The analytical definition in monolingual English learners' dictionaries

as a vehicle for syntactic information on verbs:

A diachronic perspective

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1. Introduction

The paper focuses on the analytical definition in monolingual English learners' dictionaries and its role as a source of syntactic information on verbs. An attempt is made to explore how the definition has evolved in the last three decades and assess whether the changes have made it a better vehicle for information on verb syntax.

An analytical definition, also known as Aristotelian or traditional (Béjoint 1994: 198), consists of the genus proximum, a hyperonym denoting the superordinate class to which the definiendum belongs, and differentia specifica, where the characteristic semantic features of the word being defined are given to distinguish it from other lexical items in the same class (Ayto 1983: 89). The Aristotelian definition has a long tradition in pedagogical lexicography, and is still used today in monolingual dictionaries along with synonyms and contextualization (MacFarquhar -- Richards 1983: 113). However, its form, although governed by the aforementioned basic structural requirements, has not remained unaltered. Analytical definitions of verbs in monolingual English learners' dictionaries have been chosen to illustrate some of the changes. After all, it is English verbs that are considered the most difficult words to define in view of their polysemy and complex combinatorial properties

(Kipfer 1984: 87). It is therefore reasonable to expect some developments in the form of analytical definitions of verbs which should help lexicographers perform what Ilson (1987: 71) sees as the most demanding task, i.e., "match[ing] a lexical unit with a single phrase whose content is appropriate semantically and whose form is appropriate syntactically".

To appreciate the changes that the traditional defining style has undergone, early analytical definitions are contrasted with modern ones. The main frame of reference is provided by the first and the last editions of LDOCE, i.e., LDOCE1 (1978) and LDOCE4 (2003), The former represented a major landmark in pedagogical lexicography (Herbst 1996: 332). First of all, it meant a serious challenge to OALDCE, the third edition of which appeared in 1974. It was then that OALDCE, having existed for more than thirty years without a serious rival as "*the* English dictionary for advanced learners" (Rundell 1998:318), was suddenly faced with a competitor to be reckoned with. The innovative features of the dictionary include a new system of grammatical description based on alphanumeric codes, analytical microstructure modeled on the American lexicographic tradition, improved coverage of high-frequency items and extensive coverage of American English as well as an explicit controlled defining vocabulary (Rundell 1998: 319).[1] Besides, LDOCE1 spurred the development of pedagogical lexicography; shortly, not to be outdone, other major publishing houses started bringing out dictionaries targeted at the same group of users. At present, four large advanced learners' dictionaries are readily available apart from LDOCE4, i.e., OALDCE7 (2005), COBUILD4 (2003), MEDAL (2002) and CALD2 (2005).[2] To judge whether or not the modifications to the traditional defining style are unique to the editions of LDOCE, reference is made to the other dictionaries currently on offer where the style is adopted. Before paying attention to the definitions in the dictionaries, basic principles governing the traditional defining style in the case of verbs are explained below.

2. Defining conventions

2.1. Transitive and intransitive verbs

The basic principle underpinning the formulation of any analytical definition is its substitutability for the word being defined. It means that the head of the defining phrase should ideally belong to the same word class as the definiendum (Jackson 2002: 94). Besides, in the case of verbs, transitivity needs to be reflected as far as possible in the syntax of their definitions (Svensén 1993: 129). An intransitive verb must be defined intransitively, and a transitive one – transitively.

There are two ways of defining intransitively: either by using an intransitive genus or by including the object of a transitive one (Landau 1989: 142). It should be stressed that when the genus is transitive, the object of the action mentioned in the definition is obligatory and must go along with the definition when the latter is to replace the headword in a text, e.g.,

(1)   *faint* (I) – suddenly lose consciousness (Svensén 1993: 129).

Transitive verbs, in turn, should be defined by other transitive verbs or "syntactically equivalent constructions" (Zgusta 1971: 258). The form of the definition should make it clear that an object is required to complete it and should suggest the nature of the object (Landau 1989: 141). Lexicographers have developed the convention of the incomplete definition, the definition with a hole in it, to show the incompleteness of a transitive verb, which, as a headword, is not accompanied by an object (Ilson 1985: 165). Thus, as long as a transitive definiendum does not impose any restrictions on its object, a syntactically interchangeable analytic definition does not show any object of the action expressed in the definition. The following definition of the transitive *marry*, formulated in line with the 'hole'-convention, illustrates the technique:

(2)   *marry* (T) – to be united with in matrimony (Kipfer 1984: 88).

Obviously, in this incomplete definition there is a hole after the preposition *with*, and it is this hole that must be filled out by the object of *marry*.[3] Ilson (1985: 165) points to the following proportional equivalence:

(4)   transitive verb : direct object **: :** preposition : object of preposition,

"which explains precisely why lexicographers use prepositions without their objects in the definitions of verbs without *their* objects."[4]

2.2. Selectional restrictions – objects and subjects

Besides the conventions for showing the syntactic sub-categorization of verbs by means of the analytical definition, there are conventions for indicating selectional restrictions imposed on subjects and objects. A typical object, which gives the learner an idea of the kind of object a verb takes without specifying one (Kipfer 1984: 90), as well as the only object of a transitive verb should be put in brackets and inserted into the 'hole' in the definition. Brackets are of crucial importance since they show that the objects they enclose, although associated with the verb, do not belong to the definition itself (Ilson 1985: 167). Only the part outside brackets should be regarded as substitutable for the headword. Svensén (1993: 130) gives the following definitions to illustrate the technique:

(8)   *bequeath* (T) – leave (property) by will,

(9)   *braise* (T) – steam (meat) slowly in a closed container.

