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On the Codification of Usage by Labels

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on the question of how usage is marked within dictionary macrostructure of five most representatives of *EFL* lexicographic works, namely *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary*, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, *Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary*, *Cambridge Advanced Learner`s Dictionary* and *Macmillan English Dictionary*. What is more, it sets a number of reasons why this particular area of lexicographic enquiry poses problems not only for dictionary users but also for dictionary compilers.

Key words: lexicography, label, usage, diasystematic information

Label classifications

We feel justified to start with the basic notions employed in the codification of usage by labels. As to the very notion of labels, when we turn to *Dictionary of Lexicography* (Hartmann & James, 1998, p. 80), we find out that: "label is a specialised symbol or abbreviated term used in reference works to mark a word or phrase as being associated with a particular usage or language variety. Dictionaries differ widely in the way they do this. As the information necessary to support a particular decision is not always available and boundary lines between different usage features are fluid, consistency is rarely achieved".

Obviously, when we face the challenge of investigating usage specifications in lexicography, we come to realize that one should by no means refrain from tackling the problem of the meaning of the usage category which is defined variously in the literature of the subject. And so, for example, according to Allen (1992, p. 1071), usage may be defined as "the way in which the elements of language are customarily used to produce meaning", while Landau (1989, p. 174) argues that the term *usage* is related to medium upon which the communicative event relies, that it denotes either spoken or written language, the standard ways of its usage, as distinguished from non-standard ones or – alternately – the study of any limitations on use (geographic, social or temporal).

In current lexicographic practice such data is provided by usage labels, usually given in the form of one word labels or abbreviations (such as, for example, *old-fashioned*, *slang*, *AmE*). Quantitatively, Landau (1989, p. 175) claims that most common usage labels are as follows:

1. currency or temporality: *archaic, obsolete,*
2. frequency of use*: rare,*
3. regional or geographic variation: *U.S., British, Canadian, Australian*,
4. technical or specialized terminology: *astronomy, chemistry, physics*,
5. restricted or taboo: *vulgar, obscene,*
6. insult: *offensive, disparaging, contemptuous*,
7. slang: *slang,*
8. style, functional variety, or register: *informal, colloquial, literary*,
9. status or cultural label: *nonstandard, substandard*.

The idea of incorporating thus understood labels in the structure of lexicographic description is by no means new, and it has existed, or has at least been tacitly implied for a long time. For equally long time lexicographers have faced the multitude of problems related to both shape and scope of the possible labelling system (Ptaszyński, 2010, p. 411-412). One of the main reasons, as indicated in Atkins & Rundell (2008, p. 496), is that: "many labels are umbrella terms that conceal a good deal of variation". To uncover the content of these umbrella terms is to say that labels proposed for the dictionary content aim at indicating data about limitations concerning the way words are to be used, in the contexts they occur or, alternatively, in relation to different lexical items within the body of a dictionary. In the literature of the subject, these limitations are referred to as *diasystematic marking*, which is used synonymously with the name *diasystematic information* (see, for example, Hausmann, 1989; Svensén, 2009). In turn, Landau (1989, p. 217) argues that the labelling system guides the readers how to use a given language correctly, but also its aim is to provide relevant information on the limitations of use. As a rule, usage comments are provided in dictionaries as a guide on how to use words appropriately (the use of a particular lexical item can be restricted to a certain area, a specific domain as well as style/register). Normally, these limitations are indicated in such a way that dictionaries employ labels (either in the microstructure, or in the megastructure of a dictionary).

In other words, one may say that they are to be useful when dictionary users are uncertain if a given word is old-fashioned/slang/taboo, etc. Such pieces of information, in the words of Svensén (2009, p. 315), inform dictionary users that "a certain lexical item deviates in a certain respect from the main bulk of items described in a dictionary and that its use is subject to some kind of restriction".

