**Some remarks on culture in EFL lexicography[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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**Introduction**

This article attempts to show how cultural aspects of meaning can be used in the process of dictionary compilation. In order to achieve this goal, a number of issues of paramount importance have to be discussed: (a) the notion of culture, (b) language and culture, (c) basic properties of dictionaries, (d) representation of culture in dictionaries. In addition considerable attention has been given to the Apresjan’s concept of naïve picture of the world and its impact on theoretical lexicography.

As indicated by Benson, Benson & Ilson (1986) the correlation between lexicography and society is latent in, at least two aspects. On the one hand, the number as well as variety of lexicographic projects undertaken by a given linguistic community represent the cultural development of the nation speaking the particular language. On the other hand, social and economic considerations may also prompt the number of lexicographic products. Consequently, as observed by Glinert (1998: 111) collective underpinnings of lexicographic activity and use of reference works are quite complex and involve matters of ideology, politics, economics and cultural background of a given linguistic community, its social stratification and social identities of its members. Zgusta (1989b: 3-4) stresses the importance of cultural information to dictionary users. The significance of the problem of culture in dictionaries is beyond any conceivable doubt, as every dictionary is a snapshot of the society’s life reflecting the culture (as the system of values existing in the society). Rey (1987) has attempted to characterize those features of content and organization that can be assumed to convey a cultural load. The author also discusses the issues of internal organization and the range of arrangement conventions. At the same time, Rey (1987: 4) admits that the dictionary is one of a number of dictionary types with a low cultural content and it stands in direct contrast to such dictionaries as Room’s (1986) *Dictionary of Britain* or Crowther’s (2000) *Oxford Guide to British and American Culture* the sole task of which is to familiarize the potential users with cultural facts related to Anglo-Saxon countries.

**1. Culture – towards the definition**

The word *culture* goes back to the Latin word *cultura*, with its core meaning *tilling the soil*. Most current uses of the term encompass the status of higher and lower culture on various social and aesthetic scales. But no matter if we investigate primitive or popular culture, it anyway shows that different forms of culture exist.[[2]](#footnote-2) As Herskovits (1960: 17) indicates, it is „the man-made part of the environment”. Much along similar lines is the definition given by the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (henceforth *ODE*): „The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively”.

As Goodenough (1957: 167-173) explains:

As I see it, a society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members [...] Culture, being what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist of the end-product of learning: knowledge, in a most general [...] sense of term.

No matter if we highlight intellectual aspects of culture or stress the importance of its institutionalised meaning, the fact is that we easily accept is that the meaning can evolve over time. The question is what earlier meanings can be carried over into new contexts and to what extend dictionaries provide the up – to – date senses/meanings.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It seems obvious enough that most of the vocabulary is culture-specific. That means that the lexicon reflects the particular and unique way of life of its speakers. It is fair to say at the same time that – while there are degrees of culture-specificity – some items are more culture-bound than the others, there is very little in the lexicons of different languages that is truly universal (cf. Hartmann, 1983). In the words of Zgusta (1989: 3):

[...] since language is embedded in culture, cultural data are important to the learner not only for steering his linguistic behaviour but frequently for choosing the correct lexical equivalent. Such cultural information can be understood in a broad way, so that it can pertain to political and administrative realities of the country or countries whose language is being learned, and so on. Undoubtedly a good part of this information is of encyclopedic character; be this as it may, it belongs to what the learner has to learn.

In general, however, it appears that compilers do have problems with the culture-bound words.

As the purpose of this article is an examination of the interconnection between culture and lexicography, first the interconnection between language and culture in general and then lexicography in particular is undertaken.

**2. Language and culture**

The problem of interconnection between language and culture has been widely recognised. According to Sapir (1921: 233), culture may be defined as what society does and thinks. Language is a particular how of thought. However, as also indicated by Sapir (1921: 234), in the sense that the vocabulary of a language more or less faithfully reflects the culture whose purposes it serves it is perfectly true that the history of language and the history of culture move along parallel lines. This makes it difficult to differentiate cultural words from the lexicon.

