

Multimodal metadiscourse: analysis of glosses of the definitions and examples of an English dictionary

*Metadiscursio multimodal:
análise dos esclarecedores das
definições e
exemplos de um dicionário de
inglês*

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Abstract: In this paper, we examine multimodal resources that perform the metadiscursive function of clarifying the content of definitions and examples in the entries of the Collins COBUILD Illustrated Basic Dictionary of American English (2010). The study is based on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), regarding the multimodal configuration of texts, on Hyland (1998, 2000, 2007, 2017), concerning the concept of metadiscourse, and on Kumpf (2000), Pontes (2010), Pontes and Fachine (2011, 2012), Fachine (2013), Rocha (2016), and Ribeiro and Pontes (2018), who discuss multimodal metadiscourse. We carried out an overview of the various elements that clarify the content of the definitions and examples in the dictionary and observed that, in general, the content is clarified either through verbal text or images. For this reason, we classified such elements as verbal and visual glosses. Then, we selected and analyzed representative samples of each type of gloss. We concluded that verbal and visual resources rework and even expand the text of definitions and examples in order to facilitate their understanding by a user who has limited knowledge of the English language.

Keywords: Multimodal metadiscourse. Glosses. English dictionary.

Resumo: Neste artigo, examinamos recursos multimodais que desempenham a função metadiscursiva de esclarecedores do conteúdo das definições e dos exemplos de uso constantes dos verbetes do *Collins COBUILD Illustrated Basic Dictionary of American English* (2010). O estudo baseia-se em Kress e van Leeuwen (2006), no que se refere à configuração multimodal dos textos, em Hyland (1998, 2000, 2007, 2017), no que concerne ao conceito de metadiscorso, e em Kumpf (2000), Pontes (2010), Pontes e Fachine (2011, 2012), Fachine (2013), Rocha (2016), e Ribeiro e Pontes (2018), que discutem sobre metadiscorso multimodal. Realizamos um apanhado dos diversos elementos esclarecedores do conteúdo das definições e dos exemplos no dicionário e observamos que, no geral, o conteúdo é esclarecido por intermédio do texto verbal ou por imagens. Por esse motivo, classificamos tais elementos como esclarecedores verbais e visuais. Em seguida, selecionamos e analisamos exemplares representativos de cada tipo de esclarecedor. Concluímos que recursos verbais e visuais reelaboram e até ampliam o texto das definições e dos exemplos de uso, de modo a facilitar sua compreensão por parte de um usuário que possui conhecimento limitado da língua inglesa.

Palavras-chave: Metadiscorso multimodal. Esclarecedores. Dicionário de inglês.

Introduction

This paper aims to analyze verbal and visual resources used to clarify the content of the definitions and examples contained in the entries of an English dictionary: the *Collins COBUILD Illustrated Basic Dictionary of American English* (2010). The dictionary is a monolingual one and comprises the most frequent lexical units of the English language along with their more usual meanings explained in easy language. These lead us to the conclusion that it is targeted at students who are transitioning from the bilingual to the monolingual dictionary. Visual elements, which are widely used in the dictionary at issue, play an important role in that they guide the reader and assist them in understanding the dictionary written text.

Theoretically, our study is mainly based on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), concerning their multimodal approach to texts; on Hyland (1998, 2000, 2007, 2017), regarding the concept of metadiscourse; as well as on Kumpf (2000), Pontes (2010), Pontes and Fachine (2011, 2012), Fachine (2013), Rocha (2016), and Ribeiro and Pontes (2018), who bring up the idea of multimodal metadiscourse.

This paper is structured as follows: first, we discuss the multimodal aspect of dictionaries in general, make explicit the concept of multimodal metadiscourse, and discriminate the metadiscursive category to be considered for the analysis, namely, code glosses. We also present a few studies that were made about the multimodal metadiscourse of dictionaries. Next, we describe the methodological

procedures adopted. Then, we examine the multimodal elements which clarify the text of the definitions and examples of the dictionary selected for this study. Finally, we synthesize the relevant points observed.

The multimodal aspect of the dictionary

Due to the variety of resources offered by new digital technologies, verbal language has divided space with other semiotic modes (image, sound, movement) in the production of the genres that are used in the various social interactions. This fact characterizes the current communication as **multimodal** (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006).