Obviously enough, a dictionary user normally consults the work of reference for the guides on how to use a lexical item appropriately (or alternatively one of its senses), its spelling, pronunciation, the fact if is restricted somehow (to a geographical region/ a domain / a style). Within the canvas of lexicographic reference works such items of information tend to appear in different forms, as well as varying positions. Most frequently, limitations of all types are provided as labels given within the dictionary microstructure. At the same time, they are at times to be found in the dictionary megastructure (front or back matter).

When we make enquiries about the causes of incorporating usage labels, we come to realize that lexicographers tend to claim that – most frequently – dictionary users react negatively to the lack of this kind of lexicographic information (see Landau, 1989). What is more, as revealed by the Lew's (2004) research, users turn to works of reference for data concerning usage limitations, though this need tends to develop at more advanced levels of language mastery. The author stresses that stylistic information is "primary useful in encoding tasks" (Lew, 2004, p. 126). Apparently, this seems to suggest that the incorporation of labels is justified mainly for the purpose of language production. When producing a text, one is forced to make various choices while the system of labels is supposed to guide dictionary users through the set of alternative options, as well as to warn users about the possible social consequences of using one word instead of another, since usage labels are primarily intended to show various restrictions on word application. Another problem that arises in this context is the problem of label typology.

The discussion concerning label classification has been carried by, among others, Milroy and Milroy (1990), and the major distinction drawn by the authors covers the difference between group labels and register labels. To be more specific:

1) Group labels indicate that a lexical item is restricted in its use (here geographical, temporal, frequency and field labels are mentioned).
1.1) Geographical labels show that a particular word is used in a certain region (that is it does not belong to standard language).
1.2) The function of temporal labels is to indicate the first/last occurence of the lexical item.
1.3) Frequency labels – although generally these labels are hardly ever used in printed dictionaries, their function is to indicate which forms are used most frequently.
1.4) Field labels have the function of indicating to what professional or social domain a given word belongs.

2) Register labels guide individual language users in their choice of the right words in the right contexts.

Although far from being plentiful, there have been other typological proposals, too. One of them is that of Jackson (2002, p. 109 -115). The author postulates the following categories:

10. dialect labels – that refer to geographical restriction,
11. formality labels – a number of words that are marked as *formal* or *informal*,
12. status labels – concerning the propriety of the use of a word,
13. effect labels – they relate to the effect that a word or sense is intended by the speaker/writer to produce in the hearer/reader,
14. history labels – labels for words or senses that are either no longer in current use or whose currency is questionable or suspect,
15. topic or field label – they relate to where a word or sense is restricted to,
16. usage label – used when the usage of words is a matter of controversy,

More recently, Atkins and Rundell (2008, p. 227-230) distinguish the following marking indicators:

17. domains labels,
18. region (dialect labels),
19. register (slang and jargon labels),
20. style labels,
21. time labels,
22. attitude labels,
23. meaning type labels,
24. using labels.

As to the typologies that have been advanced so far, one finds what seems to be the most detailed classificatory scheme in the work of Hausmann (1989, p. 651), who itemizes the following kinds of labels:

25. Diachronic information, which refers to time, is a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a given period throughout the history of a language. Within this dimension, one finds a variety of labels that can be placed on a chronological list, from archaic, through obsolete to the contemporary words and senses. Likewise, we find here recent neologisms, and those lexical items which do not refer to old use are usually not marked with any label. Therefore, in practice, there are no labels used to mark neologisms. Among the temporal labels that are often present in modern dictionaries, one finds categories labelled as: *old-fashioned, obsolete,* as well as *archaic, old use* or *dated*.

26. In turn, diatopic information which refers to place, is a dimension that connects a word or any of its senses with either a national language variety or with a given regional dialect. Naturally, language communities often differentiate between standard and non-standard uses. The former use is most frequently unlabelled in dictionaries, while the latter, the regional or dialectal use, is predominantly marked as *regional* or *dialect.*

27. In turn, diaintegrative information, which refers to place, is a feature associating a word or any of its senses with the dimension of integration into the repertoire of native words in a given language. Monolingual dictionaries often provide information concerning the source language, and this is especially true about those words which have preserved their original form (e.g. loan words taken from Latin incorporated into English at various stages).

