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Words, Worlds, and Usage: the Interplay Between Pragmatic Competence and Cultural Representation in Modern Dictionaries

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Abstract

This study investigates the dynamic relationship between pragmatic competence and cultural representation in modern dictionaries, examining how lexicographic practices capture not only the meanings of words but also the sociocultural norms embedded in their use. By analysing usage notes, example sentences, and contextual labels across contemporary dictionaries, the research explores how pragmatic nuances such as politeness strategies, speech acts, and register variation are encoded and communicated to users. The study argues that these pragmatic features serve as gateways to understanding cultural values, social hierarchies, and interpersonal expectations, positioning dictionaries as both linguistic tools and cultural artifacts. Through this lens, the paper highlights the evolving role of lexicographers in mediating between language description and cultural interpretation, ultimately demonstrating that modern dictionaries function as complex interfaces where words, worlds, and usage intersect.

Keywords: Pragmatic Competence; Cultural Representation; Contextual Meaning, Language, and Culture, Semanticpragmatic–Pragmatic Interface