LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN DICTIONARIES (A Comparative Study)

Robert Leščinskij

Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Saulėtekio al. 11, LT-10223 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: robert.lescinskij@vgtu.lt

The purpose of this study is to establish differences and similarities between linguistic characteristics of English and Russian dictionaries. Two dictionaries were selected for the study – electronic version of the 8th edition of Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (OALD) and the online version of Ozhegov’s explanatory dictionary. The methods chosen for the study were descriptive, comparative and contrastive analysis. Linguistic characteristics of the dictionaries were analysed and compared. The research showed that both reference books provided different linguistic information on the headwords. OALD provided exhaustive phonetic information, which Ozhegov’s dictionary lacked. The two dictionaries provided different orthographic information. OALD disclosed semantic information via various tools available in the electronic version; these were unavailable in Ozhegov’s dictionary. Both dictionaries used similar stylistic labels.

**Keywords**: dictionary, lexicography, linguistic characteristics, equivalent.


**Introduction**

For centuries, dictionaries were the guiding stars for those who sought knowledge not only in the field of linguistics, which by all means governed the field of lexicography among others, but also in all the trades and fields cultivated by human beings. Thus, the status of lexicography as a science might be problematic to explain. As stated by Geeraerts: “Lexicography has a rather paradoxical nature. On the one hand, almost everyone will agree to classify lexicography as a form of applied linguistics, but on the other hand, it is virtually impossible to give an adequate reply to the question what linguistic theory lexicography might be the application of” (referred to in Ilson, ed. 1987: 1). Being a field of applied linguistics, lexicography refers to many linguistic frameworks, which makes it difficult to classify it under any particular approach.

Berkov states that even though lexicography is one of the most ancient kinds of linguistic activities of human beings, it is often considered to be less ‘prestigious’ than some other fields in linguistics, and is therefore less popular among prominent linguists (Берков 2004: 3). This probably came as a result of the commercial nature of lexicography, as dictionaries, especially in its early days, were aimed at gaining profit rather than contributing to the science of linguistics.

Despite all the difficulties and doubts lexicology evolved as a full-bodied science the focus of which spans not only over theoretical aspects related to dictionary compilation, but also to practical issues related to dictionaries. The current work focuses on the explanatory dictionaries, as these are the ones that tell the
story not only of the evolution of languages, but also the story of the evolution of civilizations.

All the changes that take place in the society affect the development of the language in one way or another. Changes in the language induce changes in dictionaries, such as changes in spelling, for instance. “Explanatory dictionaries are not the absolute standards of spelling; all of them, however, are compiled according to the spelling needs of their time, eventually they become ‘witnesses’ of the spelling standard of a particular time” (Grigoreeva and Naumenko as referred to in Лукьянова 1996). Yet another problem for lexicography is the fact that dictionaries reflect not only language related problems. In fact, dictionaries often focus on speaker’s behaviour, rather than language in general, which makes it difficult to establish universal linguistic features of dictionaries.

In order to develop a better understanding of the basic features and the unique character of dictionaries, the comparative study of English and Russian explanatory dictionaries was carried out. The two languages were chosen because they are among the most influential European languages and they still keep growing in popularity.

The current study holds a partial analysis of the dictionaries (only linguistic features are discussed) which is meant to establish the focus of different lexicographic traditions on particular linguistic issues, which dictionary compilers consider to be topical for the users.

Topicality and significance of the research

Since the dictionaries are of applied character, they are to reflect not only the realities of modern languages, but also the needs of language users, which are, unfortunately, not always referred to in dictionaries.

This study complements the comparative studies of English and Russian lexicography. Both Russian and English linguistic schools have deep lexicographical traditions, so a comparative study of the linguistic characteristics of the dictionaries can clearly show the complex character of the mastery of balancing between the authoritative guidance and the user-friendly reference help.

The aim of the research

The research is aimed at establishing the differences between linguistic information provided in the entries of the equivalent nouns in Russian and English dictionaries to see what bearing different languages have on linguistic characteristics of dictionaries.

