ENGLISH USAGE
FOR
FRESH STUDENTS

Edited by:-
Wale Osisanwo
## Foreword

The role, status and functions of the English Language in Nigeria are not in dispute as long as the country cannot replace the language with any of her over-four hundred indigenous languages. Unfortunately, as important as the Language is to the socio-political development of the country many of the products of our secondary education system moving to tertiary level have been found to be ill-equipped for tertiary education in terms of their competent in the English Language. Individual and collaborative efforts are being made by various institutions to solve this problem of linguistic incompetence of tertiary freshmen. One of such efforts is the production of this textbook by the Department of English Adeyemi College of Education running the degree programme of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

This text meets the demand for REMEDIAL and DEVELOPMENTAL work in English required for success in the University by the fresh student. Adequate attention is paid to the four basic skills of language; listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition problem areas such as spelling, tense, using the dictionary, using auxiliary verbs, and agreement are presented. Higher level skills covering summary, word formation, the paragraph and the research essay add to the very rich menu provided in the text.

The language is deliberately simplified so that an average freshman can pick up the text and work with it with very little assistance from the lecturer. It is our sincere hope that every fresh student will find the text very useful.

Wale Osisanwo

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE DICTIONARY

1.0 Introduction

The word “dictionary” is a household name in academics. It is the commonest and most readily available reference material. You must have been told several times, perhaps as a child, to “check it up”, in a dictionary, when you had a question about the spelling or meaning of a word. Over the years, new and more sophisticated dictionaries have emerged.

In this chapter we shall define the concept of the term “dictionary”, highlight and explain some of its specific functions. We shall equally discuss how dictionaries are structured and the type of information to be found in them. It is also our aim to itemize and discuss types of dictionaries. Readers will learn to use the many kinds of information in dictionaries and thus be better able to improve their writing, reading and speaking skills.

1.1 Definition Of a Dictionary

A worthwhile definition of a dictionary is one which contains its functions. The word “dictionary” is from the root word “diction”. The term “diction” as an English word is open to different definitions. Here, we shall simply define it as “choice of words”. Already a clue is given here of the meaning of dictionary; an inventory of words; a repertoire of words or a listing of words. As correct as this is, of the meaning of a dictionary, it is elusive of the functions of dictionaries. Dictionaries are not merely inventories of words but a great deal more.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionaries defines a dictionary as:

A book dealing with the words of a language, so as to set forth their orthography, pronunciation, signification, and use, their synonyms, derivation, and history, or at least some of these; these words are arranged in some stated order, now usually alphabetical; a word-book vocabulary, lexicon.

The above definition is explicitly about what a dictionary is. It clearly sets out the meaning, characteristics and content of dictionaries. As evident from the definition, a dictionary is a book containing any, some or all of the following:

(i) a word-book
(ii) a bringing together of the words of a language.
(iii) a book showing the (orthography of words) correct spelling; or spelling according to accepted usage; or the way in which words are conventionally written.
(iv) a book explaining the correct pronunciation and significant of words.
(v) a book showing similarities, derivation and or history of words.

Therefore we have such types as spelling, pronouncing, etymological, encyclopaedic and Thesaurus dictionaries. Before dealing with the types of dictionaries let us examine the use of dictionaries.

1.2 The Uses Of Dictionaries

A pertinent question at this juncture is, what dictionaries are used for? The question is half-answered above. Dictionaries are used for the functions they perform. Now let us examine some of the specific functions of dictionaries

(i) Dictionaries give definitions of words
(ii) They give the part of speech that words belong to.
(iii) Dictionaries give hints on pronunciation of words.
(iv) They supply the correct spellings of words.
(v) They give tense of words and use same in sentences
(vi) Dictionaries supply synonyms.
(vii) Dictionaries give the idiomatic expressions of words.
(viii) They supply the origin of words.
(ix) They give the words from which words currently treated are formed.
(x) They supply the figurative use of words.

1.3 Using Dictionaries

When you open the pages of a dictionary you will see two large words printed at the top of the pages, they are called
guidewords. These indicate the first and the last words entered alphabetically on the page. The guidewords help to speed up the process of locating a word.

