Text Boxes as Lexicographic Device in LSP Dictionaries

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Abstract

It is the duty of the lexicographer to maximally utilise all lexicographic devices at his/her disposal in the compilation of a dictionary. In modern-day dictionaries lexicographers often rely on lexicographic text boxes as a means to present lexicographic data, especially where stronger emphasis or additional data regarding a specific entry is needed. It could be argued that the use of text boxes as a lexicographic device is underutilised in general dictionaries and even more so in LSP dictionaries. They should however not be used in a haphazard way but rather according to a well-devised system. Looking at existing dictionaries one often realises that a random use of text boxes has a detrimental influence on successful data retrieval. Text boxes should be used for data that need to be presented in a position of salience. The aim of this paper is first to give an overview of the current status of the use of text boxes in LSP dictionaries; secondly, to offer some suggestions as to the effective use of text boxes in these dictionaries by drawing on an analysis of the current use of text boxes in LGP dictionaries.

Keywords: Text boxes; LSP dictionaries; LGP dictionaries

1   Introduction

As pointed out by Gouws and Prinsloo (2010) the function of text boxes as lexicographic device is to place more than the default focus on a specific data item. They are typically used for data that need to be presented in a position of salience. One of the challenges for lexicographers is to make an informed decision as to what kind of data should be presented in textboxes in order to maximize data transfer and where to include the text box in order to ensure optimal access and a successful consultation by the user. Such a decision needs to be informed by a clear understanding of the user and his / her particular lexicographic needs and reference skills.

As pointed out by Tarp (2012), modern society is characterised by an ever-growing need for lexicographical tools that provide quick and easy access to data which have been prepared and selected in such a way as to enable the prospective user to retrieve the punctual information required to satisfy his / her lexicographic needs in a specific user situation. This need has resulted in an ever-increasing number of specialized dictionaries being published; however, many of these are of dubious quality, due to a lack of relevant lexicographic data. This paper consequently investigates the role that the in-

novative use of text boxes can potentially play in producing better quality specialized dictionaries. The aim of this paper is first to give an overview of the current status of the use of text boxes in dictionaries dealing with languages for special purposes, i.e. LSP dictionaries; secondly, to offer some suggestions as to the effective use of text boxes in these dictionaries by drawing on an analysis of the current use of text boxes in dictionaries dealing with language for general purposes, i.e. LGP dictionaries. For the purpose of this paper, the focus of the second point will be on LSP dictionaries for South African school learners. Within the current South African educational context, this will imply a perspective that includes the South African Bantu languages, since by far the majority of school learners and therefore of prospective dictionary users have a Bantu language as home language. The paper thus has both a contemplative and a transformative approach with regard to the use of text boxes.

2   The Nature of Text Boxes

Text boxes are typically included within the article structure of a dictionary, albeit that text boxes could also be included as article-external entries and immediate constituents of an article stretch. As article-internal entries they can prevail in a variety of article positions, cf. Wiegand and Gouws (2011). The article structure typically consists of the microstructural items and various indicators to identify article slots and item types. Text boxes are not part of these default constituents of dictionary articles. Like items they can be functionally positionally segmented but as another type of entry, mostly an inserted inner text. In this regard they usually are immediate constituents of the article but they could also be immediate constituents of a specific part of the article, e.g. the comment on semantics. They can be positioned where the lexicographer deems it necessary and can have any part of the article in their scope. They don't need to be addressed at an item in the article but can function as non-addressed entries. The nature of inserted inner texts gives lexicographers the freedom to utilize text boxes in different ways to contain whatever text the lexicographer regards as of enough importance to be allocated to a text box.

3   Text Boxes in LSP Dictionaries

It would seem that, generally speaking, text boxes are extremely rarely used in LSP dictionaries. Perusal of a random sample of five monolingual standard English LSP paper dictionaries revealed that none of the selected dictionaries utilizes this device. These dictionaries include the *Oxford Dictionary of Science*, *Oxford Dictionary of Chemistry*, *Oxford Dictionary of Economics*, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* and *Stedman's Medical Dictionary*. One can only speculate as to what the possible reasons for this may be. It could be that the kind of information typically provided in text boxes in LGP dictionaries, is not deemed to be important by LSP lexicographers. In fact, provision of this kind of data in LSP dictionari-

es, even as items in the normal microstructure, is very rare, since these dictionaries do not normally intend to inform about issues such as grammar, pronunciation, spelling, etc. Another possible reason for the sparse provision of this kind of data could be that the dictionary has been designed by experts in the subject field in question, possibly with less than adequate lexicographic background, especially regarding article structures. In the third instance, the rudimentary treatment of comment on form could be a space-saving consideration, especially in the case of paper dictionaries. One should also consider the possibility that many changes introduced in LGP dictionaries might not have been reflected in LSP dictionaries because theoretical lexicographers have paid too little attention to LSP lexicography. LSP lexicographers might have used existing LSP dictionaries as their only model. A feature of the current development in theoretical lexicography is a stronger theoretical focus on LSP lexicography, cf. publications like Fuertes-Olivera (2010), Jesenšek (2013) and Tarp and Fuertes-Olivera (2014). This should result in positive changes in the planning and compilation of LSP dictionaries.

