Book Review

Janusz Arabski, Andrzej Łyda, Krystyna Warchał. *Słownik angielskich frazemów akademickich.* Katowice: Oficyna Wydawnicza Wacław Walasek, 2009. vi + 192 pp. ISBN 978-83-60743-25-6.

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It has long been common knowledge that existing dictionaries hardly ever cover the combinatory potential of words used in academic prose in a satisfactory manner (Hollósy 1990: 536–537).[1] On the Polish dictionary scene, the palm for producing the first dictionary of this kind goes to Arabski, Łyda and Warchał's *Słownik angielskich frazemów akademickich* (*SAFA*): a most welcome development, granted the circle of people who must present their research results in English has, during the past fifteen years or so, expanded by thousands of teacher-training college students, to name but one among user groups interested in this particular language variety.[2]

The work opens with a relatively short front matter, consisting of an introduction ('Wstęp', pp. 7–11) and a user's guide ('Korzystanie ze słownika', pp. 11–14). Its central wordlist (dictionary proper, pp. 17–177), features an alphabetically ordered set of lemmata, extracted primarily from Coxhead's *Academic Word List* (2000). Items considered important but not included in Coxhead had, in turn, been retrieved from the *General Service List* (1953) by Michael West. The dictionary ends with a Polish-English index (pp. 178–192).

Regarding *SAFA's* front matter, the first impression one gets of the introduction and the user's guide (both in the user's L1) is that each of them was created with a slightly different user group in mind. The latter, with most of its space occupied by a few sample dictionary entries and explanations (of the conventions employed) in prose reduced to a minimum, is simplicity itself; as such, it was possibly meant for those who want to use the dictionary without getting involved in a theoretical debate on all possible aspects of the phenomenon under consideration. As regards the former, fellow academics, especially those in the humanities will, without a doubt, remember it as yet another fine example of scholarly prose, but a question remains whether average users are indeed going to derive much benefit from the presence in it of references or a list of the literature cited at the end, in short, features that seem slightly out of place in an introduction to a dictionary, though they would, of course, be most appropriate in, say, a conference paper.

As far as I am able to judge, the majority of users specified in the work's prefatory matter might be better served had the introduction included a short list of the dos and don'ts holding for the phenomenon in question. To provide the reader with only one example, it is a well known fact that 'some collocational ranges whose members have shared features of meaning are more extensive than others' (Cowie 1981: 223). A note of warning informing the user that such ranges cannot always be extended at will (*meet the demand*, but not **encounter the demand*)[3] does seem justified, especially that restrictions of that kind have not been made explicit in the work's microstructure.[4]

Another potentially useful addition to the introduction might be a list of sources to be consulted in case one found the treatment of certain language issues offered by this dictionary unsatisfactory from the point of view of his/her reference needs. What I mean here is, firstly, a reference to a few well-known usage guides.[5] Next, since compilers of *SAFA* are themselves experienced academic teachers, I in no way think they would disagree that the

average user's knowledge of general and specialized dictionaries, not infrequently limited to works such as *Oxford Wordpower* or, in the specialized category, *Oxford Collocations,* could be extended by pointing at, for instance, *Dzierżanowska*, the now slightly forgotten *English Adverbial Collocations*, the *BBI*, or those quality bilinguals which try to give the learner a wider context, a word *and* the company it typically keeps. Such features, if present, would, in my opinion, be more justified than the aforementioned overview of the most important theoretical contributions on collocation, where I fear the only firm impression left in the user's mind may be that of phraseology as of yet another field 'bedevilled by the proliferation of terms' (Cowie 1998: 210).

On the other hand, those who do take the trouble and read the introduction (as we know all too well, few users actually do), will find there a number of important facts, for instance, a brief discussion of the current status of English as an auxiliary language of international scholarship, the specification of the work's assigned goals, the level of English at which a user should be (this is, without a doubt, an important piece of information, especially for EFL and ESP teachers who would like to use the book to expand their students' lexical repertoire), and, finally, an overview of the user groups for whom the work was written. As the authors go on to explain, to be fully accepted by an international academic community, one has to demonstrate a native-like command of the target language. This involves, among other things, understanding that a given expression must be 'learned [– and reproduced – D.O.] as an integral whole, and not pieced together from its component parts' (Palmer 1933: 5, as cited in Cowie 1998: 211). Conversely, ignoring the company words keep will inadvertently 'obscure […] the scientific and scholarly results claimed' (Hollósy 1990: 535), and, in consequence, reduce the overall quality of the work.

