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Designing a Specialized Dictionary for Non-Native Startup Founders: A Functional Lexicographic Framework for Entrepreneurial Communication

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ABSTRACT: *Startup founders operate in professional environments in which communication involves specialized terminology, recurring phraseological patterns, and professional genres associated with specific communicative purposes. For non-native English-speaking founders, these communicative practices may generate information needs that extend beyond the identification or translation of isolated terms. This paper examines how such needs can be approached from a specialized lexicographic perspective. Drawing on entrepreneurship studies, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and functional lexicography, the study develops a conceptual framework for the design of a specialized entrepreneurial dictionary for non-native English-speaking startup founders. The framework defines the intended user profile and distinguishes between communicative situations, in which users may require assistance with language-related activities, and cognitive situations, in which they seek knowledge about entrepreneurial concepts and practices. On this basis, it proposes a dictionary model in which information selection is guided by anticipated user needs and may include definitions, contextual examples, collocations and phraseological information, translation equivalents, and pragmatic guidance. Rather than treating entrepreneurial communication as terminology alone, the framework connects specialized lexical information with the professional situations in which founders may need to understand, produce, or interpret entrepreneurial discourse. As a conceptual study, the proposed framework does not claim empirical effectiveness; instead, it provides a theoretically grounded basis for the future development and evaluation of user-oriented entrepreneurial lexical resources in multilingual and non-native contexts.*

KEYWORDS: entrepreneurial discourse; specialized lexicography; startup communication; non-native English-speaking startup founders; English for Specific Purposes (ESP); entrepreneurial dictionary.

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Introduction

The international expansion of entrepreneurial activity has contributed to growing scholarly attention to the environments in which entrepreneurial ventures emerge and develop. The entrepreneurial ecosystem perspective emphasizes that entrepreneurship is embedded in broader social, cultural, and material contexts that provide resources and support to entrepreneurial actors (Stam 2015; Spigel 2017). As entrepreneurial activity becomes increasingly international, founders may also operate across professional and linguistic boundaries, bringing new communicative demands into entrepreneurial practice.

Operating in such environments places substantial communicative demands on startup founders. Beyond developing products or securing financial resources, entrepreneurs may need to explain business models, negotiate partnerships, communicate with investors, and establish legitimacy across diverse professional settings. These demands may become particularly challenging for non-native English-speaking founders when English functions as a lingua franca in international business interactions (Nickerson 2005). The present study focuses on English without treating it as the sole language of international entrepreneurial communication, since the languages used in professional interaction may vary according to markets, partners, and communicative situations. This distinction is particularly relevant in multilingual contexts such as Algeria. Evidence from an Algerian international business setting documents the concurrent use of Arabic and French in everyday workplace communication alongside English in particular internationally oriented professional activities (Khameli 2020). Although this evidence does not concern startup founders specifically, it illustrates the multilingual professional environment within which the relevance of the proposed framework may be considered.

The linguistic dimension of this challenge becomes more visible when entrepreneurship is approached not only as an economic activity but also as a discursive practice. Williams (2010), for example, conceptualizes entrepreneurship as a form of performance in which entrepreneurs learn and reproduce particular roles and discourse patterns. In the present study, entrepreneurial discourse refers broadly to the language and discursive practices associated with entrepreneurial activity, whereas entrepreneurial communication refers more specifically to the communicative activities through which founders pursue professional purposes in particular situations. Specialized terminology, in turn, refers here to domain-related lexical units designating concepts relevant to entrepreneurial activity. These distinctions allow the linguistic resources required by founders to be considered without reducing entrepreneurial communication to terminology alone.

