

# Evaluating the Typographical Features of "Word of the Day" in Online English Learner's Dictionaries Based on a Multimodal Communicative Approach

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## Abstract

The emergence of online electronic dictionaries has brought convenience to English learners. The "Big Five" in English learning dictionaries have kept up with the pace of the times, and have established their own websites which are now working as online dictionaries, so that users can use any device which is connected to the Internet to access consultations for words. On the basis of previous studies, this paper aims to focus the research on "Word of the Day", a section unique to nowadays online dictionaries, and conducts an analysis of this section in the "Big Five" learner's dictionaries from the perspective of multimodality and typographical features.

## Keywords

"Word Of The Day", Big Five, Online Dictionary, Typography, Multimodal Communicative Approach.

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of online electronic dictionaries has brought convenience to English learners[1]. The "Big Five" in English learning dictionaries have kept up with the pace of the times, and have established their own websites<sup>1</sup> which are now working as online dictionaries, so that users can use any network-connected device to access consultations for words[2]. It is precisely because of the continuous innovative changes in the form of dictionaries that revolutionary breakthroughs have also been made in the typography of different dictionaries. For the typography of online dictionaries, though the existing studies are not so fruitful, they are quite constructive, such as investigating learners' views on the role of web typography[3], and the influence that colors for different labels on web dictionary interfaces have on vocabulary consultations[4], the evaluation of the menu and the "show more/show less" stepwise button in Macmillan's online dictionary[5], the analysis of the typographical framework of the online dictionary and its functions[6], etc. On the basis of previous studies, this paper aims to focus the research on "Word of the Day", a section unique to nowadays online dictionaries, and conducts an analysis of this section in the "Big Five" learner's dictionaries from the perspective of multimodality and typographical features.

## 2. Literature Review

Typography plays a crucial role in the presentation and visual design of dictionaries, being a "major contributor"[7] to lexicography. With the advent of online electronic dictionaries, the typographical aspects have undergone revolutionary changes. The shift from paper-based to digital formats has transformed the way typography is employed, influencing not just the aesthetics but also the functionality of dictionaries. Existing studies, though limited, have provided constructive insights into various typographical elements, such as user perceptions

of web typography[3], the impact of color on vocabulary consultations[4], and the design of interface elements like menus and buttons in online dictionaries[5, 6]. Building on these works, this paper specifically examines the "Word of the Day" section in the "Big Five" online learner's dictionaries, evaluating its typographical features, such as word sizes, colors, and layout, to understand how they contribute to user experience.

Multimodal analysis provides a framework for understanding how different semiotic resources, including typography, interact to convey meaning in online dictionaries[8, 9, 10]. "Multimodal discourse" refers to the integration of multiple modes of communication—such as language, image, and space—within a single discourse[11, 12]. This paper draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics[13, 14] and the multimodal theories of Kress and van Leeuwen[15, 16], which assert that images, like language, can represent the world, establish relationships, and structure information. By treating typography as a semiotic resource that co-occurs with other modes, this study explores how these combinations of modes are used in the "Word of the Day" sections of online dictionaries, analyzing their contribution to the overall communicative function.

This study seeks to address several research questions related to the multimodal and typographical features of online dictionaries. Specifically, it investigates how the "Word of the Day" sections in the "Big Five" learner's dictionaries are designed to enhance user experience through their typography and multimodal elements. The research is grounded in the typographical framework proposed by Luna[7], who categorized typographical features into intrinsic (textual content, typefaces, fonts, sizes, colors) and extrinsic (layout, spacing, indenting) features. Additionally, the study examines how these typographical features interact with other semiotic modes in a multimodal context, guided by the theoretical perspectives of Kress and van Leeuwen[15, 16]. The goal is to provide a comprehensive evaluation of how typography and multimodality are employed to improve the functionality and accessibility of online dictionaries.

### 3. Typography of Online English Learner's Dictionary

This study used the screenshots of the 'Big Five' online English learner's dictionaries: the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online (<https://www.ldoceonline.com/>), the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries Online (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>), the Collins Online Dictionary (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>), the Cambridge Dictionary Online (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>) and the already-closed-down Macmillan Dictionary Online (<https://www.macmillandictionary.com/>).

