

Grzegorz A. KLEPARSKI, Anna WŁODARCZYK-STACHURSKA

TOWARDS THE MAIN HIGHLIGHTS IN THE HISTORY OF MODERN LEXICOGRAPHY

At a very outset, let us point to the fact that – in an ideal world – in order to get a fully-fledged overview of the history of the science of **lexicography** one should feel obliged to go much further in history than to the advent of theoretical lexicography. The very term *lexicography* is a compound of Greek *lexikós* ‘about words’ + *graphia* ‘writing’ and dates from the 17th century. In this work, the science is understood on the basis of the notions set out in Hartmann and James (1998:85) as the academic field concerned with dictionaries and other reference works. Obviously, this is not the only understanding of the term that is available in linguistic literature. Pei and Gaynor (1954:122), for example, define lexicography somewhat vaguely as *The definition and description of the various meanings of the words of a language or of a special terminology*.¹

As Hüllen (1993:3) adequately puts it, there never was lexicography without word-lists and/or dictionaries, though one may safely say that there were for a long time (and still are) word-lists and/or dictionaries without lexicography. It seems that the earliest known prototypes of dictionaries were West Asian bilingual word lists of the second millennium BC. Fair enough, different students of lexicographic science have had different opinions on the origins of the first dictionaries, but no matter if the first dictionaries were sources of reference written on papyrus leaves already in ancient Egypt, or clay tablets in Mesopotamia the thing that remains certain is that they were to serve as practical instruments for their respective speech communities (on this issue see, among others, Al Kasimi 1997, McArthur 1998). It is beyond any conceivable doubt

¹ Somewhat significantly, many reference handbooks on language and the study of language seem to ignore the science altogether. And so, for example, in the recently published *Słownik wiedzy o języku* (2007) the entry *lexicography* seems to be missing altogether and – even more symptomatically – the science of lexicology is absent from such an otherwise respectable dictionary of applied linguistics as Schulc (1984).

that the compilation of the early reference works was not influenced in any possible way by either theoretical framework or model concerning either their content or any aspect of internal structure.

Today, the field of lexicography is regarded as consisting of two major components, that is theoretical component and practical component. Not surprisingly, a special emphasis is placed on the theoretical component, the discipline of **metalexigraphy**, as a distinct one from what may be referred to as the practical component associated with the compilation of dictionaries. At the same time, it is both evident and worth stressing that lexicography has not always had thus understood dual character and the outline of the development of lexicography proposed here will hopefully show that the theoretical component is regarded as a relatively late comer, as the lexicography as such has been associated with the practice of dictionary making.

One may generalise here and say that, until the advent of the 20th century, linguists were not in the least interested in dictionaries as they considered dictionaries merely as a commercial product compiled in a scissors-and-paste-manner without any linguistic theory or at least theoretical backing coming from the realm of linguistics. In the words of Rey (1982:17), at that time the very notion of dictionary was too unscientific to be worthy of any academic interest. In turn, according to Béjoint (2000:167):

[...] also, as a book about words, it shared the relative absence of prestige of lexis and semantics in the linguistics of the nineteenth and first three-quarters of the twentieth century. Lexicology was not a recognised branch of linguistics.

Such views are by no means any novelty. The belief that dictionaries were neglected by the academic world was expressed and emphasised much earlier by, among others, Gleason (1962:86) who honestly pleads guilty by saying that:

Certainly we descriptive linguists tend to be contemptuous of vocabulary. It is also a dogma among us that vocabulary is the least significant part of language (save for a group among us who even doubt that vocabulary is really a part of language after all).

Likewise, neither lexicographers nor dictionary publishers seemed to be in the least interested in the contribution of linguists in the process of compilation of dictionaries. The justification behind this was that they shared the opinion that academics would be of little – or no – use in lexicographical work. Urdang (1963:594) uses the following phrasing to picture a typical lexicographer's opinion those days: *[...] although more theoreticians would be a welcome addition to the field, they must remember that their theories should be interpretable above all in terms of practicality.*

The increased interest of linguists in the art of dictionary making was observable in the 1940s and 1950s. At that time, publishers began to seek linguists' advice and information and, what is more *[...] curiously enough, this*

question seems to have interested few linguists (see Knudsen and Sommerfelt 1958:98). Evidently, it had become clear by that time that linguists could play a crucial role in the improvement of the quality of lexicographic production. As a consequence of this, the relations between lexicographers and linguists gradually tightened and – with time – became both more pervading and more intensive.²