Objectives of the research

In order to achieve the aim, the following objectives are set:

1. To overview scientific literature on linguistic characteristics of dictionaries.
2. To identify linguistic information of the equivalent nouns in the dictionaries in question.
3. To establish the differences between linguistic features in English and Russian dictionaries.

Methods of the research

In order to carry out the research both qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilized. Descriptive, comparative and contrastive analyses were applied. All the entries were classified according to the patterns of defining entry terms that they follow. Entries were analysed and described according to the information they possess. Finally, the data was compared in order to identify the differences between linguistic characteristics of Russian and English dictionary entries.

The scope of the research

The corpus of 438 English and 438 Russian entries defining nouns was created using
random sampling. The English entries were obtained from the digital version of the 8th edition of the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, whereas, the Russian entries were taken from the Online version of Ozhegov’s Explanatory Dictionary (www.slovarozhegova.ru). Ozhegov’s dictionary was chosen as it is the only open source Russian online dictionary with relevant information, and possibility to copy the entries.

Theoretical framework

It is only natural for a dictionary, being a written work, to possess certain linguistic characteristics, on the basis of which typological classification is possible. Some authors, like Tekorienė & Maskaliūnienė (2004), stated that linguistic characteristics of dictionaries included the following features:

1. the range and scope of the material assembled;
2. type of information presented about the headword of each entry;
3. type of arrangement or the sequence of items;
4. purpose of enterprise.

According to the authors, each of the aspects mentioned above cover a certain field of problems and therefore, required a more thorough investigation (Tekorienė, Maskaliūnienė 2004). Such investigation was carried out within a comparative study, among others, by Selmistraitis, Nakutienė (2011: 47–59).

1. The range and scope of the material assembled

The following characteristics are considered in regard to assembling the material:

1.1. Density of entries

Density of entries is difficult, or nearly impossible, to measure, due to the fact that it is enormously hard to establish the precise size of the whole lexicon. Further difficulties may arise due to the fact that some authors consolidate homonyms under a single entry. Dictionaries may also differ in the wealth of recorded meanings of polysemous word. In some cases, dictionaries contain a number of entries which are basically derivatives (Tekorienė, Maskaliūnienė 2004). According to Malkiel, such ‘heavy saturation with recurrent derivational schemes at once arouses the suspicion of an experienced reader’ (Malkiel 1968: 9). Tekorienė and Maskaliūnienė also state that the comprehensiveness of dictionaries is to be discussed only if they are compiled using the same pattern (Tekorienė, Maskaliūnienė 2004).

1.2. Temporal, spatial, social and frequentative projection of the lexical material covered

Language is a phenomenon that exists in time, space and social environment; hence, the full coverage of language by dictionaries involves treatment of all social and regional dialects since the earliest records until the present day. This objective is very difficult to achieve though it is not necessary in every type of dictionary. Therefore, coverage of dictionaries is often restricted by the period of time, territory and social environment from which they draw lexical items (Tekorienė, Maskaliūnienė 2004).

1.3. Type of items registered

Even though general dictionaries usually record words, in some cases they can also register some sort of phrases, idioms and morphemes.

1.4. Extent of concentration on lexical and encyclopaedic data

The fact that encyclopaedias and dictionaries are not always recognized as discrete provinces of knowledge led to permeation of encyclopaedic-style data into the dictionaries. The examples of such data are finely illustrated by the examples of proper names, geographical descriptions and a prodigality of comments on ordinary words (Tekorienė, Maskaliūnienė 2004).

1.5. Number of languages involved

Scholars find the problem of dictionary languages quite intriguing. Hacken, for instance, notices that it is difficult to say what interpretation of language is meant in the dictionary context. Usually the term is applied as a reference to corpus. However, a corpus can never constitute the language being described. According to
Hacken, the lexicographer has to decide which occurrences in a corpus are errors and which reflect playful use of expressions not literally used in the text (Hacken 2006).

2. Type of information given about each item

According to Tekoriene and Maskaliuneiene, dictionaries can also be classified according to the type of information given about each item. This information may include spelling, pronunciation, the indication of the class the entry word belongs to, the definition of the meaning, morphological properties, syntactic and stylistic properties, etymology, location in the subsystems of semantically related words (Tekoriene, Maskaliuneiene 2004).

