



Folk defining strategies vs. comprehension of dictionary definitions – an empirical study

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There is no one single defining style suitable to define all kinds of words. Theoretically, nouns could be defined by means of the widest range of defining styles, however, more often than not it is the classic/analytic definition which is employed to define them in dictionaries. Nevertheless, unlike concrete nouns, abstract nouns are hard to define with the analytic definition as it is difficult to find a suitable hyperonym (or genus proximum) as well as exact differentiating features for abstract concepts. In addition, there is another definition format, namely a single clause *when*-definition, which lacks the genus of the analytic definition and hence is said to be appropriate for defining abstract nouns. This is a relatively new defining style inspired by folk defining patterns and little research has been conducted to ascertain its effectiveness. On the other hand, while spontaneously defining concepts, naive language users employ their own strategies and these may not be convergent with the styles used by learner's dictionaries. The study aims at investigating the way native speakers of Polish define abstract nouns by means of oral elicitation, and then comparing the usefulness of the two most frequent folk defining formats in a written task of providing Polish equivalents for English abstract nouns on the basis of their definitions. Finally, the Big Five (CALD3, OALD7, COBUILD5, MEDAL2, LDOCE4) are consulted in order to find out how abstract nouns are defined in pedagogical dictionaries and compare the strategies adopted by the dictionaries with the way abstract nouns are defined by ordinary language users. These three stages of the study have the aim of pinpointing the most appropriate definition format for defining abstract nouns as well as verifying whether the most prevalent folk defining styles will in fact turn out to be the most helpful for language learners.

References:

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