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Lexicography for your friends

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1. Introduction

Principled dictionary-making is, by definition, guided by a series of principles, mostly involving the notions of generality (of entries) and specificity (of audience). A dictionary must specify the general case when possible, and must address its audience. Thus a definition of the English word 'chair' would not immediately make reference to the ability to rock back and forth, since this is a property of a subset of chairs, and not chairs in general. Similarly a dictionary entry for 'thong' will include radically different primary senses depending on whether the dictionary has been written for Australian release ('item of open footwear') or for North American ('skimpy underwear').

While these guiding principles have been established and followed for good reasons in the creation and publication of all major dictionaries, there are some cases when it makes good sense to follow another route. The desire for a dictionary of a language is as strong for speakers of non-national languages as it is for national languages, and in some cases clearly stronger. There are frequently very different social pressures on the dictionary, and a very different type of audience. These differences allow for a lack of generality, and a degree of assumed shared knowledge, that is quite different from that found in dictionaries of larger languages, and which can be exploited to make some otherwise verbose entries more reasonably sized, and to give a greater sense of community ownership to a dictionary.

Specifically I shall discuss the case of lexicography in the One language of Sandaun province (earlier known as West Sepik), Papua New Guinea (Sikale, Crowther and Donohue 2001). Having a dictionary is perceived as a desirable thing, partly for its own sake and partly because a "dictionary" is required before the government is willing to consider helping to fund any community initiatives regarding bilingual education. As such, the dictionary project is being pursued with erratic community participation (as dictated by the constraints of a hunter-gatherer lifestyle). The wholesale involvement of significant proportions of one One-speaking community (Molmo) in the dictionary from the outset has led to changes in dictionary presentation and dictionary entry style that go against the grain of dictionary "traditionalists" such as Landau (1984),

but which are supported in the community-centric approach advocated by Corris et al. (2002).

2. The One language and dictionary

One is the westernmost ethnolinguistic member of the Torricelli family, spoken in divergent forms across the eastern Bewani ranges in Sandaun province, Papua New Guinea. There are many varieties of One (Crowther 2001), and the one described here is the language of Molmo and other outstations in the Pibi valley (see Donohue 2000 for some brief descriptive details). This is not the largest variety in terms of population (there are perhaps 500 speakers), nor is it the most easily reached or the variety with the greatest rate of literacy: there is no formal schooling in the valley. It is, however, a very central variety, and is spoken in a largely traditional context: there are no employers in the area, no roads to the outside, and no access to news other than from one's neighbours.

Linguistic work on the One language commenced in 2000, and has continued since. The focus of linguistic work has been with the Molmo variety, but interest from speakers of other One varieties means that the model that emerges from the Molmo One work is likely to be adopted in literacy and lexicographic work in other nearby communities as well.

Examples will be presented in the orthography that has been developed, and is developing, in consultation with Molmo One speakers. This orthography is (with minor modifications) compatible with other One varieties, and has the phoneme:grapheme correspondences shown in Table 1.

As can be seen, the orthography does not represent all the contrasts in the language for the vowels. The phonemes which are collapsed orthographically in Table 1 do not bear a great functional load; thus the difference between /i/ and /e/ is relatively infrequent in One. The orthography also uses multiple graphemes for the same phoneme in some consonantal cases. A *t > r sound change forms an important part of the linguistic identity of many One communities.

Table 1. Phonemes and graphemes in One

Phoneme	Grapheme	Phoneme	Grapheme
p	*p*	i	*i*
t	*t, r*	e	*i*
k	*k*	ɛ	*e*
(ʔ)	*'*	a	*a*
m	*m*	ɔ	*o*
n	*n*	o	*u*
f	*f*	u	*u*
s	*s*	ʉ	*u*
w	*w, u, uw*	ʉ̵	*u*
j	*y, i, iy*		

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AN: 229810 ; Lynch, John, Eades, Diana, Crowley, Terry, Siegel, Jeff.; Language Description, History
and Development : Linguistic Indulgence in Memory of Terry Crowley
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(Some northern villages apply the change completely; some, like Molmo, apply it only between vowels and glides, and some do not apply it at all.) This means that the *t* vs *r* graphemic distinction is important from a pan-dialectal perspective. The same orthographic conventions are loosely being used across a range of varieties (a separate literacy program sponsored by the Summer Institute of Linguistics is underway in Koiniri in the far north of the area), though no single pan-One dictionary will be possible.

