

The Concept of "Pedagogical Dictionary" in Contemporary Lexicographic Theory: Definitions, Boundaries, and Taxonomies

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Abstract. The term 'pedagogical dictionary' is pervasive in the metalexigraphic literature yet conspicuously under-defined: scholars and practitioners use it to denote a heterogeneous range of reference works whose shared properties remain contested. This paper undertakes a systematic conceptual analysis of the term 'pedagogical dictionary' as it has been used in English-language lexicographic theory from 1942 to the present, with the aim of establishing principled definitional criteria, mapping the conceptual boundaries of the category, and proposing a multi-dimensional taxonomy for its internal classification. Through a critical review of 45 foundational metalexigraphic sources and a comparative terminological analysis across five scholarly traditions (British, American, European continental, Scandinavian, and Central Asian), we identify four defining criteria that together constitute a necessary and sufficient definition of the pedagogical dictionary as a lexicographic genre: (1) non-native user orientation, (2) pedagogically controlled metalanguage, (3) SLA-informed microstructural design, and (4) instructional or self-study deployment context. We further propose a four-dimensional taxonomy structured around language mode, user profile, medium, and lexical scope, and examine three contested boundary cases – the bilingualised dictionary, the subject-specific learner dictionary, and the AI-augmented digital dictionary – where the limits of the category are currently under negotiation. The proposed definitional and taxonomic framework offers a conceptual foundation for comparative metalexigraphic research and provides practical criteria for dictionary evaluation, design, and pedagogy.

Keywords: pedagogical dictionary; learner lexicography; metalexigraphic; lexicographic genre; dictionary taxonomy;

definitional criteria; bilingual dictionary; second language acquisition.

Introduction. Among the many categories that populate the landscape of lexicographic theory, the 'pedagogical dictionary' occupies a paradoxical position: it is at once the most practically consequential genre – consulted millions of times daily by language learners around the world – and one of the least rigorously defined in the scholarly literature. A survey of the major metalexicographic handbooks reveals that while all leading references acknowledge the category, none provides a fully explicit set of necessary and sufficient conditions for membership. Hausmann et al. (1989-1991), Hartmann (2001), Svensen (2009), and Fuertes-Olivera and Tarp (2014) each offer partial characterisations, but these coexist uneasily with one another and leave significant conceptual territory uncharted.

This conceptual imprecision is not merely an academic inconvenience. It has practical consequences for at least three domains: (a) dictionary evaluation and quality assessment, where the absence of agreed genre criteria makes comparative appraisal problematic; (b) curriculum-integrated lexicographic pedagogy, where teachers and materials designers require a principled basis for selecting and recommending dictionaries appropriate to specific learning contexts; and (c) computational lexicography and natural language processing, where the automated construction of learner-oriented lexical resources requires explicit formal criteria that distinguish pedagogical from non-pedagogical dictionary entries.

The present paper addresses this problem through a systematic conceptual analysis of the term 'pedagogical dictionary', drawing on a corpus of 45 metalexicographic sources spanning eight decades of scholarly discourse. The analysis proceeds through three stages: definitional reconstruction (what criteria have been proposed, explicitly or implicitly, for membership in this category?), boundary analysis (where does the category end, and what are the contested cases?), and taxonomic organisation (how can the internal diversity of pedagogical dictionaries be systematically

represented?). The overarching aim is to provide the field with a theoretically grounded, practically applicable conceptual framework.

Three research questions guide the study:

What definitional criteria, taken together, constitute a principled and adequate definition of the pedagogical dictionary as a lexicographic genre?

Where are the conceptual boundaries of this genre, and what cases are most productively understood as boundary phenomena?

What multi-dimensional taxonomy best captures the internal typological diversity of pedagogical dictionaries?

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical and historical background. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 reconstructs and evaluates proposed definitional criteria. Section 5 maps the conceptual boundaries of the category. Section 6 proposes a four-dimensional taxonomy. Section 7 discusses implications. Section 8 concludes.

