

Pedagogic Lexicography: Some recent Advances and some Questions about the Future

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Abstract

Pedagogic Lexicography is today a full-fledged stream of metalexigraphy. The spread of English as the international language for communication among learners many of whom must be considered beginners or intermediate students, has created the need for more user-friendly and learner-oriented dictionaries. Although the market was, until quite recently, occupied by only a few British publishers, American and other publishers are now appearing, and with them, new and varied styles of language-learning dictionaries. After an early emphasis on encoding – in the work of Hornby and Palmer – dictionaries for production are becoming more prevalent, and integration of the mother tongue, a vital factor in foreign language learning, is now becoming an important feature in many learners' dictionaries, which were hitherto strictly monolingual. It is predicted that advanced level dictionaries will lose some ground in favor of elementary- and intermediate-level dictionaries.

1 Introduction

This paper deals with two subjects. First, some of the recent advances in pedagogic lexicography will be mentioned briefly, in order to provide a bird's-eye view of the present status of learners' dictionaries as part of the overall field of lexicography. The selection of points mentioned and the importance accorded to them are a matter of my own choice and rating, and may be appraised differently by others.

In the second part I ask some questions about the future of learners' dictionaries – questions that a publisher would ask. Where answers are ventured they are based solely on experience and intuition.

2 Recent advances

During the past two decades two particular branches of lexicography have held our attention more than any others – computational lexicography (CL) and pedagogic lexicography (PL). CL has been at the forefront of modern lexicography as a result of the multitude of innovations it has brought with it – innovations that are having an impact on all branches of lexicography. CL gave birth to corpus lexicography – the recording of language as it is used and its application in dictionaries and language textbooks. Electronic dictionaries were born, comprising of hand-held sets, computer diskettes, CDs (both passive and interactive – often with speech), on-line application, the internet, and automatic translation.

Since the late 1970s, PL has gained fresh impetus as an important branch of lexicography. This has occurred largely as a result of the work of the pioneering lexicographers and their legacies, on one hand, and the consolidation of the status of the English language as the language for

international communication in most fields, on the other hand. The need for a world language, the acceptance of English as this language, the need for people in non-Anglophone countries to learn the language, and the resultant need for good learners' dictionaries as an aid in learning English, all contributed to the development of PL. Several fine learners' dictionaries were created, developed or improved in the past two decades. It is difficult to assess, at this stage, the real progress made by PL during the '80s and '90s, as the results are still becoming evident. But PL continues to hold its own as one of the two most vibrant sectors of lexicography.

For fifty years after the creation of the first learners' dictionaries very little changed. Then, in the mid-'80s, a wonderful thing happened. Three forces caused pedagogic lexicography to rise to a new level: publishers, academics and users.

Publishers, who had hitherto performed a fairly conventional role, began to play a more crucial part from the mid-fifties, funding research, developing corpora, setting up workstations and creating lexical databases.

From about 1975 the academic world began to take an interest in pedagogic lexicography. Books were written, and articles published in lexicography and pedagogy journals. Some universities established departments for lexicography, which give courses and seminars, and grant first, second and third degrees. Research projects were undertaken, as a result of which an awareness arose of the need for large-scale research in PL.

Publishers and academe joined hands to develop two aspects of computational lexicography – corpus lexicography and electronic dictionaries. PL was quick to take advantage of these two fields for its own benefit. Word corpora constituted the basis for the data banks of some very serious and prestigious dictionary projects. COBUILD and Cambridge learners' dictionaries were born, and Oxford Advanced and Longman Contemporary learners' dictionaries were each revised twice in the past decade-and-a-half, and were made available on compact disks. Some important dictionaries were revised, and a few new intermediate-level learners' dictionaries were compiled. And the first American learners' dictionaries were published.

Some critics questioned the advantages of replacing classroom-based dictionary examples by the "real" or "authentic" language found in corpora. They questioned also the use of authentic models in the teaching of English, some of which are in their view not culturally relevant or educationally appropriate.

