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**“Dictionaries and Society” – Conference
Report about XX EURALEX in Mannheim**

1 Introduction

The internationally renowned conference of the European Association for Lexicography (EURALEX) has taken place every two years for the past 39 years. Last year’s conference, held July 12th–16th, 2022, marked EURALEX’s 20th edition, and more than 200 international participants gathered at Mannheim Palace to discuss current developments, learn about new projects, and present their own work — either in lexicography or in one of the many applied or neighboring disciplines such as corpus and computational linguistics.

EURALEX XX was organized by a small yet dedicated team from the Department of Lexical Studies based at the Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS). Annette Klosa-Kückelhaus, the guiding force behind the conference, spearheaded the application process and won the bidding to host EURALEX XX here in Mannheim.

IDS not only has a well-established lexicographic tradition but also serves as a hub for lexicological and metalexicographic research. What is more, having created a vast amount of dictionaries and language resources, which are now used around the world, the institute represents an important center for language documentation. Therefore, it seems only fitting that EURALEX XX provided an excellent backdrop for IDS and fellow experts based in Germany to present their own (meta-)lexicographic endeavors and practical dictionary projects to a global audience.

“Dictionaries and Society”, last year’s chosen theme, addressed a particularly important issue in contemporary lexicography concerning the pedagogical, cultural, and socio-political significance of dictionaries in everyday life and among the general public, thus emphasizing the intersection between language documentation and social history.

Dictionaries play an important role in our society. They are reference works and objects of research. They document language use; they provide guidance in the case of linguistic uncertainties; and they contribute to language development. Furthermore, they have political implications and represent an indispensable cultural asset of a lan-

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/lex-2023-0017>

guage community. Hardly any other object offers such a multifaceted view of these aspects and the ways in which they interact as the dictionary does.

The five-day event offered experts and academics, both experienced and those just starting out in their careers, a wide variety of events and activities for them to network and interact with one another, including a poster session, software demonstrations, a project fair, and a “Young Researchers” panel. In addition, there was a special hybrid day, which allowed 50 additional participants to join in on sessions and plenary lectures on Zoom. There were also two conference workshops, e. g. on researching and documenting neologisms (a topic that is also of interest to more general audiences), which took place both before and during the conference. Each of the sessions were sectioned off according to content and reflected different aspects of the conference theme, e. g. Promoting Dictionary Use; Bilingual Dictionaries; Lexicography: Status, Theory, Methods; Historical Lexicography, etc.

2 Plenary Lectures

Rufus Gouws opened the five-part series of plenary lectures on July 12th, 2022, with the contribution “Dictionaries: Bridges, dykes, sluice gates”. In his talk, Gouws discussed the central functions of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries in a multilingual society. He emphasized the need for a target-oriented and professional approach to dictionaries, which must be learned on the part of dictionary users and taken into account by lexicographers in the process of conception, and he referred to a functional interaction of society and lexicography as “dictionary culture”. The lack of this cultural aspect is a central problem in many mono- and multilingual societies and often leads to a situation where the potential of both printed and electronic dictionaries cannot be fully exploited. The starting point and focus of his talk was the multilingual society of South Africa; however, the lessons learned about dictionary creation are broadly applicable to multilingual segments of the general population and are relevant to both printed works and online resources.

At the beginning of the presentation, Gouws discussed the weaknesses of the dictionary culture in the South African region, mainly due to the fact that it is a relatively diverse linguistic landscape with eleven official national languages, and that some of the languages are given a higher status than others. He emphasized that this must always be taken into account when designing dictionaries, and that different types of reference works are necessary in order to be able to comprehensively cover the individual requirements and cultural conditions of the individual language groups. Gouws pointed out that bilingual dictionaries in particular can be used to increase the prominence of minority languages and to promote interlingual communication; however, the value of monolingual dictionaries should not be underestimated in a multilingual society if they are designed appropriately and used efficiently.

