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“YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CALLING FOR MORE ACTION ON WHAT THEY SAY IS A CLIMATE EMERGENCY”: ENGLISH LEARNER’S DICTIONARIES AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE

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Abstract. This paper aims to investigate the representation of “the defining issue of our time” (Guterres, 2018), that is, the global environmental crisis, in online English learner’s dictionaries, in light of the link between these pedagogical tools, directed at a target audience of young foreign language users (Wirag, 2021, p. 46), and the youth’s increasing concern over the climate emergency (Buchholz, 2022; Cordis, 2023; Harrabin, 2021). For this purpose, this study explores the online editions of three major British dictionaries for learners, namely, the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, the *Collins-Cobuild Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, and the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. These resources have been selected because their lexicographers simultaneously converged on this semantic field to identify the Words of the Year 2019, based on the increasing sociocultural relevance of the ecological crisis in spoken and written communication. Preliminary findings show many differences in the treatment of environmental terms, the quantity and quality of lexicographic data significantly vary across the three reference works, and the divergences affect the ways in which dictionaries reflect the influence of climate change on language.

Introduction

According to recent studies (see, for example, Buchholz, 2022; Cordis, 2023; Harrabin, 2021; Hickman et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2022), young people are increasingly at the forefront of climate change activism because they are worried, afraid, and anxious about global warming, they see it as an existential threat, they think that their future is frightening and, more importantly, they feel ignored and betrayed by adults, who, in their view, are failing to respond adequately. If compared to older generations, the youth have higher levels of fear, guilt, and outrage about climate change effects, and their stronger beliefs, risk perceptions, and emotions affect their well-being and serve as a motivation for taking climate action.

In light of the connection between pedagogical tools like learner's dictionaries, which are used predominantly by young people (Atkins & Rundell, 2008, p. 252; Wirag, 2021, p. 46), and their increasing concern over the health of our planet, as testified to by the global youth climate movement started in 2018 by the then 15-year-old Greta Thunberg, this study adopts a descriptive approach to investigating the representation of the global environmental emergency in the online editions of three major British dictionaries for learners—the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, the *Collins-Cobuild Advanced Learner's Dictionary* and the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*—which have been chosen because their Words of the Year (WOTY) of 2019 all belong to this semantic field. Accordingly, by drawing on their lexicographers' research, a selected sample of climate-related lemmas are comparatively analyzed to observe whether and how these reference works define words that matter to their young users.

The Changing Language of Climate Change

In the past decades, great academic attention has been paid to the relation between language and the global climate crisis (see, among others, Fløttum, 2013; 2014; 2016; 2017; Fløttum & Gjerstad, 2013; 2016; Hulme, 2009; Moser, 2010;

2016; Nerlich & Koteyko, 2009; Nerlich et al., 2010; Nerlich et al., 2012; Pearce et al., 2015; Penz, 2018; 2022; Stibbe, 2015; Tvinnereim & Fløttum, 2015). By examining a variety of genres at both word and text levels, scholars have explored the function that language has in communication about environmental issues, the ways in which language helps people assign meaning to climate change, how people express their understanding or perception of the climate crisis, and how they voice their judgements on and emotional reactions to it. The role of language in the representations and interpretations of climate discourse is subject to intense scholarly debate. However, although some studies have adopted a lexicological and lexicographic approach to investigating the use of English in specialized ecological texts (see Buonvivere, 2023; Franceschi & Pinnavaia, 2023), the means through which dictionaries reflect the increasing sociocultural relevance of the environmental crisis remains largely unexplored.

Indeed, heightened public awareness has recently generated considerable discussion about the issue and there has been a dramatic increase in more emotive and strategic language being applied to climate communication. In this sense, 2019 seems to represent a turning point for the linguistics of the planet, as summarized by the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg’s tweet: “It’s 2019. Can we all now please stop saying ‘climate change’ and instead call it what it is: climate breakdown, climate crisis, climate emergency, ecological breakdown, ecological crisis, and ecological emergency?”²

It is exactly the significance of environmental vocabulary in spoken and written texts, together with more emphatic language being used by people to reframe communication about climate change, that attracted lexicographers of Cambridge, Collins and Oxford dictionaries. Indeed, as exemplified by the online commentaries on their WOTYs 2019 (Cambridge Words, 2019; Collins Dictionary blog editors, 2019; Oxford Languages website editors, 2019), lexicographers simultaneously converged on this semantic field to select the words to be regarded as representative of 2019, the year in which the changing climate also visibly changed language.