The One dictionary is being developed as a three-language dictionary, intended primarily for One speakers but with finderlists at the back for English-One and Tok Pisin-One. The introduction, guide to usage, and explanation of the dictionary layout are all written in One, clearly establishing One speakers as the primary audience for the dictionary. What they do with their dictionary, as it appears in draft or in final form, is their business, but based on the observed discussion so far it is likely that it will be used to continue to establish their ethnolinguistic separateness from the more highly educated, numerous, and well-represented Olo people to the west, and to amuse and impress (variously) outsiders who see copies. An example of a short entry is shown below. The different fonts and line divisions keep the different languages separate, and the clear dominance of One over the other languages makes it easy to ignore the Tok Pisin and English components of the dictionary.

airi: san – sun.
　　　 Airi yeri yuplo ninki mente.
　　　 San i kam lait long moning taim.
　　　 The sun breaks in the morning.

The dictionary is not yet complete. It has been distributed in a couple of draft versions over the last few years, and has been used at a provincial level as an example of the sort of document that local communities should aim towards producing. It has not, however, been completely approved by the people working on it: there is a healthy amount of debate concerning what should be in the dictionary, and what shouldn't, whether it should take account of other dialects (consensus: no), or whether it should take account of divergent pronunciations (yes); whether Tok Pisin loans should be included (no), or whether older Malay or English loans, and possibly loans from other non-national languages should appear (yes), and if they should retain their original (if any) orthography (no), and whether variant spellings of One should be included (yes?; no?; yes? [no consensus exists]). On a more practical level, not all of the entries are fully equipped with definitions, or exemplifying sentences, and a large number of lexical roots, to say nothing of lexicalised concepts, have not been entered, and so work continues. The dictionary is very much a work in progress, and one that continues to inform, and be informed by, the One speakers and the non-One collaborators (namely the current author and Melissa Crowther).

3. Lexicography and the One people

The notion of defining lexemes is not completely foreign to the One people. Living in an exogamous society, the need to explain local words, or usages of words that speakers of other One languages are already familiar with, is part of everyone's life. Of course, some people make for better teachers than others, and this is also true for dictionary definitions. As an example of a less-than-useful definition, consider the following, offered by one helpful person. (Dictionary definitions are given as normal linguistic three-line glossed examples, with the head word that they are intended to define shown as the 'title' of the example; example (1), for instance, was given as a definition of *pala*.)[1]

PALA 'dog'
    (1)   *Pala, sa   pala.*
           dog   TOP dog
           'Dogs are dogs.'

Other people have a better understanding of what sort of definition will be useful for an outsider, and numerous One-originated definitions have found their way into the developing One dictionary. Many of these definitions have the sort of lexicographic style that would please most lexicographers uncontroversially. Some examples are shown in (2) and (3).

MAIMFLA 'grandfather'
    (2)   *I   maimfla   sa i   nanka wo e   nanka.*
           1SG grandfather TOP 1SG father 3SG GEN father
           'My grandfather is my father's father.'

SAUMU 'tree kangaroo'
    (3)   *Saumu   sa napo mulu   n-ai   n-e   aila.*
           tree.kangaroo TOP big   mammal 3PL-exist.PL 3PL-be tree
           'Tree kangaroos are large animals that stay up in trees.'

Each of these definitions produces a uniquely identifiable referent: there are no large mammals, other than tree kangaroos, that live in trees in the One area, and so the definition is perfectly adequate. Similarly, a father's father is always, and uniquely, a grandfather. The fact that *maimfla* in One can equally refer to a mother's father, as well as a father's father, does not detract from the value of the definition to uniquely identify someone who can accurately be described as a *maimfla*, even if it does not identify all people who can be described as such.

Other words are defined in terms that are culturally appropriate, but perhaps not universal for all speakers of all languages, or even all speakers of all One varieties. Given that the intended audience of the dictionary are all Molmo-

based One speakers, this is not problematic, but is perhaps a step away from universalist principles of dictionary use.

From the perspective of someone living in the Pibi valley, where every-where is forested, one of the few areas that can be described as having more kinds of trees than anywhere else is Siama (a small village one hour's walk south of Molmo), and so the sentence in (4) does serve to identify trees as the characteristic that is associated with Siama (apart from it having lost most of its population in an epidemic in the 1970s).

AILA 'tree'
(4) *Aila   mopu n-el   n-e   Siama.*
     tree   many 3PL-stand 3PL-be Siama
     'There are lots of trees around Siama.'

The definition of *sara* 'aunt' describes a culturally relevant feature of a father's sister that uniquely identifies her; while dependent on knowledge of the culture in which the language is spoken, it is a uniquely referring definition.

