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CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION IN TEACHING DICTIONARY SKILLS

Abstract The paper presents a project devised by Georgian and Hungarian lexicographers which aims at improving dictionary use skills and dictionary culture in Georgia and Hungary. The project is based on previous experience, studies and findings of its authors at Ilia State University (Georgia) and Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The feedback gathered from theoretical lexicography courses and the needs of the students emerging from these courses revealed the necessity to concentrate more on practical issues of teaching dictionary skills. The cross-border cooperation project will be divided into two stages. At the initial stage, the shortcomings in dictionary skills among students, as well as the special needs of students and teachers will be identified with the help of a questionnaire, supplemented by interviews and tests to refine the data. The results of the survey will be used in the next stage for the development of teaching materials, which will include a workbook (in print and e-book format), a teacher's book (in print and e-book format), as well as a variety of online tools and exercises for language learners which will help them explore reference skills from many different angles and in different situations.

Keywords dictionary didactics; dictionary use skills; manual for teachers; exercise book; practical lexicography module

1. Introduction

This paper presents a project, conceived by Georgian and Hungarian lexicographers at Ilia State University (ISU) and Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (KRE), aiming at developing dictionary use skills in university students. The project is motivated by our practical experience as well as our prior research projects. Many studies were conducted in Georgia concerning dictionary use. Some of them were more general aiming at revealing the attitude of the Georgian population towards dictionaries. Other studies were more specific and investigated the effectiveness of different types of dictionaries – monolingual, bilingual or bilingualized – in English language classes. Particularly interesting are those experiments which tried to measure the dictionary use skills of Georgian learners of English. The above-mentioned studies and the obtained results are described in detail in the article "How to Solve Problems in Dictionary Use: the Georgian Case" (Margalitadze & Meladze, 2023). Research projects at KRE were focused on dictionary didactics, dictionary use and how dictionaries could best be employed in the context of language teaching and learning (for the results of an ongoing research project, see P. Márkus et al., 2023). Research on dictionary use is an essential prerequisite for high-quality dictionaries and effective dictionary use. In addition, it has the potential to improve the teaching of dictionary use and lexicographic culture. For this reason, we plan to launch a joint research project to explore dictionary use habits and attitudes of university students

learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Georgia and Hungary, as well as to identify the current obstacles to effective dictionary use.

The studies carried out in Georgia and Hungary as well as the previous dictionary user studies (e.g., Rundell, 1999; Lew, 2010; Chan, 2012; Neid Curcio, 2022; Gouws, 2022; P. Márkus & Dringó-Horváth, 2023; Vrbinc & Vrbinc, 2006) have demonstrated that there is a significant gap between the dictionary user and the dictionary since people lack the reference skills required to retrieve information in a complex dictionary entry. Moreover, not having studied dictionary use in an educational context, practising teachers do not know how to integrate the topic into classroom activities effectively. There could be two approaches to resolving the dichotomy between the user and the dictionary. First, lexicographers are trying to develop techniques that match ordinary users' linguistic expertise and make dictionaries more user-oriented. As an example, online platforms are increasingly enabling this, as digital dictionaries have a much more flexible structure and fewer structural constraints than their paper predecessors. E-dictionaries are products that are ideally designed to suit human needs; thus, it seems reasonable that they would be user-friendly in every way, including editorial layout and design (cf. Tarp & Gouws, 2020). Second, users should be trained to be more skilled in using dictionaries and other lexicographic tools because no matter how user-friendly the source is, in order to successfully retrieve data, the user needs to know exactly what kind of data set is represented in different dictionary types. Knowing the layout and the basic properties of data structure is essential to accessing the right information (cf. Margalitadze & Meladze, 2023; P. Márkus & Dringó-Horváth, 2023). Students need to know the internal structure of the textual content (e.g., of an entry) that they read in print or on the internet, otherwise, the retrieval of information will take a lot of time or fail completely (cf. Lew, 2013; 2016; Campoy-Cubillo, 2015; Tarp & Gouws, 2020). In reality, we witness the improvement in the quality and user-friendliness of dictionaries, however, as a result of the lack of dictionary skills training at schools and universities, societies are losing dictionary culture (cf. Gavriilidou & Konstantinidou, 2022; Gouws, 2022). The consequence of this is poor knowledge of foreign languages, scanty vocabularies, and the negative effect it entails for national languages (Margalitadze, 2018; 2020).