This development is mainly due to influential actions and decisions which have been taken by different actors in society since 2019. These include some media outlets which reviewed their policies for reporting on climate issues. A notable example is the British newspaper *The Guardian*, which “updated its style guide to introduce terms that more accurately describe the environmental crises facing the world” (Carrington, 2019). Similarly, the international scientific community adopted a tell-it-like-it-is strategy when communicating the findings of environmental research. A representative instance is the article published in 2020 in the journal *BioScience* and signed by 11,258 scientists

² Posted on May 4, 2019, on <https://twitter.com/GretaThunberg/status/1124723891123961856>

who felt the “moral obligation to clearly warn humanity [...] that planet Earth is facing a climate emergency” (Ripple et al., 2020). Moreover, an increasing number of local, national and international bodies officially declared a state of climate emergency, as the Welsh and Scottish governments did in April 2019 (BBC, 2019a). Finally, millions of people, especially the youth, participated in climate strikes and protests to demand urgent action against climate change. As an example, three global strikes took place in March, May, and September 2019, and the one occurring in September was the biggest climate protest in world history (Laville & Watts, 2019). In sum, since 2019 the risk of an ecological disaster, described as “the defining issue of our time” by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres (2018), has been a major topic of communication and, as such, it represents a rapidly changing area of vocabulary in terms of frequency of use and meaning, a development which reflects its wider social and psychological impact.

Methodology

This section describes the most important aspects of the methodology used in this research. As mentioned in the Introduction, both the selection of the dictionaries and the collection of the data to be examined have been guided by this paper’s focus on the language development discussed above. This pilot study starts by collecting and discussing lexicographers’ research findings to spotlight their professional viewpoints. It uses the notes and commentaries posted by dictionary editors on their online platforms, because they offer valuable insights into lexicographic practice.

The dictionaries. The three online dictionaries for learners of English analyzed in this paper are the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (CALD), the *Collins-Cobuild Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (COALD) and the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (OALD).³ In these resources, users can look an expression up by typing it in the search box typically placed at the top of their online platform. Definitions are written with learners in mind, meaning that these dictionaries are designed to help learners gain a comprehensive understanding of English vocabulary and its use. Nevertheless, despite this common search mechanism, it must be specified that there is a significant difference between these three learner’s reference works. Indeed, users can access and

³ These tools belong to the group of the so-called “Big Five,” also including the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE) and the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (MEDAL). While the MEDAL could not be examined because its website was closed on June 30, 2023 (MacMillan Education, 2023), the reason for excluding the LDOCE lies in the design of this research: as opposed to the three dictionaries selected, no information about Longman’s Words of the Year, if any, is available.

consult the proper online edition of the OALD on its website,⁴ and they are presented with entries belonging to this specific dictionary only. On the contrary, the quantity and quality of accessible dictionaries and lexicographic data provided on the Cambridge and Collins websites⁵ considerably vary because they are more complex dictionary platforms. They host several resources of very different types, including both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, of many languages and combinations, both learner’s and general-purpose dictionaries, etc. Moreover, as regards English resources only, these platforms display multiple search results, their webpages provide a list of entries from different English dictionaries published by Cambridge and Collins, and users must carefully look at the bottom of the entries to find out whether those data are from the learner’s dictionary or not. These features make users’ experiences across these online editions remarkably different. In this research, the analysis has focused only on the entries explicitly associated with the CALD and the COALD on their respective websites.

Words of the Year 2019. Each year dictionary publishers announce their Word of the Year (WOTY) and celebrate it with a note or commentary posted on their blogs or websites and dedicated to the winner and the related shortlist, that is, the group of the other terms selected as candidates for the WOTY. Although the selection criteria and process differ, in 2019 the WOTYs named by Cambridge, Collins and Oxford were all climate-related. In other words, three different teams of lexicographers, who work for different publishers and, more importantly, who examine language use by searching through different text databases or corpora, have simultaneously converged on this semantic field to designate the words to be considered as representative of 2019, a result which evidences the language development described above⁶ and which prompted this study too, in light of the relationship between these pedagogical reference works and young people’s increasing concern over the climate crisis.