Phraseological information is particularly relevant in this respect. Komarova and Oks (2023, 106), in their work on geography ESP, describe verbal word combinations as the "building material" of scientific discourse in the field of Earth sciences, while Hanks (2008) highlights the central role of collocations and phraseology in lexicography. In business lexicography specifically, Leroyer (2006) relates the treatment of phraseology to dictionary functions and user needs. This orientation is consistent with functional lexicography: Bothma and Tarp (2014, 351) distinguish communicative, cognitive, operative, and interpretive situations as fundamental types of lexicographically relevant situations. For the present study, these perspectives support a shift from treating a specialized dictionary as a repository of terms toward designing it in relation to the situations and needs of its intended users.

Research on entrepreneurial discourse has already examined aspects of the language associated with entrepreneurial activity, including its lexical patterns (Roundy & Asllani 2019). The gap addressed here is not framed as the absence of entrepreneurial terminology itself, but as a more specific lexicographic design

problem: how a specialized resource can be structured around the communicative and cognitive needs of non-native English-speaking startup founders.

Against this background, the study proposes a conceptual framework for a specialized entrepreneurial dictionary intended to support this user group. By bringing entrepreneurship research and entrepreneurial discourse into dialogue with English for Specific Purposes and functional lexicography, it examines how lexical and phraseological information can be selected and organized in relation to founders' communicative needs. The framework is conceptual rather than empirically validated and is intended to provide a theoretical basis for the subsequent development and evaluation of a user-oriented entrepreneurial dictionary.

1. Entrepreneurship as a Specialized Communicative Domain

Entrepreneurial activity is embedded in ecosystems composed of interconnected social, cultural, and material attributes that provide resources and benefits to entrepreneurs (Spigel 2017). Within these environments, entrepreneurial activity also involves a substantial communicative dimension, as founders must present their ventures and engage with different stakeholders. Communication therefore forms part of the processes through which entrepreneurial ventures articulate their value, establish relationships, and pursue resources and opportunities. Approaching entrepreneurship from this communicative perspective complements economic and managerial accounts by directing attention to the role that language and discourse play in entrepreneurial practice.

The strategic role of communication is particularly visible in entrepreneurial narratives. Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) show how entrepreneurial stories contribute to the construction of venture identity and legitimacy and facilitate access to capital and market opportunities. Empirical research by Martens, Jennings, and Jennings (2007) further demonstrates the role of entrepreneurial narratives in resource acquisition. Together, these studies indicate that entrepreneurial communication does more than transmit information: it can contribute to the processes through which ventures establish legitimacy and pursue access to resources.

Entrepreneurial communication is realized through professional genres, understood here as recurring forms of professional communication associated with recognizable purposes and audiences. Entrepreneurial pitching provides a well-documented example: Daly and Davy (2016) identify structural, linguistic, and rhetorical features of successful entrepreneurial pitches. Spinuzzi et al. (2014) further show that pitching can form part of a broader cycle of interacting professional communication genres. In the entrepreneurship program they examined, this cycle included program applications, initial pitches, feedback documents, and revised pitches. Entrepreneurial communication can therefore involve interconnected genres through which founders present and progressively develop their ventures in response to particular professional situations.

Swales's (1990) concept of discourse community provides a useful analytical perspective for understanding the relationship between such genres, communicative purposes, and specialized lexis. Among its defining characteristics, a discourse community has shared public goals, uses mechanisms of communication and feedback, employs one or more genres to further its aims, and develops specific lexis (Swales 1990, 24–27). The present study does not assume that startup founders constitute a single homogeneous discourse community. Rather, the concept is used to clarify how recurring communicative purposes, professional genres, and specialized linguistic resources can become interconnected within entrepreneurial settings.

Beyond genre-level conventions, specialized communication also involves phraseological patterns that cannot be reduced to isolated terminology. Hanks (2008), discussing Sinclair's lexicographical legacy,

highlights the central role of collocations and phraseology in lexical description and the importance of supporting idiomatic language use. In entrepreneurial settings, this distinction is particularly relevant to non-native users, whose communicative needs may involve not only understanding domain-specific concepts but also producing appropriate combinations of words within professional situations. Phraseology therefore constitutes a further dimension to consider when examining entrepreneurship as a specialized communicative domain.

