



Essential Skills for a Lexicographer

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Abstract

Lexicography is a division of linguistic that is very important for recording and developing languages. Pashto is one of those languages that do not have many resources. Most afghan lexicographer using traditional methods for dictionary. The old methods cause mistakes and do not follow scientific rules. This article encourages lexicographer to stop old method and old writing system and start modern lexicography methods on facts. It also explains that lexicographers need to learn language and dictionary-making skills. These skills help the lexicographer to make better and more correct dictionary. This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive-analytical method to explore and compare key trends in both Afghan and international lexicographer practices. It critically examines the current state of Pashto dictionaries, highlights significant methodological shortcomings, and proposes a set of well-structured recommendations to address these gaps. Many Pashto-Pashto dictionaries have Data collection, grammar, or others problem. They are inconsistent, nonstandard, do not give answer user because Pashto dictionary have been written lack deep language knowledge and trained people and good method are missing. The article say it is important to work with experts, use digital tools and often update dictionary. The article says that lexicography is not just a technical job. It is an academic work that helps protect and grow the language. If lexicographer get if the right training they can make dictionaries that are useful and trusted by many people.

Keywords: Dictionary, Language, lexicographer, Lexicography, Linguistics.

Introduction

Lexicography is a part of linguistics. It helps to save, organize and standardize language. This work is important for learning, communication and language preservation. Nodaway societies are multilingual and technology is growing fast. Because the lexicography has more complex. Lexicography is not just list of words. Now it includes tasks like analyzing text, understanding user, and using digital tools like (Telex software). Lexicography need special knowledge and skills.

Lexicography connected or needed to other fields like linguistics, writing, computer science, psychology and education. We have different dictionary physical and online dictionary. Many modern dictionaries are not printed, they are online and made for specific user. Lexicographer must know how to work with language data, organize information, analyze meanings, and sometimes write basic code. Even though lexicography is growing, there is little research in what skills lexicographer need (Noorzai, 2019).

This essay offers a new approach. It tries to list and explain the essential skills that modern lexicographers need. The goal is to connect academic research with real world needs. This article gives a clear framework of language and technical skills. It is useful for lexicographers and especially for dictionaries that have fewer resources, where trained lexicographers are few.

This research is important for several reasons. It can help to design a better dictionary program. It also supports professional growth. It can help a lexicographer to make the dictionary more standard and effective. By showing what skills are needed, the study can also improve the quality of the dictionary in the future.

In this article, identify, classify, and explain the essential skills needed by lexicographers. It aims to serve as a basic guide for researchers and coaches, and professionals in the field.

Material and Method

This study used a descriptive and analytical method. It also followed a clear and organized way of comparing dictionary data through qualitative research. The research was done in several steps to ensure the study of lexicography or dictionary-making methods was deep and complete.

Essential Skills for a Lexicographer

Practical lexicography or dictionary making is a society request and very huge task. A lexicographer working on a monolingual or bilingual dictionary should have strong skills in language, writing and translation in order to successfully create a complete and accurate dictionary. For creating a high quality dictionary, we must first learn the necessary skills and then begin the dictionary making process:

Comprehensive Understanding of the language

The process of compiling a dictionary involves complex and multifaceted tasks that require a high level of expertise. A lexicographer, especially one engaged in bilingual dictionary development, must demonstrate proficiency not only in linguistics but also in academic writing and translation. Mastery of these skills is essential to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and usability of final product.

Lexicographer sometimes have need basic knowledge second language like a lexicographer who make Pashto dictionary he must have basic knowledge of Dari and Arabic as many lexical borrowing these languages.

Bilingual lexicographer must be well acquainting with linguistics principles of other languages including grammar, morphology, semantics and other relevant aspects (singleton, 2000).

The most essential aspect for lexicographer is to have a solid understanding of the lexicographic process and its various components. Without experience, jumping into this task is not advisable, as it often leads to more disadvantage than advantage.

