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The Treatment of Ideological Polysemy in Monolingual Afrikaans Dictionaries

Abstract

Afrikaans dictionaries have often been criticised for their biased treatment of ideologically loaded lemmas and senses. It is argued that in order to redress imbalances lexicographical strategies should be devised to delimit the ideologically distinct senses of a lexical item. On the basis of specific articulations in the meanings of political–ideological lexical items a typology of semantic categories is proposed; each represented by a schema for a prototypical member. The schemas are applied to selected entries in the unabridged Afrikaans dictionary *WAT*, demonstrating their heuristic value.

1. Introduction

One of the most important prerequisites for Afrikaans in a post–apartheid South Africa is a commitment towards eradicating discrimination (Webb 1992:20). According to Webb (1989:129) linguistics, as a social science, has an important part to play in attaining this goal. Language planners, linguists and applied linguists must become actively involved in devising remedial models, tailored for specific subdomains such as lexicography.

With regard to the role of dictionaries in removing discrimination, two different views have emerged. According to the first, dictionaries are comparable to archaeological sites waiting to be excavated, but instead of “unearthing bones or artefacts” the lexicographer has to “uncover the refuse of discarded social attitudes” (Landau 1985:268). This view is more or less consistent with the primary goal of most standard descriptive dictionaries, namely to give a comprehensive synchronic description of the lexical items of a particular language, based on usage records.

Adherents of the alternative (stronger) view maintain that the task of the dictionary not only is to reflect social and ideological change but also to act as a progressive influence in furthering these changes (Landau 1985:269). This essentially Whorfian view presupposes prescriptiveness with regard to the treatment of ideology in standard descriptive dictionaries. It also presupposes that the lexicographical treatment of ideologically loaded lexical items will have a direct influence on the user’s perceptions of the world, the conceptualisation of categories in that world and how the user will act in future (Webb 1989:132).

In this paper an essentially descriptive approach is followed, however slightly modified by a weak interpretation of determinism (Whorfianism).

The task and goal of a standard descriptive dictionary is therefore seen as *an objective description of the lexicon, allowing for affirmative lexicography where it is motivated by clear and systematic usage trends.*

2. Meaning variation in the political lexicon

2.1 A cognitive perspective

Based on the cognitive theory of Lakoff (1987) it can be asserted that ideology not only becomes part of the meanings of lexical items (see Hughes 1988:205) but is also compounded into mental structures. Chunks of ideology become part of idealised cognitive models (ICM's) which, according to Lakoff, structure the way we think and act. It could therefore be predicted that speakers of different ideological groups will develop different ICM's against which they interpret specific political-ideological lexical items. Left-wingers and right-wingers will for instance have slightly different ICM's for the lexical item *demokrasie* (democracy). This difference is explicated by Schema 1 below.

With regard to morphological complexes used in the political domain it can be illustrated how the notion of ICM's links up with the notions of compositionality and motivation. Afrikaans words like *bevrydingstaal* (language of liberation) and *onderdrukkerstaal* (language of the oppressor) are for instance not only motivated by their compositional meanings, but also by the ICM IDEOLOGY OF THE STRUGGLE (according to which the powerless and penurious have the legitimate power to free themselves from an illegitimate regime which has used Afrikaans as an instrument of group and class segregation).

2.2 Polysemy and variable use

Strauss (1986) distinguishes between polysemic senses and subsenses/uses of a lexical item. According to him (1986:68–78) a lexical item is **polysemic** when:

- it is used variably in different subsystems of a particular language. In everyday speech the lexical item *poot* means “paw; leg”, but in slang it means “white policeman”;
- it has different distributive (syntactic) functions. *Konserwatief* (conservative) may for instance be used either as an adjective or a noun;
- it may be applied to different semantic dimensions (object classes). The lexical item *boer* may on the one hand refer to a specific **occupational group** (farmers), and on the other hand to a specific **population group** (white Afrikaners).

Variable uses occur when different connotations are assigned to a lexical item by different ideological groups, or when a lexical item bears evidence of a speaker's association with a specific ideological group. The term 'ideological polysemy', coined by Dieckmann (1969), will be used to refer to this type of meaning variation.

