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# An interdisciplinary, intercultural and multilingual project: the new Southern African music education dictionary

*ABSTRACT: This paper presents an outline of a new lexicographical project in South Africa involving the compilation of an intercultural, multilingual music education dictionary. The formulation of goals is discussed briefly, and some specific problems. These are: the language(s) of presentation, the way in which the information should be presented, the total absence of certain terms in some cultures, and differences in conceptualization in different cultures. Some organizational aspects are mentioned briefly.*

## 1. The situation with regard to education in South Africa

The educational system in South Africa is currently being restructured, to provide for non-racial, integrated education in the post-apartheid era. In general education, children and students from a variety of African, Indian, Muslim, Western and other cultures will be educated together from now on, without one culture being regarded as superior to the others.

For music education, this situation presents specific challenges. South Africa has a very rich musical culture. Music is, however, a culture-specific phenomenon. Everyone is the product of a specific cultural background. The customs peculiar to one's own background are usually known and treasured, but very few people are bi-cultural. In South Africa, in particular, where people from different cultural groups have been isolated from each other for so many years, most people know very little about any culture other than their own.

New syllabuses are being compiled to provide for the training of pupils and students in more than one culture, in order to promote mutual interest in and appreciation of the various cultures. It will be impossible for teachers to receive specialized training in all the cultures, just as it will be impossible for them to speak all the languages of South Africa fluently. The basic idea is that teachers will choose specific modules which will take the needs and interests of their pupils into consideration, and expose them to as many different music cultures as possible. Teachers will have to be able to provide adequate information on the music cultures they teach.

Pupils and students from the various cultures will not only make music together, but will also have to communicate **VERBALLY** about different aspects of the various musical cultures. It will be of crucial importance that teachers and students use the correct terms when referring to musical practices, phenomena and experiences. They will also have to understand the meaning, or denotation, of such terms. This is why a comprehensive music dictionary, covering musical terminology from all the cultures in the country, is urgently needed.

## 2. The music education dictionary project: an outline

As a result of the need explained above, I have recently undertaken an initiative to establish an advisory board, consisting of musicologists, music educators representing the various African, Indian, Muslim and Western music cultures, linguists and lexicographers. Several people have already offered their services and expertise for this project, and others will be approached.

The project is based on insights gained from Herbert E. Wiegand's metalexigraphy. It will not, however, be possible to relate all aspects of the proposed dictionary to Wiegand's metalexigraphy within the scope of this paper.

This project is **INTERDISCIPLINARY**, involving the following disciplines: Music, Education, Semantics, especially Translation Theory, Lexicography, and Intercultural Communication. In formulating the goals of this dictionary, specific aspects from all these disciplines must be taken into consideration.

The proposed music dictionary will be **MULTICULTURAL**. The idea is to compile a dictionary consisting of several volumes of the same format, each containing terms from a specific music culture found in Southern Africa. For example, the first volume will deal with Xhosa musical terms, and the second with Zulu terms, etc. The different volumes in the series could ultimately be collated into one comprehensive volume, if necessary.

The dictionary will be **MULTILINGUAL**, because the terms to be included come from many languages. For example, in Western musical tradition alone, terms from several languages are universally used. These include mainly Italian, German, French and Spanish terms, but terms from other languages, such as those of Eastern Europe, are also used. It will be a **DICTIONARY**, and not an encyclopedia, because the focus will be on the meaning (or denotation) and the uses of the terms to be included. The aim is to provide a short explanation of the semantic features of each term, and information on the way in which each term is used. Some encyclopedic information will be included, however, to a limited extent, where necessary.<sup>1</sup>

## 3. The goals and nature of the music education dictionary

In his metalexigraphy, Wiegand<sup>2</sup> divides the lexicography of languages into four main areas. These are (i) research into the **USE** of dictionaries; (ii) research into **CRITICISM** of dictionaries; (iii) the study of the **HISTORY** of lexicography; and (iv) the **GENERAL THEORY** of the lexicography of languages.

Using these distinctions, it is possible to identify different **STEPS** in the compilation of this dictionary. The first of which would obviously be to establish the **GOALS** of the dictionary to be compiled.

This first step corresponds to Wiegand's first area of study in lexicography. The questions to be answered as accurately as possible are: For whom is this dictionary intended? Who are the potential users, and what are their specific needs?

The potential users of this dictionary have been identified as South African high school pupils and undergraduate university and college students of music.

The second and third areas of Wiegand's theory deal with the study of existing dictionaries. According to him (1983, 101), one can formulate several lexicographical principles by studying the features of existing dictionaries. By identifying the limitations and advantages of existing dictionaries, lexicographers are able to compile better new dictionaries, which will fulfil the NEEDS of the potential users. In the second step, therefore, the question is: Which dictionaries are presently available to potential users, and what are their respective advantages and limitations?

Most music dictionaries currently available in South Africa were compiled abroad, and do not take into consideration the specific needs of South African music teachers and students who have to work with terms from VARIOUS music cultures. This situation has serious consequences.

