

[研究ノート]

Some Usage Information Obtained through *COBUILD*

Moritoshi Ueda

The non-native speaker of English often finds that quite common words or idiomatic expressions are not fully explained or totally lacking in both American and British authoritative dictionaries. This may be because such words and expressions are too obvious to the native speaker. Even if he consults *Webster*³ or *OED*, chances are that he cannot find satisfactory explanations. On such occasions, he has to turn to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* or to *COBUILD*. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* is in many ways as useful as *COBUILD*, but constant use of both dictionaries has convinced me that *COBUILD* is in many cases better.

In order to show this, I will take up the idiomatic expressions, “excuse me” (in the sense of *I beg your pardon?* or *Pardon?*), “have had enough”, and “that’s enough”, which have recently given me some trouble.

COBUILD explains the idiomatic use of “excuse me” as follows:

excuse:

7 **excuse me.** you can use the expression **excuse me** in the following ways: 7.1 to get someone’s attention, especially when you are about to ask them a question. EG ‘Excuse me,’ he said, ‘but is there a fairly cheap restaurant near here?’. 7.2

2 Some Usage Information

when you are disagreeing with someone or expressing a different or contradictory point of view. EG *Excuse me, but with all respect, I think you have misunderstood.* 7.3 to apologize to someone when you have disturbed or interrupted them. EG *Well, excuse me for djsturbing you at home... Excuse me butting in.* 7.4 to indicate that you don't want to talk to someone. EG *Excuse me, but I'm busy.* 7.5 to indicate that you are about to leave the room, usually just for a while. EG *'Excuse me.'* *He stood up. 'I have to make a telephone call.'*

7.6 to apologize when you have done something slightly embarrassing or impolite, such as burping, hiccupping or sneezing. 7.7 when you are asking someone to repeat what they have just said; used in American English.

We can see from 7.7 that the phrase is used in the sense of "I beg your pardon?" or "Pardon?" in American English. Now let's look up the idiom in *LDCE*².

excuse¹:

5 Excuse me: **a** (a polite expression used when starting to speak to a stranger, when one wants to get past a person, or when one disagrees with something they have said) Forgive me: *Excuse me, but you're completely wrong.* **b AmE** for SORRY²: *She said "Excuse me" when she stepped on my foot.*

USAGE In British English, you say **(I'm) sorry** to a person if you accidentally touch them, or push against them, or get in their way (for example, if you step on someone's foot).

You might also hear the rather old-fashioned expression **I beg your pardon**. In American English you say **Excuse me**.

—see LANGUAGE NOTE: Apologies

As directed in the USAGE above, you refer to ‘Apologies in LANGUAGE NOTE’, but you find nothing about the use of “excuse me” in the sense of “I beg your pardon?” Only in ‘sorry’² the following is given:

sorry² *interj* 1 (used for expressing polite refusal, disagreement, excusing oneself, etc.): *Sorry, but you can't come in. / Sorry, did I step on your toe?* 2 *esp. BrE* (used for asking someone to repeat something one has not heard properly): *“I'm cold.” “Sorry?” “I said I was cold.”* —see LANGUAGE NOTE: Apologies

From above, we see that in British English “sorry” is used in the sense of “I beg your pardon?” But nowhere in *LDCE*, can we find any reference to the American usage “excuse me”. In *COBUILD*, however, the usage of “sorry” is fully explained as follows:

sorry 7

You also use **sorry** 7.1 when you haven't heard something that someone has said and you want them to repeat it. EG *‘Have you seen the health guide book anywhere?’—‘Sorry?’—‘Seen the health guide book?’* 7.2 as a polite introduction when you are disagreeing with someone or refusing to do

4 Some Usage Information

something for them. EG *I'm sorry, I wouldn't agree with that at all, Brian...* *I'm very sorry but I feel I cannot oblige you in this matter.* 7.3 as a polite introduction when you want to interrupt other people who are having a discussion. EG *Sorry, we're getting away from the point — I'm sorry, I don't actually get your meaning — Sorry, may I just add something here?* 7.4 to correct yourself when you have said something incorrect. EG *It's in the southeast, sorry, southwest corner of the USA — The other three suggestions — sorry — I should have said the other two suggestions, were very helpful.*

In 7.1 there is no indication that this idiom is limited to British English, which may be because this usage has gained currency in American English. If it were pointed out clearly for the benefit of the reader that “sorry” is to be read with a rising intonation, it would be of help to beginners, though it is easily seen by an experienced reader since “sorry” is followed by a question mark.

Next let's look up “excuse” in *Webster*³, *Webster's New World Dictionary (WNWD)*, *Longman Dictionary of American English (LDAE)* and *COD*⁷, and see how the idiom “excuse me” is treated.

*Webster*³:

excuse

4: to regard with indulgence: OVERLOOK — often used as an introductory apology (as when interrupting or expressing disagreement) <~ me, but do you mind if I shut the window?>

*WNWD*²:

(Nothing is mentioned as to “excuse me”.)