#### 3.1. Oxford Learner 's Dictionaries Online

As shown in Figure 1, after entering the home page of the Oxford Online Dictionary, the "Word of the Day" section is located on the far right of the page, and a brighter color is utilized to attract the attention of users. In the design of this section itself, "Word of the Day" is set with all characters centralized. Within this section the date is at the very top, and from top to bottom are the selected "Word of the Day", grammatical information (part of speech), loudspeaker buttons for pronunciations, the source of the word (either from Oxford 3000, 6000, 9000 or other vocabulary lists designed by Oxford Publish Press), and an evaluation of the word as which your English level will be regarded if you can master this word. The word has chosen a larger font size to highlight itself in the whole section.

Take the "yell" shown in the figure as an example. The word "yell" is located at the top of the "Word of the Day" section, and the part of speech is marked as "verb" in italics below the word. In terms of pronunciation, the dictionary provides American pronunciation (right) and British pronunciation (left). It does not give any phonetic transcription for users to spell the word directly, so you need to click the button (the loud speakers) to the pronunciation recorded by

announcers. Finally, it is noted that the word has been included in the Oxford 3000 word list, and the lexical level is C1.

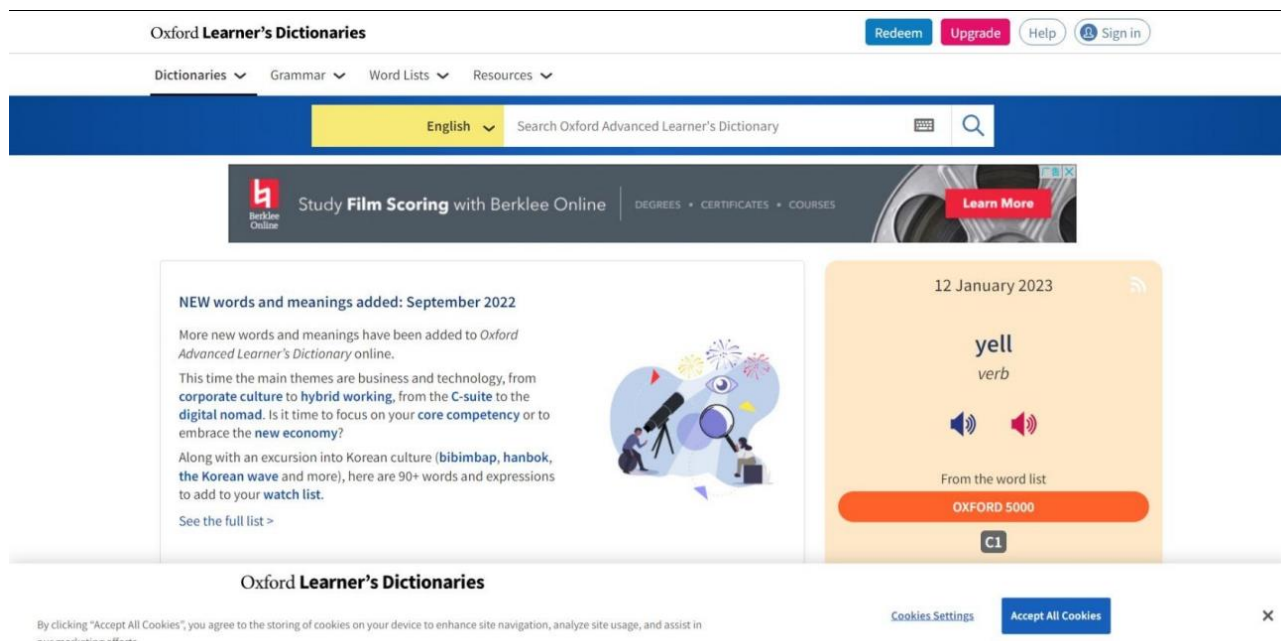


Figure 1: The homepage of Oxford Online

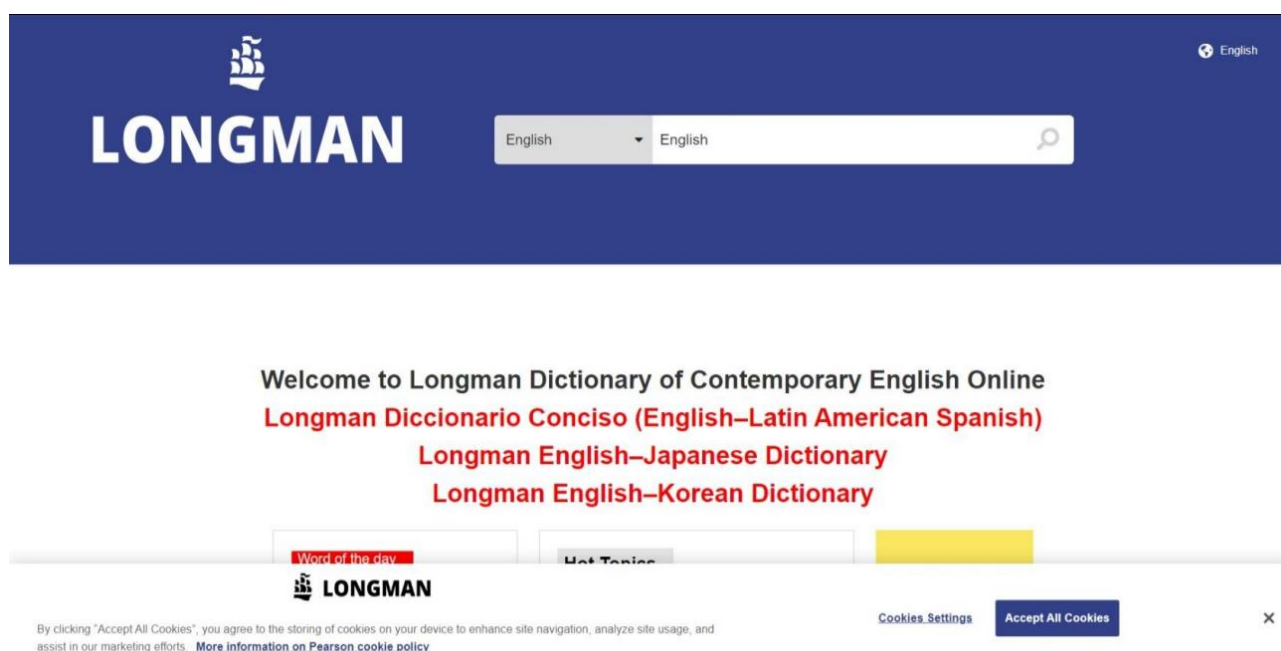


Figure 2: The homepage of Longman Online

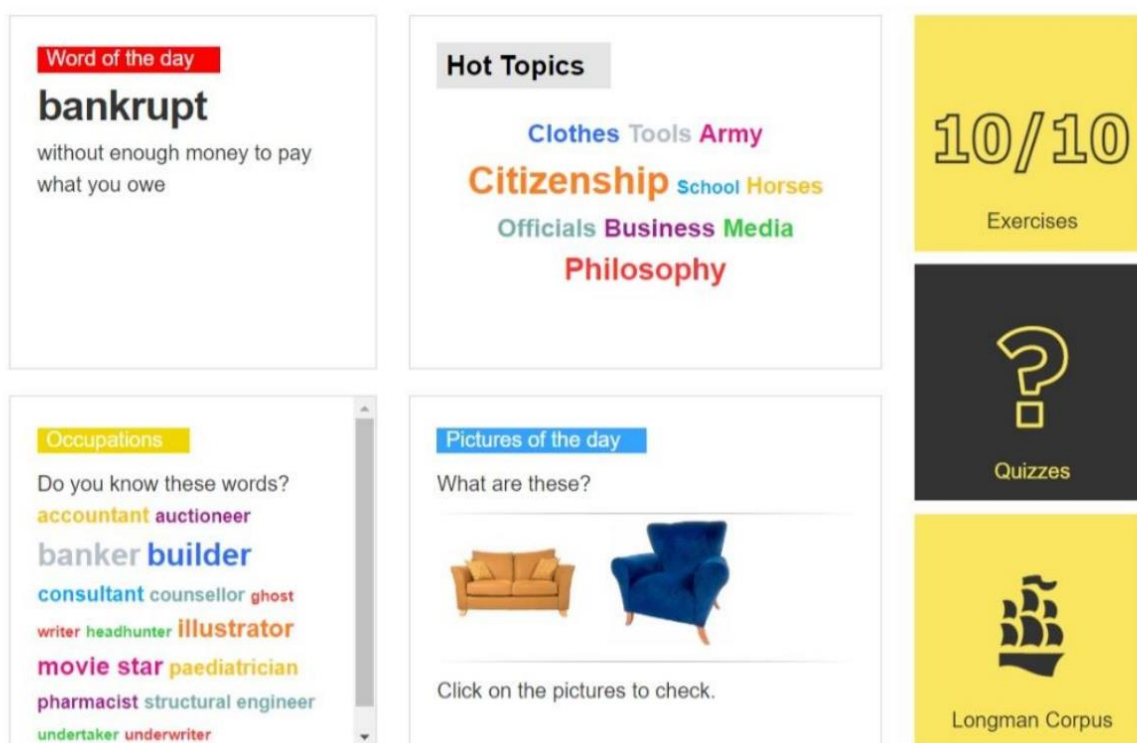
### 3.2. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online