The strategic significance of entrepreneurial language is also evident in research examining the relationship between discourse and economic outcomes. Wales and Mousa (2016, 13) argue that rhetorical choices in IPO communication can provide meaningful signals to investors when they assess the value of a firm. Their study subsequently examines affective and cognitive rhetoric in the prospectuses of young high-technology firms and reports initial support for its hypothesized effects on IPO underpricing. Although this evidence derives from the specific context of initial public offerings, it illustrates the potential significance of linguistic choices in professionally consequential entrepreneurial communication.

Taken together, these characteristics support approaching entrepreneurship as a specialized communicative domain in which recurring communicative purposes, professional genres, specialized lexis, and phraseological patterns interact within particular professional situations. This perspective has direct implications for specialized lexicography: the relevant question is not simply which entrepreneurial terms should be included in a dictionary, but what lexical and phraseological information non-native startup founders may require in order to address specific communicative and cognitive needs. The resulting lexicographic problem is therefore one of user-oriented design rather than the mere compilation of entrepreneurial terminology.

2. Specialized Lexicography and User Needs

A central development in functional approaches to lexicography is the systematic orientation of dictionary design toward users, their needs, and the situations in which those needs arise. Bergenholtz and Tarp (2003) conceptualize dictionaries as utility products designed to assist users in solving specific problems, a principle further developed within Tarp's (2008) function theory of lexicography. From this perspective, the selection and presentation of lexicographic information should be determined not simply by the lexical units belonging to a particular subject field, but by the types of users, situations, and information needs for which lexicographic assistance is intended. This orientation is especially relevant to specialized lexicography, where dictionary design must account for both subject-field knowledge and the specialized language through which that knowledge is communicated.

Within functional lexicography, the user's situation is fundamental to determining the type of lexicographic assistance required. Of particular relevance to the present study are communicative situations, in which users require assistance with language-related activities such as text reception, text production, and translation, and cognitive situations, in which consultation is motivated by a need to acquire knowledge (Tarp 2008). These two types of situations are especially pertinent to the proposed entrepreneurial dictionary because non-native startup founders may encounter both kinds of needs: they may seek conceptual knowledge about entrepreneurial phenomena while also requiring linguistic assistance to understand or produce entrepreneurial communication. The distinction therefore provides a functional basis for determining what kinds of information the proposed resource should contain.

This user-oriented perspective also resonates with a central principle in English for Specific Purposes (ESP): the orientation of language provision toward identifiable user purposes and needs. In their account of the emergence of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, 6) describe "a new generation of learners who knew

specifically why they were learning a language." They subsequently define ESP as "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (Hutchinson & Waters 1987, 19). Although this principle was formulated within language teaching rather than lexicography, its emphasis on identifiable purposes provides a useful point of connection with user-oriented lexicographic design, where decisions about information selection and presentation are likewise related to the needs that arise in particular user situations.

Specialized lexicography provides a basis for translating these differentiated needs into decisions about dictionary content. Fuertes-Olivera (2010, 17) identifies four basic lexicographic categories relevant to specialized learner lexicography: learners, the learner's situation, the learner's needs, and dictionary assistance. For the intended users of the proposed dictionary, this means that lexicographic assistance cannot be limited in advance to definitions or translation equivalents. Non-native startup founders may require conceptual information about entrepreneurial phenomena as well as linguistic information for understanding or producing entrepreneurial communication. The selection of lexicographic data should therefore be guided by anticipated consultation problems rather than by the mere inclusion of entrepreneurial terminology.

These principles provide the basis for conceptualizing a specialized entrepreneurial dictionary around clearly identified users, consultation situations, and information needs. Rather than organizing the resource solely around a body of entrepreneurial terms, the proposed model is intended to provide lexicographic assistance for both cognitive and communicative situations: acquiring knowledge about entrepreneurial concepts and addressing language-related problems arising in entrepreneurial communication. The resulting framework is therefore user- and situation-oriented, with the selection of lexicographic information determined by the anticipated functions of the resource. This functional orientation provides the theoretical basis for the specialized dictionary model developed in the following sections.