To pursue the second element of the work's structure listed above, the dictionary proper, one of the first problems compilers of phraseological dictionaries have to resolve is, undoubtedly, the criteria a multi word expression must meet to qualify for inclusion in a dictionary of that kind. It is at that point that one enters 'the fuzzy zone between free combinations and idioms proper' (Cowie 1998: 211), with purely pragmatic considerations often responsible for the inclusion of items which would otherwise be barred access to the dictionary. Next, one has to decide whether syntactic information (e.g. information concerning the complementation patterns of verbs or nouns) should also be included or should the work confine itself to what some scholars (e.g. Cowie 1998: 225) call 'genuine grammatical collocation' (e.g. verb + preposition or adjective + preposition), leaving the lexicographic description of the former to a valency dictionary. Over and above all these considerations, one should mention the issue of access and it is this particular issue that I would like to concentrate on below as one that may cause serious problems for the user.

The issue itself is not new and has long been known in the literature as the semasiological *versus* the onomasiological approach to collocation (Cop 1990).[6] For reasons of space, suffice it to say that the former entails cases in which the sense of one of the combination's components varies depending on its lexical surroundings (cf. *small talk, small hours* and *small change*), which, in turn, justifies the inclusion of a base under the collocate, an approach fostered in EFL dictionaries which must cater for both the encoding and decoding needs of the target group. In the case of encoding (active) dictionaries, and this is the assigned purpose of the work under review, their design and, consequently, entry orientation, stems from a recognition that the main problem a non-native user of English is going to have is 'one of choosing an acceptable adjective [verb or adverb – D.O] from an arbitrarily limited set' (Cowie 1998: 223), and not the other way round. This results in

including verb and adjective collocates at noun bases and adverb collocates at verb bases, a policy followed in the aforementioned *BBI* or *Selected English Collocations*, but not in *SAFA*, a decision its compilers will find hard to defend. This brings us to the question whether a clear omission such as this one can still be rectified in the work's future edition as well as a few possible courses of action left for the compilers should they, indeed, decide to have the entry reoriented in a way specified above.

The solution I decided for in the case of my own dictionary of collocations was to append the work with an English index. Though preparing the index was a very time-consuming process, once implemented, it gave the user access to hundreds of nouns which would otherwise remain hidden at respective verb entries.[7] Needless to say, the same policy had to be employed for nouns listed at some of the work's adjective entries. Implementing the same solution for *SAFA* would inform the user that important nouns such as *assumption, attempt, claim, effort, model, plan, term, theory* and *thesis* can be accessed *via abandon*, v., whereas *concept, domain, entity, feature, form, idea, information, knowledge, level, method, object, principle, problem* and *terms* are to be looked for under *abstract*, adj.

Improving *SAFA's* access profile could also be achieved by having the material in question repeated, that is leaving the nouns where they are (i.e. in respective verb and adjective entries), and then appending V:N and Adj:N sections of the noun entries in question with those collocating verbs and adjectives which are now listed at the aforementioned verb and adjective entries. This kind of treatment was, indeed, given to one of the nouns listed at *abandon*, v.: *theory*. As regards other nouns recorded at *abandon,* some of them (e.g. *assumption* and *thesis*) are themselves entries. As such, they had been appended with a considerable number of verbal collocates (in the case of *assumption*, these include *accept, admit, base on, challenge, contradict, deny, disprove, prove, put forward, question, rebut, refute, rest on, support, test, underline, undermine, underpin, violate* and *work on*) and it is all but clear why *abandon* has not been listed as one of them. With regard to other nouns listed under *abandon* (*claim, effort, model, plan* and *term*), they were not accorded entry status, and are, as a consequence, not included in the central wordlist.