As shown in Figure 2, after entering the homepage of the Longman Online Dictionary, users cannot directly see the "Word of the Day" section in the online dictionary due to the blocking of "Cookies Settings". The user must first either accept all cookies or close the setting window, and then scroll down the screen to get the information of "Word of the Day" (as shown in Figure 3). "Word of the Day" section of Longman Online Dictionary is arranged in the upper left corner

among all sections appearing in the page, and in the word box from top to bottom are the title "Word of the Day", the selected word, and the word definition.

Taking "bankrupt" in the figure as an example, the title of "Word of the Day" is highlighted in red; The selected word "bankrupt" adopts a larger font size and is bolded to add some eye-catching spice to itself on the page; Finally, a short explanation is given in small gray characters below the word. Compared with the Oxford Online, Longman Online's "Word of the Day" tends to simplify the page and directly present the most critical information to its users. However, one of the side effects of this deed is "over-simplification", which means the grammatical information related to the word, even the pronunciation of it cannot be obtained from the word box, and the user can only obtain the complete definition and other necessary information of the word after clicking the word in this online dictionary.

**Welcome to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online**  
**Longman Diccionario Conciso (English–Latin American Spanish)**  
**Longman English–Japanese Dictionary**  
**Longman English–Korean Dictionary**



**Figure 3:** The homepage of Longman Online

**3.3. Collins Online**

After entering the homepage of the dictionary, the Collins Online seems to have the same problem as Longman Online, that is, the "Cookies Settings" blocks the bottom of the page (as shown in Figure 4). However, after closing the window, it is still impossible to directly access "Word of the Day" if the user stays where he or she is. If the user wants to know the information about "Word of the Day", he needs to scroll the screen down to the "popular tools" section. As shown in Figure 5, "Word of the Day" is located at the far left of the "popular tools" section, and this section is one of the many sections designed by Collins Online Dictionary, so it is not easy

for users to notice where "Word of the Day" is located at on the webpage. Although Collins' "Word of the Day" uses a more eye-catching red in terms of color design, the various columns included in "popular tools" are also relatively easy to notice in their colors, so if users want to find "Word of the Day" on Collins' webpage, it is not an easy job to locate "Word of the Day" as they expect when using Oxford Online and Longman Online.

