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硕 士 学 位 论 文

An Exploration of Usage Labels in C-E Dictionaries

汉英词典中用法标签的一种探索

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Synopsis

Dictionaries are considered to be the best teachers to language learners. For competence in communication, appropriateness is much more important than correctness. To indicate usage information about appropriateness, dictionaries resort to usage labels.

With the study of C-E dictionaries, we find that usage labels are widely applied, but the labeling practice is not consistent and many aspects need to be improved. A close look at the front matter of the three selected C-E dictionaries reveals that the labeling system is incomplete and in a disorder in C-E dictionaries.

The present thesis studies the problems on usage labels in C-E dictionaries from two perspectives: macrostructure and microstructure. Through this study, the present author thinks that the macrostructure of a C-E dictionary should provide users with a general but complete picture of the usage label system. There are mainly three sections to present the usage label information in the front matter of a C-E dictionary. The first is to give a general introduction of usage labels information. The second is to design a special category for usage labels. The third is to make a list of all usage labels as a quick reference, so that users can find them quickly and conveniently. In the microstructure of a C-E dictionary, there are two problems. The first is what kind of entries need to be labeled. The second is how to label them. Because of sparse theoretical documentation on this topic, this thesis is an explorative study. Some suggestions to improve the current usage labeling practice in C-E dictionaries are given by the present author, but more studies in this field are needed.

Key words: usage label; C-E dictionary; macrostructure; microstructure

摘　要

　　词典作为语言学习者最好的老师，能提供给他们多方面的语言信息。除了能指导使用者正确使用词语外，还要为他们提供成功交际必需的用法信息。词典中的用法标签就是指导使用者在不同的场景中选择合适的词语好帮手，无疑在词典中提供用法标签对帮助使用者成功交际就显得极为重要。

　　在对汉英词典用法标签的研究中，我们发现绝大多数的词典中都有用法标签，使用也相当广泛，但是它们标注不一致，比较混乱，存在着很多问题，这在很大程度上困扰了读者，还有可能给读者在使用上造成误导。

　　本文作者从微观和宏观两个方面探讨用法标签在汉英词典中的现状和存在的问题：宏观方面，有些词典没有列出该词典中所有的用法标签，用法标注信息没有一个完整的系统，分布显得分散凌乱，不利于使用者对用法标签信息形成整体印象。本文作者建议，用法标签信息的宏观方面应包含三方面的信息：第一：关于词典中用法标签大概情况的介绍；第二：对词典中用法标签具体信息的说明，如标签的涵义，分类等；第三：要列出在词典中使用的所有用法标签帮助使用者快速、方便查阅。微观方面，存在有两个问题：第一：确定哪些词条需要用法标签；第二：如何标注。由于这方面的文献资料十分少见，本文作为一种探索性研究，本文作者尝试给出了汉英词典中用法信息的一些改进建议，有待于以后学者进一步的研究。

关键词：用法标签；汉英词典；宏观结构；微观结构

Contents

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A List of Abbreviations Used in this Thesis

AHD   American Heritage Dictionary (The Fourth Edition)

C-E   Chinese-English

CED   Chinese-English Dictionary《汉英词典》修订版. 北京外国语大学
                               英语系, 北京：外语教学与研究出版社, 1995.

NACED   New Age Chinese-English Dictionary《新时代汉英大词典》吴景
                               荣, 程镇球, 北京：商务印书馆, 2004.

NCCED   A New Century Chinese-English Dictionary《新世纪汉英大词典》
                               惠宇, 北京：外语教学与研究出版社, 2003.

W3   Webster's Third New International Dictionary (The Third
                               Edition)

WNCD   Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (The Third Edition)

WNWD   Webster's New World Dictionary (The Second Edition)

Chapter One　Introduction

Language is never homogenous, to the contrary, it is always changing and so there are variations in all aspects of language. Native speakers develop their intuition to different feelings evoked by different usages and they follow the conformity of the usage conventions unconsciously with minor disagreement, while foreign learners do not. Foreign learners have no awareness of the distinction between different usages and have no sense of language appropriateness. So it is easy to understand why foreign learners can speak a target language correctly but not appropriately, the situation of which makes the target-langauge listeners uncomfortable.

Dictionaries are the silent teachers and the best friends for language learners, especially foreign learners. General dictionaries provide users with information about correct spelling, pronunciation, grammatical category, definition, examples and etymology. With all the above information users can produce correct sentences but it is not sufficient for a competent speaker who needs to know how to use the right word at the right time in the right situation. So it is also necessary that the dictionaries contain the information about the usage information that helps users to use language not just correctly but also appropriately. Compared with monolingual dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries need to pay more attention to usage information to help learners avoid mistakes, because foreign learners may evoke negative feelings of the listener as a result of their limited familiarity of the language and lack of instinctive guide.