The Cambridge WOTY selection process is user-driven: teams of lexicographers look back over the past 12 months to choose a word that indicates what the dictionary and the English language mean to its users. Specifically, as the Publishing Manager of the Cambridge Dictionary website Wendalyn Nichols explains (Cambridge University website editors, 2020), lexicographers examine their data to see which words were searched for the most in the previous year

⁴ The website of the OALD online edition is <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>

⁵ These are <https://dictionary.cambridge.org> as to Cambridge and <https://www.collinsdictionary.com> as to Collins.

⁶ In this regard, it is worth adding that, based on the review of the online commentaries about these dictionary publishers’ WOTYs over time, the increasing significance of the climate issue in language use was recorded before as well as after 2019: in 2018 *ecocide* was included in the Cambridge WOTY shortlist and *single-use* was named Collins WOTY, and in 2021 *climate anxiety* was contained in the Collins WOTY shortlist.

because these words, in their view, reveal not just what is happening in the world but what matters most to people in relation to those events. Regarding 2019, the editors of the Cambridge Dictionary blog explain that they opted for *upcycling* as their WOTY 2019 (Cambridge Words, 2019) because it was “the Word of the Day that resonated most strongly with fans on the Cambridge Dictionary Instagram account, @CambridgeWords,” after they shared a WOTY selection post on July 4, 2019. Defined as “the activity of making new furniture, objects, etc. out of old or used things or waste material,” *upcycling* “received more likes than any other Word of the Day” (Cambridge Words, 2019). As Nichols highlights (Cambridge University website editors, 2019), the reason for its success is not the word itself but the positive idea behind it which makes *upcycling* a form of activism, that is, “a concrete action a single human being can take to make a difference” on climate change. As for quantitative data, since December 2011, when the word was first added to the Cambridge Dictionary website, “the number of times *upcycling* has been looked up [...] has risen by 181 per cent [...], and searches have doubled” in 2018 alone (Cambridge University website editors, 2019). Accordingly, “it seems evident that lookups of *upcycling* reflect the momentum around individual actions to combat climate change – the youth activism sparked by Greta Thunberg,” according to Nichols (Cambridge University website editors, 2019). People’s growing concern about climate change is confirmed by the Cambridge WOTY 2019 shortlist, which includes three environment-related words: the phrase *carbon sink*, the adjective *compostable*, and the noun *preservation*. Another entry recorded in 2019 was *plastic footprint*, based firstly on lexicographers’ data analysis and secondly on the fact that it “received 1,048 votes in the New Words blog poll, with 61 percent of readers saying it should be added to the Cambridge Dictionary” (Cambridge University website editors, 2019).

The way “language choices in the climate dialogue have changed recently” is also discussed by Cambridge Head of Language Research Claire Dembry (2021). As she clarifies, by using evidence from the Cambridge English Corpus, they have observed that changes “reflect a more impactful, urgent and often more negative, emotional stance.” Increasingly used to replace *climate change*, for instance, *climate emergency* and *climate crisis* “convey a more serious and threatening sentiment,” and they “have a much clearer sense of imminent danger and invoke a strong call to action” (Dembry, 2021). In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the frequency of use of words concerning speed and movement like *rapid* and *quickly* increased in this domain, “highlighting the urgency of the climate crisis” (Dembry, 2021). As to the use of *global heating* instead of *global warming*, Dembry (2021) explains that language analysis shows that “*warming* most typically conveys a positive or desirable quality – we warm our toes by the fire, enjoy warm baths and feel warm and fuzzy inside”; on the contrary, *heating* involves “more person-centred actions,” it “is more purposeful

and refers to the systematic process of making something warmer – we see it used with plumbing and ventilation; we take action to turn it up, down on and off.” According to Dembry (2021), these choices reframe the discussion about the issue; they “give a sense of seriousness, immediacy, [...] personal action and responsibility,” and they may “encourage people to do what they can to contribute to improving the situation.”

By monitoring their corpus, each year Collins lexicographers make a list of ten notable terms, one of which is crowned WOTY due to a particularly meaningful increase in use. As the Collins Dictionary blog editors explain (2019), the WOTY 2019 was *climate strike*, defined as “a form of protest in which people absent themselves from education or work in order to join demonstrations demanding action to counter climate change.” This phrase was selected because it was used on average 100 times more in 2019 than in 2018. Although the first use of the expression was registered in 2015 during the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, when the first mass strike of this kind took place, the term got its dictionary entry in 2019 due to the growth of the movement that year. The Swedish teenage activist Greta Thunberg played a major role too because her decision to skip school on Fridays hit the headlines globally (BBC, 2019b; Hanson, 2019).⁷ Regarding the Collins WOTY 2019 shortlist, a climate-related term was also *rewilding*, defined as “the practice of returning areas of land to a wild state, including the reintroduction of animal species that are no longer naturally found there” (Collins Dictionary blog editors, 2019).

