

Training in Lexicography - The Exeter ERASMUS Initiative

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Introduction

«It takes a year or two for novices to become professionally productive... If substantive academic study becomes the norm among lexicographers, the standards of career preparation in the field will be raised.» (Gates, 1989: 95 & 96).

These two eminently quotable sentences by Edward Gates, from his Article on «Training» in the new *International Encyclopedia of Lexicography*, summarise the position well: most professional activities require considerable training, and academic courses may help speed up and improve that process of training. This paper argues that the ERASMUS Project initiative at Exeter is making a significant contribution to training in lexicography.

Very little is known about what kind(s) of educational qualifications are appropriate to the job of dictionary-making, how people become lexicographers, what dictionary projects and publishers do to train their staff, and to what extent practices vary from country to country or even from dictionary to dictionary. One of the very few reasonably comprehensive treatments of these issues, the proceedings of the London 1984 Fulbright Colloquium (ed. by Robert Ilson under the title *Lexicography: an emerging international profession*), concluded that more training, more data-gathering, more research and more international cooperation was needed to bring improvements in future.

From LEXeter and EURALEX to ERASMUS

In my own paper for the Fulbright volume (Hartmann, 1986: 91-92) I offered a catalogue of 10 desiderata, i.e. things we ought to know in order to carry on an informed discussion of the lexicographer's career:

1. Complete, annotated lists of published dictionaries, by language, by information type, and by user group.
2. A list of ongoing dictionary projects.
3. A list of active lexicographers.
4. A job description of required professional skills.
5. A survey of on-the-job training schemes.
6. A directory of relevant academic courses.
7. A list of research topics and unpublished theses.
8. A list of professional associations and meetings.

9. A list of periodicals containing relevant literature.
10. Systematic bibliographies of the various aspects of lexicography.

Some of these jobs have now been taken on board, some at Exeter and some elsewhere. At Exeter, minor contributions have been or are being made to points No. 1 (a bibliography of Chinese lexicography), 2 & 3 ('Who's Who' database), 4 (draft specification of occupational standards in dictionary publishing), 8 (survey of lexicographic conferences; Hartmann, 1990) and 10 (bibliographical database). A crucial year was 1983; when the 'LEXeter' Conference took place, EURALEX was founded and the creation of several series and handbooks was planned (cf. Cignoni *et al.* 1983; Hartmann, 1984; Hausmann *et al.*, 1989 ff.).

But even against this optimistic background, we considered that the time was ripe towards the end of the 1980's for a concerted Europe-wide effort to explore the idea of a training and accreditation framework. We submitted an application under the ERASMUS Section IV ('Consortia') heading, and received a grant of ECU 10,000 for the period September 1989 - September 1990. This allowed for a series of meetings, working parties and individual submissions to produce proposals for a one-year postgraduate lexicography course leading to a professional diploma. Dictionary research centres at universities in five EC countries have been involved, and a great number of experts have been consulted.

Issues and priorities

On the basis of a 'Preliminary Action Plan' which I sent out in late autumn 1989, two 'Coordination Meetings' were scheduled to discuss the main problems and to find solutions, at Exeter (9-10 December 1989) and at Lille (12-13 May 1990).

We had to address ourselves to 6 issues:

- (1) How are training needs met at present?
- (2) What is the best model for a new training programme?
- (3) What determines curriculum and assessment?
- (4) Is an apprenticeship possible?
- (5) How is the programme to be financed?
- (6) Can accreditation of the Diploma be guaranteed?

The Preliminary Action Plan had set out some of the options before we even met for the first time. We knew that we had some stock-taking to do, and that there were some external constraints on the kind of course that could be developed in a year's time. For example, we had to find out what courses were already available, if any; what skills were to be taught, by whom and to whom.

The first priority was to establish how training needs could be met, and we found a wide diversity of existing academic courses and on-the-job training schemes. Slightly more information is available on the former (cf. Gates, 1979) than on the latter, because academic institutions are keen to publicise their degrees and diplomas, while publishers are understandably unwilling to reveal commercial secrets. We decided to carry out two surveys by means of questionnaires: one of academic courses and one of dictionary publishers.

