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Essential Skills for a Lexicographer: Based on Pashto Lexicography

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

How Pashto dictionaries meet rules of modern lexicography? Lexicography is a division of linguistic working on recording and developing data of languages. Pashto is one of the languages which do not have many resources in lexicography. Most Afghan lexicographer using traditional methods for making dictionary which can not afford the user's needs. The paper aims encouraging lexicographer to follow modern lexicography methods and rules in Pashto. As well as, explains that lexicographers need to learn language and dictionary-making skills which help lexicographer in comprehensive dictionary. This study explores and compare key trends in both Afghan and international lexicographer practices. Furthermore, critically examines the current state of Pashto dictionaries; highlights significant methodological shortcomings, and proposes a set of well-structured recommendations to address the gaps. There are many problems in Pashto-Pashto (mono-lingual) dictionaries regarding data collection, grammar, explanations, definition. Therefore, the dictionaries do not meet users' needs due to missing the standards and rules of modern dictionaries and lexicography. Moreover, the study shown Pashto descriptive mono-lingual dictionaries does not follow modern rules of lexicography, digital tools and often no update. The article tells that lexicography is not just a technical job but an academic work that helps save and grow the language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lexicography is fundamental field in linguistics that supports language preservation, development and standardization. In the context of the Pashto language many dictionaries have been compiled over the years; however, most of them lack methodological foundations and do not adhere to modern lexicographic principles (Noorzai 2019).

These dictionaries are often word collections compiled without scientific structure or attention to users' linguistic needs, which limits their practical usefulness and academic value.

Despite the presence of numerous Pashto dictionaries, they largely fail to meet professional standards. This primarily because most lexicographers in this context are not adequately trained in the essential linguistic and methodological skills required for modern dictionary compilation. Moreover, existing research in Pashto lexicography has mostly focused on general frameworks applicable to all languages, rather than addressing the specific challenges in Pashto (Fazalhaq 2019). Dictionaries produced so far remain inconsistent incomplete and often confusing for users.

The absence of a systematic guide outlining the competencies a lexicographer must possess before starting a dictionary project. In response, this study aims to highlight and analyze the key linguistic and technical skills required for effective lexicographic work. The motivation for this research stems from the growing need for dictionaries that can serve as reliable resource for both academic and practical use in a rapidly evolving linguistic landscape (Svensen, 2009; Rundell & Atkins, 2008).

This article builds upon earlier theoretical discussions and introduces a practical, skills based framework tailored for Pashto lexicographers. It critically examines existing Pashto dictionaries, identifies their weaknesses, and offers a roadmap for compiling more accurate user centered and scientifically structured dictionaries. The study integrates knowledge from fields such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and digital lexicography thereby providing a multidisciplinary approach. The present study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Why have previous Pashto dictionaries failed to meet scientific and user-centered standards?
2. What practical guidelines can help Pashto lexicographers follow modern principle and user need?
3. Why are training, collaboration, and innovation essential in Pashto lexicography and how can they be promoted.

The objectives of this study are;

To analyze why previous Pashto dictionaries have failed to meet scientific and user-centered standards.

To propose a practical guide for lexicographers, that aligns with modern lexicographic principles and user expectations.

To raise awareness about the importance to training collaboration, and innovation in dictionary making.

This structure aims to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical lexicography and to pave the way for a standardized, scientific, and innovation-driven approach to Pashto dictionary making.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lexicography as discipline requires a blend of linguistic insight,

analytical competence, and Comprehensive Understanding of digital tools. Scholars in the field have stressed that dictionary making is not merely a technical task but one that demands careful attention to precision and neutrality. Modern studies such as those by Atkins and Rundell (2008), have discussed the importance of maintaining a balance between descriptive accuracy and user needs. In addition, the increasing reliance of digital technologies in lexicographic processes has been noted by several researchers, including Svensen (2009), who emphasized their role in enhancing efficiency and consistency. Earlier foundation works, such as those of Hartman (1983) and Landau (1084), focused on the dynamic nature of language and the necessity for lexicographers to remain responsive to linguistic change. This perspective has become even more relevant in the digital age, where language evolves rapidly and new terms emerge frequently.

In relation to less resourced languages like Pashto, scholars such as Noorzai (2019) and Fazalhaq (2019) have highlighted multiple structural and methodological challenges. These include a lack of unified standards, insufficient digital corpora, and limited professional coordination among lexicographers. Such conditions often make the development of reliable and user centered dictionaries particularly difficult.

