# Lexical Management in a Controlled Dictionary: A Diachronic Study of ASD-STE100 Entries for Letters A–C (From First Release to Issue 9)*

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**Abstract**

ASD-STE100 Simplified Technical English is a controlled natural language standard whose Controlled Dictionary plays a central role in enforcing semantic precision and reducing ambiguity in technical documentation. While the evolution of writing rules has been widely discussed, the diachronic development of dictionary entries has received limited scholarly attention. This paper analyses ASD-STE100 dictionary entries beginning with the letters A, B, and C across thirteen published editions (1986–2025).

The paper examines how dictionary entries are added, retained, or removed over time, and how these entry-level decisions are supported by changes in definitions, usage restrictions, and changes in the presentation of approved alternatives within dictionary entries. Using established methods from diachronic lexicography and terminology studies, entries are compared systematically across editions to identify recurring patterns of lexical management, supported by refinement, restriction, and structural reorganization.

The analysis shows that semantic control in ASD-STE100 is achieved through deliberate lexical management, including selective retention, consolidation, and limited removal of dictionary entries, supported by definitional refinement, restriction tightening, and structural reorganization. The findings highlight dictionary microstructure as a key regulatory mechanism in the evolution of a mature and modern controlled natural language.

**Keywords**

Simplified Technical English, controlled natural language, controlled dictionary, diachronic analysis, lexicography, terminology

## 1. Introduction

Controlled natural languages rely on deliberate lexical and structural constraints to promote clarity, consistency, and translatability [1, 2, 3]. ASD-STE100 is among the most mature of these, having evolved through all its published editions over four decades. Central to the standard is the Controlled Dictionary, which defines approved meanings (definitions), usage restrictions, and preferred alternatives for dictionary entries.

Despite its centrality, the Dictionary has rarely been examined as an evolving artefact. Existing discussions of ASD-STE100 [4, 5, 6, 7] focus primarily on writing rules, compliance assessment, or training practices, rather than on how dictionary entries change over time. Yet revisions to definitions, restrictions, and approved alternatives directly shape how the standard constrains interpretation and guides lexical choice.

This paper analyses ASD-STE100 dictionary entries beginning with the letters A, B, and C across thirteen published editions, from the first release (1986) up to the current version (Issue 9, 2025). By adopting a dictionary-internal perspective, the study examines how semantic control is achieved through deliberate lexical management, supported by definitional refinement and microstructural design. By examining the diachronic evolution of a structured controlled dictionary, this study

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contributes to broader research on terminology management and the governance of specialized lexical resources.

## 2. Related work

This study builds on established research in diachronic lexicography, terminology studies, and the design of controlled natural languages. In lexicography, diachronic dictionary analysis is a recognized method for investigating semantic change, restriction, and stabilization within both general and specialized lexicons. Such approaches examine how successive dictionary editions manage meaning over time through definitional refinement and entry restructuring [8, 9, 10, 11].

Similar diachronic approaches have been applied in terminology studies to examine conceptual evolution, stabilization, and shifts in term status over time [12, 13, 14, 15]. In terminology research, diachronic perspectives are used to trace conceptual evolution and stabilization in technical domains, particularly in relation to normativity and controlled usage [16, 17, 18, 19]. These studies emphasize the role of definitions and conceptual boundaries in maintaining terminological coherence across time.

While corpus-based methods are common in lexicography and terminography, dictionary-internal diachronic analysis remains fully appropriate for prescriptive and standardized resources. In such contexts, the dictionary itself constitutes the primary object of analysis, and changes in definitions, restrictions, and entry structure directly reflect evolving regulatory priorities [20]. This perspective is particularly relevant for controlled natural languages, which are explicitly designed to regulate meaning rather than to describe usage.

Despite available research on controlled natural languages from usability, compliance, and knowledge-representation perspectives [1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 21], their dictionaries have rarely been examined as diachronic systems. The present study addresses this gap by applying lexicographic methods to a mature, versioned Controlled Dictionary.