Today, the requirements have increased to a great extent. The texts require, besides technological apparatus, varied colors and sophisticated visual resources. To the postmodern text, the need to use more than an articulated composition of phrases and sentences is added. Images, and even sounds and movements (TV, cinema, and the Internet) are needed, which intertwine to build the new meanings required by contemporary texts (VIEIRA, 2007, p. 9, translated by us).

It is worth noting that there have been few occasions when the process of human interaction has occurred in a monomodal way, since “when we speak or write a text, we are using at least two modes of representation: words and gestures, words and intonations, words and images, words and smiles, words and animations etc.” (DIONÍSIO, 2011, p. 139, translated by us). However, what is most noticed today is the ease of manipulation of resources provided by the new technologies, resulting in a convergence of the multiplicity of modes that contribute to the building of the messages.

In what it refers to written genres, illustrations, photos, graphs, and diagrams, as well as compositing and printing resources (font, color, layout, etc.) have greatly contributed to the understanding of the meaning of the texts, as they have influenced the reception of these texts by the readers.

Following this trend, producers of books for the teaching of foreign languages have been using a range of visual elements to convey the content to learners more clearly. With regard to dictionaries, most of them have gone through innovations in order to become more interactive and attractive. Among these innovations, we can pinpoint the changes in the visual configuration of the dictionaries. Although lexicographers have always made use of certain visual elements to

organize information in the dictionary, such as numbers, symbols, distinct font types and sizes, what is seen at present is an abundant use of nonverbal resources in the composition of dictionaries, which has resulted in sophistication of their editorial projects.

As far as lexicographers use different semiotic modes to guide the reader and assist them in the understanding of the dictionary text, we can consider the metadiscourse of this reference book as multimodal. Metadiscourse, in this case, refers to the organizing elements of the text content considering the audience's processing needs, knowledge, skills, expectations, and interests (HYLAND, 2007). We will go into more detail about this concept in the next section.

Defining multimodal metadiscourse

The term **metadiscourse** was coined by Harris in 1959 as a way of offering an understanding of the language in use through attempts of the writer or speaker to guide the reader's or listener's perception of the text (HYLAND, 2007). Subsequently, it was defined by Williams (1981 quoted by VANDE KOPPLE, 1985) as writing about writing, i.e., everything that does not refer to the subject matter being discussed; by Crismore (1984) as the author's discourse on their own discourse, or the author's intrusion, explicitly or not, with a view to directing rather than informing the reader; and by Vande Kopple (1985) as discourse about discourse or communication about communication. Therefore, according to these authors, each text has two levels: in the first one, information about content is provided, while in the second one, elements are used to help the reader organize, classify, interpret, evaluate and react to content information. This second level is the metadiscourse of the text.

According to Hyland (2000), the term encompasses a variety of resources used by authors to explicitly organize their texts, engage their readers, and signal their attitudes towards their material and audience. Thus, based on the processing needs, knowledge, skills, expectations, and interests of the discursive community to which the text is directed, the author makes use of metadiscursive elements with the purpose of facilitating communication, sustaining a position and building a relationship with their audience (HYLAND, 1998). The basis of the concept is the view that language refers not only to the world, but also to itself, as something that assists the reader in organizing,

interpreting, and evaluating what is being said (HYLAND, 2017). The text is then recognized not only for the content it expresses, but mainly for enabling social interactions.

Studies about the metadiscourse of different genres have been carried out (CRISMORE, 1989; BUNTON, 1999; HYLAND, 2000, 2004; HYLAND; TSE, 2004; DAHL, 2004; CARVALHO, E., 2005; MENDONÇA, 2005; MORAES, 2005; BERNARDINO, 2007; CARVALHO, D., 2019). However, they have only focused on the verbal features of texts. Hyland (2007), on the other hand, alludes to non-verbal metadiscursive resources such as tone of voice, emphases, gestures, and facial expressions in oral language, and to the various forms of punctuation and typographical marks in written language, all of which contribute to the meanings of texts. Kumpf (2000) proposes that the metadiscourse of a text can also consist of visual elements such as layout, color, typography, and image. According to this author, the text is made up of verbal and visual elements that complement each other, with the visual ones helping in the organization of the text content as well as influencing its reception by the reader. This is **multimodal metadiscourse**.