In other words, lexicography started as a practical venture with no theoretical foundation whatsoever. At the same time, Wiegand (1998:29) rightly observed that dictionaries are much older than the field known as **lexicology**.³ This is mainly due to the fact that dictionaries developed at a time when linguistics was not at all a very popular academic discipline. According to Dubois (1971:15) and Rey (1982:17–18):

It is a common observation that dictionaries can be compiled by authors who are not linguists at all, but this does not mean that there is no linguistic knowledge in a dictionary. All dictionaries necessarily adopt and transmit some points of view on language, even if lexicographers are not aware of it.

Along similar lines, Quemada (1972:427) expressed the widely accepted belief that *each lexicographical work reflects a linguistic theory which the author more or less consciously applies*. Béjoint (2000:173) went even further claiming that:

The main currents of theoretical linguists had echoes in practical lexicography, but mostly faint ones, as if the rumors had taken a long time to reach the quiet studies of working lexicographers, and as if they had been weakened by the time they finally arrived. This is because theoretical linguistics is not easily applied to lexicography, particularly new approaches, which are typically ill-fitted for a general-purpose dictionary that is meant to be used by the man in the street. Also, lexicographers have always been wary of linguistic bandwagons.

Anterior to the distinction between lexicography and lexicology, theory and practice had been entwined, and vocabulary research (the predecessor of what has been known as lexicology), formed a foundation for the practice of dictionary compilation. This means that – at a certain point of time – both lexicology and lexicography were approximately the same thing. According to recent views expressed by, for example, Geeraerts (1996), one may speak of a strong relation and correlation between lexicology and lexicography as a result of their shared historical direction. Note that linguistics at that time was chiefly

² Among others, this is evidenced by the fact that many conferences on lexicography were attended both by linguists and lexicographers, the first of which was held in 1960 in Bloomington, Indiana (for more details see Béjoint 2000).

³ Here the term *lexicology* is understood after Hartmann and James (1998:86) as a branch of linguistics concerned with the study of the basic units of vocabulary (LEXEMES), their formation, structure and meaning.

concerned with historical research of the lexicon, whereas lexicography was mostly aimed at the compilation of historical dictionaries. One may venture the claim that the historical dictionary was therefore an attempt of scientific contribution to historical linguistic research.⁴

Approaching the problem from a slightly different angle, Wiegand (1998) considers lexicology as a late product of lexicography and linguistics. Lexicology, seen as the study of words, was established within the field of linguistics in the 19th century and – according to the same scholar – the overview of the development of lexicography and lexicology demonstrates varying degrees of proximity in the relation between the two disciplines. In the course of time it became noticeable that the increasing gap between the two disciplines arose. Changes in the field of linguistics, such as for example the establishment of **field theory** in the 1930s,⁵ caused the intensification of the process of weakening in the relation between lexicology and lexicography (see Wiegand 1998:9).

On the other hand, through with the advent of other historic models of linguistic investigation, such as, for example, cognitive linguistics the gap between lexicology and lexicography was substantially decreased (see Wiegand 1998:30). This amounts to saying that during the development of dictionary making there existed unstable degrees of proximity between lexicography and linguistics depending on theories and schools of thought in linguistics. Yet, it goes without saying that different linguistic theories had varying influence not only on the explanation of meaning in monolingual dictionaries, but also on the nature and extent of the presentation of semantic data (see Geeraerts 1996, Gouws 1996).

An interesting contribution to the subject can be found in Geeraerts (1996:14–15) who states that lexicology initially offered the theoretical basis for the scientific historical dictionary, though the dictionary – at the same time – is to be viewed as some kind of the large-scale empirical realisation of lexicological research programmes. All in all, the pragmatic approach of

⁴ On this issue see, among others, Coleman and McDermott (2004).