An informed decision as to whether text boxes could be a useful lexicographic device in LSP dictionaries can only be made if the skills, needs and knowledge of the target user and the function and genuine purpose of the dictionary are taken into consideration. When deciding on the possible use of text boxes in LSP dictionaries one should negotiate the subtypological diversity based on target users in the field of LSP lexicography. Three distinct user groups can be distinguished, i.e. experts, semi-experts and laypeople. Text boxes could be extremely helpful for users introduced into a new subject field who rely on their LSP dictionary as an important source of guidance. Consequently, guidance by means of text boxes is particularly important for users of school dictionaries. This information would also be decisive when deciding on the nature of the content of text boxes. We return to this issue below.

4   Typical Content of Text Boxes in LGP Dictionaries

As pointed out by Gouws and Prinsloo (2010), care should be taken as to what kind of data should be presented in a text box, and what data should form part of the normal microstructure of an article, since overuse of this device can detract from its usefulness. An analysis of a number of LGP dictionaries reveals that the typical data types found in text boxes include (but are not restricted to) contrasting related words, application range, pronunciation, register, grammar, spelling, collocations, metaphor, syntactic restrictions and contrasting British English and American English.

Obviously, some of the types of data provided in text boxes in LGP dictionaries are indeed irrelevant for LSP dictionaries: it is for example highly unlikely that data on metaphorical use of lemmata in an LSP dictionary would be needed, as would data on offensive use be. However, other data types can indeed be relevant for LSP dictionaries as well, and the possibility that additional data types might be necessary specifically for LSP dictionaries in specific usage situations by specific users needs to be investigated. Since the focus of our investigation is on LSP dictionaries for South African school learn-

ers, our assumption is that an analysis of the use of text boxes in LGP school dictionaries could provide useful information with regard to the potential use of this device in LSP dictionaries.

5   Use of Text Boxes in South African LGP School Dictionaries

It seems that the utilization of text boxes is gaining in popularity in the compilation of South African school dictionaries. In the most recent editions of three flagship school dictionaries, the *HAT Afrikaanse Skoolwoordeboek*, the *OXFORD Bilingual School Dictionary (English-Northern Sotho)*, and the *Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary (Afrikaans – English)* text boxes are used to provide additional data to the user. Compare the following examples from the *Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary (Afrikaans – English)* and *HAT Afrikaanse Skoolwoordeboek* in figures 1 and 2 respectively:

Figure 1: *Lekker* in *Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary (Afrikaans – English*.

Figure 2: Laf in HAT Afrikaanse Skoolwoordeboek.

Of the three dictionaries mentioned above, the *HAT Afrikaanse Skoolwoordeboek* is the only one in which the text boxes are explicitly labelled in order to provide the user with some guidance as to the nature of the data provided in the text box. Typical labels are *Tesourus* 'Thesaurus', *Gebruik* 'Use', *Spelling* 'Spelling', *Skryfwyse* 'Conjunctive and/or disjunctive writing' and *Uitdrukking* '(Fixed) expression'. This

could be regarded as labels but also as topics or titles for the text boxes. Such an approach is supported by the role of text boxes as inserted inner texts, occupying an article slot and not only a microstructural slot.

An analysis of the contents of text boxes found in the randomly selected alphabetical stretch 'L' in the *HAT Afrikaanse Skoolwoordeboek* is provided in table 1.

Related words and their meaning (Thesaurus boxes)	7
Spelling	4
Usage	2
Expression	1
Approximate no. of lemma signs in alphabetical stretch 'L'	321
Average of 1 text box per 23 lemma signs	

Table 1: Text Boxes for the Alphabetical Stretch 'L'.

Compare the results of a similar analysis for the *OXFORD Bilingual School Dictionary (English-Northern Sotho)* in table 2:

Northern Sotho - English		English – Northern Sotho	
Translation / non-translation of function words	2	Register	1
Composition of multiword lemmas	1	Pronunciation	4
Morphologically shortened forms	12	Contrast related words	2
Range of application	1	Correct usage	1
Discourse pragmatic information	5	Cross reference to another note	1
Offensive use	1		
Tense	1		
Additional information on part of speech	2		
Syntactic information	1		
Approximate no. of lemma signs in alphabetical stretch 'L'	416	Approximate no. of lemma signs in alphabetical stretch 'L'	178
Average of 1 text box per 16 lemma signs		Average of 1 text box per 19 lemma signs	

Table 2: Text Boxes for the Alphabetical Stretch 'L' in the *Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary*.

Table 3 presents the results for *The Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary (Afrikaans – English):*

Afrikaans - English		English – Afrikaans	
Attributive vs. predicate use of adjectives	2	Register	1
Conjunctive vs. disjunctive writing	1	Pronunciation	6
Singular vs. plural use	2	Contrast related words	1
		Cross reference to another note	1
		Correct usage	1
		Singular vs. plural use	4
Approximate no. of lemma signs in alphabetical stretch 'L'	171	Approximate no. of lemma signs in alphabetical stretch 'L'	176
Average of 1 text box per 34 lemma signs		Average of 1 text box per 12 lemma signs	

Table 3: The Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary (Afrikaans – English).

