

## Book review

# The New Penguin Dictionary of Civil Engineering

**David Blockley. London: Penguin Books. 2005. xxiv, 533 pp., ISBN 0-140-51526-7. SIT 7.430.**

## Introduction

The New Penguin Dictionary of Civil Engineering is a monolingual explanatory dictionary. According to the author, it aims to support not only civil engineers, but anyone who seeks to enhance his/her understanding of this professional field: construction experts, clients, researchers, and students. The dictionary is primarily aimed at professionals and students in English speaking countries, yet, considering the fact that bilingual technical dictionaries are still missing for some smaller languages, it can also be helpful to specialists from these communities. In my review, I will first present the structure of the dictionary and then dwell on the benefits this dictionary provides to ESP students.

## Structure of the dictionary

As said above, *The New Penguin Dictionary of Civil Engineering* is a monolingual explanatory dictionary. On 533 pages, the author lists headwords in the alphabetical order and explains them with definitions written in English. In this review, the dictionary is assessed for findability of terms, consistency of entries, and overall usability.

In the front matter, the author presents several data useful to the prospective user: abbreviations of subject categories, mathematical units, and organizations, and a list of units and conversion factors. In the User's guide the author provides information to the user on how to use the dictionary, especially on how to find the terms searched. The principles the author followed in entering the terms into the dictionary are explained. Not all terms have their separate entries, subordinate terms, according to the author, are entered at their super-ordinate lemmata, such as "*pumping* at *pump* and *resinous* at *resin*". The author seems, however, not to follow this principle consistently. I looked up the words *pump* and *resin* to search for *pumping* and *resinous*, as advised by the author, but could find neither of them. Nor are these two terms entered separately. What the author probably meant by his statement in the introduction was that he expected the user to deduce the meaning of derivatives by himself/herself. This can be

acceptable for pumping, but much less for resinous, especially for a non-English user who might not be familiar with word-formation principles and might not see the link between the two words. In the User's guide the author also introduces the user to influential words entered in the dictionary as separate entries (and labeled "*influential words*") and in a mind map attached to the dictionary in the Appendix. Influential words are actually words figuring in general language, such as *environment*, *quality*, *culture*, *judgment*, which have been transferred to a specialized language. Their inclusion in the dictionary seems to be a valuable one, especially because their meaning is explained within the frame of civil engineering. *Culture*, for example, is explained as "the prevailing customs and attitudes within an organization or 'the way we do things around here'".

The main body of the dictionary contains a headword in bold script, subject category in square brackets showing the sub-field to which the headword belongs, and a definition in English. Most of the definitions are written in sufficiently simple language to be understood by the non-English user as well, at least by the one who masters English at the intermediate level. Subordinate terms, as explained, are entered at their super-ordinate terms. So, the dictionary article starting with the headword *pump* lists and briefly explains the following types of pumps: *air lift pump*, *centrifugal pump*, *concrete pump*, *displacement pump*, *mud pump*, *propeller pump*, and *axial flow pump*. The subordinate terms are in italic which means that they are explained more precisely in separate entries arranged according to the alphabetic order. Here again, some inconsistency can be found. Coming back to *pump*, one cannot understand why *mud pump* does not figure in a separate entry, whilst all the above listed pumps do. Unlike other types of pumps, *mud pump* is only explained at *pump* and no separate entry is added.

There are two additional dictionary features to be mentioned in this review. The first are cross-references at entries which direct the user to other places in the dictionary in his/her search of terms. Illustrations are the second important characteristic of this dictionary. They are added to some dictionary articles as a valuable aid for enhancing the user's understanding of explanations. It is a pity that the illustrations are rather scarce, yet this dictionary was not intended to be an illustrative one.

## The dictionary and the ESP student

It has to be said right from the beginning that *The New Penguin Dictionary of Civil Engineering* is primarily intended for native subject specialists. A non-native student who, moreover, is a beginner in the field will encounter some difficulties, not so much in understanding the meaning of terms as in finding the correct counterparts to the English terms in his/her native language. Bilingual technical dictionaries, it is true, are a much quicker reference for finding exact words in the user's mother tongue. Yet, considering the fact that specialized bilingual dictionaries are still missing for smaller languages (for example Slovene), the user has to do with what is available in the market.

Forgetting the impossibility of directly obtaining the counterparts in his/her mother tongue, we may still say that an ESP user can derive several benefits from an explanatory dictionary. The explanations may serve the user not only to find the

meaning of the English word searched (and consequently possibly the counterpart in his/her native language), but also to learn some important features about English. Written English explanations may help the user to grasp an idea of the principle of writing explanations, which he/she may use in his/her subsequent professional activity. An attentive reader of the explanations will also notice important collocations, the co-occurrence of words that are language specific. For example, in reading the explanation at the entry *area separation wall*, the user may learn such English collocations as *to construct a wall*, *to design a wall*, *the fire spreads*, and *the fire extends from foundation to the roof*. Knowing collocations will help him/her to produce correct English sentences in writing and speaking.

Other advantages that the user may gain from this explanatory dictionary are: (1) receiving training in dictionary use in general (for example understanding the importance of subject categories, cross-references), (2) getting the notion that terms have different meanings in different subject fields (the author discusses each meaning under a separate Arabic number), (3) learning irregular plurals (for example *bacterium* – *bacteria*), (4) distinguishing between British and American spellings (for example *storey* and *story*), and (5) getting the awareness of parallel spellings (for example *savanna* or *savannah*). These features all figure in the dictionary, it remains with the user to notice them and make use of them.

## Conclusion

It can be said in conclusion that The New Penguin Dictionary of Civil Engineering is a valuable reference tool for a civil engineer and a student in the process of acquiring professional knowledge. Despite some deficiencies, especially somewhat hindered findability, the dictionary provides necessary information in a clear and concise way. An ESP student, too, may benefit from it, especially if he/she is given some introductory explanation on the dictionary specifics by his/her teacher.

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