

The Theoretical Basis of a Systematic Approach to Dictionary Making

Abstract

This paper deals with linguistic, pragmatic and lexicographic prerequisites of a systematic approach to compiling dictionaries and to creating well ordered dictionary sets.

The lexicographic description of words and other language units as purposeful activity in compiling dictionaries can be both solitary and systematic. Solitary dictionary making is compiling isolated dictionaries without any account of how they correlate with those which are already available or will be. The overwhelming majority of existing dictionaries and those which are in the process of being compiled are representative of the solitary approach to dictionary compilation. Systematic dictionary making, on the other hand, consists of compiling dictionaries which are considered elements of an inwardly connected aggregate of lexicographic and quasilexicographic works. Such activity includes as an indispensable element so-called lexicographic designing (constructing). Lexicographic designing is engineering and philological activity which consists of inventing dictionaries, dictionary systems and dictionary series; determining their optimum form and component composition; and elaborating the procedures which permit the lexicographer to impart the highest possible informational value and user friendliness to a dictionary. Three main principles regulate the content of lexicographic designing: (a) the principle of effectiveness, (b) the principle of simplicity and (c) the principle of harmony.

To take into account the principle of effectiveness means to determine the optimum number of dictionary entrances, to assign qualitative and quantitative diversity of appendices, to work out special lexicographic devices, conventional signs, type and colour markings, etc., which make using the dictionary easier.

In accordance with the principle of simplicity, the lexicographer, when choosing from all possible ways of exposing certain linguistic information, should always choose the least complicated and most obvious method of doing so.

And finally the principle of harmony demands that the lexicographer constructs a dictionary in such a way that it's composition, the logic of it's structure and the interdependence of it's parts give the user a certain aesthetic pleasure.

Systematic dictionary making rests on several linguistic, pragmatic and lexicographic propositions. In a broad spectrum of such linguistic propositions the most significant, from the point of view of systematic dictionary making, are (1) distinguishing between linguocentric and anthropocentric approaches to the description of language facts, (2) postulation of the existence of so-called units of a lexical system (not to be confused with lexical units), and (3) the notion of systemgenerative strength of language units.

The opposition of linguocentric (objectocentric, systemcentric) and anthropocentric approaches to the description of language was formulated in a conceptually distinct form in the middle of 1980's. From the point of view of linguocentric approach the language is a given object which is represented by available texts, that is without regard to a person who speaks it. The objective of the linguocentric approach is to analyse speech evidences about the language, to generalise them and to describe in consecutive order typological diversity of phenomena and processes that in total form language mechanics. From the standpoint of an anthropocentric approach, language appears to be an acquired appurtenance of a person's consciousness and therefore as a forming and manifesting essence. The ambition of the anthropocentric approach is, first, to describe a language as an object of interiorisation, acquisition and, second, to ascertain the type of interaction between language and a man. One of the most important lexicographic implications of the aforementioned opposition consists in the fact that lexicographers more and more often come to the conclusion that a user requires specifically targeted dictionaries, which help him learn a certain language phenomenon, a certain register of speech, rather than works featuring an enormous but focusless vocabulary. In this connection the future state of Russian lexicography, as I see it, supposes not only perfection of large linguocentric dictionaries based on multimillion corpora but also a compilation of humanised lexicographic works that are intended for specific users with their specific needs.

As has been stated above the concept of units of a lexical system occupies a prominent place within the framework of systematic dictionary making. In accordance with a corresponding lexicological theory (Morkovkin 1992) there are two types of such units: simple and non-simple ones. The simple units are words and fixed multiword expressions free of ambiguity of their meaning. The non-simple units are subdivided

into composite and combined (gathered) ones. The composite units of a lexical system are such lexical sets whose elements are associated with one another by the relations of similarity, contiguity, contrast, formal-semantic succession (derivation) or hierarchy. The composite units include groups of synonyms, pairs of antonyms, chains of homonyms and paronyms, epigrammatic and derivational word nests, hyperonymic (or simply hyponymous) groups, lexico-semantic groups, lexico-semantic fields, thematic groups. In addition to the cited above linguistic proper word groups there are two of psycholinguistic origin: they are frame (or associative-situational) fields and the so-called taronyms. A frame field is a word-stimulus and an aggregate of words and word-like units which function as responses to it in a free associative experiment. Articles of any associative dictionary are illustrative examples of composite units in question. Taronyms [from Greek *ταραττο* 'to confuse' and *ονομα, ονψμα* 'name'] are lexical and phraseological units which are regularly confused in production and/or comprehension of speech because of their phonetic, semantic or thematic contiguity.

