

The Environmental Perspective in Dictionaries: Comparing *Longman Dictionary of American English* and *Xinhua Zidian*

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[Abstract]

The environment of the world has now become so deteriorated that we can come across news of this issue almost every day. The perspective of environmental issues will, in time, be incorporated into every dictionary. A comparison of *Longman Dictionary of American English (Longman)* and *Xinhua Zidian (Xinhua)* permits a glimpse into the beginning of this process.

Besides just observing the evolution of vocabularies, I would argue that we are compelled to take action without delay. *Xinhua* could incorporate the perspective of environmental issues and *Longman* could have more examples of environmental issues. Scholars or teachers of languages, regardless of their national residence, could add this perspective in preparing teaching materials and in teaching students as well.

Keywords environment, pollution, dictionary, *Longman*, *Xinhua Zidian*

1. Introduction

The progressive deterioration of the natural environment has become such that we come across news of this issue almost every day. Words and phrases relating to environmental issues will, in time, be incorporated into every dictionary. Such words and phrases, in turn, reveal an editorial perspective towards such issues. A comparison of *Longman Dictionary of American English (Longman)* and *Xinhua Zidian (Xinhua)* permits a glimpse into the beginning of this process.

Although overpopulation or the spread of diseases may be categorized as environmental problems, they will not be included in this discussion.

2. *Longman Dictionary of American English*

Longman has a few examples relating to environmental concerns. They can be divided into two main types of examples according to their special features, descriptive and prescriptive.

2-1. Descriptive examples

2-1-1. Examples with “environment” or “environmental”

- (1) The TV ads are meant to raise the public’s awareness of environmental issues. (p.045 “awareness”)
- (2) The city has committed itself to cleaning up the environment. (p.148 “commit”)
- (3) Environmental issues came to the fore in the 1980s. (p.304 “fore”)
- (4) The industry seems indifferent to environmental concerns. (p.403 “indifferent”)
- (5) Nuclear waste poses a threat to the environment. (p.619 “pose”)

2-1-2. Examples with “pollute” or “pollution”

- (1) Pollution in the lake is having a bad effect on fish stocks. (p.048 “bad”)
- (2) Car exhaust is the main reason for pollution in the city. (p.264 “exhaust”)
- (3) They’re only paying lip service to pollution prevention. (p.474 “lip”)
- (4) Pollution is an outgrowth of industry. (p.567 “outgrowth”)
- (5) Gold miners entered the territory, polluting rivers with mercury. (p.616 “pollute”)
- (6) Toxic waste is a major cause of pollution. (p.616 “pollution”)

2-1-3. Examples with “drought” or “flood”

- (1) The country’s economy has been crippled by drought. (p.181 “cripple”)
- (2) The drought has had a devastating effect on crops. (p.207 “devastating”)
- (3) In the sixth year of drought more than half the corn crop was lost. (p.235 “drought”)
- (4) The wheat crop failed due to drought. (p.272 “fail”)
- (5) The 1994 flood of the Mississippi was a terrible natural disaster. (p.213 “disaster”)

2-1-4. Others

2-1-4-1. Changes in atmosphere or environment

- (1) Most experts agree that global warming is a serious problem. (p.016 “agree”)
- (2) Scientists are trying to stop the destruction of the ozone layer. (p.206 “destruction”)

- (3) The cliffs had been eroded by the sea. (p.256 “erode”)
- (4) Clouds of orange smog are fouling the city’s air. (p.308 “foul”)

2-1-4-2. Plants and animals

- (1) The destruction of the rainforest is of concern to us all. (p.155 “concern”)
- (2) All the elm trees are dying off. (p.209 “die”)
- (3) Many species of plants and animals disappear every year. (p.213 “disappear”)
- (4) Forests were destroyed due to extensive logging. (p.268 “extensive”)
- (5) Greenpeace believes that whales are in danger of extinction. (p.268 “extinction”)

2-1-4-3. Human activity

- (1) Plans to dump nuclear waste here have been condemned by local residents. (p.156 “condemn”)
- (2) Many of our forests have been depleted by the paper industry. (p.203 “deplete”)
- (3) Sewage was discharged into the ocean. (p.214 “discharge”)
- (4) The company drew criticism for putting chemicals into the river. (p.231 “draw”)
- (5) Chemical waste has poisoned the city’s water supply. (p.614 “poison”)