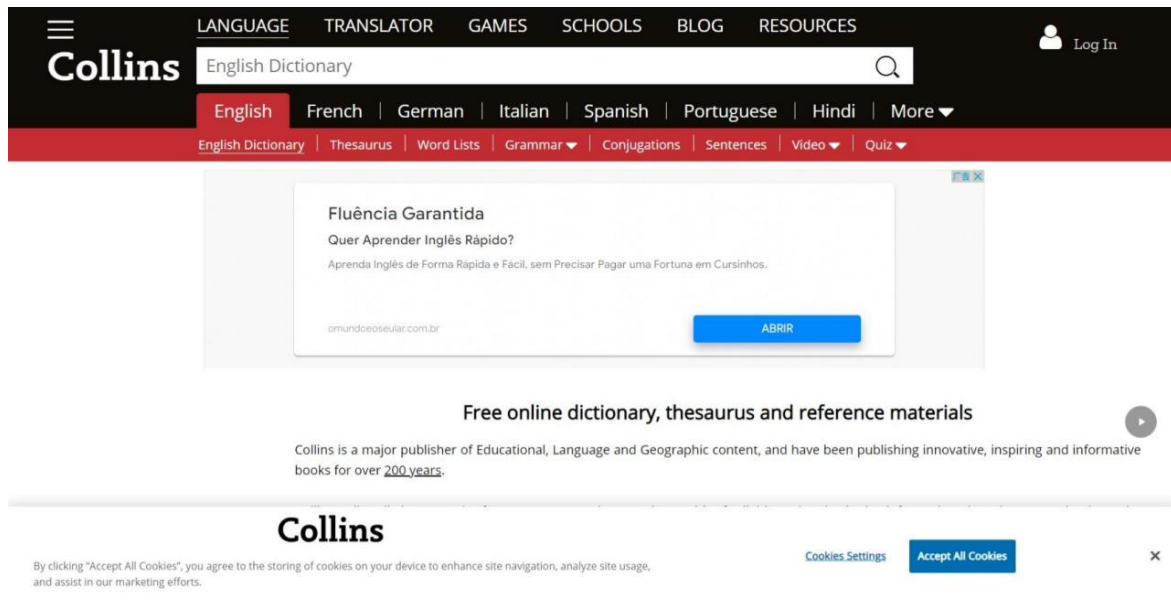


Figure 4: The homepage of Collins Online

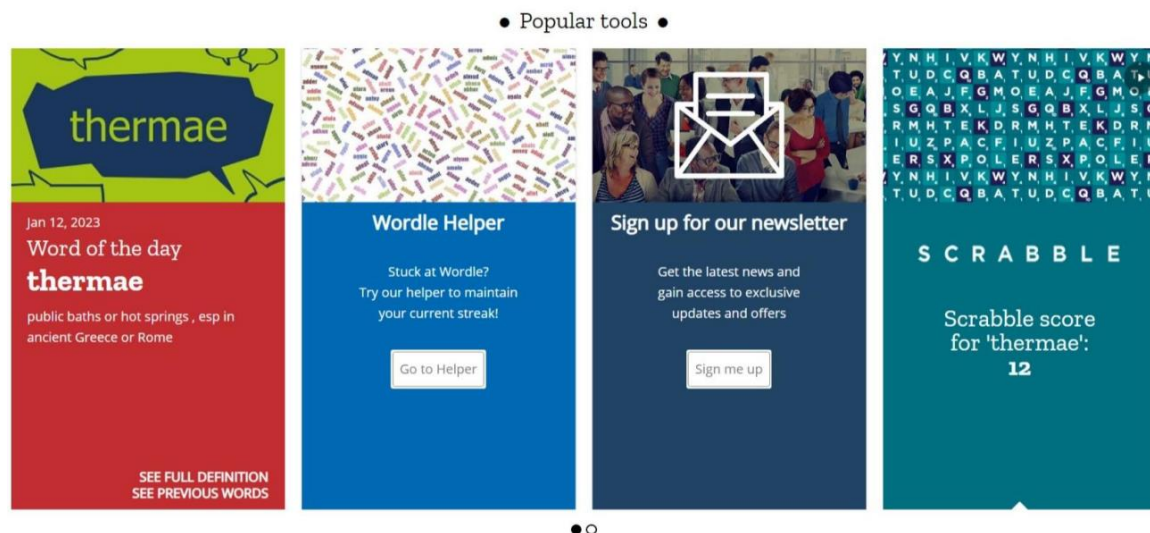


Figure 5: The "Word of the Day" section in the homepage of Collins Online

In Collins' "Word of the Day" column, from top to bottom, are the picture containing the selected word, the date, the "Word of the Day" title, the selected word, a brief definition of the word, an option button for the full definition, and an option button for previous selected words. The picture containing the vocabulary occupies about one-third of the entire column, and the vocabulary display easily catches users' eyes, so users can quickly notice the form of the word after locating the position of the column, and the vocabulary is spelled again in bold below. If the user wants to know the complete definition of the word, he can click the relevant button ("SEE FULL DEFINITION"), and Collins provides the user with a chance to browse "previous words", which is not available in other online dictionaries. However, in terms of completeness

of information, the "Word of the Day" part in Collins Online still does not provide pronunciation information. The author of this paper believes that the method of providing British/American pronunciation buttons (such as Oxford Online and Cambridge Online, which will be discussed in later parts) and the method of providing phonetic transcriptions (such as Cambridge Online) in other dictionaries can be combined so that users can obtain more useful information of the vocabulary.

