

Noun and verb codes in pedagogical dictionaries of English: A search for names

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Monolingual dictionaries of English for foreign learners are designed to cater for both decoding and encoding needs of their prospective users. Much has already been done to facilitate the explanation of meaning, including recourse to restricted defining vocabularies. To be useful in language production, dictionaries offer, among other things, pronunciation, which these days can not only be gleaned from the phonetic transcription, but simply heard after clicking an icon. The dictionaries in question also include supplementary exercises, usage notes or word finders, to mention but a few features helpful in encoding which are largely taken for granted today. Obviously, as tools used in language production, pedagogical dictionaries, whether traditional or electronic, also need to convey grammatical, and especially syntactic information. Such information is given in various forms and places in the dictionaries in question, also in the shape of codes, which constitute the focus of the present study.

The paper provides an overview of modern solutions with respect to noun and verb coding systems in the most recent pedagogical learners' dictionaries currently available on the market (OALDCE7, LDOCE4, MEDAL, CALD2, COBUILD5), and places them in the perspective of the codes previously used in pedagogical lexicography.

The analysis reveals a dichotomous nature of the systems of noun and verb codes in the recent MLDs. The identified categories of codes are, however, difficult to name, inasmuch as the adoption of the same criteria often results in code labels which are far from corresponding for the two parts of speech. While in the case of verbs it is still possible to distinguish between formal and functional-formal codes, as already done by Dziemianko (2006), the latter name does not apply in the case of nouns, where functional labels do not occur in codes any longer. Admittedly, one of the identified systems of coding grammatical information on nouns can be seen as corresponding to the formal system of verb codes. Yet, the other presents a detailed subcategorisation of nouns, without any reference to syntactic functions. Thus, apart from the form of codes, the criterion of their prevalence in the dictionaries in question is taken into consideration, and an attempt is made to establish the degree of overlap between the classifications of codes yielded by the two criteria. It is only on the basis of both criteria taken together that a nomenclature applicable to both noun and verb codes is suggested.

The coinage is motivated by an empirical study, which has already been designed and conducted. The identification of parallel dichotomous coding systems for nouns and verbs in the pedagogical dictionaries made it possible to analyze the influence of the type of coding system on the usefulness of codes separately for each part of speech as well as irrespective of the grammatical class of headwords. Still, at the stage of designing the experiment, a question of what to call the codes arose. The papers attempts to provide an answer based on a careful metalexigraphic study.

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