At the same time it must be bore in mind that both – culture and culture of language are historical concepts that call for linguistic theory to make them precise. As explained by Rey and Delesalle (1979: 11-20) the Saussurean dichotomies of synchrony/diachrony as well as language/discourse, the Chomskyan dichotomy of language/performance and plain linguistic description cannot explain what the cultural dictionary is. The fact that seems to be of a particular importance is the manifestation of culture in a dictionary that requires certain characteristics and thus, lexicographic techniques.

Rey and Delesalle (1979: 11-12) indicate five clashes between linguistic theory and elaboration of the cultural dictionary. These are as follows:

* Opposition between synchrony and diachrony (functional description vs. description of evolutions – that deals with the Saussurean opposition between synchrony/diachrony),
* The description of a unique and fictive lexical competence vs. the description of social variation and connotations (this leads to the Chomskyan competence/performance dichotomy),
* The philological usage of a corpus against the construction of a linguistic model behind the linguistics conception,
* The analysis of particular lexical items vs. Saussurean language/discourse analysis,
* The analysis of signs vs. analysis of notions.

Obviously enough, it is language that represents culture. When the members of a particular community share their experiences in order to improve the quality of their lives, they use the resources of the community to educate younger generation. Language is the tool to teach it, to fix it and to remember.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Taking the aforementioned conception of language into consideration, it seems clear that the characteristics of a cultural dictionary come from the theory of culture and from the theory of language. Therefore, it is not enough to employ lexicographic methods and techniques of treatment of what is cultural to elaborate a truly cultural dictionary.[[5]](#footnote-5)

One of the methods of identifying words in cultural context is to determine the cultural aspects peculiar to the particular speech community rather than address the domain of culture as such. It is also more informative to concentrate on a single speech community rather than to treat the interconnection between language and culture in general.

**3. Dictionaries and their users**

It seems that every attempt to formulate a sound introduction to any discussion of the question of dictionary research it is worth starting with an elucidation of what exactly a dictionary is. It seems particularly appropriate while considering the present state of affairs, since – traditionally – the main objective of the science of lexicography is to define words and terms. Burkhanov’s *Dictionary of Lexicography* (1998: 41) provides us with the following definition of dictionary:

[A] type of REFERENCE WORK which presents the vocabulary of a language in alphabetic order, usually with explanation of meanings. Since the sixteenth century the TITLE dictionary has been used for an increasingly wider range of alphabetic (but also thematic), general (but also specialized, monolingual (but also bilingual and multilingual) reference works, from the polyglot to the historical and pedagogical dictionary. At the same time there has been a tendency for other terms to be used as designations for more specialized dictionary genres, e.g. THESAURUS, ENCYCLOPEDIA, and TERMINOLOGY.

In his work, Landau (1989: 5) indicates that to most people, dictionaries and encyclopaedias are closely linked and are sometimes considered interchangeable, but they are essentially different kinds of referenceworks withdifferent purposes.For him (see Landau 1989: 5-6) a dictionary lists words in an alphabetical order and describes their meanings, while an encyclopaedia is to be viewed as a collection of articles about all branches of human knowledge. Along fairly similar lines, Jackson (2002: 21) makes the following attempt to explain the difference between dictionaries and encyclopaedias:

[…] a dictionary is a reference book about words. It is a book about language. Its nearest cousin is encyclopedia, but this is a book about things, people, places and ideas […]. The distinction between the dictionary and encyclopedia is not always easy to draw […], but they do not share the same headword list […] and they do not provide the same information for the headwords that they do have in common.

Note that although formulated much earlier, the definition provided in Zgusta (1971: 17) still remains one of the most adequate and precise definitions that have been offered in past research:

[A] dictionary is a systematically arranged list of socialized linguistic forms compiled from the speech habits of a given speech – community and complemented on 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.

