

**Review of "Jenny Thumb: *Dictionary Look-up Strategies and the Bilingualised Learner's Dictionary*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004."**

I must admit that I was rather sceptical when I started reading this new book on research in the use of learner's dictionaries. During the years I have read a number of reports on dictionary use research and I have always been impressed by the gigantic work done by the researchers in comparison with the relatively poor – and often contradictory – results. The hitherto research in dictionary use reflects obviously a reasonable desire to put the dictionary user and his/her needs in the centre of lexicographic research, but I have always had serious doubts whether this approach to the exploration of the user's needs is the right and most effective one. Of course, the real findings of this kind of research must not be disregarded as they are valuable bricks that can be used in the construction of the lexicographic building. In this way, the research in dictionary use can and should be complementary to other forms of user research, or to express it in another way, it can and should be integrated in a general theory of lexicography and, in this case, a general theory of learner's lexicography (Tarp 2004).

The real weak point in Jenny Thumb's book is that her research is not integrated in such a theory, and this is probably due to the fact that she is intimately related to the British lexicographic tradition where the «theoretical» discussions are mainly of a pragmatic character dealing with particular problems without putting them into a general theoretical framework. But once this is said, it must also be stated that Jenny Thumb's book improves on acquaintance and is highly interesting and inspiring.

The topic of the book is a think-aloud study of look-up strategies of advanced learners of English in Hong Kong using bilingualised English-Chinese learner's dictionaries in order to assist the understanding of an English text. The author pretends to address four main research questions in her study:

1. «How can we analyze and describe look-up strategies in the bilingualised learner's dictionaries?
2. What look-up strategies do students use when they are reading and need to find the meaning of a target word in a bilingualised English-Chinese learner's dictionary?
3. To what extent do different look-up strategies make use of the bilingualised entries in the English-Chinese learner's dictionary?
4. To what extent are look-up strategy patterns specific to individual students or are there common patterns among the students?» (p. 2)

The book begins with a general introduction to the use of dictionaries in Hong Kong schools and the popularity of bilingualised learner's dictionaries, i.e. English monolingual learner's dictionaries that have been translated into Chinese while maintaining the original features. Then it proceeds to a chapter called «Literature Review», the longest in the book where the problematic and aim of the study is presented and discussed. It consists of four main sections. The first deals with the so-called reference needs and skills and represents one of the less convincing parts of the book due to the theoretical problems mentioned above. The second is an overview of the bilingualised learner's dictionaries, the different types of definitions used in this kind of dictionary and the hitherto empirical studies done in this field. The third section is a short presentation of the present state of dictionary use research where different research methods are discussed (interviews, observation, tests, questionnaires, recording, protocols, think-aloud) and where Jenny Thumb argues in favour of the latter as «an effective tool for collecting valuable and valid data on look-up behaviour for the present study» (p. 33). The fourth section is a historical, theoretical etc. approach to the think-aloud study and the so-called stimulated recall interview that should complete the former. The chapter as a whole represents a well-founded and convincing introduction to the following chapters.

Chapter 3 deals with the research methodology. The author carried out two related think-aloud and stimulated recall interview studies, one preliminary with only two students in order to devise a preliminary coding scheme for identifying and describing dictionary look-up strategies, and a second study involving a larger number of students and aimed to revise and finalize the preliminary coding scheme and address the four research questions concerning look-up strategies. The chapter examines the selections of informants, the three texts to be read and the dictionaries to be used as well as procedures, i.e. instructions for the informants, the atmosphere during the think-aloud sessions, video and audio taping of the sessions, observation of the informant, follow-up questionnaire, stimulated recall interview and data transcription and analysis. The chapter leaves the impression of a solid and meticulous preparation for the test.

Chapter 4 addresses the first research question: How can we analyze and describe look-up strategies in the bilingualised learner's dictionaries? Already in the analysis of the preliminary study, the various communication units that were differentiated could be organised in «three different kinds of mental operations which were called 'executive', 'cognitive' and 'metacognitive'» (p. 58). On that basis, the following operations of the three kinds – or levels – were identified during the dictionary look-up test (p. 62-65):

<b>Executive operations</b>	<b>Cognitive operations</b>	<b>Metacognitive operations</b>
Beginning look-up task Starting research Searching headword Referring headword Referring entry Referring spelling Referring grammar Referring pronunciation Referring definition Referring text Referring example Referring usage Referring idioms Referring features Referring dictionary Writing definition Ending look-up task	<p><i>On reading text:</i> Using grammar Constructing from context</p> <p><i>On dictionary text:</i> Searching alphabetically Locating Focusing spelling Focusing entry Focusing grammar Comparing grammatical form Realizing definition Focusing Chinese Focusing English Matching definition Accepting Focusing example Focusing idiom Focusing usage Cross-referencing Formulating meaning</p> <p><i>On both reading and dictionary texts:</i> Focusing pronunciation Matching Focusing features Realizing shared meaning Choosing definition Refining meaning Inferring meaning</p>	Planning Using prior knowledge Initiating search strategy by spelling Initiating search strategy by pronouncing Monitoring Postponing meaning search Terminating meaning search Evaluating task Terminating look-up task

On the basis of the identification of the above executive, cognitive and metacognitive operations during the look-up sessions, Jenny Thumb concludes that «it is possible to describe look-up strategies in terms of regularly occurring sequences of operations» (p. 65-65), thus responding affirmative to the first research question.