## 3. Dataset

### 3.1. Dictionary dataset

The dataset consists of all Controlled Dictionary entries beginning with the letters A, B, and C extracted from thirteen published editions of ASD-STE100. This alphabetical restriction allows detailed comparison while maintaining a manageable scope. For each entry, definition wording (approved meaning), usage restrictions, approved alternatives, and structural features are recorded.

The Controlled Dictionary itself originates from a systematic analysis of aircraft maintenance documentation carried out by experts of the AECMA Simplified English Working Group in the early 1980s. The initial objective was to define a limited set of approximately 900 approved general words suitable for technical instructions, a size comparable to other controlled natural languages developed in the same period for different scopes.

ASD-STE100 has been published in a total of seventeen editions (including revisions and changes). For the purposes of this study, thirteen editions were selected for analysis based on their lexical relevance. Minor revisions without dictionary changes and administrative re-publications were excluded, as they do not affect the Controlled Dictionary.

The A–C subset includes approximately 700 dictionary entries, corresponding to roughly 9,000 entry instances across the thirteen analysed editions. This subset contains a broad range of verbs, adjectives, and general vocabulary items, providing a sufficiently representative sample to identify recurring diachronic patterns while maintaining manageable analytical scope.

### 3.2. Data tracking model

Dictionary data are organized in a structured spreadsheet, with one row per entry per edition. Core fields include the headword, edition number, definition, restrictions, approved alternatives, structural format, change type, and analytical comments. This model supports incremental analysis as the A–C comparison progresses.

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the spreadsheet used to track entries across editions and change categories.

| | A | B | C | E | F | G | H |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | HEADWORD AND PART OF SPEECH | ADDED IN EDITION | STATUS | DEFINITION ADDED OR REVISED | ALTERNATIVES ADDED OR REVISED | EXAMPLES ADDED OR REVISED | ANALYTICAL COMMENTS |
| 2 | abrade (v) | 1986 FIRST RELEASE SE1 | Entry removed - 1995 Issue 1 | | | | |
| 3 | accomplish (v) | 1986 FIRST RELEASE SE1 | Entry retained across all editions | | Revised 1995 Issue 1 - 2017 Issue 7 - 2025 Issue 9 | STE and non-STE examples added - 1995 Issue 1 STE and non-STE examples revised - 2025 Issue 9 | Help notes added - 2025 Issue 9 |
| 6 | access (n) | 1986 FIRST RELEASE SE1 | Changed to APPROVED in 1986 FIRST RELEASE CH 1 Retained from then onward as approved | 1986 FIRST RELEASE Change 1 | Revised 2017 Issue 7 | STE example added in 1995 Issue 1 | |
| 7 | ANY (adj) | 1986 FIRST RELEASE SE1 | Changed to not approved in 1986 FIRST RELEASE CH 1 Retained from then onward as not approved | | Revised 2017 Issue 7 | STE and non-STE examples added - 1995 Issue 1 | |
| 8 | conversant (adj) | 1986 FIRST RELEASE SE1 | Entry removed - 2017 Issue 7 | | | STE and non-STE examples added - 1995 Issue 1 | |

**Figure 1**: Example of the spreadsheet-based data tracking model

## 4. Methodology

The analysis follows established methods from diachronic lexicography [8, 9, 10], terminography [13, 14], and terminology studies [16, 17] where successive dictionary editions are compared to identify semantic refinement, restriction, and structural change. Dictionary entries are compared across the various editions to track changes in definition wording, usage restrictions, and approved alternatives.

Particular attention is paid to dictionary microstructure, understood as the internal organization of entries, including how alternatives are positioned, labelled, and formatted. For each entry, changes are classified according to recurrent change types, enabling cross-entry comparison and pattern identification.

In addition to dictionary-internal comparison, the analysis was supported by the consultation of meeting records and working documents made available by the ASD Simplified Technical English Maintenance Group (STEMG). These materials document change proposals and editorial discussions across successive revisions of the standard. They were used selectively to clarify the rationale behind selected entry-level decisions, such as status changes, removals, or consolidation of entries.

The meeting records were not analysed systematically and do not constitute a separate dataset; rather, they provide contextual support for the interpretation of diachronic patterns identified through dictionary comparison.

