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Abstract. This paper makes a comparison between Mathews’ Chinese-English Dictionary which is the last Chinese-English dictionary compiled by foreign missionaries, and Lin Yutang’s Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage which is the first Chinese-English dictionary compiled by a Chinese. Three aspects of the two dictionaries are studied in this paper, namely the index system, the grammatical information of the lemma and the definition of the lemma. Through comparison, this paper shows the progress that Lin Yutang has made in describing the Chinese language and gives some insight into Chinese-English dictionary making.

Introduction

The compilation of Chinese-English dictionaries has had a long history, with the earliest one dated back to 1815 when British missionary Robert Morrison published Dictionary of the Chinese Language in Macau. After Morrison, some other missionaries compiled other Chinese-English dictionaries, of which A Syllabic Dictionary of the Chinese Language (1874) by American missionary Samuel Wells Williams, A Chinese-English Dictionary (1892) by British missionary Herbert Allen Giles and A Chinese-English Dictionary (1931) by Australian missionary Robert Henry Mathews were most remarkable ones. After Robert Henry Mathews, because of World War II, the history of Chinese-English Dictionaries compiled by foreign missionaries came to an end.

As the last Chinese-English dictionary compiled by foreign missionaries, Mathews’ Dictionary occupies a non-ignorable position in the history. It was revised by Harvard-Yenching Institute in 1943 by using the photocopies of the original dictionary because of the great need for Chinese dictionaries in the United States. Renowned scholar Zhao Yuanren took part in the revision and checked the pronunciation of all the entries.

Lin Yutang had always had an ambition to compile a dictionary of the Chinese language, to record the Chinese language as it was used contemporarily. When asked why he wanted to compile a new Chinese-English dictionary, he said that all the past Chinese dictionaries had focused merely on the individual characters, not on the words that were the major parts philologically in daily language use. Then the opportunity came and he was invited by The Chinese University of Hong Kong to compile a Chinese-English dictionary after he came back to Hong Kong from the US in 1965. Lin started his work in 1967 and the dictionary was published by The Chinese University Press in 1972. Lin’s dictionary was the first Chinese-English dictionary compiled by a Chinese.

Index Systems of the Two Dictionaries

In Mathews’ Dictionary, Chinese characters are arranged in alphabetic order according to Chinese Phonetic Script used in the Phonetic Dictionary of the Chinese National Language. Readers can first refer to the List of Syllabic Headings on pages XVIII to XXI and find the sound of the character they are looking for. Then they can go to the corresponding page of it and will find a list of characters of the
same sound from the First Tone to the Fifth Tone. Mathews uses Arabic numbers 1 to 5 at the right-hand top corner of a character to indicate its tone. This index system is more convenient for users who know the sound of the character they want to look up in the dictionary. For readers who do not know the sound of the character, they can use the Radical Index at the end of the dictionary. There are 214 radicals listed in Mathews’ dictionary, the same as they appear in Kangxi Dictionary. The original Mathews’ dictionary did have an English index as a companion volume, but it was published separately.

Lin adopts the tradition of Robert Morrison’s who compiled the first Chinese-English dictionary to use a double index. That is, a Chinese-English index of the words, and an English-Chinese index of the words at the end of the dictionary. Lin uses radicals of Chinese words as the Chinese-English index. The radicals are based on those of Kangxi Dictionary, but he makes some innovations by simplifying the radicals. He reduced the 214 Kangxi radicals to only 50 most frequently used ones. He sets up this instant index system, by which users of the dictionary can look up any Chinese character by their left tops and right bottoms. For example, if a user wants to look up “买” in Lin’s dictionary, he first needs to know that “买” is written as “買”, as all the Chinese in Lin’s dictionary is written in Traditional Chinese Characters. Then s/he can first look for its left top “罒” which is numbered as 41D, and next he needs to recognize the right bottom of it which is “八” and it is numbered as 80. Then s/he can go to the index page where the words are listed as 41D. 80, and finds the character “買”. The last step is to look for the page numbered 41D. 80 in the main dictionary body to locate the character; correspondingly in Lin’s dictionary it is on page 383. During this process, there are several difficulties. First, you have to be familiar with the form of Traditional Chinese Characters. Second, you have to decide the top left and the bottom right of the character. Failing in doing any of the above two steps will result in the failure to find the character. For the convenience of the user, Lin’s dictionary provides a list of Traditional Chinese Characters to Simplified Characters and a list of Simplified Characters to Traditional Chinese Characters. For those who feel hard to use the radicals to look up a character in the dictionary, they can also refer to the Romanized Index at the end of the dictionary. For English users, they can find the corresponding Chinese characters to English words in the English Index which is the last part of the dictionary. Compared with Mathews’ dictionary, Lin’s dictionary can cater to the needs of different users.