In his most recent framework for the classification of metadiscourse, Hyland (2007) makes a distinction between **interactive** and **interactional** elements. While interactive ones organize the text considering the knowledge, skills, processing needs, expectations and interests of its audience, interactional ones are used by the author of the text to comment on it in a way to express a viewpoint and engage with a reader.

In this paper, we focus on one interactive metadiscursive category, in particular, the **code glosses**, whose function is to elaborate on or explain what has already been said, in order to ensure a correct understanding on the part of the reader. Code glosses can be realized verbally, through paraphrases and synonyms, as well as visually, through any kind of image (pictures, graphs, diagrams) that helps to clarify the meaning. We discuss how both of these types can assist in the comprehension of the text of the definition and the examples contained in the entries of the dictionary selected for analysis. But first, we present an overview of the studies already carried out on dictionary metadiscourse.

Research on the multimodal metadiscourse of the dictionary

There are few studies on the multimodal aspect of the dictionary metadiscourse in the literature. These were developed mainly by Pontes (2010), Fechine and Pontes (2011, 2012), Fechine (2013), Rocha (2016), and Ribeiro and Pontes (2018).

Pontes (2010a, 2010b) analyzes the multimodal metadiscourse of Brazilian school dictionaries. He points out the role played by visual salience as a metadiscursive resource which contributes to the identification of the entry's headword, for the differentiation of the various types of information that make up the entry, for the location of the guide words on a dictionary page, for the distinction of the entry as a graphic unit, and for highlighting the headword within the example. In addition to that, he considers salience as a useful resource for expressing the subordination of the subheadword in relation to the headword, and for identifying foreign words. He also draws attention to the importance of placing the dictionary text in two columns as a way to facilitate its reading, as well as to the role played by numbers in the distribution of the various meanings in a polysemic entry, in the distinction of homonymous headwords, and in the remission to other parts of the dictionary.

Fechine and Pontes (2011a) analyze the multimodal metadiscourse of one English learner's dictionaries. The results of their research reveal that a few multimodal elements are meant to help in locating specific information within the dictionary, and that the images may contribute to the understanding of the content of the definitions. In another paper issued the same year (2011b), they consider the dictionary's cross-references system to be a metadiscursive resource, since it relates information displayed in different parts of the dictionary. Based on existing theoretical frameworks for the categorization of cross-references, the authors propose a new classificatory model that assumes that remissions in the dictionary can be made through verbal or visual elements, or even by both simultaneously.

Fechine and Pontes (2012) also examine the metadiscourse of the inserts of one dictionary based on the categories of visual metadiscourse proposed by Kumpf (2000). Another article which deserves attention is that by Ribeiro and Pontes (2018). These authors analyze two dictionaries in order to find out which multimodal resources perform the metadiscursive function of distinguishing the different types of information that make up the entries.

In their master's theses, Fechine (2013) investigates the multimodal metadiscourse of the macrostructure and microstructure of two English learner's dictionaries, and Rocha (2016) looks into the multimodal metadiscourse of the microstructure of two Brazilian school dictionaries.

We believe that studies like these may be relevant for language teachers in the sense that these teachers might feel the need to instruct their students about the role of the metadiscursive elements in the dictionary, so that a better use of this reference book can be possible. After all, many students underestimate the dictionary value simply because they do not know how to use it properly. Therefore, it becomes evident that such kind of research may contribute significantly to studies on the development of lexicographic literacy.

Methodology

This study is characterized as analytical descriptive in that we look at integrated verbal and visual entries of an English monolingual dictionary published by Collins. The dictionary is the Collins COBUILD Illustrated Basic Dictionary of American English (2010), and the reason for choosing it for analysis is that it makes an extensive use of visual elements along with verbal ones to express meanings, which renders it multimodal.

For the selection of the entries to be examined, we initially searched for the various ways of glossing the content of the definitions and examples in the dictionary. We observed that, in general, the content was clarified either through verbal text or images. For this reason, we classified these elements as verbal glosses and visual glosses.

After that, we selected and analyzed representative samples of these verbal and visual glosses. In the following section, we present such analysis.

