

# LEXICOGRAPHY: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROBLEMS

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## Abstract

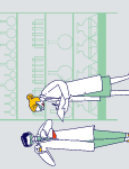
Lexicography is the practice of compiling, writing, and editing dictionaries. It involves a detailed study of words, their meanings, and their usage in various contexts. This article explores the field of English lexicography, discussing its historical development, key methodologies, and the challenges faced by lexicographers. It also examines how digital advancements have transformed the process and the role of lexicography in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Lexicography, lexical meaning, lexicon, metalexigraphy, corpus linguistics, language interpretation, language translation.

## Introduction

Lexicography is a critical discipline that bridges the gap between language and its documentation. In the context of the English language, lexicography is concerned with compiling dictionaries that accurately represent the vocabulary, usage, and evolution of words. English, with its rich history of borrowings and constant evolution, poses unique challenges for lexicographers. Understanding the role of lexicography, its methodologies, and its evolution provides insight into how language is preserved and propagated. Lexical meanings form the very core of natural language. First, when we communicate linguistically, we talk to convey informational content – and we do this by means of words. Second, natural language plays a central role in the way we apprehend the world and try to make sense out of it; this again, we achieve by using words.

The word dictionary is derived from the Medieval Latin word “*Dictionarium*” originated from the Greek term “*Dictio*” meaning a word or a phrase. Various terms are used synonymically for the word dictionary like Lexicon. Lexicon was earlier term used and this word was derived from the Greek word “*Lexickon*” meaning the list of words of ancient languages with meanings. The Greek – English Lexicon is an example of such type of Lexicon. The art of preparation of Lexicon was called as Lexicography i.e. compiling lexicon. The compiler of Lexicon was called as Lexicographer. Lexicology and Lexicography are two branches of Linguistics. Lexicology deals with study of the origin and meaning of words. Lexicography is the art of compiling a dictionary. Hence, Lexicon means ‘a dictionary of the words of a language’. It is generally used for dictionaries of ancient languages viz., Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic or Hebrew etc[1].



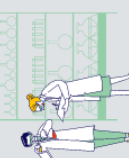
**Lexicography** is divided into two related disciplines:

- **Practical lexicography** is the art or craft of compiling, writing and editing dictionaries.
- **Theoretical lexicography** is the scholarly discipline of analyzing and describing the semantic, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships within the lexicon (vocabulary) of a language, developing theories of dictionary components and structures linking the data in dictionaries, the needs for information by users in specific types of situation, and how users may best access the data incorporated in printed and electronic dictionaries. This is sometimes referred to as 'metalexicography'.

### Materials and Methods

Lexicographic work involves systematic methodologies that can be categorized into descriptive and prescriptive approaches. Descriptive lexicography seeks to document language as it is used by speakers, reflecting both standard and non-standard variations. Prescriptive lexicography, on the other hand, aims to define how language should be used according to a set of prescribed rules. In compiling dictionaries, lexicographers follow a meticulous process:

1. **Corpus Collection:** A large and representative corpus (a database of language samples) is gathered, reflecting both spoken and written forms of English. **It** is one of the foundational steps in lexicography. It refers to the gathering of a large, representative body of text data that lexicographers use to analyze the usage of words, phrases, and linguistic patterns in real-world contexts[2]. A corpus serves as the primary source for determining the meanings, frequency, and varied uses of words, which are essential for dictionary compilation.
2. **Word Selection:** Words are chosen based on frequency, relevance, and significance in contemporary usage. **It** is a crucial stage in the lexicographic process, where lexicographers decide which words will be included in a dictionary and how they should be prioritized. It is an ongoing challenge because language is constantly evolving, and the selection criteria must balance linguistic accuracy, frequency, relevance, and cultural considerations. Lexicographers need to assess the importance and practicality of words, considering their role in daily communication, their history, and their social significance.
3. **Definition Creation:** Lexicographers construct clear, concise definitions that convey the meaning of a word in various contexts. **Definition creation** is one of the most crucial and intricate parts of lexicography, as it involves the process of clearly and accurately articulating the meanings of words. A well-crafted definition should provide users with not only the essential meaning of a word but also context, nuances, and potential variations in usage. Lexicographers must balance precision, accessibility, and conciseness while accounting for the dynamic and often complex nature of language. Here's a deeper look into how definitions are created, the considerations involved, and the challenges faced in this important step of the lexicographic process.
4. **Example Sentences:** Real-life examples are provided to demonstrate word usage in context. **Example sentences** are a critical component of dictionary definitions. They serve as real-world illustrations that show how a word is used in context, helping users understand its meaning,