⁵ The development of field theory is ultimately attributed to Trier (1931) but his original doctrine was soon followed by plenty of other, more or less advanced, viewpoints such as those of Porzig (1928, 1934), Stern (1931), Öhman (1951), Matoré (1951) or Weisgerber (1962). However, it is generally agreed that Trier's (1931) version of field theory opened a new era in the history of semantics. Working on the field of **INTELLECT** in Old and Middle High German periods the author proposed the notion of a *linguistic field*, which is a section of general vocabulary where the degree of importance of a given individual lexical item is determined by its neighbours. What is more, the great German scholar claimed that fields are covered by areas of words resembling mosaics, have clear-cut boundaries without any gaps or overlaps and the change of one component or its deletion within the field automatically results in changing of the whole system.

lexicography stimulated the need for a separate theoretical component, established later as a metalexigraphy.

To put it somewhat metaphorically, lexicography, with its own theoretical and practical components, left lexicology abandoned in terms of the realisation of its research programmes. Geeraerts (1986) concludes that from the time of advent the metalexigraphy – viewed as the theory for lexicographic practice – theoretical lexicology was in need of a broadly oriented descriptive lexicology.

From a linguistic point of view it is argued if lexicography should be regarded as a branch of applied linguistics, or as a subdiscipline of lexicology. According to Zgusta (1971:9), in 1960 UNESCO, offered a contact to the *International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences* to the *Union Académique Internationale* and inquest was undertaken resulting in a final report. As a consequence of the report UNESCO and CIPHS (the *Conseil International de la philosophie et des sciences humaines*), partly co-sponsored a special colloquium held in 1962. The colloquium was organised by the *Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences* and its main objective was to discuss the problems of lexicography.

On the grounds of the discussion outlined above, it was stated that there was the urgent need to prepare the manual for lexicography. The *Oriental Institute of Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences* accepted the task of preparing the book, with Ladislav Zgusta as its main author (see Zgusta 1971:10). One may say that the publication of Zgusta's work marked – if not a new era – then at least an entirely new approach towards the issue of lexicography because his *Manual of Lexicography* linked – beyond any doubt – lexicography with linguistics. To be more precise, in his groundbreaking work Zgusta (1971) placed lexicography within the field of the study of lexicon, including the sphere of lexical semantics. Lexicographer, according to his opinion, should be familiar with linguistics in much broader sense and has to take into consideration not only the whole structure of language in question, but also the culture of the relevant linguistic community: *The scholar, by referring to the culture, makes way for an approach which compels lexicographers to contextualize the language in terms of the more general world of the relevant speech community.* In a different place, the author states that *The theory of lexicography is connected with all the disciplines which study the lexical system, semantics, lexicology, grammar, stylistics* (see Zgusta 1971:19).

Significantly, the first four chapters of the *Manual of Lexicography* are concerned with linguistics. And the spectrum of topics they tackle range from the issue of lexical meaning, formal variation of words, variation in language and formal variation of words. By including the chapters devoted to formal variation of words and variation in language, Zgusta (1971) managed to demonstrate convincingly that dictionary needs to reflect the real language usage. On more general grounds, one may say that in this hold lexicography formed a kind of opposition to the then very much current and very much overwhelming ideas

formulated by the enthusiasts of the Transformational Generative Grammar and – to a certain extent – could be perceived as a forerunner of some ideas of what has come to be known as **sociolinguistics**.⁶ Almost two decades later in Zgusta (1989), the author focused on the role of dictionaries in displaying and accounting for linguistic change, emphasising the change from a prescriptive to a descriptive approach in lexicography.

Among others, Zgusta's work stressed that lexicography may not be regarded as a theory merely for the sake of the theory. In his opinion, those to whom we refer as theoretical lexicographers formulate theories aimed at improving the efforts of the practical lexicographer in his process of dictionary making. As a consequence, to put it somewhat metaphorically, a dictionary can be regarded as a display-window of the linguistic workshop. Obviously, stating that lexicographic theory would allow practical lexicographers to compile dictionaries aimed at a well-defined and identified target user group, being fully aware of their specific needs and reference skills, Among others, it was Zgusta who introduced what has come to be known as the user-perspective, that is a point of view which later became – to a considerable degree – the main driving force in the lexicographic research.⁷

In the long run, and – somewhat more importantly – the publication of the *Manual of Lexicography* set off a long-lasting series of numerous academic discussions concerning theoretical lexicography, particularly evident in the case of a series of academic papers published since 1984 in the *Lexicographica Series Maior*. One of the major effects of this scientific dispute was the fervent discussion concerning the relation between linguistics and lexicography that – in effect – brought about the significant improvement of the standard of many lexicographic works. Among others, the varying influence of linguistics on lexicography has been noticeable in the character of the presentation of semantic data. Besides, much variation was also seen in the case of other data types such as pronunciation, morphology, etymology and syntax in types of dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual ones.