Usage information is presented mainly in two forms in most bilingual dictionaries: usage labels, also called abbreviations or symbols, and usage notes or passages. Many words that designate the same entity in the real world are not interchangeable in different contexts. Because every word has its own style, some are slang, some are formal and some are only used in a restricted region. The usage information in bilingual dictionaries will help the users to obtain the purpose of appropriateness in communication.

1.1 Research background

According to Zgusta (1971: 332), lexicographers use these classificatory labels to indicate that a lexical unit belongs to a certain dialect, or to a restricted language (technical, terminological) or to a social stratum (argot) or to a stylistic level, etc. He also suggests that labels cover the variation of language and connotation. From his perspective, the purpose of usage labels is to inform the user of a descriptive fact of language.

Hartmann (2000: 153) defines usage label as the marking of a word or phrase as typical or appropriate in a particular context or language variety. And he also points out that dictionaries differ widely in the scope and consistency of their labeling practices. As for bilingual dictionary users, the Non-native learners are deemed to need explicit guidance, even warnings, about usages. He proposes a more detailed classification of usage labels.

Huang (1985: 142) also thinks that the connotation of an entry should be marked with labels, and also classifies them into six types. They are temporal labels, regional labels, social labels, frequent labels, metaphorical labels, and subject labels.

For C-E dictionaries, there is little theoretical works on usage labels, but the perspectives and attitudes of compilers can be concluded from the practice of dictionaries.

In previous studies, the lexicographers and compilers have different attitudes towards usage labels and different classifications of usage labels. But few of them examine the whole labeling system and detailed labeling practice in C-E dictionaries. In this thesis, the present author will examine the labeling system in C-E dictionaries and take a close look at the labeling consistency and give some suggestions to make usage labels in C-E dictionaries more helpful to users.

1.2 Scope of the topic

The usage in this study is used in its broad sense, which in lexicography means it is not

just the good correct usage. The usage label in this study is in its narrow sense. It is defined as the marking of a word or phrase as typical or appropriate in a particular context or language variety which excludes the grammatical labels and the etymological labels. The dictionaries chosen for this study are general bilingual dictionaries, not including specialized dictionaries or even usage dictionaries. This thesis will focus on the examination of usage labels in C-E dictionaries, and the present author selects three well-known C-E dictionaries as sample to study the labeling practice in C-E dictionary. Through this study the author aims to get a clear picture of usage label system and labeling practice in C-E dictionaries and then give some suggestions to make a better and more user-friendly labeling system.

There are several reasons why the present author has chosen the present topic. First, from her own experience of consulting dictionaries as a language learner the present author has benefited a lot from usage labels as they can provide users with great guidance and help in using a foreign language appropriately. Second, when further examining the usage labels in dictionaries, the present author finds that the applications of usage labels in C-E dictionaries are incongruous. There is a wide inconsistency in every aspect of usage labels, from the selection of usage labels to the definitions and then to the classifications. Some dictionaries use a great number of detailed usage labels while others have a few. And the same word has different labels in different dictionaries. For instance, an entry labeled "informal" in a dictionary can be labeled "colloquial" in another. Why does the same word bear different labels? What is the difference between the two labels that are attached to the same entry? Are they interchangeable? In addition, most C-E dictionaries do not provide definitions or explanations of usage labels, instead they merely give a list of abbreviations or symbols of the labels and take it for granted that users would understand what all the symbols or abbreviations mean. The practical importance and a close examination of these problems of usage labels lead the present author to the choice of this topic, to her contribution to a better usage label system in C-E dictionaries.

Although this topic is interesting, meaningful and helpful, it is much more difficult than expected. First, usage itself has undergone much change with the development of

lexicography, from the prescriptive good usage to the descriptive objective usage. Now there are still disagreements among different lexicographers. Second, labeling in dictionaries has long been criticized for lack of well-organized systems and consistency. Third, the complete theoretical material is sparse about this category in dictionaries except some scattered information in some articles and books. As to the C-E dictionaries, all the above difficulties become much severer, because so much work have to be done with little help or guidance.

1.3 Research methodology of the present author

Sampling: The author will choose the entries that begin with letter F in three C-E dictionaries as a sample for usage labels investigation.

Case studies: The author will select some entries as examples for close examination.

Contrastive analysis: The contrastive analysis is carried out to see the different usage labels and different usage labeling practices in the chosen C-E dictionaries.

Comparison: The comparison of the same entry with different labeling practices will be done and the result will be analyzed to give some suggestions to make the labeling system better.

1.4 Organization of the present thesis

There are five chapters in this thesis:

Chapter One gives a general introduction of the research, including the rationale, significance, the scope and the research methods of the present study, and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two provides a background to usage studies and usage labeling practices in C-E dictionary, such as definitions, distinction of the similar terms, previous researches and relevant studies.

Chapter Three investigates the consistencies and discrepancies of usage labels and