

MONOLINGUAL ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

*www.dictionary.com

(Assesed by Chen Bingmiao, a student in the postgraduate translation and interpretation program, Macquarie University, 2006)

Introduction

Dictionary.com is a multi-source monolingual dictionary search service produced by Lexico Publishing Group, LLC. The main general dictionaries that appear on Dictionary.com include:

Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.0.1), Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2006.

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc.

WordNet ® 2.0, © 2003 Princeton University

Other sources of medical, computing, legal, jargon dictionaries are also available on the site, such as Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law, Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary. The Dictionary.com also links to Thesaurus (synonyms andonyms), Encyclopedia and The Web search. In case some words or phrases are not covered by dictionary search, you can turn to other sources for reference.

In order to test and measure the reliability of Dictionary.com as a resource assisting in the comprehension of English texts, thirty-three articles (totaling 87 pages) picked from *The Economist* were provided in class for research. The students were required to identify words and phrases that they found difficult to translate and try to find a solution for their comprehension and translation in the specific context they appeared in an article from *The Economist*. A list of approximately 600 problematic words and phrases was compiled for this research on Dictionary. Com. This is a limitation on the validity of the findings, since a larger number of problematic words and phrases could have produced a different result.

Findings

Among all listed 600 words and phrases, only 5 words and 49 phrases and idioms are not covered by the Dictionary.com. However, the meanings of 22 of the problematic phrases were word compounds instead of fixed phrases and we are able to understand their meaning by checking entries for each word which makes up the phrase. In other words, only 27 of the phrases remained unresolved.

The outcome of research on Dictionary.com seems encouraging. Comparing to the total figure of problematic lexical items, the number of unresolved problems is small. We may conclude from the above research that Dictionary.com is a reasonably reliable source for linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge, a useful tool for translators and interpreters. Even compared to authoritative paper dictionaries, it maintains its characteristics and advantages. Dictionary.com consists of essential elements required for a standard paper dictionary and, additionally, it represents technological progress in the information age with its vast database, as well as a powerful and flexible search capability.