Lastly, as clarified in the “About Word of the Year” section of the website of Oxford Languages,⁸ every year Oxford dictionary teams decide on a word or expression that has attracted a great deal of interest over the last 12 months and that is judged to “reflect the ethos, mood, or preoccupations” of that particular year and to “have lasting potential as a word of cultural significance” (Oxford Languages website editors, n.d.). Candidates do not need to be neologisms; they can be already known and used too but brought to prominence by global events and/or given extra significance. Each WOTY is discussed by Oxford Languages editors in an online commentary which contextualizes the selection of the winner and the shortlist by defining each expression and describing the findings of the analysis. As for 2019 (Oxford Languages website editors, 2019), the prominence of the climate debate documented in the Oxford corpora was encapsulated in the WOTY *climate emergency* and a domain-specific shortlist of ten expressions, as shown in Table 1. As lexicographers explain, what attracted their attention was “a demonstrable escalation in the language people were using

⁷ Interestingly enough, in the Collins Dictionary Instagram account, @CollinsDict, the gif added to the dedicated WOTY post shared on November 7, 2019 (Collins Dictionary, 2019), represents a group of protesting people led by a young girl shouting through a megaphone and wearing her hair in braids, as a clear visual reference to Greta Thunberg.

⁸ The website of Oxford Languages is <https://languages.oup.com/>

to articulate information and ideas concerning the climate,” that is, “a growing shift in people’s language choice [...] that challenged accepted language use to reframe discussion [...] with a new gravity and greater immediacy” (Oxford Languages website editors, 2019).

In the Oxford teams’ view, the terms which more openly exemplify the tell-it-like-it-is approach characterizing people’s language choices are *climate emergency*, *climate crisis* and *global heating*. *Climate emergency* and *climate crisis* have indeed been progressively used in preference to *climate change*, presenting an increase in frequency of 100 times and 26 times respectively. They have been favoured as “more scientifically robust” terms to describe “the broader impact of climate change” (Oxford Languages website editors, 2019) and to communicate a sense of urgency. As summarized by *The Guardian*’s editor-in-chief Katharine Viner, who is quoted by lexicographers, the phrase *climate change* “sounds rather passive and gentle when what scientists are talking about is a catastrophe for humanity” (Oxford Languages website editors, 2019). As regards *climate emergency* in particular, statistically significant was the “new trend in the use of the word emergency,” which, being increasingly modified by the word *climate*, indicated “an extension of emergency to the global level, transcending [...] more typical uses” at “a very personal level, often relating to the health of an individual” like “health, hospital, and family emergencies” (Oxford Languages website editors, 2019). The second term illustrating the shift in people’s language choices is *global heating*, which has been progressively used in preference to *global warming*, presenting a 19% rise in frequency. In the words of Professor Richard Betts, the UK Met Office’s climate research lead, “global warming doesn’t capture the scale of destruction” (Oxford Languages website editors, 2019) and the pleasant temperature implied in the meaning of *warm* is completely misinforming (Watts, 2018).

Table 1 lists, in alphabetical order, the 18 expressions mentioned in the three online commentaries discussed above, whose treatment in the dictionaries is examined in the following section. From left to right, under the label 2019, the terms are matched to the three publishers’ WOTYs and shortlists, while the columns under the 2024 label concern their presence in the three dictionaries as of March 2024, with the symbol *x* indicating the terms included.

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Table 1. Words of the Year 2019

| Term | 2019 | | | 2024 | | |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------|--------------------|------|
| | Cambridge | Collins | Oxford | CALD | COALD ⁹ | OALD |
| carbon sink | 2019 shortlist | | | x | x | |
| climate action | | | 2019 shortlist | | | x |
| climate crisis | | | 2019 shortlist | x | x | x |
| climate denial | | | 2019 shortlist | x | | x |
| climate emergency | | | WOTY 2019 | x | x | x |
| climate strike | | WOTY 2019 | | x | | x |
| compostable | 2019 shortlist | | | x | | x |
| eco-anxiety | | | 2019 shortlist | | | x |
| ecocide | | | 2019 shortlist | x | x | x |
| extinction | | | 2019 shortlist | x | x | x |
| flight shame | | | 2019 shortlist | | | x |
| global heating | | | 2019 shortlist | x | x | x |
| net zero | | | 2019 shortlist | x | x | x |
| plant-based | | | 2019 shortlist | x | x | x |
| plastic footprint | 2019 addition | | | x | | |
| preservation | 2019 shortlist | | | x | | x |
| rewilding | | 2019 shortlist | | x | | x |
| upcycling | WOTY 2019 | | | x | x | x |