According to Gouws, the desired mode of action and function of the respective reference work must already be determined during data collection and preparation and must be made explicit by means of a guiding question. He named three central modes of action of dictionaries and used the metaphorical representation as bridges, dikes and sluices to illustrate them: while the former and the latter mode of action have a positive effect on the desired dictionary culture, in that obstacles are overcome by knowledge transfer or targeted “knowledge inflows” are made possible by conscious influence, which create a more balanced access to language, dictionaries with the effect of a dike erected for demarcation are rather an obstacle to a successful flow of information. Gouws explained that such barriers can be linguistic as well as political or cultural in nature, for example, through the deliberate suppression of varieties or strong prescriptiveness on the part of lexicographic preparation. However, dictionaries with targeted bridge and sluice functions can circumvent the problems mentioned and represent the language reality in such a way that the information provided neither overwhelms nor under-challenges the readership.

In the concluding part of his lecture, Gouws mentioned the *Wilde woordeboek* as a reference work with optimally applied bridge and lock functions, which shows linguistic creativity and has intensively promoted the development and growth of the South African official language Afrikaans.

On the second day (July 13th), in his lecture entitled “Ways of life, communication and the dynamics of word usage. How did German dictionaries cope with socio-cultural aspects and evolution of word usage and how could future systems do even better?”, **Thomas Gloning** addressed these issues by presenting them in three stages. Firstly, he provided an overview of how different “forms of life” (*Lebensformen*¹), i. e. “culture”, word usage, and changes in meaning have intertwined over time, drawing on, among others, the evolution of German jazz vocabulary, e. g. “*Negro*” music (*Negermusik*) in the 1920s and the jazz cellar (*Jazzkeller*) and jazz matinée (*Jazz matinée*) of the 1950s. He emphasized that the history of any given cultural field also embraces the history of its vocabulary. He then proceeded to demonstrate how various aspects of culture and cultural development have been treated (or not) in German dictionaries.

In further illustrating his point, he drew attention to the IDS’ and DWDS’ work over the last two years in documenting coronavirus vocabulary, letting this serve as example of the systematic documentation of a lexical-semantic and discursive field (Wortfeld).

Additionally, he claimed that while many German dictionaries contain entries that occur within a specific social or cultural context, these do not always include ample background information, e. g. in the entry *Laub(er)hüttenfest*, the German equivalent for the Jewish holiday *Sukkot*. Using this example as a backdrop, he pled for digital dictionaries to start including searchable tags, e. g. “Judaism”, “military technology”,

¹ This term goes back to Wittgenstein (1969): Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1969): *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. *Tagebücher 1914–1916*. Philosophische Untersuchungen. (= Schriften 1), Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

or “hunting”. In addition, he argued for non-alphabetic digital lexicographic systems to start implementing network structures to make such tagging possible.

Furthermore, he presented a selection of German discourse dictionaries that focus on specific aspects of social, cultural or political word usage, e. g. “guilt discourse” (*Schulddiskurs*). Here he emphasized the work of Heidrun Kämper who gave decisive impulses to discourse lexicography with her discourse dictionaries (published in OWID) and which she complemented with monographs.

In closing, Thomas Gloning highlighted methods in which digital systems of the future might go about improving the documentation and description of word usage/lexical groups in the context of culture and cultural development. For this, he advocated integrating links to encyclopedic information and making explicitly representing the social, cultural, and/or discursive background and hence extra-linguistic knowledge in word usage the gold standard.

Nicola McLelland gave an overview of the role of women in the history of lexicography up to the early 20th century in her presentation “Women in the history of lexicography” on July 14th, highlighting hurdles, milestones, and developments. As part of her research, she drew in large part on the findings of a 2018 study by Lindsay Rose Russell, the first to systematically examine women’s participation in dictionary creation in the English-speaking world in greater detail. This study reveals that women were far more involved in dictionary creation than previously thought, and focused particularly on areas of research outside the mainstream; these include, in particular, the documentation of local dialects and the learning of multiple languages. Women were often unpaid helpers and sources of inspiration, as in the case of the conception of the OED (*Oxford English Dictionary*), and were rarely if ever mentioned as participants.

McLelland’s lecture showed that a large area of research can be established with regard to the early lexicographical activities of women in other languages than English, and that a continuation of Russell’s work is needed. She herself had been working on the lexicographic history of German, and in the middle section of her presentation she highlighted three ways in which women were involved before and at the beginning of the 20th century. First, McLelland discussed the role of women as recipients and dedicatees of dictionaries; she cited Sophia, Electress and Dowager Duchess of Hanover, as the first woman to be documented as a dedicatee of a German-English dictionary, explaining the dedication by her exceptionally high level of education and linguistic proficiency. Women had also been active in lexicographical activity as users and in the role of contributors and helpers. Identifying those contributors, however, was hardly possible to any realistic degree; rather, many of those involved worked “behind the scenes” and therefore were not mentioned by name in the directories of the corresponding publications.