3. Toward a Functional Lexicographic Framework for Entrepreneurial Communication

The previous sections have established the conceptual basis for approaching entrepreneurship as a specialized communicative domain characterized by recurring professional purposes, genres, and specialized linguistic resources. They have also shown how functional lexicography provides a framework for relating lexicographic assistance to particular users, consultation situations, and information needs. On this basis, the present section proposes a functional lexicographic framework for a specialized entrepreneurial dictionary intended for non-native startup founders, with particular attention to the communicative and cognitive situations in which lexicographic assistance may be required.

The proposed framework is developed through a conceptual synthesis of the theoretical perspectives discussed above, bringing research on entrepreneurial discourse and communication into dialogue with functional lexicography and the user-oriented principles of English for Specific Purposes. Its purpose is to translate these perspectives into a set of lexicographic functions and structural components relevant to the intended users and their anticipated consultation situations. The framework is therefore conceptual rather than empirically validated: it specifies how user characteristics, communicative and cognitive situations, and corresponding information needs can inform the selection and organization of lexicographic data in a specialized entrepreneurial dictionary.

3.1 User Profiles and Consultation Situations

A central principle of functional lexicography is that dictionary design should be guided by the characteristics of intended users, the situations in which lexicographic consultation occurs, and the needs arising

in those situations (Bergenholtz & Tarp 2003; Tarp 2008). In accordance with this principle, the proposed dictionary defines its primary target users as non-native English-speaking startup founders who may use English for particular forms of entrepreneurial communication within multilingual professional environments.

The user profile is defined functionally rather than by nationality, sector, or a single linguistic background. The relevant characteristic is that the intended user participates in startup-related professional communication through English as a non-native speaker and may consult the dictionary for assistance with entrepreneurial concepts or language use. This formulation also accommodates multilingual settings, including contexts such as Algeria, without assuming that English is the user's only professional language or that all startup founders share the same linguistic repertoire. The proposed profile should therefore be understood as a design specification to be examined empirically in subsequent user research.

Within this user profile, the framework focuses on two types of lexicographically relevant situations: communicative and cognitive situations. Bothma and Tarp (2014, 351) identify these as two of four fundamental types of lexicographically relevant situations, alongside operative and interpretive situations. For the purposes of the proposed dictionary, communicative situations may involve assistance with the reception or production of entrepreneurial discourse, whereas cognitive situations involve the acquisition or clarification of knowledge about entrepreneurial concepts. These situations are not presented here as empirically established needs of all startup founders; rather, they constitute the initial functional categories through which anticipated consultation needs can be organized and subsequently tested in user research.

3.2 Lexicographic Architecture

An important consideration in lexicographic design is the effort required for users to retrieve and understand the information provided by a dictionary. Nielsen (2008) distinguishes between search-related and comprehension-related information costs and shows how aspects of dictionary structure, data presentation, dictionary functions, and use-situations can influence these costs. For the proposed entrepreneurial dictionary, this perspective highlights the importance of organizing lexicographic data in ways that facilitate access to information relevant to anticipated consultation needs.

This orientation is consistent with Fuertes-Olivera and Tarp's (2014) functional conception of specialized dictionaries as tools designed to assist specific users with specific information needs in particular usage situations. Applied to the present framework, this principle requires the proposed architecture to relate the selection and organization of lexicographic data to the communicative and cognitive situations identified above.

A related perspective can be found in Arabic lexicographic scholarship. In defining the scope of his study of dictionary making, Al-Qasimi (1991, 16–17) addresses a range of problems relevant to bilingual lexicography, including semantic differentiation, equivalence across languages, definition, usage, illustrative examples, and visual representation. His treatment illustrates that lexicographic description may involve several types of information beyond the provision of lexical equivalents alone. For the proposed entrepreneurial dictionary, this perspective supports the inclusion of complementary forms of lexicographic information where they are relevant to the user's anticipated consultation needs.