Results and Discussion

As Table 1 shows, out of a total of 18 expressions, 16 terms are recorded in the OALD and 15 in the CALD, while the COALD includes only nine, which also do not comprise the Collins WOTY 2019 *climate strike*. In this sense, it is difficult to understand why this phrase is not an entry in the *Collins-Cobuild Learner’s Dictionary*.

⁹ Concerning this dictionary, it is important to specify that actually seven entries in the list can be found on the Collins platform, but five of them belong to non-learner’s dictionaries (*climate strike*, *compostable*, *eco-anxiety*, *preservation*, *rewilding*) and two entries appear as new word suggestions (*climate denial*, *plastic footprint*), meaning that those are terms which have been submitted by dictionary users and are being monitored by lexicographers for evidence of usage. Since they are not treated in the COALD, they were excluded from the analysis.

Going back to data, only eight terms are recorded in all three dictionaries: *climate crisis*, *climate emergency*, *ecocide*, *extinction*, *global heating*, *net zero*, *plant-based*, and *upcycling*.¹⁰ Before comparing the definitions of some of these lemmas, certain aspects of their dictionary entries are worth observing here.

The analysis of the 18 terms shows many differences in the quantity and quality of the lexicographic data learners are offered. In terms of grammatical information, word classes are always included, but their type and related information may vary. Thus, the phrases *climate crisis* and *climate emergency* are countable nouns in all three dictionaries, but the plural forms are added between brackets in the COALD and not in the OALD, while they are “usually singular” in the CALD; *extinction* is uncountable in the CALD and the COALD, while it is countable in the OALD; *net zero* is an adjective and a noun in the CALD and the COALD, while it is recorded as a noun only in the OALD, although it is exemplified as a modifier in “the transition to a *net-zero* economy.”

Another important difference is related to usage labels, which appear in the CALD only and, more specifically, refer to topic or field in the entries for *carbon sink*, *ecocide* and *net zero*, which are labelled as “ENVIRONMENT specialized,” while they refer to attitude or opinion in the entry for *climate denial*, labelled as “disapproving.”

The treatment of these lemmas also contrasts in terms of definitions and examples. Regarding the former, the most visible difference lies in the typical full-sentence definition style of the COALD, which “seems to imitate the way a teacher explains meaning to students in a full sentence” (Chi, 2013, p. 173). Regarding illustrative examples, their number and accessibility differ considerably. In the CALD, most entries offer one or two examples which are fixed and appear immediately below the definition, plus three to five extra examples available in drop-down menus. In the COALD and the OALD, users are presented with one to three fixed examples only.

Divergences also characterize the association between dictionary entries and the topic-based wordlists typically offered by these reference works to help learners expand their vocabulary in specific subject areas. Even though a discussion of their features, structure and organization on each website is beyond the scope of this study, in terms of accessibility, it is worth specifying that users can easily find these resources thanks to the links purposefully placed at the bottom of the entries in the CALD and the OALD only. For example, the entries examined direct users to the “environmental issues” list¹¹ in the CALD and to

¹⁰ With reference to this lemma, it must be specified that while this noun has its own entry in the CALD, in the COALD and the OALD it is included in the entry for the verb *upcycle*.

¹¹ Online at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/topics/earth-and-outer-space/environmental-issues/>

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“the environment” list¹² in the OALD. Inversely, in the COALD, the connection between the lemmas and the “environmental terms” list¹³ is less visible and the latter is more difficult to find since it is positioned in a separate website section.

Going into more detail, a comparative analysis of the entries recorded in all three dictionaries shows noteworthy similarities and differences in the definitions offered to represent the global climate issue in the dictionaries. Due to space limitations, the following paragraphs focus on the expressions which have been deliberately used by people as more intense and emphatic terms to replace subtler alternatives and which more clearly characterize the language development monitored by lexicographers of Cambridge, Collins and Oxford dictionaries to decide on their WOTYs 2019. These relevant lemmas are *climate emergency*, *climate crisis* and *global heating*.

