

Marinela Burada–Raluca Sinu: Research and Practice in Lexicography

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The majority of people think that dictionaries are taken for granted, being just ‘a collection of words’. However, the present volume signed by Marinela Burada and Raluca Sinu proves that dictionaries are not taken for granted as they are the result of a myriad of strenuous decision-making processes. It is a truly impressive volume from the first sight. The reader can discover a neat and logical arrangement of the content in seven main chapters, headed by a list of figures and tables, acknowledgements, preface, and introduction.

At this stage, we do not want to hide the fact that we have approached the book with a certain distance, formulating the (unconscious) question “Do we need dictionaries in the age of the Internet?”, hoping to find a conclusive answer.

But *Research and practice in lexicography* follows its own path into the secrets of compiling dictionaries at such a professional level that the initial question slowly started to shrink and turn completely nonsense after having read the seven chapters, conclusions and browsing through the references. This comes as no surprise because the authors admit it from the very beginning that “This book is the result of years-long efforts” (Preface), and they have worked together with domain specialists. Yet, they warn the reader from the outset that clashes between tradition and innovation in the field “have surfaced more problems than it has actually solved.” Yet, the rationale of the book is supported by the authors’ keen observation, according to which there is an abundance of products on the present-day dictionary market, foreshadowing an interesting development in language dictionaries, commercial dictionaries, and online dictionaries. We also come to realize that considerable efforts have been made by the most prestigious international publishers (Macmillan, Webster-Merriam, Duden) to live up to the expectations of the public, and from this point further the entire book may be considered as the admiration and tribute of the authors towards dictionaries and compilers.

Chapter One discusses definitions of lexicography from reputable English, French, and Romanian dictionaries, proving that there are many branches, such as bilingual, encyclopedic, or computational lexicography, and it is worth separating research (theory) from dictionary-making (practice); furthermore, an attempt is made to position the study of lexicography among other fields such as linguistics, translation studies, or information technology. The difficulty is carried further when we come to realize that dictionary data may stem from different subfields of linguistics, such as lexical morphology, phonetics, orthography, semantics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and so on, presenting conclusive samples that “the word is studied as part of the language system”. This chapter also convinces us that Marinela Burada and Raluca Sinu wish to offer cutting-edge information in the field, mentioning electronic dictionaries on the Internet, on CD support, or via pocket electronic gadgets and applications for mobile phones. A single critical remark here would be that we would have been interested in further details regarding their quality or language-relatedness (e.g. well-developed English, much poorer possibilities for less dominant languages). A most appreciated section ends the chapter, namely the brief summary of Romanian (meta)lexicographic literature.

Each chapter starts with an overview, presenting in an abstract-like form the expectable content, which is extremely valuable in the case of Chapter Two, as it presents the concept of *dictionary* and promises to canvass dictionaries “against other types of reference works, such as encyclopedias, thesauri, or grammar books”. And the authors manage that without a doubt, ‘proving’ a paradox: it is easier for laypersons to define the dictionary as from their perspective fewer characteristics are taken into consideration. Yet, experts have a different opinion, succinctly illustrated by the authors on pages 50–52, honestly concluding: “To be fair, one can hardly expect a lexicographic definition to cover all of these aspects, nor should one expect to find a comprehensive description of the term in general dictionaries”. As a result, a plethora of definitions are offered, warning us that both content and form should be considered. Thus, the next chapter is a logical consequence, where the macro-, medio-, and microstructure of dictionaries are “anatomized” in a painstakingly thorough manner, proving the multilayered structure of dictionaries. Seemingly, this chapter is one of the authors’ favourites, full of examples and figures, partially answering our initial question: we do need (printed) dictionaries as they are the authoritative source of spelling, grammar, etymology, or pronunciation.

This anatomizing chapter tackles issues of (non-)alphabetical order from an interesting perspective, but more ardent problems also find room here, such as register and the inclusion of slang or taboo words. In fact, this is the only part of the chapter where we think that the authors might have lingered a bit more, as – in our opinion – Romanian is struggling with translating the abundance of English ‘unprintables’, for instance, in the case of subtitles. There are opinions

according to which dictionaries should be less prudish, enabling English–Romanian subtitlers to produce more lifelike subtitles, where norms are less strict, a fact which is not really reflected in Eastern-European dictionaries.

Equivalence is a hot issue in translation studies, but we learn from this volume that it may constitute a central problem in lexicography as well. Due to the profound research of the authors, we are offered wonderful examples reflecting differences between translational and explanatory equivalence as well as full, partial, and zero logical equivalence. The end of the chapter debunks another myth, according to which electronic dictionaries should not contain as much information as possible but only those of real value to users.