SARA 'aunt'
(5) *I   sara y-ani=i   mulu-wo fola eni   ompo*
     1SG   aunt 2/3SG-give=1SG   meat-PL customs now
     yo   y-ou   e   i   wine   akoula.
     MOD   2/3SG-call be 1SG 3SG.GEN sibling.child
     'My aunt gives me meat following customs because she is in a relation
      where she calls me nephew.'

Note that another definition was given for *sari*, another word with the same reference (father's sister) as *sara*, but with different connotations: while *sara* simply describes a kin relation, *sari* implies emotional closeness (this is em-phasised by the use of *aiya* 'daddy', rather than the more objective *nanka* 'father' in the definition).

SARI 'aunty'
(6) *Sari   sa   aiya-enu   pilmala.*
     father's.sister TOP daddy-GEN   man's.sister
     'A paternal aunty is your daddy's sister.'

The dictionary definitions examined so far provide explanations of the terms that they define, even if in some cases they require cultural knowledge in order to be accurately interpreted.

Some other entries contain definitions that are the opposite of universalist, requiring not just cultural information in order to be useful, but also particulars about the author. Consider the following definitions offered for the entries for *mani* 'female's brother', *taimfla mo'a* 'man's elder brother's wife', and *nanka*

'father'. The first two definitions are clearly self-referential: there is only one kin relationship for whom the statement in (7) can be true. For the sentence offered to define *mani* we have a definition that is completely accurate, but only if we know that Solomon and Womana are the brothers of Gloria, Caitlin and Enselin.

MANI 'female's brother'
  (7) *Gloria, Caitlin, Enselin, no   mani   sa   Solomon*
       Gloria, Caitlin, Enselin, 3PL female's.brother TOP Solomon
       y-ane   Womana.
       2/3SG-and   Womana
       'The brothers of Gloria, Caitlin and Enseline are Solomon and Womana.'

Similarly in (8), defining *taimfla mo'a*, the interpretation is completely clear only if we know the family history of the author; without this information neither of (8) or (9) can be interpreted in a way to define the words they are used as definitions for. In the case of the definition of *taimfla mo'a* knowledge of the speaker's (really writer's) family's recent history is also helpful, though not absolutely essential (if the reader is familiar with the term *apa*).

TAIMFLA MO'A 'man's elder brother's wife'
  (8) *I   taimfla mo'a   y-ane   apa   pointa*
       1SG man's.elder.brother's.wife 2/3SG-and elder.sibling 3PL.descend
       n-ai   n-e   Imbiyo.
       3PL-sit.PL 3PL-be Imbiyo
       'My sister-in-law, and [her] husband, have gone to live in Imbiyo.'

NANKA 'father'
  (9) *Nanka i-(e)nu sa Pouwa   mana.*
       father 1SG-GEN TOP breadfruit man
       'My father is a member of the *Pouwa* clan.'

Another definition offered for *nanka* is more "universal" in terms of access, but presupposes that the reader is already familiar with the term *aiya*, without which the definition is very hard to interpret.

NANKA 'father'
  (10) *Nanka sa mala wo y-ou   e wine   aiya. Wo sa pino foon.*
       father TOP child 3SG 2/3SG-call be 3SG.GEN daddy 3SG TOP woman NEG
       'Father is the person that a child calls his daddy; he's not a woman.'

The sentence offered in (11) to illustrate, rather than define, *namna puru* is another example of the subjectivisation of the dictionary. The text makes it clear

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what *namna puru* is likely to mean, but the context provided anchors the potentially abstract story ("If you are shot in the eye with an arrow…") to the real world in a way that a text disassociated from real community history could not be. In (12) we see a definition that is made subjective only by the use of *mine* 'we, us, our (inclusive)' in the first half of the definition; the text rather clearly defines *siyam plola*, and only the identification of the author as male renders the text specific to a particular individual.

NAMNA PURU 'blind'

(11) *I   plona   Enselin   nounke   Wilbet   y-ane   Elen   plona*
      1SG   daughter Enseline yesterday Wilbert 2/3SG-and Ellen daughter
      n-uru   aula   yo   nonklou ampona   sa   Enselin namna puru.
      3PL-shoot little MOD   bow   arrow.shaft TOP Enseline eye   blind
      'The daughter of Wilbert and Ellen shot my daughter Enseline in the
      eye with a small shaft of an arrow, and now her eye is blind.'

