

SPECIFICS OF DEFINING MEANING IN *THE DICTIONARY OF THE STANDARD LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE*
(*BENDRINĖS LIETUVIŲ KALBOS ŽODYNAS*): PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Summary

This article deals with the specifics of defining the meaning of several particular nouns denoting plants and animals. The nouns were picked out of the manuscript of *The Dictionary of the Standard Lithuanian Language* (DSL) (*Bendrinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas*) and the section of it that is already available online. In the article, the definitions of the meaning of the nouns chosen are compared to the definitions of the matching nouns available in other Lithuanian glossaries and some English and Russian dictionaries. The article attempts to identify the definition (traditional or cognitive) of a word that is typically used in defining the general names of the categories of *plant* and *animal* and the words falling into these categories.

1. Investigation of the definitions of several words denoting plants and animals shows that, as often as not, the authors of DSL navigate between the traditional (rather scientific) and the cognitive definition of the meaning of a word.

2. In defining the meanings of the words *plant* and *animal* (in the original meaning of the latter word) that stand for the two general categories, the authors of the DSL have opted for the traditional (rather scientific) method to define the meaning of words, registering the most typical attributes of a plant and an animal, such as that plants and animals are ‘organisms’, plants feed on ‘non-organic substances’ and animals on ‘organic substances’, that plants require ‘solar energy’ to survive, that animals ‘can usually move from one place to another.’ Since plant and animal species in nature are plenty, it would be difficult to define these words through, say, the characteristics of their most prominent prototypical representatives; this kind of definition would inevitably be schematic, lacking in information, and hardly adequate for the purposes of a dictionary entry. Nonetheless, the distinction and definition of the second and third meaning of the word *animal* already has to do with the cognitive strategy of definition.

3. In defining the meanings of words falling into the categories of plants and animals, such as *beržas* (birch), *pušis* (pine), *bulvė* (potato), *lapė* (fox), *žąsis* (goose), the DSL authors first of all indicate the class the word being described belongs to and then usually follow with a list of several most typical, easily recognisable external and/or internal features of these plants

and animals, hence sticking to the cognitive strategy of their definition. Quite often, they specify the purpose of plants and animals, their habitat, especially if such traits are instrumental in identifying the denotation. It should be said that the DSLL defines fruit bushes and trees under a different approach: not by their most typical external and/or internal attributes but rather by the fruit that they bear, which helps people recognise them in most cases.

4. Usually, the selection of the most typical characteristics for the purposes of definition of words denoting plants and animals depends on the national specifics: the attributes registered in the definitions of words may connect to human activity, habits and customs, the landscape, and so on. Therefore, some of the characteristics of plants and animals registered in the DSLL definitions of these words may not necessarily be present in the definitions of the matching words in the English or Russian dictionaries, and vice-versa.

5. Contrary to the other Lithuanian glossaries referred to in the article, when it comes to defining the meanings of nouns denoting plants and animals, the DSLL does not specify their taxonomical groups, such as families, genera, and such. This is because this type of information has little use to the average speaker (who is not a botanist or zoologist).

6. Just like in some of the other Lithuanian glossaries, the DSLL, too, provides Latin terms of plants and animals. The authors of the DSLL believe that providing Latin terms in dictionary entries is useful when the definition of a word alone makes it hard to identify similar plants or animals.

7. Examination of the definitions of some fruits and vegetables has revealed that, contrary to other Lithuanian glossaries, when it comes to defining own and foreign realities, the DSLL follows a non-discriminative approach: the definitions of words are thorough and are based on a similar scheme, for instance, the type of fruit (such as root-crop), appearance (shape and colour), the typical internal characteristics (taste, texture, and so on), and/or purpose (with vegetables in particular). In other words, the definition of realities does not differentiate between own and foreign but rather follows a non-discriminatively thorough approach.

8. Examination of the definitions of the words denoting plants and animals present in the DSLL and English and Russian glossaries has revealed that the DSLL's definitions are on a par to those of the other dictionaries in terms and completeness and organisation.

9. In summary, we can say that the authors of the DSLL travel the cognitive path with more assurance, often abandoning scientific or encyclopaedic definitions so typical of glossaries that usually benefit the ordinary user of the standard language hardly at all. In defining the words (covered in the article), the authors of the DSLL rather focus on the most typical, inherent, easily recognisable attributes of the realities that can be perceived, sensed in a visual,

tactile, and other ways. That way, the definitions of words become clearer, more understandable, informative, and unambiguous to the users of the Dictionary.

10. Analysis of but several examples of the two categories (of plants and animals) could hardly lead to some sure-fire conclusions about the entire Dictionary of the Standard Lithuanian Language. As a result, one should conduct a similar investigation of another category (or other categories) and compare its results to the outcomes of this research. This would give weight to our conclusions and would allow predicting the prospects of developing the Dictionary further.

KEYWORDS: meaning, definition, cognitive definition, traditional definition, dictionary, Dictionary of the Standard Lithuanian Language.

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