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Lexicographic Deixis

Rufus H. GOUWS

Department of Afrikaans and Dutch, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

In its interaction with linguistics lexicography often employs linguistic terms and concepts. The use of the same term in both fields does not necessarily imply that they share the exact same meaning. In lexicography a term from the field of linguistics might be used in a different way and even acquire a different sense or meaning.

In linguistics the term deixis is used to refer to the orientational features of language. Deictic words relate an utterance to the temporal and spatial situation in which it is made. Deictic words anchor a linguistic expression in the extra-linguistic reality. The speaker, the time and the place of utterance can be regarded as the zero point of reference for that utterance – its deictic centre.

The inclusion and treatment of lexical items in general language dictionaries reflect the language and culture of a specific speech community. In its macrostructural coverage a dictionary includes lexical items taken from their typical contexts and ordered according to a lexicographic principle. The lexicographic treatment often requires a re-contextualisation of these forms. Depending on their typological category, their function and their genuine purpose general language dictionaries primarily have the standard variety of the treated language, a neutral style and register and the time of compilation as reference point – constituting the lexicographic deictic centre.

All lemmata and sublemmata included in a dictionary and all items presented as part of the lexicographic treatment do not always fall withing the scope of the deictic centre. Most items are neutral regarding their style, dialect or chronolect whereas others can be classified as obsolete, colloquial, rude, obscene, vulgar, formal, et cetera. Lexicographers employ different procedures and types of items to identify items that deviate from the realm of the deictic centre and to anchor such an item in the dictionary-external reality. This process is known as lexicographic deixis.

In this paper various aspects of procedures of lexicographic deixis are discussed. The focus is on the marking of spatial and temporal deictic relations in comprehensive monolingual dictionaries and the treatment of social deixis in bilingual dictionaries.

It is shown how lexicographic labels and item symbols are used to mark deviations from the deictic centre. It is then argued that successful spatial and temporal deictic anchoring cannot always be achieved by these items alone. They often must be complemented by other items with which they function in tandem to ensure a deictic anchoring that will equip dictionary users with the necessary knowledge and text reception and text production confidence. To achieve this success the notion of double-layered deictic anchoring is introduced as a procedure to assist lexicographers. Referring to real dictionary data, different forms of this procedure are discussed, and proposals are made to improve the lexicographic practice.

With regard to social lexicographic deixis in bilingual dictionaries the importance of a taboo hierarchy is emphasised, and it is shown that both lemmatic and non-lemmatic addressing procedures are needed to achieve the required deictic anchoring. Looking at existing dictionaries suggestions are made for a better treatment of social deictic expressions.