

RELEVANCE OF LINGUISTICS AND LEXICOGRAPHY IN TEACHING USE OF DICTIONARY TO LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE

by

I. O. SANUSI

*Department of Linguistics & Nigerian Languages,
University of Ilorin,
Ilorin, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Despite the fact that most learners of ESL/EFL do possess copies of monolingual English dictionary, not every learner or user is aware of the essential linguistic and lexicographic information contained therein. Thus, it could be said that such group of learners or users fail to derive the maximum benefit of using a dictionary as a reference book.

In view of the fact that teachers are generally regarded as 'facilitators of learning', there is the need for ESL/EFL teachers to give their students, at all levels, all necessary guidance on the best way to use a monolingual English dictionary.

On this note, researchers in the field of applied linguistics have stressed the need for teachers of ESL/EFL to teach use of dictionary (Lado (1965), Sanusi (1988), Summers (1988), etc). For instance, Summers (1988:113) reports that,

Although more and more teachers are realizing
that vocabulary acquisition has been neglected in
ELT, the main (approved of) method of
acquiring vocabulary is still through reading, and
reading without the help of a dictionary.

However, it is assumed that only ESL/EFL teachers with sufficient linguistic background, or lexicographers, are in the best position to provide the appropriate required guidance we have in mind.

In other words, there is the need for the ESL/EFL teachers to be at home with all necessary linguistic information that is provided in a dictionary. This automatically makes lexicography an area of interest to all ESL/EFL teachers.

1. Defining Lexicography

Lexicography, as a field of study, could be defined as the art and science of compiling dictionaries. When a scholar gathers, lists, and defines words in a particular language, we say he/she compiles a dictionary. Therefore, one who compiles a dictionary is called a lexicographer.

The aim of compiling a dictionary, either monolingual or bilingual type, for a particular language, is to make information about the language available to learners in the language. Such a dictionary will serve as reference book for those that are literate in the language.

Like other aspects of applied linguistics, lexicography benefits immensely from practical application of descriptive or theoretical linguistics.

1.2 Linguistics in Lexicography

In his treatment of 'lexicography' within the field of applied linguistics,, Carter (1987:125) observes that,

Lexicography is a good example of a domain in which linguistic insights can be directly applied and practical advantages quite readily recognized. But we should not forget that lexicographic practice can also, as Ilson (198 5a) demonstrates, be of service to refinements in linguistic description.

In other words, insights from different levels of linguistics are employed in compiling a dictionary. Those levels include phonetics, phonology, semantics, syntax, morphology, pragmatics, etc.

Pointing out the relevance of linguistics to lexicography, Lado (1964:21) states that, Good dictionaries, monolingual and bilingual, are difficult to compile. They require a good basic linguistic analysis for the proper identification, description and classification of the words of a language.

For instance, correct pronunciation, which is one of the major important information contained in a dictionary, is an output of phonetics (of. Na'Allah and Sanusi (1992)).

Similarly, phonology provides the lexicographers with the necessary information on the sound systems of a language in which a dictionary is being compiled. That is, all the attested phonemes (consonants and vowels) in a language are made available through phonological analysis of such language data. Also, correct official spellings, which are derived from an approved orthography of a language, could be regarded as outputs of phonology.

In teaching use of dictionary, most especially in a second/foreign language situation, ESL/EFL teachers need to intimate their students with the fact that morphology provides information about the processes involved in word formation, for example, all the derivatives of a given lexical entry in a dictionary, could be regarded as end products of morphological analysis of such an entry in the language. For instance, the verb *examine*, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, has the following derivatives: examination, examiner, examinee, etc. which are morphologically derived through the addition of suffix morphemes-ation, -er, and -ee respectively. ;

Syntax provides information on the acceptable structures in the combination of words, phrases, and clauses to form grammatical sentences. As expressed in Stockwell (1977:1), "No language allows sentences to be formed by stringing words together randomly. There are observable regularities." In consonance with the syntactic rules, a dictionary provides information about the acceptable basic word order in a language. The order of constituents could be observed from simple sentences given in a dictionary to exemplify how lexical entries are used in sentences. A dictionary also provides information about the syntactic status of every lexical entry.

Semantics takes care of the types of meanings or *senses* of a given lexical entry in a dictionary.