An entry is made up of all the information about a word in the dictionary. The entries in most Advanced Learner’s Dictionaries of Current English usually follow this order:

1. Entry word
2. Pronunciation
3. Part of Speech
4. Etymology
5. Definition (or definitions) and usage
6. Synonyms
7. Words derived from the entry word
8. Idiomatic expression

It is noteworthy that not every item is included in every entry.

In most dictionaries, you will find that the bottom right hand page contains a key to the pronunciation symbols and other symbols used in the dictionary. There is often a more detailed set of symbols and abbreviation in the front or back of the book.

1.4 The Content Of A Dictionary Entry

The above items are the content of a dictionary entry. They are explained below:

Entry words are printed in dark type and divided into syllables. For instance when one is writing a long word cannot go into the available space on a line and has to be put on two lines, such division, custom dictates, should occur only between syllables.

At times one may notice what appear to be two entries for the same word. They are referred to as homographs (words that have the same spelling but different meanings). An example of a homograph is “minute”. This could either mean “one sixtieth part of an hour” or “very small in size”. As a result of these distinct meanings, most dictionaries give at least two entries for the spelling “Minute”.

Apart from listing complete words, many dictionaries usually list word parts such as the prefix (un) and suffix (ist) such words are useful in determining the meaning of combined forms such as “unsuitable” or “communist”.

Coming after the entry words, always given in parenthesis, is the pronunciation. Different dictionaries use different pronunciation and accent symbols, therefore one should endeavour to understand the system one’s dictionary uses. The pronunciation key at the bottom of the page can help one to determine the correct pronunciation of different words. Equally words with different pronunciation, due to different circumstances, are explained.

Next to pronunciation, boldly written letter or letters indicate the part a word belongs to. “vt” after the pronunciation of “enlist” indicates it is a verb transitive. In cases where the plural of a noun is not formed by simply adding “-s” or “-es” to the singular form, most dictionaries give the correct spelling of the plural form at this point. The designation “pl” introduces the plural form of words.

Followed by part of speech is the material within dark brackets which gives the etymology of the word. Etymology is the tracing of a word back to its origins. The entry of the word “entente” in some dictionaries contain in brackets after the part of speech “(Fr. oft. entendre, to understand)” which tells that the word comes from a French word which was derived from an old French word extensive meaning to understand.

Following the etymology is the definition of the entry word. Usually the definition is the only reason for looking up a word but the fact is that each dictionary entry gives much more than just the definition.

When after the definition one comes across the abbreviation SYN it implies synonym. Here words that are similar in meaning to the entry words are listed. Also slight differences in the meanings of the synonyms are pointed out.

In some cases, following some of the synonyms are additional words printed in bold type and divided into syllables. These are words derived from the entry word:
Cross-Reference occurs when in the discussion of etymology you see a word printed in small capital letters. They tell you to turn to another entry for additional information about the origin of the entry word.

It is noteworthy those abbreviations and symbols are used in many dictionaries to provide additional information about particular entries. In some dictionaries, for example, the symbol + is used to describe foreign words or phrases, while the symbol * is used to indicate a word or phrase that originated in America. It is important that whatever dictionary one uses, one should make sure that one is familiar with the abbreviation and symbols listed in the front or back of the book.

Let us examine an example of a dictionary entry, taken from the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English:

March /ˈmaːtslv/ (a) (1, lpr, lp) walks as soldiers do, with regular steps of length: Quick march! i.e. a military command to start marching: Demonstrators marched through the streets. (b) (l, lpr, lp) walk purposefully and determinedly: *she marched in and demanded an apology. (c) (Tn, pr, Tnp) cause (sth) to march: march the troops up and down. They marched the prisoner away. o she was marched into a cell. (2) (idm) get ones marching orders: give (sb) his/her marching orders (infml or joc) be told/tell sb to go; be dismissed/dismiss sb: she was totally unreliable so she got/was given her marching orders. 3(phr V) march past (sb) (of troops) march ceremonially past (an honoured guest, a high ranking officer, etc) e.g. in a parade. > marcher n: freedom marchers civil-rights marchers.

