

LONGMAN INTERACTIVE ENGLISH DICTIONARY (LIED) – 2nd Edition

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Publisher: Pearson Education Limited, 2000.

Product type: electronic dictionary

Language: English

Level: intermediate to advanced, teachers, students

Media format: CD-ROM

Operating System: PC: Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT; Macintosh: OS7

Hardware requirements: Pentium IBM-compatible PC, 16 MB RAM, VGA 256-colour monitor, MPC compatible audio board (e.g. Soundblaster) + loudspeakers, 4X speed CD-ROM drive; Power MAC, 16 RAM, 8 bit 256 colour display, 4X speed CD-ROM

Description

The CD-ROM is based on the well-known Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. It includes over 80,000 words and phrases. Apart from that the programme also contains 15,000 references to people, places, events and organisations from the Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture.

The Dictionary also comprises an essential guide to English grammar, which can be used to help learners study new language areas, as well as review and practise language.

"Longman Verbs", another LIED section, contains conjugations of all the verbs appearing in the dictionary, which allows the user to check the spelling and increase grammatical accuracy. Apart from the above features, the dictionary also encompasses "Common Error" section, which can help learners avoid making common mistakes, especially with their homework.

Definitions are illustrated by 650 drawings, photos and maps – many in colour. Some of the pictures have labels to show exactly what a particular part of the item being illustrated is called. Thanks to that, by clicking on a picture a user can learn new words in full context of a picture, increasing the retention of vocabulary.

Also, the dictionary contains 8 videos, each illustrating grammar used in real-life situations. In this section the user can extend vocabulary, improve written English and practise listening comprehension. It needs to be noted that it is possible to follow the dialogue in the script as

the video is playing, which can be really helpful in self-study at home as well as in class activities.

Apart from these features, the programme is also equipped with "Exercise bank" part, where learners of English can choose among over 2,000 multiple-choice, cloze text, error correction and key-word transformation exercises. They include also the FCE, CAE and the CPE tests that can be used either in class or at home

It is also worth mentioning that the programme contains 10 tables giving general information such as numbers, weights and measures.

In "Features", the last section of the dictionary, learners can enjoy reading extra information on topic areas such as Education, Christmas and Shakespeare's Plays.

In the crucial part of the programme, the A-Z dictionary, the user may find a definition of a given word and listen to its pronunciation. It needs to be emphasised that all the databases are fully interlinked, which enables quick and easy access to the information one needs. Apart from the pronunciation of a given word, the user can, by clicking on appropriate buttons of the database icons, look at a relevant picture, see some related words, study a related grammar point, and play a video. If someone does not understand a word from the definition, he may double-click on it and a new dictionary window will appear containing the entry for that word. In this way it is much easier to use this dictionary than a traditional one.

It should also be noted that the dictionary is well-integrated with other programmes, so it can be instant help when writing on the word-processor, using email or surfing the Internet. Also, entries can be copied to the word-processing programme. Moreover, it is possible to print most of its parts.

Another important feature is "Internet Update". It allows the user to download new dictionary entries and pictures into the programme. "Collection menu" offers other facilities, namely it allows the learner to group together a number of entries, which can be saved on a hard or floppy disk for future use. It can be very useful for somebody who is working on a project, preparing for an exam or somebody who just wants to review vocabulary.

The learner is also given the chance to find information by using the Search facility. It could be done in different ways: by date search, text or headword search. The "Date search" section allows the user to search for groups of famous people who were born in particular year. In the "Text search", on the other hand, one can search for each occurrence of a given word in the entire dictionary, as well as extract all the entries containing this word in their definition. The last type of search, "Headword search", lets learners of English find all the dictionary entries containing a particular word or pattern of letters.

Evaluation

When compared with the traditional resources, LIED turns out to be an extremely quick and useful reference tool. The users can not only look up a particular word in a matter of a second, but they can also hear its pronunciation, see it in a picture or in the video script. Moreover, the "linking feature" enables learners to achieve grammatical information about the word or words one is looking at, to study the "Common Errors" section and even to practise grammar by doing exercises in "Exercise bank" part. It is needless to say that no book dictionary can provide the users of English with such friendly, easy and fast access to information of different kinds. It must be said that, in fact, it is not only a dictionary but also a grammar reference and practice book, a picture book and even a video programme. Thanks to a good integration with other software and the Internet, it is almost an infinite source of getting information about the language.

The programme is clear and easy to use, with intuitive icons and well-known commands. It also has an extensive help section. For these reasons, it can be used by students at home, in self-study mode. As for the possible applications of the dictionary in teaching English, I am absolutely convinced that it can be a great help in the classroom. While teaching the whole class the teacher can use the section containing conjugations of the verbs and practise grammar in the "Exercise bank" part. In groups, on the other hand, the pupils can practise listening comprehension by watching the video section. Then, the real-life situations in the video mini-dramas can be a nice introduction to speaking practice activities.

When compared with other electronic dictionaries, it needs to be emphasised that with LIED it is possible to download new entries from the Internet. Obviously, this is not a frequent tendency among electronic dictionaries nowadays, as ELT publishers generally prefer to update them in a traditional way, namely by releasing a new updated edition.

As for some drawbacks of the dictionary in relation to other programmes, it needs to be mentioned that it lacks a variety of vocabulary exercises and games. It seems that the dictionary database and the computer capabilities could be used to produce vocabulary activities, so that after having looked up a given word or phrase a learner could practise using it in context.

As regards the Search facility, it seems to be quite an advanced procedure. However, it does not have the system of "filters" which is used in other electronic dictionaries. In these programmes the user may, for example, set a part-of-speech filter (where one can choose parts of speech for the wanted word), register filter (old-fashioned, slang, taboo, etc.), or

geographical filter (British or American English). Such sophisticated search capabilities would be certainly welcome by more advanced users of the program doing semantic research.

Recommendation

To sum up, it must be said that despite some minor weaknesses, *Longman Interactive English Dictionary* is a product worth recommending for the following reasons. Undoubtedly, it is an extremely effective, easy and fast reference tool. It needs to be emphasised that the programme is really interactive because it is possible to learn with it, and not just to look up unknown words. Also, apart from facilitating students' work at home, it is flexible enough to be adapted at school, which can bring novelty to traditional teaching methods.

To conclude, I heartily recommend this programme to anybody who takes learning English seriously. It really has been expertly and skilfully prepared to match the needs of learners of English in the era of computers and the Internet.