Pragmatics, which studies how words are used, and what exactly speakers have in mind in using certain word(s) in a particular context, helps to differentiate between sentence meaning and speaker-meaning. Discussing the importance of pragmatics in lexicography, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, (1987) edition, page F12, states that,

There can be considerable difference between sentence-meaning and speaker-meaning. For

example, a person who says "Is that your car?" may mean something like this: "Your car is blocking my gateway-move it!" - or this: "What a fantastic car - I don't know you were so rich!" - or this: "What a dreadful car - I wouldn't be seen dead in it!" The very same words can be used to complain, to express admiration, or to express disapproval.

Many other levels of linguistics are of importance in compiling a dictionary for a language.

Dictionaries could be viewed in terms of their functions in any written language and the unique position they occupy in language teaching and learning, most especially in the aspects of vocabulary development.

2. What are Dictionaries?

Dictionaries are reference books dealing with the words of human languages. They are designed to provide useful information on the official spellings, pronunciation, accepted meanings, syntactic status of lexical entries, correct usage, etc. of the words in a given language.

Following Carter (1987:125), a dictionary is said to be a trusted and respected repository of facts about a language

In terms of its contents, a dictionary could be divided into parts or sections.

2.1 Parts of a Dictionary

Based on the categories of information provided in a dictionary, the following three parts are distinct in a given monolingual English dictionary:

- (a) The front matters
- (b) The body of the dictionary (i.e the dictionary proper)
- (c) The appendix (plural = appendices).

a. The Front Matters

The first part, known as the front matters, contains a preface to the dictionary, a general introduction, information about the grammar of the language in which the dictionary is being compiled, guide on how to use the dictionary, information about style and usage, types of labels used in the dictionary, abbreviations and pronunciation symbols used in the dictionary, British and American pronunciations (in the case of a monolingual English dictionary), information about how stress or tone is marked in the dictionary, etc.

b. The Dictionary Proper

The second part of a dictionary is the body of the dictionary or dictionary proper. As the name implies, it is the core or the main part of a dictionary where information about the correct official spellings of all the lexical entries, correct pronunciations of the entries, syntactic status of every entry and its derivatives, definitions or meanings of all the entries and their senses could be found.

An *entry* connotes a headword together with its article (i.e. definitions, derivatives, pronunciation, examples of usage, etc).

It is in the body of a dictionary that entries or headwords are normally printed in bold type and positioned to the left column of the dictionary.

c. The Appendix

The appendices are found at the end of a dictionary, and therefore form the third and the last part.

Though the appendices contain useful information about a dictionary, they are not as important as the first two parts (i.e. the 'front matters and the dictionary proper').

Among other things, information about irregular verbs, common abbreviations, word formation, numerical expressions, weights and measures, geographical names, military ranks, etc. could be found in the appendices.

Because of the purposes for which dictionaries are intended, they are found in various sizes. Thus, we can talk of types of dictionaries according to size and categories of users.

2.3 Types of Dictionaries

Using 'size' and 'categories of users' as parameters, this paper examines some types of dictionaries, as discussed in (2.3.1) and (2.3.2) below.

2.3.1 Types of Dictionaries According to Size

Dictionaries vary in size and volume. Either a monolingual or bilingual dictionary could be in any of the following sizes:

(i) Unabridged Version

This type comes in large volumes. It is very hefty and voluminous (i.e. not portable). Dictionaries of this type are normally kept in the library as reference books for readers to consult.

Dictionaries that come in large volumes are published in different volumes; with the volumes arranged in alphabetical order. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary, which was first published in 1933, is of this type. It comes in twelve volumes (volumes i - xii).

(ii) Desk Dictionaries

Compared to the unabridged version, desk dictionaries are smaller in size and therefore easier to carry about. They also vary in size and volume, depending on the price and the type of audience or users for which they are meant. For example, the Longman Junior English dictionary, published in (1965), is smaller in size and volume than the advanced type; even though the two are of desk type.

Some of the popular monolingual EFL dictionaries, which are of desk type, include the following:

- (a) Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English.
- (b) Oxford American dictionary.
- (c) Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.
- (d) Longman New Generation Dictionary.
- (e) Standard Learner's English Dictionary, etc.

(iii) Pocket Dictionaries

As the name implies, this type is perhaps the smallest type known; in the academic field. Pocket dictionaries follow the desk type in terms of size, volume and their prices.

Both Collins and Universal Webster are examples of monolingual pocket English dictionary.

Apart from the types mentioned in (2.3.1) above, there are other types of dictionaries whose contents are determined by the purpose and type of users or audience for which they are intended.

