

Adverb Use in EFL Student Writing: From Learner Dictionary to Text Production

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Adverbs, especially those occurring in adverb+adjective collocations, play a central role in the language that advanced learners are expected to produce in their argumentative writing. Submodifying adverbs of degree such as closely, deeply, strongly and widely, however, have been identified as being problematic for learners of English: Italian learners over-use very and really to the virtual exclusion of any other adverb (Philip 2007). This situation is due in part to the EFL curriculum, but monolingual and bilingual learner's dictionaries appear to do little to address the issue. This presentation examines the way in which lexical adverbs of degree are treated in the five major English dictionaries for advanced learners (CALD, COBUILD, LDOCE, MED and OALD). It also evaluates the way these same forms are treated in four bilingual dictionaries specifically aimed at Italian learners of English (Longman, Oxford Study, Rizzoli-Larousse, and Oxford-Paravia). The analysis reveals that these dictionaries do little or nothing to help students expand their working knowledge of adverbs of degree. In general, the presentation of lexical adverbs is regarded to be subservient to the adjectives from which they are derived. The information boxes which most modern learner's dictionaries include seem to focus on elementary matters of grammar and word choice rather than on the collocation of these polysemous, metaphorically-motivated language items. The presentation concludes by suggesting some ways in which monolingual and bilingual learners' dictionaries might modify their treatment of lexical adverbs in order to enable students to identify and use alternatives to very, really and a lot.

1. Introduction

Adverbs are often considered a kind of “dustbin” word class (Crystal 1995: 211), comprising all manner of different forms and functions which simply do not belong in the more neatly defined classes such as noun and verb. The neglect of adverbs in linguistic studies is palpable, and the effect of this lack of study and documentation is over-generalisation. While discourse adverbials have risen in prominence in the EFL syllabus, especially as a result of corpus-based studies, lexical adverbs—those that are typically defined as deriving from adjectives—have fared rather worse.

Lexical adverbs are introduced relatively early in the EFL syllabus, where they are explicitly identified as adjective derivatives. As adverb exercises favour salient word-meaning, they concentrate on the compositional use of adverbs which corresponds roughly to the gloss “in a *adjective way*”. Little if any guidance is given on the textual use of adverbs, nor on how the use of adverbs in English might differ from the expression of the same meaning in other languages. This appears to lead to later problems with adverb collocations, as well as to the over-use of the form “in a *adjective way*” (Philip 2007: 6-7).

A certain familiarity with collocations involving intensifying adverbs is an essential component of argumentative prose in English, and hence of the type of written language that advanced learners are expected to be able to produce: *deeply troubling*; *widely-known*; *strongly-held beliefs*. Yet in spite of this expectation, intensifying adverbs have been identified as being problematic for learners of English: elementary forms such as *quite*, *very* and *really* are over-used, while their corresponding lexical adverbs (such as *highly*, *closely* and *deeply*) are relatively rare in learner data (Philip 2007, Granger 1998; see also Lorenz 1999: 262-280). Adverb-related problems seem to affect learners equally, regardless of mother-tongue, which would suggest that the EFL curriculum is likely to be at fault. However, dictionaries appear to be failing in their duty to offer

adequate vocabulary-building information for lexical intensifying adverbs, with monolingual learner dictionaries tending to treat adverbs as adjective derivatives (and therefore ignoring their collocational meanings), and bilingual learner dictionaries failing to offer sufficient lexical variety in their entries.

This contribution examines the treatment of lexical intensifying adverbs in monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. It suggests improvements to layout and content which would enable learners to overcome their adverb-related problems and discover alternatives to the over-used forms *very*, *really* and *a lot*.¹

2. Rationale

The rationale behind this study of dictionary treatment of adverbs is the awareness that Italian learners of English systematically avoid using lexical adverbs in their written work (Martelli 2006, Philip 2007).² While Martelli suggests that adverbs are less problematic than teachers believe, citing the fact that there are no instances of adverb+verb collocation errors in the Italian subset of the ICLE corpus (2006: 1008), this fails to take into consideration Philip's (2007: 7) observation that "there is a distinct preference in the writing of borderline B2-C1 learners to use *very* and *really* to the virtual exclusion of any other adverb". Such basic intensifying adverbs pose few problems—learners rarely use them incorrectly, and seem never to use them inappropriately. They are a lexical safety-net which few learners are prepared to cast aside in favour of a more idiomatic, lexical equivalent, such as *highly*, *closely*, or *widely*. It is precisely this class of adverbs that are examined in this paper: intensifying adverbs derived from adjectival forms, used mainly as submodifiers in conventional collocations.

