

Alan Kirkness

International Conference on Lexicography

Exeter, 9.–12. 09. 1983

LEXeter '83, an international conference on lexicography held at the University of Exeter on September 9–12, 1983, was attended by some 270 participants from 39 different countries. They included practitioners and theorists of lexicography, representatives of commercial and academic lexicography, computer specialists, terminologists and publishers' representatives. The conference was sponsored jointly by the British Association of Applied Linguistics, the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing, and the Dictionary Society of North America. Planning and organisation were in the capable and experienced hands of Dr. REINHARD R. K. HARTMANN, Director of the Language Centre at Exeter. That such a major exercise, which involved bussing the participants, most of whom were accommodated in halls of residence on campus, to and from the meeting rooms and ensuring that a full programme of plenary and section sessions kept to a tight schedule, went off with but minor hitches is a measure of his skill and patience and the courtesy and efficiency of his staff.

The academic programme covered a wide range of topics spread across some 19 languages. On the first two days of the conference there were six plenary papers and five sections of ten papers each on the following fields:

1. general and historical lexicography,
2. bilingual lexicography,
3. the learner's dictionary,
4. computer-aided lexicography,
5. terminology and the technical dictionary.

As the printed programme had been sent out in advance together with abstracts of the papers and it was possible to change sections between sessions or in mid-session, one could virtually compile one's own programme. With the exception of Section 5 the printed programme was largely adhered to. Because the proceedings as published are a fair representation of the papers held in Exeter, I can content myself here with a brief summary of the plenary papers.

In the opening paper JOHN SINCLAIR (Birmingham) weighed up the pros and cons of introducing lexicography as an academic discipline and sketched a core syllabus for a possible master's degree in lexicography. LADISLAV ZGUSTA (Champaign-Urbana, Illinois) followed with reflections on the problem of translational equivalence in bilingual dictionaries, drawing his examples from many ancient and modern languages. ANTHONY COWIE (Leeds) reviewed past achievements and present needs of ELF-dictionaries, concentrating on questions of ellipsis and object deletion and their presentation in a learner dictionary. On the second day FRANCIS KNOWLES (Aston, Birmingham) provided a comprehensive, up-to-date survey of the range of computer hardware and software available to lexicographers and a balanced assessment of the possibilities of computer aid in lexicography. JUAN SAGER (Manchester) summarised the historical development of terminology science and discussed the increasingly important international role of terminology work and the technical dictionary. In the final plenary paper HERBERT ERNST WIEGAND (Heidelberg) sketched the contents and structure of a general theory of lexicography with particular reference to the so-called lexicographic definition.

The final morning session was devoted to a summing-up discussion in the individual sections with a subsequent plenary meeting to hear reports and recommendations from the section chairmen, and to a plenary session to found the European Association of Lexicography (EURALEX).

The summing-up discussion was of necessity inconclusive, but it did serve to highlight a number of general issues of concern to lexicographers. A strong need was felt for more systematic empirical research into the use and users of different types of dictionaries in specific situations, especially in the fields of bilingual and learner dictionaries. The uneasy relationship between lexicographers and publishers was a key issue, with the emphasis of a lively debate shifting from the idealism of scholarly demands to the reality of commercial constraints. The respective merits of a general purpose dictionary as opposed to specialist area dictionaries were discussed, as were those of large general conferences with plenary and section papers as opposed to smaller workshops on specific topics. The question of computer aid was by no means restricted to Section 4 and is clearly going to loom even larger on the lexicographer's horizon in the future. A recurrent theme was the need for improved research facilities and exchange possibilities and for appropriate professional training and status for lexicographers. Recognition of this need led directly to the founding of EURALEX.

The final session proved to be controversial. Although there was unanimous agreement on the need for a European Association of Lexicography to promote „scholarly and professional activities related to dictionary-making, including the training of lexicographers“, some of the participants interpreted a well-intentioned, but mishandled attempt to facilitate proceedings as an undemocratic attempt to stage-manage the election of officers. Because of the ensuing debate and the large number of candidates proposed from the floor, the elections were protracted and no time was left to discuss the draft constitution of EURALEX. The following Executive Board was elected:

Chairman:	GABRIELE STEIN (Hamburg)
Vice-Chairman:	NEIL OSSELTON (Leiden, now Newcastle)
Secretary:	REINHARD HARTMANN (Exeter)
Treasurer:	FRANCIS KNOWLES (Aston, Birmingham)
Committee:	SUE ATKINS (London), ANTHONY COWIE (Leeds), ROBERT ILSON (London), TAMAS MAGAY (Budapest), ANTONIO ZAMPOLLI (Pisa)

It is unfortunate that the Executive Board does not fairly represent European lexicography in a politico-regional sense. The short term practical advantages are clear. It is to be hoped that longer term political disadvantages do not become apparent.

The fact that the evenings were left free, apart from a wine and cheese party on the eve of the conference, and that the participants lived in and were not scattered throughout the town in hotels meant that informal contact was easily possible. Needless to say, this opportunity was taken full advantage of. An exhibition of dictionaries, works on lexicography and technical aids to dictionary-making was held during the conference.

LEXeter '83 was an important milestone in European lexicography because of its size and scope and the chances it offered lexicographers to inform themselves comprehensively on virtually all the major aspects of dictionary-making. Its real significance, however, lay in the opportunity for personal contact and the direct exchange of ideas among colleagues working on diverse projects in a variety of languages. One of the main tasks of EURALEX, working in association with the Dictionary Society of North America (DSNA), will be to help maintain these contacts and to extend and intensify the exchange of ideas in the interest of lexicographers and lexicography.

Dr. Alan Kirkness, Institut für deutsche Sprache, Friedrich-Karl-Str. 12, D-6800 Mannheim