

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Users' Guide to the Use of Dictionary

Christopher Okeke Ajah.

Department of General Studies,
Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu
snugpontiff@gmail.com

Abstract: Dictionary making is the preoccupation of a lexicographer (dictionary compiler) and the art of making it (dictionary) is called lexicography. Dictionary can either be in printing or electronic form. It is no doubt a vital tool for language learning and usage. The importance of a dictionary in learning and usage of a language cannot be neglected because its role in learning generally which includes among others: word meaning, word usage, pronunciation, spelling, origin and parts of speech are fundamental in communication. The research adopts secondary sources of data collection. The neglect of the use of dictionary for study by our students is no doubt the cause of poor language performance, low performance in examination and poor individual vocabulary acquisition. This work will therefore be limited to the features of a dictionary that will serve as a guide to dictionary users.

.

Keywords: Dictionary, User Guide, lexicographer.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It is important to explain the concept 'Dictionary'. On the peripheral, dictionary is a well-known concept, possessed by almost everybody in every home but rarely optimally used. According to Crystal (1981), "dictionary is a reference book that lists the words of a language or more languages usually arrange alphabetically along with information about the spelling, meaning, history and usage." (p.108). Secondly, Barber (1965) opines that "Dictionary is a book containing a selection of words usually arranged alphabetically with explanation of their meaning and other information concerning them, expressed in the same language." Thirdly in the words of Ezikeojiaku (2004):

Dictionary is systematic arranged list of socialized linguistic form compiled from speech community and commented upon by the author in such a way that the qualified reader understands the meaning of each

separate form and is informed of the relevant facts concerning the function of that form in its community. Dictionary of a language is a system of concept. To each of such concept is assigned certain phonological, syntactic and morphological characteristics. (p.29)

From the review above, we deduced that *Dictionary* is an anthology of words of a language(s) compiled by a linguist called a lexicographer for language users. It provides the necessary information about the spelling, pronunciation, usage, word class and meaning of the lexical items of a language(s). Dictionary can be monolingual, bilingual or multilingual. Other compendia or anthologies that we are not researching on but worthy of note are:

- **Wordlist.** It is the word collection which does not usually offer beyond a one-word alternative to the listed word and its phonetic transcription. Wordlist may or may not arrange the words collated in alphabetical order.
- **Glossary.** Glossary is another anthology that explains a word of a field (jargon) or borrowed word in a table or at the end of a drama, grammar or prose text.
- **Encyclopaedia.** This type of anthology compiles things or ideas with comprehensive reference often spanning several printed volumes, arranged in alphabetical order on a range of subjects, sometimes general, sometime limited to a particular field with explanation of the ideas' etymology.

FORMATS OF DICTIONARY WITH EXAMPLES

The following are the formats of a good dictionary that a user should look after in order to make optimal use of a dictionary.

- Citation of entries
- Alphabetization
- Transcription
- Etymology
- Form class
- Semantics

Citation of entries: This format of a dictionary refers to the design of a dictionary or the out-look/approach. *Citation of entries* as an approach is a process whereby lexical entries could be cited in a dictionary with or without its prosodic features like diacritics, tones or intonation. The lexicographer is at liberty to include or exclude these features in his entries. For example, Igbo language lexical entries in

Igbo dictionary may be chosen to be entered without tone mark even as a tonal language:

1. akwukwọ /akwɔkwɔ /
2. onwu /ɔŋwu /
3. ngaji /ŋgædʒi /
4. nkụ /ŋkɔ /

Words can also be tone marked by the lexicographer thus:

5. onwu / óŋwó /
6. akpụ / ápǔ /
7. ngaji / ŋgædʒi /
8. akwukwọ / ákwɔkwó /

In the case of *intonational* language like English, the lexicographer may or may not wish to recognize the intonation (rising and falling of voice). This art in citation of entries determines whether that dictionary will be abridged or unabridged. Non inclusion of these prosodic features will render a dictionary abridged.

Alphabetization. Lexicographers arranged the words entered in alphabetic order. This order is the acceptable standard format for lexical entries in a dictionary. Words are sequentially arranged for speedy location by users; even the case of diacritic and *diagraphic* languages. For example, a good English dictionary will thus arrange the words entered into it:

1. abusive /ə'bjʊ:sɪv /
2. academy /əkædəmi /
3. accept /ək'sept /
4. accident /æksɪdənt /
5. after /a:f.tər /
6. double /dʌbl /
7. dove /dʌv /
8. eat /i:t /
9. echo /'ek əu /
10. ego /i:gəu /
11. equality /i'kwɒləti /

From the above examples, you can see that words are not just entered haphazardly, but done in an arranged manner for easy access. This is one of the features of a good dictionary that made it different from other works like wordlist.

