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The Dictionnaire Contextuel du Français Économique: A Production Oriented Dictionary of Business French

Abstract

The *Dictionnaire contextuel du français économique* (DICOFE) is an attempt to make the first production-oriented dictionary of Business French that has an onomasiological organisation. Its main characteristic is the systematic presentation of the combinatorics of the vocabulary in core sentences combined with an introduction to economics. These sentences show how language can be used in context and introduce the learners into the field and into the discourse of economics. The DICOFE also pays much attention to common errors learners make in spelling and in the use of related words.

1. Pedagogical lexicography and Business French

The *Dictionnaire contextuel du français économique* (DICOFE) is part of a lexicographical (and lexicological) research project on Business French conducted at the Institute for Modern Languages of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven by Jean Binon and Serge Verlinde in collaboration with Jan Van Dyck from UFSIA (Universitaire Faculteiten Sint-Aloysius, Antwerp). All three of us are involved in teaching Business French (LSP) at university level.

With this project we intend to make a description of Business French by means of dictionaries and lexicological studies of some specific aspects (for instance the combinatorics of the vocabulary of fluctuations, increase and decrease) of business language. We are presently working on two different types of dictionaries:

- a. *The Dictionnaire d'apprentissage du français des affaires* (DAFA) should become the reference production-oriented dictionary for Business French for advanced learners based on an onomasiological organisation. Its richness should make it useful not only for learners of French as a foreign language but also for native speakers who have to decode the language of business and economics. The principles on which the DAFA is based have been presented two years ago at the previous EURALEX Congress (Binon and Verlinde 1992).
- b. The DICOFE. This dictionary was mainly conceived for intermediate learners. The different target group compared to the DAFA justifies not only a reduction of the materials but also a slightly different organisation, although we kept the basic onomasiological structure

(see below). To reduce the price (less than \$5) and to facilitate the use of the DICOFE, it is published in booklets (less than 100 pages), each covering one specific aspect of the economic activity: company, trade, finances and employment (Verlinde et al. 1993a and 1993b). For each volume of the DICOFE, an exercise book is provided (Verlinde 1993 and 1994). In section 3 we will present the DICOFE and the exercise books in detail.

2. Sources

To realise both the DAFA and the DICOFE we can rely on our wide didactic experience and on the lexical information contained in our corpus.

We are struck by the fact that specialised dictionaries, and especially those for Business French, are mostly inadequate for learning objectives because they do not provide adequate answers to the questions learners have when they learn vocabulary. Summarizing the remarks made in Binon and Verlinde (1992:43–44) we could say that those dictionaries do not enhance the combinatory competence of the learner since they focus mainly on terminology. Moreover, most of these specialised dictionaries are made by natives so that they do not give linguistic information which is essential for a language learner. They do not explain, e.g., the use of easy-looking concepts like *ouvrier* and *travailleur*; *source* and *ressource*; *entreprise*, *firme* and *compagnie*. Even with the help of a translation dictionary a learner will frequently have difficulties to put the right word into the right context.

The second source of information we have is a corpus of about 1.1 million words of business texts covering a wide range of topics and uses of business language: from newspaper articles to specialised articles, French and Belgian usage from the middle of the eighties until now.

3. Objectives, contents and approach

The objective of the DICOFE is to offer a dictionary that meets the (written and oral) production needs of our intermediate learners. To reach this goal we think that at least the following information should be given in a comprehensible way:

- a. The basic vocabulary that can partly be found in the LSP-dictionaries of Business French.
- b. The combinatorics of the words, mainly nouns, with verbs and adjectives (collocations and broader combinations). This information should be presented with a minimal metalanguage and in a transparent organisation. The lexicographer should not forget that dictionary users generally don't read the introduction or the User's Guide telling them how to use the dictionary properly.