proper usage, and nuances[3]. A well-crafted example sentence does more than just demonstrate how the word functions in a sentence; it helps users visualize the word's role in communication, thereby enhancing comprehension and retention. Here's a deeper look at the purpose, structure, and challenges of creating example sentences in lexicography.

5. Editorial Guidelines: Lexicographers adhere to specific guidelines regarding spelling, pronunciation, and etymology. **Editorial guidelines** in lexicography are a set of standards, principles, and rules established by dictionary publishers to ensure consistency, accuracy, and clarity across all entries in the dictionary. These guidelines govern various aspects of the dictionary's content, from defining words to presenting example sentences, and help maintain quality control throughout the lexicographic process. Editorial guidelines are crucial not only for the lexicographers working on the dictionary but also for the users who rely on it for accurate and accessible information. In this context, editorial guidelines ensure that dictionaries meet the needs of diverse users, from language learners to professional linguists.

In modern lexicography, computational tools such as corpus linguistics and automated dictionary compilation software are frequently employed to streamline the process.

### Results

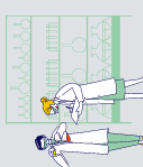
Lexicography has evolved considerably, especially with the advent of digital technologies. The introduction of online dictionaries has made language resources more accessible, and real-time updates allow lexicographers to keep pace with the rapid evolution of the English language. Digital platforms enable immediate changes to definitions and word inclusion, offering an unprecedented level of flexibility. Notable developments include the Oxford English Dictionary's online platform, which incorporates user feedback and continuously updates its entries. Similarly, apps like Merriam-Webster offer interactive features, allowing users to explore word meanings, pronunciations, and trends.

Having presented the three fundamental principles that constrain definitions from the viewpoint of their content, we switch now to the three principles dealing with the form itself of definitions: they specify the way the definitions must be structured. In actual practice, of course, both aspects – the content and the form of a definition – are inseparable. We have already introduced formal considerations when discussing the definiendum and the definiens; we have even proposed a sketch of the definition template for quasi-predicative nouns denoting tools.

Furthermore, there has been a notable increase in the diversity of the sources used for lexicographic work, incorporating regional dialects, jargon, and online slang. Lexicographers now aim to be more inclusive, considering how marginalized communities use language and representing linguistic diversity more equitably.

### Discussion

Despite the advances in digital lexicography, challenges persist. One key issue is determining the boundary between standard and non-standard usage. While prescriptive dictionaries often focus on standard English, the rapid expansion of informal language and non-standard dialects has created a need for more inclusive lexicographic work. Additionally, lexicographers must



contend with the ever-changing nature of English. New words are constantly being created, and existing words frequently undergo shifts in meaning.