28. One may also speak of diamedial information, which refers to medium. On the whole, it is a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a given medium of communication. The labels which are the most frequently used are *written* and *spoken*.

29. Diastratic information, which refers to socio-cultural group, is a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a specific social community. This kind of label is often associated with the social varieties, such as slang or jargon. The most common labels of this kind are *slang, vulgar* or *taboo*.

30. As to diaphasic information, which refers to formality, this feature associates a word or any of its senses with a specific register of a given language. The most common labels that are provided here are *formal* and *informal*.

31. In turn, diatextual information, which refers to text type, is a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a given type of discourse or genre. The most frequently labelling markings here are *poetic* and *literary*.

32. So-called diatechnical information, which refers to technicality, is a feature which connects a word with a specific subject field. In monolingual dictionaries, one finds subject-field labels, field labels, as well as domain labels which usually signal that a word or any of its senses belongs to scientific or technical domains of the lexicon. It is obvious that numerous sublanguages pertaining to different subject fields may pose problems even for those native speakers that are well-educated, because any given subject field is known to have its own specialist vocabulary. For the reasons stated above, some dictionaries often make use of such general labels as *technical* or *science,* usually without providing any specific information on particular subject fields.

33. What has come to be known as diafrequent information, refers to frequency, and it is a dimension which associates a word or any of its senses with their frequency of occurrence. *Less frequent* and *rare* are the most frequent labels found in dictionaries.

34. Diaevaluative information pertains to attitude, and it may be defined as a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a given attitude. The labels used in this context are *derogatory, offensive* as well as *humorous, ironic* and *euphemistic*.

35. Finally, there is dianormative information, which refers to normativity, and one may define this type of information as a dimension which associates a word or any of its senses with some departure from a linguistic standard established by a given language community. Typically, the labels used to denote a dianormative kind of information are *non-standard, substandard* as well as *disputed.* That is to say, the items marked with such labels tend to be considered as linguistically incorrect by the members of a given linguistic community.

The detailed typology worked out by Hausmann (1989) is by no means the only one. Much along the same lines is the division proposed 20 years later by Svensén (2009, p. 326-331) where we find:

1) diachronic marking involves archaisms and neologisms (*archaic*, *old-use*),
2) diatopic marking refers to geographical dimension,
3) diaintegrative marking concerns dimension (*native* vs. *foreign*),
4) distratic marking covers all kinds of markings that have to do with style (*spoken*, *written*, *formal*, *slang*),
5) diatechnical marking pertains to technolects or subject field (*medical*, *law*),
6) diafreqential marking involves frequency of occurrence (*often*),
7) diaevaluative marking is related to speaker's attitude or mood (*derogatory*, *humorous*, *ironic*),
8) dianormative marking refers to these words and expressions which acceptability is questioned as regards linguistic correctness (*substandard*).

As could be seen, the classificatory systems that have been proposed in the literature differ both with respect to their scope and the number of typological categories that are distinguished. Yet, one may say that all the classifications that have been sketched jointly provide evidence that is welcome, if not downright indispensible to classify both restrictions and constraints that should be incorporated within the structure of lexicographic works.

Labels in *EFL dictionaries*: the state of the art

It seems reasonable to continue our discussion by taking a closer look at each of the *EFL* dictionaries individually, in order to find out how practicing lexicographers classify usage labels. To start with *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary* (2009) (henceforth: *CCAD*), its usage information may be sampled in the following manner:

Style Labels

BUSINESS:	Used mainly when talking about the field of business, e.g. **annuity**
COMPUTING:	Used mainly when talking about the field of computing, e.g. **chat room**
DIALECT:	Used in some dialects of English, e.g. **ain't**
FORMAL:	Used mainly in official situations, or by political and business organizations, or when speaking or writing to people in authority, e.g. **gratuity**
HUMOROUS:	Used mainly to indicate that a word or expression is used in a humorous way, e.g. **gents**
INFORMAL:	Used mainly in informal situations, conversations, and personal letters, e.g. **pep talk**
JOURNALISM:	Used mainly in journalism, e.g. **glass ceiling**
LEGAL:	Used mainly in legal documents, in law courts, and by the police in official situations, e.g. **manslaughter**
LITERARY:	Used mainly in novels, poetry, and other forms of literature, e.g. **plaintive**
MEDICAL:	Used mainly in medical texts, and by doctors in official situations, e.g. **psychosis**
MILITARY:	Used mainly when talking or writing about military terms, e.g. **armour**
OFFENSIVE:	Likely to offend people, or to insult them; words labelled OFFENSIVE should therefore be avoided, e.g. **cripple**
OLD-FASHIONED:	Generally considered to be old-fashioned, and no-longer in common use, e.g. **dashing**
RUDE:	Used mainly to describe words which could be considered taboo by some people; words labelled RUDE should therefore usually be avoided, e.g. **bloody**
SPOKEN:	Used mainly in speech rather than in writing, e.g. **pardon**

TECHNICAL:	Used mainly when talking or writing about objects, events, or processes in a specialist subject, such as business, science, or music, e.g. **biotechnology**
TRADEMARK:	Used to show designated trademark, e.g. **hoover**
VERY OFFENSIVE:	Highly likely to offend people, or to insult them; words labelled VERY OFFENSIVE should be avoided, e.g. **wog**
VERY RUDE:	Used mainly to describe words which most people consider taboo, words labelled VERY RUDE should be avoided, e.g. **fuck**
WRITTEN:	Used mainly in writing rather than in speech, e.g. **avail**

When we move further to the relevant features provided in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2014; henceforth: *LDCE*), we see that its treatment of usage guidance is merely restricted to the inside front cover within the space given, and the labels that are distinguished are grouped in the following way:

LABELS

1. Words which are used only or mainly in one region or country are marked:

BrE   British English
AmE   American English
AusE   Australian English

2. Words which are used in a particular situation, or show a particular attitude:

approving	a word that is used to praise things or people, although this may not be clear from its meaning
disapproving	a word that is used to show dislike or approval, although this may not be clear from its meaning
formal	a word that is suitable for formal speech or writing, but would not normally be used in ordinary conversation
informal	a word or phrase that is used in normal conversation, but may not be suitable for use in more formal contexts, for example in writing essays or business letters
humorous	a word that is normally used in a joking way

3. Words which are used in a particular context or type of language:

biblical	a word that is used in the language of the Bible, and would sound old-fashioned to a modern speaker
Law	a word with a technical meaning used by lawyers in legal documents etc

literary	a word used mainly in English literature, and not in normal speech or writing
medical	a word or phrase that is more likely to be used by doctors that by ordinary people, and that often has a more common equivalent
not polite	a word or phrase that is considered rude, and that might offend some people
old-fashioned	a word that was commonly used in the past, but would sound old-fashioned today
old use	word used in earlier centuries
spoken	a word or phrase used only, or nearly always, in conversation
taboo	a word that should not be used because it is very rude or offensive
technical	a word used by doctors, scientists and another specialists
trademark	a word that is the official name of a particular product
written	a word or phrase that is used only, or nearly always, in written English

When we turn to the information section contained in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2014; henceforth: *OALD*) that is located on the inside cover we find out that the editors provide a list of labels that have been employed as guidance marks, and it is there that we find the following explanation: "The following labels are used with words that express a particular attitude or are appropriate in a particular situation*":*

approving	expressions show that you feel approval or admiration, for example *feisty, petite.*
disapproving	expressions show that you feel disapproval or contempt, for example *blinkered, newfangled.*
figurative	language is used in a non-literal or metaphorical way, as in *He didn't want to cast a shadow on* (=spoil) *their happiness*.
formal	expressions are usually only used in serious or official language and would not be appropriate in normal everyday conversation. Examples are *admonish, besmirch*.
humorous	expressions are intended to be funny, for example *ankle-biter, lurgy*
informal	expressions are used between friends or in a relaxed or unofficial situation. They are not appropriate for formal situations. Examples are *bonkers, dodgy*
Ironic	language uses words to mean the opposite of the meaning that they seem to have, as in *You're a great help, I must say!* (= no help at all).