3. Patterns of arrangement

Tekoriene and Maskaliuneiene (2004) suggest that basic arrangement of dictionary items may be alphabetic, semantic or casual.

3.1. Alphabetic arrangement

Most authors (cf. Landau 2004) agree that alphabetic arrangement dominates in most dictionaries; however, alphabetic arrangement does not necessarily mean arrangement according to the alphabet strictly a to z. Vvedenskaja, for instance, claims that reverse dictionaries also belong to those that are arranged alphabetically (Введенская 2007).

3.2. Semantic arrangement

There are two kinds of dictionaries that are organized according to bonds of meaning between the lexical items they describe: ideological dictionaries, or dictionaries of synonyms, and systematic dictionaries. The main purpose of dictionaries of synonyms is to indicate chains of synonyms, near-synonyms, and groups of semantically related words (Landau 2004: 30).

Systematic dictionaries group words according to the semantic fields. The arrangement usually proceeds from hyperonyms to respective hyponyms. Such arrangement is usual for terms of particular sciences.

3.3. Casual arrangement

Casual arrangement of headwords in dictionaries is a mixture of alphabetic and semantic arrangements. (Tekoriene, Maskaliuneiene 2004).

4. Arrangement of the meanings of a polysemous word

The arrangement of meanings of the same headword is nearly as significant for the characterization of the dictionaries as the arrangement of headwords themselves. Landau suggests three major ways in which the meanings of a polysemous word can be arranged:

1. The historical order. The meanings are arranged in the sequence of their historical development.
2. The order of meanings can be arranged in accordance with the frequency of use.
3. The logical lay out of the meanings. This order reflects the hierarchical relations between the meanings (Landau 2004: 36).

5. Illustrative examples

The illustrative examples provided in dictionaries pursue a number of aims. The prevailing aim is to clarify the meaning and usage, or to reflect typical patterns of collocations or the difference between synonymous words (Tekoriene, Maskaliuneiene 2004).

6. Prescriptive vs. descriptive purpose of a dictionary

Needs arising in the society introduce new concepts in lexicography; for instance, the need to establish and maintain a national standard of a language has given rise to the prescriptive or normative concept in lexicography.

The prescriptive tendency in lexicography is opposed to the descriptive principle. The latter makes the lexicographer an objective recorder of the language. A descriptive dictionary records not only the standard language, but also dialectal words, archaisms, or occasional usages by individual authors (Tekoriene, Maskaliuneiene 2004).

7. Productive vs. receptive purpose of a dictionary

According to Hartmann and James, dictionaries aiming at reception are often termed passive dictionaries. They are designed to help with decoding tasks, such as the comprehension of text, whereas dictionaries concerned with production, i.e. with encoding tasks, such as writing, are sometimes referred to as active dictionaries (Hartmann, James 1998: 106).
Juxtaposition of Linguistic Characteristics

This part of the paper deals with comparison of linguistic information given by OALD and Ozhegov’s Explanatory Dictionary. This involves the type of information given about items in the dictionary. This information may include spelling, pronunciation, the definition of the meaning, syntactic and stylistic properties, etymology, etc. Due to space limits the stylistic labels shall not be discussed as they require a separate article to be fully covered.

Pronunciation

The pronunciation in the 8th edition of OALD is given directly beneath the headword. The headword itself is divided into syllables, which, in a way, introduces the pronunciation guide offered by the dictionary at the very beginning of the entry.