The combined (gathered) units of a lexical system are lexical strata which are formed by words of the same non semantic characteristic. The combined units are comprised of loan-words, obsolete items, neologisms, terms, colloquial words, dialectisms, slang words, frequent and rare words, etc. Besides these quite traditional lexical strata there is a rather untraditional one among combined units. I mean so-called agnonyms. Agnonyms [from Greek *α* 'no', *γνωσις* 'knowledge' and *ονομα, ονψμα* 'name'] are lexical and phraseological units of a mother tongue which for many native speakers are unknown, difficult to understand or misunderstood. Simple units are connected with non-simple ones by the relationship of entailment and that's why the information about the ability or inability of a word to be a component of a certain non-simple unit must be considered an important fragment of word's meaning. This information determines the so-called relative value of a word, that is the component of meaning which ensures an accurate localisation of an item in the lexical space of a language. A proposed conception of units of a lexical system besides its proper linguistic implications permits one to take new approaches to some problems of theoretical and practical lexicography. Among them I can point out those such as providing a stimulant genre and type classification of dictionaries, elaboration of dictionary systems, making a multi-dimensional projection of the vocabulary represented in a dictionary, etc.

Lastly, one of the basic linguistic reference-points of systematic dictionary making is an idea of system-generated strength of linguistic

units and their power potential. According to this idea every word holds a remembrance of both all lexical sets to which it appertains and of all contexts in which it ever occurred. The stated conception provides a solid basis for constructing both dictionaries and whole dictionary systems.

From a pragmatic aspect the quality of systematic dictionary making depends largely on whether, to what degree and in what forms the lexicographer takes into consideration users' assumed potential needs and concerns. It is quite clear that in saying that I mean first and foremost anthropocentric lexicography, because the role of pragmatic aspect within the bounds of linguocentric lexicography practically comes to nought. Then, how can we adequately meet the needs of dictionary users? It can be done by means of successive and expedient responses to the user's claims. A user's claim is information about the aspect of a certain language unit necessary to defined groups of assumed potential users as well as about the advisable, from the user's viewpoint, profundity of its examination. One of the possible approaches for ascertainment and classification of users' claims was proposed at the Fifth Congress of EURALEX in Tampere (Morkovkin, Kochneva 1992).

The central lexicographic thesis that determines the nature of the discussed type of lexicographic activity concerns the formal and content peculiarities of the dictionary sets whose construction is one of the main aims of systematic dictionary making. The most important sets here are the dictionary system and the dictionary series.

The dictionary system is a set of dictionaries different from the viewpoint of their genre, which ensure a multiaspect description of a defined (including the same) corpus of language units. The number of components of a dictionary system varies considerably and in this connection we can speak about a maximum dictionary system and a minimum one.

The notion of a maximum dictionary system is to a considerable extent linguocentric. We can define the term maximum dictionary system as a system whose components reflect all revealed linguistic aspects of some corpus of lexical units and hence all conceivable needs of users. For example, a maximum dictionary system may include explanatory (monolingual or bilingual), ideographical, synonymical, phraseological, grammatical, etc. dictionaries oriented towards a lexical kernel of corresponding language.

The notion of a minimum dictionary system is fully anthropocentric. A system of this type consists of such and only such dictionaries which meet concrete needs of quite concrete users stipulated by the content and the character of their activity. For example, a minimum dictionary system destined for foreign users, who specialise in a certain field of

knowledge and learn Russian, may consist of two dictionaries, that is a basic comprehensive dictionary of literary language (this provides an opportunity to form general language competence) and a pedagogical active-passive terminological dictionary that reflects lexical and other peculiarities of texts of a corresponding field of knowledge (this provides an opportunity to form language competence in a certain sublanguage).

Dictionary systems are made by use of a generative power of language units that are an object of lexicographic treatment with obligatory regard to a rational genre and type classification of dictionaries such as, for example, a stimulant classification of lexicographic works founded on “what”, “how” and “for whom” bases (Morkovkin 1994).

Dictionary series are a set of dictionaries identical from the viewpoint of their genre and manner of treatment of language units but different either in treated language units or in assumed users. Dictionary series may be clonal or graduated, each type created on the base of a common blue-print.

Other requirements whose consistent fulfilment permits one to make practical lexicographic activity emphatically systematic are: (1) discrimination between language units' individual and group properties, (2) use in a dictionary of special composition parts that permit one to exhaust from dictionary articles language material that reveals group properties of headwords, (3) different interpretation of headwords designed to facilitate production and comprehension of speech, (4) group semantization of headwords. And some others.

All the above observations can not be considered, of course, as a comprehensive list of prerequisites of systematic anthropocentric dictionary making. But I have every reason to suppose that their presence is highly desirable in any such list. This conclusion is based on experience that was gathered in the course of carrying out a number of lexicographic projects of a serial type.

References

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