The third party in this alliance, the dictionary user, may be expected to dominate the scene in the coming decade, just as computational lexicography dominated the scene in the previous decade. Dictionaries for production have appeared lately – thesaurus-type learners' dictionaries, with the learner in mind. Training in dictionary use, from both the teacher's and the student's viewpoints, is now included in some school curricula, and dictionary workbooks are now prevalent.

Bilingual dictionaries always were (and still are) the language learner's first choice, even though the traditional bilingual dictionary is not classed as a learner's dictionary. Bilingual dictionaries as a language-learning aid received a jolt when monolingual learners' dictionaries (English-English) entered the ring – but they were not knocked out. The new dictionaries were readily accepted by the teaching public (in particular, by monoglot native-English-speaking teachers), who tried to enforce their use by language learners. It was the period in which the Direct Method in English language teaching (English-in-English, or total immersion in the language being

learnt), and its successor the Audio-Lingual approach, were prevalent, as opposed to the Indirect or Translation Method. And as so often happens, when the pendulum swings it doesn't stop in the middle, but moves right to the other end. Today we understand that second language learning depends to no small degree on the knowledge of mother-tongue equivalents and on cognitive contrastive analysis. As a result, monolingual learners' dictionaries are serving as the base into which are inserted various amounts of translation and contrastive analysis. Thus, the process of bilingualization.

Finally, PL is conceding to the user, seen as the "client", whose needs must be satisfied by the consumer-marketing ethos of today, so that the realm of pedagogic lexicography is now becoming a user's world. Still, the danger of political bias – or ethnocentricity – is still prevalent. Examples provided for various headwords still reflect local politics (such as references to Mrs. Thatcher), and are now somewhat incomprehensible to 21st century users. The Big Four dictionaries of the UK and the newer American dictionaries tend to assume that the learner is either living in the UK or the USA, or wishes to "integrate" into British or American culture. So does Microsoft's Encarta World English Dictionary, "the first dictionary born in the information age". The choice of headwords, definitions and examples in these dictionaries reflects this. Whereas it is probably true that most learners are interested in acquiring English for "instrumental" purposes, such as for professions, tourism, knowledge of current events, leisure activities, etc. Now, the dominance of British and American English is slowly being broken by the introduction of dictionaries with a special national or regional emphasis, such as Macquarie Australian Learners' Dictionary (Sidney, NCELTR and Macquarie University, 1997), or Times-Chambers Essential English Dictionary (Singapore Federal Publications & Chambers, Second Edition, 1997).

But the most important development, in my opinion, is the integration of the mother-tongue (the source language) into existing monolingual learners' dictionaries in which English is the target language. The mother-tongue is claiming its rightful place in foreign language learning, and, as a result, in pedagogic lexicography. This assertion will help other languages to withstand the onslaught against them, of English, the world language. Although on the academic level it is yet to be accorded the recognition which it deserves, the bilingualization of English learners' dictionaries has already become an established fact in language learning in many countries.

3 The future

What has pedagogic lexicography in store for us? English language learning is spreading throughout the world: thus, a greater need for English learners' dictionaries. Moreover, developments in language-teaching methodology (which promote learner independence and free reading), as well as the growth of supplementary reading, are becoming more and more prevalent, and as a result, so is the need for independent dictionary use. Until now, the emphasis in pedagogic lexicography has been on the advanced level, both with regards to the compiling of dictionaries and the study of lexicography. But most significantly, since the researchers are themselves located in universities, their research projects rely in most cases on university students, as they are the easiest to reach. Indeed, a glance at most surveys on dictionary use will show that the subjects are most often university students. This gives a distorted, even an incor-

rect picture of dictionary use and users. Most dictionary users today are not university students; they are actually high-school students.

