Teaching Lexicography

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Abstract

Teaching lexicography and lexicology in a country where the language spoken is one of the lesser known languages (i.e. Hungarian), and where, for various reasons, lexicography and lexicology has not yet been taught as an academic subject at university level are treated from the point of view of the main components of a dictionary, viz. word (lexis, lexicology), grammar (morphology, syntax), meaning (semantics), as well as pronunciation (phonology), and multi-word units (phraseology). The author addresses how to organize courses in lexicology and lexicography as one subject and curricula thereof. A proposal is made to create a pool of curricula in lexicography and lexicology.

1 Introduction

Due to a lack of information and communication, it is impossible to draw an overall picture of how lecicography is taught throughout Europe and beyond, and whether it is taught at all. Is there any need for teaching it at university level at all? If not – why not?

During the past decade radical changes have swept through Europe. The Berlin Wall fell, the Soviet-dominated countries have been liberated, the "Eastern bloc" ceased to exist together with the Soviet Union itself and with it the two-pole world has been reduced to one "pole", and a slow but steady progress towards the integration of the old-new democratic states towards a united Europe has started.

These most favourable issues have already made their mark also on world lexicography, and on the future of EURALEX as well. For the past 18 years EURALEX did a wonderful job in discussing, surveying and describing what has been done and is still to be done in lexicography. However, the future of lexicography cannot be envisaged without assessing the younger and still younger generations of lexicographers.

Apart from some famous British projects on training and graduating lexicographers, there are rather fragmentary pieces of information on where and how lexicography is taught in European universities. Once we accept that dictionary-making is by now a profession, it has to be taught on the highest level.

2 How to organize a course in lexicography

2.1 The Hungarian scene

Hungary has a brand new university – Károli Gáspár University, founded in1993, which is the first among Hungarian universities to introduce the teaching of lexicography. Lexicography was introduced as an optional subject, but after three years it became a compulsory subject.

It soon became clear, however, that lexicography without its theoretical background, viz. lexicology, is similar to a house without foundations. One must start teaching lexicography together with lexicology.

The primary aim of the Faculty of Humanities of Károli Gáspár University is to turn out secondary-school teachers, preferably the scholar-type teachers. But once they have graduated they are by no means under any pressure to take up teaching as a profession, and the liguistically and lexicographically trained young teachers may take a degree in lexicography or get involved in dictionary-making or in some academic project on the theoretical aspects of lexicography.

2.2 Lexicology and lexicography as one subject

By now lexicology and lexicography represent two separate disciplines, as is well known. Yet they are so deeply interrelated that it is most advisable to treat (and teach) them simultaneously, as they overlap in several rather important aspects. – What they have in common first and foremost is their subject, their "material" as it were, viz. *word* and *vocabulary (the lexicon).* But then, there is also a marked difference between them: while lexicology is for the most part a theoretical sudy dealing with the *process*, lexicography is preoccupied mostly with the result of lexicalization. David Crystal in his wonderful book (CRYSTAL 1995) wrote a very educational chapter on the nature and sources of the English lexicon. He is absolutely right – and lexicographers have to forgive him for his slant – in stating that if someone wants to write a dictionary s/he needs to have had some training in lexicology. On the other hand "a lexicologist is very well off without ever having written a dictionary at all." (ibid. 162)

3 Themes for a course in lexicology and lexicography

3.1 Groundwork

First of all we have to define what course we have in mind. It is not for MA students specialising in lexicography but for all arts (or humanities) students majoring in at least one language. Thus, the first step is to make it clear what we mean by lexicology and how it differs from lexicography.

The origin of both words (terms) comes from the Greek ’lexicon’ meaning dicitionary, vocabulary, word-stock. Hence the prefix *lexico-* to which was added first *-graphia* (-graphy) also from Greek (’graphein’ to describe). ’Lexicography’ became lexicalized and recorded in OED in 1680. It was some 150 years later (in 1838, according to OED) that another linguistic term was coined with the same prefix, and *-logia* (-logy) was attached to it (from the Greek ’logos’ and ’legein’ to say): ’lexicology’.