1. Main Entry: acad • emy
   Pronunciation: BrE / əˈkædəmi /; NAmE / əˈkædəmɪ /
2. Main Entry: acro • bat • ics
   Pronunciation: BrE / əkrəˈbætɪks /; NAmE / əkrəˈbætɪks /
3. Main Entry: leis • ure
   Pronunciation: BrE /ˈlɛzə(r) /; NAmE /ˈlɪzər /
   Since the British pronunciation is so often different from the American pronunciation, two variants are always provided. If the word can be pronounced in any other way, all the variants are provided. Consider:
4. Main Entry: ob • el • isk
   Pronunciation: BrE /ˈɒbəlɪsk /; NAmE /ˈɑːbəlɪsk /
5. Main Entry: gar • age
   Pronunciation: BrE /ˈɡærəʒ /; BrE /ˈɡærɪdʒ /; NAmE / ˈɡɑːrəʒ /; NAmE / ˈɡɑːrɪdʒ /
6. Main Entry: genre
   Pronunciation: BrE /ˈʒɜːrə /; BrE /ˈʒɜːnə /; NAmE /ˈʒɜːnə /

The purpose of OALD dictates the need to indicate all the possible variants of pronunciation. The CD-ROM version is also equipped with sound files that are represented in the interface by two speaker icons, which if pressed reproduce the word. Stress mark is also given to indicate stressed syllables.

The words in the Russian language are pronounced the same way they are spelled, except for some rather rare deviations; therefore, the pronunciation, in most of the cases, is not given. However, in some extremely rare instances, when the pronunciation differs from the spelling, the former is indicated in square brackets immediately after the headword. The pronunciation is indicated only for the part of the words that is pronounced differently than spelled. Consider:

1. Main Entry: ДЕТЕКТОР
   Pronunciation: ДЕТЕКТОР [дээтэ]
2. Main Entry: БАТТЕРФЛЯЙ
   Pronunciation: БАТТЕРФЛЯЙ [тэ]
3. Main Entry: КОНТЕЙНЕР
   Pronunciation: КОНТЕЙНЕР [тэ]

Interestingly, the entries with the phonetic information provided are all of non-Russian origin. It seems that this deviation is applicable only to the sound e, which is usually pronounced as [je] in Russian but in words of foreign origin this letter is pronounced as [э] (reverse э). Furthermore, the stress in Ozhegov’s online dictionary is not indicated, even though the paper version of the same dictionary provides this kind of information. Such deviation from the original version is rather difficult to explain as mistakes concerning the inappropriate stressing of the words are common not only for language learners but also for native speakers.

The analysis of the entries above reveals that the OALD paid much more attention to the issues of pronunciation. Such approaches to problems of pronunciation as division of words into syllables, indication of primary and secondary stress marks, phonetic notation of every single headword indicating both British and North American pronunciation, as well as possibility
to reproduce the word were applied. Such thorough approach to problems of pronunciation was, by all means, dictated by the purpose of the enterprise as well as by the needs of contemporary students. Ozhegov’s dictionary, on the other hand, serves a different purpose and was compiled in a very different way, which excluded the possibility of phonetic notation of every single headword. Furthermore, the intended users of the dictionary, ideally, should have included people who are familiar with certain rules of Russian pronunciation and for whom phonetic notation would be unnecessary. Therefore, the dictionary only included pronunciation of some words of foreign origin which differ in pronunciation of the letter e in favour of the reverse э, pronunciation of which might have been a problem for the users. Moreover, only the part of the word which possessed deviations was transcribed.

Orthographic Information

Orthography has to do with the writing systems used within one or another language. The scope of orthography, however, is not limited to spelling only, as it may also deal with the rules of punctuation and capitalization. The current study focusses on nouns only; therefore, only spelling will be taken into account.

Ozhegov’s online dictionary does not provide variants of spelling due to the fact that words in the current Russian dictionary follow the standard accepted in 1956 by the Academy of Science of USSR. Preface of the dictionary stated clearly that no variants of spelling were provided in the dictionary. As was anticipated, the situation with English entries obtained from the OALD was different. Such instances were usually found in the geographic variants of English. The following examples illustrate the problem of spelling variants in English:

1. Main Entry: kerb (BrE)
   Geographic Variant: (NAmE curb)
2. Main Entry: axe (especially BrE)
   Geographic Variant: US usually ax
3. Main Entry: fil • let
   Geographic Variant: NAmE also filet
4. Main Entry: flaut • ist (BrE)
   Geographic Variant: NAmE flut • ist
5. Main Entry: plough (BrE)
   Geographic Variant: NAmE plow

The OALD is generally concerned with British and American variants of spelling; therefore, if it differs in any way, both variants are presented. The fact that both variants are provided in the entries perfectly illustrates that both forms exist in free variation.

