

8 Meaning in dictionaries

In Chapter 7, we identified checking spelling and finding out about meaning as the two principal reasons why someone would consult a dictionary. Because dictionaries are based on the written form of the language and their word lists are arranged in alphabetical order, they coincidentally and inevitably provide information about spelling. It is, thus, in explaining, describing and defining the meaning of words that the major function of dictionaries is considered to lie, and on which they are judged. We discussed some of the components of word meaning in Chapter 2, and in this chapter we explore how and with what success dictionaries describe the various aspects of lexical meaning. First, though, we need to determine exactly what the objects are whose meaning dictionaries are attempting to characterise.

8.1 The objects of definition

Dictionaries present us with a list of headwords as the objects to be defined, though some items within the entry under a headword may also be subject to definition. The headword list may contain a variety of types of item. Consider the two following short lists from CED4:

hook, hookah, hook and eye, hooked, hooker¹, hooker², Hooke's law, hooknose, hook-tip, hook-up, hookworm, hookworm disease;

its, it's, itself, itsy-bitsy, ITU, ITV, -ity, i-type semiconductor, IU, IU(C)D, Iulus, -ium

The headword list in CED4 (personal and geographical names are excluded) contains 'simple' words like *hook* and *hookah*, but it also contains a range of other items:

- derived words – *hooked*, *hooker*²
- compound words, including those written solid (*hooknose*, *hookworm*, *itself*), those hyphenated (*hook-tip*, *hook-up*, *itsy-bitsy*), and open compounds (*Hooke's law*), as well as combinations of these (*hookworm disease*, *i-type semiconductor*)
- binomials (*hook and eye*)

- abbreviations (*ITU, ITV, IU, IU(C)D*), whose ‘definition’ consists only in spelling out the words whose initial letters make up the acronym or initialism
- affixes (*-ity, -ium*), which have similar definitions to those for words
- contractions (*it’s*), for which only the full forms are given.

Some headwords – abbreviations, contractions – are not included for definition as such, just for explanation; similarly, word forms manifesting irregular inflections are often entered with a cross-reference to the base form (or lemma), e.g.

felt the past tense and past participle of **feel**

Some of the items that CED4 includes in its headword list would feature as nested or run-on items in other dictionaries, including derivatives and some compounds. The practice varies, with, for example, some dictionaries listing solid compounds as headwords, but not hyphenated or open compounds. CED4 itself includes some items within entries that are further defined. Under *hook*, for example, it defines: by hook or (by) crook; get the hook; hook, line, and sinker; off the hook; on the hook; sling one’s hook; hook it. These are various kinds of phrase, including idioms (*by hook or crook, sling one’s hook*), trinomials (*hook, line, and sinker*), and slang expressions (*get the hook, hook it*).

One item in the list is entered twice: *hooker*, with the same pronunciation, and with the following main meanings:

hooker¹ a commercial fishing boat using hooks and lines instead of nets

hooker² a person or thing that hooks

At first glance, you would think that the meaning of *hooker*¹ would be included in the more general meaning of *hooker*². Why then does *hooker* have two homographs (in fact, homonyms), which are entered as separate headwords, especially as the meanings seem so close? The basic criterion that dictionaries use to identify homographs is etymology: if two or more different origins can be identified for the same spelling, then the orthographic word is entered as many times as there are different etymologies. In the case of *hooker*, the first homograph is identified as a loanword from Dutch *hoeker* in the seventeenth century, and the second is the derivation by means of the suffix *-er* from the verb *hook*, which has its origin in the Old English *hoc*.

With *hooker*, the homographs have not too dissimilar meanings. The opposite case can also be found. Consider the following meanings for the word *table* (definitions from CED4):

a flat horizontal slab or board, usually supported by one or more legs, on which objects may be placed

an arrangement of words, numbers, or signs, usually in parallel columns, to display data or relations.

Intuitively, you might think that these meanings must be associated with words of different origin, but that is not the case. There is a single entry for *table* in CED4, since both meanings are associated with the word that came into English from Old French in the twelfth century, with its origin in Latin *tabula*, 'a writing tablet'.