Theoretical and Historical Background

The Emergence of Learner Lexicography as a Scholarly Field

Learner lexicography — the branch of lexicographic theory and practice concerned with the design, compilation, and evaluation of dictionaries for language learners — emerged as a distinct scholarly field in the latter half of the twentieth century, driven by the rapid expansion of communicative language teaching and the global growth of English as a foreign language (EFL) education (Cowie, 1999). The field's institutional consolidation can be traced to the founding of EURALEX (European Association for Lexicography) in 1983 and the subsequent establishment of a dedicated learner dictionary research community centred on publications such as the *International Journal of Lexicography* and the annual *Lexicographica* series.

The foundational text of the field is widely held to be A.S. Hornby's *Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary*, first published in Tokyo in 1942. Hornby's innovation lay not primarily in the dictionary's macrostructural organisation — its headword list was not markedly different from existing general-purpose dictionaries — but in the systematic encoding of grammatical information in a form intelligible to non-native users. The 'verb patterns' introduced by Hornby constituted an early instance of what later

metalexigraphers would term 'pedagogically controlled metalanguage': a systematic simplification and regularisation of linguistic description calibrated to the learning needs of a non-native audience.

Definitional Heterogeneity in the Literature

A systematic reading of the metalexigraphic literature reveals a striking degree of heterogeneity in the definitions and characterisations of the pedagogical dictionary on offer. This heterogeneity operates along at least three dimensions. First, different scholars emphasise different properties as definitionally central: Hartmann (1992) privileges the criterion of user adaptation; Tono (2001) foregrounds the SLA-theoretical grounding of entry design; Fuertes-Olivera (2018) emphasises the functional purposiveness of the work as a whole. Second, the terminological landscape itself is inconsistent: 'learner dictionary', 'pedagogical dictionary', 'educational dictionary', 'teaching dictionary', and 'school dictionary' are used near-interchangeably in some sources and distinguished carefully in others. Third, the scope of the category has expanded considerably over time as new dictionary types — bilingualised dictionaries, electronic learner dictionaries, subject-specific pedagogical glossaries — have emerged and demanded theoretical accommodation.

The Concept in Central Asian Metalexigraphic Discourse

Central Asian lexicographic traditions, including the substantial Uzbek-language metalexigraphic scholarship that has emerged since the 1990s, have engaged with the concept of the pedagogical dictionary (o'quv lug'ati) through a somewhat different conceptual lens than the dominant Anglo-American tradition. Uzbek metalexigraphic discourse tends to draw a sharper distinction between the izohli lug'at (explanatory or definitional dictionary, providing semantic explanations in the target language) and the o'quv lug'ati (pedagogical dictionary, oriented toward educational use in institutional settings), treating these as distinct genre categories rather than subspecies of a single type. This distinction reflects the specific institutional context of Uzbek language education, in which the boundaries between the dictionary as a reference tool and the dictionary as a curricular resource are more sharply drawn than in many Western educational traditions. The present study draws on this distinction as a productive conceptual resource and seeks to integrate it within a broader cross-linguistic definitional framework.

Methodology

Conceptual Analysis as Metalexigraphic Method

The present study employs conceptual analysis — a method drawn from analytic philosophy and applied in linguistics by Wierzbicka (1996) and others — as its primary research method. Conceptual analysis, as understood here, involves the systematic examination of how a concept (in this case, 'pedagogical dictionary') is delimited, defined, and distinguished from related concepts in a body of scholarly discourse, with the aim of identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for a principled definition. The method is appropriate for the present research question because the problem at hand is primarily conceptual (what does the term mean, and how should it be used?) rather than empirical (what are the measurable properties of dictionaries designated by this term?).

Source Corpus

A source corpus of 45 metalexigraphic texts was assembled for systematic review. Inclusion criteria were: (a) publication in a peer-reviewed journal or edited volume of recognised scholarly standing; (b) substantive engagement with the concept of the pedagogical or learner dictionary (defined as at least one sustained discussion of definitional criteria, genre properties, or taxonomic issues); (c) publication between 1942 and 2024. The corpus includes foundational monographs (Zgusta, 1971; Landau, 2001; Hartmann, 2001), handbook chapters (Rundell, 1998; Cowie, 1999; Tarp, 2008), journal articles (Bogaards, 1996; Lew & De Schryver, 2014; Fuertes-Olivera, 2018), and representative Uzbek-language metalexigraphic scholarship (Bozorov, 2004; Yo'ldoshev, 2012).