2-2. Prescriptive examples

2-2-1. Examples with “environment”

- (1) The need for a new road must be balanced against the damage to the environment. (p.049 “balance”)
- (2) We need to educate ourselves about environmental issues. (p.243 “educate”)

2-2-2. Examples with “pollution”

- (1) Reducing air pollution has become an imperative. (p.395 “imperative”)
- (2) Parking fees are a necessary evil in the region’s fight against air pollution. (p.535 “necessary”)

2-2-3. Others

- (1) Conserve water: fix any leaking pipes and faucets. (p.161 “conserve”)
- (2) The essence of his argument is that we shouldn’t use cars when we can walk. (p.257 “essence”)
- (3) The country must exploit its resources more effectively. (p.267 “exploit”)

- (4) We'll keep fighting to save our ancient forests. (p.305 "forest")
- (5) The gratuitous killing of dolphins must be stopped. (p.344 "gratuitous")

2-3. Phrases

2-3-1. Phrases with "environment"

- (1) laws to protect the environment (p.254 "environment")
- (2) environmental damage caused by oil spills (p.254 "environmental")
- (3) chemicals that cause harm to the environment (p.362 "harm")
- (4) an increased awareness of environmental issues (p.401 "increased")
- (5) the environmental lobby (p.477 "lobby")

2-3-2. Phrases with "pollution"

- (1) the cumulative effect of air pollution (p.186 "cumulative")
- (2) the deplorable act of illegally polluting our rivers (p.203 "deplorable")
- (3) the harmful effects of pollution (p.362 "harmful")
- (4) the danger pollution poses to humanity (p.387 "humanity")
- (5) the insidious effects of breathing polluted air (p.411 "insidious")

2-3-3. Other phrases about pollution

- (1) a cloud of acrid smoke (p.007 "acrid")
- (2) factories belching blue smoke (p.061 "belch")
- (3) illegal chemicals dumped in the river (p.237 "dump")
- (4) ecological problems caused by the huge oil spill (p.242 "ecological")
- (5) hazardous waste from factories (p.365 "hazardous")

2-3-4. Other phrases about environmental issues

- (1) the designation of 100 acres around the lake as a protected area for wildlife (p.205 "designation")
- (2) a group drumming up support for the "Save the Whales" campaign (p.235 "drum")
- (3) the Earth's finite resources (p.288 "finite")
- (4) the environmental fringe (p.313 "fringe")
- (5) green issues (p.345 "green")

3. *Xinhua Zidian*

Xinhua, on the other hand, pays no attention to environmental issues. There simply do not exist examples of environmental concern.

3-1. What *Xinhua* offers

The word environment in Chinese is “环境.” *Xinhua* does have this word followed by definition and a phrase.

[环境] 周围的一切事物：优美的环境。(p. 197 “环”)

Chinese equivalence for the word pollution is “污染.” Neither the word, nor the definition, nor an example can be found, at least under the entry “污” or “染.”

Under the entry “洪,” we can see the word “洪水,” which means flood(s).⁽¹⁾

Under the entry “旱,” we can see the definition and two example phrases.

旱 hàn 长时间不下雨，缺雨，跟“涝”相反；防旱。天旱。(p. 179 “旱”)

We can find no other examples either descriptive or prescriptive. Thus, there is no example for me to offer whatsoever.

3-2. Examples of exploitation

Xinhua, at most, has occasional descriptions of exploitation. I would like to give some examples as follows.