Another criterion that may be used to trigger multiple headwords for the same spelling is word class membership. This criterion operates in LDEL, where *table* has three entries, one each for the noun, adjective (e.g. *table manners*), and verb. The criterion operates alongside the etymological one, so that a homograph identified by etymology may also have multiple entries on the basis of word class membership. For example, *line* is entered four times in LDEL2: ¹*line* (put a lining in, for example, a garment) is distinguished from the others on the basis of etymology: it has its origin in Middle English *linen*, derived from *lin*, the Old English for 'flax', which developed into modern English *linen*. The other entries for *line* also have a Middle English origin, but from Old French *ligne*, though this word, interestingly, goes back to a Latin word meaning 'made of flax'. This *line* has three homographs based on word class membership, one each for the noun, verb and adjective.

Many words are polysemous; they have more than one meaning, as *table* cited earlier. For any spelling (orthographic word), therefore, for which a lexicographer identifies multiple meanings, a decision must be made whether the different meanings arise from polysemy or because there are homographs. The lexicographer applies the criterion of etymology, and, according to dictionary policy, that of word class membership. If the criteria are satisfied, then multiple headwords are entered in the dictionary. If not, then a single headword is entered with multiple meanings or senses. We shall see (Chapter 11) that these criteria do not necessarily apply in learners' dictionaries, because they may be regarded as not serving the reference needs of this user group.

8.2 Lumping and splitting

If polysemy is identified, how does a lexicographer decide how many meanings or senses of a word to recognise? The lexicographer collects the evidence, such as citations and concordance lines (Chapter 13), which indicate the different contexts of use. What is then done with the evidence depends on whether the lexicographer is a 'lumper' or a 'splitter' (Allen 1999: 61):

The 'lumpers' like to lump meanings together and leave the user to extract the nuance of meaning that corresponds to a particular context, whereas the 'splitters' prefer to enumerate differences of meaning in more detail; the distinction corresponds to that between summarizing and analysing.

Here are the entries for the noun *horse* from NODE and from CED4: one of these is a 'splitting' and the other a 'lumping' dictionary.

horse ► **noun** **1** a solid-hoofed plant-eating domesticated mammal with a flowing mane and tail, used for riding, racing, and to carry and pull loads.

• *Equus caballus*, family Equidae (the **horse family**), descended from the wild Przewalski's horse. The horse family also includes the asses and zebras.

■ an adult male horse; a stallion or gelding. ■ a wild mammal of the horse family. ■ [treated as *sing.* or *pl.*] cavalry: *forty horse and sixty foot*.

2 a frame or structure on which something is mounted or supported, especially a sawhorse.

v *Nautical* a horizontal bar, rail, or rope in the rigging of a sailing ship for supporting something. v short for **VAULTING HORSE**

3 [mass noun] *informal* heroin.

4 *informal* a unit of horsepower: *the huge 63-horse 701-cc engine*.

5 *Mining* an obstruction in a vein.

(NODE)

horse *n* **1** a domesticated perissodactyl mammal, *Equus caballus*, used for draught work and riding: family *Equidae*. **2** the adult male of this species; stallion. **3** **wild horse**. **3a** a horse (*Equus caballus*) that has become feral. **3b** another name for **Przewalski's horse**. **4a** any other member of the family *Equidae*, such as the zebra or ass. **4b** (*as modifier*): *the horse family*. **5** (*functioning as pl*) horsemen, esp. cavalry: *a regiment of horse*. **6** Also called: **buck**. *Gymnastics*. a padded apparatus on legs, used for vaulting, etc. **7** a narrow board supported by a pair of legs at each end, used as a frame for sawing or as a trestle, barrier, etc. **8** a contrivance on which a person may ride and exercise. **9** a slang word for **heroin**. **10** *Mining*. a mass of rock within a vein or ore. **11** *Nautical*. a rod, rope, or cable, fixed at the ends, along which something may slide by means of a thimble, shackle, or other fitting; traveller. **12** *Chess*. an informal name for knight. **13** *Informal*. short for **horsepower**. **14** (*modifier*) drawn by a horse or horses: *a horse cart*.