Firstly, existing dictionaries are biased towards Western music, or consist entirely of Western musical terms. In Southern Africa, much has already been done to compile and describe terminology of LOCAL musical styles, instruments and practices. Lists of terms, with adequate descriptions, can be found in many books and articles on African music. This also applies to Indian music. There is, however, no comprehensive publication which explains all these terms. Students do not generally have access to the work which has already been done by scholars. Such existing terminology lists are now being used as the starting point for the proposed comprehensive music dictionary.

Secondly, most music dictionaries from abroad are written for English-speaking students. In South Africa, however, many languages are spoken. The issue of mother tongue education is currently receiving a great deal of attention, because in multicultural education this problem is extremely relevant. For example, according to the Urban Foundation, in 1991 over seven million pupils received their education by means of English, even though English is the mother tongue of less than 9% of these pupils. This means that, for the majority of pupils and students in South Africa, English is only a second or third language. It is, nevertheless, considered by many to be the academic LINGUA FRANCA in South Africa. Research has shown that in general education, the majority of pupils' standard of English is not high enough to ensure a proper education. In music education, the use of English music dictionaries often results in incomprehension. Afrikaans students, for example, often claim that Haydn was born in Australia, because they do not know the Afrikaans equivalent for AUSTRIA!

Thirdly, apart from the English music dictionaries from abroad, there exist only four Afrikaans music terminologies in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> These terminologies are by Roode (1950), F. P. van der Merwe (no year), F. Z. van der Merwe (1958), and Malan (ed.) (1971). Only the latter is still used widely by students and educators, and is currently in the process of being revised. These works all have important limitations, some of which are:

(i) They have all been compiled according to the compilers' own intuitive goals and convictions. This explains why much of the information is presented in such an inconsistent manner. To mention only one inconsistency: In Malan (1971), some terms are provided only with translation equivalents, while others feature an additional short

description or explanation (usually only one phrase). No explanation is given for this inconsistency. Many scholars and students have reported their frustration with this specific inadequacy.

(ii) The terminologies were all published some years ago and no recent terms are therefore included.

(iii) The terminologies all concentrate solely on Western musical terms and do not include terms from any other local music cultures.

(iv) There is, as yet, no standardized music terminology in Southern Africa. The existing terminologies all follow different approaches which results, in many cases, in divergent definitions of the same concept. The term *rubato* serves as an example in this regard. From a musicological point of view, none of the definitions of this term is accurate.

The problem with the language of presentation is still unsolved. The language policy of the new government will, of course, also be taken into account. It would be impracticable and uneconomical to compile each volume in each of the eleven different major languages spoken in South Africa. At present, a more practical approach seems to be the compilation of a so-called LEARNERS' or PEDAGOGICAL DICTIONARY for students of ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. According to Moulin (1983, 144), this type of dictionary can be compiled for purposes of academic or professional study in a particular field, and would, in our case, fulfil the needs of our potential users. It will be necessary to formulate definitions in such a way that they are, to use Moulin's (1983, 149) words, "clear, complete and accurate".

I should appreciate advice on this language issue from lexicographers who have experience of this type of situation.

To summarize: Taking into account the needs of the potential users, and the limitations of existing dictionaries, it becomes clear that the project should aim towards a (i) multilingual, (ii) pedagogical or learners' dictionary, (iii) for students for whom English is a second or third language.

#### 4. Some specific problems of the dictionary

It will be clear that such an endeavour faces serious methodological problems. Some of these are the following:

(i) As explained, the main aim will be to enhance communication within the subject area of music. Therefore, a sound COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH, drawing on research done in intercultural communication, will have to be followed. In Ethnomusicology, the epic/emic debate has been going on for several years. The proposed music dictionary will have to approach the terminology of each culture from the point of view of that culture. This means that the descriptions or definitions accompanying each entry will have to be formulated very carefully, to be CONCEPTUALLY understandable to students from other cultures. Ethnomusicologists and scholars with experience of intercultural education will together have to plan a policy which will fulfil the needs of the potential users.

(ii) Another aim is to enhance the subject knowledge within the field of music education. With regard to subject knowledge, two issues emerge: the board will have to decide which terms to include, and what type of information to present for each entry. These

issues will, in part, be determined by the content of the new music syllabuses which are presently being drawn up, so that the ACADEMIC needs of the potential users will be fulfilled.

(iii) Another issue is the problem of so-called "semantic voids". Because musical terms are culture-specific, this dictionary will take into account Menachem Dagut's<sup>4</sup> classification of so-called "semantic voids", which exist in the case of culture-specific words. Dagut (1978, 1981) has analyzed translations of Hebrew texts into English and identified semantic voids in cases where no translation equivalents exist in a target language for culture-specific source language words. He (1978, 45) claims that differences in conceptualization between speakers of different languages often lead to differences in the "encapsulation" or bundling together of semantic features in a one-word lexical item. Each language group chooses only a few salient or situational features, to the exclusion of all others, and group these features together to form the semantic features of each word. This explains why similar experiences can have different situational features in different languages.