As was noted in the introduction, adverbs are taught relatively early on in the EFL curriculum, with A1-level learners already able to use adverbs of frequency and quantity, and A2-level learners able to form adverbs derived from adjectives in order to modify verbs. The use of adverbs of different sub-classes is developed and extended afterwards, but there are two substantial gaps in the curriculum: the explicit recognition of the submodifying function of adverbs, and the insufficient attention paid to polysemy in vocabulary-building in general, which has repercussions on the acquisition of collocations in the language as a whole. If not incorporated into the curriculum, these elements must necessarily appear in dictionaries, which are the language reference works that learners consult most often. Sections 3 and 4 examine the treatment of lexical adverbs in monolingual and bilingual learner dictionaries respectively, focusing particular attention on a number of lexical intensifying adverbs which have previously been identified (Philip 2007) as problematic for Italian-speaking learners of English.

3. Adverbs in monolingual learner dictionaries

The dictionaries consulted in this study are five monolingual dictionaries for advanced learners: Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (CALD), Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary (COBUILD), Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE), Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (MED), and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD), plus a number of bilingual (English – Italian) dictionaries (see section 4). A range of intensifying adverbs was identified, on the basis of an earlier, corpus-based investigation into learner problems with such adverbs, which included not only error, but also over-use and under-use, when compared to native norms (Philip 2007). The adverbs considered were: *broadly*, *closely*, *deeply*, *greatly*, *heavily*, *highly*, *lightly*, *radically*, *slightly*, *strongly* and

¹ These intensifiers belong to the sub-class of "boosters" in Quirk et al.'s (1985) classification, and include those adverbs which amplify the 'normal' degree of meaning of their collocate without turning it into a superlative.

² The same problem has been documented for learners whose mother tongue is French (Granger, 1998), German (Lorenz 1999), Dutch (de Haan 1999) and Norwegian (Hasselgren 1994).

widely, in addition to the learners' "lexical teddy-bears" (Hasselgren 1994) *very*, *a lot* and *really*. A selection of the results is included in the following subsections.

3.1. Looking up adverbs: broadly

The five monolingual dictionaries consulted varied considerably in their positioning of adverbs. Taking *broadly* as an example, it can be seen that CALD is the only one not to grant it headword status, inserting it at the end of the entry for the subsense of the adjective to which it corresponds. This is the style adopted throughout by CALD, which separates adjective subsenses into distinct headwords, under which the adverb appears where appropriate. COBUILD adopts a similar approach to the inclusion of adverbs. While the adjective subsenses are numbered and clearly indicated in bold type, they appear under the same headword entry. The adverb form is included where appropriate under each of the nine subsenses, is cross-referenced at the end of the adjective entry and also appears as a headword in its own right, with a cross-reference to the adjective entry. LDOCE distinguishes *broad* from *broadly* to such an extent that no connection is made apparent between the two. Each has its own entry and, as if they existed in a vacuum, no cross-reference is made from one sense to another, and no adverbial form appears under any of the eleven subsenses of the adjective. MED adopts a similar approach but provides a cross-reference to *broadly* from the adjective entry, though none from the adverb to the adjective. The adjective entry in OALD too includes a cross-reference to *broadly*, but as this appears between the final subsense and the run-on phrases, it is easily missed. No indication is given at *broadly* that it has any relation to the adjective.

Lexical adverbs such as *broadly* are derived from an adjectival base, so it is not surprising that adjective entries should cross-reference to the adverb. It is odd, however, that the same is not true in reverse, with the adverb often being "orphaned". CALD's choice not to grant the adverb headword status is understandable, though it should be remembered that learners often lack look-up skills, and may not think to consult the adjective from which the adverb is derived. This problem does not apply to the CD-ROM, which leads the user directly to the relevant adjective entry.