Comprehensive Understanding of the phonology

A competent lexicographer should have a sound understanding of phonology to accurately reflect the pronunciation of headwords and transcribe their phonetic forms. This competence is vital for maintaining standardized spelling across dictionary entries. In Pashto, for example, words with identical orthographic forms can carry distinct meanings and pronunciations. Consider the word /xara/ means female donkey, if the emphasis comes on the first vowel /xa'ra/ which refers to a (pill of something), and /xar/ (donkey) commonly written as /xrə/, which functions as plural form emphasizing the final sound (B.T. & Michael).

Similarly, the word /kwata/ may signify a pile of plants, while a slightly different pronunciation /kota/ denotes a room or a particular breed of dog (Momand & Sahrai, 1996). Without sufficient knowledge of phonology, the lexicographic process becomes significantly more difficult in addition, error prone.

Comprehensive Understanding of the Morphology

Understanding morphology is essential for lexicographers, as it involves the study of word structure, including inflectional patterns, pluralization, and other morphological features. This expertise ensures the correct handling of irregular forms and minimizes inconsistencies in the dictionary. For example, identifying a word's grammatical category whether it is a noun, verb, adjective, infinitive or conjunction is crucial. Consider /ʒa[əwə'l/ transitive verb and /ʒa[edəl/ intransitive verb (Rashtin, 1993).

Another example is the word /tor/, which acts as a noun when used to denote color with plural form /torona/ but when used adjectivally; its form remains unchanged in the plural (Descriptive Dictionary, 2012).

A lack of morphological knowledge can result in misclassification of words and structural errors within the dictionary.

Comprehensive Understanding of the syntax

Lexicographer must also possess a firm grasp of syntax, since word meaning often depends on their syntactic role within a sentence. The structure and rules of sentence formation help in determining the precise function and interpretation of a word in context. For instance, the Pashto word /donya/ exhibits different meanings across sentences;

1. /pə ʈola donyɑ ke wə gər dʒa/ here /donya/ means (world),
2. / ʈola donyɑ war ta wala[ɑ wa. / in this sentence, it refers to (people),
3. /ʈola donyɑ raw[ɑ. / where /donya/ is interpreted as (money) (Chamto, 2019).

Another illustrative case is the multifunctional pronoun /ʈok/, which can serve various grammatical functions. In the sentence /saba har ʈok ratlayji./ it acts as indefinite pronoun

referring to an unknown individual, while in / *ʔok rəʔay?*/ it functions as an interrogative pronoun asking question (Tegey & Barbar, 1996).

The word /*gwəʔl*/ is another example of a word that takes different grammatical form depending of its usage in sentence;

1 - /*Belal gwəʔl saʔay day*/.

2 - /*de Belal gwəʔl ye rəwoʔ*/.

3 - / *gwəʔl ma ʃkawa*/.

In the first sentence /*gwəʔl*/ is used as an adjective, meaning (good) that is Bilal is a good person. In the second sentence /*gwəʔl*/ means (sign) or symbol that is Bilal is engaged. In the third sentence /*gwəʔl*/ is used as a noun, meaning (flower) it means do not cut the flower (Zyar, 2017).

Comprehensive Understanding of the Semantics

A lexicographer must possess a deep understanding of semantics, as dictionaries are not just collections of words but comprehensive resource that clarify meaning, usage, and contextual relevance. Semantic knowledge enables the lexicographer to distinguish fine shades of meaning, accurately list synonyms and antonyms, and deal effectively with polysemous words those with multiple meanings (Harman, 1383)

Contextual variation is also key. For instance, the word /*sar*/ may denote the anatomical head a group leader, or the uppermost part of an object. Recognizing such semantic differences is essential for drafting precise and informative definitions (Descriptive Dictionary, 2012).

In bilingual dictionaries, semantic awareness plays a vital role in choosing equivalents that faithfully represent meaning across languages. This ensures that translations do not merely convey surface meanings but reflect deeper and context specific nuances. Ultimately, semantics forms the backbone of effective lexicographic work. Without it dictionaries risk becoming vague, misleading, or untrustworthy for users.