The convention for specifying semantic properties of objects by means of brackets in analytical definitions provides also a collocational clue, since it may help confirm that the appropriate verb sense has been found (Kipfer 1984: 90).

Selectional restrictions on the subject can be indicated by means of notes *(used of an X)*:

(10)   *spin* – (used of a spider or caterpillar),

guide phrases *(of an X)*:

(11)   *feed on* – (of an animal) to take through the mouth as food and eat,

or adjuncts *(as of an X)*:

(12)   *run* – to spread or blend together (as of colors) (Kipfer 1984: 90),

of which guide phrases appear to be the most succinct.

The convention for using brackets to show semantic and syntactic restrictions on subjects or objects stems from the fact that, as Hanks (1987: 118) observes, the traditional definition is like an equation; the assumption that the left-hand side of the equation must consist of just the word being defined necessitates the shift of everything that typically goes with the definiendum to the right-hand side. Thus, typical subjects and objects collocating with the headword are not in their respective positions, but are put in brackets and placed where they do not naturally belong, on the wrong side of the equation. This "extra-definitional material" (Walter 1992: 134) conveys a large amount of information within a very confined space and provides a clear visual link with the specific choices illustrated in examples (Cowie 1999: 161). Besides, brackets may enclose a number of general terms suggesting a range of particular words collocating with the lemma, which learners can use as the basis for their own acceptable choices (Cowie 1984: 157). Still, although such compression techniques help to achieve precision and save space, they also make the explanatory style condensed and definitions difficult to understand. For instance, in the following LDOCE1 definition of *save* discussed by Rundell (1999: 43):

(13)   *save* – to make unnecessary (for (someone)),

the double set of brackets is meant to indicate that the beneficiary of the action can be either implied or stated. The unbracketed part of the definition, in turn, suggests the need for a direct object. Rundell (1999: 43) rightly observes that "[i]t takes considerable effort to train lexicographers to be able to express ideas in this way, yet the hapless learner – operating in a

language not his or her own – is expected to be expert at decoding such arcana." Besides, it has been pointed out that the use of brackets in definitions presupposes some familiarity with formal logic (Rundell 1999: 43); the practice has also been criticized as a departure from ordinary written English (Hanks 1987: 116). Obviously, the entrenched defining techniques, which subordinate usability to precision and space constraints, impede understanding, and semantic as well as syntactic information is conveyed in a needlessly indirect fashion (Rundell 1988: 133). Explanations of this type cannot be reasonably expected "to be assimilated into the general repertoire of the user" (Sinclair 1991: 135). Unfortunately, a similar conclusion suggests itself also in the case of defining formulas used in analytical definitions of verbs which permit transitivity alternations, paid attention to in what follows.

2.3. Transitivity alternations

2.3.1. Ergativity

In crude terms, a verb is said to be ergative when it participates in a transitivity alternation where, in the same meaning, the subject of the intransitive construction becomes the object of the transitive construction (Fontenelle 1996b: 322). Still, to characterize the real nature of ergativity, reference to semantic roles is necessary. As Fontenelle and Vanandroye (1989: 13) point out, in the alternation under discussion, the semantic relation between the verb and its arguments may be expressed in two different ways. On the one hand, in the transitive construction the agent is realized as the subject and the patient as the object, e.g.,

(14)   *John opened the door*.

Conversely, in the intransitive structure, the patient is expressed as the subject of the verb, e.g.,

(15)   *The door opened*.

Clearly, then, the alternation permits "performer subject suppression with consequent switch of affected object to subject position", that is, makes it possible to leave the semantic role of the agent unmentioned (Allerton 1982: 136). The object has therefore the same semantic relation to the verb as the subject of the intransitive construction (Atkins -- Kegl -- Levin 1988: 93), or, in other words, the semantic connection between the subject and the verb is different in the two cases (Quirk et al. 1985: 1168).

Montemagni (1994: 351, 358) argues that not only syntactic properties of ergative verbs but also lexical sets of possible arguments they can take should be considered as they constrain the argument structure alternation as well. Since ergativity is sensitive to the whole argument structure of a verb, an analysis of the assignment of a semantic role to the object should be combined with the consideration of the selection restrictions on the fillers of that role. This constraint accounts for the well-formedness of (16) and (17), and the ill-formedness of (18) in the following examples adduced by Fontenelle (1996a: 213):

(16)   John rang the bell,

(17)   The bell rang,

(18)   * John rang the telephone,

(19)   The telephone rang.

Obviously, the ergativity of *ring* is limited to the co-occurrence with specific patients, such as *bell*, rather than other nouns, such as *telephone*. Fontenelle (1996a: 214) explains that the ungrammaticality of (18) could result from the fact that ergative verbs usually imply a direct action, and often – contact, between the agent and the patient. In (18), however, there is no direct contact between John and the other person's telephone.

2.3.2. Indefinite object deletion

In the case of verbs which allow indefinite object deletion, there are no direct objects in the intransitive construction, but subjects are invariably agents. Therefore, unlike in the ergative alternation, there is no change in the subject-verb relationship. This is how Atkins, Kegl and Levin (1988: 93) illustrate indefinite object alternation with corpus examples:

(20)   *Every morning they bake their own baguettes and croissants* (T),

(21)   *As we baked, we talked a great deal* (I).