2.3 Dimensions of ideological polysemy

2.3.1 Peripheral descriptive meaning and evaluation (intention)

In cognitive semantics it is generally accepted that some features of a lexical item are more salient than others and that these features constitute the prototypical meaning of the lexical item. There are however optional or variable features which may be attached to the core meaning in variable contexts. To the essential features of a lexical item I shall refer as its 'central descriptive meaning' and to the variable features as 'peripheral descriptive values'.

Ideological polysemy only concerns peripheral descriptive variation (radical differences imply lexical polysemy) and may be illustrated by the following example: The adjective *konserwatief* (conservative) in Afrikaans has two distinct polysemic senses, namely (1) "Opposed to change"; and (2) "Cautious, avoiding extremes". (1) displays two additional modulations in Afrikaans: right-wing Afrikaners interpret it as: (1a) "Opposed to *radical* political change; *value-preserving*; *convention-loving*", while moderate and left-wing Afrikaners interpret it as (1b) "*Narrow-mindedly* opposed to political change; *bigoted*, *reactionary*" (author's italics, indicating the variable peripheral values).

Evaluations (positive as well as negative) and peripheral descriptive values are closely connected. The peripheral descriptive values of a lexical item usually determine whether a positive or a negative evaluation is associated with a specific subsense. Evaluative meaning and peripheral descriptive meaning may therefore be treated as one phenomenon, namely as connotation. Connotation and central descriptive meaning may on their part be subsumed under the umbrella term 'intention'.

Hermanns (1982:91) terms political-ideological lexical items with meliorative connotations, used by members of a specific ideological group for self-reference, "Fahnenwörter". For the purpose of this paper Fahnenwörter is translated as "insignia". In Afrikaans terms like (*die*) *struggle* and (*die*) *regime* (the [discredited] ruling party) are used as insignia of leftist groups, whereas (*die*) *volk* (the nation), and (*die*) *leier* (the leader) are used as insignia of the right. The same author terms political-ideological lexical items with pejorative connotations, usually applied to denigrate an opposing ideological group, "Stigmawörter". Examples of stigma words used by Afrikaans speaking leftists are *regime* (regime), *Fascis* (Fascist) and *kapitalis* (capitalist); and examples of stigma words used by Afrikaans

speaking rightists are *terroris* (terrorist), *kommunis* (communist) and *volksvreemde* (stranger to the nation).

2.3.2 Denotation and group focus (extention)

In Strauss's terminology (1986:72) 'extention' pertains to the class of objects or entities denoted by a specific word. 'Extentionalisation' is the formation of schemas on which speakers base their associations between the real world and a particular lexical item, and includes the denotation of the lexical item as well as the applicable ideological group/norm. 'Denotation' is taken here to refer to individual members of a specific object class. 'Group focus' on the other hand refers to the direction of reference: If a lexical item is used for the group the speaker belongs to 'in-group focus' is displayed and if it is used to denote an oppositional group or its activities 'out-group focus' is displayed. *Demokrasie* (democracy) for instance displays only in-group focus, whereas *aggressie* (aggression) is only used in an out-group application (see Murphy 1991).

3. A typology of usage variation for Afrikaans

In the following paragraphs political-ideological meaning variation in Afrikaans is described against the background of intention and extention as expounded above. A typology consisting of five categories is proposed and each category is represented by a semantic schema for a prototypical member of that category.

The idea of a typology originated in the work of Strauss (1986), but has for the purpose of this paper been adapted to fit the political-ideological lexicon of Afrikaans as well as the background assumptions already stated. The most important adaptations of Strauss's proposal consist in simplifying the typology, systematising category labels in order to present a coherent nomenclature, and revealing correlations between intentional and extentional usage values (for instance that positive intentional values correlate with in-group use and negative intentional values correlate with out-group use).

GROUP I: Bilateral insignnia

Prototypes: *demokrasie* (democracy), *legitiem* (legitimate),
vryheidsvegter (freedom fighter), *struggle*

Schema 1: *demokrasie* (concrete sense)

	A	B
Central descriptive meaning	Country or state in which a democratic form of government is realised	Country or state in which a democratic form of government is realised
Peripheral descriptive meaning	within a parliamentary system	within a socialistic system
Evaluation	Positive	Positive
Denotation	Concrete systems such as the USA, Great Britain, France	Concrete systems such as the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden
Group focus	In-group focus	In-group focus

GROUP II: Bilateral stigma words

Prototypes: *aggressie* (aggression), *militarisme* (militarism), *geheime agenda* (hidden agenda), *ekstremisme* (extremism), *revolusionêr* (revolutionary)

