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The ECD's lexicographical definition

A8 - Lexicography and Lexicology - Éva Buchi & Carlos Valcárcel Riveiro

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Overview

A lexical entry in the ECD is divided into three major zones:

1. The Semantic Zone
   - Lexicographic definitions
   - Connotations
2. The Phonological/ Graphematic Zone
   - Pronunciation
   - Spelling
3. The Cooccurrence Zone
   - Morphological cooccurrence sub-zone
     - » Inflection data
   - Syntactic cooccurrence sub-zone
     - » Government pattern
     - » Part of Speech
     - » Syntactic Features
   - Lexical cooccurrence sub-zone
     - » Lexical Functions
   - Stylistic cooccurrence sub-zone
     - » Usage Labels
   - Pragmatic cooccurrence sub-zone
     - » Pragmatic Clues

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Form of the definition

definiendum	≡	(definiens)
presentation of the LU L to be defined	is identical to	presentation of its meaning (L) (definition)

Substantive requirements for ECD definitions - Overview

- L's links with the extralinguistic world —
  L's denotational potential
- L's semantic links with related LUs in the lexicon —
  L's paradigmatic potential
- L's syntagmatic links with other LUs in the sentence —
  L's syntagmatic potential

Substantive requirements for ECD definitions - 1

- L's links with the extralinguistic world —
  L's L's denotational potential
  - class of extralinguistic entities or facts to which L can be applied
  - NO information about the things denoted by L (encyclopedic information)
    - » *cups: come with saucers, are breakable, should be washed, etc.*
      → *encyclopedic knowledge*

Substantive requirements for ECD definitions - 2

- L's semantic links with related LUs in the lexicon —
  L's paradigmatic potential
  - whole set of LUs in the lexicon of L with which L shares important semantic material (= has semantic bridges)
    - » must state the semantic similarities and differences between L and its potential substitutes
      escape: flee
      He escaped Cambodia ≈ He fled Cambodia
      *He barely escaped Cambodia, *He barely fled Cambodia*

Substantive requirements for ECD definitions - 3

- L's syntagmatic links with other LUs in the sentence — L's syntagmatic potential
  - whole set of L's lexical 'partners'—LUs that cooccur with L
    - » definition of L must ensure the proper combinability of L with all LUs that can/cannot cooccur with L according to semantic considerations only
      graft cannot be defined as practice of …, because:
      *these various practices vs. *these various grafts (not equal in terms of countability)*
    - » definition of L must contribute to the description of its restricted lexical cooccurrence
      exam: (… Y's goal being to show the necessary level of knowledge or skills …), pass an exam: achieving that goal

Rules for well-formedness of ECD definitions - 1

Propositional Form Rule

L's definiendum is a propositional form—an expression constituted by L supplied with variables X, Y, Z, … that represent L's Semantic Actants (SemAs) (and with structural elements such as with, out of, …, syntactically relating the variables to L).

- *REPROACH$_V$: X reproaches Y for Z*

Rules for well-formedness of ECD definitions - 2

Decomposition Rule

The definiens of an LU L must be written in terms of meanings of two or more full LUs L_1, L_2, …, L_n such that
1) (L) = (L_1) ⊕ (L_2) ⊕ … ⊕ (L_n) and
2) each (L_i) is semantically simpler than (L);
in other words, the lexicographic definition of the meaning (L) must be its decomposition.

- ⊕: linguistic union - semantic amalgamation, uniting of two meanings
- The meaning (L') is semantically simpler than the meaning (L) if and only if [= iff] (L) can be defined in terms of (L') but not vice versa: (L) = (L') ⊕ … ⊕ (L'_n), while (L') ≠ (L) ⊕ … ⊕ (L_m).
  → This avoids "vicious circles"

Rules for well-formedness of ECD definitions - 2

- Decomposition Rule
  - Exceptions: Two types of LUs do not undergo semantic decomposition:
    - » semantic primitives, like (not), (feel) or (set)
    - » absolute synonyms, of which one is semantically decomposed and all the others are simply referred to it: COUGAR (puma) and MOUNTAIN LION (puma).

Rules for well-formedness of ECD definitions - 3

Standardization Rule

The lexicographic definitions in the ECD should contain neither
1) ambiguous expressions (= each one is carrying different meanings) nor
2) synonymous expressions (= several ones are carrying the same meaning).

1) HAUTEUR: (dimension dans le sens vertical, de la base au sommet)
HEIGHT: (dimension, in the vertical direction, from the base to the top)
dimension: 6 senses, sens: 3, base: 11, sommet: 3, vertical: 1
→ hauteur interpretable in 594 ways

2) WATCH is often defined as (device allowing one to know the time), HAMMER—as (tool for striking), KNIFE—as (instrument serving to cut with), and
SPOON—as (utensil used to carry food to the mouth).