Building upon these scholarly contributions, the present study explores the essential competencies lexicographers must develop in order to address both general and language specific challenges. The review thus serves as a conceptual foundation for analyzing skill gaps and proposing strategies for improved lexicographic practices in underdeveloped linguistic contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research followed a qualitative, descriptive and analytical approach to explore both theoretical and practical aspects of lexicography. The methodology is clearly organized so that other researchers can follow and reproduce the steps. The process includes several main components;

3.1. Data Type and Collection

The study used both primary and secondary data. The primary data consisted of selected Pashto dictionaries currently in use or developed in recent decades. The secondary data included academic works on lexicography written by Afghan and international publication on dictionary-making theories and practices.

To collect the data, and extensive literature review was conducted. This review focused on books and available print dictionaries. Special attention was given to work written by Afghan linguists that explain local methods of dictionary development. In addition, recognized international resources were reviewed to build a strong comparative base.

3.2. Data Analysis

The collected materials were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This method helped to identify important patterns, structures, and techniques used in dictionary-making across both Afghan and international sources. A comparative approach was applied to;

- Examine the theoretical background of dictionary making.



- Identify major differences between Afghan and global lexicographic methods.

- Evaluate the accuracy, structure, and usability of current Pashto dictionaries.

One well known Pashto dictionary was chosen as a case study. Its entries, structure, and supporting information were closely examined to find technical weakness and areas for improvement.

3.3. Validation

Where existing methods were used, proper references were provided. Only relevant changes and adaptations made for this study were explained in detail.

To ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings, the study used triangulation. This involved.

- Comparing results with multiple sources, such as dictionaries and academic texts.
- Using real-world example to support each key point related to lexicographic practice.
- Referring to international standards in lexicography (Landau, 2001; Svensen, 2009).

3.4. Theoretical Framework

The methodology was shaped by four closely related disciplines; language studies, linguistics, theoretical lexicography, and practical lexicography. This combination ensured that the study was well grounded systematic, and supported by both theory and practice.

3.5. Contribution of the Method

The method used in this study contributes in two main ways;

- It identifies the key issues and gaps in current Pashto dictionaries.
- It provides a practical, skill based roadmap that Afghan lexicographers can use to improve their methods and produce more professional and user friendly dictionaries.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Result

Practical lexicography or dictionary making is a social request and very huge task. A lexicographer working on a monolingual or bilingual dictionary should have strong skills in language, writing, and translation in order to successfully create a complete and accurate dictionary. For creating a high-quality dictionary, we must first learn the necessary skills and then begin the dictionary making process:

4.1.1. Comprehensive Understanding of the language

The process of compiling a dictionary involves complex and multifaceted tasks that require a high level of expertise. A lexicographer, especially one engaged in bilingual dictionary development, must demonstrate proficiency not only in linguistics but also in academic writing and translation. Mastery of these skills is essential to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and usability of the final product.

Lexicographers sometimes have need for basic knowledge of second language, like a lexicographer who makes Pashto dictionary, he must have basic knowledge of Dari and Arabic,

as many lexical borrowings exist in these languages.

A bilingual lexicographer must be well acquainted with linguistic principles of other languages including grammar, morphology, semantics, and other relevant aspects (Singleton, 2000).

The most essential aspect for a lexicographer is to have a solid understanding of the lexicographic process and its various components. Without experience, jumping into this task is not advisable, as it often leads to more disadvantages than advantages.

4.1.2. Comprehensive Understanding of the phonology

A competent lexicographer should have a sound understanding of phonology to accurately reflect the pronunciation of headwords and transcribe their phonetic forms. This competence is vital for maintaining standardized spelling across dictionary entries. In Pashto, for example, words with identical orthographic forms can carry distinct meanings and pronunciations. Consider the word /xará/ means female donkey, if the emphasis comes on the first vowel /xára/ which refers to a (pill of something), and /xar/ (donkey) commonly written as /xrə/, which functions as plural form emphasizing the final sound (B. T. & Michael, 2008).

Similarly, the word /kwata/ may signify a pile of plants, while a slightly different pronunciation /kotá/ denotes a room or a particular breed of dog (Momand & Sahrai, 1996).

Without sufficient knowledge of phonology, the lexicographic process becomes significantly more difficult in addition, error prone.