It is a commonly held view that there obtains a strict correlation between the use and choice of linguistic framework and the consistency of lexicographic account. To provide but one example, according to Wahrig (1983:449) [...] *consistent lexicographic description depends on the use of theoretical models*. Other students of the science such as, for example, Sinclair (1983:9–11) go even further in claiming that lexicography should focus on newer disciplines which are

⁶ Sociolinguistics – a branch of linguistics born in the second half of the 20th century – studies the relation between language and society and – in particular – it may be defined as the study of variation in language, or more precisely, after Trask (1997), variation within speech communities.

⁷ For a recent discussion on user-perspective see Osuchowska (2007).

concerned with language in use. Fox (1987:137–138) seems to be putting much stress on the role of the context when he states that the use of examples forms an integral part of learning a word. Let us add at this point that the examples are to be extracted from a corpus and are supposed to represent real language use. In general, the use of examples plays an important role in the art of dictionary making, and the influence from sociolinguistics has made a definite impact on the way in which lexicography deals with this type of entry. Obviously, the aforementioned point of view was hardly ever shared either by all linguists or all lexicographers. For example, in his recent work Stein (2002:68), states that:

Linguistic research will and has to influence the making of language dictionaries is self-evident. What is, however, more astonishing is that linguists expect lexicography to incorporate their findings, yet they rarely assume that lexicography might further certain areas of linguistics itself. They use the wealth of linguistic information that dictionaries provide; they rely on lexicographical data. They draw heavily upon these data banks to support or corroborate their theoretical views and therefore regard dictionary information as useful or necessary but of only secondary importance to their theoretical assumptions. They underrate the idea-provoking, insight-provoking value of these data because the underlying theoretical framework may not be as coherent or stringent as they think it should or could be.

Uriel Weinreich, a very much influential linguist whose interests centred, among others, on the issue of dictionary making, assumed that a dictionary should form a basis for lexicological theory. More recently, much along the same lines sounds the statement made by Geeraerts (1989:287) who says that: *lexicography is the purposeful human activity for which the principles of language are merely one among a number of parameters that determine the actual shape dictionaries take.*

However, not infrequently linguists cast serious doubts on the existence of any tangible relation between lexicography and linguistics. Among others, the relation between the two was questioned by Hanks (1979:37) who – somewhat dramatically – points out that [...] *when theory comes into lexicography, all too often common sense goes out.* Likewise, Haensch (1984:118) expresses his scepticism saying that lexicographers continue with their purely empirical practice without any interest in theoretical linguistics.

Yet, one may generalise and say that – on the whole – during the 1970s and 1980s theoretical lexicography was performed and studied mainly within linguistic context. In particular, many publications in the field of metalexicography focused on linguistic aspects of dictionary compilation and production. This general attitude was probably caused and conditioned by the fact that researchers working in the field of theoretical lexicography were – at the same time – linguists working at the universities' departments of linguistics.

In turn, in the 1980s and 1990s the work in the field of metalexigraphy was dominated by the intensive work of Wiegand (1983,1984,1989,1998). In his early work published in 1983 the author emphasised the importance of the formulation of a general theory of lexicography. In the publication issued in the following year Wiegand (1984:14–15) argues that lexicography is to be treated neither as a branch of applied linguistics nor a branch of lexicology, and – beyond any conceivable doubt – it is not determined by lexicology on its own.⁸ At the same time, according to the author, metalexigraphy is formed of four components, that is:

- 1) the history of lexicography,
- 2) a general theory of lexicography,
- 3) research on dictionary use,
- 4) the criticism of dictionaries.