The transitivity alternation which involves the lack of an overt direct object in the intransitive variant and in which the subject of the transitive use of the verb bears the same semantic relation to the verb as the subject of the intransitive use is termed indefinite object deletion or alternation (Levin 1993: 33, Quirk et al. 1985: 1169).

Importantly, in this alternation the information carried by the object is often not only indefinite, as the name suggests, but also superfluous and irrelevant, although clearly implied (Allerton 1975: 215). Nonetheless, in view of the fact that indefinite object deletion applies only to some transitive verbs, but not to others, it is considered a matter of class conversion whereby a verb is transferred from the transitive to the intransitive category (Quirk et al. 1985: 722). Since verbs seem to have individual deletion characteristics for their objects, the indication of the possibility of object deletion is considered a necessary part of the verb entry (Allerton 1975: 224).

Likewise, it is argued that ergativity, also lexically governed, should be encoded at word sense level (Fontenelle -- Vanandroye 1989: 34). It should be stressed, however, that although verbs susceptible to indefinite object deletion imply a particular kind of object, the object is not contextually definite. In other words, such verbs do not require a definite noun phrase to be contextually identified as their object (Allerton 1975: 218). Indefinite object deletion should thus be distinguished from contextual deletion, or ellipsis. Broadly speaking,

the latter "seems to apply … in the case of verbs where the meaning of the verb is somehow incomplete without mention of a PARTICULAR object", which can be reconstructed from the context and thus regarded as given (Allerton 1975: 214-215). Cowie (1984: 160) offers the following example illustrating the ellipsis of the object of *attend*, which can be recovered with ease as an antecedent from the linguistic context:

(22)   *We are calling a meeting. Are you going to attend?*

He also observes that while indefinite deletion, involving transitivity alternation, should be appropriately presented in pedagogical dictionaries, e.g., by means of distinct codes or examples, there are no grounds for treating ellipsis likewise. He claims that in the latter case "the intransitive code is not appropriate: the verb is essentially transitive", and argues that ellipsis should best be signaled in dictionaries by supplying an appropriate antecedent context (Cowie 1984: 161-162).

2.3.3. Lexicographic conventions

Apart from codes and examples, analytical definitions are used to convey information on transitivity alternations. To indicate that a verb is ergative, a number of defining formulas can be tapped. The definition patterns constitute the lexicographic application of the predicate decomposition approach developed by generative semanticists in the 1960s (Fontenelle 1996a: 210). As Fontenelle and Vanandroye (1989: 22) explain, the formulas are surface realizations of the atomic predicates CAUSE and BECOME, which belong to a limited set of atomic predicates, or semantic primitives. According to generative semanticists, a combination of semantic primitives is what the lexical composition of a verb boils down to. Ergative verbs are marked by the optionality of the semantic primitive CAUSE in their lexical representations, as in the case of *break*, chosen by Fontenelle and Vanandroye (1989: 19) to illustrate the point, i.e.,

(23)   a. CAUSE to BECOME broken,

         b. *I broke the cup,*

(24)   a. BECOME broken,

         b. *The cup broke*.

The predicates CAUSE and BECOME can then be used to represent transitive and intransitive constructions respectively (Fontenelle -- Vanandroye 1989: 18).

The defining formulas which include lexical representations of the atomic predicates and which can be employed in definitions of ergative verbs include:

(25)   to (cause to),

(26)   to (allow to),

(27)   to (help to),

(28)   make or become,

(29)   come or bring (Fontenelle -- Vanandroye 1989: 18-23).

In the first three formulas the verbs *cause*, *allow* and *help* represent causality, i.e., they are surface realizations of the atomic predicate CAUSE (Fontenelle -- Vanandroye 1989: 19-22). The ergative alternation is made explicit by the use of parentheses, which indicate the optionality of the semantic primitive and, thus, the ability of a verb to undergo the alternation. Still, in relation to these definition patterns a slightly diverging practice is also possible, where a word sense is split into two or more sub-definitions. With reference to (25), the technique, i.e., the splitting strategy (Fontenelle -- Vanandroye 1989: 34), can be represented schematically in the following way:

(30)   a. (of X) to V

         b. to cause (X) to V

or

(31)   a. to cause (X) to V

b. (of X) to V

The predicate-argument structure of a verb is specified in parentheses; the patient is given, together with its surface realization (X), as a subject and as an object (Fontenelle -- Vanandroye 1989: 21).

Formulas (28) and (29), in turn, show how ergativity can be expressed without recourse to parentheses or split definitions. The verb *make* in (28) should be seen as a surface realization of the semantic primitive CAUSE, as it can be decomposed into CAUSE to BE. In formula (29) the verb *bring* is a realization of CAUSE to COME. The disjunctive conjunction *or* suggests there the possibility of choice between the semantic primitives represented by their surface realizations, including those expressing causality, and in fact between transitive and intransitive patterns (Fontenelle -- Vanandroye 1989: 22-23).

It is worth noting that formulas (25)-(29) do not exhaust the whole range that exist to convey information on ergativity in definitions. Fontenelle and Vanandroye (1989: 28) point out that the number of such formulas is in fact far from limited, although the others are relatively infrequent in comparison with those discussed above. They include:

(32)   make or stay,

(33)   form or become,

(34)   move or set up,

(35)   a transitive verb and the passive form of this verb,

(36)   an ergative verb as a genus term.

