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THE CONSTRUCTION OF ENTRIES IN THE 'ALPHABETICAL DICTIONARY' (1668)

OF JOHN WILKINS AND WILLIAM LLOYD

There is perhaps no major work in the history of Linguistics which has been at once so highly acclaimed and so widely ignored or forgotten as John Wilkins' Essay towards a real character and a philosophical language (1668). The lexicographical component of the Essay, the ALPHABETICAL DICTIONARY (with William Lloyd as co-author), has received only passing mention until quite recently. However, in my research (e.g. Doležal 1983) I have discovered that Wilkins and Lloyd are responsible for three innovations in the development of English lexicography:

(1) they introduced the broad range of the English vocabulary into the lexicon of the English monolingual dictionary (including a formidable number of multi-word lexical units);

(2) they were the first lexicographers to use a highly systematic and methodological construction of entries;

(3) their ALPHABETICAL DICTIONARY was the first to have a self-defining lexicon (that is, words used for definitional purposes were also defined).

In this essay I will analyze the construction of entries in the ALPHABETICAL DICTIONARY (hereafter AD), concentrating my attention on (1) the notational system; (2) the delineation of polysemy; and (3) the use of sub-entries.

As one might suspect, the methodological foundation for dictionary entries is the notational system. I found five basic kinds of notational devices in the AD:

(1) Abbreviations. All grammatical information and locations in the Philosophical Table are abbreviated. Also, words repeated within a single entry are abbreviated; all occurrences of especially are written as sp. Entries E_1 to E_3 illustrate these features.

E_1: Coherent. [adj. Congruity]

E_2: Jug. [Narrow-necked pot sp. of Earth]

E_3: Resin. PP.I.6.A.

Note: PP. = Genus of Particular Parts of Animate Bodies;

I. = Lasting Parts of Plants;

6. = that part of the plant which is dissolvable by water;

A. = affinity to Gum.

(2) Brackets. There are four kinds of brackets, illustrated by entries E_4 to E_7, to signify explication or paraphrase.

E_4: *Grout-head*. [Having a great head]

E_5: *Scoff*. $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Reproach]} \\ \text{Mock]} \end{array} \right.$

E_6: *Grow upon*. $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Usurp} \\ \text{Get} \\ \text{Increase} \end{array} \right\}$ gradually]

E_7: *Spendthrift*. [adj. Squandering (person]

(3) Typeface. Italics are used to mark entry headwords and sub-entries.

(4) Indentation. This device is used to represent categories, classes, and sub-classes of semantic features. Items in the same vertical axis within an entry are meant to be interpreted as distinct meanings (thus indicating polysemy). Items indented are members of the most immediately preceding item which, relative to the target item, is not indented. Entry E_8 is a partial illustration.

E_8: *Discharge*.

    [Un-oblige]
        From Duty.
            [Perform]
            [a. Immunity]
        From Debt.
            [Pay]
            [Acquit]
        From Guilt.
            [a. Innocent]
            [Acquit]
            [Absolve]

(5) Horizontal line. Compound words, derived words and combinations formed upon an entry word are given as sub-entries in most cases. The horizontal line signifies that the entry word is to be inserted in the space the line occupies, as in E_9 and E_{10}.

E_9: *Eaves*. [Margin of Roof]
        ____ dropper, [Concealed(person)hearing]

E_{10}: *Jail*. [adj. Prison(place]
        ____er [adj. Prison(officer]

The preceding examples of notational devices also show us other, more general aspects of the method of definition. The definitions are mainly one-word/one-phrase paraphrases (which is congruent with the practice of other seventeenth-century mono-lingual English dictionaries). Other illustrations of this method suggest that the definitions are endocentric, even though no formal morphological system is indicated:

E_{11}: <u>Arse</u>. [Buttock]

E_{12}: <u>Fecundity</u>. [Fruitfulness]

The form of the entry is actually prescribed by the theory of grammar that is a part of the universal language system in the <u>Essay</u>. Wilkins asserted that in an <u>uncorrupted</u> language the basic (canonical) form of all words was <u>the noun</u>. However, in the AD he was content to act <u>as if</u> the entries were all nouns, though it is obvious from a <u>cursory</u> reading of the dictionary that the theory gave way before the irreducible facts of the English language. The definitional descriptions of verbs are many times given as nouns with the abbreviation <u>a.</u> appended (<u>a.</u> stands for active). For example, <u>to weather one</u> [<u>a.</u> Patient] <u>is</u>, according to the system, read <u>to be patient</u>, while <u>to toy</u> [a. Wantonness] is read <u>to be</u> wanton. As a result of the theoretical demands of the <u>Essay (with which</u> the AD is cross-referenced), parts of speech were <u>not</u> used in the normal descriptions of entries.

