

Critical Review of the *Longman Dictionary of American English* and the *American Heritage*

*Dictionary of the English Dictionary*

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## Abstract

This review provides comparison and contrast between the *Longman Dictionary of American English* (LDAE), designed for intermediate English learners, and the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (AHD) for native speakers. The two dictionaries were examined in terms of the range of contents, the entries, senses and meanings, connotational meanings, collocational information, expressions related to the headword, fixed expressions, controversial usage issues, and databases. I have concluded that the two dictionaries are appropriate for each target user. LDAE is useful for Korean EFL intermediate high school learners because of its authentic, necessary, and clear language information.

*Keywords:* dictionary, review

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In this paper, two dictionaries are chosen to review and one is a learner's dictionary and the other is a dictionary for native speakers. One is *Longman Dictionary of American English* (LDAE) with 1,179 pages, designed for English learners. The other is the *American Heritage dictionary of the English language* (AHD) with 2,074 pages, designed for native speakers.

Each dictionary will be reviewed and compared in terms of the range of contents, the entries including pronunciation, syllabication, parts of speech, grammar, and etymology, senses and meanings, connotational meanings, collocational information, expressions related to the headword, fixed expressions, controversial usage issues, and the data on which they are based.

### **The Range of Contents**

LDAE provides not only entries but also illustrations, pictures, and thesaurus to make learning more comprehensible if necessary in the dictionary. For example, it does not provide additional visual information in the case of familiar entries to learners such as *dog*, *cat*, however, visual information is provided in the case of unfamiliar entries such as *cougar*, *marsupials*. It is noted that LDAE offers a picture dictionary separately. Basically, LDAE does not include entries about proper names except in some cases such as *Easter*, *Christmas*, *Uranus*, so LDAE has few entries with a capital letter in it. The catch here is that LDAE provides a Learner's Handbook with 58 pages and the Handbook includes all basic and essential English knowledge for learners: exercises for spelling, meaning, vocabulary, picture dictionary with a map of U.S.A., capitalization, punctuation, writing guide and grammar guide.

In the meantime, AHD includes not only English language matters, but also a variety of fields such as biological and geographical information with about 4,000 pieces of maps,

pictures and drawings. For example, we can get information about Fort Collins from AHD p.692. It also provides five types of additional information: synonyms, usage issues, the histories of interesting words, regionalisms and social dimensions of language. Proper names are listed according to a shared surname in alphabetical order.

## The Entries

### Pronunciation

LDAE uses the symbols of International Phonetic Association (IPA) and shows pronunciation used by speakers of common American English dialects. LDAE includes possible pronunciations if they are commonly used by educated speakers. For example, in the case of *data*, two possible first vowel sounds /eɪ/ and /æ/, are provided. In addition, both of the vowel /ɑ/ as in *hot* and /ɔ/ as in *walk* are said as /ɑ/. In terms of stress, primary stress / ' / and secondary stress / , / if necessary, are shown respectively.

On the other hand, the pronunciation symbols of AHD are the AHD symbols which are not the same as IPA except a few symbols such as /b,d,f,etc./. For example, the symbol of the vowel in *pat* is /æ/ in IPA and / ǎ/ in AHD. A list of pronunciation symbols including the equivalent symbols with IPA is presented at the end of Guide to the Dictionary, and the key to the pronunciation symbols is shown in every other page for the users. The pronunciations of AHD reflect educated speakers' speech acceptable in all circumstances and a regional variety of American English by adding dialect labels such as *Southern & South Midland U.S.* in the case of the word *bodacious*. The primary stress ( ' ) and the secondary stress ( ' ) are indicated and the weakest stress is unmarked.

### Syllabication and Syllabification

Dots are used to indicate syllables of each entry word in LDAE. For example, *bad•ly*

( /'bædli/), *baf •fle* ( /'bæfəl /). Likewise, an entry word including its inflected and derived forms in AHD shows pronunciation by syllabication using centered dots as in *ab• duct*, *No• vem• ber*. The syllabication of pronunciation is used for clarity. The syllabification (syllabication of pronunciation) may not match the syllabication of the entry word because pronunciations are syllabicated based on phonological rules as in the word *passive*: pas•sive vs. pās'iv.