3.2. Finding the right meaning: heavily

Once the headword has been located, the meaning of a polysemous adverb has to be established. As the most polysemous of the adverbs studied is *heavily*, the performance of the monolingual learners dictionaries will be judged on their treatment of this word. *Heavy* and its derivatives pose additional difficulties for the Italian learner because the figurative meanings of the equivalent, *pesante* / *pesantemente* do not overlap completely.

CALD does not use signposting, but separates the main senses into distinct entries with a clearly-identifiable gloss provided immediately after the headword and numbered subsenses following. Phrases appear at the end of the third entry, and these are followed directly by *heavily* and *heaviness* as derivatives. As the phrases do not all refer to the third sense, it is unclear whether *heavily* it is limited to the "to a great degree" sense cited, or if it can also be used with the other senses "solid" and "man". COBUILD provides *heavily* with a short entry – not the core sense, but the one which does not correspond to any of the adjectival senses. This entry is followed by a cross reference to *heavy*, which is the successive entry on the page. As with *broadly*, the COBUILD approach is to include all derivatives in each of the subsenses where appropriate. Thus *heavily* appears under subsenses 3, 4, 7 and 8, and *heaviness* under 1 and 3; yet despite being apparently lumped together, the derivatives are easily identified (e.g. ◆ *heavi|ly*) in the entry. LDOCE sets each of the six subsenses on a separate line of text, forfeiting valuable space for clarity. The number of the entry is therefore easily located and the gloss follows on immediately in bold. MED adopts signposting at the start of the entry, indicating that there are seven subsenses plus phrases. Each of these senses appears on a new line, as in LDOCE, with phrases appearing at the end. The signposting makes it easy to navigate this entry, and is especially effective when an entry extends over a page turn, as is the case of *heavy*. The seven senses of the OALD entry for *heavily* are clearly numbered and the glosses are informative, but this entry illustrates how useful signposting would be: the entry occurs over two facing pages, with the fourth entry ending one page and the fifth starting the next. Were this to

occur over a page turn rather than over facing pages, the final three senses would probably be missed because the user is provided with no indication the entry continues overleaf.

MED's adoption of signposting at the start of a polysemous entry is a great help to learners, as it limits the amount of scanning (in a foreign language) which has to be done in order to locate the meaning of a polysemous lexical item. It is a practice that could be usefully adopted by the other four dictionaries; and MED's use of signposting for items which have five or more senses could be extended downwards to include items with three or four senses when these are long and/or include several subsenses. Numbering senses makes them stand out, especially if the numbers appear on new lines of text, but dictionary users still have to scan the entire entry to find the relevant meaning. The print layout can help in this—COBUILD's layout is densely packed but easy to scan, because only headwords and derivatives appear in bold. CALD's decision to provide separate entries for main senses reflects the notion that distinct senses are really different words. However this style might be more appropriate for a dictionary for native speakers who are already aware of the individual senses. Learners tend to look up character strings, not meanings.

3.3. Information about usage

One of the main differences between dictionaries for natives and those for learners can be found in the usage information provided. As well as pronunciation, learners are provided with example sentences, syntactic information, and even information boxes explaining uses of similar words, collocation preferences, or frequently misused forms.

All of the dictionaries included example sentences for adverbs, even when treated as derivatives and relegated to the end of an entry. They also all contain syntactic information where necessary, although the fact that lexical adverbs do not have peculiar patterning limits the need for such information. The exception to this 'minimalist' rule is COBUILD, whose entries contain a vast amount of syntactic and pragmatic information. These annotations are found in a narrow side column next to the entry, where they can be consulted if necessary, otherwise ignored. Essentially, COBUILD makes explicit what the example sentences illustrate as normal, typical usage of the word in question. While explicit in its syntactic presentation, COBUILD does not feature lexical information boxes, keeping such notes to a bare minimum, to indicate, for instance differences between American and British usage ("in AM, use *high-strung*" at *highly-strung*), otherwise cross-referencing. CALD too cross-references to related entries, while the remaining three make use of information boxes. Some of these, such as the disambiguation of *high* and *tall* (MED and OALD) are of a rather remedial nature, and seem out of place in an advanced learner's dictionary where collocational information is of more value. Others, such as LDOCE's word focus on *strong*, are helpful vocabulary builders. On the whole, though, once a learner has found the relevant entry, s/he should have no problem understanding how to use the word correctly.