2.3.2 Types of Dictionaries According to Users

a. Scholarly Dictionaries

Dictionaries of this type aim at completeness and thoroughness of coverage. In other words, they are considered as being highly comprehensive. They contain minute details on every entry, with adequate illustration and examples of usage. *The Oxford English dictionary* that comes in twelve volumes and *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, first published in (1933), are examples of this type.

b. Specialized Dictionaries

As the name implies, dictionaries of this type are designed to serve special purposes. They include the following:

- (i) Etymological dictionaries
- (ii) Thesaurus
- (iii) Abbreviations dictionaries
- (iv) Dictionaries of technical terms
- (iv) Dictionaries of idioms
- (v) Dictionaries of usage
- (vi) Pronunciation dictionaries
- (viii) Encyclopedia Britannica and Americana).

It should be noted that even though entries in an encyclopedia are normally organised alphabetically like entries in a dictionary, information on each entry in an encyclopedia reflects things like culture, commercial and sociological activities that are related to that entry, rather than linguistic information.

2.4 Some Essential Linguistic Information Provided in a Dictionary

Some of the important linguistic information contained in any monolingual English dictionary includes the following:

- (a) Information about correct official spellings of individual entries.
- (b) Information about correct pronunciations of each entry and its derivatives.
- (c) Information about the syntactic status of each entry (i.e. stating whether a word is a noun (countable or uncountable), verb (transitive or intransitive), preposition, adjective, adverb, conjunction, pronoun, or interjection.
- (d) Information about accepted meanings or definitions of entries.
- (e) Information about correct usage of each entry. Also, if an entry has a special way in which it is used, such information is normally provided in a dictionary. For instance, the following restrictive labels are used to indicate such special definitions: idiom, archaic, colloquial, derogatory, figurative; jocular, old use, modern use, vulgar, proverb, and a host of others.

3. Conclusion

Having discussed the need for ESL/EFL teachers to teach use of dictionary to learners; this paper briefly defines lexicography and explains the relevance of linguistics to lexicography. The paper also highlights some relevant linguistic and lexicographic

information contained in a given monolingual English dictionary, which learners or users are expected to be familiar with.

The main reason why this paper emphasizes the need to teach use of dictionary to learners of ESL/EFL is not unconnected with the fact that, in reading any particular passage or text, comprehension depends on the ability of a reader to understand the meanings of individual lexical items that make up, such passage or text. Therefore, unknown words will always remain stumbling blocks to comprehension.

The only plausible solution is to look up such difficult words in a dictionary. And this can only be effectively done if and only when the reader knows how to use a dictionary. On this note, we are of the view that teaching use of dictionary to learners should form an integral part of an English language lesson.

References

- Carter, R. (1987). *Vocabulary: Applied Linguistic Perspective*. London, Alien and Unwin (Publishers) Ltd.
- Lado, R. (1964). *Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach*. New York, McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- , (1965). "Patterns of Difficulty in Vocabulary" In Harold B. Alien and Russell N. Campbell (1965) *Teaching English as a Second Language*. New Delhi, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Ltd.
- Na'Allah, A. and I.O Sanusi (1992). "Teaching Speaking Skills Among Second Language Learners". *Language International*, vol. 4.6pp. 33-35.
- Sanusi, I. O. (1988). "Error Analysis of the Performance of Secondary School Pupils in English Language in Ilorin." Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Ilorin.
- Stockwell, R. P. (1977). *Foundations of Syntactic Theories*. New Jersey. Inc. Englewood Cliff. U.S.A.
- Summers, D. (1988). "The Role of Dictionaries in Language Learning." In Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy (1988). *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London, Longman Group U. K. Ltd.
- Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. (New Edition) (1987) by Longman Group UK Limited, London.
- Longman Dictionary of English Idioms*. (1979) Longman Group Limited, London.
- Longman Pronunciation dictionary*, (1990) Longman Group UK Limited, England.
- Longman Junior English Dictionary*. (1965) Longman Group Limited, London.
- Longman New Generation Dictionary*. (1981) Longman Group Limited; England.
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. (1974) Oxford University Press,

Oxford. *Oxford American Dictionary*. (1980) Oxford University Press, Inc., New York.

The Oxford English Dictionary (vols. i - xii). (1933) Oxford University Press, London.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Published in (1933) Oxford University Press, London.

Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English. (1983) Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English. (1958) by Routledge and Kegan Paul: Ltd. London.

Thesaurus of English words and Phrases (1852) Penguin Books Ltd., England.

The Encyclopedia Americana (30 volumes). (1976) by Americana Corporation, New York.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (30 volumes). (1977) Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., U.S.A.