Chapter 5 responds to the second research question: What look-up strategies do students use when they are reading and need to find the meaning of a target word in a bilingualised English-Chinese learner's dictionary? Jenny Thumb

identifies seven different look-up strategies which are then carefully explained and discussed: 1) ignoring, 2) assuming, 3) minimizing, 4) checking, 5) paraphrasing, 6) stretching and 7) maximizing. These seven differentiated strategies «offer empirical evidence for the hypothesis that the look-up strategies involve a series of deliberate, metacognitive and cognitive steps learners take to assist in acquiring, storing, and retrieving dictionary information» (p. 85) and «were also found to be used by learners of different studies involving the use of monolingual dictionaries and bilingual dictionaries» (p. 88).

Chapter 6 deals with the third research question: To what extent do different look-up strategies make use of the bilingualised entries in the English-Chinese learner's dictionary? The study showed that of the total of 259 look-ups made by the 18 informants in the main session, 185 were only in the Chinese part (L1) of the dictionary, 62 in both the Chinese and English parts (L1/L2) and only 12 in the English part (L2). It also showed that «the specific strategies appeared to have elicited specific use of bilingualised entries» (p. 90). This finding was also influenced by other factors: «Look-up strategies, language preference and L2 definitions appeared to have exerted stronger influence on the use of the bilingualised entries, however, than language proficiency and target words» (p. 96-97), and at the same time, «it appears that higher English language proficiency may not necessarily elicit use of the L2 or L1/L2. Conversely, lower English language proficiency may not necessarily discourage use of the L2 or L1/L2 part» (p. 93). Jenny Thumbs makes the following conclusion:

«The hypothesis that bilingualised dictionary users will find reading only the translated text sufficient, and completely ignore the English text because L1 is more accessible than L2 is not confirmed by the results. Higher and lower learners of this study were found to use the English text, though at a lower frequency. When the bilingualised dictionary was consulted both languages were used, though not at the same time and nor for each word. Learners were found to prefer one language for some words, the other language for other words. Sometimes both languages were used. Five interacting factors, i.e. look-up strategies, language preference, language proficiency, target words and L2 definitions, may contribute to eliciting specific use of the bilingualised entries. It is, therefore, justifiable to include both L1 and L2 parts in a bilingualised learner's dictionary because the results clearly showed that such dictionary caters for a variety of look-up possibilities and individual preferences an proficiency.» (p. 97-98)

Chapter 7 addresses the fourth and last research question: To what extent are look-up strategy patterns specific to individual students or are there common patterns among the students? The answer to this question is that the «learners were found to have common as well as different patterns of strategy use» (p.

106). The findings in this chapter furthermore led to the following important conclusion:

«The use of a variety of strategies did not necessarily automatically make a dictionary user a good one and the reverse was also true. Some characteristics of the good bilingualised learner's dictionary user have been identified. The most salient characteristic was thought to be the ability to negotiate between L1 part and L2 part of an entry. It appeared that the good dictionary user may also be the good language learner.»  
(p. 106)

The think-aloud method has until now only been used in very few studies of dictionary use whereas other methods as questionnaires and protocols have flourished. In the last chapter of her book, Jenny Thumb summarizes the results of the research and stresses the effectiveness of the think-aloud method in comparison with the other method. At the same time, she points out some limitations of the research, among which she mentions that there was «no instrument to measure and quantify the subjects' difficulties» understanding the L2 definitions, that »the study does not show if dictionary skills training plays a part in successful meaning retrieval», that there is «insufficient data on unsuccessful look/ups to generalize the reason of failure» and that «the study does not identify all the qualities of a 'good' or 'bad' bilingualised dictionary user» (p. 110). Another limitation is that the research only covered advanced learners (separated in higher and lower proficiency levels) and only one activity, i.e. reading. On that basis she makes a number of recommendations for further research.

It is difficult to disagree with her conclusions. However, it is necessary to add a few comments to these conclusions. First of all, Jenny Thumb does answer the old question which she herself raises in the beginning of the book, i.e. «whether failure to use dictionaries effectively is a result of poor reference skills or deficiencies in the dictionaries themselves» (p. 1). The answer of this question has to do with the overall approach to lexicography. Jenny Thumb's own research shows that the informants have achieved their look-up skills from different sources: teachers in the school, fellow students, home-made or elsewhere. It might be of interest for a publishing house to design dictionaries that corresponds to the target users' lexicographic skills and their expectations to which information they can retrieve from dictionaries because in this way they can predict a higher sale. But the big and real risk here is that this will lead to the reproduction of expectations built on existing dictionaries and incidental skills. Another approach, which may be more proper for the scientific researcher, is to study specific types of users in specific user situations (reception, production and translations of text) in order to identify specific types of problems that can be resolved by means of lexicographic data and then conceive the corresponding dictionaries and instruct the users how to retrieve information from these dictio-

naries. Of course, it might not bring the highest sales in the beginning (due to a certain amount of conservatism among the users), but it would surely lead to the production of a new generation of dictionaries that may – at least theoretically – resolve the users' problems. If lexicography is approached in this way, then the user surveys could be reconceived in order to support this new vision. One thing that is, for example, not discussed by Jenny Thumb is the structure of the dictionary articles (entries) used in the experiment. She reproduces a number of these articles and they are all characterised by their old-fashionedness and lack of an appropriate search-field structure that could make the consultation much easier and maybe lead to other look-up strategies – or at least the preference for certain of the already discovered strategies – and to an even more successful result of the dictionary look-up. A combination of the mentioned lexicographic approach and user surveys would be able to design the most suitable structures in this respect. And in comparison with many previous studies of dictionary use, Jenny Thumb has without any doubt made an important contribution that could be useful in future dictionary research. I will therefore recommend this little book to anybody interested in lexicographic theory.

### Literature

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