4. Adverbs in bilingual learner dictionaries

In addition to the five monolingual learner dictionaries discussed in section 3, four bilingual dictionaries specifically aimed at Italian learners of English were examined. These are the three pocket-sized dictionaries of the type that many learners bring to class: Dizionario compatto. Italiano-inglese inglese-italiano (Longman), Dizionario Oxford Study per studenti d'inglese (Oxford Study), and Dizionario "pronto per l'uso" inglese-italiano italiano-inglese. (Rizzoli-Larousse), plus the Oxford Paravia dizionario inglese-italiano italiano-inglese concise (Oxford-Paravia), whose (free) online version is widely used by university students. Other large bilingual dictionaries principally aimed at translators and other language specialists (such as the Ragazzini Dizionario inglese-italiano italiano-inglese, and the Sansoni dizionario delle lingue italiana e inglese) were excluded from the study as they are neither aimed at, nor used regularly by language-centre learners.

In order to test the ease with which Italian learners might find the translation of a familiar (L1) collocation, and the resulting likelihood of using one of the English adverbs identified in section

3, a list their approximate equivalents was drawn up. These included two forms which have no adjective base—*estremamente* [extremely] and *molto* [very]—plus eight others, all derived from adjectives: *ampio* [wide], *alto* [high], *forte* [strong], *leggero* [light, slight], *pesante* [heavy], *profondo* [deep], *radicale* [radical] and *stretto* [narrow, close].³ The notion of translation equivalence here is problematic, as the salient meanings of these adverbs (i.e., the salient meaning of the adjective from which they are derived), does not necessarily correspond to their textual meaning in collocation. All of the lexical adverbs are metaphorically motivated, and, at the same time, slightly delexical, with the meaning of the full collocation taking precedence over the meaning of its component parts. It is precisely this factor which appears to condition learner errors, combined with a tendency to calque collocations from the L1. The effect is to create anomalies such as *heavily changed*, *highly responsible* and *strongly convinced*,⁴ which on a superficial level can be classed as collocation errors, but which require an explanation that takes account of the metaphorical motivation of the adverb-collocate, both in the L1 and in English. It is with this particular language problem in mind that the four learners' bilingual dictionaries were examined, to ascertain (I) whether the adverb forms are listed explicitly, (II) if the correct translation can be identified or extrapolated from the information contained in the entry, and (III) if the bilinguals help learners identify idiomatic collocations in alternative to *very/really*+ *adjective*.

4.1. Looking up adverbs

Of the three paper dictionaries examined, Longman, Larousse-Rizzoli and Oxford Study, the general tendency was to list adverbs as separate headwords only when the translation-meaning differed substantially from that of the adjective. So, for example, *ampiamente*, *estremamente*, *leggermente*, *profondamente* and *radicalmente* all have headword status in one or more of the paper dictionaries; the most important of these, in translation terms, is *leggermente* (translating as *slightly*, not the more immediate *lightly*), and it is the only one of the lexical adverbs to be included by all three. As far as *molto* is concerned, the adverbial form is not morphologically distinct from the adjectival and pronominal uses, so no separate headword would be expected. In this case, however, Longman and Oxford Study include a usage box which focuses distinguishing the separate grammatical functions of *molto*.

The remaining adverbs, *altamente*, *fortemente*, *pesantemente* and *strettamente* are not listed under separate headwords; nor, however, are they listed explicitly within the entry for the corresponding adjectival form. In fact, while the adverbial function of the base forms *alto*, *forte*, *pesante*, *profondo* and *stretto* are listed, occasionally with information on collocations, such as *volare alto* [fly high] or *tener stretto* [hold tight], the meaning and use of the morphologically-distinct adverb can only be surmised. A learner wishing to check the translation into English of a collocation such as *fortemente convinto* [*strongly (i.e., deeply) convinced] is given no guidance whatsoever, leaving the creation of the correct English form to happenstance.

