

LEXICOGRAPHIC PARAMETERS: CRITERIA FOR SELECTING, CLASSIFYING, AND DEFINING LEXICAL UNITS

Jumaboyeva Dildora Munis kizi

Urgench Ranch Technological University

ABSTRACT: This article explores the fundamental lexicographic parameters that determine the selection, classification, and definition of lexical units in modern dictionaries. Lexical entries do not merely reflect language use; they are shaped by specific theoretical and practical criteria that guide lexicographers in their decision-making. The study examines how semantic, grammatical, stylistic, and frequency-based factors influence the inclusion and organization of lexical items. Particular emphasis is placed on the methodological principles applied in structuring dictionary entries, with reference to both monolingual and bilingual lexicographic practices. Through comparative analysis, the paper highlights the challenges lexicographers face when defining polysemous, idiomatic, or culturally loaded terms. The findings underline the importance of consistent and user-oriented criteria in achieving accurate and functional dictionary definitions.

Keywords: Lexicographic parameters; lexical unit; selection criteria; classification; definition principles; dictionary entry; monolingual lexicography; bilingual lexicography; semantics; user-oriented approach.

INTRODUCTION

Lexicography, as a discipline situated at the intersection of linguistics and applied language studies, plays a critical role in documenting, organizing, and standardizing the vocabulary of a language. Modern dictionaries—whether monolingual or bilingual, printed or digital—are no longer perceived as mere repositories of words, but as carefully curated linguistic tools based on established scientific principles. At the heart of lexicographic practice lies a set of parameters that guide the selection, classification, and definition of lexical units. These parameters are essential not only for ensuring the consistency and usability of dictionaries but also for addressing the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of language. The process of selecting which lexical items to include in a dictionary is not arbitrary; it involves a complex interplay of criteria such as frequency of use, semantic relevance, grammatical behavior, stylistic appropriateness, and sociolinguistic importance. Similarly, classifying lexical units into parts of speech, semantic fields, or pragmatic categories requires systematic linguistic analysis. The final stage—defining the lexical unit—demands precision, clarity, and sensitivity to both linguistic and cultural nuances, especially in the case of idioms, neologisms, polysemous terms. Moreover, the rise of electronic lexicography and user-centered lexicographic design has introduced new challenges and expectations for dictionary makers. Users now demand more contextualized, accessible, and interactive resources. As a result, the traditional criteria for inclusion and description are being revisited and refined. This article aims to examine the major lexicographic parameters involved in the creation of dictionary entries. It analyzes the theoretical foundations behind lexical selection, classification, and definition, while also considering the practical implications for lexicographers. Through comparative insights and methodological reflection, the paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of how lexicographic decisions impact the quality and functionality of dictionaries in various linguistic and cultural settings.

1. Selection of lexical units

The first and perhaps most critical stage in lexicographic work is the selection of lexical items for inclusion. This process is guided by both objective and subjective criteria. Objective factors include corpus-based frequency counts, collocational strength, and usage across registers. Subjective decisions may involve cultural salience, pedagogical relevance, or even anticipated user interest. In modern lexicography, corpora play a key role in offering empirical evidence for inclusion, allowing lexicographers to track how frequently and in what contexts certain words appear. However, frequency alone does not determine selection—lexical items that are culturally significant or critical to domain-specific discourse (e.g., legal or medical terminology) may be included even if their frequency is relatively low.

2. Classification of lexical units

Once selected, lexical units must be classified systematically. This involves identifying their part of speech, semantic domain, syntactic behavior, and pragmatic usage. Classification is essential for dictionary usability, as it affects how entries are organized and retrieved. Lexicographers often rely on taxonomies from structural linguistics, cognitive semantics, and pragmatic theory to inform classification decisions. For instance, verbs may be further categorized into transitive and intransitive types, while nouns may be divided into countable and uncountable classes. Semantic classification may involve grouping words into thematic fields such as food, emotions, or technology, which can enhance dictionary navigation and cross-referencing.

3. Definition of lexical units

Defining lexical units is a nuanced and challenging aspect of lexicography. A good definition must be accurate, concise, and accessible to the intended user group. Lexicographers must decide whether to use a genus-differentia format (e.g., "A sparrow is a small bird...") or a full-sentence definition style, especially for learner dictionaries. In bilingual dictionaries, the challenge of achieving equivalent meaning is amplified due to cultural and conceptual differences across languages. Moreover, polysemy—the presence of multiple meanings for a single word—requires careful disambiguation, often through numbered senses and usage examples. Idiomatic expressions and fixed collocations add further complexity, demanding both literal and figurative interpretations.

4. Influence of dictionary type and target audience

The lexicographic parameters discussed above are also influenced by the type of dictionary being compiled—general-purpose, learner-oriented, terminological, or corpus-driven—and by the intended audience. A monolingual learner's dictionary, for example, may include simplified definitions, visual aids, and phonetic transcriptions to support language acquisition, whereas a specialized technical dictionary may prioritize terminological precision over readability. Similarly, digital dictionaries introduce interactivity, hyperlinks, real-time corpus updates, and multimedia features, shifting the focus from static content to dynamic user experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, lexicographic practice is a highly structured and theoretically informed process that requires careful consideration of several key parameters—namely, the selection, classification, and definition of lexical units. Each of these stages is governed by both linguistic principles and practical user-oriented considerations. While frequency and contextual relevance guide the selection of vocabulary items, classification ensures that words are organized in a way that reflects their grammatical and semantic relationships. Meanwhile, the task of definition demands precision, clarity, and cultural sensitivity. The evolution of dictionary-making, particularly with the integration of digital tools and corpus linguistics, has significantly enhanced the efficiency and accuracy of lexicographic processes. However, it has also introduced new complexities and responsibilities for lexicographers, especially in ensuring that dictionaries remain accessible, inclusive, and pedagogically valuable across diverse user groups. As language continues to evolve, so too must the criteria and methodologies of lexicography. Future research and practice must strike a balance between technological innovation and linguistic integrity to produce dictionaries that are not only informative but also responsive to the communicative needs of their users.

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