Review of H.F. Eggeling, A Dictionary of Modern German Prose Usage

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enough and to spare. But it was the imagina-
tion of experience, not of transcendence, and
this primary distinction is not to be blurred.

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A Dictionary of Modern German Prose Usage.

"The purpose of this volume... is to
provide teachers and students of German, and
others whose calling demands a sound
knowledge of standard German prose, with a
reliable guide in the many cases of difficulty
which that language presents" (p. v). As this
statement suggests, the book offers a kind of
Fowler for the English-speaking user of
German and invites comparison with norma-
tive works of the same sort available in the
German-speaking countries, such as Wust-
mann's Sprachdummheiten and the ortho-
graphic, stylistic, and grammatical volumes of
the Duden series. Despite the prescriptive
orientation, the book is made useful for more
scholarly purposes by its wealth of citations
from authors ranging from MHG times (for
occasional historical discussions) to the pre-
sent. Almost half of the authors listed in the
Appendix (which is not an exhaustive list)
were born between 1851 and 1900. Quotations
are identified only by the author's name, a
limitation obviously necessary in a work of
this size and scope.

The main body of the work consists of a
series of articles which are ordered alpha-
betically by headings that are (somewhat
capriciously) now German, now English.
Most of the articles deal with the habits of
individual words, giving information as to
orthographic conventions (e.g., deutsch), mor-
phological irregularities or fluctuations (e.g.,
hängen), syntactic problems (e.g., the idiomatic
collocations of prepositions and verbs, such as
sinnen with über or auf). The author also
draws stylistic distinctions in these areas as
well as in matters of lexical choice (e.g., Roß
vs. Pferd). Copious cross-references allow the
author to deal with parallel problems in one
place, and there are a number of articles on
general topics such as "word order," "nouns
of measure," "Monatsnamen." Synonymy is
treated both in the sorts of articles referred to
above and, in many instances, by discussing
an English word that can be rendered by several
different German words (e.g., "place"). As is
apparent, Eggeling has attempted to cover a
very large territory indeed.

The author displays a rather conservative
orientation (as is proper in a book of this
type), but he is generous in providing counter-
examples for many of his prescriptions. The
"Prose Usage" of the title must be taken liter-
ally. In spite of Molière, prose is as far
removed from speech as is verse, and the book
has little to say about the modern spoken
idiom. As for "modern," the adjective will
fit better if we qualify it by "literary" or
"formal" and think of it as applying to the
period from, say, 1800 on. Linguistically, the
author is very conservative, if not quaint, as
in the use of such terms as "Saxon genitive"
(used in German pedagogy to refer to the
English possessive case, but by Eggeling for
the pre-posed genitive in German). His
innocence of the various linguistic advances (or
heresies) of our century is pristine.

As in any book of this range, it would be
possible for the reviewer to quibble with
details. Historical information is not always
relevant (cf. Ablaut, p. 4). The discussion of the
"subjunctive mood" is confusing in its failure
to distinguish sharply between the tense
system of the subjunctive and that of the
indicative: there is no tense difference between
sei and währe. Sonderm is not "used to introduce
a proposition which contradicts a preceding neg
ative statement or idea" but rather one
which contradicts the positive statement under-
lying the negation, s.v. aber (conjunction).
A more serious criticism is that the author
gives no precise documentation for the
authorities he cites (as opposed to the examples
from leading authors). Thus, it is impossible
to discover from the book whether a statement
on a particular usage is made by Konrad
Duden himself in one of his several works or
in one of the later volumes of Der große
Duden, each existing in several quite different
editions.
The value of the book lies in its handiness (compared to larger more specialized works) and in its wealth of factual detail. It will furnish a useful tool for the writer of German and can be recommended to advanced students as well as to non-specialists desiring a reference work on many points of German usage.

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