(CED4)

NODE has five numbered senses, by comparison with CED4's fourteen. The first sense in NODE encompasses the first five senses in CED4; NODE's second sense encompasses senses six, seven and eleven in CED4; NODE's 3 corresponds to CED4's 9, NODE's 4 to CED4's 13, and NODE's 5 to CED4's 10. CED4 has some senses not covered by NODE: 8, 12, 14. Some of CED4's senses are 'subsenses' (introduced by the symbol ■) to the 'core' senses in NODE. The arrangement of NODE suggests that it is essentially a 'lumping' dictionary, whereas CED4 falls more obviously into the 'splitting' category. Most dictionaries tend to be of the 'splitting' type, though different dictionaries do not necessarily agree on where to make the splits between senses. Compare the following entries for the noun *length* in COD9 and CCD4:

length n. **1** measurement or extent from end to end; the greater of two or the greatest of three dimensions of a body. **2** extent in, of, or with regard to, time (*a stay of some length; the length of a speech*). **3** the distance a thing extends (*at arm's length; ships a cable's length apart*). **4** the length of a swimming pool as a measure of the distance swum. **5** the length of a horse, boat, etc., as a measure of the lead in a race. **6** a long stretch or extent (*a length of hair*). **7** a degree of thoroughness in action (*went to great lengths; prepared to go to any length*). **8** a piece of material of a certain length (*a length of cloth*). **9** *Prosody* the quantity of a vowel or syllable. **10** *Cricket* **a** the distance from the batsman at which the ball pitches (*the bowler keeps a good length*). **b** the proper amount of this. **11** the extent of a garment in a vertical direction when worn. **12** the full extent of one's body.

(COD9)

length n **1** the linear extent or measurement of something from end to end, usually being the longest dimension. **2** the extent of something from beginning to end, measured in more or less regular units or intervals: *the book was 600 pages in length*. **3** a specified distance, esp. between two positions: *the length of a race*. **4** a period of time, as between specified limits or moments. **5** a piece or section of something narrow and long: *a length of tubing*. **6** the quality, state, or fact of being long rather than short. **7** (*usually pl*) the amount of trouble taken in pursuing or achieving something (esp. in **to great lengths**). **8** (*often pl*) the extreme or limit of action (esp. in **to any length (s)**). **9** *Prosody, phonetics*. the metrical quantity or temporal duration of a vowel or syllable. **10** the distance from one end of a rectangular swimming bath to the other. **11** *NZ inf.* the general idea; the main purpose.

(CCD4)

Table 8.1 shows how the senses match in these two concise dictionaries.

COD9 has only half of its twelve meanings directly matched in CCD4, while CCD4 has seven of its eleven senses matched in COD9; the disparity arises from the fact that Sense 7 in COD9 is matched to two senses (7 and 8) in CCD4. There is one sense that looks closely related but is not a direct match: Sense 6 in COD9 and Sense 5 in CCD4. The two dictionaries have not carved up the meaning of *length* in the same way, and there are senses in each that do not have counterparts in the other (the gaps in Table 8.1).

Are there any criteria, or rules of thumb, that lexicographers use in deciding what senses to recognise in analysing the meaning of a lexeme? Context, clearly, plays a part, but context can be analysed more or less finely. For example, the first four senses of the noun *interest* in CED4 are given the following definitions:

- 1 the sense of curiosity about or concern with something or someone
- 2 the power of stimulating such a sense
- 3 the quality of such stimulation
- 4 something in which one is interested; a hobby or pursuit.

Table 8.1

COD9	CCD4	CCD4	COD9
1	1	1	1
2	4	2	
3	3	3	3
4	10	4	2
5		5	
6		6	
7	7, 8	7	7
8		8	7
9	9	9	9
10		10	4
11		11	
12			

LDEL2 encapsulates these meanings under one numbered sense with two parts:

5a readiness to be concerned with, moved by, or have one's attention attracted by something; curiosity **5b** the quality in a thing that arouses interest . . . *also* something one finds interesting

Clearly, in the end, it comes down to the lexicographer exercising their informed judgement in the face of the evidence that they have to work with.

There are, however, two factors that a lexicographer can take into account when distinguishing the senses of words: grammar, and collocation (Clear 1996). It is possible that the use of *length* 'usually plural' as against 'often plural' led the CCD4 lexicographer to distinguish senses 7 and 8 (see above). The fact that *reply* can be used intransitively, as against transitively with a clause as object, distinguishes the first two senses in CED4:

1 to make an answer (to) in words or writing or by an action; respond: *he replied with an unexpected move*. **2** (*tr*; takes a clause as object) to say (something) in answer: *he replied that he didn't want to come*.