Nevertheless, McLelland introduced at least four women who had published demonstrably influential dictionaries in this early period: Elizabeth Weir as editor of the bilingual dictionary *Heath’s/Cassel’s New German Dictionary* (1888), Klara Hechtenberg Collitz as editor of *Fremdwörterbuch des 17. Jahrhunderts* (1904), Agathe Lasch

as editor of the German-language dialect dictionary *Hamburgisches Wörterbuch* (1917) and *Mittelniederdeutsches Handwörterbuch* (1923), and Luise Berthold as editor of *Hessen-Nassauisches Volkswörterbuch* (1927).

In the final part of her presentation, McLelland dealt with feminist lexicography, more specifically the representation of women in bilingual German-English dictionaries. She argued that women and sexuality are mostly underrepresented, stereotyped, and ideologized in the definitions and examples contained therein; to support this thesis, McLelland examined the definitional development of the terms *Hure* and *woman* as examples. Whereas with regard to the former she found a changing sensibility for the acceptance of the term, the emergence of euphemistic language, and semantic refinement in the analysis of entries from a total of 150 years, for the latter she cited two entries from the 16th century that exemplified the trivial and stereotypical presentation of women in dictionaries published by men.

Martina Nied Curcio discussed on July 15th in her lecture “Dictionaries, Foreign Language Learners and Teachers. New Challenges in the digital era” the role dictionaries play in foreign language teaching at schools and universities. Besides a number of other issues, she also questions how competent learners and teachers are in using dictionaries.

Both in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) and in school curricula, dictionary use is mandated in the language classroom. However, the reality of the situation and whether or not and how often dictionaries ever get used is highly dependent on the teacher. What is more, task instructions in course materials are often simply too vague, e. g. “use a dictionary”. Nevertheless, Nied Curcio claims that in spite of these obstacles, the majority of learners consult dictionaries almost on a daily basis — print dictionaries up until the 1990s and since then ever increasingly electronic dictionaries.

In both print and since the 1990s also in electronic lexicographic sources, learners experience similar difficulties, e. g. disorientation, lack of knowledge pertaining to dictionaries, and, in the case of bilingual dictionaries, selecting the first equivalent, etc. In addition, in referencing recent studies, Nied Curcio showed that learners increasingly use search engines as a substitute for dictionaries and formulate their search queries in online dictionaries as if they were search engines. Moreover, evidence shows that nowadays, combined resources such as online dictionaries with integrated grammar tables are also popular among learners.

Regarding teachers, there are currently few studies that focus on their competence in using dictionaries. Martina Nied Curcio conducts regular workshops and training sessions for teachers in Italy despite the fact that the use of bilingual dictionaries is often not allowed and online resources are largely banned from the classroom.

In one such session, 50 Italian teachers of German as a foreign language filled out a questionnaire both before and after the workshop. Based on their answers, it became clear that all those who participated felt more confident in using online dictionaries by the end of the workshop. They were introduced to the various types of resources that

are available and expressed interest in integrating online dictionaries in their classrooms in the future.

In her summarizing statement, Nied Curcio spoke about the new challenges lexicographic resources face in foreign language teaching in the digital age. To her mind, it is imperative to keep the potential user in mind when developing resources, and to strengthen co-operation between lexicographers, language teachers and educators during the process. What is more, educational policy needs to be adapted so that dictionaries in general and the critical reflection of dictionary skills play a greater role in the classroom. That said, for any such change to take hold, teachers must first be made aware and familiarized with the vast world of contemporary lexicographic resources. According to Nied Curcio, strengthening the competence of learners and teachers in the use of dictionaries is important not only because they are essential for translating and learning a foreign language in general, but also because the right consultation skills help to fundamentally access new information and new world knowledge.

On the final day of the conference (July 16th), **Ben Zimmer** traced how “racism” has been defined in U.S. *Merriam-Webster* dictionaries since the 1930s and also the term’s genesis of lexicographic description in the corresponding reference guides.