Data analysis

For this study, we discuss verbal glosses in two entries (*crater* and *ache*) and visual glosses in six entries (*butterfly*, *muffin*, *deck*, *car*, *classroom* and *musical instrument*) of the Collins COBUILD Illustrated Basic Dictionary of American English (2010) (henceforth Collins COBUILD). The verbal glosses are firstly examined, followed by the visual glosses.

Verbal glosses

As stated earlier, we begin our analysis by looking into the verbal glosses contained in the entries for headwords *crater* (Figure 1) and *ache* (Figure 2).

Figure 1 – Entry for the headword *crater*

crater /kreɪtər/ (**craters**) **NOUN** SCIENCE
A **crater** is a very large hole in the top of a volcano (= a mountain that forces hot gas and rocks into the air). □ *Rocks shot up three miles from the volcano's crater.*

Source: Collins COBUILD (2010, p. 110).

Figure 2 – Entry for the headword *ache*

ache /eɪk/ (**aches, aching, ached**)
1 **VERB** If you **ache** or a part of your body **aches**, you feel a steady pain. □ *Her head was hurting and she ached all over (= in every part of her body).* □ *My leg still aches when I stand for a long time.*
2 **NOUN** An **ache** is a steady pain in a part of your body. □ *A hot bath will take away all your aches and pains.*
→ look at **sick**

Source: Collins COBUILD (2010, p. 5).

It can be observed that within the definition in the entry for the headword *crater* (Figure 1), some explanation is provided for the term *volcano*, immediately after the term. The same occurs in the entry for the headword *ache* (Figure 2), in which some explanation is given for the phrase *all over*, which appears in the first example for the first sense of the headword. In both cases, the paraphrases are presented in parentheses and following a sign of equality that represents the equivalence between the lexical unit and its explanation. In addition to helping in the understanding of the content of the definition and the example, such paraphrases save time for the reader, who will not need to search for the meaning of the word or the phrase in other parts of the dictionary.

Yet, since there is no marking for distinguishing the items under explanation from the rest of the text, the reader might consider the paraphrases as elaboration of the entire text of the definition or example.

Visual glosses

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), each of the different semiotic modes that make up the multimodal text has its own affordances and therefore does not convey meaning in the same way. Having this in mind, we cannot think of a simple translation from one mode to another. Instead, an orchestration between them contributes to the building of the meaning of the text, as it can be observed in headwords *butterfly* (Figure 3) and *muffin* (Figure 4):

Figure 3 – Entry for the headword *butterfly*



Source: Collins COBUILD (2010, p. 64).

Figure 4 – Entry for the headword *muffin*



Source: Collins COBUILD (2010, p. 309).

With regard to the dictionary text, Duran (2004) calls on the importance of the illustration in pedagogical dictionaries, claiming that it helps the learner make a clear idea of the meanings conveyed by the verbal language. In fact, when one observes the definitions given for the headwords *butterfly* (Figure 3) and *muffin* (Figure 4), one can see that the written text is not enough for a full understanding of the meaning of the words. This is only possible by viewing a picture of the items under description. The image, in this case, elaborates on the content of the definition so as to guarantee the reader a correct understanding of the word.

As one can see in figures 3 and 4, the picture is located to the right of the written text. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), with respect to the information value of multimodal texts, in Western

cultures, where the reading process traditionally occurs from the left to the right side of the page, elements which are placed on the right are considered as new information and, therefore, are relevant to reader. Since this is the position where the image of a butterfly and a muffin are in the entries under analysis, we can infer that the pictures play an important role in the understanding of the meaning of the headwords.

The Collins COBUILD (2010) also provides different types of informational charts. Some of them offer an imagetic representation of the different senses within a polysemous entries; others make use of visual resources to relate the entry's headword to other words contained in the dictionary. These can be verified in Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8:

Figure 5 – Entry for the headword *deck* and its *Spelling Partners*



Spelling Partners **deck**

deck /dɛk/ (decks)

1 NOUN A **deck** on a vehicle such as a bus or ship is a lower or upper level in it.
□ We went on a luxury ship with five passenger decks.

2 NOUN A **deck** is a flat wooden area attached to a house, where people can sit.
□ A deck leads into the main room of the home.

3 NOUN A **deck** of cards is a complete set of playing cards. □ Matt picked up the cards and shuffled the deck.

Source: Collins COBUILD (2010, p. 121).