Comprehensive Understanding of the pragmatics

Lexicographers must also be well versed in pragmatics the study of how meaning is shaped by context. Words often carry both literal and implied meanings, which may shift depending on social, cultural, and situational factors. Understanding these subtleties is crucial for a accurate representation.

For example, while the word /*ya*/ typically means (yes) in region like Kandahar and Ghazni province people it conveys (no) among nomadic tribes such as the Kochis and other Zadrans (Descriptive Dictionary, 2021).

Such pragmatic variation must be reflected in the dictionary to avoid miscommunication. Similarly, seemingly straightforward phrases like "I am hungry" may have implicit meaning in specific context such as being a polite hint during a meal rather than literal statement (Sahib Arghan, 2017).

Pragmatic competence allows lexicographers to capture not just word meanings, but also how words function in real life communication. This ensures the dictionary reflects language as it is used naturally emotionally, socially and culturally (Jalal, 2019).

Understanding lexicology

It is essential for a dictionary lexicographer to have a good understanding of lexicology, as this field examines the roots and grammatical roles of words. Lexicographer should be able to trace the origin of a word and document its various forms. For example, the word /xartʃ/ meaning (sale) is a base form, and the lexicographer must also identify and explain related forms like /xartʃlɔw/ (Sales), /xartʃedəl/ (to be sold), /xartʃwəl/ (to sell), /xartʃawunay/ (seller), /xartʃa/ (sale, and so on (Zyar, 2014).

Understanding dictionary profile

A user profile very essential for dictionary, the lexicographer must able to make dictionary profile and identifying their audience and needs. A lexicographer able to make list of user. Essential things for lexicographer to find and target audience; for whom the dictionary is being made. For example, if the dictionary is being created for children, the lexicographer will not focus on adults but will consider the child's level, environment and interests (Noorzai, 2019).

Creating Descriptive Language for the Dictionary

When creating definitions for headwords, a lexicographer should carefully choose the words that will appear repeatedly, such as (applied, useful, used, or filed) these terms form the foundation of many definitions and should be selected with intention. To keep users engaged, it is important to avoid overusing the same expressions, as this can become repetitive and dull. Advanced dictionaries sometime include a separate list of commonly used defining words at the end to help readers better understand the definitions (Saghar & Fariba, 2018).

Understanding Dictionary Anatomy

A professional lexicographer must be able to design and organize the overall structure of a dictionary. Different type of dictionary, such as those for adults versus children, often have different formats and content. Although the internal components of dictionaries vary. The basic structure of general-purpose dictionary tends to follow a common framework. Nowadays many dictionaries are created with commercial goals in mind, each based on their own design principles and audience needs. (Fazalhaq, 2019).

Organizing Dictionary Content Effectively

One of the key responsibilities in practical lexicography is arranging the entries clearly and logically. A lexicographer must be skilled in selecting which words to include and which it leaves out. Still a well-rounded dictionary should aim to represent both frequently used and less common words in the language. In Pashto dictionary, much word we use in language but lexicographer did not entry but many words it did not for entry to dictionary the lexicographer entry in dictionary (Noorzai, 2019).

Be patient for lexicography

Creating dictionary is a long-term effort that cannot be completed quickly. Lexicographer should not lose motivation if progress seems slow. Good planning a realistic schedule helps manage time and tasks efficiently. While it is not feasible to document every word in language, lexicographers should aim to do as much as possible within their available time and resource (Fine Clouse, 1997).

Writing Definitions with care and integrity

During the compilation process, you may face situations where no clear rule or theory applies. In such cases, rely on your linguistic knowledge and analytical skills. When resources are available, conduct thorough research. Try different ways to present entries and choose the format that communicates the meaning most clearly and effectively. You are writing should show confidence, but you should also be ready for explain your decisions. Avoid adding information that might mislead readers or fail to meet their expectations. (Fine Clouse, 2012).