Schema 2: *aggressie*

	A	B
Central descriptive meaning	Unprovoked political or military attack of one country against another, often with the intention to gain power	Unprovoked political or military attack of one country against another, often with the intention to gain power
Peripheral descriptive meaning	within a parliamentary system	within a socialistic system
Evaluation	Negative	Negative
Denotation	Action of the National Party government in South Africa, e.g. the SA Army's invasion of Angola during the seventies and eighties	Action of anti-apartheid fighters in Southern Africa, e.g. the Cuban invasion of Namibia during the seventies and eighties
Group focus	Out-group focus	Out-group focus

GROUP III: Unilateral insignia

Prototypes: (*die*) *mense* (the people), (*die*) *struggle* (the struggle), *kameraad* (comrade), (*die*) *leier* (the leader), (*die*) *volk* (the nation), *selfbeskikking* (self-determination)

Schema 3: *kameraad*

	A	B
Central descriptive meaning	Name, vocative or title used by a member of a communist or socialist group for referring to a fellow member	
Peripheral descriptive meaning		
Evaluation	Positive	
Denotation	Member of a specific political-ideological group	
Group focus	In-group focus	

Complete avoidance of a lexical item by a specific group (B in Schema 3) may be due to non-existence of the corresponding concept in the ideological domain of that group. It may also be ascribed to the fact that the insignia of one group are held in contempt by other groups. The lexical item *struggle* is for instance never used by right-wing Afrikaans speaking persons, firstly because white Afrikaners have not known a quest for political power between roughly 1950 and 1990, and secondly because the word *struggle* is closely associated with concepts such as COMMUNIST REVOLUTION and BLACK POLITICS. This category is, strictly spoken, not an example of ideological polysemy, but of ideological monosemy.

GROUP IV: Unilateral stigma words

Prototypes: (*die*) *regime* (the regime), *imperialisme* (imperialism), *Fascisme* (Fascism), *witvel* (white skin = white person), *verkramp* (bigoted)

Schema 4: *witvel*

	A	B
Central descriptive meaning	White South African	
Peripheral descriptive meaning	especially used as a racial slur	
Evaluation	Negative	
Denotation	Person of Caucasian origin	
Group focus	Out-group focus	

In this category the ideological group to which the lexical item refers, usually avoids usage in favour of a more neutral synonym. In midstream and right-wing politics the ideologically loaded lexical item *regime* is for instance avoided in favour of the neutral one, *regering* (government). This too is a case of monosemy rather than polysemy.

GROUP V: Lexical items used bilaterally with variable connotations and group focus

Prototypes: *Boer* (Boer), *kapitalisme* (capitalism) *sosialisme* (socialism), *liberalisme* (liberalism), *kommunisme* (communism)

Schema 5: *kommunisme* (abstract sense)

	A	B
Central descriptive meaning	Socio-political movement based on commonality of property and profit, advocating a classless society and dictatorship by the proletariat,	Socio-political movement based on commonality of property and profit, advocating a classless society and dictatorship by the proletariat,
Peripheral descriptive meaning	mainly in reaction to the capitalist system of private enterprise and the accumulation of wealth by the middle class	with strong anti-capitalist and revolutionary persuasions arising from Marxist-Leninist tenets
Evaluation	Positive	Negative
Denotation	Abstract entity	Abstract entity
Group focus	In-group focus	Out-group focus

4. The lexicographical treatment of ideological polysemy

4.1 Identifying semantic classes

As mentioned above, one of the lexicographer's most important tasks is to delimit the different polysemic distinctions and usage modulations within a lexical meaning. (Robins 1987:54). In order to provide semantic subdivisions on a principled basis, diagnostic support is needed and in this respect a typology of semantic schemas may be useful. Support for such an approach (with regard to semantic analysis as well as lexicographical application) is found in Moerdijk (1990) and Carstens (1992).

In the next section it will be demonstrated how semantic systematicity is captured by schemas, particularly with regard to peripheral descriptive meaning, evaluation, denotation and group focus.