Thus, the subject of both lexicography and lexicology is the same, viz. ’word’, the difference being that while lexicology is a term used to refer to the theoretical aspect of the study of a language’s vocabulary, lexicography is a more practical discipline, lexicology applied. Although they are interrelated, it does not mean that lexicology is merely a theoretical discipline, and lexicography merely practical. They complement and presuppose each other. From among the differences between the two disciplines we underline just one: how they are organized. While

the author of lexicological studies takes optional parts (segments) of vocabulary discussing the form, meanings, origin and various peculiarities of words (lexemes) from any arbitrary aspect, the lexicographar faces at all times the entire vocabulary of the language he is concerned with, and creates numerous mini-monographs, in other words, dictionary entries.

When the lexicologist deals with the major and minor categories of word-formation, viz. affixation, compounding, conversion, or back-formation, clipping, blending, abbreviations and acronyms, – s/he is preparing the ground for the lexicographer who is soon fully aware of the relevance of these categories (models, structures, functions and relationships) to his /her dictionary.

Again, when polysemy, synonymy or homonymy are highlighted by the lexicologist, unawares s/he is treading on the soil of lexicography. For, can any issue be more pivotal for a lexicographer than the complexity of meaning, the contrasts of lexical fields and other semantic issues?

3.2 Typology and orientation

Typology varies with authors. One of the most detailed typology has been given by SVENSÉN (1993). It classifies dictionaries according to various aspects, contrasts or dichotomies, such as the format (printed or electronic), arrangement of entries (alphabetical or thesaurus-type), the linguistic aspect (descriptive or prescriptive), the temporal factor (synchronic or diachronic), other linguistic aspects: monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, general-purpose or special-purpose dictionary, and finally: size and compactness.

Typology is in close correlation with the *orientation* of dictionary, in other words, who the *target audience* is. This aspect is decisive in all types of information the dictionary caters for as will be seen later.

To illustrate this we might refer to a dictionary-use situation where, eg two major languages are matched, say English and French. In these dictionaries it is assumed that the dictionary would be of equal interest in both English and French language communities. When, however, a major and a minor language are described in a dictioanry, eg English and Hungarian, one language has to be described in terms of the other. For example, the intensity of – say – grammatical information given varies with the language pairs described, depending on whether active or passive dictionaries are involved. Students will have to differentiate between – say – learner's and natives', linguistic or encyclopedic, general-purpose or special-purpose dictionaries. Since Hungarian is rather an isolated language among the languages of Europe, prominence will have to be given to bilingual lexicography.

3.3 Three 'pillars' of lexicography

There are three main components or 'pillars' of a dicitionary: the *lexical*, the *grammatical* and the *semantic.* This involves three basic disciplines of lexicography: *lexicology, descriptive grammar* and *(lexical) semantics.* There may be three ways of looking at words.

3.3.1 The word as a lexical unit

The 'word' as a lexical unit or lexeme (MCARTHUR 1996) is referred to in lexicography as headword, the basic unit of a dictionary.

Firstly, we have to treat the main types of headwords which, conventionally, may be: single words *(book, house)*, groups of words such as compounds (*clockwork, grass snake, lamp-black)*, attributive phrases *(grand piano, genetic engineering)*, compound verbs (phrasal verbs etc.) *(get on, put up with)*, parts of words *(auto-, -logy* and other affixes and combining forms or morphemes), shortened forms or clippings *(ad, info)*, abbreviations and acronyms *(EU, NATO)*, and encyclopedic elements *(Alexander the Great, Court of St James's, United Kingdom, Scotland, Sydney, the Met).*

Secondly, the modes of arrangement of headwords have to be considered. This can be alphabetic (within it: root or cluster-type arrangement or the combination of the two) or thesaurus-type arrangement, typically the synonym dictionaries.

Thirdly, the selection and dimension of vocabulary, and within this the proportion of the general and technical (specialist) vocabulary (MAGAY 1984) is treated. Students have to be aware how large the English – and their native language's – vocabulary is (about one million at least). But, again, it is the question of lexicology which words we regard as being technical as opposed to general. For example, *ant* and *fly* are both insects, two out of more than one million identified insects. How many – and which? – of these are we to include in a – say – medium size bilingual dictionary containing about 50 000 headwords in all?