Analytical Procedure

Each source was subjected to close reading with attention to four analytical targets: (a) explicit or implicit definitional criteria proposed for the pedagogical dictionary; (b) genre boundaries drawn or implied; (c) taxonomic distinctions proposed within the category; and (d) contested or problematic cases identified. Data were systematically coded using a theoretically derived coding scheme and subjected to iterative refinement through constant comparison across sources.

Definitional Criteria: Toward a Principled Definition

The Four Proposed Criteria

The analysis of the source corpus yielded four criteria that recur, in varying explicit and implicit forms, across the range of definitional proposals surveyed. We argue that these four criteria, taken together, constitute a necessary and sufficient definition of the pedagogical dictionary as a lexicographic genre. Each criterion is discussed below.

Criterion 1: Non-Native User Orientation

The most consistently invoked criterion across the corpus is the orientation of the dictionary toward a non-native or L2 user rather than a native speaker or language specialist. This criterion reflects the foundational insight of Hornby and his successors that the reference needs of language learners differ systematically from those of native speakers: learners require more explicit grammatical information, simpler defining vocabulary, more numerous and contextually diverse illustrative examples, and more extensive pragmatic and cultural guidance than native-speaker users typically need or seek. Non-native user orientation thus functions as a design criterion that permeates every level of dictionary architecture, from macrostructural decisions about headword selection to the microstructural formulation of individual definitions.

Criterion 2: Pedagogically Controlled Metalanguage

A second consistently identified criterion is the use of controlled, pedagogically simplified metalanguage in definitions and other explanatory components. Pedagogically controlled metalanguage, as exemplified in the defining vocabularies of OALD (2,000-word defining vocabulary) and LDOCE (2,000 headwords for definitions), ensures that the explanatory apparatus of the dictionary does not presuppose a level of L2 proficiency that the target user may not yet possess. This criterion, emphasised particularly by West (1953) and elaborated by Nation (2001), distinguishes the pedagogical dictionary from the general-reference dictionary, in which definitions may freely use any word in the language.

Criterion 3: SLA-Informed Microstructural Design

The third criterion — more theoretically sophisticated and more recently prominent in the literature — is the grounding of microstructural design decisions in second language acquisition research. Tono (2001), drawing on research in vocabulary acquisition and dictionary use, argues that pedagogical dictionaries are distinguished from other reference works by the degree to which their microstructural choices (which components to include, in what order, in what format) are informed by empirical evidence about how learners process and acquire lexical information. This criterion encompasses, for example, the decision to include corpus-derived frequency information (reflecting SLA research on frequency effects in vocabulary learning), to provide detailed collocation information (reflecting research on phraseological competence), and to offer culturally annotated entries for pragmatically complex items (reflecting research on pragmatic transfer and intercultural communication).

Criterion 4: Instructional or Self-Study Deployment Context

The fourth and most contextual criterion concerns the intended deployment context of the dictionary: a pedagogical dictionary is designed for use in an instructional or self-study language-learning context, rather than for professional, literary, or general-reference purposes. This criterion, implicit in the work of Hartmann (1992) and made explicit by Tarp (2008) in his theory of 'lexicographic functions', distinguishes the pedagogical dictionary from technically advanced reference works that may share some structural features with learner dictionaries (e.g., controlled vocabulary, ample illustrative examples) but are oriented toward different user situations. The instructional deployment criterion also encompasses the growing category of curriculum-integrated dictionary resources — vocabulary learning apps, embedded glossary tools, adaptive digital learner dictionaries — whose functionality is explicitly tied to language-learning sequences.

Toward a Composite Definition

On the basis of the four criteria identified above, we propose the following composite definition of the pedagogical dictionary:

A pedagogical dictionary is a purpose-designed lexicographic reference work whose macrostructural and microstructural features are systematically oriented toward the needs of non-native users operating in instructional or self-study language-learning contexts, characterised by the use of pedagogically controlled metalanguage and an SLA-informed design rationale.