Of course, one may always argue that users should be equally well-served by the Polish-English index (incidentally the last component specified at the beginning of our discussion) which the work does have. This would concern scholars who write in Polish, but must, then, have a certain part of the work (e.g. an abstract) translated or, perhaps, less advanced users, accessing some L2 items via L1. The problem I have with this line of reasoning, though, is that to be of any practical value to the user, the Polish entry points would have to constitute a perfect match with L1 items which prompted the search. To see if this is, indeed, the case, I carried out a very simple simulation with an authentic Polish sentence fragment *Materiał do badań zaczerpnięty został z 60 artykułow …*, my starting point thus being *zaczerpnąć materiał.* Needless to say, none of the two has found its way into the Polish-English index.

Going back to *SAFA's* entry structure, one more solution the authors may want to implement in the work's future editions would entail eliminating some of the material included in what the authors call the phraseme section. The way it has been done in the present edition was simply to reproduce material found in a corpus of 2400 authentic texts representing academic prose. As a result, one of the illustrative examples found at *available* reads *data are available for,* followed by *data are not available for.* This does seem a bit extravagant and I dare say better uses could be found for some of the valuable dictionary space reclaimed had such unnecessary repetitions been condensed or eliminated altogether.

One of them would entail extending the macrostructure (now featuring about 500 headwords) by items which were not granted entry status in the present edition or appending individual entry sections with additional material extracted from other dictionaries.

Among the solutions worth commending (one can, indeed, see that methodological issues played an important role in giving the work its final shape, a fact which is hardly surprising granted the professional background – and expertise – of the team of scholars responsible for its compilation), one should name a decision to have the overall entry structure as well as some of the conventions employed partly derivative of such well-known dictionaries as *Oxford Collocations*. Having a format many of the user groups specified in the work's prefatory matter are well-familiar with *is* important: it is common knowledge that many of them do lack the reference skills needed to make dictionary consultation a successful one. On the other hand, here too, the authors may consider it worthwhile employing, in future editions, such time-proven solutions as having some of the collocates arranged in semantically-related groups rather than alphabetically.

The specified omissions notwithstanding, the work is an important step forward and a very valuable addition to one's collection of publications on academic English. Therefore, I highly recommend it to all user groups specified, to have and to hold from this day forward, in good and, especially, in bad times of lexical crisis.

Notes

[1] The same concerns writing manuals: those few (e.g. Macpherson 1994; Osuchowska and Kleparski 2009) which do have sections devoted to 'comings-together-of-words', are usually not in a position to offer enough to be considered a reliable source of the respective section of the lexicon.

[2] The author would like to express gratitude to Professor G. A. Kleparski for reading the present version of the review carefully. Likewise, many thanks are due to Mr D. Trinder for acting as my language consultant. Obviously, all the remaining errors are entirely my own responsibility.

[3] An authentic example, extracted from a master's thesis by one of this author's students, who motivated his decision to change what he found in a monolingual learner's dictionary by saying that *encounter* is more formal than *meet* and, thus, 'more appropriate' in a formal piece of writing.

[4] As is the case with *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* which uses the 'danger sign' (an exclamation mark placed within a triangle).

[5] E.g. the *Oxford Guide to English Usage* by Weiner and Delahunty.

[6] See also Wanner (1996), for a comprehensive overview of this and related issues.

[7] The inclusion policy described above met with a justified, as I see it now, criticism on part of my PWN reviewer, who argued that other dictionaries on the market (the ones he mentioned were *Dzierżanowska* and the *BBI*) did it 'the other way round'. Dzierżanowska, herself a distinguished scholar, academic teacher and translator, seems to have intuitively known that since 'it is the noun that sets the semantic context of the sentence' (Dzierżanowska 1982: 7), she must have the verb listed at the (noun) base; later research (e.g. Siepmann 2006: 10) only confirms that it is, indeed, with the noun that the user's 'formulation process' starts. The authors of the *BBI* must have been following the same line of reasoning: the lexical collocation section at verbs treated as bases consists only of

collocating adverbs, the remaining part of the entry featuring what the authors of this particular dictionary call 'grammatical collocation' (verb patterns).

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