Rules for well-formedness of ECD definitions - 4

Maximal Block Rule

If the lexicographic definition of L contains a Sem-configuration (L_1) ⊕ (L_2) ⊕, …, ⊕ (L_n) such that it is semantically equivalent to the meaning of a LU L' that exists in **L**, so that

$$(L_1) \oplus (L_2) \oplus \ldots \oplus (L_n) = (L'),$$

then (L'), and not the above Sem-configuration, must appear in the definition.

- The semanteme (L') is the *maximal block* with respect to the Sem-configuration (L_1) ⊕ (L_2) ⊕, …, ⊕ (L_n).
- Rule 4 guarantees that every semantic decomposition is the shallowest possible. The deepest possible definition would be made of semantic primitives which is problematic because they have to be established first, the definition will become very long and complicated and the semantic links between LUs are not directly visible.

Rules for well-formedness of ECD definitions - 5

Mutual Substitutability Rule

An ECD definition of an LU L should guarantee absolute mutual substitutability with L in text:
L must be replaceable by its definition and the definition of L must be replaceable by Lin any imaginable context (with the exclusion of metalinguistic ones) - *salva significatione* (i.e., stylistic elegance or even normal lexical cooccurrence may be violated).

- Salva significatione - preservation of the same meaning
- The rule of mutual substitutability of the definiendum and the definiens guarantees the correct constitution of the definiens: it must contain the right number of necessary semantic components. If 'L is overdefined') (L) might not be substitutable by its decomposition in certain contexts; If ('L is underdefined') the decomposition of (L) might not only be substitutable for (L), but for some other semantemes different from (L).

Criteria of linguistic truthfulness of ECD definitions

If a definition is well-formed, it satisfies the condition of being usable, but not, as yet, the condition of sufficiency; in order to be sufficient it must also be:

- explicitly linked with all semantically related definitions in the dictionary;
- factually true, i.e., it must correspond to the facts of **L**.

The goal of any dictionary is of course to have true definitions; formally correct but factually false definitions are good for nothing.

Criteria of linguistic truthfulness of ECD definitions - 1

Linguistic relevance of a semantic component

A dubious semantic component *σ* must be included in the definition of L iff language **L** has at least one other LU L that is formally linked to L and has *σ* in its meaning.

- Examples: *σ*: “white” in the definitions of snow, sugar, salt and rice
  snow: yes, because “white as snow”, “snowy hair”

  sugar, salt, rice: no, because “*white as sugar”, “*sugar-white”, “*salty white”, “*rice whiteness”
  - language dependent: Russian: saxarnye zubki lit. (sugary nice.little.teeth) = (very white nice little teeth [of a child or a young woman])

Criteria of linguistic truthfulness of ECD definitions - 2

Cooccurrence with qualifying modifiers

The definition of L must explicitly reflect L's cooccurrence with qualifying modifiers: it must include a semantic component σ capable of 'accepting' the meaning of the given modifier M, i.e., technically, of being the argument of the corresponding predicate (M).

- Adjectival modifier
  - APPLAUSE: deafening, frenetic, frenzied, thunderous; scattered, subdued, thin
- Adverbial modifier
  - BATTRE (beat, defeat): à plate couture (lit. to flat seam), complètement (completely)

Criteria of linguistic truthfulness of ECD definitions - 3

Cooccurrence with quantifiers

The definition of L must explicitly reflect L's cooccurrence with quantifiers—especially with plural markers and numerals.

- Edible plants: AIL (garlic), OIGNON (onion), CAROTTE (carrot), CHOU (cabbage)
  - Apporte-moi un/trois oignon/s / une/trois carotte/s / un/trois chou/x! (Bring me an/three onion/s / a/three carrot/s / a/three cabbage/s!)
  - *Apporte-moi un ail/trois ails/aulx! (lit. Bring me a/three garlic/s!)
  - …

Criteria of linguistic truthfulness of ECD definitions - 4

Cooccurrence with negation

The definition of L must explicitly reflect the way L combines with negation.

- X is a widow ≡ (X is a woman who has lost her husband and has not remarried)
- X is not a widow only negates that X lost her husband and that X has not remarried.

Criteria of linguistic truthfulness of ECD definitions - 4

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- X is a widow ≡ (X is a woman who has lost her husband and has not remarried)
- X is not a widow only negates that X lost her husband and that X has not remarried.
- → X is not a widow ≡ (|[X being a woman,]| X has not lost her husband or has remarried)

General characteristics of ECD definitions

- ECD-style verbal definitions vs. SemRs of LUs
  - verbal definitions are more convenient for the human user
- Internal structures of ECD definitions
  - communicative status of its components
    - » presuppositions (between the symbols "|[…]|")
  - logical status of its components
    - » a given context can neutralize or suppress a semantic components that is present in the definition—without giving rise to a contradiction. Such components are called weak.
  - different structural roles played by its components
    - » a component *σ* can a) specify a fact about one or several semantic actants of L, b) constitute a semantic taxonomic restriction on an actant of L, c) modify another semantic component, restraining its content
  - inheritance of semantic actants
    - » a component (s) in the definition of L brings to (L) all of its own SemAs, which must be explicitly accounted for in the definition.

Thank you for your attention!