Culture-bound words (to which musical terms belong) cannot be understood by speakers of other languages when merely a TRANSLATION EQUIVALENT is given in dictionaries. Foreign terms have to be EXPLAINED to a certain extent, in the sense that their semantic features, information on the way in which they are used in the particular culture, and their role in that culture, etc. need to be included.

In the case of musical terms, many such semantic voids can be found. For example, the words **music** and **dance** have different situational features in different music cultures. In English, the word **dance** has semantic features which are clearly distinguishable from those of a word such as **music**. In other communities, the experience of "dance" may differ, and other features may be selected to represent a similar, but not identical experience. This can be illustrated by Hugh Tracey's (1969, 10) remark that in the different African music cultures, people "do not necessarily agree as to what constitutes music within their experience and comprehension. For example, the word **kuvina** or **kusina** in some languages means 'to make music' and 'to dance', but it does not include the playing of an instrument." Rommelaere (1990)<sup>5</sup> also stresses this point: "In most African music there is an inextricable relationship between music and dance. Among the Xhosa, for example, little distinction is made between the two and dancing is in fact so much part of the music that it would not even be mentioned, because, in their opinion, everybody knows that 'singing and dancing are the same thing' and that 'the two go together'." In Indian music, on the other hand, the experience of the art of dancing is conceptualized in a completely different way.

A closely related problem is the occasional absence of terms in some music cultures for certain phenomena and practices. It seems that in certain African cultures, there is no "need to develop an abstract terminology", according to Dargie (1988, 67). He (1988, 63) explains that "African traditional conceptualization is not abstract but CONCRETE. One may take a further step and say it is CONCRETE in a HUMAN way: the focus is on what is human and what is done by humans... MUSIC is an abstraction; a SONG is something performed by PEOPLE." This explains why the people in the Lumko district have no word for music, but a song is called "ingoma". Dargie (1988, 63) proceeds:

"Song terminology focusses on the activities of PEOPLE concerned in the production of the song... All the words meaning 'to sing' have some added notes focussing on the particular activities designated by the term. Thus UKUHLABELA means TO LEAD A SONG... UKOMBELA means TO SING WITH CLAPPING... UKUXHENTSA means TO DANCE..."

In the proposed dictionary, translation problems caused by semantic voids will have to be solved by a close examination of the semantic features of the source language terms to be included, and the cultural context in which these terms are used. Clear and understandable target language phrases must then be formulated to convey the entire semantic content of these terms, and to serve as explanations.

(iv) A further issue is whether a DESCRIPTIVE or prescriptive approach will be preferred. Because of the lack of a standardized music terminology in South Africa at this stage, all forms of terms (i.e. standardized, non-standardized, variants, etc.) will need to be recorded and classified, which will, in turn, hopefully contribute to standardization. A descriptive approach therefore seems better.

Considering these problems, it is clear that the composition and task of the advisory board will be extremely important in this next step, where decisions of a methodological nature will have to be made.

## 5. Organizational aspects of the dictionary

The last step in the compilation of the proposed dictionary will be to deal with the ORGANIZATIONAL aspects. Once the compilation process has begun, it is visualized that the advisory board will meet from time to time to discuss relevant policy issues. Some of the organizational aspects are, briefly:

(i) The first phase in the actual compilation is to determine which sources will be excerpted for terms. The following sources are being considered: handbooks and articles on the various musical styles in the country, existing terminology lists, general dictionaries and encyclopedias, as well as audio-visual examples of oral tradition (because traditionally, African musical performance has always been oral).

(ii) The second phase will be to determine which of the existing terms will be included in the dictionary, according to the academic needs of the potential users.

(iii) The third phase will be to provide accurate information for each term, according to the goals of the dictionary, as mentioned above.

(iv) A computer programme will be used to document all information. Several possible computer programmes are being considered at the moment, to determine which one will best suit our needs.

(v) The advisory board's function will mainly be to evaluate the lists of terms which fall within their field of speciality, and to correct or supplement the subject information.

All in all, there is great enthusiasm in South Africa for this project among the music educators, ethnomusicologists, linguists and lexicographers involved. If a dictionary of this type can be completed, it will not only fulfil a need within the field of music education, but will also set an example for other special field dictionaries in Southern Africa. Very few of these have taken terminology from local languages into account.

## Endnotes

- 1 Cf. Wiegand (1988, 775), who distinguishes between the encyclopedic subject knowledge of the MEANING OF WORDS, and the encyclopedic subject knowledge of WHAT THE TERM DENOTES. The proposed dictionary will focus on the former type of information.
- 2 Cf. Wiegand 1983 and 1984.
- 3 For an analysis of these terminologies, cf. Smit (1990b).
- 4 For a detailed discussion of Dagut's models, cf. Smit (1990a).
- 5 Rommelaere (1990) draws upon Hansen (1982).

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