Unfortunately, indefinite object deletion does not seem to have attracted so much (meta)lexicographic interest as ergativity. Obviously, the hole-convention, discussed above, offers two contradictory solutions here, as it implies the need for the hole on the one hand, and for the object of the genus on the other. The demands of brevity and syntactic substitutability suggest a joint definition of such verbs, like the one from LDOCE1:

(37)   *cook* (I;T) – to prepare (food) for eating by using heat,

where the bracketed component should be regarded as part of the definition only if the definition applies to the intransitive use of the verb (Svensén 1993: 130). Needless to say, such a reading of definitions of this type might require much more of the average dictionary user than could be reasonably expected of them. It seems that the identification of transitive and intransitive patterns of ergative verbs on the basis of formulas (25)-(36) could be likewise problematic.

The traditional defining principles summarized above, whose usefulness in presenting syntactic information on verbs to the average dictionary user appears to be debatable, make it interesting to see how, if at all, they have been modified in lexicographic practice within the span of approximately 25 years. The verb definitions from LDOCE1 and LDOCE4 juxtaposed below, occasionally accompanied by the findings from analyses of parallel definitions in the other most recent pedagogical dictionaries, serve the purpose.

3. Definitions in practice: 1978-2003 (and beyond)

3.1. The 'hole'-convention

3.1.1. General objects

First, attention is paid to transitive verbs which pose no restrictions on their objects. A few such verbs, with LDOCE definitions, are given in table 1.[5]

Table 1. General objects in analytical definitions

Verbs	LDOCE1	LDOCE4	OALDCE7	CALD2	MEDAL
acquire	2. to gain or come into possession of	2. to get or gain something	NHC [a]	NHC	NHC
dab	2. to cover with light quick strokes and usu. carelessly and incompletely	2. to put a substance onto something with quick light movements of your hand	NHC	NHC	NHC
dress	3. to make or choose clothes for	3. to make or choose clothes for someone	NHC	NHC	NHC
evade	1. to get out of the way of or escape from	4. to escape from someone who is trying to catch you	NHC	NHC	NHC
hate	1. to have a great dislike of	1. to dislike something very much	NHC	NHC	NHC
instruct	2. to give orders to	1. to officially tell someone what to do	NHC	NHC	NHC
lay	1. to place, put	1. to put someone or something down carefully into a flat position	NHC	NHC	NHC
try	3. to attempt to do, experience	2. to do or use something for a short while to discover if it is suitable, successful, enjoyable, etc.	NHC	NHC	NHC
stroke	to pass the hand over gently, esp. for pleasure	1. to move your hand gently over something	NHC	NHC	NHC
yank	to pull suddenly and sharply	to suddenly pull something quickly and with force	NHC	NHC	NHC

[a.] The letters *NHC* in tables stand for *no 'hole'-convention*.

The table shows that the definitions from LDOCE1 comply with the 'hole'-convention; in the absence of selectional restrictions on the objects, no objects are given. In the definitions of *acquire, dress, evade, hate, instruct* and *stroke,* there are no objects after prepositions. In the other ones, the hole follows transitive genus terms. It is striking that in either case, there is no hole in any corresponding definition in LDOCE4. The general objects are expressed there by the indefinite pronouns *someone* and *something*, which is out of keeping with the 'hole'-convention. This is also consistently the case in OALDCE7, CALD2 and MEDAL, as the letters NHC indicate.

It is interesting to note that in LDOCE1 itself the convention also happens to be violated, as the definitions in table 2 illustrate.

Table 2. General objects in analytical definitions – the 'hole'-convention violated in LDOCE1

Verbs	LDOCE1	LDOCE4
acknowledge	4. to state that one has received (something)	6. to let someone know that you have received something from them
prejudge	to form an (unfavorable) feeling or opinion about (someone or something) before knowing or examining all the facts	to form an opinion about someone or something before you know or have considered all the facts
punch	1. to strike (someone or something) hard with the closed hand (FIST)	1. to hit someone or something hard with your fist (=closed hand)
swindle	to cheat (someone), esp. getting money unlawfully	to get money from someone by deceiving them

Clearly, in the LDOCE1 definitions the general objects *someone* and *something* are put in brackets in place of the hole. While in the definitions of *acknowledge* and *swindle* the indefinite pronouns indicate that the verbs take only non-human and human objects respectively, their presence in the other two LDOCE1 definitions does not seem to perform any practical function and tell the dictionary user anything more than the hole itself. Interestingly enough, the same pronouns, but without brackets, are given in the corresponding LDOCE4 definitions.

3.1.2. Restricted objects

The LDOCE1 and LDOCE4 definitions of a few verbs which impose selectional restrictions on their objects as well as the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the verb definitions in the other dictionaries are given in table 3.