### Parts of Speech

The entries are categorized according to parts of speech: adjective (adj.), adverb (adv.), noun (n.), phrasal verb (phr. v.), preposition (prep.), pron. (pronoun) and verb (v.) in LDAE. It is noted that phrasal verb is added to parts of speech separately. On the other hand, AHD categorizes the entries into ten parts of speech and they are indicated in the form of italicized labels in parenthesis: adjective (*adj.*), adverb (*adv.*), conjunction (*conj.*), definite article (*def.art.*), indefinite article (*indef.art.*), interjection (*interj.*), noun (*n.*), preposition (*prep.*), pronoun (*pron.*), verb(v.).

### Grammar

LDAE provides grammatical patterns that are presented in dark letters in the example sentences if necessary. For example, *He gave the books to Carol* in the case of *give*. Furthermore, nouns are marked as follows: countable nouns [C], an uncountable noun [U], a noun that can be used as countable and uncountable [C,U], a singular noun with no plural form [singular], a plural noun with no a singular form [plural], a countable noun but is not used in the plural very often [C usually singular], a countable noun that is usually used in the plural [C usually plural] and a singular and uncountable noun [singular, U]. Verbs are marked as follows: an intransitive verb [I], a transitive verb[T], a verb that is used as transitive and intransitive [I,T]

and [linking verb]. Adjectives are marked as follows: [only before noun] and [not before noun].

On the other hand, AHD nouns use *pl.*, *sing.*, and *pl.n.* for plural, singular and plural only respectively. Verbs are categorized into three: transitive (*tr.*), intransitive (*intr.*) and auxiliary (*aux.*).

When the way to present entry word-related information are compared, LDAE seems more in favor of learners by indicating the words *past tense*, *past participle*, *third person singular* in each verb than AHD does. For example, the verb *go* is presented as follows: *go* (g<sup>o</sup>), *v.* *went* (w<sup>e</sup>nt), *gone* (g<sup>o</sup>n, g<sup>o</sup>n), *going*, *goes* (g<sup>o</sup>z) in AHD; **go** /gou/ *v.* (past tense **went** /wɛnt/, past participle **gone** /gɔn, gən/, third person singular **goes** /goʊz/) in LDAE.

### Etymology

LDAE provides etymology of entry words with the name of *ORIGIN* in the form of square brackets [ ]. *ORIGIN* notes at the end of the entry offer information about the entry word: when a word first entered in the English language or where the word came from. In the case of *cabin*, ...[ORIGIN: 1300-1400 Old French *cabane*, from Old provençal *cabana* “small wooden building”].

AHD seems to get more involved with etymologies than LDAE and provides a great deal of information about etymologies. Etymologies in AHD are provided in the form of square brackets [ ] after the definition of the entry words and it shows the history of words in sequence. In addition, an asterisk is added to the word whose history is not attested, yet there is reasonably certainty from comparative evidence. Furthermore, AHD provides roots of appendices: the Appendix of Indo-European Roots (Appendix I) and the Appendix of Semitic Roots (Appendix II). For example, in the case of *certain*, ...[Middle English, from old French, from Vulgar Latin *\*sertānus*, from Latin *certus*, past participle of *cernere*, to determine. See

*kresipin* Appendix I .

In addition, AHD contains Word Histories Notes (WHNs) which include particularly interesting etymologies above the history and origin of the entry word. WHNs give information about how the history of the word is connected with historical and cultural development and how the words move from one language to another. For example, in the case of *alligator*, dictionary users may get additional interesting information about the role of taboo deformation in the history of the word *crocodile* and *alligator* through WHN instead of the simple etymology of *crocodile*.

### Senses and Meanings

LDAE provides the meanings of each entry in order of frequency with numbers, and the most common meaning is shown first. For example, in the case of the word *fatal*, two meanings are listed: **1** resulting in someone's death **2** having a very bad effect. In addition, synonyms, antonyms and related words are shown after the definition.