Accordingly, the proposed entrepreneurial dictionary adopts a multidimensional architecture:

Lexicographic Component	Function	Anticipated User Need
Term	identifies the lexical unit	terminology recognition
Definition	explains conceptual meaning	conceptual understanding
Context of Use	situates the term in relevant communicative contexts	contextual interpretation
Example Sentence	illustrates contextualized use	text production
Collocations	provides recurrent phraseological combinations	phraseological production
Translation Equivalent	supports multilingual mediation	cross-linguistic understanding
Pragmatic Note	clarifies situational or usage constraints	appropriate language use
Related Terms	establishes conceptual and lexical connections	knowledge organization

Table 1. Proposed Lexicographic Architecture for Entrepreneurial Communication

Table 1 operationalizes the proposed framework by relating different types of lexicographic information to anticipated user needs. Definitions are intended primarily to support conceptual understanding, while contextual information, example sentences, and collocations provide assistance relevant to text reception and production. Translation equivalents support cross-linguistic mediation, whereas pragmatic notes can provide information about situationally appropriate usage. Related terms, in turn, can help users establish conceptual and lexical connections within the entrepreneurial domain. The architecture thus combines several types of lexicographic information whose relevance can subsequently be examined through corpus analysis and user-based evaluation.

To illustrate how this architecture may be applied at entry level, Table 2 presents selected entrepreneurial expressions together with examples of the types of lexicographic information that a future dictionary could provide. The examples are illustrative rather than corpus-derived or empirically validated.

Term	Illustrative Usage	Information Need	Illustrative Lexicographic Treatment
pivot	The startup pivoted from B2C to SaaS.	conceptual and contextual understanding	definition + context-of-use note
runway	We have six months of runway left.	interpretation of specialized meaning	contextual definition + usage example
traction	The company gained traction among users.	specialized meaning and phraseological use	definition + collocational information
bootstrapping	We bootstrapped the company.	conceptual understanding	definition + related terms
pitch deck	Send your pitch deck.	conceptual and genre-related understanding	definition + brief genre/context note

Table 2. Illustrative Application of the Proposed Lexicographic Architecture

Table 2 illustrates how the proposed architecture can be applied to selected entrepreneurial expressions without assuming that the examples represent empirically established user difficulties. Different lexical units may be associated with different types of anticipated information needs. A term such as pivot, for example, may require conceptual and contextual clarification, whereas traction may call for both semantic and phraseological information. An expression such as pitch deck may additionally benefit from a brief explanation of the professional genre to which it refers. The examples therefore illustrate how different components of the proposed architecture can be combined according to the type of lexicographic assistance anticipated in a particular consultation situation. Their actual relevance and adequacy would need to be established through subsequent corpus-based analysis and user research.

3.3 Functional Integration & Future Research

While Table 1 outlines the structural architecture of the proposed dictionary and Table 2 illustrates its possible application at entry level, Figure 1 synthesizes the broader functional logic connecting user situations, anticipated information needs, lexicographic assistance, and the organization of lexicographic data. The figure therefore brings together the principal components of the proposed framework and shows how they relate within the conceptual model.