Yet another aspect of orthography emphasized in the OALD is the spelling of irregular plurals. Such detailed explanation of plurals can, again, be explained by the fact that this particular dictionary focuses on the needs of learners. Consider the following examples:

1. Main Entry: amanuensis
   Inflected Form: amanuenses
2. Main Entry: colloquium
   Inflected Form: colloquia
3. Main Entry: embryo
   Inflected Form: embryos
4. Main Entry: naiad
   Inflected Form: naiads or naiades
5. Main Entry: Fish
   Inflected Form: fish or fishes

The instances above illustrate the examples of plurals given in the OALD. As seen in the examples, if more than one inflected forms are available all of the possibilities are given.

The Russian dictionary does not provide any examples of plurals, as all the plurals are made in accordance to a set of rules which do not allow any irregularities. Instead, the dictionary provides the ending of the noun in the genitive case, as these endings are often problematic for users. Consider the following Examples:

1. Main Entry: КАРТЕЛЬ
   The Genitive Case: КАРТЕЛЬ, -я
2. Main Entry: ШАХМАТЫ
   The Genitive Case: ШАХМАТЫ, -ат
3. Main Entry: СИГАРЕТА
   The Genitive Case: СИГАРЕТА, -ы
4. Main Entry: КЛИЕНТ
   The Genitive Case: КЛИЕНТ, -а
5. Main Entry: СВЯЗЬ
   The Genitive Case: СВЯЗЬ, -и
   Some of the loanwords in Russian can be neither declined nor do they possess plurals, thus they are provided with an abbreviation which informs the reader of the fact. Consider:
   1. Main Entry: ТАКСИ
      Declension: ТАКСИ, нескл.
   2. Main Entry: КОНФЕТТИ
      Declension: КОНФЕТТИ, нескл.
   Based on the analysis of the dictionary entries given above, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the orthographic information provided in the dictionaries was to the greatest extent influenced by two major factors – the language of the dictionary itself and, the purpose of the dictionary. The language of the dictionary determined not only the system of writing used in the dictionary, but also the kind of orthographic information provided in the entries. Russian entries, for instance, present the information on the genitive case of the headword. Declensions are characteristic of synthetic languages, to which Russian is attributed. English, on the other hand, is an analytic language, therefore, it expresses cases differently than synthetic languages do, and hence, there is no need to provide this kind of information in the dictionary entries.
   Second, the dictionaries provide the kind of information relevant for their purpose. On the one hand, entries from Ozhegov’s dictionary (rather prescriptive in character) gave the information concerning orthography of declined forms. On the other hand, entries from the OALD provided information topical to those who study English.

Semantic and Etymological Information

Linguistic semantics is the study of meanings of words and sentences. Semantic information is disclosed via the definitions of the headword. This paper focuses on comparison of semantic information given on the headwords rather than techniques of the presentation of that information.
The plane was guided in by radio beacon.
3 (in the past) a fire lit on top of a hill as a signal.
The first meaning of the word above covers its most general usage. The second meaning explains the word in a more modern context. The third meaning is marked as referring to the past and is not illustrated by an example.

Main Entry: МАЯК
МАЯК, -а, м. Башня с сигнальными огнями на берегу моря, на острове, в устье реки. Береговой м. Плавучий м. (на якорях).
The meaning of the word offered by the Russian dictionary is restricted to a particular building (a tower) and to particular places (seashore, an island, mouth of a river). Such restrictions exclude the usage of the word in the sense of a gadget that was given as a second meaning of the word in the entry obtained from OALD. Furthermore, the figurative usage of the word is also excluded as it is not common in Russian language, which uses expression the ray of hope instead.

The comparative study of the entry terms for beacon in OALD and Ozhegov’s dictionaries revealed an interesting peculiarity. It appears that the definition provided by the OALD disclosed the meaning of the word via certain diachrony as it aimed to show not only the general meaning of the word, but also its usage in the past context as well as its applicability in the context of modern life. The entry obtained from Ozhegov’s Explanatory Dictionary, on the other hand, focused on a single meaning of the word, which considering the modern context may be outdated in certain cases.