Transcription: Transcription enables users of dictionary to know the exact pronunciation of words as many words are borrowed or technical that the users may not be able to use them except guided by dictionary.

Perhaps, this is why non-linguists cannot write a standard dictionary, because, transcription needed a good knowledge of phonetics and phonology for effective work. Lexicographer who is not well grounded in the sound system of a language cannot write a dictionary in that language. Transcription which is the process of writing what the speaker speaks (representing the articulated sounds in writing) is of the most difficult aspect of dictionary compilation. The two strokes // indicates that what is enclosed are sounds not word. For example:

1. bee	is	transcribed as	/ bi: /
2. beef	“	“	/ bi:f //
3. Bible	“	“	ba'bl /
4. block	“	“	// blɔk //
5. calibre	“	“	/ kæl'bar //
6. Caucasia	“	“	/ kɔ:keiziən //
7. cherub	“	“	// tʃerəb //
8. cultivate	“	“	// kʌlt'velt //
9. Ivy	“	“	a'vi //

Etymology: Words that are borrowed from other languages called donor languages are usually identified as such. The lexicographer uses abbreviations of the donor language to show source (etymology). Words from German for example are indicated with *Ger*, Latin words are shown with *lat*, Igbo words are tagged *Igb*, French *Fr*, words from Yoruba *Yor*, Hausa words *Hau*. Etc. For example in Igbo dictionary:

1. akamu (Hau)
2. akara (Yor)
3. agboro (Yor)
4. komputa (Eng)
5. ichafu (Fr)

There is always an indication of how a word is written in different varieties of a language or how different geographical locations write or speak. For instance, center is written thus by Americans and British:

center - American English
centre - British English

Form class: The lexicographer must show the part of speech that each lexical item falls into, whether it is a noun (n) verb (v), Adjective (Adj), Adverb (Ad) or any other class.

This format is important mostly to users and learners of a language who is thus guided to the usage of such lexicon. Letters related to the word class is used in a bracket to show the word class they belong to. Examples:

1. Ammon /æmən / (n)
2. Archbishop /ɑ:tʃbɪʃəp / (n)
3. Fighter /faɪ.tər / (n)
4. intermix /intəmi:kz / (v)
5. kill /kɪl / (v)
6. to /tu: / (Pre)
7. toleration /tələ'reiʃn / (Ad)

Semantics: The lexicographers also provided the meaning of words entered into a dictionary. This could be the literal meaning of a word (denotation) or literary meaning of a word (connotation).

The lexicographer exposes the user/learning of a dictionary to different meaning associated with a word. This is because a word can make different meaning in different context or passage when transformation occurs. This is because; there are two structures (surface and deep) in every expression or sentence. For example:

1. master /ma:stər / Denotation - boss
Connotation –expert
2. boy /bɔɪ / Denotation -a male child
Connotation – inexperience person
3. wizard /wɪzəd / Denotation - a female witchcraft
Connotation - an expert

CONCLUSION

Dictionary is by its technicalities seen above, no doubt, a work of a language scientist called lexicographer. The above stated formats of the work of the lexicographer are beyond writing other reference books like *wordlist* and *glossary*. In compilation of a standard dictionary, the compiler most cite the entries, enter the words in alphabetic order, transcribe the words, state the origin of the words entered, the form class and provide different meaning of a word entered. It is therefore imperative in knowing this for easy understanding of the work of a dictionary and the enhancement of written and spoken English. The work thus recommend for the regular use of dictionary for study by our students as it will improve language performance and solve the problem of low performance in examination and poor individual vocabulary acquisition.



REFERENCES

- Advanced Learners Dictionary: International Student's Edition (7th Ed)
Barber, C.L (1965). *The story of language*. London: ELBS & Pan Books LTD
Charles R. G, Cal M. L, Dwight L. F & Richard C. H. (1972). *Speech communication in society*. Boston: USA. Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
Cystal, D. (1981). *Linguistics*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
Ezikeojiaku, (2004). *Lexicography: Theory and Practices*. Owerri: Ark Publishers.