### 3.4. Cambridge Online

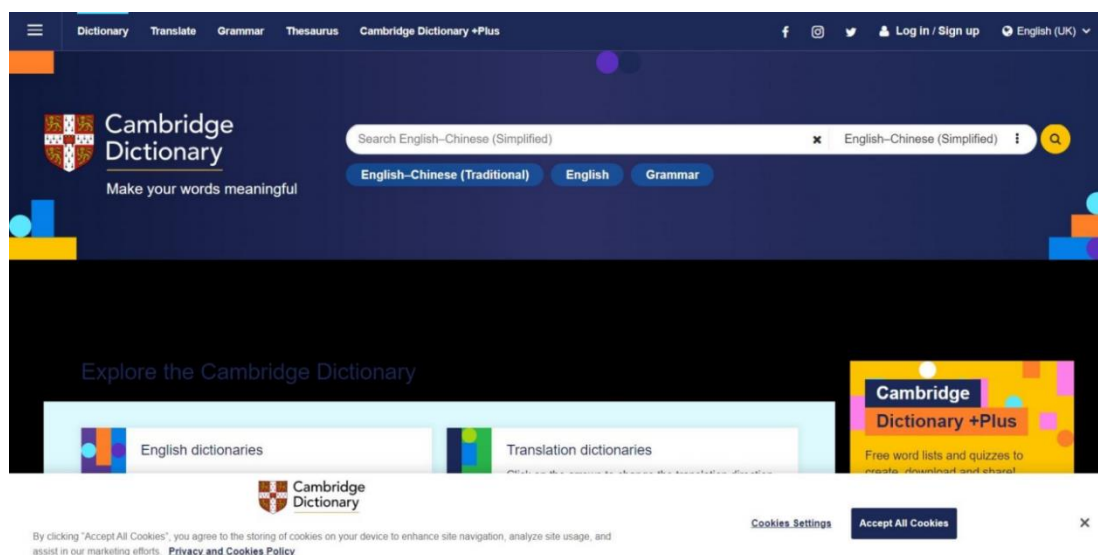


Figure 6: The homepage of Cambridge Online

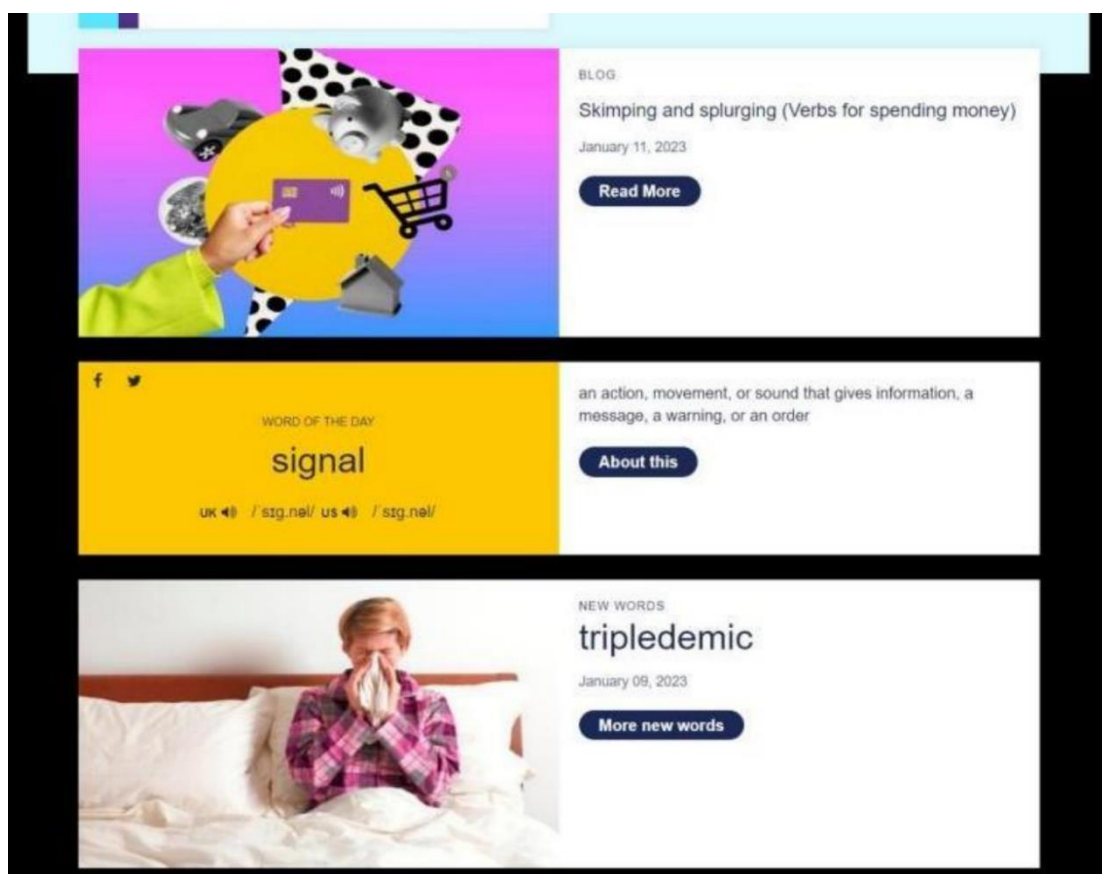


Figure 7: The "Word of the Day" section in the homepage of Cambridge Online

Cambridge Online Dictionary has a similar situation with the above two dictionaries. As shown in Figure 6, the "Cookies Settings" window on the homepage covers the bottom of the screen, so that users cannot directly see the content displayed at the bottom. Users need to scroll down the screen to find the location of "Word of the Day". As shown in Figure 7, "Word of the Day" in Cambridge Online exists between "Blog" and "New words". The color mainly used in this section is yellow, which forms a sharp contrast with the adjacent sections, so it is relatively easy for users to find this section after scrolling down the screen.