Likewise, AHD lists entries with more than one sense and the central and main meaning is presented first. For example, in the case of *fatal*, five meanings are listed with numbers: 1. Causing or capable of causing death...5. Obsolete Having been destined; fated. Furthermore, AHD provides more specific division of senses using boldface letters before senses to show that two or more subsenses are closely related. For example, in the case of *phenomenon*, ...2. pl. - **nons a.** An unusual, significant, or unaccountable or occurrence; a marvel. **b.** A remarkable or outstanding person; a paragon.

### Connotational Meanings

Connotation refers to “aspects of the meanings of the words that indicate the speakers’/ writer’s attitude toward the word’s referent(s)” (Delahunty & Garvey, 2010, p.269). Namely,

connotation has something to do with different attitudes referring to the same entities.

LDAE provides information about connotational meaning by indicating approving / disapproving, formal / informal, spoken / written, offensive, old-fashioned, slang, and taboo with the entry word if necessary. For example, in the case of a *fiddle*, *informal* is indicated in the entry to convey the difference between a *fiddle* and a *violin*: *a violin* and *a fiddle* refer to the same musical instrument, but a *fiddle* is an informal word for a *violin*. In addition, LDAE provides the differences between words with similar meanings or between words related to a particular topic through *Thesaurus Boxes*. For example, in the case of *bad*, 8 synonyms such as *awful*, *terrible*, etc are listed with connotational meaning.

AHD provides two types of synonyms through SYNONYMS notes: a group of indiscriminated meaning in all sense and a group of discriminate synonyms that reflect their relationship and imply additional information to the literal meaning. For example, in the case of *fat*, 9 synonyms such as *obese*, *stout*, etc. are listed with connotational meaning.

### Collocational Information

Collocation refers to a grouping of words which are typically and often used together as in *rancid bacon* and *rotten apple*: *rancid* collocates with the words which involved with fatty or oily substance while *rotten* is likely to be used with fruits or vegetables (Delahunty & Garvey, 2010, p.266).

LDAE provides information about collocations in bold in examples as in *beat ...The woman had been **beaten to death***. Collocation boxes are also shown in the entry, if the related collocation information is too much. Furthermore, LDAE shows additional useful information about the collocation to avoid making common errors through *Usage Notes* (▶◀) as in *test ...All students must **take** a placement **test**. ▶Don't say "make a test." Say "take a test."◀ In*



addition, collocation is separately presented in a Learner's Handbook: verbs that go with nouns, adjectives that go with nouns, and nouns that go with nouns. It is assumed that LDAE regards collocational information as important.

AHD provides little information about collocations. The widely used collocations such as *rancid butter*, *be green with envy* are not mentioned in any entry of AHD while these two collocations are listed in LDAE.

### Expression Related to the Headword

Homographs which have the same spelling but are different in meaning and parts of speech have separate entries. In LDAE homographs are marked with numbers as in *good*<sup>1</sup> (adj.) and *good*<sup>2</sup> (n.). If a word can be spelled in different ways, both spellings are shown at the beginning of entry as in *blonde*, *blond*. The most common spoken and written words are in red letters. Useful examples using the headword are shown after definition and examples are followed by *usage notes* to help dictionary users to avoid common errors. Derived words are shown at the end of the entry when the meaning is clear from the definition of the main form, while irregular forms of verbs, nouns, and adjectives are shown at the beginning of the entry. Parts of the speech are shown in italics and additional information such as countable, uncountable, transitive, intransitive, etc. Compounds are listed in a separate entry as in *boyfriend*, *bus stop*. Lastly, idioms and fixed phrases are shown in dark type with a full definition because idioms are sometimes tricky to use as in ...**9 go over sb's head** a) *to be too difficult for someone to understand...* b) *to ask a more important person to deal with something than the person you would normally ask* in the case of *head*.

AHD includes homographs in one entry. For example, unlike LDAE, AHD includes *good* (adj.) and *good* (n.) within one entry word. If a word can be spelled in different ways, both

spellings are shown at the beginning of entry as in *blonde also blond*.