Dictionary *definitions* are separated from *explanations* in Chapter Four, where an extremely valuable succinct list describes types of explanations, such as explanatory cross-reference, illustration, exemplification, expansion, and discussion, with the possibility to combine them. In the following, various definitions are presented, such as analytical, functional, or formulaic definitions, separately discussing synonym definitions. We highly appreciate the section about principles and conventions in constructing definitions, leaving us with the feeling that nothing is missing here: simplicity, specificity, clarity, priority of essence, brevity, non-circularity, and substitutability, going as far as the format of definitions (full sentence or *when* clauses).

Since Eleanor Rosch's long-range research in the mid-1970s, we are all aware of the importance of categorization, including salient (prototypical) and marginal examples, sometimes resulting in fuzzy categories. Interestingly, James Holmes set up a possible and rather successful categorization of his newly coined *Translation Studies* during the same period (1972). Connected to that, we tend to believe that we can see a very successful taxonomy of dictionaries in Chapter Five of the volume, supported by extensive theoretical research on behalf of the authors. We would like to offer only a teaser about the content, highlighting that the authors themselves state that clear-cut dictionary typologies are doomed. How they still manage to convert this impossible task into a successful one is to be found in the following fifty-plus pages...

The authors conclude that “dictionary taxonomies are highly desirable” being part of metalexicography and taxonomies help “improve the quality of dictionary-making”. And we are convinced that after a cross-examination of ten criteria of dictionary types, the authors can offer invaluable guidelines towards compiling a dictionary that fulfils the requirements of any target reader. In fact, Chapter Six challenges the reader to think about the creation of a dictionary through presenting the basic steps: planning, writing, and production. Even if “dictionaries are not built from scratch”, the process proves to be difficult enough.

An enlightening idea is that dictionary compilers tend to be selfish, unless they do not determine the target audience. And we have to admit, this rarely happens,

as compilers, possible lovers of words and expressions,¹ are much more inclined towards proudly including all the words they know rather than have an eye for the target readers.

Our globalized and profit-oriented world leaves no space for mistakes, so it is also vital to follow non-lexicographic decisions, such as budgeting, time management, staffing or (partially hidden) extra costs. Style guide and design specifications are also included in this section, and in case we are still not discouraged, data collection may begin based on a particular corpus.

Corpora management is a trendy subject since the advent of computers and authentic collections of texts may be stored electronically in vast amounts. Term extraction may take at least two routes: incidence, or, more technically, *frequency* may be one of them, while *relevance* for a particular purpose (cf. technical terms) may be the other. The authors agree that computer corpora has led to the revolution of the lexicographic process, offering convincing examples again: Macmillan, Oxford Dictionaries, or the Collins COBUILD Corpus.²

A highly interesting case study based on the personal experience of the authors is presented in one of the sections, mentioning the LEXICA project, resulting in an online English–Romanian dictionary as the joint work of linguists and IT experts.³ Their aim is manifold, among which we can mention an enhanced awareness towards lexicographical, informational, and ethical aspects connected to online dictionary development. No wonder that the end of the chapter discusses legal and ethical problems connected to dictionary compilation.

The authors' table regarding the stages of dictionary compilation and related ethical and legal issues are thought-provoking in many respects. First, they signal that from the initial phase of planning, prospective compilers have to deal with copyright issues and the would-be content might require explicit permission. However, publicly available online sources as the starting point for dictionary entries may overlook these worries unless we have in mind a monolingual explanatory dictionary, which might have been the primary concern of the authors when drafting the table on page 278. Less stressful issues can be easily eliminated if credits are given to the team of compilers and we acknowledge previous contributions and references. Another view is to consider the words of a language as public property that can be used without restriction, leading to further remarks; one of them is that – obviously – “no two dictionaries can have words defined in exactly the same way”, strengthening our initial feeling that monolingual dictionaries are at stake. Furthermore, detecting plagiarism

1 A famous TED Talk in this respect is Erin McKean's *The joy of lexicography* with more than 850,000 views and 31 subtitles (https://www.ted.com/talks/erin_mckean_redefines_the_dictionary) as of February 2016.

2 A more detailed description is available at: <http://www.collins.co.uk/page/The+Collins+Corpus>, 27.02.2016.

3 Further details available at: <http://lexica.unitbv.ro/>, 27.02.2016.

may start from the *ten-word-rule* or the *test of the bugword*, an issue of growing concern in the case of amateur dictionary compilers without giving credit to their own ‘production’ but making them available online.