There is one more aspect of dictionary use skills. In today's internet-driven society, an increasing number of students are studying foreign languages outside of the traditional classroom, which may provide challenges in finding reliable sources of information (cf. Nied Curcio, 2022; P. Márkus et al., 2023). In general, there is a considerable difference between classroom learning and autonomous learning. Since language teachers are not always available, students who are having language-related problems must look for credible sources of information on their own. If students learn how to utilize reference works, such as dictionaries or encyclopaedias efficiently, these resources will help them to answer their language-related questions. Thus, they will make a big step in the direction of becoming autonomous learners of English (cf. Roby, 2006; Lew, 2016; Rundell, 2016).

Based on our previous experience and findings, we embark on jointly developing a dictionary skills handbook that can be integrated into lessons in different courses,

at different language levels, or even for independent study. The handbook will also include a methodological guide for teachers to give them ideas and useful advice on how to teach dictionary skills.

2. Lexicography Courses at ISU and KRE

A course in lexicography, "Introduction to Lexicography" (Margalitadze, 2022), was introduced at ISU and several state and private universities in Georgia. The course consists of two parts: a theoretical part, dealing with different issues of modern lexicography and a practical part, made up of exercises developed by the author of the course. The exercises are tailored to the needs of Georgian students and address the most problematic issues, mostly connected to the meaning of words, understanding the complexity of interaction between English and Georgian lexis, the problem of equivalence, polysemy, homonymy, conversion, phrasal verbs and idioms. Students' feedback is particularly positive on the exercises which they find very useful and efficient in improving their dictionary use skills. Students not only improve their dictionary skills but also understand the importance of dictionaries in learning foreign languages, in enriching their vocabulary, in becoming more independent in learning foreign languages.

At KRE, "Lexicology and lexicography", as university courses, have been taught since the academic year 1996/1997 (at the Department of English Linguistics). The lexicology part of the course provides a basis for many of the lexicographic topics covered in the second section. The objective is to present the theoretical and practical relationships between these two important fields and to offer all the resources required for hands-on dictionary skills training. Research shows (Márkus & Szöllősy, 2006; P. Márkus et al., 2023) that these courses should increasingly focus on practical lexicography, covering areas such as dictionary use and reference skills, as this will be an important part of the digital literacy of students (whether linguists or teachers) graduating from university.

The lack of available textbooks and teaching aids is tangible in this area. Studies reveal that in Hungary and Georgia "dictionary awareness" is generally rather low and that more attention to the teaching of dictionary skills would be needed in the curricula for English language learning. The major challenges that result from a weak dictionary culture, as well as teachers' inability to incorporate dictionary pedagogy into regular teaching activities in primary and secondary schools, are readily obvious. The following section will detail our cooperative project, which aims to find ways to overcome some of these problems.

3. New Project

Our new project "Cross-Border Collaboration in Teaching Dictionary Skills" advocates for the inclusion of dictionary skills in language classes at school and university. Through our university lexicographic courses, more and more teachers are recognising the importance of teaching and integrating the use of dictionaries

into the educational process. After graduation, students give feedback on how they continue to incorporate dictionary use into foreign language teaching. In order to facilitate these positive trends, we must constantly strive to provide methodological aids and training courses to help language teachers achieve a more diverse and cross-competence development – using a wider range of digital tools (e.g., ChatGPT) and adapting to the changing needs of students.

Our cross-border collaboration aims to demonstrate the teachability of dictionary skills, and to this end, we attempt to present the topic from multiple perspectives, involving as many activities as possible. The first thing teachers need to learn is that knowledge is not simply a matter of repeating existing knowledge, but rather of acquiring the missing knowledge as effectively as possible, for which creative thinking and problem-solving are essential skills (Baron, 2021). Moreover, it is crucial to understand and distinguish between two fundamental forms of dictionary use: active and passive. We aim to develop a conscious use of dictionaries in learners, hence exercises will be developed for both types of dictionary use. Dictionary skills exercises will focus on all the information types (e.g., phonological, grammatical) in the dictionary entry (both monolingual and bilingual). From a methodological point of view, there are several key aspects to keep in mind concerning the tasks, such as *recognition* (e.g., exercises focusing on recognition of the correct part of speech, correct homonym, correct polysemous meaning of a word); *comparison* (e.g., students compare a dictionary entry from an online dictionary with a print dictionary); *evaluation* (e.g., comparing dictionaries according to evaluation criteria); *observation* (e.g., tasks interpreting the structure of a dictionary entry or the user guide require observational activity). This type of task is particularly important since careful observation is required for solid thinking. Critical thinkers collect data during observations and filter out extraneous aspects to focus on the important facts, which is considered an essential skill in the 21st-century digital world. Dictionaries are an inexhaustible repository for grouping words in different ways, so they can be used for a variety of topics, as the language learner can search for words of the same part of speech, the same ending, or the same meaning in print or electronic dictionaries. Exercises involving the *collection* of words are suitable for teaching the effective use of both print and electronic dictionaries. The *supplementation* activity can also be carried out creatively, for example, in online dictionaries, where the task is to further edit or supplement individual entries. Finally, *creativity* and *cooperation* should also be highlighted (e.g., students prepare their own tasks based on the given sample exercises independently or in groups) (Gonda, 2009; P. Márkus, 2023).

