
Historical Comparison of the Iconic Dictionaries of the Three Baltic Nations

Andrejs Veisbergs

Keywords: *Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian, explanatory dictionary.*

Abstract

Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian lexicography are characterised by similar early development, despite different historical development and different language-contact situations. There is a clear dominance of bilingual and multilingual dictionaries, which were initially compiled to serve the needs of the clergy in the main contact-language pairs and triples. After achieving independence early in the 20th century, all three states embarked on large, iconic projects of nation building and prestige, of very different scope and timescale from the bilingual dictionaries. These projects had both extralinguistic prestige objectives (proving the wealth of the language resource, demonstrating it to the outside world, putting the languages on the comparative linguistics map) and linguistic objectives (registering, etymologising, explaining, expanding, purifying and stabilising the wordstock). Elements of language engineering can be observed in prescriptivism (Estonian language planning) and xenophobic purism. These large, iconic projects were led by the well known linguists of the time. Comparing the three, we can see that Latvian and Lithuanian projects are more retrospective (focusing on the heritage) while the Estonian dictionary is more forward-looking. The status of these iconic dictionaries is also different today: only the Latvian project has retained it.

1. Introduction.

Baltic lexicography has so far been viewed mainly within the confines of each language and nation (Zemzare 1961; Veisbergs 2000; Balode 2002; Jansone 2003; Jakaitienė 2005; Erelt 2007; Melnikienė 2009), so its description lacks the broader regional and European dimension (Consadine 2008; Cormier 2010) which its lexicography does possess. Baltic lexicography shows many parallel and amazingly similar processes, testifying to the common space of knowledge (*Wissensraum*).

Baltic lexicography started with bilingual and multilingual dictionaries in the 17th century. These were mainly connected with religious needs (Reformation and Counter-Reformation rivalry tended to help in local language development). The three countries, however, had varying historical development and different dominating languages. As a result of the dominance of another language (German or Polish) the dictionaries were compiled by non-native speakers and for the needs of non-native ruling elites. While in Latvia and Estonia this was predominantly German-Latvian or German-Estonian, in Lithuania it was Polish-Latin-Lithuanian (Catholic tradition) and German-Lithuanian (Protestant tradition in Lithuania Minor). The German contribution is thus dominant in all Baltic language lexicographies. Dichotomies and splits were rife, between the written and spoken language, and between language variants: northern versus southern Estonian, Latvian versus Latgallian, and Lithuanian proper versus the Lithuanian of Lithuania Minor (Lithuanian in Eastern Prussia). Bilingual dictionaries completely dominated the lexicographical scene until the 20th century.

Only in the late 19th century did lexicography pass into the hands of native speakers. In the 20th century, the three Baltic states had a similar historic background, they achieved independence after World War One and started active nation-building processes which involved work on iconic lexicography works. These were large-scale national projects with a multitude of aims, such as both extralinguistic prestige objectives (proving the wealth of the language resource, demonstrating it to the outside world, putting the languages on the

comparative linguistics map) and linguistic ones (registering, etymologizing, explaining, expanding, purifying and stabilizing of the wordstock). These iconic works are associated with well-known lexicographers who usually made up the first generation of native linguists. The result of the project was intended to be the definitive dictionary of the respective language. These projects reflected the languages' past tendencies and future challenges.