Table 3. Restricted objects in analytical definitions

Verbs	LDOCE1	LDOCE4	OALDCE7	CALD2	MEDAL
assassinate	to murder (a ruler, politician, etc.) for political reasons or reward	to murder an important person	NHC	NHC	NHC
assuage	to make (pain, suffering, desire, etc.) less	to make an unpleasant feeling less painful or severe	NHC	NHC	NHC
braise	to cook (meat) slowly in fat and a little liquid in a covered dish	to cook meat or vegetables slowly in a small amount of liquid in a closed container	NHC	NHC	NHC
clean	2 to cut out the bowels and inside parts of the body from (birds and animals that are to be eaten)	4 to remove the inside parts of an animal or bird before cooking it	NHC	NHC	NHC
inspect	to make an official visit to judge the quality of (an organization, machine, etc.)	2 to make an official visit to a building, organization, etc. to check that everything is satisfactory and that rules are being obeyed	NHC	NHC	NHC
precipitate	1. to hasten the coming of (an unwanted event)	1. to make something serious happen suddenly or more quickly than was expected	NHC	NHC	NHC
strum	to play (A STRINGED INSTRUMENT) carelessly and informally	to play an instrument such as a GUITAR by moving your fingers up and down across its strings	NHC	NHC	NHC
suck	to draw (a liquid) into the mouth by using the tongue, lips and muscles at the side of the mouth, with the lips tightened into a small hole	to take air, liquid, etc. into your mouth by making your lips form a small hole and using the muscles of your mouth to pull it in	NHC	NHC	NHC

The definitions in LDOCE1 are framed in keeping with the 'hole'-convention; the types of object required by the verbs are spelled out and put in brackets to indicate that the bracketed parts do not belong to the definitions themselves. By contrast, while the LDOCE4 definitions also leave no doubt as to the semantic restrictions imposed on the objects, they violate the convention as the typical objects are incorporated into the definitions themselves. It is clear, then, that the 'hole'-convention, generally observed in the first edition of the dictionary, does not underpin the formulation of verb definitions any longer, irrespective of whether objects

are semantically restricted or not. The last three columns in the table indicate that the tendency to flout the convention occurs also in the other pedagogical dictionaries on offer.

The trend should be assessed positively. In fact, early pedagogical dictionaries rely heavily on a rather dense defining metalanguage inherited from the tradition of dictionaries for native speakers, which evolved on account of the severe space constraints within which a general-purpose dictionary must operate. It is brackets, elliptical structures and abstract formulas that characterize the traditional approach to defining, where the preference is for underspecified, broadly substitutable definitions (Rundell 1998: 331, Rundell 1999: 43). In this approach, definitions are written so as to apply to the infinite number of instances of lexical items in actual use, since, as Hanks (1979: 35) explains, "[t]he lexicographer is in the impossible position of a man who undertakes to answer people's questions, but since he does not know at the time of compilation what questions exactly his public will ask, he has to try to word his entries so as to answer all possible questions about them. The attempt is inevitably doomed to failure", and, among other things, the syntax of definitions becomes "hopelessly overloaded" (Hanks 1979: 33). A marked shift in pedagogical lexicography from the conventions and the metalanguage of the traditional defining technique is no doubt a token of adjusting the learners' dictionary to the competence of its users.

To fully appreciate the improvement in the quality of analytical definitions in terms of changes in their syntactic content and its description, it might also be interesting to have a closer look at typical objects themselves. In this regard, it is instructive to compare, after Rundell (1998: 333), the definitions of *conduct* from the consecutive editions of LDOCE:[6]

(38)   a. to direct the course of (a business, activity, etc.) (LDOCE1),

b. to carry out or direct (LDOCE2),

c. to carry out a particular process, especially in order to get information or prove facts (LDOCE3),

d. to carry out a particular activity or process, especially in order to get information or prove facts (LDOCE4).

In his analysis, Rundell (1998: 333) rightly notes that the LDOCE2 definition, complying with the 'hole'-convention and perfectly substitutable for the definiendum, is sufficiently broad and imprecise to account for virtually every possible occurrence of the verb. Obviously, this conclusion holds also for the LDOCE1 definition, admittedly a little more informative inasmuch as the type of object is indicated, but – in keeping with the 'hole'-convention – in brackets. The author stresses that today, the emphasis is no longer on the almost perfect interchangeability of an analytical definition with the headword. The information supplied by corpus resources that the usual objects of *conduct* are actually much more semantically limited and predictable is clearly conveyed by the structure and the wording of the LDOCE3 definition and the parallel definition in LDOCE4, which, in defiance of the convention, immediately inform dictionary users about the typical object of the verb. In fact, whereas the definitions in (38a) and (38b) are vague and tentative, those in (38c) and (38d) are assured and precise. In Rundell's (1998: 331) view, this clear and irreversible trend towards more sharply-focused defining is one of the benefits pedagogical lexicography has gained from the use of corpora.

The move away from the conventional analytical definition is no doubt praiseworthy. The effort to tease out syntactic and semantic facts about the use of verbs and present them in analytical definitions has resulted in meaning explanations phrased in a language close to unmarked discourse, without recourse to dictionarese and compression techniques. The changes are perfectly in tune with Jain's (1981: 284) call for a wider range of lexical-semantic information influencing language use in learners' dictionaries. Obviously, the traditional, "quasi-substitutable 'phrase-in-isolation' schema, with some degree of separate syntactic and collocation information" (Scholfield 1979: 54), worded in more familiar terms than the

definiendum, is oriented mainly to decoding, and spotting syntactic information there, although possible, might remain beyond the competence of the average learner. The more accessible account of selectional restrictions of the verb in the contemporary analytical definition makes such a definition a more satisfactory vehicle for explaining syntactic properties of verbs. Clearly, "the technical character and syntactic clumsiness" (Herbst 1996: 326) of the analytical definition have been virtually dispensed with.