The "Word of the Day" section of Cambridge Online is shaped in a long bar which is divided into two equal parts on the left and right with a clear boundary in the middle. The content of the left half is from top to bottom the title of "Word of the Day", the selected topic word, pronunciation buttons and phonetic transcriptions; The right half is the brief definition of the topic word and the "About this" button that leads users to view the full definition. From the perspective of lexical definition, Cambridge Online provides relatively complete definitions of the selected topic words, including not only the word form, British/American pronunciations, but also its brief definition. However, the fly in the ointment here is that the definition does not directly indicate the part of speech of the selected topic word, but users can infer that "signal" is a noun through the definition on the right part ("an action, movement or sound").

### 3.5. Macmillan Online

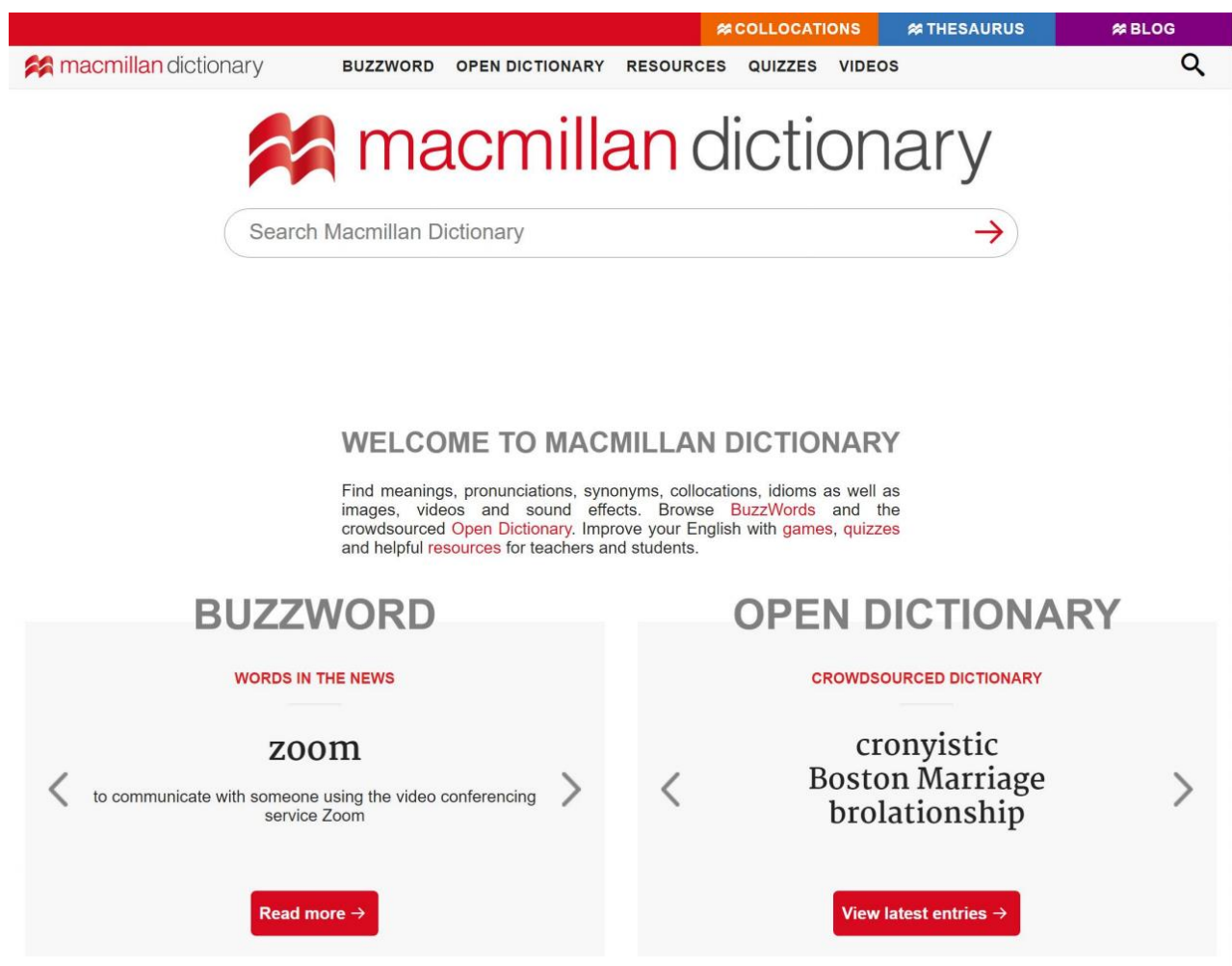


Figure 8: The homepage of Macmillan Online

First of all, it should be pointed out here that the "Word of the Day" section of the other four dictionaries is named "BUZZWORD" in Macmillan Online, and the topic word displayed is closely related to the news of that day. The content presented on the homepage of the dictionary is shown in Figure 8. The homepage of the dictionary is generally simplified, and there is no "Cookies Settings" window and pop-up windows for advertisements. This is an obvious advantage that Macmillan Online has presented to its users compared with the other four online dictionaries in the "Big Five".

In terms of typography, the "BUZZWORD" section of Macmillan from top to bottom includes the title "BUZZWORD", the source of the topic word "WORDS IN THE NEWS", the selected word, the brief definition of the selected word, and the link to obtain its full definition, i.e. the "Read more" button. However, in terms of information provision, Macmillan Online does not display the part of speech and phonetic transcription of the selected vocabulary in the box of the topic word, and there is not even a button for British/American pronunciations. Users must click the button "Read more" below to get other relevant information of the word.

### 3.6. Blockings on the page

As shown in the figures of the homepages of the "Big Five" online dictionaries, except for Macmillan (which suggests Macmillan may provide a relatively easier access to "Word of the Day" to its users), after entering the homepage of the other four online dictionaries, a "Privacy Policy" window will appear at the bottom of the screen. Cookies is a computational technique that allows website operators to store or read a small amount of data in the user's hard disk or computer's memory. When the website is accessed, by this technique the website operators will record some data and information that the user has input, and then the next time the user visits the website, the website operators will evaluate the user's habits according