In the opening of his presentation entitled “The Evolving Definition of ‘Racism’ and its Trail of Textual Artifacts” he talked about how in 2020, 22-year-old Kennedy Mitchum sent an email to *Merriam-Webster* requesting that the then-current definition of the lexical term *racism* be expanded to include systemic racism. After a few email exchanges, the editors agreed to her request, which Zimmer reported led to some revisions to the entry, which Zimmer illustrated one after another chronologically. He then took the audience on a journey back to the 1930s to demonstrate how the entry had entered the dictionary.

The second edition of *Webster’s New International Dictionary* released in 1934 did not yet include the entry *racism*, but did include *racialism*, a word related in meaning. Assistant editor Rose Frances Egan, whose role Ben Zimmer emphasized several times during his lecture, noticed the absence of the entry and petitioned for including *racism* in the dictionary. Thus, the entry for *racism* made it into the dictionary *Webster’s Second* in 1939 where it was published in a section for newly added words.

Zimmer told how he had been allowed to research the *Merriam-Webster* archives. This enabled him to present the audience with several photographs of handwritten slips of paper on which various editors had made notes about the definition of *racism*. He also showed dictionary entries from 1945 (*Webster’s New Handy Dictionary*), 1961 (*Webster’s 3rd International*), and 1963 (*Webster’s 7th Collegiate*) and explained the changes made to the definition in each case. He also drew attention to and explained various entries and explanations of the online versions from 1996 to the present.

In conclusion, Ben Zimmer made the claim that the practice of defining racism “can be seen as emerging from a kind of communicative interplay”, continuously impacted and influenced by each new generation. He raised a number of critical questions, including what role the lexicographer ought to play in public debates and discussions

about controversial words and phrases. Another question was whether we need more transparency in the lexicographic processes of creating and editing dictionary content. A third question is to understand what we can learn from the “text artifacts” that document lexicographic revisions.

3 Conclusion

The organization committee and the participants were delighted to be able to come together face-to-face at this year’s long-awaited and much-anticipated conference, especially in lieu of the many events that had been forced to take place exclusively online due to the pandemic.

For several years now, it has been evident that lexicography is undergoing many changes and facing many challenges. This conference helped to hone in on the ever-evolving and volatile conditions of the future, and to workshop the list of criteria lexicography and lexicographers must lean into in order to accommodate and adapt along these shifts.

What must remain cognizant for all of us is that dictionaries are meant to be used. They pique curiosity, impart knowledge, and send those using them down a road of discovery. However, it has become increasingly clear how diverse users’ reference needs are and how important it is to be continuously reflecting and representing linguistic realities. Mapping these out in reference works requires a careful, steadfast hand.

Without sacrificing solid data analyses and comprehensible, reliable descriptions, creating adaptable and innovative ways of presenting lexical data as part of linguistic-technological applications must serve as guidepost in awakening interest in dictionaries. Naturally, this goes hand in hand with the responsibility entrusted in lexicographers to document language in a way that is factually correct and empirically sound, yet ideologically and politically neutral. Furthermore, it is the lexicographer’s prerogative to sensitize dictionary users to linguistic changes and developments. Bearing this mind, lexicographers would do well to remember the tensions these responsibilities may bring about between the layperson’s understanding of dictionaries as a prescriptive norm and the scientific claim for descriptive documentation. However, while being a well-known source of contention, it is perhaps best that this ongoing debate be resolved further down the line.

Lastly, if EURALEX XX has demonstrated one thing, it is that not only dictionaries and their users, but also the lexicographic practice itself have undergone tremendous changes. Reference works in all their multi-faceted glory remain relevant sources of language and knowledge transfer, and the significance of the role they play within society continues to be indisputably and undeniably high.

4 Acknowledgements

The financial support of the DFG as well as that of numerous sponsors and friends ensured not only a wide-ranging program in terms of content, but also a diverse social program that allowed conference participants to explore Mannheim and the surrounding area.

Finally yet importantly, it cannot be emphasized enough that this conference would not have been possible without the undying patience and organizational talents of Annette Klosa-Kückelhaus and her team. It is with our utmost gratitude that we would like to thank the organizing committee, the scientific program committee, the EURALEX board, and the commitment of the IDS publishing house and numerous volunteers for a successful conference.²

² A sincere thank-you to Adam Kirchner for translating parts of this report.