The second priority was to find a suitable model for a new training programme. We soon agreed that it should be a one-year course, multidisciplinary in outlook, multilingual, multipurpose and possibly multisite, leading to a postgraduate diploma. However, it took us much longer to work out the relative weightings to allocate to individual components (should they be determined by theory or practice, by the availability of teachers, or by some other criteria?).

The third priority was to reach a consensus on what should determine curriculum content and assessment formats of the new course. We explored two possibilities, one 'discipline-oriented' and one 'activity-based'. The discipline-oriented approach to training would start with the question of what the component fields of lexicography are and which knowledge about them has to be presented (cf. Wiegand, 1989 on 'dictionary research' and its four sub-fields dictionary typology, dictionary criticism, dictionary history and user studies; cf. also Zgusta, 1988). The activity-based approach to training would start from the practice of dictionary-making and ask what are the component skills required to perform this practice, e.g. in terms of such processes as 'recording' or data-gathering, 'description' or editing, and 'presentation' or publishing, together with any tools that may be necessary, such as computing. (We commissioned an expert on occupational measurement to draft a set of competence standards for professional lexicographers in publishing.)

Combining the discipline-oriented and the activity-based approaches and after much debate, we arrived at the following syllabus of 'Basic Core' and 'Specialised Option' course modules:

Basic Core Courses (5 modules of approx. 20 hours' classroom contact each, total student workload approx. 300 hours):

- (1) The Principles and Practice of Dictionary Publishing/Théorie et pratique de la publication de dictionnaires/Pragmatische aspecten van de lexicografie (course outlines from Exeter and Lille);
- (2) Computing in Lexicography/Informatique et lexicographie/Lexicon en computers (course outlines from Exeter, Lille and Amsterdam);
- (3) The Representation of Meaning in the Dictionary/La Représentation du sens dans les dictionnaires/Definitiemodellen en betekenisrepresentatie in/voor woordenboeken (course outlines from Exeter, Lille and Amsterdam);
- (4) Typology and Component Structures of Dictionaries/Typologie et structure des dictionnaires/Informatie categorieën in woordenboeken (course outlines from Exeter, Lille and Amsterdam);
- (5) *one* of the following:
 - (a) The User Perspective in Dictionary Research/L'utilisation des dictionnaires/Wordenboek en gebruiker (course outlines from Exeter and Lille);
 - (b) The Social Stratification of the Lexicon/La stratification sociale du vocabulaire/Dc natuurlijke geleding van het lexicon (course outline from Lille);
 - (c) Seminar in Lexicographical Practice/Séminaire de pratique lexicographique/Werkcollege Lexicografie (course outline from Amsterdam);
 - (d) Terminology/Terminologie/Terminologie (course outline from Amsterdam).

Specialised Options (2 or 3 modules chosen from the following, total student workload 300 hours):

1. History of Lexicography and National Traditions/Histoire de la lexicographie et traditions nationales/Geschiedenis van de lexicografie (course outline from Exeter);
2. Terminography/Terminographie/Terminografie (course outline from Amsterdam);
3. Electronic Dictionaries/Dictionnaires électroniques/Electronische woordenboeken (course outline 'Lexical Relations and Databases' from Liège);
4. Bilingual Lexicography/Lexicographie bilingue/Bilinguale lexicografie (course outline from Exeter);
5. Advanced Syntax and Semantics for Dictionary-making/Syntaxe et sémantique approfondies pour les lexicographes/Syntaxis en semantiek en woordenboek (course outline from Amsterdam);
6. Dictionaries and Word-formation/Dictionnaires et formation des mots/Morfologie en woordenboek;
7. Dictionary Criticism/Critique des dictionnaires/Woordenboekkritiek;
8. The Learner's Dictionary/Les dictionnaires d'apprentissage/Leerwoordenboeken (course outline from Exeter).

The fourth priority was to design an apprenticeship scheme by integrating a period of practical placement with a 'real' dictionary project into the course. Initial responses from some publishers had been encouraging, but we shall have to await the final results of a questionnaire survey to see whether such an internship is a realistic option. Of the 30 or so returns received, half have commented favourably on the course description as set out above (with only 4 strongly against), and 13 would be willing to offer places to students and 9 jobs to graduates. One computer software company has offered free access to several electronic dictionaries for training purposes.

