

DEFINITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN CHILDREN'S BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES

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Abstract

Defining phraseological units in children's bilingual dictionaries represents one of the most challenging tasks in educational lexicography. Phraseological units are characterized by semantic opacity, figurativeness, and cultural specificity, which often conflict with the cognitive and linguistic capacities of young learners. This article investigates definitional strategies employed in children's bilingual dictionaries and proposes a theoretically grounded framework for defining phraseological units in a way that is linguistically accurate and pedagogically accessible. Drawing on insights from phraseology, educational linguistics, and digital lexicography, the study analyzes core definitional approaches, including paraphrasing, situational explanation, exemplification, and multimodal support. The article argues that effective definitions for child users must prioritize conceptual clarity, contextual anchoring, and age-appropriate language, rather than traditional lexicographic precision alone. The findings contribute to the development of child-centered bilingual phraseological dictionaries and provide practical implications for dictionary compilers and language educators.

Keywords: phraseological units, definitional strategies, children's dictionaries, bilingual lexicography, educational linguistics

1. Introduction

Phraseological units occupy a central position in natural language use, as they encode culturally established meanings and recurrent communicative patterns. Despite their importance, phraseological units have traditionally been marginalized in dictionaries designed for young learners, particularly in bilingual contexts. One of the primary reasons for this marginalization lies in the difficulty of defining

phraseological meaning in a way that is both linguistically sound and cognitively accessible for children.

Children's bilingual dictionaries are not merely reduced versions of general dictionaries; they constitute a distinct lexicographic genre with specific pedagogical functions. Young learners differ from adult users in their cognitive development, metalinguistic awareness, and learning objectives. Consequently, definitional strategies that are acceptable in adult dictionaries often prove ineffective—or even misleading—when applied to child-oriented lexicographic resources.

This article addresses the following research question: **Which definitional strategies are most appropriate for presenting phraseological units in children's bilingual dictionaries?** The study aims to identify key principles that can guide dictionary compilers in balancing linguistic accuracy with pedagogical effectiveness.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Phraseological Units and Their Definitional Complexity

Phraseological units are typically defined as stable multi-word expressions whose meaning is partially or fully non-compositional. This semantic non-transparency presents a major challenge for lexicographic definition, particularly in bilingual dictionaries where meaning must be mediated across languages and cultures.

In the case of children, the difficulty is amplified by limited abstract reasoning skills and insufficient cultural background knowledge. Definitions that rely on abstract paraphrases or metalinguistic terminology may obscure rather than clarify meaning. Therefore, phraseological definition in children's dictionaries requires alternative strategies that go beyond conventional lexicographic practices.

2.2 Children as Dictionary Users

Children represent a unique group of dictionary users with distinct needs. Research in educational linguistics emphasizes that young learners rely heavily on concrete representations, contextual cues, and experiential knowledge. Their

understanding of language is largely situational rather than analytical, which has direct implications for dictionary definition.

From a pedagogical perspective, definitions should support comprehension, retention, and practical use, rather than merely describe meaning. This shifts the focus from formal precision to functional clarity, especially in the case of phraseological units.

2.3 Bilingual Lexicography and Mediation of Meaning

Bilingual dictionaries for children perform a mediating function between two linguistic systems. In phraseology, this mediation is particularly complex, as direct equivalents are often unavailable or only partially overlapping. Definitional strategies must therefore compensate for gaps in equivalence by providing explanatory support that facilitates conceptual transfer rather than literal translation.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven approach. Rather than conducting a corpus-based frequency analysis or learner experiment, the research focuses on synthesizing existing theoretical insights and lexicographic practices to develop a coherent framework of definitional strategies.

The analysis draws on:

- theoretical literature on phraseology and educational linguistics;
- typological observations from existing children's bilingual dictionaries;
- pedagogical principles relevant to early language learning.

This approach is appropriate given the exploratory and conceptual nature of the research aim.