Maintaining Objectivity

A lexicographer must be realistic, free from bias and independent to ensure the scientific credibility of their work. A lexicographer must be like historian analyze language from a neutral perspective. Lack of objectivity undermines the value of dictionary. A dictionary should not promote regional, ethnic, or ideological prejudices (Fine Clouse, 1997).

Innovation in lexicography

While language naturally experience gradual lexical changes whether through internal development or the adoption of foreign terms lexicographic work must go beyond simply reflecting these changes. Instead, it should aim to introduce meaningful innovation that enhance the quality and usefulness of dictionaries. A dictionary should not merely reproduce existing entries but must present them in a more refined, comprehensive, and well organized manner.

In the context of Pashto lexicography, early dictionary making efforts were based on a relatively narrow selection of vocabulary. Over the year, these same word lists have often been reshuffled or restructured by different lexicographers, yet without addressing the deeper linguistic needs such as compiling thorough records of words actually used in everyday communication (Hilaly, 1354).

The Role of Note -Taking

Lexicographers should always be prepared to write down new words, idiom, expressions, proverbs, or any relevant linguistic information. Since general-purpose dictionaries mostly focus on frequently used words, it is important to document them as they appear in real – life situations. Taking notes is a vital part of creating a complete and accurate dictionary. While digital tools have made this process easier in many, rural areas often lack access to such technology. Therefore, fieldwork in these communities remains a valuable method for collecting rich and authentic language data (Fine Clouse, 1997).

Lexicography Language

The language used in a dictionary must be simple, precise and easy for readers to understand. Definition should be written clearly, so that they do not confuse or overwhelm the user. Complex grammar or overly detailed sentence structures should be avoided. The lexicographer need to choose words carefully to eliminate and ambiguity. It is best to avoid overly directive words like (Must or should) and avoid uncertain terms such as (maybe, or possibly) (Noorzai, 2019).

Choosing Characters for Example

Dictionary entries are often supported by example sentences, which sometimes include fictional names or characters. This example should use clear, short, and recognizable make that do not vary depending on the sentence. It is helpful to use names that are culturally familiar yet simple enough for nonnative speakers to understand. Good example include name like Bilal, Ahmad, Sara or Lailo, which are easy to read and do not confuse the reader and it is unchangeable name in Pashto (Noorzai, 2019).

Understanding the Audience

Identifying the target audience is one of the key challenges in lexicography. When creating a dictionary, the lexicographer must first determine who the users will be whether children, adults, language learners, translators, or the public. For instance, a children's dictionary should focus on simple language and avoid detailed grammar explanations. Visual aids and illustrations are also helpful in making the content more accessible to young readers (Noorzai, 2019).

For lexicographer

If the lexicographer sends even a few pages of their work via email to Pashto language scholar and seeks their feedback, they may notice much new term.

The lexicographer reads literary works to extract words. Selection is crucial when dealing with literature works. Particularly fictional works are important because language with all its nuances is extensively used in them. The contributions of skilled and insightful writers hold great value. A truly realistic writer, in my view, is highly aware of the fine distinctions between similar words. Recognizing these subtle differences can greatly improve the quality of a dictionary. Focusing on implied meanings not only increases the dictionary's reliability but also supports its overall thoroughness (Noorzai, 2019).

Conclusion

Lexicography is a constantly developing field that requires patience, careful analysis, and an unbiased approach. A skilled lexicographer must combine deep linguistic knowledge with accurate research and creative methods to produce dictionaries that meet the needs of a wide and varied audience. By staying neutral, regularly updating entries, and applying modern techniques, lexicographer's help, keep dictionaries trustworthy and valuable language tools. If lexicographer making a dicotinary without mastering these skills, they will merely produce a collection of words, unable to meet the needs of the users or address linguistic challenges. Ultimately lexicography is not just about compiling words, it is about preserving and shaping the language for future generation. The lexicography must be not

only familiar with language and linguistic but a good writer, capable of producing clear, accurate and accessible definition and familiarity with lexicography and anatomy and software.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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