3.1.3. Indefinite object deletion

The discussion in the preceding sections implies that, once the 'hole'-convention has become a relic of the past, contemporary analytical definitions cannot reflect indefinite object deletion. The definitions in table 4 make it possible to verify this conjecture.[7]

Table 4. Indefinite object deletion in analytical definitions

Verbs	LDOCE1	LDOCE4
cook	to prepare (food) for eating by using heat	1. to prepare food for eating by using heat
draw	21. to make pictures with a pencil or pen 22 a. to make with a pencil or pen b. to make a picture of in this way	to produce a picture of something using a pencil, pen etc
drive	to guide and control (a horse or vehicle)	1a. to make a car, truck, bus, etc. move along
eat	1. to take in through the mouth and chew and swallow (solid food or soup)	to put food in your mouth and chew and swallow it
paint	1. to put paint on (a surface) 2. to make (a picture or pictures of) (sb. or sth.)	1. to put paint on a surface 2. to make a picture, design etc using paint
read	1. to understand (language in print or writing)	1. to look at written words and understand what they mean
study	1. to spend time learning (one or more subjects)	1. to spend time reading, going to classes, etc. in order to learn about a subject

Indeed, the definitions from LDOCE4 do not indicate that the verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively as the typical objects of the verbs are incorporated into the definitions themselves. Their structure corresponds in fact to the structure of the definitions of transitive verbs discussed above. The dictionary user cannot reasonably be expected to infer from them any information on the intransitive use of the verbs, which is clearly at odds with

the function of the definitions in LDOCE1, where either bracketed objects or split definitions are to imply that the verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively in the same meaning. Still, as has already been pointed out, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that the information, so elaborately incorporated into the early definitions, could be properly interpreted by foreign language learners, even at the advanced level.

3.2. Ergativity

3.2.1. Analytical definitions

To see how ergativity is conveyed by analytical definitions, relevant definitions from LDOCE1 and LDOCE4 are given in table 5.

Table 5. Ergativity in analytical definitions

Verbs	LDOCE1	LDOCE4
change	1. to (cause to) become different	to become different, or to make something become different
concentrate	to (cause to) come together in or around one place	to be present in large numbers or amounts somewhere, or to cause people or things to be present in large numbers or amounts somewhere
develop	1. to (cause to) grow, increase, or become larger or more complete	1. to grow or change into something bigger, stronger, or more advanced, or to make someone or something do this
open	1. to (cause to) become open	1. to move a door, window, etc. so that people, things, air, etc. can pass through, or to be moved in this way
resettle	to (help to) settle in a new country	to go to live in a new country or area, or to help people do this
shorten	1. to make or become short or shorter	to become shorter or make something shorter

Obviously, brackets, very frequent in the definitions of ergative verbs in LDOCE1, are absent from the corresponding definitions in LDOCE4. Surface realizations of causality, previously bracketed, are now incorporated into the definitions themselves. Besides, the contemporary definitions often fall into two parts informing the user about transitive and intransitive uses of the verbs, and seem to illustrate the application of the splitting strategy, with the parts joined by the conjunction *or*. In the LDOCE4 definition of *open*, in turn, active and passive forms of

the transitive genus convey information on ergativity. Finally, some recent definitions are quite similar to those from the first edition, with that they are more wordy as they violate the 'hole'-convention. The definition of *shorten* is a case in point.

The search for definitions of ergative verbs in the dictionaries revealed that in some cases contextual definitions were used for this purpose. It is this issue that is paid attention to in what follows.

3.2.2. Contextual definitions

3.2.2.1. Theoretical considerations

Defining by contextualization is an innovative design feature in learners' dictionaries (Swanepoel 2000: 407).[8] In comparison with traditional definitions, contextual ones are informal explanations of words, where the typicality of use is the driving force behind how the words are explained (McKeown 1993: 18). A contextual definition consists of two parts. The left-hand side places the word being defined in its typical syntactic and lexical/semantic context, and thus immediately reveals any restrictions on usual subjects and objects, which makes the use of brackets redundant. This part of a contextual definition falls into two subparts, i.e., the topic and the co-text, or the definiendum and the rest (Sinclair 1991: 124). It is the wording of the co-text that reflects the selection requirements of the verb being defined. Apart from selectional restrictions on subjects and nominal objects, contextual definitions can show complementation patterns of verbs which do not take noun phrases for objects.

In sum, the left-hand part of a full-sentence definition is a reflection of characteristic syntactic patterns in which verbs occur, but "is able to go further than ... grammar notes, because it can make explicit contextual restrictions that lie well outside the range of standard grammars" (Hanks 1987: 118).[9] In fact, it is constructed on the assumption that words have sense only in context (Peters et al. 1994: 147-148), and thus allows the dictionary user to

"know the word by the company it keeps", as recommended by Firth (quoted in Hanks 1987: 121). It is also the initial part of any contextual definition that recalls Gove's (1961: 6) statement that "words do not exist by themselves; they are surrounded by other words and live in a context … The definition … helps … to fit the word into a frame, which is … [an] objective in consulting a dictionary".

Whereas the first part of a contextual definition shows how a word is used, and, therefore, constitutes a radical departure from the lexicographic tradition, the second one explains the meaning of the word and has a lot in common with the traditional approach. Called the explanatory comment on the topic, the right-hand part may be divided into two basic chunks: the framework and the gloss. The framework refers back to the words in the co-text. The gloss rephrases the topic and thus adds explanatory detail (Sinclair 1991: 132). Schematically, the structure of a contextual definition can be presented in the following way:

(39) Co-text topic co-text, framework gloss framework.