This definition is intended to be both theoretically principled and practically applicable. It specifies the genus (lexicographic reference work) and the four differentiating properties (non-native user orientation, pedagogically controlled metalanguage, SLA-informed design, instructional deployment context) that together constitute the definitional core of the category.

Chronological Evolution of the Concept

Table 1 presents a chronological overview of the evolution of the concept of the pedagogical dictionary in metalexigraphic discourse from the 1940s to the present, illustrating the gradual accretion of definitional criteria and the shifting emphases of successive scholarly generations.

Table 1. Chronological Evolution of the Concept of the Pedagogical Dictionary (1940s–2020s)

Period	Key Scholar(s)	Proposed Definition / Concept	Dominant Emphasis
1940s–1960s	Hornby (1942); West (1953)	A reference tool for non-native speakers of English providing grammatical and idiomatic information	Grammar & idioms
1970s–1980s	Zgusta (1971); Cowie (1981)	A dictionary whose defining vocabulary and microstructure are controlled and adapted for second-language learners	Defining vocabulary control
1990s	Hartmann (1992); Rundell (1998)	A purposefully designed artefact encoding usage-oriented lexical information accessible to non-native users	Usage & accessibility
2000s	Tono (2001); Nation (2001)	A pedagogical instrument mediating L2 vocabulary acquisition through structured metalinguistic information	SLA & vocabulary learning
2010s–2020s	Lew & De Schryver (2014); Fuertes-Olivera (2018)	A multimodal, user-adaptive digital artefact providing layered lexical and encyclopaedic information to support L2 competence development	Digital affordances & user adaptivity

Conceptual Boundaries: Where the Category Ends

The General-Reference Dictionary: A Clear Boundary

The boundary between the pedagogical dictionary and the general-reference dictionary is the most clearly delimited in the literature and the least contested in practice. The defining contrast rests on the first and second criteria established above: general-reference dictionaries are designed for native or highly proficient users (criterion 1) and

employ unrestricted metalanguage (criterion 2). Table 2 presents a systematic comparative analysis of the properties that distinguish these two categories, and further contrasts both with the specialised or technical dictionary.

Table 2. Comparative Boundary Analysis: Pedagogical, General-Reference, and Specialised Dictionaries

Criterion	Pedagogical Dictionary	General Reference Dictionary	Specialised / Technical Dictionary
Primary User	Non-native / L2 learner	Native / advanced user	Domain expert / professional
Defining Vocabulary	Controlled (2,000–3,000 words)	Unrestricted	Domain-specific terminology
Metalinguistic Load	High (usage notes, pragmatic guidance)	Low to moderate	Moderate (field-specific conventions)
Grammatical Information	Prominent and simplified	Minimal / implicit	Variable
Encyclopaedic Content	Selective (cultural notes, pragmatics)	Minimal or absent	Extensive (domain knowledge)
Design Orientation	Pedagogical / SLA-informed	Descriptive / normative	Functional / professional

Contested Boundary Cases

The Bilingualised Dictionary

The bilingualised dictionary — a hybrid form in which a monolingual learner dictionary is supplemented with L1 translation equivalents added to each entry — presents a theoretically interesting boundary case. Laufer and Hadar (1997) and Hartmann (2001) both argue that bilingualised dictionaries qualify as a subtype of the pedagogical dictionary, given that they satisfy all four defining criteria: non-native user orientation, controlled metalanguage (in the monolingual definition component), SLA-informed design, and instructional deployment. The addition of L1 equivalents does not violate any of these criteria; rather, it represents an additional microstructural feature serving the comprehension needs of beginning and intermediate learners. We concur with this view and

treat the bilingualised dictionary as a legitimate subtype of the pedagogical dictionary category.

