 Acquisition of basic lexical semantic conceptual relations using specialized dictionaries

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Abstract

The paper is focused on analysis of traditional teaching methodology used in acquisition of basic lexical semantic conceptual relations. It summarizes results of language study program strategy which emphasize mostly on teaching grammar rules rather than presenting lexical relations. Generally, lexical meanings and lexical relations are presented in dictionaries, however, in monolingual language study dictionaries are not used in teaching process. The introduction of pedagogical and specialized dictionaries which present basic lexical conceptual relations like synonymy or antonymy or other lexical reference sources in language study is a useful strategy for both acquisition and mastering student’s language skills and ability for reasoning.

Keywords: Language teaching, e-learning, pedagogical dictionaries, specialized dictionaries, synonymic dictionaries;

1. Introduction

Traditionally, language teaching methodologies (for both native and foreign language teaching) at almost all levels of study include applications of different approaches to grammar teaching. The differences in teaching approaches concern mostly teaching methodology or the sequences in which grammar phenomena and their improvements through exercises are introduced to students in course outline.

Generally, language teaching presents almost teaching grammar features of a particular language. Concerning lextica, language teaching uses mostly bilingual dictionaries predominantly for translation of related words in foreign language teaching. As for native language teaching, dictionaries are not traditionally used. Further, we are going to discuss the importance to use dictionaries for both native and foreign language teaching. We also will analyze appropriate types of dictionaries which can be used.

2. Traditional approaches

The traditional approach to language teaching is mostly to present definitions of different grammar features in their related sequence and then mastering them by working with texts. Working with texts is a basic approach to...
language study (Frydrychova Klimova, 2012). It is also a basic approach in designing different types of tests for quality evaluation. The methodology is based on discovering related grammar features in their respective contexts which develop ability for reasoning as well. It is important to note that such type of reasoning is mastered on the base of comparison of both lexical and logical contexts of related word(s) or grammar feature(s), and it is a basic mechanism for further development of ability for reasoning for different specialized knowledge domains (Stoykova & Mitkova, 2011). So, mastering language skills is a reliable base for development of ability for reasoning.

At the same time, dictionaries and encyclopedias present lexical semantic, grammar, and logical information about word(s) and their related grammar features (grammar knowledge) both explicitly and implicitly by means of definitions and examples of natural language usage. Encyclopedias also present knowledge of different domains (Stoykova & Petkova, 2012). However, traditional lexicography is also based on working with texts by means of extensive expertise of related word contexts so to define different meanings of that word.

Thus, dictionaries and encyclopedias are very useful tools in language teaching for improvement of different language skills because they combine both lexical and grammar knowledge. Moreover, there is a specialized lexicographic genre called pedagogical lexicography which presents a variety of hybrid lexicographic approaches.

3. General purpose and pedagogical dictionaries

There are different types of dictionaries which can be used in mastering language skills. Thus, the general purpose monolingual dictionary is the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) (and similar monolingual dictionaries for other languages) but pedagogical dictionary like Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (OALD) (and similar monolingual dictionaries for other languages) is more useful for improving language skills. It is important to note, that most of them are available in electronic form on-line and are regularly updated, hence are suitable for all types of e-Learning applications (Frydryhova Klimova & Semradova, 2012). Further, we are going to analyze some possible applications of these types of dictionaries for both acquisition and mastering student’s language skills and ability for reasoning. Fig 1 and Fig 2 show lexical entries of word “good” form OED and OALD (we have excluded from both some usage examples for shortening and we are presenting mostly lexical semantic information like senses, definitions and lexical semantic relations like synonymy).

Figure 1. The lexical entry for the word “good” from OED (on-line).
The OED presents the meaning of the word “good” giving its possible lexical realization as three parts-of-speech: adjective, noun, and adverb and their respective senses. It defines 7 senses for “good” as adjective (also gives comparative and superlative irregular grammar forms), 3 senses as noun and one sense as adverb. All definitions of related senses are given as full sentences instead that for the adverb which is presented by giving a synonym and a register marked by “informal”. Related senses are supported by many usage examples (which we do not present here). The dictionary also gives in interactive form a possible translation of that word into French, German, Italian, and Spanish. At the end of the lexical entry, idioms are presented. Generally, the OED concept of lexical meaning presentation gives full sentence definition to present lexical semantic relations.