4.2 Applying schemas

4.2.1 Connotations (peripheral descriptive meaning and evaluation)

Dictionaries often evade thorny ideological issues by presenting underspecified definitions, i.e. by ignoring peripheral meanings completely. Good (1987:7) rejects ideological neutrality in principle by saying that

“Middle of the road–definitions raise questions about whose road it is and who decides where the middle is”. (See also Murphy 1991:565; Winer 1991:70; Sands 1980–1981:44.) In my opinion however, “the strategy of the common denominator” must not be rejected altogether. Although larger dictionaries should accommodate ideological polysemy in all its dimensions, smaller ones are advised to utilise the restricted space they have by covering the central descriptive values, rather than providing biased definitions. Unfortunately biased definitions are a common phenomenon in Afrikaans dictionaries – even in the unabridged ones. The lemma **konserwatief** (sense 1) is for instance defined from only one perspective in *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (WAT)*. By presenting only the following synonyms a seal is put on the one–sidedness: *behoudend* (preserving [trusted] values), *behoud(en)sgesind* (conservation–minded), *behoudensliewend* (convention–loving). In an updated version the pejorative values need to be represented as well, by means of a separately defined subsense which include synonyms such as *reaksionêr* (reactionary) and *verkramp* (bigoted).

Pejorative and meliorative values may be suggested subtly by the wording of the definiens. While the adjective “free” usually suggests fairness it will assign a meliorative value to the noun it qualifies. This implicit way of conveying ideological meaning may be illustrated by the lemma **Demokratie 1a** in *Duden*. By incorporating the phrase “durch freie Wahlen” in the definiens, and the phrase “durch freie Meinungsäusserung” in the usage example, a favourable value is implicitly added. Care should however be taken not to define an ideological polysemic lexical item only in the loaded terms of one group. The definiens of **kommunisme** (sense 2) in *WAT* demonstrates this kind of bias in its use of words such as *revolusionêr* (revolutionary), *geweld* (violence), *opruïing* (instigation), *ondermyning* (undermining) and *nivellerings* (levelling).

Evaluations, especially pejorative values, can also be expressed explicitly, by for instance adding labels such as *neerhalend* (derogatory) or *verkleinerend* (disparaging). Many dictionaries do indeed make use of such labels. *Duden*, for instance, presents the label *abwertend* (disparaging) in the articles of **Bolschewik 3.** and **Fascismus 2.** It is however interesting to note that most lexicographers refrain from commenting explicitly on positively valued lexical items/senses. This may be due to the fact that melioratively used lexical items do not normally facilitate discrimination, whereas pejoratively used lexical items frequently do.

In order to assure ideological balance, lexicographers should also take care that contextual examples confirm (and not contradict) the peripheral and emotive values expressed by means of the definiens and the labels.

4.2.2 Extention (denotation and group focus)

Afrikaans dictionaries generally lack reference to the ideological domain within which a lemma occur. However, in some cases ideological frames are

implicated through reference to oppositional concepts in the definiens or in the usage material. In *WAT* the lemmas **Bolsjewisme** (Bolshevism) and **Fascisme** (Fascism) are defined by referring to oppositional ideologies. The definiens of **Bolsjewisme** contains *Kommunisme* (communism) as its superordinate, and **Fascisme 1** is defined by describing the oppositional ideologies against which Fascism acts (i.e. *liberalisme*, *Bolsjewisme* and *kommunisme*) as “radikale elemente” (radical elements).

Larger descriptive dictionaries should illustrate group focus in greater detail than their smaller counterparts, for instance by supplementing genus–differentia definitions with “e.g.” entries. These types of entries may be illuminating in the case of senses pertaining to the concrete realisation of political systems, for instance *demokrasie* (Schema 1). As in the case of intentional aspects group focus should be handled with sensitivity. Group focus expressed in citations and other examples should be consistent with the focus expressed in the definiens. *WAT* errs in its treatment of the lemma **kameraad** (comrade) by supplying two (out of three) citations illustrating the less prototypical out–group focus.

5. Conclusion

Revised editions of Afrikaans dictionaries are often the unfortunate results of purely macrostructure orientated activities – attempts to keep up with lexical expansion. Time and energy are therefore seldom reserved for updating entries **ideologically**. On the other hand dictionaries in progress often rely strongly on comparable dictionaries in sister languages for guidance on the treatment of related lexical items, such as the so called *-isms*.

These inadequate practices should be discarded and replaced by strategies based on linguistic research. Linguistic testing, however, only forms the basis of manuscript preparation. Theoretical constructs should continually be mirrored against actual usage.

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