Some senses have a specialised or restricted use, and are labelled as such, e.g. the Gymnastics, Mining, Nautical, Chess and Informal uses of *horse* in the CED4 entry given earlier. Some senses enter into particular collocations; as indicated by the words in brackets in these senses for *isometric* from CED4:

(of a crystal or system of crystallization) having three mutually perpendicular equal axes

(of a method of projecting a drawing in three dimensions) having the three axes equally inclined and all lines drawn to scale.

However, collocation has not been exploited as much as it could be by lexicographers for this purpose (Clear 1996).

Having decided what senses to recognise for a polysemous lexeme, the lexicographer must then decide how to order them in the dictionary entry. In an historical dictionary – OED or SOED – the order is given: from earliest sense to latest sense, according to the citational evidence. However, even in historical dictionaries, things are not always as simple: some words have a complicated ‘sense history’, with more than one ‘branch’ (see Berg 1993 for a description of the entry structure in OED2). In general-purpose dictionaries, the practice varies. *Chambers* follows the historical order:

There are at least two possible ways of ordering . . . definitions. One way is to give the most modern meaning first and the oldest last. The other is the way selected for this dictionary, historical order. In this method the original or oldest meaning of the word is given first and the most modern or up-to-date last. Both methods are equally easy to use but historical order is perhaps more logical since it shows at a glance the historical development of the word, each entry providing a potted history of the word.

(p. vi)

This is a matter of opinion, and whether anyone would consult a general-purpose dictionary for a ‘potted history’ of a word is debatable. The alternative argument would focus on likely user needs, which would privilege the more modern senses. In fact, dictionaries that follow the ‘modern meaning first’ principle are usually rather more subtle in their arrangement of senses, e.g. CED4:

As a general rule, where a headword has more than one sense, the first sense given is the one most common in current usage. Where the editors consider that a current sense is the ‘core meaning’ in that it illuminates the meaning of other senses, the core meaning may be placed first. Subsequent senses are arranged so as to give a coherent account of the meaning of a headword . . . closely related senses are grouped together; technical senses usually follow general senses; archaic and obsolete senses follow technical senses; idioms and fixed phrases are usually placed last.

(p. xxi)

LDEL2 attempts a synthesis of the historical and contemporary approaches:

Meanings are ordered according to a system which aims both to show the main historical development of the word and to give a coherent overview of the relationship between its meanings. Meanings that are current throughout the English-speaking world are shown first; they appear in the order in which they are first recorded in English, except that closely related senses may be grouped together regardless of strict historical order. They are followed by words [sic – presumably for ‘meanings’] whose usage is restricted,

such as those current only in informal use or in American English. Senses which have become archaic or obsolete are shown last.

(p. xvi)

Compare the order of senses in the entries for the noun *mate* from CED4 and LDEL2:

mate **1** the sexual partner of an animal. **2** a marriage partner. **3a** *Informal, chiefly Brit., Austral., and N.Z.* a friend, usually of the same sex: often used between males in direct address. **3b** (*in combination*) an associate, colleague, fellow sharer, etc.: *a classmate, a flatmate*. **4** one of a pair of matching items. **5** *Nautical*. **5a** short for **first mate**. **5b** any officer below the master on a commercial ship. **5c** a warrant officer's assistant on a ship. **6** (in some trades) an assistant: *a plumber's mate*. **7** *Archaic*. a suitable associate.

(CED4)

mate **1a** an associate, companion – often in combination <flatmate> <playmate> **1b** an assistant to a more skilled workman <plumber's ~> **1c** *chiefly Br & Austr* a friend, chum – used esp as a familiar form of address between men **2** an officer on a merchant ship ranking below the captain **3** either member of a breeding pair of animals <a sparrow and his ~> **3c** either of two matched objects <a ~ to this glove> **4** *archaic* a match, peer

(LDEL2)

Mate entered the language during the Middle English period, with the general 'companion' meaning. The LDEL2 entry reflects the later (sixteenth-century) addition of the 'sexual partner' meaning, though this comes first in CED4 because it is considered the more common and central meaning in modern English.