- c. The translation of words and word combinations: at an intermediate level the production of sentences still often means the translation of an idea formulated in the mother tongue. Moreover, when learners have the translation at their disposal they feel more secure even though in many cases translation doesn't actually help them (Battenburg 1991:Chapter four).
- d. The presentation of word families instead of isolated words in an alphabetical order offers the learner the opportunity to survey quickly what can be said and what not to translate/formulate a specific idea and to vary more easily the sentences he wants to produce.
- e. An introduction into the business world: learning about the business world and learning the words to speak or to write about it should take place simultaneously.
- f. A variety of exercises: from very directive exercises to very open ones, written and spoken, focused on isolated words, combinations of words and the use of words in texts. When the learner gets used to the organisation of the information that is given in the dictionary and when he fully understands the concept he can use further reading material to add useful information and to create his own personalised dictionary.

If we compare this project with the principles of the *Longman Language Activator*, the "first production dictionary of English" (Summers 1993:F8–F25) one can notice that we defend more or less the same ideas. We, however, stress the importance of translation and, to a lesser degree, the importance of a systematic description of word families. Furthermore we offer pregnant conceptually organized discourse. This facilitates the reactivation of the vocabulary and the integration in long term memory.

4. Presentation of the DICOFE

4.1 The onomasiological organisation

The DICOFE has an onomasiological organisation of the lexical information. The learner can enter the dictionary by means of the table of contents, thus making a selection of a subject he wants to find out about (all extracts from Verlinde et al. 1993a and 1993b):

2. La vie d'une entreprise	21
2.1. une entreprise se crée	21
2.2. une entreprise se gère	23
2.3. une entreprise se développe	27
2.4. les entreprises se concentrent	31
2.4.1. la fusion d'entreprises	31
2.4.2. l'achat d'actions d'une entreprise par une autre entreprise	31
2.4.3. la collaboration entre entreprises	35
2.5. une entreprise change de statut juridique	35
2.6. une entreprise connaît des difficultés	37

or by means of the index, thus choosing a word:

<p>**** action (nf, syn. un titre) 32; 33; 34; 35 une - nominative 32 une - au porteur 32 un portefeuille d'actions 32 (r)acheter des - 32 céder des - 32; 33 coter une - 32 détenir des - 33 émettre des - 32 négocier des - 32 un (r)achat d'actions 31; 32 la cession d'actions 32 la cotation d'une - (en Bourse) 32 la cote d'une - 32 une émission d'actions 32</p> <p>...</p> <p>**** associer (s' - avec qqn, qqch) (v) 32</p> <p>...</p> <p>**** banquier, -quière (n, adj) 16</p>

For each word, four clusters of information are given:

- a. To the left of the word: an indication of the frequency in our corpus of the word family to which the word belongs with a distinction between very high frequency (****), frequent (***), low frequency (**) and very low frequency (*) words.
- b. To the right of the word: grammatical information (with specific verb patterns).
- c. To the far right of the word: reference to pages
 -in bold italics: the page where the word family is presented
 -in roman: the page where the word is presented in context.
- d. Under the word: specific collocations and word combinations containing the word organized in a systematic way: noun + adj., noun + complement, verb + noun and derived noun + noun.

4.2 The odd pages

The text within the DICOFE is divided into even and odd pages. The text on the odd pages gives a very elementary introduction to the world of business by means of pregnant conceptually organized discourse and core sentences (e. g. subject - verb - one or two essential complements). So the learner discovers the economic reality and the discourse which is used to express it at the same time.

les créatifs traduisent la stratégie en un message	
les rédacteurs	la traduction de la stratégie en un message inventent des slogans accrocheurs conçoivent la conception de slogans accrocheurs
les slogans "Perrier, c'est fou" et "United Colors of Benetton" comptent parmi les plus célèbres	

la Générale de Banque vient de placer	une annonce publicitaire dans tous les quotidiens
	un publi-rédactionnel de huit pages dans un hebdomadaire
la chaîne suédoise Ikea lance	la publication d'une annonce publicitaire dans des revues
Coca-Cola et Martini nous matraquent de	une campagne d'affichage spots radio et TV
Trafalgar Square est connu pour sa multitude d'	on assiste de plus en plus à un matraquage du public enseignes lumineuses
Carat Espace est une société qui achète des espaces publicitaires dans les médias pour ses clients annonceurs	
l'afficheur JC Decaux crée des supports publicitaires grâce à son mobilier urbain (p. ex. les abribus)	

The easy structure of the sentences focuses the attention on the most important information: 'Who does what?'. The core sentences are often followed by more complex sentences adapted from the corpus and introducing more economic facts. Parasyonyms are grouped together by a vertical line.