The Subject-Specific Learner Dictionary

The subject-specific learner dictionary — illustrated by such works as the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2010) and the various learner-oriented LSP glossaries produced for academic English (EAP) contexts — presents a more nuanced boundary challenge. These works satisfy criteria 1, 3, and 4 (non-native user orientation, SLA-informed design, instructional deployment) but may not satisfy criterion 2 in the strict sense: their defining vocabulary is controlled not with respect to general L2 lexical frequency, but with respect to the technical vocabulary of a specific discipline. We propose that subject-specific learner dictionaries be treated as a boundary subtype of the pedagogical dictionary — members of the genus who partially satisfy the definitional criteria — and argue that the defining vocabulary criterion requires reformulation as 'metacognitive accessibility calibrated to the target user's proficiency level and domain knowledge'.

The AI-Augmented Digital Learner Dictionary

The most theoretically challenging contemporary boundary case is the AI-augmented digital learner dictionary: a category that has emerged rapidly with the development of large language model (LLM) technology and adaptive learning platforms. These tools generate customised lexical explanations, examples, and annotations in response to the specific proficiency level, L1 background, and learning history of individual users. On the one hand, such tools satisfy all four defining criteria at a high level of sophistication: their user orientation, metalinguistic control, SLA-informedness, and instructional deployment are not merely designed in but dynamically computed from individual user data. On the other hand, they challenge the traditional assumption that a dictionary is a stable, pre-compiled artefact: their content is generated dynamically and may lack the consistency and editorial quality control associated with traditional lexicographic products. We argue that AI-augmented digital learner tools should be treated as the most recent extension of the pedagogical dictionary genre, while acknowledging that their inclusion challenges several boundary assumptions that have hitherto been taken for granted in the field.

A Four-Dimensional Taxonomy of Pedagogical Dictionaries

Rationale for a Multi-Dimensional Approach

Existing taxonomies of pedagogical dictionaries have typically been organised around a single dimension — most commonly language mode (monolingual versus bilingual) or user level (beginner versus advanced). While these single-dimension taxonomies have practical utility, they fail to capture the full complexity of the contemporary pedagogical dictionary landscape, in which multiple dimensions of variation interact in ways that resist reduction to a single classificatory axis. The present study proposes a four-dimensional taxonomy structured around the dimensions of language mode, user profile, medium, and lexical scope.

The Taxonomy

Table 3 presents the full four-dimensional taxonomy, with representative exemplars for each cell.

Table 3. Four-Dimensional Taxonomy of Pedagogical Dictionaries

Dimension	Category	Sub-type	Exemplars
By Language Mode	Monolingual	—	OALD, COBUILD, LDOCE, Cambridge ALD
	Bilingual	—	Oxford EN-Uzbek, Barkamol, Langenscheidt DE-EN
	Bilingualised	—	LDOCE Bilingual editions, Cambridge bilingual
	Multilingual	—	Multilingual school glossaries, EU terminology tools
By User Profile	General learner	EFL / ESL	OALD, Macmillan ALD, Merriam-Webster ALD
		Heritage speaker	Heritage language pedagogical glossaries
	Subject-specific	LSP / EAP / ESP	Fuertes-Olivera LSP dict., Academic Word List tools
	Age-differentiated	Children / Young adult	Oxford Primary, Longman Children's
By Medium	Print	—	Traditional hardbound / paperback editions
	Electronic / Digital	CD-ROM / App / Web	OALD app, Vocabulary.com, Quizlet-integrated tools

	AI-augmented	Adaptive / Generative	LLM-assisted gloss generators, adaptive e-dict.
By Lexical Scope	General vocabulary	—	OALD, COBUILD, LDOCE
	Restricted vocabulary	Frequency-based	West's General Service List dictionaries
		Academic / Technical	Academic Word List resources, discipline glossaries

The four dimensions of the taxonomy are not independent: they cross-classify in productive ways that reveal the full range of pedagogical dictionary types. A bilingual, subject-specific, digital, restricted-vocabulary learner dictionary (e.g., an Uzbek-English academic vocabulary tool delivered via smartphone) occupies a distinct taxonomic cell from a monolingual, general-purpose, print, general-vocabulary learner dictionary (e.g., OALD). The taxonomy thus provides the conceptual infrastructure for systematic comparative research across this entire typological space.

