

# Importance of dictionaries, in the preservation and development of languages

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# Lexicographers anonymous?

“Among these unhappy mortals (= ‘those who toil at the lower employments of life’) is the writer of dictionaries; whom mankind have considered, not as the pupil, but the slave of science. ... Every other author may aspire to praise; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach ...”

(Samuel Johnson, 1755)

# Importance of dictionaries

- The average language user (and often translator) relies on a dictionary as authoritative source of information.
- People typically refer to *the* dictionary; not *a* dictionary.
- Important but the authority of a dictionary is only that of the person who made it.

# Dictionaries and the preservation of language

- Looking at the history of lexicography it is clear that dictionaries played an important role in making information available to their users.
- *Thesaurus*: = storehouse, treasure.
- Modern-day lexicography still has this assignment, employing a variety of dictionary types.

# Dictionaries and the development of language

- General dictionaries reflect the actual language usage of a speech community in its day to day communication.
- Specialised dictionaries reflect the languages for special purposes, representing a variety of technical fields.
- Dictionaries should be compiled and used accordingly.

# The obligation of the lexicographer

The compilation of any dictionary should be preceded by:

- An unambiguous identification of the target user of the dictionary;
- An identification of the user and usage situation;
- An identification of the needs and the reference skills of the intended target user.

# Dictionary functions

- The user-perspective demands an early identification of the lexicographic functions of the dictionary:
- A cognitive-directed dictionary
- A communication-directed dictionary
  - directed at text production
  - directed at text reception
- Dictionary functions have to be identified for both general and specialised dictionaries.

# The genuine purpose of a dictionary

The identification of the functions results from an important question the lexicographer has to answer: What do I want my user to be able to do with this dictionary? This is what the user-perspective is all about.

If a dictionary is compiled in such a way that all its functions prevail that dictionary has achieved its genuine purpose.



# Dictionary structures

- Once the functions have been determined the lexicographer decides on the relevant lexicographic structures. This has to comply with the needs and the reference skills of the target users.
- Dictionary structures constitute the package that ensures the successful access to and preservation of data.

# The contents of a dictionary

- Once the structures have been identified the lexicographer determines the contents of the dictionary.
- A lemma candidate list is compiled.
- The data types to be allocated to each article are determined.
- The data distribution structure is devised.

# The data distribution

- As a carrier of text types a dictionary can achieve an optimal data transfer by means of a frame structure.
- A frame structure makes provision for front matter texts and back matter texts to complement the central list.
- The data distribution structure determines what should be accommodated in the central list and what should go to the outer texts.

# General and specialised dictionaries

- The one-size-fits-all approach does not prevail in lexicography.
- Distinctions between dictionary types are real but not absolute.
- The introduction of hybrid dictionaries.
- User/usage situation determines

# Terminology?

- Language is also developed through the development of its terminology.
- Terminology needs to be presented and treated in dictionaries.
- The terminologist helps to create terms; the lexicographer includes and treats them in a dictionary.
- Lexicographers do not make terms; terminologists do not make dictionaries.

# LSP dictionaries

- To be the result of a team effort:  
lexicographer, terminologist, subject expert.
- Then the user will have every reason to rely  
on the dictionary as a source of information.

# Which dictionary should preserve terms?

- LSP lexicography is directed at the presentation and treatment of terms.
- LGP lexicography is directed at the presentation and treatment of other lexical items.
- However: the user situation often determines that some terms should also be treated in an LGP dictionary.
- LSP and LGP do not function in isolation.

# Lexicographers anonymous ?

“I am not yet so lost in lexicography, as to forget that words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven.”

(Samuel Johnson, 1755)