ВОПРОСЫ ЛЕКСИКОЛОГИИ И ЛЕКСИКОГРАФИИ

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THE LEXICOGRAPHY OF CONCEPTS: ABRAHAMIC VARIATIONS

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A comparison of the treatment of three culturally significant concepts, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, in dictionaries of several languages, in the hope of learning about dictionaries and the dictionarate cultures that produce and use them – and in order to encourage my colleagues to undertake such comparisons.

Key words: Abrahamic Variations; concept; lexicography.

Introduction

In an earlier essay, "The Lexicography of Concepts in English, French, and Russian", I discussed the treatment of various concepts (black/white, dog/cat) in dictionaries of English and Russian – and then climaxed with the treatment in dictionaries of English, French, and Russian of the (Protestant) *Reformation*, *La Réforme*, *реформация.* In a subsequent essay, "The Lexicography of Concepts: the Crusades"[1], I investigated in the same way another important but controversial item: the *Crusades.* In doing so I used the same dictionaries as before, but added to them two dictionaries of Spanish. I propose now to investigate in monolingual dictionaries of English, French, and Russian the lexicographical treatment of the names of three related religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three are nowadays often called in English the Abrahamic religions, in order to emphasise their common origins rather than their differences. My corpus is the same three dictionaries as in "The Lexicography of Concepts in English, French, and Russian": the English dictionary is the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*[2], the French dictionary is *Le Petit Robert*[3], and the Russian dictionary is *Ожегов Толковый словарь*

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[1] *Ilson R.* The Lexicography of Concepts: the Crusades // Moscow State University Bulletin. Series 19. Linguistics and Intercultural Communication. 2020. № 4. P. 22–25.

[2] COD, 12th edition, Oxford University Press. Oxford, 2011.

[3] PR, Dictionnaires Le Robert. Paris, 1988.

русского языка[4]. But before I proceed to the evidence, it is worth looking at the adjective *Abrahamic* and the concept behind it. Though attested in English since 1807[5], it is not to be found in COD, nor are its equivalents in the French PR or the Russian O. OED defines *Abrahamic* simply as "Of, pertaining to, or characteristic of Abraham". But its etymology adds significant information: "f. The name of *Abraham*, the first of the Hebrew Patriarchs..." A definition awkwardly phrased but more relevant to my present endeavour is offered on line by the *Cambridge English Dictionary*: "relating to the religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, that recognize Abraham as part of their religion". It seems likely that this interfaith sense of *Abrahamic* (as in <*Abrahamic* religions>) is recent.

Without further ado, let me proceed to the evidence:

Evidence:

Judaism:

COD: Judaism: the monotheistic religion of the Jews, based on the Old Testament and the Talmud.

PR: JUDAÏSME: Religion des juifs, descendants des Hébreux et héritiers de leurs livres sacrés.

О: иудаизм: Одна из древнейших религий, возникшая в 1 тыс. до н.э. в Палестине и распространившаяся среди евреев разных стран, в основе которой лежит культ бога Яхве (Иеговы). *И. – официальная религия Израиля. Догматы иудаизма изложены в Торе, Библии и Талмуде.*

Christianity:

COD: Christianity: the religion based on the person and teachings of Christ.

PR: christianisme: Religion fondée sur l'enseignement, la personne et la vie de Jésus-Christ.... *Le Dieu en trois personnes du christianisme. Christianisme primitif....*

[PR also enters chrétienté, which however is defined essentially as equivalent to English Christendom].

О: ХРИСТИАНСТВО: Религия, в основе которой лежит культ Иисуса Христа.

Islam:

COD: Islam: the religion of the Muslims, a monotheistic faith regarded as revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah.

[COD: Islamism: Islamic militancy or fundamentalism. (Note the difference between the definitions of COD's English Islamism and PR's

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[4] *Ожегов С.И.* (сост.) Толковый словарь русского языка / Под общ. ред. Л.И. Скворцова. М., 2015 (далее – О).

[5] *Oxford English Dictionary* OED, 2nd Ed. 1989.

French ISLAMISME; O seems to have no comparable Russian entry; COD makes Islamist an undefined run-on at Islamism; for O, ИСЛАМИСТ is merely Сторонник ислама; alone among our dictionaries, COD enters Islamophobia)].

PR 1 ISLAM: Religion préchée par Mahomet et fondée sur le Coran. V. **Islamisme.** *Les cinq piliers de l'Islam:* profession de foi, prière, jeûne, dîme et pèlerinage à La Mecque (ou Médine).

PR 2 ISLAMISME: Religion musulmane. V. **Mahometisme** (*vx*).

O1: ИСЛАМ: Магометанство, мусульманская религия. *Шиитское направление ислама. Суннитское направление ислама.*

O2: МАГОМЕТАНСТВО: Религия, по преданию основанная Магометом в VII в. н. э., мусульманство, ислам.

In examining these dictionary entries, we find several pieces of information mentioned in at least one of the dictionaries:

1) religion (in all entries); faith (COD, definition there including the sense "a particular religion");

2) monotheistic: In Judaism and Islam (COD);

3) adherents: Jews (COD, PR); Muslims (COD, O1); Note that Christians are not mentioned in our sample!

4) leading figure: (Jesus) Christ; Muhammad (COD, PR, O2);

5) divinity: (Jesus) Christ (COD, PR, O2); Yahweh, Jehovah (O1); Allah (COD);

6) sacred scripture: Old Testament (COD); Torah (O example); Talmud (COD & O example); sacred books (PR); Koran (PR); Bible (O example);

7) age: one of the oldest religions, arisen in the First Millennium in Palestine BCE (O); 7th Century CE (O2).

