum webpages is increasing daily. By the end of August 2007 there were altogether 18 pages, each containing 50 threads. Under the various threads discussions are carried out among users and editors, which are categorized into seven types indicated by attaching categorical labels to the title of each thread. Namely, [增 (Add)] for missing entries, [补 (Complement)] for missing meanings, [订 (Revise)] for places for improvement, [正 (Rectify)] for errors, [提问 (Question)] for questions about dictionary use

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[1] *The English-Chinese Dictionary (Unabridged)* was first published in 1991 by the Shanghai Yiwen Press.

[2] Web address for the e-ECD-forum: *http://www.yiwen.com.cn/mybbs/Board/Board.asp?BoardID=18.*

and language learning, [讨论(Discussion)] for general, miscellaneous discussions, and [公告 (Announcement)] for official announcements from the publisher.

Lu Gusun, editor-in-chief, and two other junior editors visit the e-forum on a daily basis, and make prompt responses to all kinds of questions from users, which makes the "bottom-up editing" possible. Their work includes: deciding whether what is commented on is in fact an error or a new entry fit for inclusion; revising a questionable entry properly and publishing it in the e-newsletter linked to the forum; and answering questions concerning the use of ECD, or the learning of English.
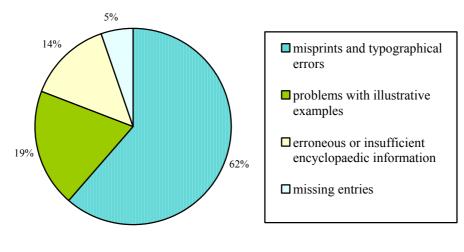
Bottom-up editing is based on a direct interaction between the users and editors, which can be rewarding for both parties. From the lexicographer's perspective, this active involvement of users helps tremendously toward revision efficiency. "In the past, our dictionaries were revised every 20 or 30 years" (Noring-Christensen 1982: 214). The ECD was first published in 1991; its first revision began in 2002 and ended in 2007 (Lu 2007: 1). Yet the revision of the second edition began the next day following its launch when the e-forum was founded. Three months later a decision was already reached to print it for the second time in November 2007 with all omissions and commissions corrected. The users' contribution in revising ECD will be better demonstrated in the second part of this paper which illustrates the various problems they have detected in the dictionary.

Meanwhile there are three major benefits from the user's perspective:

1. They are better motivated to use the dictionary, even if sometimes just for the sake of finding fault with it;

2. They can obtain firsthand professional advice in using the dictionary;

3. They can obtain useful information in learning the English language. (Topics on language learning problems abound on the forum.)

Types of mistakes and/or deficiencies

The latest calculation of the mistakes and/or deficiencies listed in the e-newsletter[3] (25th July 2007) reveals that all together 79 places in the ECD have been properly revised. I divided them into six major groups and counted their respective occurrences. There are 35 misprints or typographical errors, 22 problems with definitions, 11 problems with illustrative examples, 8 erroneous or insufficient encyclopaedic information, and 3 missing entries. The following graph1 shows the distribution of the users' contribution in the different areas of dictionary-making.

Graph 1

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[3] Web address for the e-newsletter: *http://www.yiwen.com.cn/dict/print.asp*.

Apparently, users are most helpful in detecting misprints or typographical errors, which professional editors with a larger vision often fail to notice. For instance, the illustrative example for *earthquake* is "an ~ measured *6.2* on the Richter scale", with the Chinese translation "里氏*6.4*级地震" (ECD 2007: 582). If this is a more or less easily detectable mistake, it takes an amazingly careful reader to find out there is an extra "<" in the etymological information for *courier*: [… < *correre* to run < L < *currere*] (ECD 2007: 422).