In contrary, the OALD defines “good” as adjective and presents a synonymic approach to define its 24 senses (10 of which are given at Fig. 2) grouped and defined as joined to their related synonyms. In fact, the related sense definitions are given by different synonyms followed by usage examples rather than by full sentence definition. At the end of the lexical entry idioms are presented and no translation is offered. As for the grammar features, comparative and superlative irregular forms are presented as well.

The OALD is considered as a pedagogical dictionary and its lexical semantic presentation scheme takes into account the simplest way the lexical meaning can be presented and memorized in their respective semantic correlations. Also, presenting synonymic definitions gives a straightforward way to develop ability for reasoning by starting to build semantic conceptual hierarchies and realizing reasoning of similarity. Thus, the synonyms given before related definitions of the word “good” are: of good quality, pleasant, sensible/strong, favorable, skilful, morally right, following rules, kind, healthy, useful/helpful, suitable, large, thorough, amusing, etc. The OALD presents the lexical wealth by means of which language can express not only different senses but also different stylistics. All these language features are basic and very important to be mastered by students not only for foreign language teaching but also for native. They are basic for acquiring specific domain knowledge as well.

The presented analysis of lexical entries of the word “good” shows the importance to use pedagogical dictionaries for developing student’s language skills and ability for reasoning. It also outlines the importance of using dictionaries presenting basic lexical semantic relations in the process of language acquisition and mastering.

4. Specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias

Reference sources like specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias are widely used in teaching different subjects including literature mostly as a source of specialized domain knowledge. Also, there are specialized dictionaries which present basic lexical semantic relations like synonymic (Sparck Jones, 1986) and antonymic dictionaries (for various languages) which are indispensable source for mastering language skills like correct stylistic usage and ability for reasoning. They are very useful for both native and foreign language teaching since they include structured knowledge for both lexical and grammar language features. However, there are different types of specialized dictionaries which can be used in mastering language skills. Generally, basic lexical relations are presented in synonymic and antonymic dictionaries. There are also dictionaries which combines both using more complex approaches. Further, we are going to present analysis of lexical entries for “good” form two synonymic dictionaries of two Slavonic languages – the Dictionary of Synonyms with Antonyms (DSA) (Dictionary of Synonyms with Antonyms, 2013, in Bulgarian) and the Slovak Synonym Dictionary (SSD) (Synonymický slovník slovenčiny, 2004, in Slovak).

The DSA presents lexical semantics of the word “good” by diving synonymic definitions as a row of synonyms which ends with a possible antonym. According to DSA, the Bulgarian word for “good” (Fig. 3) is also an adjective and has 4 senses which are defined by rows of synonyms. Such lexical semantic presentation scheme is very semantically clear and simple and can be usefully applied also at the lower levels students study programs. It emphasize on both logical and stylistic language features which can be mastered.
doby 1. благ, отличив, милостив, счастлив, добродушен, мил ## добр
2. близок, скрыт, почтен
3. велен, благоприятен
4. донос, изображен

Figure 2. The Bulgarian lexical entry for the word “good” from DSA.

The SSD concept for lexical semantic relations presentation follows similar approach and presents the meaning of the word “good” in Slovak with 7 senses combining both sentence definitions and synonymic rows definitions which also end with antonyms. The senses are illustrated with usage examples which are not presented here for the reasons of short description. The SSD combines fully lexical semantic presentation approach of OED, OALD, and DSA and presents basic lexical relations by using both synonymic and antonymic definitions, and full sentence semantic description definitions. Fig. 4 shows lexical entry for the Slovak word for “good” from SSD on-line.

5. Conclusion

The results from analysis of basic lexical semantic conceptual relations presented in pedagogical and specialized dictionaries for three different languages show that these conceptual relations are similarly presented independently
of language used. They realize basic semantics of similarity or opposition expressed by various related words from different stylistic registers which underlay general language skills and ability for reasoning.

The use of specialized and pedagogical dictionaries which present basic lexical semantic conceptual relations like synonymy or antonymy or other types of lexical reference sources in both native and foreign language teaching is a useful strategy for acquisition and mastering student’s language skills and ability for reasoning.

References