The entry provides examples using the headword with definition and derived words are presented at the end of the entry. For example, in the case of *baffle*, *bafflement* (n.) and *baffler* (n.) are shown at the end. Inflected forms are shown after the parts of speech label. Compounds are listed in a separate entry like LDAE. Lastly, idioms are shown with the heading **-idiom** or **-idioms** in boldface type and idioms are listed in alphabetical order with definitions.

### **Fixed Expressions Longer Than a Single Word**

LDAE provides a group of fixed phrase and idioms within one entry. If you refer to *hit*, you can find the idioms *hit the roof* or *hit the road* as well as phrasal verbs such as *hit back* or *hit on*. Phrasal verbs follow idioms and can be found at the end of the entries for the verbs that they begin with and phrasal verbs are listed in alphabetical order after the main verb. AHD provides phrasal verbs with the heading **-phrasal verb** or **-phrasal verbs** in boldface type after the definitions and before the idioms if there are idioms in the same entry. Likewise, phrasal verbs are listed in alphabetical order.

### **Controversial Usage Issue**

As to controversial usage issues, though the two dictionaries try to provide additional information usage notes, LDAE provides relatively limited information compared to AHD which provides in-depth and detailed usage.

For example, are collective nouns treated as a singular noun or plural noun? LDAE does not provide any information about collective nouns. In entries of *collective noun*, *committee*, *family*, *government*, what LDAE provides is definitions, examples, and thesaurus and collocations if necessary. In contrast, ADH provides a variety of information collective nouns usage in each entry. For example, in the case of *collective noun*, *committee*, *family*, *government*,

learners can get information about the difference in American and British usages as well as whether it is treated as singular or plural. Specifically, according to AHD, a collective noun takes a singular verb when it refers to the collection as a whole as in *The family was united on this question*, while it takes a plural verb when it refers to the members of the group as individuals as in *My family are always fighting among themselves* in American English. However, collective nouns are more often treated as plurals in British English as in *The government have not announced a new policy*.

Another controversial issue is the usage of *however*. Likewise, LDAE provides the definition of *however* with an example: *It is a serious disease that is, however, easy to treat*. Though it provides an example showing the position of *however*, it does not mention the position of *however* at all. On the other hand, AHD provides detailed information about the position of *however*. According to AHD, though some grammarians have insisted that *however* should not be positioned at the beginning of the sentence, this rule is not valid any more. They also provide supporting evidence: 42 percent of Usage Panelists do not follow the rule in their writing, 19 percent sometimes observe it and 36 percent usually observe it.

### Databases

LDAE is based on corpora, and the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of LDAE used the analysis of Longman Learner's Corpus, which has over 8 million words of writing in English by learners. Since the dictionary used the analyzed information about learners' English writing errors, LDAE provides clear and helpful usage information about definitions, example sentences, usage notes, etc. to avoid learners' common errors and to provide more authentic language information. On the other hand, AHD collected billions of citations of traditional and contemporary writers with a searchable database of electronic citations, and AHD provides thousands of words from

the quotations reflecting a broad base of American usages with diverse regions and cultures.

### **Conclusion**

AHD is designed for native speakers. Based on in-depth lexical information of each entry with additional relevant information, AHD is useful and appropriate for target users.

LDAE is designed for learners of English. The student group I envision is Korean intermediate EFL high school students. Considering the items I have reviewed, I would conclude that LDAE seems appropriate for the students though there is something to be desired.

First, LDAE provides authentic necessary and clear language information. Because the data are based on the learner's Corpus, LDAE will contribute to predicting and avoiding learner's common errors leading to successful English learning. Second, LDAE provides all kinds of essential information about the entry word such as not only definition and pronunciation, but also grammatical matters, etymologies, usage notes and fixed phrases in a concise way instead of a wordy explanation. Furthermore, the formatting such as font size or colored-letters is learner-friendly, so it seems to be very handy. Lastly, the Learner's Handbook covers a wide range of contents from check spelling to writing essays and Grammar Guide. Specifically, a Grammar Guide includes countable and uncountable nouns, verb patterns, adjective patterns, prepositions, phrasal verbs, modal verbs, intensifiers, and articles. It is assumed that the dictionary will contribute to successful learning by meeting the needs of English language learners.

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