If we might add anything, we would have appreciated a separate discussion on multilingual dictionaries, especially in an English–Romanian and Romanian–English ethical and legal framework. Thus, as a preliminary conclusion, we are looking forward to a sequel to this volume when bilingual issues in an explicit Romanian context are analysed by the authors, who have indulged us with elaborated discussion within each previous chapter.

Chapter Seven presents a mirror to all the tackled issues so far and delves into dictionary criticism, trying to explain the “criteria of goodness” from a threefold perspective. Our expectations are fulfilled when we discover the definition of *dictionary criticism*, which is a process of “examination, analysis and evaluation of existing dictionaries”. This chapter offers joy to the reader further on as well because a well-positioned quotation partially exonerates us from the pressure of giving a final verdict about this conscientiously designed reference work:

“Reviewing a dictionary is a fraught exercise. For one thing, there is no way a single reviewer working under constraints of space can hope to do justice to a work that represents the product (usually) of a team of lexicographers working for a number of years.”⁴

The quotation above actually reflects our state of mind, realizing that the effort invested by Marinela Burada and Raluca Sinu and their LEXICA team cannot be rewarded in a couple of pages, but at least we would be happy to guide a certain niche audience towards this seminal work on lexicography. We tend to believe that the reading of this volume will boost the number of otherwise scarce dictionary reviews in Romania (p. 293) and (in)directly lead to an improved quality of dictionary compilations based on micro-, macro-, and interstructure-related criteria. From the users’ point of view, the knowledge of certain criteria, such as reliability, accessibility, or coverage may lead to a more conscious choice of a particular dictionary, even if we know that financial constraints may play a decisive role. This fact is acknowledged by the authors as well when drawing the conclusion: paper-based dictionaries have more positive features although used in fewer cases than online available ones. At a larger scale, although the mass-media canvasses for enhanced quality, one can more readily find appalling examples for dictionaries in an age when we have more tools available than ever to produce near-perfect ones. It is our firm belief that the present work is such an effective tool in the hand of a would-be dictionary compiler, especially when towards the end of the volume we could see that the authors offered a palette of 42

4 Kirkness, Alan (2004) “Review of three advanced learners’ dictionaries: Cambridge advanced learners’ dictionary (2003), Collins cobuild advanced learners’ English dictionary (2003), Longman dictionary of contemporary English (2003)”. In: *ELT Journal* 58(3): 294.

online English–Romanian dictionaries, not hiding the major drawback: they are the output of computer experts without the awareness of the metalexicographic complexities.

Parsing process issues are also exemplified in a Romanian–English context, bringing into the picture the spreading nonchalance towards language-specific diacritical marks, especially in the case of electronic dictionaries, concluding that however poor results online dictionaries may return convenience and free-of-charge access are above professional considerations. Yet, there is at least one positive proof that an online dictionary may be professional enough, exemplified by the Romanian Explanatory Dictionary, DEX Online. The endnotes to this chapter contain all the 42 online dictionary sites at the time of the research, but the book is not over yet.

The Conclusions section is understandably confident that even if alternative reference tools may come into being instead of printed dictionaries “they will still be the products of lexicography”. Although the authors expressly want to raise students’ awareness towards dictionaries, we think that they will have a word to say among experts as well, including recent developments such as *e-lexicography*. We are also left with a nascent hope that in the near future compiling (e)-dictionaries will be funded by the governments of the implied languages to assure quality and dictionaries will be treated as national assets, offering free access to all the interested.

Throughout the book, we could enjoy much-debated topics within lexicography such as the differences between the products (Chapters 1–5) and processes (Chapters 6–7) as well as an evergreen tug of war whether lexicography is science, art, or craft (similarly to translation). The authors have made it clear from the very beginning that lexicography involves both products and processes, leaving us with the feeling that both aspects have been covered with proper professional humility during the two main parts.

Marinela Burada and Raluca Sinu managed to impress us to such an extent that even if they state that there is no single adequate definition for *the* dictionary, we definitely encourage the appearance of their mono- or bilingual (e)-dictionary as soon as possible. But their ‘story’ is not over with the conclusions as the icing on the cake is represented by the nearly two hundred reference entries of relevant resources, topped with 101 dictionaries and dictionary websites, a questionnaire and an index, resulting in a volume of 392 pages. Let us finish the review with an expression that might be used as a dictionary entry as well: *I raise my hat to you*.⁵

5 A possible first documented occurrence of the term comes from a letter by an admirer of Mark Twain, Len G. Westland, 1905, presented in R. Kent Rasmussen (ed.), *Dear Mark Twain*, University of California Press, 2013.