6   Text Boxes in South African LSP School Dictionaries: Some Suggestions

A logical point of departure for the LSP lexicographer would be to ascertain which of the data types provided in text boxes in LGP dictionaries could also be utilized in LSP dictionaries. Perusal of existing LSP dictionaries reveals that none of the currently available ones makes use of text boxes. A lexicographic device which seems popular is the use of shaded blocks, especially in math and science dictionaries. Formulae, equations and chemical reactions mostly make up the contents of these blocks. The data provided in these blocks are however not additional to the comments on form and semantics, but form an essential and inherent part of it. The function of these shaded blocks is mainly to act as typographical markers of a specific data type. Compare the following example from the *Oxford Physical Sciences Dictionary Grades 10-12* in figure 3:
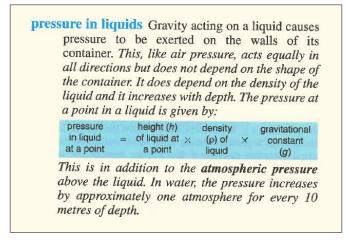

Figure 3: Pressure in Liquids in Oxford Physical Sciences Dictionary Grades 10-12.

These shaded blocks contain microstructural data and are not inserted inner texts. Taking the function of text boxes as explained by Gouws and Prinsloo (2010) into consideration, there seems to be no reason why they cannot be utilized as a lexicographic device to assist with enhanced data retrieval, within an extended obligatory microstructure, from an LSP dictionary. Further motivation for the use of text boxes is the fact that they are increasingly utilized in LGP school dictionaries. It can therefore be assumed that the target user is already familiar with text boxes and knows what kind of data he / she can expect to find in them.

When deciding on the data types to be provided in text boxes for LSP dictionaries for South African school learners, care should be taken not to provide data that should form part of the default obligatory microstructure in text boxes. The fact that comments on form are generally inadequate in these dictionaries does not automatically qualify them as good candidates for presentation in a text box. Useful data on, for example, (regular) singular / plural forms, morphological derivations and pronunciation would indeed add value to LSP dictionaries as good lexicographic products, but these data categories should rather form part of the obligatory microstructure.

 One data type that appears in text boxes in all three dictionaries mentioned above is information on related words, which is specifically aimed at distinguishing between words which are semantically and conceptually related. LSP dictionaries essentially deal with terminology in that the lemma signs are in actual fact terms. Apart from their function as subject specific linguistic labels for concepts in LSP, terms are often also used by laypersons as words in LGP, in which case the conceptual distinction between related concepts is often fuzzy. Words referring to related but distinct concepts are often used interchangeably, precisely because they are used by lay persons. Examples include 'temperature' and 'heat', 'weight' and 'mass', and 'power' and 'force'. It is likely that learners' first acquaintance with these concepts would have been in the non-technical sense. Using a text box in an LSP dictionary to explicate the distinction between conceptually related terms would add to the cognitive unravelling of subject specific concepts. A typical example of a text box in an LSP school dictionary would highlight the difference between the related concepts 'weight' as 'force experienced by an object due to gravity' and 'mass' as 'the amount of matter in an object'.

South African English is strongly based on British English. However, an increasing use of American English, also in subject field literature, is noticeable in South African English. American and British English do not always use the same terms. Lexicographers will do well to make provision for this situation by discussing the British and American use where applicable in the text boxes. Besides British and American English it is sometimes also necessary to refer to International English because these terms may differ from those found in both British and American English.

LSP lexicographers furthermore need to distinguish between culture-dependent and culture-independent terms. In South African dictionaries terms, e.g. in the field of medicine where terms from traditional healers still prevail, need additional treatment which falls outside the default microstructural slots. Text boxes could assist the lexicographer in this regard to ensure an optimal retrieval of information by the user.

An issue which is particularly relevant to the South African situation is standardization of terminology, especially with regard to the nine official South African Bantu languages. Official structures which are responsible for development, standardization and validation of terminology are largely non-functional, particularly those dealing with the Bantu languages. Consequently, one finds an almost unchecked proliferation of terminology, resulting in multiple terms for a single concept. Compare for example table 4:

	Northern Sotho equivalents	Zulu equivalents
	lerathana	inhlayiya
particle	karolonyana	intwanyana
	seripana	iphathikili
	sekgawana	

Table 4: Northern Sotho and Zulu Equivalents for *Particle*.

Apart from standard treatment of the lemma 'particle' in the dictionary, which may include listing and labelling of variant equivalent forms, data in the text box should provide the user with adequate guidance with regard to the use of standardized versus non-standardized forms and also with regard to the status of a specific term as having been standardized or not.

7 Conclusion

The use of text boxes as a lexicographic device in LSP dictionaries is under-utilized, even more so than in LGP dictionaries. Text boxes can potentially add the same value to LSP dictionaries as to LGP dictionaries, although the nature and content of these boxes will differ. The function of text boxes, i.e. to place more than the default focus on a specific data item, should be the main consideration when deciding on data inclusion in or exclusion from text boxes.

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