Obviously, the very fact that the dictionary is consulted rather than read is obviously linked to its content because – ex definitione *–* dictionaries are reference books that are resorted to in the case of need; and the need may be simply defined by saying that people consult dictionaries in order to find explicit information about the meaning(s) of (a) particular word(s) that are usually – yet not exclusively – arranged in an alphabetical order of the headwords. Dictionaries are of many kinds and may, and usually do provide phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical-semantic, pragmatic, and/or stylistic information about the native or non-native language (see Burkhanov 1999: 27). Béjoint (2000: 1), quoting Rey-Debove (1987) distinguishes between two main lexicographic categories while discussing dictionaries; namely **macrostructure** and the **microstructure**. In accordance with the generally upheld view „macrostructure is a rough equivalent of the English word-list [...] The word microstructure refers to the content of each entry”*.* Earlier, the term macrostructure was defined by Hausmann and Wiegand (1989: 328) as „the ordered set of all lemmata (headwords)”.In the *Dictionary of Lexicography* authored by Burkhanov (1998:91) we find the following definition:

The overall list structure which allows the compiler and the user to locate information in a REFERENCE WORK. The most common format in Western dictionaries is the alphabetical WORD-LIST (although there are other ways of ordering the HEADWORDS, e.g. thematically, chronologically or by frequency), which constitutes the central component. This can be supplemented by OUT- SIDE MATTER in the front, middle or back of the work.

Hartmann (2001: 59) is of the opinion that:

The Macrostructure is depicted as a sequence of entries (from 1 to n), preceded, interrupted and followed by Outside Matter in the form of Front Matter (such as a preface), Middle Matter (such as illustrations) and Back Matter (such as list of bibliographical references). The Microstructure […] is shown as consisting of the Headword (usually typographically marked in **bold**) and two subsidiary structures, the left-core ‘formal’ comment and the right-core ‘semantic’ comment. The Macrostructure and Outside Matter together constitute what is […] called the Megastructure.

In short, the macrostructure of a dictionary is the arrangement of the stock of **lemmata**[[6]](#footnote-6) in the word list (see Burkhanov 1998: 146). According to the author, in the discussion of macrostructure three main types can be mentioned:

1. ideographic (lemmata organized according to semantic affinities of whatever sort),
2. alphabetical (lemmata arranged in accordance with the alphabetical position of each letter comprising the graphic words representing the lemmata),
3. analogical (which is the mixture of both alphabetical and ideographic types of lemmata arrangement).

In turn, the microstructure – according to Hausmann and Wiegand (1989: 344) – may be defined as „[...] an order structure made up of classes of items which have the same function”. In the simplest of terms, microstructure is the way of arranging the various information categories within the entries.

When we progress to the main question we see that Zgusta (1971: 222-223) observes that when a lexicographer sets out to compile a dictionary, he is bound to take two basic decisions, that is 1) what part of the total vocabulary of language the proposed dictionary will cover and 2) to what type the proposed dictionary will belong.

4. **Culture in dictionaries**

At a very outset let us draw reader’s attention to the types of concepts and knowledge structures. As indicated in numerous contributions to lexicography practice, it can be of two main types: commonsense (everyday, folk) as well as expert knowledge. Consequently, the problem of semantic description lies latent in the correlation between these two.

The first was introduced by Ščerba (1940). Since then it was elaborated by many scholars – see, among others, Wierzbicka (1985), Lakoff and Turner (1989), Grzegorczykowa (1993), Bartmiński i Tokarski (1993).[[7]](#footnote-7)

It is intuitively clear that culturally – significant information, along with linguistically – relevant lexicographic data, when encompassed to the dictionary, cannot be referred to as encyclopaedic information. Firstly because expert concepts is not language dependent, let alone the fact that is acquired in the course of study, while commonsense knowledge is culturally determined, thus language – specific. What is more, as explained by Burkhanov (1999: 175), peculiarities of commonsense knowledge may also be caused by the grammatical structure of a language, the correlation between units of different symbolic levels of the language structure, and conventional ways of designating extra – linguistic reality by lexical items.[[8]](#footnote-8)

One of the general observations that emerge from the above considerations seems to support the earlier formulated thesis that dictionary use constitutes difficulties. From one hand it seems obvious that compilers have never had at their disposal the space they really need to give an exhaustive account of words. At the same time, culture should be obligatory reflected, and this should be done adequately since in the process of learning of the English language students should avoid the wrong lexical choice consequences.