literary	language is used mainly in literature and imaginative writing, for example *aflame, halcyon.*
offensive	expressions are used by some people to address or refer to people in a way that is very insulting, especially in connection with their race, religion, sex or disabilities, for example *half-caste, slut*. You should not use these words.
Slang	is very informal language, sometimes restricted to a particular group of people, for example people of the same age or those who have the same interests or do the same job. Examples are *dingbat, dosh.*
Taboo	expressions are likely to be thought by many people to be obscene or shocking. You should not use them. Examples are *bloody, shit.*
technical	language is used by people who specialize in particular subject areas, for example *accretion, adipose.*

The following labels show other restrictions on the use of words:

dialect	describes expressions that are mainly used in particular regions of the British Isles, not including Ireland, Scotland or Wales, for example beck, nowt.
old-fashioned	expressions are passing out of current use, for example *balderdash, beanfeast*
old use	describes expressions that are no longer in current use, for example **ere, perchance**.
saying	describes a well-known fixed or traditional phrase, such as a proverb, that is used to make a comment, give advice, etc., for example *actions speak louder than words*.
™	shows a trademark of a manufacturing company, for example *Band-Aid, Frisbee.*

In case of *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2008; henceforth: *CALD*), the front page explanation of usage labels employed in the case of this dictionary acquires the following shape:

Style and usage labels used in the dictionary:

ABBREVIATION	a shortened form of a word
APPROVING	praising someone or something
AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH	
CANADIAN ENGLISH	
CHILD'S WORD/EXPRESSION	used by children

DATED	used in a recent past and often still used by older people
DISAPPROVING	used to expressed dislike or disagreement with someone or something
EAST AFRICAN ENGLISH	
FEMALE	
FIGURATIVE	used to express not the basic meaning of a word, but an imaginative one
FORMAL	used in serious or official language or when trying to impress other people
HUMOROUS	used when you are trying to be funny
INFORMAL	used in ordinary speech (and writing) and not suitable for formal situations
IRISH ENGLISH	
LEGAL	specialized language used in legal documents and law courts
LITERARY	formal and descriptive language used in literature
MALE	
NORTHERN ENGLISH	used in the North of England
NON STANDARD	commonly used but not following the rules of grammar
OFFENSIVE	very rude and likely to offend people
OLD-FASHIONED	not used in modern English – you might find these words in books, used by older people, or used in order to be funny
OLD USE	used a long time ago in other centuries
POLITE WORD/EXPRESSION	a polite way of referring to something that has other rude names
SAYING	a common phrase or sentence that gives advice, an opinion, etc.
SCOTISH ENGLISH	
SLANG	extremely informal language, used mainly by a particular group, especially young people
SPECIALIZED	used only by people in a particular subject such as doctors or scientists
TRADEMARK	the official name of a product
UK	British English
US	American English

WRITTEN ABBREVIATION	a shortened form of a word used in writing
E	Essential: the most common and useful words in English
I	Improver: the next level of words to learn to improve your English
A	Advanced: words to make your English really fluent and natural

Finally, as to the labelling system devised by the editors of *Macmillan English Dictionary* (2007; henceforth: *MED*), there are the following labelling conventions:

formal	in current use but not used in ordinary conversation or in normal everyday writing: *aegis, remonstrate, remuneration, accede, perpetrate*
humorous	used in an ironic and often friendly way; *ill-gotten, gains, rascal* (used to a child). Some humorous words are more disapproving than they seem, for example: ladies who lunch
impolite	not taboo but will certainly offend some people
informal	more common in speech than in writing and not used on a formal occasion: *guy, bloke, gobroke, gutsy, crackup, cop*
literary	old but still used in some kinds of creative writing: *behold, jocund, perfidious*
offensive	extremely rude and likely to cause offence
old-fashioned	no longer in current use but still used by some older people: *A-!* (=very good), *gramophone* (=record player)
showing approval	used when it is not obvious from a definition that a word says something good about someone or something: *fearless, tireless*
showing disapproval	used when it is not obvious from a definition that a word says something bad about someone or something: *babyish, smooth* (=relaxed and confident)
spoken	used in speech rather than writing: *believe it or not, after you, I bet*
very formal	not very common. People who use them often seem to be trying to be more intelligent and important than they really are: *ameliorate, asperity, abjure*

very informal	used only in very informal situations and mainly among people who know each other well. Some dictionaries use the label *slang: go ape, journo*
[modal verb]	that are used with another verb to express ideas such as possibility, permission, or intention: *She **might** come. He **can** go now. I **will** ask him to call you.*

As stressed in the foregoing, both style and usage labels are aimed to provide dictionary users with restrictions on the particular word usage. Yet, it is fairly obvious that the main problem involved here is that we find different labels in different *EFL* dictionaries; fair enough all of the *EFL* dictionaries under scrutiny seem to propose different – both quantitatively and quantitatively – sets of labelling systems, and – what is more – they tend to employ them differently in the dictionary macrostructure. The most extended list of labels used is to be found in *CALD* (2008), where altogether 34 labels are provided. The dictionary distinguishes the following categories of labels: *abbreviation, approving, Australian English, Canadian English, child's word/expression, dated, disapproving, East African English, female, figurative, formal, humorous, informal, Irish English, legal, literary, male, Northern English, non standard, offensive, old- fashioned, old use, polite word/expression, saying, Scottish English, slang, specialized, trademark, UK, US, written abbreviation, E, I, A*. Much shorter lists of labels are proposed by the editors of *CCAD* (2009) and *LDCE* (2014), because only 20 different labels in either of them are employed. To be more specific, *CCAD* (2009) divides the body of labels into the following marking units: *business, computing`, dialect, formal, humorous, informal, journalism, legal, literary, medical, military, offensive, old-fashioned, rude, spoken, technical, trademark, very offensive, very rude, written*. In turn, *LDCE* (2014) proposes the following set of labelling categories: *BrE, AmE, AusE, approving, disapproving, formal, informal, humorous, biblical, law, literary, medical, not polite, old-fashioned, old use, spoken, taboo, technical, trademark, written*. In case of *OALD* (2014) we find 17 different markings, and the array of labels put to use there includes the following ones: *approving, disapproving, figurative, formal, humorous, informal, ironic, literary, offensive, slang, specialist, taboo, dialect, old-fashioned, old use, saying, TM*. Interestingly, the shortest list (13 in all) is identified in *MED* (2007), and the marking system includes such labels as: *formal, humorous, impolite, informal, literary, offensive, old-fashioned, showing approval, showing disapproval, spoken, very formal, very informal, [modal verb].*

As to the mode of presentation, only *OALD* (2014) and *LDCE* (2014) group labels in categories. In case of the first one, we have:

36. labels used with words that express a particular attitude or appropriate in a particular situation,

37.   labels that show other restrictions on the use of words.

When we turn to *LDCE* (2014), we find the following:
38. words which are used only or mainly in one region or country,
39. words which are used in a particular situation, or show a particular attitude,
40. words which are used in a particular context or type of language.

The dictionary analysis that has been carried out reveals that in case of the majority of *EFL* dictionaries we encounter major variation in the way the guiding labels are introduced and presented to the users. In general, the editors of *LDCE* (2014) apparently prefer the acronimised forms for dialect words, such as: *BrE, AmE, AusE*., while in case of *CALD* (2008) we find the following versions of acronimised labels: *UK, US.* At the same time, there are one-letter acronyms, such as *essential* (*E*), *improver* (*I*), *advanced* (*A*). Moreover, substantial differences can also be noticed in the way the same information is codified. There are a number of labels that apparently mean the same, but acquire different labelling conventions. For example, we find the label *dated* in *CALD* (2008), while in *CCAD* (2009), *LDCE* (2014), *OALD* (2014), *MED* (2007) there is the label *old-fashioned* provided to encode exactly the same information. What is more, one is tempted to ask: What is the difference between *old-fashioned* and *old-use*. This is because both labels are given by the editors of *LDCE* (2014), yet – regrettably – there is explanation that might clarify the difference, if any.

