

A Multidimensional Approach to Definitions, Applied to e-Learning in Language Education

A presentation by Professor Steve McCarty at the Minpaku Linguistics Circle

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ABSTRACT

Dictionary definitions tend to be circular, as in: big means large and large means big, so for all these years have they been getting away with not truly defining words? What would it mean for a bilingual dictionary to define words fully or sufficiently, particularly so that their situational usage would be clear enough to convey how to use them appropriately for intercultural communication? Is it now possible to create dictionaries that define words in their fuller dimensionality?

When it comes to technical terms in academic fields, abstract definitions may fail to contextualize terms that are sensitive to changes over time, new media, and so forth. Moreover, what is the difference between a field and a discipline? The author will illustrate the problem with three terms that tend to be used synonymously or defined without regard to their historical and disciplinary development: distance education, e-Learning, and online education.

The main focus of this presentation will be a chart that illustrates the method to define technical terms more clearly and fully than before, by contextualizing them in three relevant dimensions: cultural / institutional, disciplinary, and historical / temporal contexts. This approach will be applied to examples including e-learning in language education, from past to future.

Participants will also be able to try the method with the handout form, and see if their chosen field or concept is defined in fuller dimensionality. Questions and comments are most welcome for a wide-ranging discussion.

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