2. The Iconic Dictionary of Latvian

The Latvian project was started by Mühlenbach, a notable and well known linguist, in early 1880s. He initially focused on supplementing Ulmann's "Lettisches Wörterbuch" (1872). As a result, the dictionary was designed as a bilingual translation book with explanations in German and examples in Latvian. Mühlenbach strongly disliked words he considered unwelcome intruders, an idea which fully accorded with the ideas of Neo-Latvians and their followers. He appealed several times for the public to send in missing and new materials and, since the dictionary was based on Ulmann's, it was easy to identify what was missing. Public involvement was a rather novel phenomenon, which has never been repeated in Latvian lexicography since. Mühlenbach died in 1916 (having got as far as the letter P) and the work was entrusted to Endzelīns (by now Latvian linguist number one, who had advised Mühlenbach on etymological and other issues). Endzelīns introduced some minor orthographical changes, re-edited the whole material, and ejected numerous borrowings from the manuscript, commenting that the dictionary should contain only "genuinely Latvian goods", thus outlining his understanding of the aim of the dictionary. Folk language (Latvian *dainas*, fairy tales, proverbs etc) and spoken language form the dictionary's backbone. The early texts are represented too, there is a multitude of localisms and dialectal words. Special attention was paid to words of Baltic origin, with comparative studies in mind.

The microstructure of the entry contains intonation patterns (shown in the headword), in many cases etymology, senses and their translations in German (extended rather than equivalents), samples of use suggested by the authors and rather extensive citations from the corpus with an emphasis on the regional dialects and provenance, phraseology and idioms. The dictionary contains many archaisms marked with a cross. In the latter volumes occasional pictures appear for difficult words – fence types, knots, etc. – a notable development testifying to an open mind of the editors.

The dictionary "Mühlenbacha Latviešu valodas vārdnīca" was published between 1923 and 1932 (Mühlenbacha 1923-1932), first in folios and then in four large volumes (77,175 entries). Meanwhile, new information was being added to the corpus. Together with E. Hauzenberga, Endzelīns compiled a further two volumes of supplements and corrections, published from 1934 to 1946 (Endzelīns 1934-1946). Thus altogether the dictionary contains 132,718 entries and covers 5480 pages. Its creation took sixty years and, fortunately, it escaped Soviet ideological influence (cf. Lithuanian). Begun as a one-man work, it developed into a three-person effort with some public support. The dictionary was published in the new spelling, as Latvia underwent an extended orthography reform from Gothic script to Latin (1908-1937).

The purpose of the dictionary can be partly seen in its dual title: in Latvian it called "Dictionary of the Latvian language" and, in German, "Lettisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch". It seems the authors were seeking to achieve three things: they produced a comprehensive stock of genuine Latvian for the time; they glossed in German, so it could be used as a bilingual dictionary; and they put Latvian into the international framework of comparative linguistics by emphasising its ancient Indo-European roots. At home it became a touchstone for correct, good Latvian, and remains so. It has been republished abroad and is available on the internet.

Of course it is ironic that this iconic Latvian work is mostly composed in German. A monolingual Latvian explanatory dictionary was published in the last quarter of the century but, because of a multitude of restrictions (ideological, purist, anticolloquial, limited to the last century, no etymologies), it is much less highly regarded.

3. The iconic dictionary of Lithuanian.

For historical reasons (the Russian authorities banned Lithuanian for half a century), the iconic work of Lithuanian lexicography could only start with Lithuanian independence after World War I, when Lithuanian became the official language of the country. It was clear that a major dictionary was needed to show the vitality and functionality of the native language. A card index for a dictionary had already been started by Kazimieras Būga, a renowned Lithuanian linguist, in 1902. In 1920, the government asked him to compile a large dictionary including all words used in Lithuanian, together with their histories and etymologies, plus also dialects and proper names (rivers, lakes, family and local names). This spelled the beginning of a long and tortuous project, reflecting the political and historical shifts Lithuania was to undergo in the 20th century. Būga, who died in 1924, managed to collect about 600,000 citations, write a long introduction to the dictionary and edit 2 fascicles (82 pages), getting as far as *anga*. Many of the old citations compiled were in other languages. Besides literary vocabulary, Būga's dictionary comprised dialectal words, Old Lithuanian text words, proper nouns and borrowings. This won him some condemnation, as borrowings were considered not in line with the purification of the Lithuanian language. Būga protested, insisting that a dictionary should be a mirror of the language and nobody is at fault if the image is not exactly what one wishes to see.