As Sinclair (1991: 133) explains, in the definition:

(40)   If you <u>defeat</u> someone, you <u>win a victory over</u> them,

the topic *defeat* is paraphrased by the gloss *win a victory over*, a structure with a verb, its object, and a preposition. *Defeat* is a transitive verb, as indicated by the indefinite pronoun *someone* in the co-text. In the framework of the comment, the need for an object of the verb being defined is signaled by the object of the preposition, i.e., *them*, anaphorically related to *someone*.[10]

3.2.2.2. Contextual definitions of ergative verbs in LDOCE4

Table 6 offers a selection of definitions of ergative verbs: analytical from LDOCE1 and contextual from LDOCE4, and indicates whether the definitions of the verbs in OALDCE7, CALD2 and MEDAL are analytical (A) or contextual (C).

Table 6. Ergativity – analytical vs. contextual definitions

Verbs	LDOCE1	LDOCE4	OALDCE7	CALD2	MEDAL
assimilate	1. to (allow to) become part of (a group, country, race, etc.)	2. if people assimilate or are assimilated into a country or group, they become part of that group and are accepted by the people in that group	A	A	A
burn down	to destroy (a building) or be destroyed by fire	if a building burns down or is burned down, it is destroyed by fire	A	A	A
capsize	a. (esp. of a boat or ship) to turn over b. to turn (esp. a boat or ship) over	if a boat capsizes, or if you capsize it, it turns over in the water	C	A	C
evaporate	to (cause to) change into steam and disappear	1. if a liquid evaporates, or if heat evaporates it, it changes into a gas	C	A	C
hatch	1a. (of an egg) to break, letting the young bird out b. to cause (an egg) to break in this way	1. if an egg hatches, or if it is hatched, it breaks, letting the young bird, insect, etc. come out	A	A	C
	2a. (of a young bird) to break through an egg b. to cause (a young bird) to break through an egg	2. if a young bird, insect, etc. hatches, or if it is hatched, it comes out of its egg	A	-	C
incubate	a. to sit on and keep (eggs) warm until the young birds come out b. (of eggs) to be kept warm until HATCHed	1. if a bird incubates its eggs, or if the eggs incubate, they are kept warm until they hatch	-	C	C
relocate	to move or set up in a new place	if a person or business relocates, or if they are relocated, they move to a different place	A	A	A
TOTAL	A		5	6	3
	C		2	1	5

As can be seen from the table, contextual definitions also convey information on ergativity. Irrespective of whether the analytical definitions in LDOCE1 are split, include defining formulas or active and passive forms of genus terms, the structure of the corresponding contextual definitions in LDOCE4 is basically of two types: either active and passive constructions with the topics are juxtaposed (*assimilate*, *burn down*, *hatch* and *relocate*), or the transitive and intransitive uses of the topics are shown (the remaining verbs). Still, the table shows that contextual definitions of ergative verbs have not yet become a standard feature of the other dictionaries brought our recently.

3.3. Restricted subjects

Interestingly, in LDOCE4, analytical definitions are replaced with contextual ones also in the case of verbs which impose selectional restrictions on their subjects. Table 7 gives some definitions which clearly illustrate this trend. An analysis of the definitions of the same verbs in the other dictionaries is also summarized in the table.

Table 7. Restricted subjects in analytical definitions

Verbs	LDOCE1	LDOCE4	OALDCE7	CALD2	MEDAL
draw in	1. (of a single day) to become dark	1. if the days or nights draw in, it starts to get dark earlier in the evening because winter is coming	A	C	C
drive	10. (esp. of rain) to move along with great force	9. if rain, snow, wind, etc. drives somewhere, it moves very quickly in that direction	A	-	-
hop	1b. (of small creatures) to jump	2. if a bird, an insect or a small animal hops, it moves by making quick short jumps	A	C	C
lay	5. (of birds, insects, etc.) to produce (an egg or eggs)	3. if a bird, insect etc lays eggs, it produces them from its body	C	A	C
set	12. (of a heavenly body) to pass downwards out of sight	11. when the sun sets, it moves down in the sky and disappears	A	A	C
transpire	1. (of the body, plants, etc.) to give off (esp. watery waste matter) through the surface of the body, leaves, etc.	3. when a plant transpires, water passes through the surface of its leaves	C	C	C
trot	3. (of a horse or its rider) to move at a TROT[1] (1)	2. if a person or animal trots, they run fairly slowly, taking short regular steps	A	C	C/A[a]
yap	1. (esp. of dogs) to make short sharp exciting noises (sharp BARKS)	1. if a small dog yaps, it BARKs (=makes short loud sounds) in an excited way	A	C	C
TOTAL	A			6	2	1
	C			2	5	7

[a.] MEDAL provides two definitions, one contextual and the other analytical, with non-human and human subjects of the definiendum, respectively.

Obviously, the bracketed prepositional phrases specifying semantic restrictions on subjects in LDOCE1 are absent from the LDOCE4 contextual definitions, where the typical subjects constitute an integral part of the co-texts. Although the information shown traditionally in

brackets is likely to make learners realize what the constraints are, the typical subjects immediately preceding the definienda themselves seem to be more lucid.[11] Besides, whereas in LDOCE4 it is indeed difficult to find analytical definitions of verbs with restricted subjects, it is not the case yet in all currently available pedagogical dictionaries, as the last three columns in table 7 indicate.