Whereas the above-mentioned specialized dictionaries of lexicography agree on lexicography having both a practical and a theoretical component, one of the first crucial issues in the discussions of *lexicography* as found in scientific publications is whether the notion of a theory of lexicography is accepted or not. Different approaches prevail, ranging from Atkins and Rundell [4] saying, with regard to a theory of lexicography, that they "do not believe that such a thing exists", and Bejoint (2010) saying: "I simply do not believe that there exists a theory of lexicography, and I very much doubt that there can be one", to lexicographers who firmly believe in a lexicographic theory, cf. Wiegand (1989), Bergenholtz and Tarp (2003), Gouws (2011), Tarp (2012). It is important to note that the supporters of a lexicographic theory do not all adhere to the same theory: there are different lexicographic theories but they all acknowledge the fact that the lexicographic practice is complemented by a theoretical component and that lexicography, with dictionaries as its subject matter, should be regarded as an independent discipline. Wiegand [5] categorically denies that lexicography is a branch of applied linguistics or of lexicology, but when working outside a specific lexicographic theory, relations between lexicography and other disciplines are often postulated that go against the grain of lexicography as an independent discipline, cf. Kempcke [6] who says "Eine Wörterbuchtheorie kann nur Teilder Lexikologie sein, ..." (A dictionary theory has to be part of lexicology). Lexicographers like Urdang (1963) believe that "Lexicography, in practice is a form of applied linguistics ..." and Sinclair [7] denies the prospect of a theory of lexicography and believes that the relevant theory is to be found in or via the areas of linguistics and information technology.

Another challenge lies in representing the full range of a word's meanings and nuances. As English words can have multiple interpretations depending on context, the work of a lexicographer becomes even more complex. Lexicographers also face the problem of balancing precision with accessibility, ensuring that definitions are both accurate and understandable to a wide audience.

The dictionary is not only consulted if there is a gap in the user's knowledge. It often also serves as a code of law for all kinds of language issues, i.e. it is used as a touchstone in deciding whether to accept or reject regional, historical or social variants. Although most modern dictionaries claim only to describe the language

produced by a certain speech community and not to prescribe anything, this cannot be upheld in the strictest sense. The choice of headwords has, after all, a certain prescriptive nature. Too many taboo words will not be appreciated, nor will artificial, unfamiliar neologisms. The application of stylistic indications is not objective either. For instance, editors may consider something to be either 'informal' or 'vulgar', depending on their own age. These assertions lead to us being able to say that our prototypical dictionary attempts to maintain the purity of the language.

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning presents opportunities and potential pitfalls for lexicography. While AI has the potential to automate parts of the process, such as

corpus analysis or the generation of definitions, human oversight remains crucial to ensure the accuracy and nuance of entries. Furthermore, ethical considerations arise, particularly in relation to cultural sensitivity and the potential bias inherent in data used by AI systems.

Much research has been done over the last twenty years on the topic treated in this paper, much more than I was able to mention here. That is why I would like to mention two recent publications which give overviews of the field with important annotated bibliographies [8]. Nevertheless, uses and users of dictionaries remain for the moment relatively unknown. Especially model building and experimental research have an important role to play in the ongoing enterprise of making ever better dictionaries

### Conclusion

Lexicography plays a central role in preserving, documenting, and disseminating the English language. It has undergone significant transformations, especially with the advent of digital technologies, but remains grounded in core principles of accuracy, clarity, and inclusivity. As the English language continues to evolve, lexicographers will need to navigate new challenges and embrace innovative methodologies. By doing so, they will continue to ensure that dictionaries remain relevant and valuable tools for speakers and learners of English worldwide. Dictionaries are necessary reference tool for all common and advanced learners of Sanskrit language. Dictionaries are useful for getting grammatical information and meaning of words, collocations, spellings, pronunciations, context and etymology of words. Thus dictionaries are one of the essential reference tools and act as a reference book or tool having collection of words listed alphabetically in a particular vocabulary, with all feasible explanation, pronunciations, synonyms, antonyms, and related as well as contrasted phrases. It is also used for language interpretation and language translation along with benefits to learners and teachers. Some of significant features of a dictionaries tend to be specific in nature and defines words and terms; confirms spelling, definition, and pronunciation; used to find out how words are used; helps to locate synonyms and antonyms and to trace the origin of words (e.g. Webster's Dictionary). Every subject has its own dictionaries prepared for different usage.

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