The *Spelling Partners* chart, which is identified by the light green color, provides images for each sense of the headword *deck*. By observing Figure 5, one can notice that the sequence of these images occurs from left to right, following the order of presentation of the senses within the entry. Moreover, the color of the word *deck* inside the chart is the same as that of the headword. This visual rhyme (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006) leads to an understanding that what is shown in pictures is the same as what is described about the headword. One can still see that, in the written part of the entry, each one of the different senses given for the headword is introduced by a number inserted in a square which, in its turn, visually rhymes with the headword in color, indicating that the senses refer to the headword.

Figure 6 – Entry for the headword *car* and its *Word World*

car /kɑː/ (cars)

1 NOUN A car is a motor vehicle with space for about 5 people. □ They arrived by car.

2 NOUN A car is one of the long parts of a train. □ He stood up and walked to the dining car.

→ look at **Word World: car**
 → look at **transportation**

Word World car

trip, slow, fast, old, new

accident, traffic, driver, expensive, big, back up

highway, street, drive, park, start

gas, loan, steer, buy

passenger, insurance

Nouns / Adjectives / Verbs

Source: Collins COBUILD (2010, p. 70).

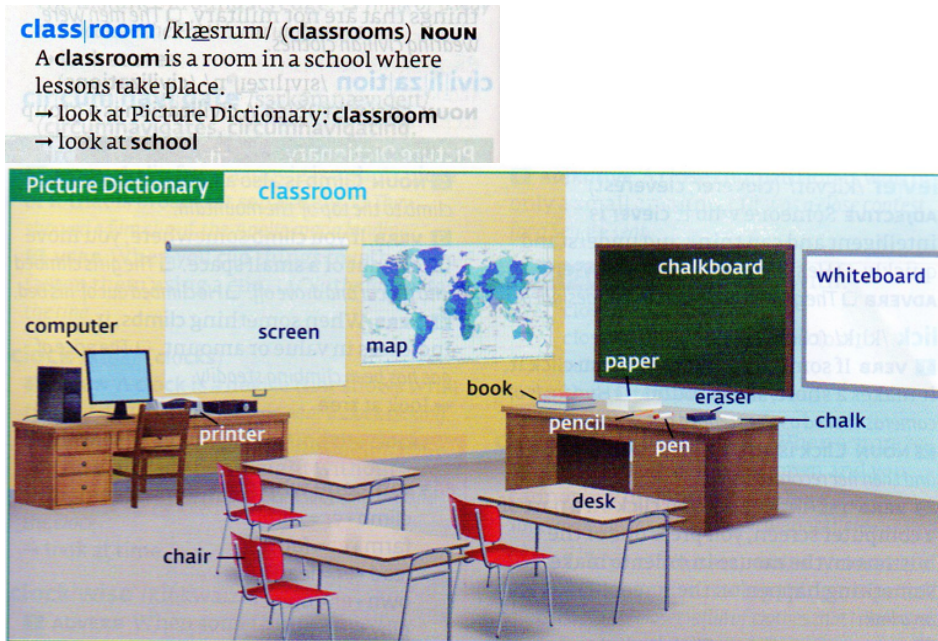
In the *Word World* chart, identified by the dark blue color, an imagetic representation of the headword is provided in the center, while semantically related words are displayed around it. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), with respect to the information value of multimodal compositions, in center/margin arrangements, such as the one described, the central element is considered as the core information and all the surrounding elements are subordinated or dependent upon it. Indeed, as one can see in Figure 6, the image of the car is the most important element of the set and all the surrounding words refer to it. These words belong to different parts of speech, and an explanatory caption located in the bottom right corner identifies each part of speech: the green color discriminates the nouns, the orange color, the adjectives, and the red color, the verbs.

At the end of the entry, a reference is made to the chart. This is necessary because the chart *Word World* is usually placed far from the entry it relates to.