The situation in the Oxford-Paravia online is somewhat different, thanks mainly to the fact that space constraints no longer determine content.⁵ Here, every one of the adverbs sought was listed under the adverb form and, wherever the collocations suggested different translations, both collocations and sub-sense indicators are provided. This is especially important for those lexical adverbs whose metaphorical motivation does not transfer wholesale to English, such as

³ The need to locate the adjectives as well as the adverbial form is motivated by the fact that Italian makes less use of lexical adverbs *per se* than it does of the form *in modo* + *adjective*, or *con* + *noun* [with + noun]. Lower frequency reduces the likelihood of the adverb having headword status, or indeed being listed at all.

⁴ Examples from author's corpus of Italian advanced learners' writing.

⁵ Reference is made here to the full version, which requires (free) registration. In the author's experience, students do not register except under duress, and, in this particular case, an unregistered user would not gain access to the detailed information that is discussed here. The paper version was not consulted in this study.

profondamente (see 4.2). The inclusion of common Italian collocations and phrases greatly increases learners' chances of finding the right translation—should they look for it—and generally illustrates the range of vocabulary items on offer. The exception to this general rule is at *molto*, which is discussed in 4.3.

4.2. Finding the right meaning: identifying idiomatic collocations

If it is difficult to find adverbs in the paper dictionaries, the identification of appropriate, idiomatic translations is an even greater problem. In the few cases where the adverb is listed as a headword (*ampiamente* in Larousse-Rizzoli, *radicalmente* and *profondamente* in Oxford Study, *leggermente* in all three), collocates, sub-sense indicators, phrases and example all make some contribution, although they are limited by the space available. Where the adverb is not listed separately, are not mentioned at all, the user might be expected to extrapolate subsenses and collocation information from that given for the corresponding adjective, which is valid when the adverb is being used descriptively, but less likely to be so when it is being used textually, in conventional collocations. The author's learner corpus data supports this notion: where lexical adverbs are used as compositional submodifiers, contributing information value to the collocation, very few errors arise. However, when the submodification is noncompositional, errors are common, although overall instances are relatively rare. Lacking adequate collocational knowledge, learners who over-use *very*, *really* and *a lot* are often aware that their word-choice lacks lexical richness but simply do not know of another word which would be more suitable. Rather than risk making a mistake, they fall back on these fail-safe alternatives.

The situation in the larger Oxford-Paravia is, thankfully, much more promising. In a departure from the more traditional bilingual dictionaries, extensive information on collocates is provided, rather than relying on subsense indicators alone. The entry for *profondamente* (Figure 1) is exemplary, making use of a range of collocates and phrases to separate out the various translation meanings of this metaphorically-motivated adverb. The range of detail provided elsewhere is not always as rich as might be wished for. *Ampiamente* is well documented (five translations provided) yet *fortemente*, which is an extremely common lexical adverb in Italian, whose collocational preferences and metaphorical meanings differ significantly from those of the English equivalent *strongly*, is given one subsense (believe/suspect) and two separate collocates, *~coinvolto*, and *~industrializzato*. In other words, its treatment is much the same as that in the smaller paper dictionaries, where salient senses are privileged and figurative meanings implicit in the entry for the corresponding adjective.

avverbio
 [respirare, soffrire, commuovere] deeply; [odiare, disprezzare] intensely; [credere] passionately; [scavare] deep; ~ **influenzato, traumatizzato** profoundly affected, traumatized; **dormire** ~ to be sound o fast asleep; **impressionare** ~ **qcn.** to leave a deep impression on sb.; **essere** ~ **infelice, arrabbiato** to be bitterly unhappy, extremely angry; **sono** ~ **consapevole di questi problemi** I am acutely aware of these problems.

Figure 1. *profondamente* (Oxford-Paravia online)

4.3. Information about usage

In production, a learner will try to identify a target form by looking up the source language, but what happens when that form cannot be found? It would be desirable, though somewhat unrealistic, for the learner to try to guess the translation and then look up that hypothetical translation in a bilingual dictionary to check meaning and usage. This sometimes happens, of course, but it is more common for the learner, having failed to find the L1 term, to resort to avoidance strategies (i.e., not use anything) or fall back on a lexical teddy bear, in this case *very* or *really*. Learners who mainly make use of a monolingual dictionary will generally look up their hypothetical translation, but if its meaning does not tally with what they are trying to

express, the same strategies of avoidance or resorting to old favourites inevitably follow. In the specific case addressed in this contribution, the problem is not always that the adverb form cannot be located (though this also happens), but a more complex problem related to the primacy of salient meaning in a dictionary.