4. Definitional Strategies in Children's Bilingual Phraseological Dictionaries

4.1 Paraphrasing in Simple Language

One of the most widely used strategies is paraphrasing the phraseological meaning in simplified language. For children, paraphrases must avoid abstract vocabulary and complex syntactic structures. Instead of explaining meaning through synonyms or technical terms, effective paraphrases describe what happens in familiar situations.

For example, instead of defining an idiom through an abstract equivalent, a child-oriented definition may explain what a person does or feels in a concrete context. This strategy prioritizes comprehension over terminological exactness.

4.2 Situational Explanation

Situational explanation involves embedding the phraseological unit within a short scenario that illustrates its use. This approach aligns with children's experiential learning patterns, as meaning is inferred from context rather than deduced analytically.

Situational explanations are particularly effective in bilingual dictionaries, as they reduce reliance on direct translation and instead encourage conceptual understanding. By presenting typical communicative situations, dictionaries can help learners internalize phraseological meaning naturally.

4.3 Use of Examples as Definitional Support

In children's dictionaries, examples often function not merely as illustrations but as integral components of the definition itself. Carefully constructed examples can convey meaning more effectively than abstract explanations, especially when accompanied by visual or contextual cues.

Examples should be short, realistic, and age-appropriate, reflecting situations familiar to children's everyday experiences, such as school, family, or play.

5. Visual and Multimodal Definitional Strategies

5.1 Visual Representation of Meaning

Visual support plays a crucial role in defining phraseological units for children. Images can bridge the gap between figurative meaning and concrete understanding, particularly when idiomatic meaning diverges significantly from literal interpretation.

Visuals should not depict literal meanings in a misleading way but rather represent the situational or pragmatic essence of the phraseological unit.

5.2 Audio and Interactive Elements

In digital bilingual dictionaries, audio pronunciation and interactive elements enhance definitional effectiveness. Hearing phraseological units used in context supports phonological awareness and reinforces meaning through multimodal input.

Interactive features, such as clickable explanations or simple comprehension checks, transform definitions into learning opportunities rather than static descriptions.

6. Translation-Based vs. Explanation-Based Definitions

6.1 Limitations of Direct Translation

Direct translation is often insufficient for defining phraseological units in bilingual dictionaries, particularly for children. Literal equivalents may obscure meaning or create false associations. In many cases, no exact equivalent exists in the target language.

Overreliance on translation-based definitions risks reducing phraseology to a mechanical correspondence, neglecting cultural and pragmatic dimensions.

6.2 Explanation-Based Mediation of Meaning

Explanation-based strategies prioritize meaning mediation over formal equivalence. By combining paraphrase, context, and examples, dictionaries can convey phraseological meaning even in the absence of direct equivalents.

For child users, this approach supports deeper conceptual understanding and reduces cognitive overload associated with abstract bilingual mapping.

7. Pedagogical Implications of Definitional Strategies

Definitional strategies in children's bilingual dictionaries have direct pedagogical consequences. Definitions that are clear, contextualized, and engaging contribute to vocabulary acquisition, phraseological awareness, and learner confidence.

From an educational standpoint, dictionaries should function as learning tools

rather than reference manuals. Definitional strategies must therefore align with instructional goals and developmental stages.

8. Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that defining phraseological units for children requires a departure from traditional lexicographic norms. Precision and conciseness, while essential in adult dictionaries, must be subordinated to clarity and accessibility in child-oriented resources.

Importantly, no single definitional strategy is sufficient in isolation. Effective children's bilingual dictionaries employ a combination of paraphrasing, situational explanation, examples, and multimodal support. This integrative approach reflects the complex nature of phraseological meaning and the diverse learning needs of children.

9. Conclusion

This article has examined definitional strategies for phraseological units in children's bilingual dictionaries and proposed a child-centered framework grounded in linguistic and pedagogical principles. The study argues that successful definitions prioritize conceptual clarity, contextual grounding, and age-appropriate language over formal equivalence.

Future research should empirically evaluate the effectiveness of different definitional strategies through classroom-based studies and learner feedback. For lexicographers and educators, the findings provide a theoretical foundation for designing bilingual phraseological dictionaries that genuinely support early language learning.

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