Some of our experiments revealed that students try to use ChatGPT, Google Translate or other tools instead of dictionaries while completing different vocabulary tasks (cf. P. Márkus et al., 2023). Therefore it is important to include these tools for the development of dictionary use skills. It is important to teach learners of English to what extent they can rely on modern tools and what their pitfalls and limitations are, particularly in a bilingual context while translating English texts into their native languages or vice versa. Such comparisons between the performance of machine translation or ChatGPT and a dictionary entry will prevent students from being too dependent on technologies and will help them realize that these tools should be

regarded as aids in solving particular tasks and not the only resources to be consulted. In order to develop a method to improve the existing situation in dictionary didactics, this project intends to investigate where and when the instructors of the different courses educate students on the skills of dictionary use in university programmes. In light of all this before embarking on developing a dictionary skills module the current situation will be assessed by identifying:

- the shortcomings of dictionary skills among the 1st-year students;

- the special needs of students;

- the special needs of teachers.

For this purpose, a questionnaire (which aims to investigate students' dictionary use habits and attitudes towards dictionaries, and the role of dictionaries as an aid to language learning and teaching; for more on the questionnaire, see P. Márkus et al., 2023), devised by Hungarian lexicographers, will be used both at ISU and KRE. The questionnaire will be supplemented in some cases (approximately 10%) by interviews. The aim of the interviews is to refine the quantitative data and to highlight further problems and needs. The results of the survey at both universities will be thoroughly analysed by the project participants. Based on the findings, a test-based experiment will be conducted at ISU and KRE. The experiment will start with a pre-test, worked out at ISU, for measuring the dictionary use skills of students. Based on the pre-test, we will develop worksheets aimed at effective dictionary use, focusing on problem areas. During one semester these teaching materials (i.e., worksheets) will be tested in the classroom in various courses. Students will be asked for feedback on the materials, as we want to know what they think about the tasks, and how difficult or useful they find them. At the end of the semester, the "dictionary skills training" will end with a post-test to measure students' progress and see how their skills have developed. The feedback and the results of the post-test will be used to develop a "dictionary skills module" based on the worksheets that will be constantly improved and revised during the semester. Thus two clearly distinctive but interrelated parts will be dealt with during the project. First, dictionary use habits, strategies and needs will be mapped by the questionnaire, interviews and tests, identifying areas for improvement. Second, a "dictionary skills module" intended to improve these skills will be designed and tested.

As a result of the project, we will jointly develop a dictionary skills handbook with exercises and activities that can be integrated into lessons in different courses and language levels. The handbook will also include methodological guidelines on dictionary didactics for teachers to give them ideas and useful advice on how to teach dictionary skills. The teaching materials will include a workbook (in print and e-book format), a teacher's book (in print and e-book format), as well as a variety of online tools and exercises so that language learners will be able to explore reference skills from many different angles and in different situations.

4. Conclusion

We believe that the successful implementation of the project and development of the practical lexicography module will contribute to the improvement of dictionary culture in our countries. We are also convinced that good dictionary skills will enable students to be more successful in their English degree programmes – and not only in the language development classes, but also in the literature, history, culture, and linguistics courses. Improving students' efficiency in using online dictionaries of English will also improve their digital competencies in general, and data mining and data retrieving skills in particular. As the majority of online dictionaries are all freely accessible, learning how to use them efficiently will reduce inequalities among students coming from different socio-economic backgrounds.

After the completion of the project, we will be able to:

- give guidance on how to integrate (the teaching of) dictionary use into traditional classroom teaching in higher education, thus making the teaching and learning process more effective,

- provide background information on dictionaries,

- increase students' potential in achieving the goal of becoming autonomous learners,

- improve our students' level of English language proficiency,

- contribute to more students being able to successfully cope with university requirements,

- improve the digital competencies of students,

- contribute to the reduction of inequalities among students coming from different socio-economic backgrounds.

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