Although the AD follows the early tradition of English lexicography in the general method of definition (one-word paraphrases) and is deficient in some aspects (no etymologies; no indication of morphological status), Wilkins' and Lloyd's notational system created other possibilities, which they implemented, that anticipate the modern practice of lexicography. The notational devices are used throughout the AD (with some lapses in the system); their use gives the total dictionary a uniform appearance and structure. Specifically, the notational device [( ] serves to mark a qualification or modification of the usual one-word paraphrases. In fact, its use is sufficiently regular that I would claim that it signals the presence of a lexicographic gloss.

The use of the gloss is widely distributed in the AD. Again we see the influence of the universal language project. Within the universal grammar are semantic operators called 'Transcendental Particles'; their function is to extend the meanings of the Radical words ('Radicals' are concepts which are basic and necessary for communication) in systematic and predictable ways. In the <u>Philosophical Tables</u> of the <u>Essay</u> we find <u>Bee</u>, but not <u>beehive</u>; <u>to express beehive</u> in the universal language we must append the Transcendental Particle <u>house</u> to the Radical <u>Bee</u> (other examples include: Dog + house = <u>kennel</u>; Sick Persons + house = hospital). There are 48 different Transcendental Particles, including <u>Cause</u>, <u>Figurative</u>, <u>Instrument</u>, <u>Diminutive</u>, <u>Augmentative</u>. Those familiar with Igor Mel'čuk's Explanatory-Combinatorial Dictionary (cf. Apresyan et al. 1969) will notice the similarity in type and function between the two sets of semantic operators. The Transcendental Particles in the AD take on the function of glosses.

E_{13}: <u>Ladle</u>. [Spoon(augm.]

E_{14}: <u>Swashbuckler</u>. [adj.   Boasting(person)of fighting]

The gloss (augm.) in E_{13} provides a semantic feature which distinguishes a spoon from a ladle; the use of the gloss tells the reader that <u>spoon</u> is a hyponym of <u>ladle</u>, and that therefore a ladle is a spoon-like instrument. The gloss in the definition for <u>swashbuckler</u> is a note which tells us that the entry pertains to

persons: we know from this gloss that a gorilla thumping his chest after successfully defending his territory cannot be properly be called a swashbuckler (of course, in this case the gloss may be redundant, because boasting can only be predicated of humans).

The delineation of polysemy in the AD provides another reason why we should consider it a work standing as a transition between early lexicography and the modern concept of the dictionary. The practice of the major English dictionary authors from 1604-1721 was to separate multiple senses in an entry by commas and semi-colons; see, for example, E_{15} from Kersey's DICTIONARIUM ANGLO-BRITANNICUM (1708):

E_{15}: Infallible, that cannot err, or be deceived; never-failing

In the AD, each separate sense is distinguished by vertical sequencing and indentation. Though Wilkins and Lloyd did not provide the mixture of Roman and Arabic characters we now associate with outlines and dictionary entries, they used a structure which easily accepts this form of numeration.

It is the substance of their entries that is the most important facet of their lexicographical method; the practice of early English lexicography was to indicate only the primary sense of a so-called 'hard word', or very frequently the hard senses of a common word. In contrast, Wilkins and Lloyd include the broad range of the English vocabulary; they also provide a relatively large amount of lexicographical detail within entries of commonly used English words (the entry deliver, for instance, has nearly 30 senses and sub-senses listed). Most entries which indicate polysemy are not so copious as deliver, though not surprisingly detailed entries are found under such words a clear, dead, come, etc. Some typical examples of entries showing polysemy are:

E_{16}: Edifie. [a. Building]
          [a. Bettering]

E_{17}: Foppery. [Vanity] { (T.IV.5.0.
                          { (M.IV.6.0.
          [Folly]   Ha.VI.2.0.