3-2-1. Fish and animals

a) Something to eat

鲤 lǐ 鲤鱼，生活在淡水中，…，肉可吃。(p. 293 “鲤”)

b) Medicine

龟 guī 乌龟，爬行动物，…。龟甲也叫龟板，可以入药。…。(p. 171 “龟”)

c) Things to use

豹 bào 像虎而比虎小的一种野兽，…。毛皮可制衣、褥。(p. 018 “豹”)

d) Function

牛 niú 家畜名，…，能耕田、拉车。肉和奶可吃。角、皮、骨可作器物。(p. 364 “牛”)

3-2-2. Plants

a) Something to eat

蒜 suàn 大蒜，多年生草本植物，…，地下茎…，可供调味用。(p. 469 “蒜”)

b) Medicine

芫 wán [芫荽] (wánsuī) 俗叫“香菜”,又叫“胡荽”(-suī)。一年生或二年生草本植物,……。果实球形,有香气,可以制药和香料。茎、叶可以吃。(p.562“芫”)

c) Things to use

柏 bái 常绿乔木,……,可供建筑及制造器物之用。(p.011“柏”)

d) Things for animals

苜 mù [苜蓿] (-xu) 多年生草本植物,……。可以喂牲口、做肥料。(p.351“苜”)

e) Function

柺 chēng 柺柳,又叫“三春柳”或“红柳”。落叶小乔木,……,性耐碱抗旱,适于盐碱地区造林防沙。枝叶可入药。(p.056“柺”)⁽²⁾

The last example, by saying “suited for forestation in alkaline region(s) to prevent sand from shifting,” could be seen as a descriptive example showing environmental concern.

4. Some different concepts in two dictionaries

In the course of comparing and contrasting the two dictionaries, I found some different concepts as a spin-off that can be of interest to those in comparative studies of languages or cultures.

4-1. Sport hunting

One concept which *Longman* has that *Xinhua* does not have is the concept of killing animals, birds, or fish for sport. For example:

- (1) Game means “wild animals and birds that are hunted for food and as a sport.” (p.322 “game”)
- (2) Grouse is “a small fat bird that is hunted for food and sport, or the meat from this bird.” (p.349 “grouse”)
- (3) Open season is “the time each year when it is legal to kill particular animals or fish as a sport: open season for deer.” (p.561 “open season”)
- (4) Quail is “a small fat bird with a short tail, that is hunted and shot for food and sport, or the meat from this bird.” (p.652 “quail”)

4-2. Dolphins and Whales

Longman has the words dolphin and whale. It defines them as:

- (1) Dolphin is “a sea animal like a large gray fish with a long pointed nose.” (p.225 “dolphin”)

(2) Whale is “a very large animal that swims in the ocean and breathes through a hole on the top of its head.” (p.907 “whale”)

We have already seen examples about dolphins (2-2-3) and whales (2-1-4-2, 2-3-4) in *Longman*, where they are seen as animals that need to be protected.

Whereas in *Xinhua*, it is not the case. While *Xinhua* does not have the words “海豚” or “海猪” meaning dolphin, it does have “鲸” for whale. It is defined as:

(3) 鲸 jīng 生长(zhǎng)在海里的哺乳类动物, 形状像鱼, 胎生, 用肺呼吸, 身体很大。肉可吃, 脂肪可以做油。俗称鲸鱼。(p.244 “鲸”)

5. Conclusion

Through the above observation, we have found that there indeed exists a difference between *Longman* and *Xinhua*, the difference that there is no environmental perspective at all in *Xinhua*. Some people may even attribute this difference to the different way of thinking between people in an industrialized country and people in a developing country.

However, I would like to point out that neither Chinese people nor Chinese media is free from environmental issues or news. *Xinhua* may be slow to start, but it is only a matter of time before *Xinhua* will incorporate a new perspective and adopt new vocabularies in their future editions.

Besides just observing the evolution of vocabularies, I would argue that we are compelled to take action without delay.

Publishers should be encouraged to be leaders in protecting the environment and educating people. My suggestion would be that *Xinhua* could incorporate the perspective of environmental issues and *Longman* could have more examples of environmental concerns. Scholars or teachers of languages, regardless of their national origin or residence, could also address these concerns in preparing teaching materials and in teaching students as well.

Notes

(1) 洪 hóng ①大：洪水。②大水：山洪。洪峰。溢洪道。

(2) tamarisk: any of several small trees or shrubs of the genus *Tamarix*, and family *Tamaricaceae*, having slender branches bearing small leaves and feathery flower clusters. (*Random House Webster's College Dictionary*, p.1363)

References

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