Similar questions and queries may be formulated for other labelling conventions employed in various *EFL* dictionaries. And so, for instance, a certain discrepancy is found in case of *not-polite* that is put to use in *CCAD* (2009), *OALD* (2014), *MED* (2007), *CALD* (2008), *LDCE* (2014), and the label *offensive* employed by the editors of *CALD* (2008), *MED* (2007), *OALD* (2014), *CCAD* (2009), where – in fact – the label *very offensive* is provided, while the editors of *CCAD* (2009) have opted for *rude.* Less doubt goes with the label *disapproving* that is used in *LDCE* (2014), *OALD* (2014), *CALD* (2008).

Likewise, we observe certain inconsistencies that are related to the way the parameter of formality/informality is grasped and codified. In most general terms, the labels within the group are arranged according to the descending scale formal>informal>slang>taboo. As far as handling of register is concerned, the bulk of lexicographic works that have been examined is by no means free of variation and inconsistencies either. While the authors of *CALD* (2008) use: *specialized/ legal/ literary* labels, in *LDCE* (2014) we find such markings as: *technical/ medical/ literary/ law/ biblical*. In turn, *CCAD* (2009) provides the following labels: *business/computing, journalism, legal, literacy, medical, military,*

technical, while *OALD* (2014) employs only two register-specific labels, namely: *literary* and *specialist*.

Another general observation is that the information content of various labels is rarely treated with equal attention by the editors of *EFL* dictionaries: we notice that while some of them are almost universally included in the structure of the dictionaries others tend to be routinely ignored. And so, for example, it is noticeable that practicing lexicographers differ in their opinions concerning the importance of including and marking dialect words. In *MED* (2007), the regional dialects are not distinguished at all. At the same time, there is the label *dialect* given in *OALD* (2014) and *CCAD* (2009). In case of *LDCE* (2014), there are the following labels related to the dialect category: *BrE, AmE, AusE*, while in *CALD* (2008) we find: *Australian English, Canadian English, East African English, Northern English, Scottish English*.

At the same time, some of the labels are singular in the sense that they are employed only on individual occasions by one (or some) and not all (or many) other dictionary editors. In this context let us point to *MED* (2007) which provides 3 labels that occur in no other dictionary, and these are: *showing approval, showing disapproval, modal verb*. Simultaneously, these labels appear with certain modifications as *approving* and *disapproving* in case of *CALD* (2008), *LDCE* (2014), *OALD* (2014). The label *modal verb* appears in none of the dictionaries, except *MED* (2007). The label *very informal* used within the body of the dictionary, expresses intensification, and – although it is apparently close in meaning to the label *slang* – the latter is not used. Another label used only in case of one dictionary is *written* in *LDCE* (2014), explained as "used mainly in writing rather than in speech. When compared to formal used mainly in official situations, or by political or business organisations, or when speaking or writing to people in authority" (see *LDCE* 2014), one gets the impression that these two explain very much the same. Another observation worthy of comment is the fact that the system of labels worked out for *MED* (2007) is by no means detailed and all-embracing. In particular, it is striking to see that there is no special group of labels denoting different registers.

The survey of the labels that has been carried out in the foregoing shows that one may hardly speak of any consistency of either the system itself, or the usage of labelling systems in the dictionaries of current English. Let us now, for the sake of illustration, take a closer look at the sample of informal words and the labelling values attached to them within the body of the dictionaries under scrutiny.