to the data in the Cookies, and will send personalized information to the user. This setting was originally developed as a way to show the dictionary's designing from a users' perspective, but the pop-up window of Cookies more or less covered the required information. For example, in Longman Online shown in Figure 2, the "Cookies Settings" window almost blocked the entire "Word of the Day" section, which would cost more time for the user to accomplish consultation.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the typographical features of the online versions of the "Big Five" in English learners' dictionaries from a multimodal perspective. The analysis focuses on the font size and color of the intrinsic features of typography, as well as the extrinsic ones, and comprehensively evaluates the typographical effects of the "Word of the Day" section of the chosen online dictionaries from different aspects. Different dictionaries have different typographical approaches in the "Big Five": "Word of the Day" may be placed in a prominent position on the dictionary's homepage, such as Oxford Online and Macmillan Online; this section is also possible to be prevented in an inconspicuous location, requiring the user to spend time looking for it, such as in Longman Online, Collins Online, and Cambridge Online. The content presented in the "Word of the Day" section may change. The content presented by the "Big Five" includes titles, word forms, and definitions. On this basis, the Oxford Online also gives the date, part of speech, word source, British /American pronunciation buttons; Collins Online gives the date, "SEE FULL DEFINITION" button, "SEE PREVIOUS DEFINITION" button; Cambridge Online gives British/American pronunciation buttons, British/American phonetic transcriptions, "About this" button; Macmillan Online gives a "Read more" button. In terms of color and font size, the "Word of the Day" sections of the five major dictionaries all use bright colors, either for the section itself or for the title of this section, to attract users' attention, and the selected topic words all use a larger font size and bold letters.

For users, the process of consulting online dictionaries can be seen as an interactive communication with the website operators, and website operators communicate with users through the medium of online dictionaries. If the user cannot quickly obtain the required information related to "Word of the Day", then the user may very well switch to another dictionary when he needs to obtain that kind of information next time just because of what has happened in his last consultation. Such a communication process is unsuccessful both for the dictionary itself and for the website operators. Therefore, when it comes to the design of online dictionaries, attention must be paid to an effective and efficient integration of all the semiotic resources related to typography. Only in this way can online dictionaries be more alive in the future.

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