## 5. Results: lexical management across editions

### 5.1. Entry addition, retention, and removal

Across the analysed A–C dataset, most entries remain stable across editions. Approximately 65–75% of entries show no substantial change, while 15–25% undergo definitional refinement and 5–

10% involve status changes, additions, or removals. Entry removal remains relatively rare, confirming the overall stability of the controlled core vocabulary. These proportions provide a general quantitative overview of the patterns discussed in this section.

The diachronic comparison of ASD-STE100 dictionary entries beginning with the letters A, B, and C across the various editions reveals a high degree of lexical stability, with a limited and controlled number of entry additions and removals. These changes do not reflect uncontrolled lexical turnover but appear to function as deliberate regulatory mechanisms within the Controlled Dictionary.

Entry additions tend to occur in response to emerging needs for semantic precision. Newly introduced entries (whether listed as approved or not approved headwords) are often narrowly defined from their first appearance and show limited subsequent change, indicating a stabilization-oriented approach rather than incremental expansion. An illustrative example is provided by the adjective *contiguous*, added in Issue 2 (2004). Across successive editions, the entry is consistently retained, indicating its continued relevance within the Controlled Dictionary. Removed entries, by contrast, are typically associated with semantic overlap or functional redundancy rather than with loss of conceptual relevance. In several cases, removal coincides with tighter definition or expanded scope of related entries, suggesting a strategy of semantic consolidation. Rather than eliminating concepts, the dictionary reallocates meaning to a smaller number of more tightly controlled entries.

Entry additions do not primarily affect the approved controlled core, which remains largely stable over time. Instead, growth occurs mainly among not approved entries, typically addressing ambiguous general-language words or terms whose specialized meanings could mislead writers. Listing such entries as not approved and directing authors toward clearer alternatives functions as a central control mechanism, supporting consistency and preventing misinterpretation without expanding the controlled lexicon. A closer inspection of entry additions and removals indicates that these changes are not uniform in motivation. Some removals are linked to the obsolescence of terms that no longer reflect current technical usage, while others result from reclassification decisions, where items are excluded from the Controlled Dictionary because they are evaluated as technical nouns or technical verbs rather than general vocabulary [22]. For example, the approved noun *compound* was removed from the Dictionary and added to Technical Noun category 4 (“Names of materials, consumables, and unwanted materials”) in Issue 7 (2017). Additions follow the opposite trajectory, typically involving terms that reflect technological development or that have become part of everyday technical language over time.

The dataset also reveals cases of entry retention accompanied by functional change. Some entries shift from not approved to approved status, indicating a reassessment of their suitability within the general core vocabulary, while the opposite pattern—entries retained but reclassified from approved to not approved—is also attested in the dataset. These status changes do not affect entry presence but modify how retained items are intended to function within the standard. This pattern is illustrated by the verb *activate***.** The entry was retained as not approved (users were directed toward more precise alternatives such as *start*, *operate,* or *connect*, the latter added in Issue 1, 1995) from the first release until Issue 9, where it underwent a change in status to approved following definitional refinement and restriction of usage contexts. This transition reflects a functional re-evaluation of an existing lexical item rather than the introduction of new vocabulary, allowing controlled adaptation while preserving dictionary stability.

Taken together, these observations indicate that the Controlled Dictionary manages its lexicon through selective consolidation rather than growth or reduction. Lexical change in ASD-STE100 thus functions primarily as a mechanism of semantic centralization, supporting long-term stability while allowing controlled adaptation.

The entry-level changes discussed in this section correspond primarily to the “entry introduction”, “entry retention”, and “entry removal” change types in Table 1.

### 5.2. Diachronic patterns in definitions

The diachronic comparison of dictionary entries beginning with the letters A, B, and C across the various editions shows that definitional change is closely linked to entry-level management decisions. Rather than functioning as an independent process, definition refinement consistently supports entry retention, consolidation, or removal.