4.1.3. Comprehensive Understanding of the Morphology

Understanding morphology is essential for lexicographers, as it involves the study of word structure, including inflectional patterns, pluralization, and other morphological features. This expertise ensures the correct handling of irregular forms and minimizes inconsistencies in the dictionary. For example, identifying a word's grammatical category whether it is a noun, verb, adjective, infinitive or conjunction is crucial. Consider /zəwə`l/ transitive verb and /zəwədəl/ intransitive verb (Rashtin, 1993).

Another example is the word /tor/, which acts as a noun when used to denote color with plural form /torona/ but when used adjectivally; its form remains unchanged in the plural (Descriptive Dictionary, 2012).

A lack of morphological knowledge can result in misclassification of words and structural errors within the dictionary.

4.1.4. Comprehensive Understanding of the syntax

A lexicographer must also possess a firm grasp of syntax, since word meaning often depends on their syntactic role within a sentence. The structure and rules of sentence formation help in determining the precise function and interpretation of a word in context. For instance the Pashto word /donya/ exhibits different meanings across sentences;

1. /pə ʈola donya ke wə gər dza/ here /donya/ means (world),
2. / ʈola donya war ta walaʈa wa./ in this sentence, it refers to (people),
3. /ʈola donya rawʈa./ where /donya/ is interpreted as



(money) (Chamto, 2019).

Another illustrative case is the multifunctional pronoun /tsok/, which can serve various grammatical functions. In the sentence /saba har tsok ratlayji./ it acts as indefinite pronoun referring to an unknown individual, while in / tsok raway?/ it functions as an interrogative pronoun asking question (Tegey & Barbar, 1996).

The word /gwə`l/ is another example of a word that takes different grammatical form depending of its usage in sentence;

1. /Belal gwə`l saɾay day/.
2. /de Belal gwə`l ye rawoɾ/.
3. / gwə`l ma ʃkawa/.

In the first sentence /gwə`l/ is used as an adjective, meaning (good) that is Bilal is a good person. In the second sentence / gwə`l/ means (sign) or symbol that is Bilal is engaged. In the third sentence /gwə`l/ is used as a noun, meaning (flower) it means do not cut the flower (Zyar, 2017).

4.1.5. Comprehensive Understanding of the Semantics

A lexicographer must possess a deep understanding of semantics, as dictionaries are not just collections of words but comprehensive resource that clarify meaning, usage, and contextual relevance. Semantic knowledge enables the lexicographer to distinguish fine shades of meaning, accurately list synonyms and antonyms, and deal effectively with polysemous words those with multiple meanings (Harman, 1383)

Contextual variation is also key. For instance, the word / sar/ may denote the anatomical head a group leader, or the uppermost part of an object. Recognizing such semantic differences is essential for drafting precise and informative definitions (Descriptive Dictionary, 2012).

In bilingual dictionaries, semantic awareness plays a vital role in choosing equivalents that faithfully represent meaning across languages. This ensures that translations do not merely convey surface meanings but reflect deeper and context specific nuances. Ultimately, semantics forms the backbone of effective lexicographic work. Without it dictionaries risk becoming vague, misleading, or untrustworthy for users.

4.1.6. Comprehensive Understanding of the pragmatics

Lexicographers must also be well versed in pragmatics the study of how meaning is shaped by context. Words often carry both literal and implied meanings, which may shift depending on social, cultural, and situational factors. Understanding these subtleties is crucial for a accurate representation.

For example, while the word /ya/ typically means (yes) in region like Kandahar and Ghazni province people it conveys (no) among nomadic tribes such as the Kochis and other Zadrans (Descriptive Dictionary, 2021).

Such pragmatic variation must be reflected in the dictionary to avoid miscommunication.

Similarly, seemingly straightforward phrases like "I am hungry" may have implicit meaning in specific context such as being a polite hint during a meal rather than literal statement (Sahib Arghan, 2017).

Pragmatic competence allow lexicographers to capture not just word meanings, but also how words function in real life

communication. This ensures the dictionary reflects language as it is used naturally emotionally, socially and culturally (Jalal, 2019).

4.1.7. Understanding lexicology

It is essential for a dictionary lexicographer to have a good understanding of lexicology, as this field examines the roots and grammatical roles of words. Lexicographer should be able to trace the origin of a word and document its various forms. For example the word /xarts/ meaning (sale) is a base form, and the lexicographer must also identify and explain related forms like /xartslaw/ (Sales), /xartsedəl/ (to be sold), /xartswəl/ (to sell), /xartsawunay/ (seller), /xartsa/ (sale, and so on (Zyar, 2014).