The meaning of the word can be disclosed in different contexts in OALD, this is mostly due to the fact that additional banks of information are available via colourful buttons directly below the headword and pronunciation. The buttons dealing with semantics include: example banks, thesauri, cultural references, synonyms and which word sections.

1. Main Entry: ad • jec • tive
Example Bank: ‘My’ is a possessive adjective. Adjectives qualify nouns. Attributive adjectives precede the noun. Predicative adjectives follow the noun. Adjectives describing texture
2. Main Entry: bag • gage
Thesaurus: baggage noun [U] (especially AmE)
Please do not leave baggage unattended.
bags suitcase | especially BrE luggage
carry baggage/bags/a suitcase/luggage
check (in) your baggage/bags/suitcase/luggage
search sb’s baggage/bags/suitcase/luggage
3. Main Entry: birth • day
Cultural References: Birthdays are especially important to the very young and the very old. On their birthday, people receive birthday cards and birthday presents from their family and friends, etc.
4. Main Entry: block
Synonyms: property, premises, complex, structure block.
All the synonyms given in the data bank are provided with additional explanations and notes concerning their usage. Such information is found in the which word section. Consider:
Main Entry: diary
Which Word: agenda / diary / schedule / timetable A book with a space for each day where you write down things that you have to do in the future is called a diary or a datebook (NAmE) (not an agenda). You may also have a calendar on your desk or hanging up in your room, where you write down your appointments. A diary or a journal is also the record that some people keep of what has happened during the day: the Diary of Anne Frank. In BrE your schedule is a plan that lists all the work that you have to do and when you must do each thing and a timetable is a list showing the fixed times at which events will happen: a bus/train timetable. In NAmE these are both called a schedule.

According to Durkin, etymology is the investigation of word histories. It has traditionally been concerned most especially with those word histories in which the facts are not certain, and where a hypothesis has to be constructed to account either for words origin or for a stage in its history (Durkin 2009: 1). Presence of etymo-
logical information in a dictionary entry is also a linguistic characteristic. The electronic version of OALD provides neatly arranged etymological information accessible via the word history button directly beneath the headword.

1. Main Entry: biol • ogy
   Word Origin: early 19th cent.: coined in German, via French from Greek bios ‘life’ + -ogy.

2. Main Entry: acu • puncture
   Word Origin: late 17th cent.: from Latin acu ‘with a needle’ + puncture.

3. Main Entry: clois • ter
   Word Origin: Middle English (in the sense ‘place of religious seclusion’): from Old French cloistre, from Latin claustrum, clostrum ‘lock, enclosed place’, from claudere, ‘to close’.

Ozhegov’s dictionary provided no information whatsoever, therefore, no comparison can be made.

Conclusions

The analysis of the scientific literature and the results of the research allow the following conclusions to be drawn:

1. The phonetic information was presented in OALD in an exhaustive manner, whereas Ozhegov’s dictionary provided phonetic information only when pronunciation deviated from the patterns established in the Russian language.

2. OALD provided different geographical variants of spelling where available as well as peculiarities concerning the deviations in inflected forms, whereas Ozhegov’s dictionary focused mainly on the endings of the nouns when declined in different cases.

3. OALD used databanks making etymological information, cultural references, thesaurus, usage notes and additional example banks available. Ozhegov’s dictionary provided neither of those.

4. OALD being a dictionary for learning purposes covers much more information, whereas Ozhegov’s dictionary can satisfy a rather narrow field of the user interests.

Sources:


www.slovarozhegova.ru

References


Введенская, Л. А. 2007. Русская лексикография. Москва: МарТ.

LINGVISTINĖS ŽODYNŲ YPATYBĖS: LYGINAMASIS TYRIMAS

Robert Leščinskij


Reikšminiai žodžiai: žodynas, leksikografija, lingvistinės ypatybes, lygiareikšmiai.

Įteikta 2013-02-18; priimta 2013-02-28