The first recurring pattern is semantic narrowing. Early definitions often allow relatively broad interpretation, including abstract or general uses. In later editions, definitions increasingly restrict meaning to specific procedural, physical, or observable actions. This narrowing reduces semantic overlap between entries and supports consolidation by allowing a smaller number of entries to cover a more clearly delimited range of meanings. This pattern can be illustrated by the approved verb *apply*. In the first release, the entry is present with a general meaning that overlaps with several more specific verbs. Its approved meaning is progressively refined, moving from a broadly explanatory description toward a more explicitly procedural interpretation. Indeed, later editions (Issue 7) restrict its usage to concrete actions performed on physical components, reducing overlap with general-language senses. This example reflects the broader tendency toward increased semantic precision while maintaining lexical continuity.

A second pattern concerns the shift from explanatory to regulatory phrasing. Definitions in earlier editions function primarily as descriptive guidance, whereas later definitions adopt a more operational tone. This shift strengthens the regulatory role of retained entries and reduces reliance on parallel or partially overlapping terms.

A third pattern involves coordination between definition wording and usage restrictions. In several entries, definitional refinement is accompanied by tighter or more explicit restrictions. This coordination further limits interpretive flexibility and supports the stabilization of retained entries, particularly where other entries are removed.

Taken together, these patterns show that definitional refinement in ASD-STE100 functions primarily as a supporting mechanism for lexical consolidation and long-term stability rather than as an isolated process of semantic adjustment. These definitional changes support the “definition management” and “restriction management” categories in Table 1.

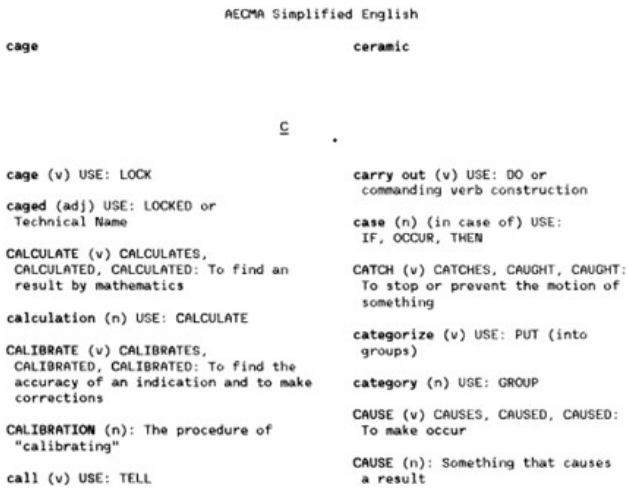
### 5.3. Evolution of approved alternatives

In ASD-STE100, approved alternatives provide recommended lexical choices to replace words or meanings that are not approved for use in the Controlled Dictionary. These alternatives are intended as guidance rather than as mandatory or exclusive solutions, allowing authors to select appropriate wording while remaining within the constraints of the standard.

In this context, the presentation of approved alternatives refers to the way they are structured, labelled, and positioned within dictionary entries, rather than to their lexical content.

Approved alternatives constitute a second major area of diachronic change. From the first release up to Issue 1, alternatives are embedded immediately after the headword or presented informally. In later editions, these alternatives are separated from the entry headword and presented in a separate column with a structured list and the corresponding part of speech clearly indicated and aligned (starting from Issue 7). This is especially important when the suggested alternative has a different part of speech and it is therefore necessary to rewrite the sentence differently (instead of doing a word-for-word replacement), increasing visibility and usability. The subsequent introduction of usage examples further supports correct interpretation, complementing tighter definition and restriction management.

This evolution strengthens the functional distinction between approved meanings and preferred lexical choices. The increasing formalization of alternative presentation enables tighter semantic control without expanding the size of the Controlled Dictionary.