Users are also less tolerant with Chinese definitions that prove erroneous, imprecise, or simply outdated. Many of the entries with problematic definitions turn out to be technical terms. For example: *ecdysis n. [动] (label for Zoology) 蜕皮 (skin shedding)；换羽 (molting)* (ECD 2007: 586). The first translation equivalent is correct, but it is rightly pointed out that *ecdysis* doesn't have the meaning of "feather changing". Therefore the second translation equivalent ought to be omitted. In the ECD the word *anchorwoman* originally had a wordy translated definition and no equivalent: "新闻（或访谈）节目主持人" (news (or interview) programme presiding person) (ECD 2007: 64). But as a matter of fact the lexical unit "女主播" (woman major speaker) has been in use for a long time and is the exact equivalent for *anchorwoman*.

Of the ten problems with illustrative examples, seven are problems with the Chinese translation (either wrong or inadequate). Three examples ought to be deleted because they are already listed as head entries or quoted elsewhere. One example under the entry *knock* is simply misplaced: *Please ~ twice at the door before entering* (ECD 2007: 1054). It apparently illustrates the intransitive use of *knock* but is included under *knock* vt. Once alerted to the glaring mistake, the editors have immediately found a new example to take its place: *~ a table with one's knuckles*. This detection on the users' part shows that though Chinese English learners turn to English-Chinese dictionaries mostly for translation equivalents to identify the referent, they do read examples and are likewise concerned with the accuracy of their rendering or their usefulness in illustrating the actual uses of a word.

Discussions about encyclopaedic information indicate that some users are not only meticulous in using dictionaries but also quite well-informed on Western culture. They are able to detect misinformation under encyclopaedic entries such as there being 11, not 8, remaining works of Aristophanes (ECD 2007: 93), or that Lucian is a Roman, not Greek, writer (ECD 2007: 1142), etc.

Only three new entries are added: *comfort woman*, *French paradox*, *high touch*. In providing new entries users are the most enthusiastic but find their efforts the least "appreciated". This is because on the one hand, editors are highly scrupulous in judging whether a new entry is fit for inclusion, and on the other, users tend to suggest strictly technical or encyclopaedic terms which are unfit for a general dictionary like ECD. Users are also enthusiastic in suggesting what appear to them to be missing meanings for certain words. But since sense discrimination is one of the most demanding professional skills in the art of dictionary-making, here more than anywhere else one feels the limit of a layman user's contribution in editing a dictionary and hence the importance of guiding his energy and attention to where they won't prove a sheer waste.

Online collaborative lexicography: potential benefits and problems

Aside from bottom-up error-detecting, other potentials are being observed in such online collaborative lexicography through the e-forum:

1. Editors can expect to get expert advice on the treatment of technical entries which can benefit their career in a long-term perspective. Quite a number of in-depth discussions are carried out on certain technical or metaphysical terms whose translation equivalents in Chinese are suspected of ambiguities but about which no ideal solutions have been reached.

2. Editors can gather firsthand information to meet users' needs since they are ready to voice their honest opinions concerning the use of the dictionary. It is possible to design on-line questionnaires for systematic investigation of user feedback.

3. The training of dictionary skills can be offered online which are otherwise largely neglected by the majority of dictionary users.

4. Language competences in both English and Chinese can be improved online through communication and mutual corrections and aids among those who share a love for languages and dictionaries.

But new potentials bring new problems as well. On the e-ECD-forum, editors often find themselves facing a plethora of professional opinions concerning a single technical term. Which advice to follow and which to ignore becomes a difficult decision for dictionary makers. User information is valuable but at the same time hard to evaluate because the e-forum population is highly mobile, and after all only really avid dictionary users visit it regularly, which involves the risk of yielding biased results in investigations envisioned for future lexicographic research. The most severe question is, however, will the e-forum stand the test of time? "Making a dictionary is like painting a bridge: by the time one coat of paint has been applied, the bridge is in need of another" (Landau 2004: 396). In a year's time, will the users remain as active in contributing to the improvement of the dictionary as they were in the first two months?

In spite of all the potential problems of future online collaborative lexicography, however, Rutkowski's (1995) prediction that the Internet could serve as "a way to bring together experts spread across the world in 'collaboratories' to create, innovate, improve and produce in many different research areas" is not too far-fetched after all. Lexicographic democracy is already in sight where "bottom-up editing" is quietly but also significantly revolutionizing the revising process of an English-Chinese dictionary.

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