In his further research work (see Wiegand 1989:251), the author proposed the term **dictionary research** that was aimed to stand for a scientific research area, maintaining that dictionary research can be divided into four research areas; that is research in dictionary use, critical, historical and systematic dictionary research. What is of utmost importance here is the fact that – while the author admits the importance of linguistics for lexicography – Wiegand (1989) maintains, at the same time, that lexicography must be regarded as a discipline which – though much influenced by linguistics – is not to be held a subdiscipline of linguistics. Let us add that the same applies to lexicology, considered as a branch of linguistics. In other words, although linguistics is of an important influence in the field of lexicography, the object of lexicography is not the language but dictionaries. Note that the main idea that practical lexicography is aimed at the process of dictionary making, while theoretical lexicography deals with dictionary research has been supported by many pillar figures and works associated with the science of lexicography, such as, for example, Hartmann and James (1998), Wiegand (1984,1998), Hausmann and Wiegand (1998).

One of the most noticeable features of world developments in theoretical lexicography in the 1980s and 1990s was a clearly visible bias towards encircling and meeting the needs and the reference skills of the target users of the dictionaries. Among others, the influence of such running ideas may be found in the work by Hausmann (1989) *An International Encyclopaedia of Lexicography* which focuses on a number of relevant topics in lexicography, such as:

- 1) dictionaries and their public,

⁸ In the 1990s the widely accepted belief was that lexicographic practice belongs to the domain of applied linguistics whereas metalexigraphy forms part of theoretical linguistics was advocated by, among others, Burkhanov (1998:136).

- 2) dictionaries and their users,
- 3) the history and theory of lexicography,
- 4) components and structures of dictionaries,
- 5) problems of description in the general monolingual dictionary types,
- 6) dictionaries dealing with language varieties,
- 7) procedures in lexicographical work,
- 6) lexicography of individual languages and the theory of bilingual and multilingual lexicography.

The focus on the structure of dictionaries clearly visible during the 1990s emphasised the content of dictionaries as extremely important (see, among others, McArthur 1986). From the linguistic point of view almost no interest was placed on the structure of dictionary, its layout, articles or the use of the front and back matters texts. At the same time, some authors, such as Beregeriholtz (1995), Almind and Bergenholtz (2002) focused on the problems relating to dictionary layout. Wiegand's (1989) arguments that lexicography is influenced not only by lexicography are supported in, among others, the work by Berenholtz and Tarp (1995). The two authors make a hard-and-fast distinction between Language for General Purpose (henceforth: LPG) and Language for Specific Purpose (henceforth: LSP). As a consequence they maintain that – as a rule – general dictionaries deal with LGP, while special dictionaries treat various special subfields of the lexicon. As a result the compilation of LSP dictionaries both assumes and necessitates some form of collaboration between lexicographer and the expert of the specialised subject matter.

Let us point to the fact that the history of lexicographic thought shows a certain interesting research theme that appears, disappearing only to reappear at a different moment all at once. One such recurrent subject is the notion of user-perspective introduced by Zgusta (1971), then much discussed at the Exeter conference in Exeter in 1979. Since that time, studies have been conducted in different countries, at different levels, and against a variety of first-language backgrounds. Hartmann (1987) published a critical survey of the research and listed the following four points of focus (after Cowie 1999:77):

- 1) identifying the specific categories of linguistic information (e.g. meaning, spelling, pronunciation, grammar) perceived as important by particular groups of dictionary users,
- 2) seeking to throw light on the users themselves, and on their assumptions and expectations in turning to the dictionary,
- 3) investigating the study of occupational activities in the course of which and in support of which a dictionary is used.

- 4) investigating the reference skills which users have developed, or need to develop, to use their dictionaries more effectively, and evaluating teaching programmes or aids designed to enhance such skills.

Evidently, present-day lexicographic theory seems to be based on an underlying assumption that dictionaries are utility products, and as a consequence they should be designed to meet the needs of all potential users. All the ongoing changes, the results of which are clearly visible in the output of lexicographic production, are – on the one hand – the obvious consequences of various developments in descriptive linguistics, yet – on the other hand – they result from the growing awareness of the needs of potential dictionary users. Undisputedly, current lexicographic work, as an independent discipline, continues to benefit from many currents in linguistic research, though the focus in lexicographic research has shifted to the structure and functions of dictionaries. The questions that arise while considering the direction of today's lexicographic work focus on other disciplines of science that may aid, influence and have constructive impact on lexicography. According to Dolezal and McCreary (1999), among others, lexicographic research should also focus on models for dictionaries directed at specific target user groups.

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