

PROBLEMS OF ENGLISH LEXICOGRAPHY IN COMPILING DICTIONARIES

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Annotation

Lexicography is the art and science of dictionary-making. It involves the systematic collection, analysis, and organization of words and their meanings, often resulting in the creation of dictionaries or lexicons. Lexicographers study language usage, gather information about word origins (etymology), and document various meanings, pronunciations, and grammatical functions of words.

There are two main types of lexicography: descriptive lexicography, which aims to observe and record how language is used in practice without prescribing rules, and prescriptive lexicography, which provides guidelines on correct language usage based on established norms. The work of lexicographers is essential for understanding linguistic evolution, supporting language education, translating texts, and preserving cultural heritage through written records.

In recent years, advancements in technology have transformed lexicography with the rise of digital dictionaries and online resources that allow for more dynamic updates and greater accessibility to users worldwide.

Keywords: dictionary, lexicon, thesaurus, definition, etymology, semantics, morphology, syntax, usage examples, corpus linguistics, lexical entries, bilingual dictionaries, glossary, word formation, neologism, descriptive lexicography, prescriptive lexicography, onomastics, phraseology, semantic fields, problems, challenges, compiling, editing.

Lexicography is the practice and study of compiling dictionaries. It involves the systematic collection, analysis, and presentation of words and their meanings, along with various other linguistic information

Types of Dictionaries

There are several types of dictionaries that lexicographers may create:

- General Dictionaries: These provide definitions for a wide range of words used in everyday language (e.g., Merriam-Webster's Dictionary).

- Specialized Dictionaries: Focus on specific fields or topics (e.g., medical dictionaries, legal dictionaries).
- Bilingual Dictionaries: Translate words between languages.
- Thesauruses: List synonyms and antonyms rather than definitions.
- Historical Dictionaries: Track the evolution of word meanings over time (e.g., Oxford English Dictionary).

Challenges in Lexicography

Lexicographers face several challenges:

1. Language Change: Languages constantly evolve, with new words emerging and existing ones changing meaning or falling out of use.

Example:

Old English: Wifmann (woman) → Modern English: woman.

2. Ambiguity: Many words have multiple meanings that can vary based on context.

Example:

Head – the organ of a human body; head – to lead, to guide.

English lexicography, the art and science of compiling dictionaries, faces several challenges. Here are some key problems associated with it:

1. Language Evolution: The English language is constantly evolving, with new words being created and old words falling out of use. Lexicographers must keep pace with these changes to ensure dictionaries remain relevant.

Language evolution refers to the ways in which languages change over time. Here are some examples across different aspects of evolution:

- a) Vocabulary Changes:

Old English: cwēn → Modern English: queen

Over centuries, spelling and pronunciation shifted.

- b) Introduction of new words due to technology:

Telegraph (19th century) → Internet (20th century) → Smartphone (21st century).

- c) Semantic Shifts

Word Meaning Change:

Nice (Middle English: foolish) → Modern English: pleasant.

Awful (Old English: full of awe) → Modern English: terrible.

- d) Borrowing from Other Languages

English borrowed words due to contact with other cultures:

Café (French), kindergarten (German), safari (Swahili).

2. **Variety of English:** English is spoken in many dialects and varieties around the world (e.g., British English, American English, Australian English, etc.). Deciding which variants to include and how to represent regional differences can be challenging.

An example of a dialectical difference between British and American English is the word for the back part of a car used for storage:

British English: boot

American English: trunk

Similarly, there are differences in spelling, vocabulary, and pronunciation, such as:

British: colour, theatre, flat (apartment)

American: color, theater, apartment

3. **Technological Impact:** The rise of digital communication (social media, texting) has introduced new vocabulary and informal usages that may not fit traditional standards of language. Lexicographers need to determine which terms deserve inclusion in formal dictionaries.

The impact of technology on lexicography has revolutionized how dictionaries are created, updated, and used. Here are examples illustrating the technological impact:

a) **Digital Dictionaries**

Example: Online platforms like Merriam-Webster Online or Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online.

b) **Corpus Linguistics and Data-Driven Lexicography**

Example: Use of corpora like Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) or British National Corpus (BNC).

4. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Language reflects culture, and certain terms may become outdated or offensive over time. Lexicographers must navigate these sensitivities while providing accurate representations of language usage.

Example: Updating Offensive or Biased Definitions

Word: Eskimo

Traditional Definition: A term used to describe indigenous peoples of Arctic regions.

Cultural Sensitivity Issue: The term is considered outdated and offensive by many Inuit and Yupik people.

Modern Definition: Many dictionaries now replace Eskimo with Inuit or specify that the term is pejorative.

5. Technical Vocabulary: Specialized fields (e.g., science, technology) develop their own jargon that may not be widely understood outside those disciplines. Including such terms requires careful consideration of audience needs.

Examples of Technical Vocabulary by Field:

a) Medicine:

Hypertension (high blood pressure).

MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging).

Anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction).

b) Engineering:

Torque (rotational force).

Cantilever (a beam anchored at only one end).

Nanomaterials (materials engineered at a molecular scale).

6. User Expectations: Modern users often expect quick access to information via digital platforms but may not have patience for detailed explanations or historical context that traditional dictionaries provide.

Example: Words like selfie, vape, or stan became widespread through social media and pop culture.

Expectation: Users want definitions available in online dictionaries as soon as these words enter common usage.

Response: Dictionaries like Merriam-Webster and Oxford English Dictionary now update their entries frequently to include trending terms.

7. Integration of Multimedia: As digital dictionaries evolve, incorporating multimedia elements (audio pronunciation guides, visual examples) poses technical challenges and requires continual updates.

Example: Online Dictionaries with Multimedia Elements

Modern online dictionaries such as Oxford English Dictionary Online or Merriam-Webster integrate multimedia to resolve problems like insufficient context, unclear pronunciations, or abstract concepts.

a) Audio Pronunciations:

Problem: Difficulties in understanding pronunciation, especially for non-native speakers.

Solution: Audio clips provide accurate pronunciations in different accents (e.g., British vs. American English).

Example: A user can click on the speaker icon next to "schedule" to hear its pronunciation.

b) Video Clips:

Problem: Abstract or complex words are hard to understand through text alone.

Solution: Videos provide contextual examples.

Example: The word ballet might include a short clip of a performance, illustrating its meaning visually.

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