The fifth priority was the financing of the programme. At the moment it is still not clear how the trainees and tutors are to be funded. The representatives of the three 'founding centres' at Exeter, Lille and Amsterdam agreed at their London meeting on 13 July 1990 to consult their respective institutions on the tuition fees to be charged and also to apply to ERASMUS for both an extension grant to continue the Consortium for an interim year (deadline 15 October 1990) and a student mobility grant (deadline 31 October 1990).

The sixth priority was to guarantee accreditation of the Diploma Course as devised by the Consortium. We discovered very early on that the mutual recognition of degrees and diplomas even within the countries of the EC is far from clear, a fact confirmed by a letter from the ERASMUS Bureau. It was therefore essential to define clearly the points at which trainees would start and finish the programme. Basically they would enter the course with at least a qualification equivalent to a British Bachelor's degree, but preferably of the level of a French *Maîtrise*. They should also wherever possible have proficiency in two Community languages and a knowledge of Basic Linguistics. On completing the course they would obtain a higher diploma at 2 levels, Certificate I (Postgraduate Diploma or *Diplôme du premier degré*) for coursework done and Certificate II (M.A. or *Diplôme d'étude supérieure*) sub-

sequent to placement or internship with a dictionary project and completion of an externally assessed dissertation.

In addition, we resolved to commission the design of a vocabulary-based battery of language proficiency tests and recommended a minimum standard course in Basic Linguistics, but we have not (yet) found a suitable scheme for exempting trainees from work already done before commencing their studies. We believe that practising lexicographers could be involved in the internal examination process and professional bodies should be consulted in the external validation of the diplomas.

Achievements and open questions

The likely outcome of the project must be judged in the context of the recent explosion of interest in the field of lexicography, especially in the last 10 years, as I have already said. It has been a sweeping movement that has rapidly led to rising standards, through meetings, publications, dictionary criticism, special courses, and other exchanges of information.

Against the background of these activities, our ERASMUS Project has achieved a number of remarkable objectives. It has brought together some influential figures to discuss lexicographic training in terms of both theory and practice, it has produced substantial agreement on a modular framework of courses in a truly European perspective, and it has enticed three 'founding centres' (at the Universities of Exeter, Lille and Amsterdam) to design a basic teaching programme, and at least two more (at Erlangen and at Liège) to offer specialised options. Most important of all, perhaps, even if the actual courses were not to be implemented, the project has created a collaborative spirit which will make future contacts so much easier. The latter point is borne out by the many constructive submissions and comments we have received from academics and practitioners alike.

Not all problems have been solved, and much coordinative work remains to be done. We have not yet received all responses from the survey of dictionary publishers (which is crucial for the organisation of placements). We have still to specify an agreed syllabus on the basis of detailed outlines for each of the basic and specialised course modules. We need to gain the confidence of the lexicographic profession and involve them in the process of international accreditation (we hope to incorporate our draft 'standards of occupational competence' into the debate on 'national vocational qualifications', especially in the publishing industry). We need to work out tests for measuring linguistic skills and devise a scheme of exemptions for experience equivalent to certain portions of the course. We have to settle the issue of tuition fees and obtain funding for the taught and examinable portions of the course. We shall investigate the possibility of support from ERASMUS and other bodies.

Conclusion

We are confident that the most important and most difficult phases of the project have been completed and that the remaining problems can be solved, given the goodwill generated already. We trust that eventually it may even be possible to extend this scheme to countries in Eastern Europe.

We hope to have succeeded in presenting a framework for a professionally-oriented training and accreditation programme at postgraduate level which is European in extent, comprehensive in coverage, multidisciplinary, multilingual and—in the spirit of ERASMUS—multisite.

Finally, I should like, on behalf of all the collaborating institutions and individuals, to thank our sponsors (especially ERASMUS, the university authorities at Exeter and Lille, and members of the Executive Board of EURALEX), the participants and helpers at the two Coordination Meetings, and the many people who have sent in suggestions and criticisms. We trust that all these efforts will benefit future generations of lexicographers.

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