SIYAM PLOLA 'chest'

(12) *Mine   mana siyam plola sa   pare   n-eri   n-ai*
      1PL.INCL   man   chest short TOP hairs 3PL-come.up   3PL-exist.PL
      n-e   e   no   pini   sa   nimna n-eri   n-ai   n-e.
      3PL-be   and 3PL women   TOP breast 3PL-come.up 3PL-exist.PL 3PL-be
      'On our men's chests you can see hair on them, and on women's
      chests there are breasts.'

Some definitions offered are in some respects salacious or even insulting of other, non-Molmo, groups. The Molmo people are mountain dwellers, and they routinely denigrate those One groups that have moved out of the mountains and on to the alluvial plain leading to the coast, north of the Bewani and Torricelli mountains, as well as the traditional coast dwellers and their environment.

UNKUN 'mosquito'

(13) *Mine   tiri-ma   sa   unkun   fe   yauwon foon, e   no*
      1PL.INCL   above-group   TOP mosquito NEG very   NEG and 3PL
      maiplapon-ma sa   unkun   yauwon, mine   ese   was   m-iya   m-e.
      sand-group   TOP mosquito very   1PL.INCL will can't 1PL-sleep 1PL-be
      'We mountain people don't have a lot of mosquitoes, but the coastal
      peoples have lots, and you can't sleep (at night).'

Similarly, in (14) we see *solla* defined with respect to people from Siama: since (as already mentioned) an epidemic devastated the population of Siama some time in the last few decades, people from that village have been thought of as unhealthy or even diseased, and the definition of pimples as being associated with the skin of Siama people follows that stereotype.

SOLLA 'pimple/wart'

(14) *I   wani solla   mopu-mopu n-eri   n-ai   n-e*
      1SG see   pimple/wart many-RDP   3PL-come.up 3PL-exist.PL 3PL-be
      Siama mana nali   tapi.
      Siama man body skin
      'I saw a lot of things like pimples on the skin of a Siama man.'

We find another "type" of definition, which might be classified as being too broad for even a generous, subjective definition. An example of this sort of definition can be seen in the entry provided for *fe* 'things'. Admittedly this is a very hard concept to define, but the text offered does not restrict things enough to be useful.

FE 'thing'

(15) *Mopu-mopu fe   n-ai   n-e   mouli.*
      many-RDP   thing 3PL-exist.PL 3PL-be bush
      'There are lots of things in the bush.'

In addition to unhelpful examples such as (15) (and (1)), we have a set of definitions that are less objective than most guidelines to dictionary production would wish, but at the same time are not hopelessly unusable. Do these definitions have a place in a dictionary? In the following sections I argue that not only do they have a place, but that their place is the preferred one.

4. Evaluation

4.1 *Is it good enough?*

We have seen that, while some definitions in the One dictionary are universal, or at least universal within the cultural and geographic context that defines One, there are many entries that cannot be interpreted without intimate knowledge about the author, or the author's family. Are definitions of this sort good enough for a dictionary?

I would argue that the answer is "Yes". The use of author-referential definitions is justified in a dictionary project such as the One dictionary, for the reason that the target audience can reasonably be assumed to be aware of the author's identity, his family, and his recent family history. This is something that cannot be reasonably expected of users of a dictionary for which the language has millions, or even thousands, of speakers. But in the case of a language spoken by only a few hundred speakers, in a sharply delimited geographical area, and with frequent contact between people from the village and the outstations on a daily basis, it is quite reasonable for a dictionary to assume

that the future users of the vernacular dictionary will have access to knowledge about the dictionary-makers.

4.2 *Is it better?*

If we accept that a subjective definition can be taken to be no less valid, and no less useful, than an objective one, we are driven to wonder if it is not only as adequate as the objective one, but perhaps even more adequate.

The arguments for the more-than-adequacy of the objective definition lie in the social domain of lexicography, not in the theoretical. If the purpose of a non-academic dictionary, especially a dictionary for a minority language, is to be used, or at least valued, by speakers, then we can make a strong argument for the superiority of subjective definitions. Why will someone, probably a subsistence hunter-farmer or else someone with a minimum-wage or erratic job in town, spend time reading? Reading even a few sentences is a conscious time investment, and not one undertaken lightly. Reading something that is self-evident is not something that can generate conversation, discussion, and appreciation of the literacy skills of the reader. If a definition such as (6) (or, worse, (1)) were to be read out to an audience, then very little social capital would accrue. On the other hand, a definition such as (4) or (5) gives a degree of either familiar recognition to people from the culture area, and the chance to discuss and compare their traditions with any members of a different ethnic group that might be listening. Definitions such as (8) and (9) are even better, conversationally: speakers of another ethnic group, including One speakers from other language areas, can be liable for a detailed explanation of the history of the One author, and of the relationship between the author and the reader. Vaguely salacious definitions such as (13) and (14) lead to gossip, which is, based on observed patterns in the New Guinea area generally, one of the more important (or at least most frequent) functions of language. In short, the more a definition is distanced from the lexicographer's objective, impersonal statement, the more likely it is to be a definition that is used, and used to explain, by adult native speakers, the primary audience of the dictionary in the first place.