Fourthly, the sources of compilation come under investigation. We have to turn first to historical lexicography to survey the traditional ways of collecting the desired headword list (excerpting from various texts, primary and secondary literature, existing dictionaries, encyclopedias). Then the radically new ways of collecting and recording linguistic material of the electonic age: databanks (databases) and corpora.

The dimensions of a dictionary in terms of headwords (vocabulary) are determined basically by the orientation of the dictionary: who the prospective users or target audience are. This is what we call user-oriented dictionary-making.

3.3.2 The word as a grammatical unit

It can be argued whether the phonological representation of word, ie. pronunciation, should be treated separately or within the category of grammar. Whereas spelling and the division into word classes are the minimum information in all types and sizes of dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual, pronunciation can be regarded as optional when, for example, a bilingual L1 – L2 dictionary is involved. In an L2 – L1 dictionary, however, it is most advisable to include current pronunciation of the source language.

Grammatical indications cover morphological and syntactic information. As to whether morphological information should be given in the introductory material of the dictionary or under the appropriate headword preferably by means of codes from the text of the dictionary to an appendix or prefatory material, has to be decided in the policy for each single dictionary. Depth of grammatical information – of course – varies with dictionaries. Some of the most typical morphological information include spelling variants, alternative forms *(enquire/inquire, organize/organise, colour/color)*, irregular forms *(went, dying, men, mice)*, dropping of final -e *(dance, dancing)*, changing of -y into -ie- (*study, studies)*, word-division etc.

Syntactic information is normally found in the sense section of the entry. Information of this kind are: the division into word classes, conversion (an important category of word-formation) (*quote, book* etc. verb and noun), the attributive use of nouns (*steel bridge, London house, china teapot)*, number classes of nouns *(people, scissors)*; the place of the adjective: normal or appositional (*London proper),* government: adjectives with prepositions (*unfit for, innocent of),* concord: in number, person and gender; transitive and intransitive use of verbs; verbal constructions such as verb+infinitive, verb+ ing form; English phrasal verbs in contrast with verbs in agglutinative languages (as eg Hungarian etc.)

3.3.3 The word as a semantic unit

Whether we call it 'meaning' or 'sense' (MCARTHUR 1996, BERG 1993) let us agree right at the beginning that they are synonymous terms, referring to the basic fact that words in general have more than one sense or meaning, and this phenomenon is called polysemy. Whatever we think of *a* dictionary or what kind of reference book a dictionary is at all depends on (1) how it defines the notion of polysemy and (2) how it treats polysemy in the given dictionary. When we look at polysemy vs homonymy, it can be argued whether homonymy is a semantic category or not. (LIPKA 1990)

Another crucial question crops up when we face polysemy vs functional shift (or conversion). Can lexical meaning and grammatical function be separated? Is it a question of semantics whether the various distinguishable senses of a word (or lexeme) are treated within separate word classes as it is done in most of the current dictionaries or ordering the various senses should be irrespective of their word-class category as it is done eg by Collins Cobuild (SINCLAIR et al. eds. 1995)?

In teaching lexicography to potential dictionary users (and makers) it has to be made clear that meaning discrimination (or sense division) is carried out in a totally different way in historical dictionary with chronological listing of senses and in dictionaries describing the current state of language with frequency of senses as the guiding principle, ie with the current and general meaning first, followed by the less common or current and special meaning(s)/sense(s).

Next, students have to realize that in describing the various meanings (or senses) and differentiating them (ie carrying on the process of disambiguation), the dictionary is compelled to use a metalanguage.

What then are the means of disambiguation? The meaning of each headword and each sense or subsense of it is explained in definitions with information about content, context, typical use and other relevant facts. Synonyms often substitue definitions. E.g.

exhilarant *adj*

1. exhilarating; invigorating (Collins)

exist *vb intr*

1. to have being or reality; to be
2. to be living; to live (Collins)

A typical way of communicating with the user is through labelling (a kind of code language) to indicate when and how a word is mainly used by a particular group of people or in a particular social context. The labels, apart from grammatical codes or abbreviations, are (a) temporal, (b) regional, (c) stylistic, or (d) occupational (subject-field indication). Eg *arch, obs, US, infml, med* etc. A fifth group may be (e) the semantic label, such as *trans* and*fig*, i.e. indicating transferred or figurative meaning or sense.