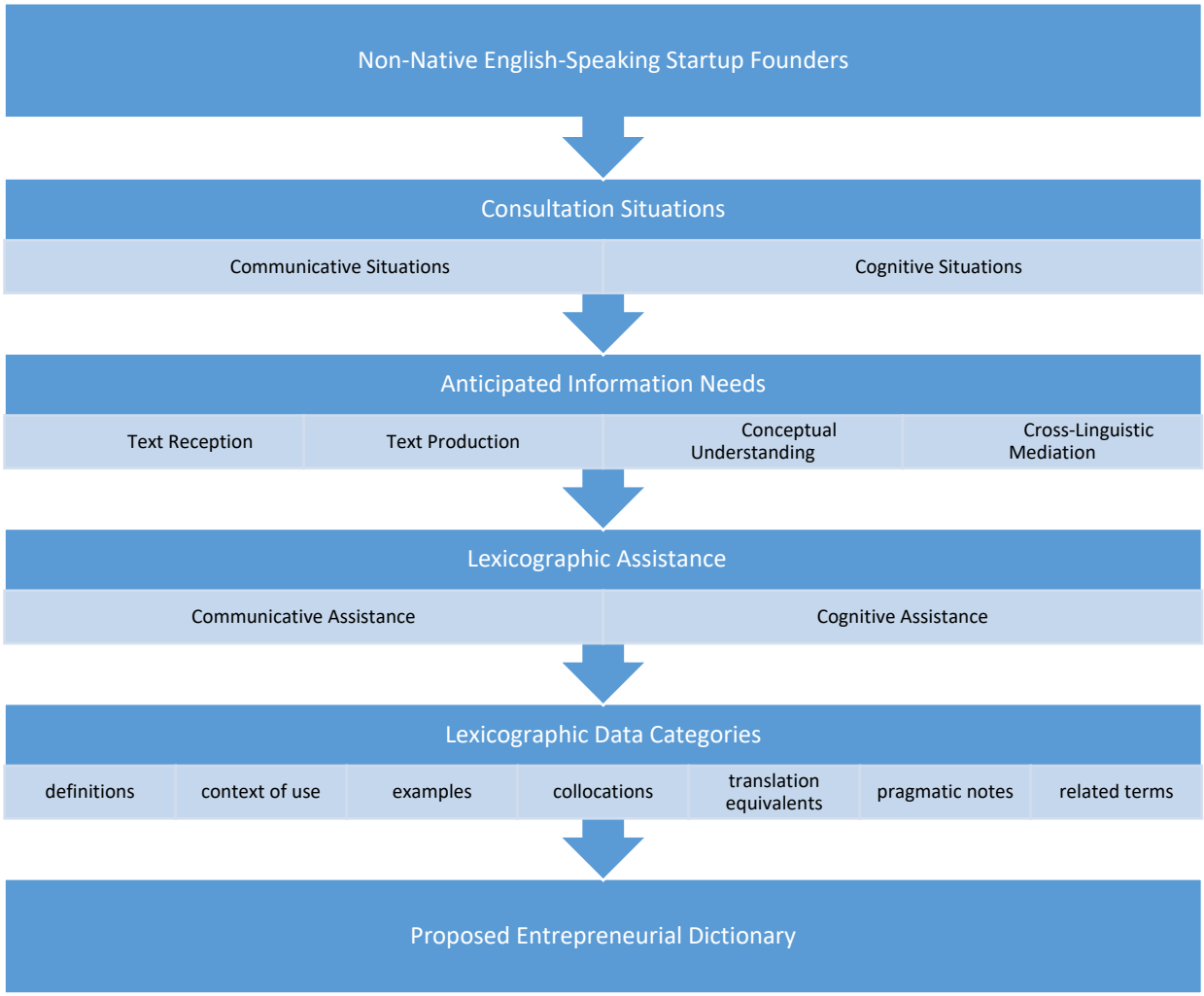


Figure 1. Proposed Functional Model of Entrepreneurial Dictionary Consultation for Non-Native English-Speaking Startup Founders

Figure 1 represents the central logic of the proposed framework by showing how anticipated communicative and cognitive needs can be related to corresponding forms of lexicographic assistance and to the data categories through which that assistance may be provided. Rather than representing dictionary consultation as lexical retrieval alone, the model conceptualizes it as a process in which different types of lexicographic information are selected in relation to particular user situations and anticipated information needs. The figure thus integrates the user-oriented and function-oriented principles developed in the preceding sections into a single conceptual representation.