Since, it has been argued, the primary function of language is to help cement, or establish, social bonds (see, for instance, Foley 1997 for discussion), any interaction fostered by the dictionary can only be a good thing, even if it is achieved at the cost of some loss of completely objective description. It might be true that an imperfect speaker of the language will find less reinforcement of her or his knowledge with the less objective definition, but the same speaker will also be exposed to much more commentary from native speakers as a result of this less objective definition. A dictionary with subjective, or uninterpretable, definitions may be even more interesting without a native speaker present. A literacy programme using such a dictionary as a model will inspire discussion in a way in which a purely biological definition (of, say, 'dog') will not.
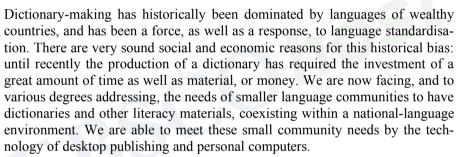
Even from a non-native perspective, a dictionary with non-objective content in its definitions is preferable, in most settings, to one in which a purely objective set of definitions is used. It takes a peculiar mindset to read a dictionary or wordlist simply for the sake of the words (a mindset I share), but the more amusing, contentious or risque the entries themselves are, the more likely any random person will be to invest the time taken in a barely literate society to read the dictionary simply for the sake of reading.

Finally, from the authors' perspective, prose that is somewhat salacious or reinforcing of stereotypes is much more likely to be produced, than the sort of 'scientific', objective prose favoured by lexicographers. For this reason alone we should prefer, or at the very least accept, the personal viewpoint in a dictionary for a small language.

5. Conclusions

Dictionary-making has historically been dominated by languages of wealthy countries, and has been a force, as well as a response, to language standardisation. There are very sound social and economic reasons for this historical bias: until recently the production of a dictionary has required the investment of a great amount of time as well as material, or money. We are now facing, and to various degrees addressing, the needs of smaller language communities to have dictionaries and other literacy materials, coexisting within a national-language environment. We are able to meet these small community needs by the technology of desktop publishing and personal computers.

In addition to providing orthographies that are at least as accepted by the native-speaker community as they are by a phonemically inclined linguist (in my experience acceptance relies much more on matching the allophones of the local language with the graphemes of any national-language orthography than in making phonemic distinctions clear), we also face the challenge of producing culturally acceptable, and accepted, literature in that orthography. While no one would question this principle with respect to the choice of lexemes in an introductory spelling booklet, the selection of stories for a primer, or the details of illustration in a picture dictionary or other booklet, the application of this principle of localisation, dominating those universal lexicographic principles that call for objectivity, is less widely acknowledged, and yet is just as crucial in making not just pride but functional acceptance part of the heritage of a community dictionary project.

Finally, a dictionary is often the first, and certainly the most thorough (and, sadly, often the last), large piece of work that is directly relevant to vernacular literacy that a full-time linguist produces. A dictionary can be as minimal as that required to satisfy a local government's requirement that a language have a wordlist demonstrating standardised spellings in order to be

eligible for community program support, or it might be enriched with textual and ethnographic materials (such as many of the dictionaries that Terry Crowley produced—I mention only Crowley 2000a). In any case, it is often all that appears that is useful to a community (it could well be argued that this should be an industry-standard minimum, regardless of the size or state of the community).

If it is to inspire any further use of the local language as a medium for writing, it must provide an example of something that is, simply, interesting; only a very small number of semi-literate minority language speakers find the sort of prose common in majority-language dictionaries to be exciting reading, and very few will invest time in reading when they could be engaged in (almost) any other activity. As one One speaker said once, after a long session of explaining his language:

(16) *Miri   mopu-mopu sa   nene!*
      speech much-RDP   TOP don't
      'Enough of this chatter!'

And with that, back to work.

Note

1. The dictionary itself does not indicate morpheme breaks, or have a separate gloss line. (See section 2 for an example entry.)