8.3 Definitions

Once identified, each sense needs a definition. The definition is a characterisation of the meaning of the (sense of the) lexeme; it is not an exhaustive explanation of the possible referents (Zgusta 1971: 252ff.). Like other linguistic statements, definitions in monolingual dictionaries consist of 'language turned back on itself', using the same language to describe as is being described. Much of the art of lexicography (compare the title of Landau 1989, 2001) consists in finding apt wording for constructing telling definitions. A number of general principles can be identified:

- a word should be defined in terms simpler than itself (Zgusta 1971: 257), which is not always possible with the 'simple' words
- circularity of definition should be avoided, i.e. defining two or more lexemes in terms of each other (Svensén 1993: 126)

- a definition should be substitutable for the item being defined; so the head of the definition phrase should belong to the same word class as the defined lexeme (Zgusta 1971: 258; Svensén 1993: 127)
- different forms of definition are appropriate to different types of word (Zgusta 1971: 258).

The most common form of definition is the 'endocentric phrase' (Zgusta 1971: 258), the 'completely analytical one-phrase definition' (Preface to W3), which consists of 'stating the superordinate concept next to the definiendum (*genus proximum*) together with at least one distinctive feature typical of the definiendum (*differentia specifica*)' (Svensén 1993: 122). A good example of such a definition is that given for the first sense of *horse* in NODE, cited earlier:

a solid-hoofed plant-eating domesticated mammal with a flowing mane and tail, used for riding, racing, and to carry and pull loads.

The 'definiendum' (*horse*) is related to its 'genus' (*mammal*), i.e. its 'superordinate concept', and given a number of 'differentiae' (*solid-hoofed, plant-eating, domesticated, with a flowing mane and tail, used for riding, etc.*), which are 'typical features' serving to distinguish this mammal from other mammals.

The 'genus + differentiae' style of definition, as it is sometimes called, is used for a great many words from most of the word classes, with 'differentiae' appropriate to whether the meaning is concrete or abstract, referring to a thing, event, quality, and so on. Here are some further examples from a range of types of word, taken from a number of dictionaries (the 'genus' is in each case in *italics*):

beat (verb) to *strike* with or as if with a series of violent blows [CED4]

clean (adjective) *free* from dirt, stain, or whatever defiles [Chambers]

glamour (noun) a romantic, exciting, and often illusory *attractiveness* [LDEL2]

humble (adjective) *of* low social or political *rank* [COD9]

somewhat (adverb) *to a moderate extent* or *by a moderate amount* [NODE]

see (verb) *perceive* with the eyes [COD10]

variety (noun) the *quality* or *condition* of being diversified or various [CED4]

A second major type of definition consists of a synonym, a collection of synonyms, or a synonymous phrase. Many, especially abstract, words are not easily defined analytically by the 'genus + differentiae' style; and lexicographers resort to the use of synonyms. It is this type of definition that is most likely to create circularity, where a set of synonyms is used to define each other. Smaller dictionaries, where space is more limited, use synonymy as a defining method more extensively. Compare these entries from the *Collins Pocket English Dictionary* (2000):

miserable 1 very unhappy, wretched. 2 causing misery. 3 squalid. 4 mean

unhappy 1 sad or depressed. 2 unfortunate or wretched

wretched 1 miserable or unhappy. 2 worthless

The larger *Collins Concise* (1999) is already an improvement; although it still relies largely on synonymy for defining, its more extensive treatment creates less circularity:

miserable 1 unhappy or depressed; wretched. 2 causing misery, discomfort, etc. 3 contemptible. 4 sordid or squalid. 5 mean; stingy.

unhappy 1 not joyful; sad or depressed. 2 unfortunate or wretched. 3 tactless or inappropriate.

wretched 1 in poor or pitiful circumstances. 2 characterised by or causing misery. 3 despicable; base. 4 poor, inferior, or paltry.

Interestingly, the parent, desk-size CED4 adds almost nothing to the definitions of the *Concise* for these words.

A third style of definition specifies what is 'typical' of the referent. This style is normally used in combination with one of the others, usually the analytical style, and is introduced by the adverb *typically*. Here are some examples from COD10:

day of rest a day set aside from normal activity, typically Sunday on religious grounds

gingham lightweight plain-woven cotton cloth, typically checked

measles an infectious viral disease causing fever and a red rash, typically occurring in childhood

scramble move or make one's way quickly and awkwardly, typically by using one's hands as well as one's feet

ululate howl or wail, typically to express grief

The last example adds a typifying definition to a synonym one, while the others add it to an analytical definition.