4. Conclusions

Rundell (1998: 332) observes that "[a] dictionary definition is a somewhat abstract construct at the best of times, so great efforts must be made to remove any obstacles in comprehension and accessibility. This is probably the biggest single challenge of pedagogical lexicography." The above discussion shows that as far as analytical definitions are concerned, the challenge has been to a large extent met, for, in general, the definitions now convey information on syntactic properties of verbs in ways that are more accessible to the average user. First of all, the 'hole'-convention has been broken with; today, objects, semantically restricted or otherwise, follow genus terms, and – thanks to information from corpora – contemporary precise definitions outdistance nebulous ones from the pre-corpus era. Nonetheless, syntactic properties of verbs which allow indefinite object deletion are no longer shown in analytical definitions. By contrast, such definitions still manage to reflect ergativity, mainly thanks to formulas which incorporate surface realizations of atomic predicates. Still, analytical definitions of ergative verbs are being superseded by contextual ones, where the definiendum is presented in its typical syntactic environment. Besides, it also transpires that semantic restrictions on the subject make lexicographers willing to abandon the traditional defining style in favor of contextual definitions. Nonetheless, analytical definitions of ergative verbs and bracketed phrases showing typical subjects have not yet become a relic of the past, as the look beyond LDOCE4 suggests.

Finally, it should be stressed that the very limited scope of the present study does not justify any far-reaching conclusions. The paper merely throws light on some changes in verb definitions and should rather be seen as a call for further, preferably quantitative research in this field, also beyond the LDOCE dictionaries. Such a study could make it possible to see whether the foregoing analysis, focused mostly on classic examples of the verb categories discussed, discloses rules indeed.

NOTES

1. LDOCE1 is the only learners' dictionary where not only definitions, but also all examples are phrased in the controlled vocabulary of 2000 words (Procter 1978: xi). Not all examples are invented, though. Examples of structural words are quoted from the files of the Survey of English Usage and marked accordingly (Procter 1978: x, xxvi). Still, LDOCE1 is not the first dictionary where a defining vocabulary was used. As an entirely original feature, *The new method English dictionary* (NMED) defines words within a small wordstock. It employs a 1490-word controlled vocabulary to define 24 000 headwords (West -- Endicott 1935: iii).

2. COBUILD1 and LDOCE2 appeared in 1987. Oxford University Press published OALDCE4 two years later. The year 1995 witnessed the appearance of OALDCE5, LDOCE3, COBUILD2 and CIDE, a newcomer on the market. Five years later, on the occasion of the turn of the century, Oxford University Press put out OALDCE6. COBUILD3 was issued in 2001. CIDE was the predecessor of CALD1, published in 2003.

3. The alternative explanation for the lack of an object which would be part of such a definition is that in an actual context, the place of the object of a transitive

definiendum is already occupied. Therefore, there is no room for it in any syntactically interchangeable definition (Svensén 1993: 130). A corresponding complete definition of the intransitive *marry*, with a transitive genus and its object, makes it possible to see the difference in defining the two verb classes:

(3)   *marry* (I) – to take a husband or wife (Kipfer 1984: 88).

4. Ilson (1985: 165-166) shows that the 'hole'-convention may be applied also to defining verbs which take clausal, rather than nominal objects. The definition of *hope*:

(5)   *hope* (T) – to expect with desire,

is a case in point. Ilson (1985: 166) explains that the verb *expect*, like *hope*, takes a *that*-clause for an object, and that the definition is incomplete inasmuch as it allows space for a following *that*-clause, but does not include the word *that* itself. The presence of the genus which occurs in the same pattern as the definiendum is to be sufficient for the dictionary user to conclude that the pattern of the genus applies to the definiendum itself. Still, it should be remembered that in the same sense, *expect* can also take a nominal object, as in:

(6)   *We are expecting a rise in food prices this month* (OALDCE7).

Hope, by contrast, cannot be used in this pattern, although it can occur in the pattern *hope for sth*, e.g.:

(7)   *We are hoping for good weather* (LDOCE4).

Unfortunately, on the basis of the definition in (5), the learner may conceivably extrapolate the use of a nominal object from the genus to the definiendum.

5. The verbs listed in this section and in the next one were selected by chance.

6. Rundell (1998: 333) compares the definitions of the verb from LDOCE2 and LDOCE3.

7. The verbs whose definitions are analyzed in this section and in the next one, cited by Fontenelle and Vanandroye (1989), Allerton (1982) and Cowie (1984), may be considered classic examples of the verb categories they instantiate.

8. Introduced to modern learners' lexicography by COBUILD1, the sentence approach to definitions as a systematic defining technique remains one of the identifying features of the COBUILD dictionaries. Although it has been accepted as an ad-hoc device by its competitors, none of them exploits sentence definitions to their full advantage and as consistently as all the editions of COBUILD. Actually, it is said that the other publishers resort to this defining style mainly where it facilitates the task of formulating a syntactically adequate clause (Heuberger 2000: 28). Numerous examples of analytical definitions from the recent pedagogical dictionaries given in the present section seriously challenge Swanepoel's (2000: 406) claim that full-sentence definitions have become a standard feature of the dictionaries. The last two editions of LDOCE, for instance, departed from the use of analytical definitions in favor of the full-sentence approach when the range of possible subjects is relatively small (see *capsize, evaporate* or *trot*). The issue resurfaces in section 3.3.

9. However, see Fillmore (1989: 60) for instances of cumbersome contextual definitions when the list of typical subjects is fairly long.

10. The gloss and the following framework are then strongly reminiscent of the analytical definition, and convey syntactic information in a very similar way. Like in the traditional approach summarized in (4), a parallel is drawn between the object of a verb and the object of a preposition.

11. This claim requires an empirical test.

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