Grammatical Information of the Lemma

Compared with Mathews’ dictionary, in Lin Yutang’s Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage, Chinese characters are given some modern linguistic treatments.

Firstly, different from existing Chinese-English Dictionaries, Lin’s dictionary does a lot of work on word determination, that is, to decide monosyllabic and polysyllabic words and their part of speech. For example, hǔ (tiger) is treated as lǎo hǔ in Lin’s dictionary, which represents that hǔ (tiger) is often used as a polysyllabic word in Modern Chinese. However, in Mathews’ dictionary, hǔ (tiger) is treated as a monosyllabic word, which represents the usage of the character in Ancient Chinese. There are many more examples like these in the two dictionaries.

Secondly, Lin’s dictionary marks clearly the part of speech of the lemma as they are nouns, verbs (including the transitivity of the verb), adjectives, adverbs, and etc. This modern linguistic approach to Chinese characters is a great progress in the description of the Chinese language. While in Mathews’ dictionary, there is little grammatical information of the character. In places where grammatical information is documented, it is done randomly and fragmentally. For example, only some initial particles, final particles, and name prefixes are marked.

Thirdly, Lin’s dictionary is based on contextual semantics and it distinguishes the different levels of speech. For this purpose, he uses 13 levels that are indicated in brackets after an expression to show its usage in real context. They are Ancient Chinese (AC), Middle Chinese (MC), literary language (LL), dialect colloquialism (Dial.), courteous address (Court.), Slang (sl.), satirical (satir.), facetious (facet.), contemptuous (contempt.), abuse, derogatory (derog.), vulgar and literary (litr.).
Definition of the Lemma

For bilingual dictionaries, the definition of the lemma is a matter of translation. However, as two totally different languages, it is a challenge for dictionary makers to translate Chinese into English, especially Chinese culture-specific words that do not have equivalents in English. In Mathews’ dictionary, the translation of the above mentioned words is far from being clear. For example, in Mathews’ dictionary, for zhuàng yuán, the definition is “highest graduates of the Hanlin Academy”; for bǎng yǎn, the definition is “the ‘eye of the list’—a graduate who came out second on the list at the former palace examination”; and for tàn huā, the definition is “title of the third graduate on the list at the finals for the Hanlin Academy”. In comparison, in Lin’s dictionary, zhuàng yuán is defined as “the No. 1 of the national civil examinations”, bǎng yǎn defined as “No. 2 at palace examinations (‘on bull’s-eye’)”, and tàn huā defined as “No. 3 in former national civil examinations”. From the definitions provided by the two different dictionaries, we can see that Mathews’ dictionary fails to show the inner connection among the three Chinese culture-specific words, therefore, the definitions are isolated from each other and are comparatively fragmented. What’s worse, for foreign users who know nothing or little about Chinese culture, it’s hard to figure out what “Hanlin Academy” is. As a result, the original meaning of the above three words is not effectively and accurately explained. Lin’s dictionary has done a better job in this regard by showing that the three words all have something to do with examination. In this way, Lin has built a wholesome picture for the three words to fit in, greatly assisting the understanding of these words. And Lin also sees to it that he avoids the using of another culture-specific concept in the definition of one Chinese culture-specific word.

Summary

Mathews’ dictionary mainly focuses on the explanation of the meaning of the lemma, without paying attention to the usage of the character. It does not document the grammatical information of the Chinese language either. However, in the early history of Chinese-English dictionaries, Mathews’ dictionary played a remarkable part in the communication between China and the English world, and paved the way for more and better Chinese-English dictionaries to come. It was so influential in the US that until 1960, it had been printed eight times. Lin Yutang made use of the latest development in modern linguistics and adopted new approaches to the Chinese language. His dictionary marked a new epoch of Chinese-English dictionary making and he conveyed the information of Chinese culture-specific words to the English world more effectively.

References