A fourth type of definition explains the 'use' to which a word or sense of word is put, usually in the grammar of the language. This type is typically employed for defining 'grammatical' or 'function' words (determiners, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliary verbs – see Chapter 1), especially where these have no reference outside of language. Here are some examples from COD10:

and (conjunction) used to connect words of the same part of speech, clauses, or sentences

do (auxiliary verb) used before a verb in questions and negative statements

ever (adverb) used for emphasis in questions expressing astonishment or outrage

herself (pronoun) used as the object of a verb or preposition to refer to a female person or animal previously mentioned as the subject of the clause

that (pronoun/determiner) used to identify a specific person or thing observed or heard by the speaker

us (pronoun) used by a speaker to refer to himself or herself and one or more others as the object of a verb or preposition

All these definitions are introduced by *used*, and they are mostly framed in terms of how the word operates in the grammatical structure of the language. In the case of the adverb *ever*, though, the ‘use’ relates to its function in discourse, i.e. for emphasis.

Definitions aim to describe the reference relations (Chapter 2) of a lexeme, specifically their denotations. They do not usually comment on the connotative or associative meaning of a lexeme, though this may occasionally find mention, as in the definitions of *champagne* and *youth* in NODE:

champagne a white sparkling wine from Champagne, regarded as a symbol of luxury and associated with celebration

youth the state or quality of being young, especially as associated with vigour, freshness, or immaturity.

More often, connotation is indicated by appropriate labelling (see Chapter 9), as for the following words in COD9:

crony (often *derog[atory]*) a close friend or companion

ethnic cleansing (*euphem[istic]*) the mass expulsion or extermination of people from opposing ethnic or religious groups within a certain area

ladyship (*iron[ical]*) a form of reference or address to a woman thought to be giving herself airs

missive (*joc[ular]*) a letter, esp. a long and serious one

wrinkly (*slang offens[ive]*) an old or middle-aged person.

8.4 Sense relations

In Chapter 2, we identified the ‘sense relations’ that may hold between lexemes within the vocabulary as: synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and meronymy. In

this section, we shall explore how these meaning relations are represented in dictionaries. We have noted already (8.3) that (loose) synonymy is used as a defining style for some words. A somewhat tighter synonymy is sometimes indicated by the phrase ‘also called’, when an alternative term is given for the headword under consideration. For example, both CED4 and NODE give ‘also called: **viper**’ under *adder*, and ‘also called: **hydrophobia**’ under *rabies*. But there is no consistency of treatment. For example, in CED4 *hookah* is given the following alternatives: *hubble-bubble*, *kalian*, *narghile*, *water pipe*; and their definitions all contain the phrase ‘another name for **hookah**’. NODE, however, does not give these alternatives in its entry for *hookah*, though *hubble-bubble* is defined simply as ‘a hookah’, *narghile* has ‘a hookah’ included in its definition, and *water pipe* has a similar definition to that for *hookah* but without making the connection. *Kalian* is not entered in NODE. CED4 is perhaps particularly commendable for making these synonym connections, as the following examples from a single column in the dictionary show:

love apple an archaic name for **tomato**

lovebird another name for **budgerigar**

love feast Also called: **agape**

love-in-a-mist See also **fennelflower**

love-in-idleness another name for the **wild pansy**

love knot Also called: **lover’s knot**

lovmaking an archaic word for **courtship**

lovey *Brit. informal.* another word for **love** (sense 11).

Another way of treating synonyms in dictionaries is to draw together near-synonyms under one of the items and discuss them. This procedure is used by LDEL2 and by ECED. The latter has the following account of ‘generous’ words:

SYNONYMS *generous, magnanimous, munificent, bountiful, liberal*

CORE MEANING: giving readily to others

generous willing to give money, help, or time freely; **magnanimous** very generous, kind, or forgiving; **munificent** very generous, especially on a grand scale; **bountiful** (*literary*) generous, particularly to less fortunate people; **liberal** free with money, time, or other assets.