Understanding dictionary profile

A user profile very essential for dictionary, the lexicographer must be able to make dictionary profile and identifying their audience and needs. A lexicographer able to make list of user. Essential things for lexicographer to find and target audience; for whom the dictionary is being made. For example if the dictionary is being created for children, the lexicographer will not focus on adults but will consider the child's level, environment and interests (Noorzai, 2019).

4.1.8. Creating Descriptive Language for the Dictionary

When creating definitions for headwords, a lexicographer should carefully choose the words that will appear repeatedly, such as (applied, useful, used, or filed) these terms form the foundation of many definitions and should be selected with intention. To keep users engaged, it is important to avoid overusing the same expressions, as this can become repetitive and dull. Advanced dictionaries sometimes include a separate list of commonly used defining words at the end to help readers better understand the definitions (Saghar & Fariba, 2018).

4.1.9. Understanding Dictionary Anatomy

A professional lexicographer must be able to design and organize the overall structure of a dictionary. Different types of dictionary, such as those for adults versus children, often have different formats and content. Although the internal components of dictionaries vary. The basic structure of general-purpose dictionary tends to follow a common framework. Nowadays many dictionaries are created with commercial goals in mind, each based on their own design principles and audience needs. (Fazalhaq, 2019).

4.1.10. Organizing Dictionary Content Effectively

One of the key responsibilities in practical lexicography is arranging the entries clearly and logically. A lexicographer must be skilled in selecting which words to include and which to leave out. Still a well-rounded dictionary should aim to represent both frequently used and less common words in the language. In Pashto dictionary, much word we use in language but lexicographer did not enter but many words it did not enter to dictionary the lexicographer entry in dictionary (Noorzai, 2019).

4.1.11. Be patient for lexicography

Creating dictionary is a long-term effort that cannot be



completed quickly. Lexicographer should not lose motivation if progress seems slow. Good planning a realistic schedule helps manage time and tasks efficiently. While it is not feasible to document every word in language, lexicographers should aim to do as much as possible within their available time and resource (Fine Clouse, 1997).

4.1.12. Writing Definitions with care and integrity

During the compilation process, you may face situations where no clear rule or theory applies. In such cases, rely on your linguistic knowledge and analytical skills. When resources are available, conduct thorough research. Try different ways to present entries and choose the format that communicates the meaning most clearly and effectively. You are writing should show confidence, but you should also be ready for explain your decisions. Avoid adding information that might mislead readers or fail to meet their expectations. (Fine Clouse, 2012).

4.1.13. Maintaining Objectivity

A lexicographer must be realistic, free from bias and independent to ensure the scientific credibility of their work. A lexicographer must be like historian analyze language from a neutral perspective. Lack of objectivity undermines the value of dictionary. A dictionary should not promote regional, ethnic, or ideological prejudices (Fine Clouse, 1997).

4.1.14. Innovation in lexicography

While language naturally experience gradual lexical changes whether through internal development or the adoption of foreign terms lexicographic work must go beyond simply reflecting these changes. Instead, it should aim to introduce meaningful innovation that enhance the quality and usefulness of dictionaries. A dictionary should not merely reproduce existing entries but must present them in a more refined, comprehensive, and well organized manner.

In the context of Pashto lexicography, early dictionary making efforts were based on a relatively narrow selection of vocabulary. Over the year, these same word lists have often been reshuffled or restructured by different lexicographers, yet without addressing the deeper linguistic needs such as compiling thorough records of words actually used in everyday communication (Hilaly, 1354).

4.1.15. The Role of Note -Taking

Lexicographers should always be prepared to write down new words, idiom, expressions, proverbs, or any relevant linguistic information. Since general-purpose dictionaries mostly focus on frequently used words, it is important to document them as they appear in real – life situations. Taking notes is a vital part of creating a complete and accurate dictionary. While digital tools have made this process easier in many, rural areas often lack access to such technology. Therefore, fieldwork in these communities remains a valuable method for collecting rich and authentic language data (Fine Clouse, 1997).