Illustrative examples are perhaps the most efficient and direct way of disambiguating senses. They are selected from actual texts (taken since the advent of the computer from text files or *corpora*) to show typical contexts, collocations and grammatical structures, in other words the grammatical and semantic behaviour of the entry word.

Bilingual dictionaries normally give translation equivalents for meanings which can be substituted in the target language text. Definitions instead of equivalents in bilingual dictionaries are given when no translation equivalent is possible, as eg with culture-bound words or phrases.

The main difficulty in bilingual lexicography is that full (or complete) equivalence (or one-to-one correspondence) between the source-language and target-language items is seldom (except for the area of 'realia'). In these clear cases labelling is not necessarily needed. When, however, there is ambiguity involved, double labelling may be applied, and – of course – metalinguistic glossing is inevitable.

The best way of disambiguation in bilingual dictionaries, too, is the use of examples to illustrate usage, ie the use of words in actual context. For semantic problems in bilingual dictionary see AL-KASIMI (1977).

3.3.4 Phraseology

It is a much debated question where to treat the various forms of multi-word lexical units. As it often happens, as in the present paper, the author fails to find a proper slot in the treatment of general lexicographic questions, therefore he gives it a separate chapter. The reason may be found in the double goal of their inclusion it the dictionary. First, they behave – grammatically – as single words and as such they have to be recorded together with other lexical elements to fulfil the descriptive role of dictionary-writing; second, they can be used best as illustrations of the various meanings (or senses) of the headword.

Since phrases and idioms (and idiomaticity) have far outgrown the diemnsions of lexicography (inaugurating perhaps a new discipline: *'phraseography'*) and have cut their own way through the countless mass of dictionary references, either collecting them in phraseological dictionaries (as eg COWIE 1975 and 1983) or treating them monographically (MAKKAI 1972, MOON 1998 and others), I would prefer assigning 'phraseology' to the chapter of meaning when dealing with the lexicographical issues of general-purpose dictionaries.

One can visualize phraseology in a dictionary as a 'continuum', with free combinations at one end and proverbs at the other, and collocations, phrases, phrasal verbs, idioms, sayings in between.

Idioms are to be treated as lexemes: they have to be defined as any other lexical unit, or their equivalents have to be found in the target language in the case of a bilingual dictionary, and have to be exemplified duly.

When, however, it is the case of an L1 – L2 dictionary (ie from native to foreign language), the lexicographer has to be on full alert when chosing target-language equivalent idioms for source-language idioms, so that the equivalent idiom is not a dated idiom. It is therefore more than necessary to find frequency indications in native dictionaries of idioms, as eg Collins Cobuild (1995).

Set phrases, fixed expressions (MOON 1998) and idioms, and an important subcategory: phrasal verbs, have to be included in due proportion in both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. But collocations (ie words often used together, sometimes called semi-idioms) are even more important in the bilingual dictionaary than in the monolingual, and have a special role in the L1 – L2 dictionary. An excellent example of treating collocations in a bilingual dictionary can be found in Collins Robert (1993), s.v. **extend**.

4 Dictionaries in the electronic age

Both encoding lexical items (ie dictionary-making or editing) and decoding them (ie using dictionaries) can efficiently be done by now only by means of electronical devices, the computer.

Since in all stages of making a dictionary the computer plays an important (and in the 21st century an exclusive) part, computational lexicography and corpus lexicography cannot really be treated in a separate chapter, as it is in fact present in all chapters or phases of lexicography, in particular in dictionary-making.

5 Results to be expected and a proposal

The author is speaking from experience. As he has already mentioned his university is six years old. Courses on lexicology and lexicography have been included in the curriculum only recently. They have already 3 masters degree students in lexicology and 3 have taken part in a major project of the Academy: an English-Hungarian comprehensive dictionary, a new edition of "Országh".

And, finally, I should like to put forward a *proposal*. Within EURALEX it would be most welcome to create an international and interlingual *pool for curricula in lexicography* taught at various universities all over Europe and beyond.

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