When collocates are listed in the Italian-English dictionary entries examined, particularly the collocates listed under the adjective (base) forms, it is implicit that these are “compositional collocates”, i.e. collocates which preserve their full salient meaning in combination with their (sub)modifiers, and whose (sub)modifiers too preserve their salient meaning. Thus *colpire* + *forte* [to hit + hard] represents a verb and the manner in which it is executed, as does *tenere* + *stretto* [to hold + tight]. The intensifying function of the adverbs examined is, as a general rule, entirely overlooked.

If lexical intensifying adverbs are badly documented in bilingual dictionaries, the logical consequence is that they will only be used by learners who have already encountered the forms in their reading. In this case, their successful deployment depends on the accuracy with which the learner has documented, on paper or in memory, the combinations that can be formed. There is some evidence to suggest that learners passively recognise such forms, but reproduce them erroneously as the meanings become confused with the patternings of the L1 equivalent (Philip 2005). Clearly, dictionary guidance on this matter would be of considerable help to advanced learners, who typically require help with such textual meanings in their essay-writing. Some information is provided in the monolingual learner dictionaries (see 5), but none is present in the bilinguals examined in this study.

Although Oxford-Paravia lists all of the adverbs as separate headwords, it too focuses too closely on their salient meanings. Some of the adverbs are always metaphorically-motivated—*altamente* is a case in point—and here the salient meanings transferred from the corresponding adjective are of necessity discarded. The translations are textual and guided by frequent collocates. *Ampiamente*, another metaphorically motivated adverb, is also treated well. It is those adverbs which have both salient and textual meanings which are problematic. *Leggermente* is divided into two subsenses, but no collocations are provided, leaving it to the learner to differentiate between what in English are two well-defined meanings, namely *slightly* and *lightly*. Rather than the sense indicators *appoggiare*, *muovere* [rest, move] and *toccare* [touch], glosses would be more helpful here in helping the learner differentiate (I) extent from (II) delicacy. The fact that *lightly* is far less frequent than *slightly* in corpus data might also be useful for the learner to know, as would the listing of some of the more common collocates of this adverb, many of which come from the domain of cooking *lightly knead*, *lightly salted*, etc.⁶ *Pesantemente* suffers from the same shortcomings, with salient meanings recorded, but no equivalents for collocations such as *pesantemente coinvolto* [heavily involved] or *pesantemente criticato* [strongly criticised]⁷

Given the inadequate treatment of intensification in these common intensifying adverbs, a learner might, as a last resort, look to the entries for *estremamente* or *molto* in the hope that some alternative wordings are suggested. Unfortunately, none are.

Longman’s entry at *molto* comprises a focus box providing information on (fairly elementary) grammar points, but a learner trying to translate *molto* as a submodifier is given only one option: *very*. The Oxford Study and Rizzoli-Larousse entries, while providing a little more detail and more sense divisions also give *very* as the only translation of *molto* with adjectives and adverbs. The main preoccupation with *molto* is to distinguish its grammatical role (adjective, adverb, pronoun) and to ensure that the translation is accurate both in terms of form and syntactic position. The Oxford-Paravia is a larger dictionary and, as expected, more information is provided for the adverb sense of *molto*, yet still the translations offered are still

⁶ Observation based on 56 million word corpus WordbanksOnline www.collins.co.uk/corpus/corpussearch.aspx

⁷ Italian data from CORIS <http://corpora.dslo.unibo.it/CORISCorpQuery.html>

limited to *very*, *very much*, *really* and *a lot*. None of the bilingual dictionaries offers information regarding synonyms of *very* or *really* in the English-Italian section. In other words, there is no provision made for the suggestion of more idiomatic synonyms. How this situation could be redressed is discussed in 5.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This examination of both monolingual and bilingual learner dictionaries casts a different light on learners' over-use of *very* and *really* and under-use of other intensifying adverbs. Users demand dictionaries which serve as complete language reference books, not simply books of words, and it is the author's opinion that the resulting inclusion of grammatical information is eating away at space which could be dedicated to more detailed lexical notes.