Finally, the *Picture Dictionary* chart, identified by the dark green color, provides images of words that are associated with the headword. Based on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), we can conclude that these words relate to the headword in two distinct ways: either through a representational conceptual process of the analytical type, characterized as a relationship between the parts (the Possessive Attributes) and the

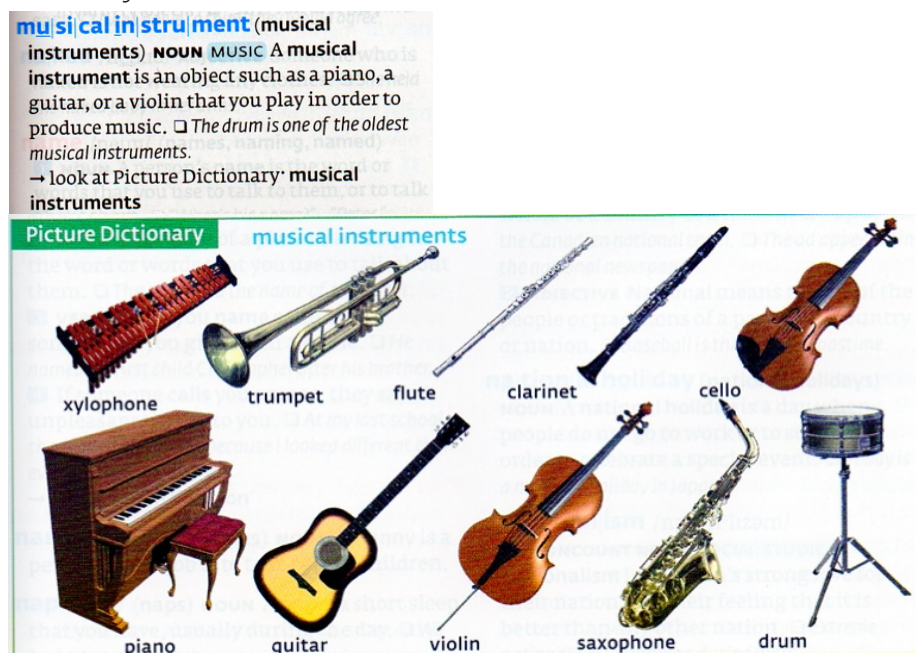
whole (the Carrier), or through a representational conceptual process of the classificational type, in which the participants of the image (the Subordinates) are presented in terms of a superior element that defines them (the Superordinate). These two processes can be viewed in Figures 7 and 8:

Figure 7 – Entry for the headword *classroom* and its *Picture Dictionary*



Source: Collins COBUILD (2010, p. 84, 85).

Figure 8 – Entry for the headword *musical instrument* and its *Picture Dictionary*



Source: Collins COBUILD (2010, p. 311).

In Figure 7, one can notice an analytical conceptual process happening: the *classroom* can be considered as the Carrier whose Possessive Attributes are the different elements that make up the classroom. On the other hand, in Figure 8, one can see a sample of the classificational conceptual process: the various types of musical instruments are presented as Subordinates of *musical instrument*, which is the defining item, the Superordinate.

The reference at the end of both entries is necessary because, similarly to the *Word World* charts, *Picture Dictionary* charts are usually not located close to their corresponding entries.

In the entries of the dictionary examined, therefore, verbal and visual glosses clarify specific words or the whole text of the definitions and examples in order to facilitate their understanding by the reader. The idea behind this is that these readers are moving from bilingual dictionaries to monolingual ones, and the glosses may contribute to their understanding of the meaning of the headwords. The *Word World* and the *Picture Dictionary* charts not only provide a visual representation of the content of the definitions, but also expand on such content, by presenting words which are somehow related to the headword.

Final remarks

In this paper, we investigated metadiscursive strategies used for clarifying the text of definitions and examples of one monolingual English dictionary: the Collins COBUILD Illustrated Basic Dictionary of American English (2010). We have found out that verbal as well as non-verbal elements are used as glosses in this dictionary.

We observed that some verbal explanation is provided for words or phrases that may hinder the understanding of the text of the definitions and examples. Besides that, the content of the definitions is also clarified through images, which elaborate on the written text with the aim to ensure a correct understanding of the meaning. Lexical units related to the headword are also provided multimodally, resulting in more learning on the part of the reader.

We conclude, therefore, that the multimodal metadiscourse (more specifically, the glosses) of the dictionary selected for analysis plays the role of filling in gaps resulting from the student's difficulty in understanding the dictionary's foreign metalanguage. Since the glosses help the learner perceive the nuances of the words, a better use of the dictionary is expected.

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