

## DIL: a German-Italian online specialized dictionary of linguistics

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### Abstract

DIL is a bilingual (German-Italian) online dictionary of linguistics. It is still under construction and contains 240 lemmas belonging to the subfield of “German as a Foreign Language”, but other subfields are in preparation. DIL is an open dictionary; participation of experts from various subfields is welcome. The dictionary is intended for a user group with different levels of knowledge, therefore it is a multifunctional dictionary. An analysis of existing dictionaries, either in their online or written form, was essential in order to make important decisions for the macro- or microstructure of DIL; the results are discussed. Criteria for the selection of entries and an example of an entry conclude the article.

**Keywords:** online dictionary, open dictionary, linguistics, bilingual, German-Italian, German as foreign language.

### 1. Introduction

This paper describes some selected aspects of an online German-Italian specialized dictionary covering the field of linguistics. Following the University Reform of 1999, the need for such a tool in Italy was particularly strong, as no such dictionary existed either in a printed version or online.

DIL (*Deutsch-Italienisches Fachwörterbuch der Linguistik*) is a project of the Institute of Linguistics of the University of Pisa (Foschi Albert and Hepp 2004: 37). In order to make it available to as many users as possible it was created as an online dictionary with free access via the internet. It was published in 2008 on the University’s server ([http://www.humnet.unipi.it/dott\\_linggensac/glossword/](http://www.humnet.unipi.it/dott_linggensac/glossword/)), and is regularly updated.

DIL is a bilingual dictionary (German-Italian), but it is “monolemmatized” in the sense that it is one-way: the entries are in German, but the equivalents and the explanations are in Italian.

It is a specialized dictionary covering the field of linguistics. At the moment only the subfield of DaF (*Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, i.e. “German as a foreign language”) is

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complete, but other subfields (such as morphology, lexicography, etc.) are either in preparation or planned.

DIL is an open dictionary, so the participation from experts from the various subfields is welcome. The concept is that of “Wikipedia”, but the entries are strictly controlled and revised by an academic committee before publication. The author remains responsible for the entries and can be contacted by the users.

After stating the specific functions of the dictionary, the needs of the potential user group and its possible usage (Section 2), an analysis of the existing dictionaries within this field, both in their written and their online forms (Section 3), was carried out. These analyses were of great importance in order to create a dictionary that would combine both the qualities of a print and of an online dictionary. This helped to provide guidelines for the composition. The lexicographic basis and the criteria for the compilation are also briefly presented (Section 4). An example of an entry taken from the dictionary (Section 5) concludes the article.

## 2. Dictionary Functions

Dictionary functions are strictly related to the intended user group (a), its needs (b) and the potential usage situation (c). All of these were crucial for the design and preparation of this dictionary.

(a) The identification of the potential user is one of the primary requirements in planning a dictionary (*cf.* Barz *et al.* 2005: 15), but this is a recent interest in lexicography (*cf.* Hartmann 1983) and a real turning point (*cf.* Zöfgen 1991: 2896). Usually the lexicographer has a special set of users in mind from the beginning.

Even in the case of LSP dictionaries, which represent a category in its own right as they are designed for small, homogenous groups with similar characteristics, the potential user group is normally heterogeneous.

Lexicographers therefore need general guidelines for their project and recent literature distinguishes between three main user groups: experts, semi-experts and laypeople (*cf.* Nielsen 1990: 131, Bergenholtz and Kaufmann 1997: 98-99).

The intended user group of DIL is a mixture of these three categories, with different levels of knowledge and language competence. It encompasses both the layperson and the expert (student or teacher from various fields, such as germanistics, linguistics or German as a foreign language, authors of books, lexicographers or academics in general), so flexibility is important.

Lexicographers usually have to make a profile of the intended user group. DIL distinguishes between:

- a primary user group: users with Italian as their mother tongue and German as a foreign language;

- a secondary user group: users with German as their mother tongue and Italian as a foreign language;

(b) The needs of the intended user group can be assessed in many ways. Lexicographers usually differentiate between: listing of dictionary user habits, users' experiences, analyses of the real, concrete needs of the user group in a particular usage situation and listing of the hypothetical problems of the user.<sup>2</sup> The results determine what type of information should be included in the dictionary and what can be omitted.

Different methods can also be used (questionnaires<sup>3</sup>, observation, experiments, using protocols, interviews etc.) in order to analyze the different needs. DIL used written questionnaires (sent by e-mail) and interviews.

Every method has a higher or lower level of objectivity: while more objective methods are preferred (*cf.* Baunebjerg Hansen 1990: 8), it is also important to include the introspection of the lexicographer (*cf.* Barz *et al.* 2005: 83). Through accurate analyses, lexicographers can avoid many critical comments (*cf.* Zöfgen 1994: 51). In order to have a concrete contact with the users and to try to fulfil their needs in the most effective ways, DIL has chosen to add a questionnaire that the user can read, save and answer.

(c) In order to have a real idea of the potential user group and of its needs, lexicographers recommend defining the possible usage situation (*cf.* Wiegand 1977: 101; Kühn 1983). Usually, lexicographers choose one of two possible situations:

1. The user needs some specific information and looks for it in the dictionary;
2. The user uses the dictionary in order to solve a problem (reception, production or translation).

DIL will try to fulfil both needs.

