

From corpora to learners' dictionaries: a case study of the function word *otherwise*

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1. Introduction

In this study I examine descriptions of the function word *otherwise* in five corpus-based learners' dictionaries, and compare these descriptions with findings of an analysis carried out on a sample of contexts for *otherwise* in the British National Corpus (BNC).

The dictionaries examined are: *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (cd-rom, hereafter CALD4), *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary of English* (cd-rom, COB5), *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (online, LDOCE6), *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (online, MEDAL), and *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (cd-rom, OALD9). These are broadly comparable dictionaries, all being produced by UK-based publishers and marketed with higher-level learners in mind.

The BNC was searched using the BNC*web* interface (<http://bncweb.lancs.ac.uk>). The corpus contains 8622 tokens of *otherwise*, and a 5% random sample (431 tokens) was analyzed by reading through extended contexts for each token.

2. Dictionary analysis of *otherwise*: recognized senses and functions

The five dictionaries differ as regards the number of senses/functions assigned to the word *otherwise*. Ignoring those presented in terms of fixed phraseology (e.g. *or otherwise*, as in 'accidentally or otherwise'), there are either three, four or five senses (see Table 1). Grammatical labelling also differs.

	SENSES	GRAMMATICAL LABEL/S
CALD4	4	conj / adv / adv / adj after verb
COB5	4	adv with clause adv adv with vb adv before verb
LDOCE6	5	sentence adv sent. adv adv sent adv, adv + adj/adv adv
MEDAL	5	1 general heading: adverb (with a note about use as adv or sent. adv)
OALD9	3	1 general heading: adverb

Table 1. *Otherwise* in dictionaries: number of sense divisions, and grammatical labels

The various explanations of *otherwise* in the dictionaries are now discussed. In order to facilitate discussion, they are presented in terms of five specific senses/functions, being those which have most clearly emerged from a comparative analysis of the relative dictionary entries.

1) 'Except for what has just been mentioned'

This meaning (the wording comes from LDOCE6) is common to all dictionaries. Furthermore, four dictionaries include examples of *otherwise* being used in the following two, grammatically different, ways (the examples are from CALD4): *The bike needs a new saddle, but otherwise it's in good condition.* ♦ *The poor sound quality ruined an otherwise splendid*

film.¹ It is to be noted, however, that only LDOCE6 explicitly separates the two grammatical uses, labelling the first as a 'sentence adverb' and the second as the pattern 'adverb + adjective/adverb'.

2) 'Other ways of doing something'

Three dictionaries (COB5, LDOCE6, MEDAL) include a usage described as follows in COB5: 'You use **otherwise** to indicate that other ways of doing something are possible in addition to the way already mentioned: *The studio could punish its players by keeping them out of work, and otherwise controlling their lives.*' CALD4 and OALD9 also include examples of this type, but they are within more general sub-entries of adverbial usage.

3) 'In a different or opposite way from what has been mentioned'

This meaning (the wording is from MEDAL) is presented in COB5, LDOCE6, and MEDAL. An example from LDOCE6 is: *The government claims that the economy is improving, but this survey suggests otherwise.* COB5 associates this usage with written English, and LDOCE6 presents it (phraseologically) as 'say/think/decide etc otherwise'. CALD4 and OALD9 also include examples which correspond to this usage, but the examples are within more general sub-entries.

4) *Otherwise* as a predicative adjective

One dictionary (CALD4) includes a usage in which *otherwise* is 'used to show that something is completely different from what you think it is or from what was previously stated: *He might have told you he was a qualified electrician, but the truth is quite otherwise.*' Meaningwise, this usage is similar to 3).

5) Conditional *otherwise*: 'If not'

All dictionaries include a use which has the word *if* in the relative explanation/s, though they differ considerably as to how this general function is broken down into more specific uses. Time reference is one variable. For example, future and present reference can both be seen in the explanation and examples in OALD9: 'used to state what the result would be if something did not happen or if the situation were different': *Shut the window, otherwise it'll get too cold in here.* ♦ *We're committed to the project. We wouldn't be here otherwise.* LDOCE6, by contrast, distinguishes between future and past reference, an example of the latter being, *We were delayed at the airport. Otherwise we would have been here by lunch time.* The explanation in CALD4 refers only to the future, but introduces a pragmatically more specific description: 'used after an order or suggestion to show what the result will be if you do not follow that order or suggestion'; one of the examples is: *Phone home, otherwise your parents will start to worry.*

Still with 'conditional *otherwise*', in two dictionaries (LDOCE6 and MEDAL), the idea of negative consequence is introduced: in LDOCE6, for example, we read that *otherwise* can be 'used when saying what bad thing will happen if something is not done'. Lastly, MEDAL introduces the notion of necessary consequence: 'used when you are trying to show that something must be true, by saying that the situation would be different if it was not true', *Of course they're interested. Otherwise they wouldn't be asking about prices.* ♦ *He must be fairly intelligent, otherwise he wouldn't have got into university.*

¹ Examples in corpus-informed dictionaries are not necessarily taken directly from corpora; most dictionaries adapt many citations in order to make them clearer to language learners. In the case of a word like *otherwise*, several lines of authentic text may be necessary in order to clarify meaning.

3. BNC-derived data and dictionary data

The various functions of *otherwise* listed above were confirmed by BNC data, but other aspects of usage were noted which are absent from dictionaries or not explicitly pointed out; I will give a few examples in relation to general usages 2) and 5) above. To start with the former, in this usage *otherwise* is only found in the dictionaries with verbs, whereas in the corpus sample it is also found with adjectives or adjectival phrases (e.g. '... may prove to be untraceable or otherwise impracticable to pursue.' Also, the sequences 'and otherwise' and 'or otherwise' appear to be an integral part of this sense, but this phraseology (with regard to *this* sense) is not highlighted in dictionaries.

Turning now to the set of uses grouped above under the broad label 'conditional *otherwise*', in the dictionary examples *otherwise* appears 12 out of 15 times in clause-initial position and twice in clause-final position. This is a useful dictionary strategy which enables two simple clause meanings to be clearly contrasted and linked by the word *otherwise*. In the corpus sample, however, *otherwise* is also frequently found within verb phrases (e.g. '... who would otherwise have died'), and sometimes after conjunctions (e.g. 'because otherwise ...'). Furthermore, and in relation to written texts, there is no comment in dictionaries on the fact that when *otherwise* is clause-initial, it can either follow a full-stop (or semi-colon) and thus introduce a sentence-like unit, or else follow a comma, thus introducing a clause which is itself part of a sentence.

4. Discussion and suggestions

Otherwise is well distributed throughout modern British English, at least judging from frequency figures in the BNC. Leech et al (2001, p. 84) list it as having a frequency of 88 per million words, both overall and individually for the written and spoken sub-corpora; it also appears in the full (100/100) range of 'sectors' of the BNC and with a high dispersion value (95). It is interesting, therefore, that the corpus-based dictionaries examined in this study do not come to closer agreement on the description of *otherwise*, and also that there are aspects of its usage which are not included in any of them. The probable reason for this is that only a limited amount of space is devoted to this particular lexical item, and choices have therefore been made as to what data to include. However, while this may be a valid reason where print dictionaries are concerned, it is more difficult to justify elsewhere. *Otherwise* is a multi-faceted word, and deserves a richer description. It might also benefit from being recognized as a 'one-member word class' (Sinclair, 1999, p. 165). Otherwise, it is just another 'adverb'.

References

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