AECMA Simplified English

cage — ceramic

C

**cage** (v) USE: LOCK

**caged** (adj) USE: LOCKED or Technical Name

**CALCULATE** (v) CALCULATES, CALCULATED, CALCULATED: To find an result by mathematics

**calculation** (n) USE: CALCULATE

**CALIBRATE** (v) CALIBRATES, CALIBRATED, CALIBRATED: To find the accuracy of an indication and to make corrections

**CALIBRATION** (n): The procedure of "calibrating"

**call** (v) USE: TELL

**carry out** (v) USE: DO or commanding verb construction

**case** (n) (in case of) USE: IF, OCCUR, THEN

**CATCH** (v) CATCHES, CAUGHT, CAUGHT: To stop or prevent the motion of something

**categorize** (v) USE: PUT (into groups)

**category** (n) USE: GROUP

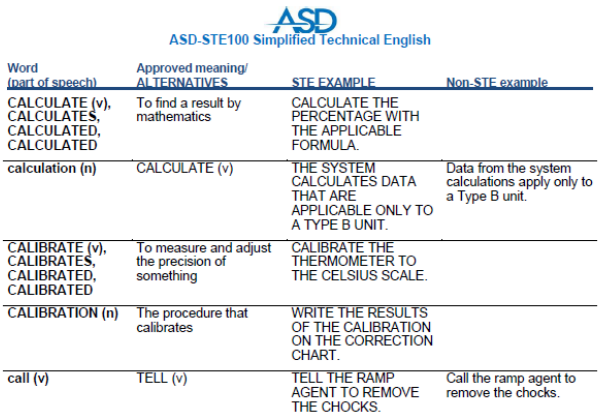
**CAUSE** (v) CAUSES, CAUSED, CAUSED: To make occur

**CAUSE** (n): Something that causes a result

**Figure 2**: Example for letter C in First Release (1986)

In some cases, changes affect not only the presentation of approved alternatives but also their content. Alternative formulations introduced in earlier editions are later revised, replaced, or reduced, reflecting a refinement of lexical guidance rather than a change in conceptual scope. These entry-level developments are consistent with the broader trend toward tighter control and clearer separation between definitions and alternative guidance observed across the Dictionary.

In addition to alternative wording, later editions increasingly rely on explicit usage examples to guide correct application of constrained entries. From Issue 1 onward, the Dictionary progressively introduces usage examples. The evolution of their designation is interesting: they were initially placed in columns labelled *approved example* / *not acceptable*. The columns were subsequently re-labelled *approved example / not approved* in Issue 5 (2010) and then modified to *approved example / not approved example* in Issue 8 (2021). In current Issue 9 they are designated with the label *STE example* and *non-STE example*. This metaterminological development does not alter lexical content but extends dictionary microstructure by providing explicit guidance on correct usage [23].



ASD-STE100 Simplified Technical English

| Word (part of speech) | Approved meaning/ ALTERNATIVES | STE EXAMPLE | Non-STE example |
|---|---|---|---|
| CALCULATE (v), CALCULATES, CALCULATED, CALCULATED | To find a result by mathematics | CALCULATE THE PERCENTAGE WITH THE APPLICABLE FORMULA. | |
| calculation (n) | CALCULATE (v) | THE SYSTEM CALCULATES DATA THAT ARE APPLICABLE ONLY TO A TYPE B UNIT. | Data from the system calculations apply only to a Type B unit. |
| CALIBRATE (v), CALIBRATES, CALIBRATED, CALIBRATED | To measure and adjust the precision of something | CALIBRATE THE THERMOMETER TO THE CELSIUS SCALE. | |
| CALIBRATION (n) | The procedure that calibrates | WRITE THE RESULTS OF THE CALIBRATION ON THE CORRECTION CHART. | |
| call (v) | TELL (v) | TELL THE RAMP AGENT TO REMOVE THE CHOCKS. | Call the ramp agent to remove the chocks. |

**Figure 3**: Example for letter C in Issue 9 (2025)

The increasing use and formalization of examples coincides with tighter lexical control and consolidation of entries. As definitions become more constrained and alternative choices more explicitly regulated, examples function as a complementary mechanism that supports correct interpretation and application of retained entries.

Changes in the presentation of approved alternatives correspond to the "alternative management" categories in Table 1.