4.1.16. Lexicography Language

The language used in a dictionary must be simple, precise and easy for readers to understand. Definition should be written

clearly, so that they do not confuse or overwhelm the user. Complex grammar or overly detailed sentence structures should be avoided. The lexicographer need to choose words carefully to eliminate and ambiguity. It is best to avoid overly directive words like (Must or should) and avoid uncertain terms such as (maybe, or possibly) (Noorzai, 2019).

4.1.17. Choosing Characters for Example

Dictionary entries are often supported by example sentences, which sometimes include fictional names or characters. This example should use clear, short, and recognizable make that do not vary depending on the sentence. It is helpful to use names that are culturally familiar yet simple enough for nonnative speakers to understand. Good example include name like Bilal, Ahmad, Sara or Lailo, which are easy to read and do not confuse the reader and it is unchangeable name in Pashto (Noorzai, 2019).

4.1.18. Understanding the Audience

Identifying the target audience is one of the key challenges in lexicography. When creating a dictionary the lexicographer must first determine who the users will be whether children, adults, language learners, translators, or the public. For instance, a children's dictionary should focus on simple language and avoid detailed grammar explanations. Visual aids and illustrations are also helpful in making the content more accessible to young readers (Noorzai, 2019).

4.1.19. For lexicographer

If the lexicographer sends even a few pages of their work via email to Pashto language scholar and seeks their feedback, they may notice much new term.

The lexicographer reads literary works to extract words. Selection is crucial when dealing with literature works. Particularly fictional works are important because language with all its nuances is extensively used in them. The contributions of skilled and insightful writers hold great value. A truly realistic writer, in my view, is highly aware of the fine distinctions between similar words. Recognizing these subtle differences can greatly improve the quality of a dictionary. Focusing on implied meanings not only increases the dictionary's reliability but also supports its overall thoroughness (Noorzai, 2019).

4.2. Discussion

The main finding of this research is that digital tools are playing a bigger role in modern lexicography. All Pashto dictionary made without these tools. Using tools like corpora, dictionary software an automatic data collection helps make dictionary more accurate and faster to create. This supports what earlier researcher like (landau, 1984; Noorzai, 2019) have said that technology can make dictionary better and easier to use. This research would be clear with example of specific tools for instance, modern lexicographers often use tools such as Telex and WordNet.

This research and study shows important teamwork is in lexicography. In that language which resources are limited, like in Pashto, it is very helpful when linguists, lexicographer and experts in different subjects work together. Teamwork can



make better and complete dictionary. The same idea appears in research in Pashto dictionary (Fazalhaq, 2019). Which explain the problems caused by not having clear methods for building dictionary. Some afghan and forging person outside Afghanistan are also trying to make dictionary, but they do not know Pashto language well. They can work together online with local teams, especially in areas where they have more experience, like software or research methods.

The lexicographers should be fair and accurate. The dictionary data not reflect personal opinion or biases. They must be write everything in dictionary reliable sources of information.

Language changeable some time the word meaning decrease some time increase some time the word remove in society also some time come new words, it must be inter to dictionary it is mean the dictionary must be keep update. When such words become common, lexicographer study how they are used, look them up in large text collection, and ask experts to review them. This helps make sure the definition are correct and useful. Lexicographer need supporter from institution, access to good digital tools and help from language community. This need has been discussed theory and practice and many experts believe we must be flexible.

This study helps us better understand lexicography as a growing dictionary making. It show that we need for good lexicography; good skills, modern technology, and teamwork. If researcher can make a clear plan for dictionary making, the future work in this field will be more useful and successful.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Lexicography is a constantly developing field that requires patience, careful analysis, and an unbiased approach. A skilled lexicographer must combine deep linguistic knowledge with accurate research and creative methods to produce dictionaries that meet the needs of a wide and varied audience. By staying neutral, regularly updating entries, and applying modern techniques, lexicographer's help, keep dictionaries trustworthy and valuable language tools.

Ultimately lexicography is not just about compiling words, it is about preserving and shaping the language for future generation. The lexicography must be not only familiar with language and linguistic but a good writer, capable of producing clear, accurate and accessible definition and familiarity with lexicography and anatomy and software.

This study identified key shortcomings in previous Pashto dictionaries, including weak methodology and neglect of user needs. It proposed practical, modern guidelines for lexicographers and stressed the vital role of training, collaboration, and innovation. Advancing Pashto lexicography requires a shift toward scientific methods and user focused practices to produce effective and relevant dictionaries.

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