The following are the information contained in the above extract about the entry word “march”. They are itemized in their order of occurrence.

(i) The spelling of the word itself
(ii) Its pronunciation
(iii) The part of speech it belongs
(iv) Numbers 1, 2, 3, indicating that there is more than one definition given of the word.
(v) Codes showing the verb pattern
(vi) Meaning of the word/closely related meanings marked by letters a, b, c.
(vii) Examples of how the word may be used in sentences
(viii) Its idiomatic expression marked by (idm), etc.

1.5 Types Of Dictionaries

Generally there are different types of dictionaries, six types will be mentioned here.

(i) Abridged and unabridged dictionaries:

An unabridged dictionary is one massive volume dictionary containing several hundred thousand detailed entries. It is usually placed on a special stand in the school or public library. Occasionally one needs to use an unabridged dictionary. An unabridged dictionary is smaller in size and it contains lesser entries.

(ii) Spelling dictionary:

This is a special type of dictionary designed to supply information about the spelling of words. It equally gives information on how to master the system of writing correct spelling of words.

(iii) Pronunciation dictionary:

A dictionary designed specifically for pronunciation. It gives orderly information about the phonetics sounds and oral rendition of words.

(iv) Etymological dictionary:

The dictionary that sets out primarily to trace the starting point of words. Apart from tracing the origin of words, etymological dictionary also supplies information about the changes a particular word has undergone before its present form of achieved.
(v) Encyclopedic dictionaries:
These are dictionaries giving information about every branch of knowledge, or about one particular subject, with articles in alphabetical order. Examples are Encyclopaedia of music and Children’s Encyclopaedia.

(vi) Roget Thesaurus:
A book containing list of words and phrases grouped according to their meanings. Also a dictionary containing words of a certain type. An example is the Thesaurus of slangs.

1.6 Summary

Dictionaries are vital weapons for developing the amount and precision of one's vocabulary. They are important for reference in different subject area. Dictionaries are available in abridged and unabridged forms. They are also many specialized dictionaries of terms from particular technical or professional fields.

1.7 Exercise

(1) From which type of dictionary would you learn more details about the origin of “entail”?  
(2) What does the hyphen indicate before the entry “-ent”?  
(3) Using an Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, study the entry for “front” and write a sentence for each specific meaning of “front”  
(4) The word “slip” is used in ten different ways in the following sentences. Explain the meaning of the word as it is in each of the sentences:
   (i) Ruth slipped softly from the room.  
   (ii) The ship slipped its moorings.  
   (iii) It must have slipped my mind.

(iv) We all wrote our names on a slip of paper  
(v) Mother bought slips for the pillows in the guest room.  
(vi) Kemi slipped on a piece of ice yesterday.  
(vii) She is a slip of a girl.  
(viii) Why don’t you slip off your coat?  
(ix) The hunter slipped his dog.  
(x) Mr. Clinton made a bad slip while talking with the College Provost.

(5) With the aid of an appropriate dictionary, determine the meanings of the underlined words in the following sentences:
   (i) The Security men scoured the village for the missing girl.  
   (ii) As an artist, I do not subscribe to the school of Art for Art sake.  
   (iii) The Ex-Deputy Provost converted his assets into liquid form.  
   (iv) Because of the dangerous list, the captain called all hands.  
   (v) His profit margin on the fairly-used good was too low.  
   (vi) If the pilot is successful, the show will become a series.

Each of the following words has several different meanings. Consult the dictionary entry for each word. Use each word in three sentences to illustrate three meanings:
   (i) bark (ii) tip (iii) keep (iv) pledge (v) rail
List four synonyms for each of the following words. Use each synonym in a sentence that illustrates its specific meaning:
   (i) error (ii) crowd (iii) pleasure

What is etymology?
Advance two reasons of your own why we use dictionaries.
What are the differences between a list of words and a dictionary?
1.8 REFERENCES