### 5.4. Summary of recurrent change types

All diachronic changes identified in the A–C dataset can be classified using a small set of recurrent change categories and types, summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.**
Recurrent diachronic change categories and types in ASD-STE100 dictionary entries (A–C, from initial release up to the current Issue 9)

| *Change category* | *Change type* | *Description* | *Functional role in the standard* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Lexical status** | Entry introduction | New dictionary entry introduced in a given edition | Addresses need for increased semantic precision |
| | Entry retention | Entry retained across multiple editions | Ensures lexical stability while allowing status changes |
| | Entry removal | Entry removed in a later edition | Enables consolidation and reduction of semantic overlap |
| **Definition management** | Refinement of approved meaning | Approved meaning reworded without replacing the entry | Narrows or clarifies admissible meaning |
| | Semantic narrowing | Reduction of abstract or general meanings | Supports consolidation elsewhere in the lexicon |
| | Operationalisation | Shift toward procedural or action-oriented phrasing | Aligns meaning with technical usage |
| **Restriction management** | Restriction tightening | Addition or clarification of usage restrictions | Limits interpretive flexibility |
| **Alternative management** | Introduction of approved alternatives | Explicit listing of preferred lexical choices | Guides writers after consolidation or restriction |
| | Alternative reformatting | Structural separation or list-based presentation | Increases visibility and usability of alternatives |
| **Microstructure support** | Introduction of usage examples | Addition of STE / non-STE examples | Supports correct application of constrained entries |
| **Stability** | Lexical stabilization | No substantial change across successive editions | Indicates maturity of the standard |

The patterns described in Section 5.1 correspond primarily to the change types “entry introduction”, “entry retention”, and “entry removal” in Table 1. The patterns described in Section 5.2 correspond to the change types “definition refinement”, “semantic narrowing”, and “restriction tightening”, while those in Section 5.3 correspond to the “alternative management” categories.

## 6. Discussion

The results show that ASD-STE100 manages its Controlled Dictionary through deliberate lexical governance rather than through incremental vocabulary growth. Entry additions and removals are limited in number and appear to be closely coordinated with definitional refinement, restriction tightening, and changes in the presentation of approved alternatives.

Rather than removing concepts, the standard consolidates meaning by reallocating it to a smaller number of more tightly controlled entries. Definition refinement and operational phrasing support this process, while approved alternatives provide guidance to writers when lexical choice is constrained.

This combination of selective retention, consolidation, and supporting microstructural adjustments contributes to the long-term stability of the Controlled Dictionary. Lexical change in ASD-STE100 thus functions primarily as a regulatory mechanism that balances stability with controlled adaptation, and less as a process of expansion or reduction.

This study therefore frames the Controlled Dictionary of ASD-STE100 as an actively governed lexical system, in which change is achieved through consolidation, definitional refinements, and structured guidance. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how controlled natural languages evolve while maintaining stability and may inform future revisions of controlled dictionaries and more transparent editorial decision-making in similar prescriptive lexical resources.

## 7. Limitations

The study is intentionally limited in scope. It focuses on a restricted alphabetical subset (A–C) and relies exclusively on dictionary-internal evidence. This supports depth and methodological clarity but does not provide exhaustive coverage of the ASD-STE100 lexicon.

The study does not provide a systematic analysis of editorial deliberations in accordance with the STEMG meeting records.

These limitations are consistent with the study's aim to prioritize depth of analysis over coverage.

## 8. Conclusions and future work

This paper has presented a diachronic, dictionary-based analysis of ASD-STE100 entries beginning with the letters A, B, and C across various editions. The analysis shows how semantic control is achieved through selective retention, consolidation, and limited addition or removal of dictionary entries, supported by definitional refinement and the evolving structure of approved alternatives.

The findings highlight dictionary microstructure as a central mechanism in the evolution of a mature controlled natural language and provide a replicable framework for further diachronic research on prescriptive lexical resources. This work represents a first step toward a more comprehensive study aimed at analysing the full diachronic evolution of the standard.

## Declaration on Generative AI

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Chat-GPT-5.2 in order to complete grammar and spelling checks. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the publication's content.

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## A. Source Documents and Standards

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L) AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe. ASD-STE100 Simplified Technical English, International specification for the preparation of technical documentation in a controlled language, Issue 8 (2021)
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N) ASD Simplified Technical English Maintenance Group (STEMG). Meeting records and working documents related to the development and maintenance of ASD-STE100 (1983-2025)