Digital and AI-Augmented Types: Expanding the Taxonomy

The emergence of digital and AI-augmented pedagogical dictionaries requires careful taxonomic accommodation. Within the proposed framework, these works are classified along the medium dimension (Electronic / AI-augmented) and may occupy any position along the other three dimensions. This approach avoids the error of treating digital delivery as a genre-defining property in itself, while providing a principled location within the overall taxonomy for the full range of contemporary digital learner dictionary types. Future work may find it necessary to introduce additional dimensions — for example, an interactivity dimension distinguishing passive reference tools from active vocabulary learning platforms — as the digital landscape continues to evolve.

Discussion

Contributions to Metalexicographic Theory

The present study makes three principal contributions to metalexicographic theory. First, it provides the field with a composite definition of the pedagogical dictionary that is both principled (grounded in an explicit set of necessary and sufficient criteria) and historically situated (sensitive to the ways in which the concept has evolved over eight decades of scholarly discourse). This definition resolves several longstanding ambiguities in the literature and provides a stable conceptual foundation for future comparative research.

Second, the boundary analysis clarifies the category's limits and provides a framework for addressing the three contested boundary cases that currently pose the greatest challenge to the field: bilingualised dictionaries, subject-specific learner dictionaries, and AI-augmented digital tools. Third, the four-dimensional taxonomy provides a more comprehensive and flexible classificatory framework than existing single-dimension taxonomies, enabling systematic comparison across the full typological range of contemporary pedagogical dictionaries.

Implications for Lexicographic Practice

For dictionary publishers and compilers, the definitional and taxonomic framework proposed here offers a principled basis for quality assurance and design decisions. The four defining criteria — non-native user orientation, pedagogically controlled metalanguage, SLA-informed design, and instructional deployment — provide a checklist against which the pedagogical adequacy of dictionary entries can be assessed. For language teachers and curriculum designers, the taxonomy provides a vocabulary for discussing dictionary selection and recommending dictionary types appropriate to specific learning contexts, proficiency levels, and pedagogical goals. For researchers in SLA and vocabulary learning, the framework provides the categorical precision necessary for robust experimental designs comparing the effectiveness of different dictionary types.

Limitations

The present study is subject to several limitations. The source corpus, while extensive, is weighted toward English-language metalexigraphic scholarship; the integration of Central Asian and other non-Western metalexigraphic traditions, while attempted, is necessarily incomplete. The conceptual analysis method, by its nature, cannot determine how practicing lexicographers and dictionary users actually understand and apply these concepts; empirical research on practitioner and user understandings of the pedagogical dictionary category would be a valuable complement to the present theoretical analysis. Finally, the rapidly evolving digital landscape means that any taxonomy proposed at a specific moment in time will require ongoing revision as new dictionary types emerge.

Conclusion. This paper has undertaken a systematic conceptual analysis of the term 'pedagogical dictionary' as it has been used in metalexigraphic theory, with the aim of establishing principled definitional criteria, mapping the category's conceptual boundaries, and proposing a multi-dimensional taxonomy for its internal classification. The analysis has yielded a composite definition grounded in four necessary and sufficient criteria — non-

native user orientation, pedagogically controlled metalanguage, SLA-informed microstructural design, and instructional or self-study deployment context — and a four-dimensional taxonomy structured around language mode, user profile, medium, and lexical scope.

The study has also identified three contested boundary cases — bilingualised dictionaries, subject-specific learner dictionaries, and AI-augmented digital tools — that represent the most theoretically productive sites of definitional negotiation in contemporary learner lexicography. We have argued for the inclusion of all three within an appropriately flexible conception of the pedagogical dictionary genre, while acknowledging that their accommodation requires refinement of some criteria and expansion of the taxonomic framework.

The broader claim of the paper is that conceptual precision in metalexigraphic theory matters for practice: that clearer definitions, sharper boundary analyses, and more comprehensive taxonomies are not merely academic exercises but have direct consequences for dictionary design, curriculum integration, and empirical research on dictionary-mediated vocabulary learning. We hope that the framework proposed here will serve as a productive point of departure for continued theoretical and empirical work in this domain.

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