Climate emergency and climate crisis. Based on lexicographers’ research, these phrases have been increasingly used in preference to *climate change* to communicate a sense of urgency about the global environmental breakdown. As the definitions shown in the tables below clearly demonstrate, the two terms refer exactly to the same concept in the dictionaries, which present identical descriptions for both. The only exception is found in the CALD, where, as opposed to *climate crisis*, *climate emergency* denotes serious “and urgent” problems, probably as part of the gravity the noun *emergency* involves. The correspondence between the two is particularly apparent in the OALD, which suggests, within brackets, that one expression is equivalent to the other, as if they could be used interchangeably. Moreover, in spite of some differences in the phrasing, all dictionaries adopt strongly worded formulations to define their meanings: (very) serious, urgent problems; danger, and (permanent) damage, for example. However, there are some distinctions as to how the three dictionaries frame urgency in relation to the more passive *climate change*¹⁴: in the CALD, problems “are being caused or likely to be caused” by it; in the COALD, “danger and damage is [just] likely because of” it; while in the OALD, both lemmas refer to “a situation

¹² Online at: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/topic/the-environment>

¹³ Online at: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/word-lists/environmental-environmental-terms>

¹⁴ Although the meaning of *climate change* was not affected by the language development observed by lexicographers, for comparison purposes, its definitions in the three dictionaries read as follows: “changes in the world’s weather, in particular the fact that it is believed to be getting warmer as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere” (CALD); “climate change refers to changes in the earth’s climate, especially the gradual rise in temperature caused by high levels of carbon dioxide and other gases” (COALD); and “changes in the earth’s weather, including changes in temperature, wind patterns and rainfall, especially the increase in the temperature of the earth’s atmosphere that is caused by the increase of particular gases, especially carbon dioxide” (OALD). Given that the three definitions are similarly neutral and quite scientific, it is interesting to observe that the CALD is the only dictionary mentioning human activity as the cause of climate change.

in which immediate action is needed to reduce or stop climate change.” “Special action must be taken” also according to the COALD, while no response is mentioned in the CALD, which is, however, the only dictionary explicitly attributing the *climate emergency/crisis* to “human activity.”

| <i>Climate emergency</i> | |
|--------------------------|---|
| CALD | serious and urgent problems that are being caused or likely to be caused by changes in the world’s weather, in particular the world getting warmer as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere |
| COALD | If there is a climate emergency, very serious danger and damage is likely because of climate change, and special action must be taken. |
| OALD | (also climate crisis) a situation in which immediate action is needed to reduce or stop climate change and prevent serious and permanent damage to the environment |

| <i>Climate crisis</i> | |
|-----------------------|--|
| CALD | serious problems that are being caused or likely to be caused by changes in the world’s weather, in particular the world getting warmer as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere |
| COALD | If there is a climate crisis, very serious danger and damage is likely because of climate change, and special action must be taken. |
| OALD | (also climate emergency) a situation in which immediate action is needed to reduce or stop climate change and prevent serious and permanent damage to the environment |

Global heating. Like the expressions above, the frequency of use of *global heating* has progressively increased as a term adopted to replace the less person-centred and more pleasant concept of (global) *warming*.

| <i>Global heating</i> | |
|-----------------------|---|
| CALD | an increase in world temperatures, especially the current increase caused by gases such as carbon dioxide that are collecting in the air around the earth and stopping heat escaping into space |
| COALD | Global heating is the same as global warming |
| OALD | the increase in temperature of the earth’s atmosphere that is caused by the increase of particular gases, especially carbon dioxide. Some people now use this term instead of ‘global warming’ to emphasize how rapid and serious this increase in temperature now is |

As the definitions above illustrate, there is a considerable difference in the way the meaning of this phrase is described across the dictionaries. While the CALD opts for scientific and neutral phrasing,¹⁵ the relation between *global heating* and *global warming* is explicitly mentioned in the COALD and the OALD, but very differently. The former limits itself to explaining to learners that they are “the same,” thus forcing them to look *global warming* up to access the meaning of both.¹⁶ Contrariwise, the OALD offers an objective description followed by a usage note clearly reflecting language change and openly defining *global heating* as an alternative term used by some people to highlight the urgency of the problem.¹⁷ However, no reference to human activity and/or to the need for immediate action is made in the dictionaries.