The sense relation of antonymy is sometimes used in definitions, when the opposite of the (sense of the) lexeme being defined is preceded by *not*, e.g. (from COD9)

artificial not real**conventional** not spontaneous or sincere or original**long-standing** not recent**vacant** not filled or occupied

Sometimes, an antonym may be indicated more explicitly. NODE, for example, introduces antonyms with the phrase ‘the opposite of’, but this is for a limited number of mostly quite technical terms, e.g. anode – cathode, holism – atomism, sinistral – dextral, zenith – nadir. CED4 uses the phrase ‘compare’ to fulfil a similar function, but again with a small number of fairly technical terms. Antonymy is not a well-represented sense relation in the text of dictionaries.

Hyponymy is better represented, largely because the analytical definition (8.3) is formed using the hyponymy relation. The ‘genus’ term is, or should be, the superordinate of the lexeme being defined, the ‘definiendum’. Consider the following definition from CED4:

serge a twill-weave woollen or worsted fabric used for clothing

Serge is a hyponym of *fabric*, the ‘genus’ term in this definition, and it can be related as a co-hyponym to other words that have *fabric* as their ‘genus’, such as *corduroy*, *lace*, *velvet*, *worsted* and so on. What you cannot find out from a conventional dictionary is the set of all the co-hyponyms of a particular superordinate term (see Chapter 12). If a dictionary is consistent, though, co-hyponyms should be related to the same genus term. But dictionaries are not noted for their consistency in such matters. For example, NODE relates *fork* and *spoon* to the genus term *implement*, but *knife* is related to *instrument*. NODE defines *handwritten* as ‘written with a pen, pencil, or other hand-held implement’, but *pen* and *pencil* both have *instrument* as their genus term.

Meronymy, the ‘part-of’ relation, is a less well recognised as well as a less pervasive sense relation. It is, though, used in the definitions of some lexemes, e.g. (from COD10):

algebra the part of mathematics in which . . .

coast the part of the land adjoining or near the sea

loin the part of the body on both sides of the spine between the lowest ribs and the hip bones

vamp the upper front part of a boot or shoe

Again, we should not look for consistency in conventional dictionaries. While *upper* is defined in COD10 as ‘the part of a boot or shoe above the sole’, *sole* has a quite different type of definition: ‘the section forming the underside of a piece of footwear’.

The dictionary that has most consistently treated sense relations is the learners' dictionary COBUILD1, where synonyms, antonyms and superordinate terms are indicated in the dictionary's 'extra column' (further in Chapter 11).

8.5 Phraseology

The other major component of meaning that we identified in Chapter 2 was collocation, the regular or particular company that a word keeps. We noted in 8.2 that collocation may offer a method for distinguishing the senses of a lexeme (cf. Clear 1996). Collocation is, in the end, a matter of statistical frequency of co-occurrence, and lexicologists have not yet collected full data on the collocational behaviour of words. Where dictionaries note collocation, it is in cases either of a known restriction to the range of a word or where a collocation appears in a particular context. The possible collocates or the restrictions are usually contained within brackets before the definition and introduced by 'of' or 'especially of'. Here are some examples from NODE:

bijou (especially of a house or flat) small and elegant

bifacial *Botany* (of a leaf) having upper and lower surfaces that are structurally different. *Archaeology* (of a flint or other artefact) worked on both surfaces

convoluted (especially of an argument, story, or sentence) extremely complex and difficult to follow

meander (of a river or road) follow a winding course. (of a person) wander at random. (of a speaker or text) proceed aimlessly or with little purpose

teem (of water, especially rain) pour down; fall heavily

terrigenous *Geology* (of a marine deposit) made of material eroded from the land.

Most of the lexemes for which collocates are indicated belong to the adjective word class: the collocates specify the nouns or types of noun they typically accompany. Some verbs (e.g. *meander*, *teem*) may have their typical Subject or Object noun collocates specified. Collocation is the subject of considerable research currently, especially following the development of extensive computer corpora that promise to yield interesting and reliable data on this topic. Lexicographers of learners' dictionaries have begun to include some of this information in their works, since it is an area of particular interest and difficulty for learners of English as a second or foreign language (see Chapter 11).