In the specific case of intensifying adverbs (and to a lesser extent, that of their counterparts, intensifying adjectives), there are various means of rectifying the current dearth of information in dictionaries. One approach which is equally relevant to monolingual and bilingual dictionaries would be to supplant the existing (primarily grammatical) information boxes at *molto/very* with information on collocation or, more crudely, lists of possible synonyms which cross-reference to the relevant entries elsewhere in the dictionary.⁸ Such information cannot plausibly cover all intensifiers, of course, and it would therefore be at the discretion of the lexicographical team to decide on a suitable cut-off point, if frequency of occurrence is the principal selection criterion. An alternative approach would be to identify two broad groups of intensifiers based on the freedom with which they combine with their collocates: the more flexible forms could be grouped together to illustrate a range of near-synonyms, while the more common metaphorically-motivated lexical forms could be listed under a warning header highlighting the need to make reference to the headword entry.

Of particular relevance to the monolingual advanced learner dictionaries is the need to do more with adverbs than simply listing them, implicitly or explicitly, as adjective derivatives. Advanced learners require information regarding the textual and functional meanings of the words they look up, and this does not appear to have been addressed well. The kind of information that is required includes indications regarding the propensity of the given word to associate with positive or negative collocates, or to indicate any prominent semantic preferences, as well as indicating fixed collocates: this is especially useful for the metaphorically-motivated intensifiers that have been the main object of study in this paper, as learners are apt to map the preferences of their L1 equivalent onto the English form, usually with less-than-satisfactory results. The succinct analyses in Kennedy (2003) may be a useful model to follow in compiling the necessary information for such amplified definitions.

Having analysed the presentation of lexical adverbs in the five main English dictionaries for advanced learners, some further considerations have emerged which relate merely to the position and presentation of adverbs in the entries. Firstly, it is not always easy to locate the adverb. The practice of separating adverbs from adjectives when their meaning differs substantially, but otherwise listing them as derivatives (and hidden near the end of the entry) makes lexicographical sense, but hinders the user in his or her attempts at finding the form and interpret its meaning correctly. COBUILD's practice of listing all derivatives in the same entry and separating them by meaning but not grammatical function may appeal less to lexicographers. However, from the user's point of view, the entry is easy to navigate and the transfer of meaning between adjectives and their derived adverbs is made explicit. Listing textual collocates in a dedicated section on writing skills (as in MED) is also helpful, but care must be taken to ensure that the information is reiterated under the relevant headwords: in the

⁸ In bilingual dictionaries, this kind of information would be of most practical use to the learner if located under *molto*, i.e., in the encoding side of the dictionary, as students encounter *very* early on in their learning and are therefore unlikely ever to look it up in a bilingual dictionary. They would be likely to look *very* up in a monolingual dictionary, especially if their chosen intensifying adverb were either unsuitable or simply undocumented.

collocation boxes examined (MED: see especially IW8, IW11 & IW18) the place of adverbs is implicitly subservient to the adjectives and verbs that they collocate with and, as a result, their importance is diminished. Cross-references would increase visibility, as well as ensuring that users can locate the necessary information under the relevant headword rather than having to look for it in a separate part of the dictionary.

There is always a mismatch between desiderata for dictionaries and what can realistically be included in the space available. Intensifying adverbs may not appear to be a top priority for the majority of learners, but learner corpus studies repeatedly demonstrate that they are problematic. At the very least, cross-references should be provided under *very* to these synonyms; even better would be to include a box highlighting the value of using lexical adverbs as alternatives to *very/really*. The CD-ROMs which now accompany learner dictionaries could easily provide more detailed information, perhaps even practice exercises. Bilingual dictionaries too could include some specific advice on the use of synonyms of *very*, by including lexical usage information alongside grammar notes, or simply by cross-referencing. Only in this way will learners be able to expand their vocabulary and begin to use lexical intensifying adverbs with confidence in their written production.

References

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