Concluding Remarks

Prompted by the connection between young people’s use of learner’s dictionaries and their increasing concern about environmental issues, as discussed in the Introduction, this paper aimed at exploring the treatment of words that matter to a generation of climate activists in the online editions of three major British learner’s dictionaries: the CALD, the COALD and the OALD, selected because of their climate-related WOTYs 2019. By drawing on these words and the related shortlists, the analysis has identified 18 terms discussed by lexicographers of Cambridge, Collins and Oxford dictionaries in the online commentaries associated with their WOTY selection.

Out of the total of the WOTYs 2019, findings show that the number of lemmas included varies significantly when comparing the dictionaries, with the COALD comprising the smallest number of entries. Results also indicate that only eight terms out of the total of 18 are recorded in all three works. More relevantly, many differences have emerged from the examination of the treatment of these lemmas, in respect of the amount and nature of the lexicographic data learners are presented with. The dissimilarities concern grammatical information, usage labels (which appear in the CALD only), definitions, examples (especially the number of usage sentences offered) and also the relation between lemmas and environment-based wordlists. Regarding definitions, the analysis has focused on phrases which, in lexicographers’ view, clearly exemplify the

¹⁵ This definition proves to be a more elaborate version of the one of *global warming* in the CALD: “a gradual increase in world temperatures caused by gases such as carbon dioxide that are collecting in the air around the earth and stopping heat escaping into space”.

¹⁶ In the COALD, *global warming* is “the gradual rise in the earth’s temperature caused by high levels of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere”.

¹⁷ In the OALD, *global warming* is “the increase in temperature of the earth’s atmosphere that is caused by the increase of particular gases, especially carbon dioxide.”

language development they have been monitoring, namely *climate emergency*, *climate crisis* and *global heating*. Findings reveal some important divergences in the treatment of these new expressions: although forceful language is used to define their meanings in all resources, the semantic values motivating their increase in use (in terms of urgency, immediacy, personal action and human responsibility) are not always and/or similarly framed, thus affecting whether and how the three dictionaries mirror the current social concern. Indeed, users can learn that these expressions represent deliberate linguistic choices made to replace existing forms in the OALD only, a result which highlights the suitability of lexicographic data like usage notes in this sense.

As to future research, this study will extend the analysis to other lemmas in the WOTY 2019 shortlists and the environment-related wordlists across the three resources to describe and compare how their definitions and examples of use represent the climate crisis, and also to observe whether and how dictionaries relate to heightened public awareness and youth activism.

Learner's dictionaries are essential pedagogical tools for young students of English as a foreign language (Wirag, 2021, p. 46). As reference works, dictionaries can direct and influence the linguistic behaviour of their users and help learners in gaining a deeper understanding of the ways in which language can be used correctly and consciously. Linguistic guidance is particularly beneficial when users deal with evolving areas of vocabulary, and the use of dictionaries can serve as a way of discovering and learning new words and new senses of old words. This is especially important if these words matter to users because they express what the young generations care for and worry about.

The environmental crisis features prominently in communication and its sociocultural impact is also affecting language. The use of more strongly worded vocabulary represents a strategy aimed at encouraging people to do what they can to reduce the global climate crisis, and dictionaries, as a mirror of society, cannot but record people's growing concern as reflected in language usage. As Mike Berners-Lee's handbook title claims (Berners-Lee, 2019), there is no planet B—immediate action is needed and language is a means of action, including climate action.

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Силвија ПЕТИНИ

Универзитет Рома Тре

Одсек за стране језике, књижевности и културе

Рим (Италија)

„Млади људи захтевају хитну акцију због еколошке кризе”:
енглески речници за учење и глобални еколошки проблеми

Резиме

Овај рад има за циљ да истражи приказ глобалних еколошких проблема у онлајн енглеским речницима за учење, на основу везе између ових педагошких алата које млади људи претежно консултују и све веће забринутости младих због климатске кризе. У ту сврху, овај рад истражује онлајн издања три главна британска речника за учење, и то: *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, *Collins-Cobuild Advanced Learner's Dictionary* и *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, који су одабрани због својих речи године 2019. које су повезане са климом. Прелиминарни налази показују многе разлике у обради еколошких појмова, како у квантитету и квалитету лексичких података, тако и у начинима на које речници одражавају мењање језика изазвано климатским променама.

Кључне речи: климатске промене; климатска криза; животна средина; онлајн енглеска лексикографија; онлајн речници за учење; Реч године.



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