Because the proposed framework is conceptual rather than empirically validated, future research should examine its assumptions through corpus-based studies of entrepreneurial discourse and user-based research with startup founders. Such research could investigate the relevance of the proposed information categories, identify recurrent consultation needs, and evaluate prototype dictionary entries in specific communicative and cognitive situations. A subsequent stage could explore the implementation of the validated framework in digital and multilingual lexicographic resources and examine how their content and structure might be adapted to different entrepreneurial contexts.

4. Discussion

The proposed framework brings into dialogue three perspectives that are relevant to the design of an entrepreneurial dictionary: research on entrepreneurial discourse and communication, the needs-oriented perspective of English for Specific Purposes, and functional approaches to specialized lexicography. Their integration shifts the central lexicographic question from which entrepreneurial terms should be included to what kinds of lexicographic assistance non-native English-speaking startup founders may require in particular communicative and cognitive situations. The contribution of the framework therefore lies primarily in applying a user- and situation-oriented lexicographic perspective to entrepreneurial communication.

The conceptual analysis also suggests that entrepreneurial communication should not be reduced to specialized terminology alone. As discussed above, entrepreneurial activity may involve professional genres, communicative purposes, specialized lexical units, and phraseological patterns. These dimensions are analytically distinct but can interact within particular professional situations. Maintaining this distinction is important for lexicographic design because terminology, phraseology, and genre-related information may respond to different anticipated information needs and may therefore require different forms of lexicographic treatment.

From a functional-lexicographic perspective, the framework illustrates how established principles concerning users, consultation situations, information needs, and lexicographic assistance can be operationalized in the design of an entrepreneurial dictionary. The proposed architecture accordingly combines conceptual, contextual, phraseological, pragmatic, and cross-linguistic information rather than treating the dictionary as a repository of terms and definitions alone. The relevance of these information categories, however, remains a design hypothesis that requires subsequent empirical evaluation with the intended users.

For the proposed lexicographic framework, domain delimitation alone does not determine the selection of information. User situations and the types of assistance associated with those situations must also be considered. This has consequences for both data selection and entry design: the relevance of a definition, collocation, contextual example, translation equivalent, or pragmatic note depends on the information need that the resource is intended to address.

The principal limitation of the study is its conceptual nature. The proposed user profile, anticipated information needs, lexicographic architecture, and illustrative entry-level applications have not yet been empirically validated. Future research should therefore combine corpus-based analysis of entrepreneurial

discourse with user research involving startup founders in order to identify recurrent lexical and phraseological patterns, examine actual consultation needs, and evaluate the relevance of the proposed data categories. Prototype entries could subsequently be tested in specific communicative and cognitive situations, while multilingual adaptations could be examined in relation to particular linguistic and entrepreneurial contexts.

Conclusions

This article has examined how a specialized entrepreneurial dictionary for non-native English-speaking startup founders can be conceptualized from a user- and situation-oriented perspective. Rather than approaching entrepreneurial lexicography primarily as the compilation of domain-specific terminology, the study has considered how communicative and cognitive situations can inform the identification of anticipated information needs and the selection of corresponding forms of lexicographic assistance.

By bringing research on entrepreneurial discourse and communication into dialogue with English for Specific Purposes and functional lexicography, the study has proposed a conceptual framework linking intended users, consultation situations, information needs, lexicographic assistance, and specific categories of lexicographic data. The resulting architecture incorporates conceptual, contextual, phraseological, pragmatic, and cross-linguistic information according to the anticipated functions of the resource.

A central implication of the framework is that entrepreneurial terminology, phraseology, and professional genres should remain conceptually distinct while being considered in relation to the communicative situations in which they may interact. This distinction allows the proposed dictionary to address specialized lexical knowledge without reducing entrepreneurial communication to terminology alone.

The framework remains conceptual and has not yet been empirically validated. Its proposed user profile, anticipated information needs, data categories, and illustrative applications therefore require examination through corpus-based analysis and user research with startup founders. Such research can provide the empirical basis for refining the framework, evaluating prototype entries, and subsequently exploring its implementation in digital and multilingual lexicographic resources.

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