Tab 1: Informal value markings of selected words in *EFL* dictionaries.

lexical item	*LDCE*	*MED*	*CCAD*	*OALD*	*CALD*
mate	+	+	+	+	+
quid	+	+	+	+	+
hooker	+	+	+	+	+
dude	+	+	+	+	+
shit	+	+	+	+	+
bloody	-	+	+	+	+
freak	+	+	+	+	+
moron	+	+	+	+	+

Tab 2: Usage labels provided for the informal words in *EFL* dictionaries.

lexical item	*LDCE*	*MED*	*CCAD*	*OALD*	*CALD*
mate	informal	informal	informal	informal	informal
quid	informal	informal	informal	informal	informal
hooker	informal	informal	informal	informal	informal
dude	informal	informal	informal	slang	slang
shit	not polite	impolite	informal	taboo/slang	offensive
bloody	-	impolite	rude	taboo/slang	very informal
freak	informal	informal	informal	informal	informal
moron	informal	informal	offensive	informal	informal

As may be noticed, the usage labels given in various dictionaries differ substantially with respect to the very system employed by individual lexicographic editorial teams. Consequently, it seems reasonable to clarify the usage labelling practices in case of each work of reference, as well as group the usage labels and their explanations.

Ways of optimization: In search of a unified labelling scheme

What we have already stressed many a time is that we have a strong conviction that the information labels should be included in the structure of current dictionaries, but in their present form they appear, and – in actual practice – turn out to be less useful as they are supposed, meant and expected to be. In general, the reasons of this state of affairs are varied and many. To start with, all dictionaries have their own criteria for marking words or word senses, which consequently causes problems related to accurate labelling policy. As indicated by Stain (2002, p. 14) "it is admittedly very difficult to make objective assessment on the social status of the word but it seems […] that we need much more research in this area". Also, Leech and Nessi (1999, p. 259) admit that dictionaries "fall well short of perfection". Attempts to improve usage labelling devices in *EFL* dictionaries have been given much stimulus from the work of Atkins & Rundell (2008, p. 496) who admit openly that "labelling is an area of lexicography where there is more work to be done".

When we turn to the question of how lexicographers determine usage labelling, we see that practicing lexicographers consistently acknowledge the difficulty of labelling words. Ptaszyński (2010, p. 411) clarifies that "lexicographers have been searching in vain for an exhaustive and precise answer to the questions of which words to label in what kind of dictionaries and how to do it". As shown in the previous section, and emphasised by the same scholar, these difficulties "stem from the lack of firm theoretical basis for the application of diasystematic information in dictionaries" (Ptaszyński, 2010, p. 411). Certainly, it could be argued that the virtual non-existence of commonly agreed on criteria for usage labelling is dependent only on formal theoretical framework or rather functional approach, as suggested by practicing lexicographers.

As we have seen, some of the labels that are proposed in current *EFL* dictionaries overlap, and consequently labels that may be considered synonymous are assigned to unconnected words. The actual length of labels should be limited to one word (as the abbreviations and longer usage notes are rather cryptic). First of all, it is plausible to develop and propose a new systematized and unified schedule of usage labels that could be successfully employed in the structure of the existing *EFL* dictionaries. We find it justified to single out the following main categories according to which labels could be grouped as follows:

41. attitiudinal,
42. style,
43. field,

44. regional,
45. axiological

It should be noted that, as a consequence of the lack of clear distinction between the parameter of style and register, an attempt to account for this shortcoming has been made, and it is the category termed field that serves the purpose. What is more, in order to formalize the evaluative colouring with which various lexical items are charged, we propose the label termed axiological.

The proposal made here should be treated as a voice in the lexicographic discussion rather than an attempt to provide a final all-solving key in the infinitude of the theoretical and practical lexicographic ventures currently studied. Yet, what we hope to have made abundantly clear is that the diversity of English vocabulary can hardly be approached, and should by no means be approached, from the simplistic perspective of its correct/incorrect usage solely. Consequently, as a follow-up to this proposal, one may expect that some universal labelling system be formulated one day.

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