LDAE:

excuse me : **a** (a *polite expression used when starting to speak to a stranger, or when one wants to get past a person, or when one disagrees with something he/she has said*) Forgive me : *Excuse me, does this bus go to the airport?* **b** *AmE*// also **sorry** — polite expression used when asking to be forgiven for wrong, usu. accidental behavior) *She said “Excuse me” when she stepped on my foot.* — see *SORRY* (USAGE)

The explanations and example sentences of “sorry” in *USAGE* are the same as in *LDCE*².

*COD*⁷:

excuse me (as an apology for lack of ceremony, interruption, etc., or as form of dissent)

I am surprised that no American or British dictionary cited above except *COBUILD* gives any explanation of the idiomatic use of “excuse me” in the sense of “I beg your pardon?” or “Pardon me?”.

Next let’s consult *Taishukan’s Genius English-Japanese Dictionary*, which has a reputation for its exhaustive information on usage.

excúse me [ùs] .

6 Some Usage Information

(1) in answer to “Excuse me”, you can say, “That’s all right (O. K.)”, “Excuse me”, “Certainly”, “Of course”, “Sure (ly)”, “Yes”, but in many cases you say nothing.

(2) when you haven’t heard something that someone has said and you want them to repeat it, you say, “Excuse me? (↗)”; used in American English. In British English, “Sorry? (↗)” is common.

(3) To express gratitude, you say “Thank you”: *Thank you* (× *Excuse me*) *for seeing me off.* (Translated from the Japanese)

And in *Obunsha’s Sunrise English-Japanese Dictionary*, which gives the following explanation for the benefit of the reader:

Excuse me? (with a rising intonation), please repeat what you have just said (a polite way of saying). (Translated from the Japanese)

Now let’s move on to “have had enough” and “that’s enough”. Only in *COBUILD* is the idiomatic use of “that’s enough” fully explained. In *Webster*³ we find the following explanation close to the usage in question, but nothing is mentioned about the usage of “have had enough” and “that’s enough”.

*Webster*³:

enough 3 : — often used interjectionally usu. with an implication that what has gone before has exceeded any proper

sufficiency <~ ! how dare you insult our queen >

Let's see what other dictionaries say.

*COD*⁷:

enough *a, n., & adv.* Not less than the required number, quantity, degree, as: ~ ~ ~ *I have had enough (am tired) of him, ~ ~ ~*

This does not give non-native speakers a clear idea whether “have had enough” can be used alone or it should always be followed by “of ~”.

*LDCE*²:

enough¹ *determiner, pron [(for)]* as much or as many as may be necessary: ~ ~ ~ *I've had enough of your rudeness!* (= too much of it) | ~ ~ ~

The example given above seems to show that “had enough of ~” is an idiom and should be used in the past or the present perfect tense. In view of the fact that “I've had enough” can be used without being followed by “of ~”, something should be added for clarification. Nothing is mentioned of “that's enough”.

*OALD*⁴ :

enough¹ 2 (idm) ~ ~ ~ **have had enough (of sth/sb)** be unable or unwilling to tolerate sth/sb any more : *After three years without promotion he decided he'd had enough and*

8 Some Usage Information

resigned. I've have enough of her continual chatter. I'm surprised you haven't had enough of him yet — I found him very boring.

OED :

Enough A. 3. *absol.* in *sing.* That which is sufficient; as much as is requisite or desired. Often const. *of* (in OE. partitive genitive). Also const. *of* († *at*) with *inf.*, or *for* with *sb.*, indicating the purpose. *To have had enough* (*of* anything) : to have become tired of (it), desire no more.

The explanations and example sentences of *OALD*⁴ and *OED* are enough to clarify the question in usage, but nothing is mentioned as to the usage of “that’s enough”.

Now let’s turn to *Taishukan’s Genius English-Japanese Dictionary* :

enough

1 ... / *I've had ~.* (I’m full, I’ve eaten enough) 2 (~ of + noun) (more than) enough ... {◆ with a definite noun (phrase)} : *That’s enough of this folly!* (I’m sick and tired of this folly.) {◆ Omitting “that’s”, “Enough of this folly!” is often used.} / *We’ve had ~ of America!* (We’re tired of America.) / *I’ve had enough of this!* (I don’t like any more. I’m fed up with it.) (Translated from the Japanese)

The example sentence “I’ve had enough” in 1 is not an idiom. The last two example sentences in 2 are the idioms in question,

but they do not give us enough information. The idiomatic use of “I’ve had enough” is ignored and the use of “that’s enough” is not fully explained. Only *COBUILD* explains both usage clearly and satisfactorily :

COBUILD :

enough 6.3 If you say that you **have had enough**, you mean that you are unhappy and dissatisfied with a situation and you want it to stop. *EG I’ve had enough ... He seemed to have had enough of talk about wars and wounds.* 6.4 you say **that’s enough** to tell someone, especially a child, to stop behaving in a particular way, usually when you think they are being silly or unpleasant. *EG ‘That’s enough!’ the doctor said sharply.*

REFERENCES

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Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary

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Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Fourth Edition)

Webster’s New World Dictionary (Second College Edition)

Taishukan’s Genius English-Japanese Dictionary

Obunsha’s Sunrise English-Japanese Dictionary