It is clear from the information above that the entries for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have not been defined together as a set. It might be possible to do so now, however, using the English language and basing the revised definitions on the existing ones plus Torah and Bible from an example in O plus of course Christians!

Judaism: the monotheistic religion of the Jews, descendents of the Hebrews, arisen in the First Millennium BCE in Palestine, based on the Old Testament/the Bible/the Torah and the Talmud and centered on the worship of Yahweh/Jehovah.

Christianity: the religion of the Christians, arisen in the First Century CE in Israel and based on the person and teachings of Christ as found in the Bible.

Islam: the monotheistic religion of the Muslims, arisen in the Seventh Century CE and regarded as revealed in the Koran through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah.

Problems:

Proper Names: May not be entries in the dictionaries under discussion. For example, Allah/Аллах is in COD and O but not PR; Bible, Koran, Old Testament, Torah, Talmud, Yahweh, Jehovah are all in COD – but the Russian and French equivalents of Yahweh and Jehovah are not in O or PR (though there is a PR dictionary devoted to names). In like wise, the particular problem presented by Palestine/Israel is easier to avoid than to solve: Middle East or Near East offer themselves instead.

Old Testament: Defined in COD as "the first part of the Christian Bible...corresponding approximately to the Hebrew Bible"; Hebrew Bible being defined in COD as "the sacred writings of Judaism, called by Christians the Old Testament".

Unexpected Problem 1: The Bible and the Torah are not mentioned in the definitions of any of our three religions. They appear only in an example in O – at иудаизм – where the relation of the Bible to the Torah is, to say the least, unclear.

Unexpected Problem 2: O2's definition of МАГОМЕТАНСТВО includes the information по преданию основанная Магометом... At ПРЕДАНИЕ (sense 1), O as a so-called second substitute offers легенда. Thus, the phrase just quoted says that Islam was founded by Muhammad "according to legend". Neither Judaism nor Christianity has the authenticity of its origin called into question by O in this way. Nor does COD or PR call thus into question any of our three religions.

Monotheistic:

Officially, Christianity is monotheistic, as suggested by the PR example *Le Dieu en trois personnes du christianisme.* But that very example shows the difficulty of describing Christianity as monotheistic in the sense that Judaism and Islam are: it is significant that none of our three dictionaries calls Christianity monotheistic.

Doctrine:

Though the definitions offered above are in each case longer than their originals, they still give remarkably little information about the doctrinal content of their respective religions beyond what the user will find at the entries for *religion* itself or *monotheistic.* This is a recurrent problem in the lexicography of concepts. The PR example < *Les cinq piliers de l'Islam:* profession de foi, prière, jeûne, dîme et pèlerinage à La Mecque (ou Médine) > suggests what might be required to make such definitions fuller. At this point, however, the question "Are we saying enough?" must yield to the question "Have we the space to say it?" By contrast, a hypothetical definition of *water* might run:

Water: a colourless odourless tasteless transparent liquid (H_2O) that freezes to ice, boils to steam, falls as rain, and is used for drinking, wash-

ing, cooking, swimming, and sailing in. What, after all, is the difference between a dictionary and an encyclopaedia?

Extra Information (given typically in Examples rather than in Definitions):

Judaism: Official religion of Israel, sacred books are the Torah (O example), the Bible (O example).

Christianity: the Trinity; "primitive Christianity" (PR).

Islam: the Five Pillars of Islam (PR); Shiite Islam, Sunni Islam (O1).

It is clear from the information above that the Extra Information for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam has been added in each entry individually, with little or no effort to provide similar information for all the entries. Moreover, there is no clear boundary between information given in the definition and information given elsewhere in the entry, especially in examples. So some monolingual dictionaries supplement or even replace their examples with what is often called a "second sentence", officially part of the definition but not structurally integrated within it. Thus at Judaism one might have:

"Judaism: the monotheistic religion of the Jews, descendents of the Hebrews, arisen in the First Millennium BCE in Palestine, based on the Old Testament/the Torah and the Talmud and centred on the worship of Yahweh/Jehovah. It is the official religion of Israel."

An Alternative: Should we perhaps start our definitions with "the Abrahamic religion..."? An attractive idea, though requiring a fuller definition of Abrahamic. But what would it add to the definitions we already have – except perhaps to reaffirm the common origin of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam given our reluctance to call one of them, Christianity, "monotheistic"?

A note on dictionary format: Every aspect of dictionaries is worth considering. Thus a COD entry will be laid out like this (ie as an inversely indented paragraph):

xxxxx.....
....
....

A PR entry will be laid out like this (ie as a normally indented paragraph):

　　xxxxx....
....
....

And an O entry will be laid out like this (ie flush left):

xxxxx......

....
....

The differences are non-trivial: an O entry takes up less space than a PR entry, which in turn is more economical than a COD entry (which seems nevertheless to be the preferred format in Anglophonia). But O can accommodate more entries than PR, which has room for more entries than COD.

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ЛЕКСИКОГРАФИЯ ПОНЯТИЙ: АВРААМИЧЕСКИЕ РЕЛИГИИ

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В статье представлено сравнение трактовок трех культурно значимых понятий – иудаизма, христианства, ислама – в словарях нескольких языков, для того чтобы: 1) исследовать словари и культуру составления словарей, которые используют данные концепты; 2) побудить исследователей реализовывать подобную практику сравнений.

Ключевые слова: Авраамические вариации; концепция; лексикография.

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