Another area of interest to learners is that of idioms and other fixed expressions, especially where the meaning of the expression cannot be deduced from the meanings of its individual words. Some dictionaries, as we saw in 8.1, list binomials, and perhaps trinomials, as headwords. COD9, for example, has some

120 such items as headwords, e.g. *bells and whistles*, *flotsam and jetsam*, *sweet and sour*, *waifs and strays*. More difficult to locate are idioms proper, which are normally entered under one of the 'main' words of the idiom. Many dictionaries are not very explicit about the rules for finding an idiom, though the rule of thumb is that it will be under the first 'main' word. For example, *a storm in a teacup* will be under *storm*, *shoot one's mouth off* will be under *shoot*, but *take a bull by the horns* will be under *bull*, because *take* does not count as a 'main' word. Sometimes the rules are more complicated; LDEL2, for example, follows an older tradition:

An idiom is entered at the first noun it contains; hence **on the ball** appears at **ball** and **in spite of** at **spite**. If it contains no noun, it is entered at the first adjective; hence **give as good as one gets** is shown at **good**. If it contains no adjective, it is entered under the first adverb; if no adverb, under the first verb; if no verb, under the first word. In any case, cross-references to the entry where the idiom appears are given at the entries for other major words in it: **hand** . . . – see also **take the LAW into one's own hands**. The entry where the idiom appears is shown in SMALL CAPITAL letters.

(p. xiv)

Not all dictionaries are as good about cross-referencing, and locating an idiom can turn into something of a hunt at times, especially as they are usually nested towards the end of an entry. Some of the more modern layouts do make the hunt easier, e.g. in COD10, which has a separate paragraph marked 'PHRASES' where this is relevant in an entry. Under *shoot*, for example, the following phrases are listed:

shoot the breeze (or the bull), shoot one's cuffs, shoot oneself in the foot, shoot a line, shoot one's mouth off, the whole shooting match, shoot through.

Each phrase is then given a definition, and any appropriate restrictive label.

Summarising, the treatment of meaning in dictionaries goes beyond simply the definition; it includes the distinction of homographs, the identification of senses and their ordering, the contribution of the sense relations, the incorporation of collocational information, and the consideration of idioms and other phrasal expressions.

8.6 Further reading

Sidney Landau deals with 'definition' in Chapter 4 of *Dictionaries: The Art and Craft of Lexicography* (1989), as does Bo Svensén in Chapter 10 of his *Practical Lexicography* (1993). The section on defining styles owes something to Barbara Kipfer's treatment in Chapter 6 of *Workbook on Lexicography* (1984), where she also discusses the ordering of senses.

9 Beyond definition

In the previous chapter we discussed the treatment of what is often considered the main function of dictionaries: the description of word meaning. In this chapter, we investigate some of the other information about words that dictionaries may contain, some of the ‘facts about words’ that we outlined in Chapter 2. While we shall look at topics such as spelling, pronunciation, inflections, word classes, and usage, we shall leave etymology until the next chapter.

9.1 Spelling

As we have noted before, dictionaries cannot help but give information about spelling, since as alphabetically organised word books they are founded on the written form of words. Consulting the dictionary to check the spelling of words we also found to be one of the major occasions of their use (Chapter 7). While headwords, or nested derivatives, supply information about the usual spellings of words, there is additional information, about variations in spelling, that dictionaries also give. The variation can be of various kinds.

Some words simply have alternative spellings, where the choice of one rather than the other is purely a matter of personal preference. Both spellings are equally acceptable. Here are some examples (from COD9):

absorption – absorbtion, baptistery – baptistry, caddie – caddy, diffuser – diffusor, extrovert – extravert, filigree – filagree, gizmo – gismo, horsey – horsey, judgement – judgment, movable – moveable, neurone – neuron, pendent – pendant, regime – régime, smidgen – smidgeon – smidgin, tranquillity – tranquility, yogurt – yoghurt.

A surprisingly large number of words have alternative spellings, and from this list we can observe some possible patterns: final *-ie* or *-y*, suffix *-er* or *-or*, *z* or *s*, possible loss of *e* after *dg* or *v* plus suffix, loss of accent from vowels of words borrowed from French, and so on.

Many British dictionaries take account of the differences between British and American spelling. CED4, for example, enters the American spelling of words like *center* and *pediatrics* at the appropriate place in the headword list, and then