After Būga's death, the project was put on the back burner for six years, after which Juozas Balčikonis was appointed editor of the dictionary in 1930. He found Būga's card index lacking words from literature as well as scanty in dialectal lexis. These were to be supplemented, but nothing from contemporary press was to enter the dictionary. Being short of material, Balčikonis tried involving the general public in addition to his staff. He rejected proper names, word histories and explanations in foreign languages. Though in doubt about entering foreign words in general, finally those found in the old texts and those frequently used were considered acceptable. Regionalisms and "barbarisms" (unwelcome borrowings) were not included. Numerous dated and inappropriate words were preceded by x.

It was only in 1941 that the first volume of the Lithuanian Academic Dictionary was published, covering A and B (Lietuvių 1941). However, the Soviet occupying powers did not allow its distribution. The ban was lifted by the Germans when they drove the Soviets out. Balčikonis also finished editing the 2nd volume that appeared in 1947 (Lietuvių 1947) in two versions (the Soviet censors purged the second of the language of those Lithuanians who had fled to the West). Nevertheless, the dictionary was criticised in 1949 for its "reactionary clerical phraseology" and, after lengthy discord and friction, the 3rd, politically correct, volume appeared in 1956 under a new editor. It was full of quotes from Marx and Lenin, and also from Stalin, but without attribution, as the political stance had again changed. The first two volumes were also re-edited and republished according to the new instructions (Lietuvių 1968, 1969).

Apart from ideological shifts, serious editorial changes occurred in the 50s as well. Balčikonis was criticised for a tendency to view all aspects of the standard language by the laws of the folk language, a stance hostile to the evolving and new written language models. He could not accept the ideological change and the new editorial demands and left. Further editors did not hold clear personal views, and editing became anonymous. The new

illustrative material now started, with sentences from contemporary (i.e. Soviet) texts, prefixed words were alphabetised under the unprefixed ones, parallel forms and dialectal words were put under the most common form, borrowings were supplied with origins (while internationalisms were not), some historical and connotational meanings were marked, as was transitivity, participial adverbs were put under the verbs from which they were derived. Aside from their ideological aspect, the new policies could be viewed as reasonable and user-friendly. In this form the dictionary under various editors slugged on, saw the collapse of the Soviet Union and was finished in 2002, a full century since its inception. In the end, there were 20 volumes (Lietuvių 1968-2002) with about 22,000 pages, 500,000 headwords (including a huge number of dated and obsolete words) and five million citations from 1547 to 2001. It is available on the internet.

4. The Iconic Dictionary of Estonian

The Estonian dictionary is perhaps less of an icon than the Latvian and Lithuanian ones. Veski's (Veski 1925-1937) orthological dictionary was accomplished in a relatively short period and was less elaborate than its Baltic counterparts, who tried to create storehouses of national language treasures. It shares its iconic status with Wiedemann's (1869) 19th century dictionary. It could be described as a forward-looking project, while the Latvian and Lithuanian iconic dictionaries were more retrospective. Thus it can be seen more as a functional and pragmatic, prescriptive and normative book, aimed at stabilising the language and enriching it. This goal was partly the result of the never ending chaos in spelling and varieties, it also reflected the personality of the lexicographer. The compiler Johannes Voldemar Veski was a natural scientist by education with a terminologist's approach to language, wishing it to be planned, ordered and structured, favouring a synchronic approach and monosemy, but paying less attention to history. It is suggested that he created well over 100,000 words and terms. In a parallel process, Veski's general standardisation demands were adopted for schools and publishing in 1927.