As shown, in present day works of reference there is no comprehensive, highly informative cultural note while most of the vocabulary is culture – specific. That means that the lexicon reflects the particular and unique way of life of its speakers. At the same time, while there are degrees of culture – specificity (some words are more culture – bound than the others) there is very little in the lexicons of different languages that is truly universal (cf. Hartmann, 1983). However, it appears that lexicographers do have problems with the culture – bound words.

**Conclusion**

Taking the issue from different perspective, providing that scientific worldview is different from commonsense worldview encoded in grammatical and lexical meanings of a particular language, we need employ the concept of naive picture of the world[[9]](#footnote-9) in order to represent specific features of natural environment and ways of life, customary beliefs of a particular speech community as well as their commonsense considerations.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It should be noted that whether we accept the existence of language – specific picture of the world, as different form the system of expert concepts, we still need the right lexicographic description for the language user to adjust to language – specific, idioethnic, culturally – determined concepts.

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**Summary**

The aim of this paper is to outline the way of culture marking in lexicography. Obviously enough, dictionaries should provide a balanced, convenient and accurate record of the usage of words, supplementing the knowledge of the usage of the words, especially in the realm of the particular linguistic community. In looking at the words an Englishman condemns we must always be aware of the special attitudes he may hold. On the other hand, the foreign language uses must be on the watch with the limit of his intention in marking words with the fellow- foreigner. It is beyond any doubt that these particular area of study seems to pose some difficulties not only for lexicographers, but also – if not merely – for the translators.

1. This paper enlarges on issues raised earlier in Włodarczyk-Stachurska (2010, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Obviously, culture cannot be investigated as neither primitive nor for the masses. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As Hanks (2000) explains dictionaries do not contain the meaning of words, but only describe how have been used, and list meaning potentials. From the meaning potentials, we can extrapolate new meanings from new contexts. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As Rey (1987: 246) stresses, here is the mistake made in not recognizing that the cultural processes are so selective as the interests of the human beings in the relation to all the every day events. Assigning a cultural character to every social fact equals to denying the main character of the cultivation of experiences in a society. On the other hand, though, the mistake in the conception of culture as a purely intellectual, aesthetic and ethical fact, disdains the cultivation effectively found, among others, in the agricultural traditions. According to him, both mistakes can be overcome, if the emphasis is placed on the cultivation of the pertinent experiences to the interests of a society and, consequently, on the cultivation of its language. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Simultaneously, the cultural load of modern dictionaries seems not to be an intrinsic quality, as a consequence of a change of view in its interpretation. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Here the term is used as equal to *headword*,afterBurkhanov (1998: 116). It is a morphological form of a lexeme, which is widely used, grammatically simple, and traditionally serves to represent all morphological word forms of a lexeme. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Here the terms commonsense knowledge and encyclopaedic knowledge are used as the same distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The concept of commonsense and expert knowledge is usually referred to as worldview, specified by Whorf (1956), and according to him it embodies collective experience shared by the speakers of a particular linguistic community. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The concept of naive picture of the world was introduced into lexicographic description by Apresjan (1974), to denote the aggregate of commonsense concepts underlying meanings of lexical items. Also Počebcov (1990) assumes the existence of linguistic mentality of a given nation. All in all, it represents cultural and spiritual experience of a given linguistic community. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Here the works of cognitive semanticists should be compared (e.g. Lakoff 1987, Johnson 1987, Taylor 1989) concerning two autonomous types of categorization. Also Langacker’s (1987) distinction between primary or secondary domains come to our minds. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)