This means that the emphasis in the study of dictionary use, and indeed, the dictionaries themselves, will shift from advanced level dictionaries to intermediate- and/or elementary-level dictionaries. New dictionary publishers, some British, some American, and some in non-English-speaking countries, have entered the field of ELT dictionaries. Will the "Big Four" publishers of English learners' dictionaries continue to dominate the scene and to set the tone? They very well might continue their control of the markets, because of their extensive distribution apparatuses. But if they – and those engaged in lexicography research – continue to neglect beginners and intermediates, they might lose their monopoly.

In this post-corpus era, what new developments may be expected in PL with respect to content, methodology and presentation? To what extent will neologisms, with which we are presently being swamped, find expression in PL? These are questions that only time will answer.

The ELT industry, until recently a British monopoly, has begun to flourish in other countries. Will British "universal" PL continue to lose ground to localized, population- specific PL, and if so, to what extent? Semi-bilingual dictionaries have been introduced into over 30 countries in the past decade, and there is every reason to believe this trend will continue. The "Big Four" publishers may not yet have felt this development, as the monolingual market has itself been increasing so rapidly. But bilingualized dictionaries are here, and here to stay.

What new developments may be expected in electronic lexicography? Electronic dictionaries are already more prevalent than printed ones among students in many schools and universities. Will electronic dictionaries replace or just supplement printed dictionaries, or will printed dictionaries supplement electronic ones? Much work is being carried out in the field of electronic translation. Will automatic translation become part of PL? Today many software programs come with monolingual, bilingual and semi-bilingual dictionaries "thrown in". To what extent will learners' dictionaries continue to become an integral part of other products, such as word processors and language courses?

To answer all these questions one would have to be a prophet. The use of paper in offices did not disappear with the onslaught of the computer, as some thought it would. And at home, people still prefer the feel of holding a book or a newspaper in their hands, that can be read in any position, and at any time, and in whose accessing they have had a lifetime of experience. Nevertheless, electronic dictionaries are more than just the replication of paper dictionaries in an electronic device. They can contain more data than any printed volume, with more entries, examples, collocations and grammatical notes. They can contain speech, can be interacted with, can be faster to use than any book, can be put in your pocket, can be accessed by telephone, and can translate instantaneously. They can provide a choice of linguistic levels, terminologies or characteristics in the same data base. They can be updated, added to and altered, and will be able to follow spoken instructions. And they eliminate the frustration caused by trial-and-error when looking up entries in paper-based dictionaries. All that is going to be hard to beat. But so long as they do not have the look-and-feel of a printed dictionary they might continue to remain supplements to, but not replacements for, printed dictionaries. Many dictionaries already may be acquired in two forms – either paper or electronic. Some publishers offer "package deals" – dictionaries that come with a CD tucked into the inside pocket. The threat to the printed book is

frightening, and book publishers are being hard pressed to introduce more innovations and user-friendliness into their new editions, such as systems for quick accessing of entries, for avoiding the need for cross-referencing, and, in general for finding what is needed faster and with less effort.

Research in pedagogic lexicography is gaining momentum. In what areas is more research required, and what may be expected? It may be assumed that interest in the user-oriented approach in pedagogic lexicography will bloom, and that scientific investigations in this field will become more common, both among the theoreticians (university-based lexicographers) and the practitioners (the teachers). It will be interesting to follow this newly-developing branch of lexicography, and to see what impact the results will have on forthcoming dictionaries.

To sum up, I think the following four directions can be expected:

- A marriage of the printed book with the electronic contraption, in which each provides what it can do best, and will be mutually complementary;
- replacement of monolingual learners' dictionaries by bilingualized dictionaries at all but the advanced level;
- The localization of learners' dictionaries in content as well as in bilingualization, so that the cultures of the English-speaking peoples which are presently reflected in most learners' dictionaries will eventually be replaced by local or national cultures;
- A new consciousness regarding the importance of dictionary use at pre-high school levels. This will give rise to dictionary research for beginners and intermediates, and a new generation of English learners' dictionaries designed specifically for lower levels.