The dictionary, under the purposeful title "Dictionary of Correct Estonian Usage", was published in three volumes, the 3rd coauthored by Muuk. It is an Estonian-Estonian explanatory dictionary, but also contains German, English, Latin and Russian equivalents, especially for technical terms. It contains 1720 pages and approximately 130,000 words. Veski's terminological bias lead him to prefer monosemy and augmentation of lexis (on the basis of existing Estonian wordstock, which he did not consider limited as Aavik did). As a neologist he created numerous words by means of derivation, compounding and backformation. Thus the dictionary had a multitude of derivatives. Its main purpose was to stabilise language and usage, introduce new coinages and guarantee correctness. In this senses it is perhaps oversystematic. As it contained many new words coined by Veski himself, it was also a prescriptive work in this sense.

5. Conclusions.

In conclusion, we can see that the above dictionaries have a different status today. The Latvian dictionary, although the most academic one, and bilingual) is still viewed by many as an iconic dictionary of correct and unspoilt Latvian lexis, known in conjunction with the names of the authors, which have become canonical in their own right. The Lithuanian dictionary is generally viewed as a project of unprecedented scope, not associated with a particular author. Estonian dictionary is viewed as the period-bound, prescriptive product of a

forward-looking linguist-terminologist. All three display a defensive and purist stance against the major contact languages (German, Russian and Polish), a standardising streak and the wish to expand the vocabulary. A retrospective analysis also reveals differing vectors: the generally retrospective drive of Lithuanian and Latvian linguistics (as the old languages of the Indo European family) and the prescriptive and codifying drive of the Estonian dictionary, which reflected the need to overcome the chaos in spelling.

References

- Balode, I. 2002.** *Deutsch-lettische Lexicographie*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Consadine, J. 2008.** *Dictionaries in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Cormier, M.C. 2010.** ‘New Perspectives on Seventeenth- and Eighteenth- Century European Lexicography.’ *International Journal of Lexicography* 23.2: 133–135.
- Endzelīns, J. and E. Hauzenberga 1934-1946.** *Papildinājumi un labojumi K. Mīlenbaha Latviešu valodas vārdnīcai*. R., 1-2. sēj.
- Erelt, M. (ed.) 2007.** *Estonian Language* Tallinn: Estonian Academy Publishers.
- Jakaitienė, E. 2005.** *Leksikografija*. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas.
- Jansone, I. 2003.** ‘Entwicklung der lettischen Lexikographie von G. Mancelius bis zu elektronischen Wörterbüchern. Lettische Lexikographie im 17. Jahrhundert.’ *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*. Heft 129/Jg. 64–95.
- Lietuvių kalbos žodynas 1968-2002.** T.1-20.Vilnius.
- Lietuvių kalbos žodynas 1941.** Vyr. red. J. Balčikonis. T.1. Vilnius: Lietuvių kalbos institutas.
- Lietuvių kalbos žodynas 1947.** Vyr. red. J. Balčikonis. T.2. Kaunas: Valstybine enciklopedijų, žodymų ir mokslo literatūros leidykla.
- Lietuvių kalbos žodynas 1968.** J. Kruopas. T.1. Vilnius: Mintis.
- Lietuvių kalbos žodynas 1969.** Vyr.red. J. Kruopas. Vilnius: Mintis.
- Melnikienė, D. 2009.** *Dvikalbiai žodynai Lietuvoje*. Vilniaus universiteto leidykla.
- Mühlenbach, K. 1923-1932.** *Latviešu valodas vārdnīca* (1–4) Riga.
- Ulmann, C.C. 1872.** *Lettisches Wörterbuch*. Riga.
- Veski, J. V. 1925/1930/1937.** *Eesti õigekeelsuse-sõnaraamat*. I/III. Tartu.
- Veisbergs, A. 2000.** ‘Latvian Bilingual Lexicography – Tradition and Change.’ In *Lexicographica*. Series Maior, Band 103. Tuebingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 27–33.
- Wiedemann, F. J. 1869.** *Ehstnisch-deutsches Wörterbuch*. St. Petersburg.
- Zemzare, D. 1961.** *Latviešu vārdnīcas*. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas Izdevniecība.