The text is put into dotted boxes to help the learner distinguish the different aspects treated in the text and to make it more readable. Special attention is paid to clusters of words with similar meanings.

une entreprise	terme courant, général
une compagnie	terme courant dans le monde des assurances, des transports maritimes et aériens
une firme	entreprise industrielle de grande dimension ex. VAG est la plus importante firme automobile européenne.

4.3 The even pages

The even pages are the dictionary part of the DICOFE containing:

- A description of the derivatives that appear on the odd page. Special attention is paid to orthographical difficulties mentioned in bold.
- If necessary, a comprehensive definition of some members of the word family and an illustrative example are given. We also added some important collocations or word combinations that are not included in the text on the odd pages.

substantif/nom quoi	qui	verbe	adjectif adverbe
une action un actionnariat	un actionnaire	-	-
<p><i>une action</i></p> <p>1. Titre délivré par une société de capitaux qui donne à son détenteur la propriété d'une partie du capital avec tous les droits attachés à cette propriété. (...) Son revenu, appelé dividende, est touché par l'actionnaire (d'après Silem 1989:9).</p> <p>1.1. un portefeuille d'actions</p> <p>1.2. une action nominative <-> une action au porteur</p> <p>1.3. émettre des actions l'émission d'actions</p> <p>coter une action en Bourse la cotation (d'une action) en Bourse</p> <p>négocier des actions:</p> <p>céder des actions <-> (r)acheter des actions</p> <p>la cession d'actions le (r)achat d'actions</p> <p><i>un actionnariat</i></p> <p>1. L'ensemble des actionnaires</p>			

It is important to note that the complete text of the DICOFE is only in French.

4.4 The exercise book

The exercises provided in the different DICOFE exercise books are classified according to the following principles:

- a. An exercise on single words, words in combination with others and words in the text.
- b. Written and spoken exercises.
- c. Yes-or-no questions and open exercises.

They present more than twenty different tasks: from easy translation exercises on single words to an exercise on what a learner can do with the DICOFE to better understand texts and how he can use his reading to develop his own vocabulary following the general organisation of the DICOFE. We added a key to all the exercises and many comments so that the learner should be able to do them autonomously. To encourage an autonomous attitude, we made ten simple exercises which precede the real vocabulary exercises to help the user find his/her way to the answers in the DICOFE.

It has to be noted that the exercises are meant for Dutch-speaking learners: we give a complete translation of the index of the DICOFE (words and word combinations) keeping the same layout in the two indices (Dutch index in the exercise book; French index in the DICOFE). To facilitate searching a Dutch word in this translated index, an alphabetical list of all Dutch lemmas is also provided. The learner can thus start with a Dutch word and find it easily in the translated index in Dutch (with all word combinations). He then can without any problem find the word in French in

the index of the DICOFE thanks to the same layout. Following the references he then finds in the text of the DICOFE all the information about the use of this word (definition, word family and word combinations) in French.

5. The use of the DICOFE

The DICOFE has been used for three years at different universities and colleges in Flanders. The reactions of the learners are quite encouraging. What they appreciate most of all is the detailed information on the combinatorics of words combined with the introduction to economics, although they say that the onomasiological organisation makes the search for information more difficult. In general, they find it necessary to have a translated economic vocabulary at their disposal. Probably the two last remarks are to be explained by years of a more traditional teaching of vocabulary. Familiarizing the learner with a production dictionary thus seems to be the essential point in the breakthrough of this kind of dictionary.

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