

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION IN MODERN ENGLISH LEXICOGRAPHY

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Abstract: Lexicography and lexicology share a common subject of study, but they differ in the extent of organization and comprehensiveness they can attain. This article provides a wide-ranging theoretical overview of lexicography, focusing on the challenges encountered in compiling dictionaries and their presence in English lexicography.

Keywords: Lexicography, compilers, lexical units, explanatory dictionaries of the synchronic type, meaning, entry.

The field of lexicography, which involves creating dictionaries, is a significant area of research. Lexicography is closely linked to lexicology, as they both address similar issues such as the structure, definition, usage, and etymology of words, and they benefit from each other's accomplishments. Linguists heavily rely on the vast collection of raw material found in dictionaries for their research. At the same time, the creation of dictionaries follows linguistic principles, with each entry being constructed based on the latest knowledge and discoveries of scholars in different areas of language study. The way the compiler deals with different linguistic issues, like homonymy and idiomatic phrases, is always evident in how they choose and organize the content.

The most important problems of lexicography are connected with:

1. Choosing which lexical units to include;
2. Organizing the chosen lexical units;
3. Formatting the entry;
4. Formatting and organizing word meanings;
5. Defining the meanings;
6. Providing illustrative examples.

The lexicographer's first task is to determine which lexical units to include in the dictionary. They must decide on the types of units, the quantity, what to include and exclude, which language form to reflect (spoken, written, or both), and whether to include obsolete units, technical terms, dialectisms, colloquialisms, and others.

The decision on which answers to include in a dictionary depends on various factors, such as the dictionary's purpose, target users, size, the compilers' linguistic perspectives, and other relevant considerations. For instance, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (second edition, 1987) is designed to serve as a resource for advanced English students and teachers, providing comprehensive information on the core vocabulary of contemporary international English. This dictionary contains approximately 56,000 words and phrases, encompassing scientific and technical terms, business and computer terminology, literary vocabulary, and informal and idiomatic usage. It also covers both American and British English extensively. Whenever the lexicographers work on a new edition of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (fifth edition, 2009), their objective remains consistent: how can they enhance the dictionary's usefulness for those at an advanced level of English.

There are two modes of presentation of entries, the alphabetical order and the cluster-type, i.e. when the units entered are arranged in nests, based on this or that principle. For example, in synonym-books words are arranged in synonymic sets and its dominant member serves as the head-word of the entry. Explanatory dictionaries of the synchronic type contain the most complex type of entry. Typically, these entries include information about accepted spelling and pronunciation, grammatical characteristics like the part of speech and countability of nouns, transitivity of verbs, and irregular forms, definitions of meaning, modern currency, illustrative examples, derivatives, phraseology, etymology, and occasionally synonyms and antonyms. There are three possible arrangements for word meanings: first is the historical order, which follows their development over time; second is the empirical order, where meanings are listed based on their frequency of use, with the most common meaning given priority; lastly, there is the logical order, which organizes meanings according to their logical relationship.

The issue of organization is approached differently in various dictionaries. The New Oxford Dictionary of English, for instance, follows a broad principle in which every word is assigned a core meaning, with additional submeanings. According to the dictionary's authors, these core meanings represent the most common and central uses of each word in contemporary Standard English. They are the literal and primary meanings acknowledged by native speakers. Most dictionaries arrange meanings based on how often they are used, but occasionally the main meaning is listed first if it is crucial to comprehending related meanings. Certain dictionaries provide detailed information about the author, work, page, verse, line, and exact publication date, while others merely mention the author to provide a basic understanding of the word's occurrence in a specific time period.

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