E_{18}: Indigent. [Poor]
                    [Deficient]
                    [Wanting]

E_{19}: Rescue. [Deliver]
          [Un- {captive]
               {prisoner]

There are two points I would like to make about examples E_{16} to E_{19}. The first point concerns the awareness of polysemy within the definition itself. Under Foppery we see the definitional word Vanity further explicated by reference to two Table loci; from this we know that Vanity has two separate meanings, and that both meanings evidently are synonomous with Foppery. Unfortunately, we find this sort of attention to detail only sporadically in

the AD; the main fault of the authors can be said to be one of assuming that the reader will interpret the simple paraphrases according to the intentions of the authors. The second point concerns a flaw in the method of construction. Under Indigent the three senses are represented as being as separate as Building and Bettering under Edifie; their system does not delineate the subtle differences and similarities between the appropriate senses of Poor and Wanting. Under Rescue, on the other hand, I think we have a simple misapplication of the notational system. The rescue sense of deliver is semantically related to un-captive/-prisoner. In fact, under the headword Deliver all of the other three lexical items (rescue; un-captive; un-prisoner) are listed. A better construction using their own method would be:

$$E_{20}: \quad \underline{\text{Rescue}}. \quad \begin{cases} \text{Deliver} \\ \text{Un-} \begin{cases} \text{captive} \\ \text{prisoner} \end{cases} \end{cases}$$

Notwithstanding the flaws in systematically analyzing and describing polysemy, Wilkins and Lloyd show awareness that an entry can be best defined at times by two or more synonyms, or near-synonyms, thus indicating that the definition of the entry word falls somewhere in the shared semantic range of the synonyms. Potentially ambiguous definitions are disambiguated by lexical juxtaposition. As with most of the entries in the AD, the reader is not given examples of use which would show correct application of each of the related lexical items.

The final component of the construction of entries in the AD I will concentrate upon is the use of the sub-entry. The sub-entry in the AD serves to collect under one entry headword several lexical combinations, whether free or fixed, which have the main entry as part of the concatenation of lexical items; thus, under Repair we find in good repair. While multi-word lexical units make up a large share of the sub-entries (e.g. of one accord; all to pieces; yield up the ghost , I find many compound words (e.g. backdoor; weathercock; coachman) and free combinations (e.g. hard to be understood; beam of a house; beam of a balance). In general, the use of the sub-entry in the AD in all its applications presents the scope and variety of the English lexicon with particular emphasis on the ordinary words and phrases of English. The practice shows an awareness on the part of the authors that multi-word lexical units and similar combinations approach the status of discrete entries. Sub-entries are written in italics, as are the main entries, but naturally, they are included within the text of a main entry.

As with the other methods I have discussed, the use of the sub-entry is not without inconsistencies. However, we must recognize that Wilkins and Lloyd were struggling with a problem that is not altogether settled in modern lexicography. Given a multi-word lexical unit, say bear down, do we put it under bear or down? The usual method is to determine which member of the unit can be expected to be understood by the reader. We would expect the reader to be familiar with down, but perhaps not with bear in this context; therefore it would be appropriate to insert bear down under bear. Elements such as prepositions and forms of the verb to be are ignored (e.g. of one accord is best entered

under accord). Wilkins and Lloyd apply this strategy for the most part; for example bolt upright and to bolt meal are included under bolt. However, the combinations shake the head and hang down one's head are listed under head and hang, respectively. The most significant problem with the sub-entry in the AD is that compound words, multi-word lexical units, and free combinations are treated as if they were of the same category. In the system as given, grain of wood, weatherglass, making a difference, and conjunction of Planets are notationally undifferentiated. Furthermore, some compound words are listed as main entries rather than sub-entries (e.g. Goggle-eyed, Firestone, Eke out, Death-watch, Cucking stool and Bugbear). These problems within the method point out how ambitious a project the AD was. The regular use of the sub-entry was, after all, unique in the early history of English monolingual lexicography.

In this essay I have attempted to show that the construction of entries in the AD is systematic and allows for a cogent display of lexicographic detail. My analysis included three aspects of their lexicographic method: (1) the use of a notational system (which provides the overall structure for the entries); (2) the delineation of polysemy (an innovation in monolingual English lexicography); and (3) the use of sub-entries (a method which coherently recorded and grouped lexical combinations of English).

References

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