Dictionary functions represent a compromise between the needs of the user group and the information found in a dictionary in order to meet these needs.<sup>4</sup> A dictionary can perform many functions and an LSP Dictionary even more so, but multifunctionality is always recommended (*cf.* Bergenholtz 1992: 49). The distinction between more and less important functions is fundamental and helps the lexicographer in the definition of the lexicographic basis, the selection of entries, the choice of information following

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* Wiegand (1977); Kühn (1983); Hartmann (1983); Baunebjerg Hansen (1990); Zöfgen (1991); Storrer and Harriehausen (1998); Schaefer and Bergenholtz (1994); Zöfgen (1994); Barz *et al.* (2005).

<sup>3</sup> The pros and cons of making use of questionnaires are discussed in Barz *et al.* (2005: 85), Ripfel and Wiegand (1988: 493).

<sup>4</sup> Many authors have investigated functions (*cf.* Ščerba 1982, Hausmann 1977, Kromann *et al.* 1984, Mugdan 1992), trying to build classifications and typologies; we quote only some of them: communication and knowledge functions (*cf.* Schlaefter 2002); direct or indirect functions (*cf.* Tarp 1994: 230f); active and passive functions (*cf.* Ščerba 1982: 52ff); productive and receptive functions (*cf.* Welker 2003: 12); "enkodierende und dekodierende Funktionen" (*cf.* Wiegand 1998); text dependent and text independent functions (*cf.* Bergenholtz and Kaufmann 1997: 98-99); L1-L2 or L2-L1 translating functions (Hausmann 1977).

the entry (Kromann *et al.* 1984: 167), the determination of the “outside matter”, and the construction of the layout and web design (*cf.* Barz *et al.* 2005: 21).

DIL is a multifunctional dictionary and performs a plurality of functions, in that it is both active and passive, but also usable for the production and reception of texts. In addition, it can be used for translating from L1 to L2 and from L2 to L1.

On the basis of the intended user group and of their factual and linguistic competences (both in L1 and L2), the needs that DIL has to fulfil and its functions can be summed up as follows:

- The Italian mother tongue user can use DIL in order to perform the following operations: understand an LSP German word; translate a German word; learn more about an LSP word (the user wishes not only to find information but also to improve his encyclopaedic knowledge).
- The German mother tongue user will use DIL when translating into Italian; and/or when he/she is producing LSP texts in Italian.

### **3. Analyses of the existing dictionaries of linguistics**

Two analyses proved to be of great importance in order to make decisions about the macro- and micro-structure of the dictionary: 1) the analyses of written monolingual dictionaries of linguistics; and 2) the analyses of online monolingual and bilingual dictionaries covering the field of linguistics.

1) The first important monolingual dictionaries of linguistics were published in Germany at the beginning of the 70s and in Italy at the end of the 80s. Before this period, there were only translations from French and from English. Even if the two countries had a similar evolution, the lexicographic work was much more intensive in Germany. In addition, the number of published dictionaries was higher and nowadays there are many more dictionaries in Germany (Bußmann, Lewandoswki, Metzler, etc.) than in Italy (Beccaria, Cardona). After 1999, we could not identify any publications in either country, the one exception being the Italian translation from Bußmann (2007).

Even though monolingual dictionaries differ from each other, in the sense that they have different entries, the given information is not the same and the structure of the entries changes. The analyses of a small corpus of dictionaries revealed that a written dictionary is made of at least the following components, also called “outside matter”: a) an introduction; b) a register of the entries; c) a list of abbreviations; d) a guide for the correct usage of the dictionary; e) a bibliography.

While both German and Italian dictionaries have these components, the major difference concerns the bibliography: German dictionaries place a precise bibliography at the end of each entry, so that the users who wish to know more about the theme can find further information; Italian dictionaries have only a large and detailed

bibliography at the end of the dictionary. This bibliography is not of great use for the layperson or semi-expert user, who will tend to get lost in detail.

2) From the start of the 80s, many dictionaries of linguistics (both monolingual and bilingual) have been published online.<sup>5</sup> If we enter “dictionary of linguistics” in a search engine like *Google*, *Altavista* or *Lycos* the results include not only dictionaries but also lexicons and glossaries. One search result (April 2009) includes 24 dictionaries/glossaries<sup>6</sup>: 17 are monolingual, 5 bilingual and 2 plurilingual.

Some general considerations can therefore be made:

a) The term “dictionary” is used often in a general way, rather than following lexicographic criteria. The limits between dictionary, archive, grammar, databank are not strict and this can be seen as a typical characteristic of the online product (*cf.* Abel 2006: 52);

b) There is an extensive use of the terms “glossary” and “lexicon”, often interchangeably;

c) There are both dictionaries that have been explicitly created for the online medium and dictionaries that are adaptations of written ones. We also found dictionaries that are added as Word or pdf files;

d) 83% of the published dictionaries have been financed by universities or university institutes; 8% also belong to the academic world, but they are published privately by university professors or research groups;

e) Many works were produced as a result of university courses, seminars, lessons or written publications;

f) Some dictionaries are linked to large portals;

g) Most of them have never been modified after their publication; updates are not often seen (only 25% have been updated since 2007);

h) Some dictionaries are still present on general portals but the links are no longer functioning so that they cannot be opened;

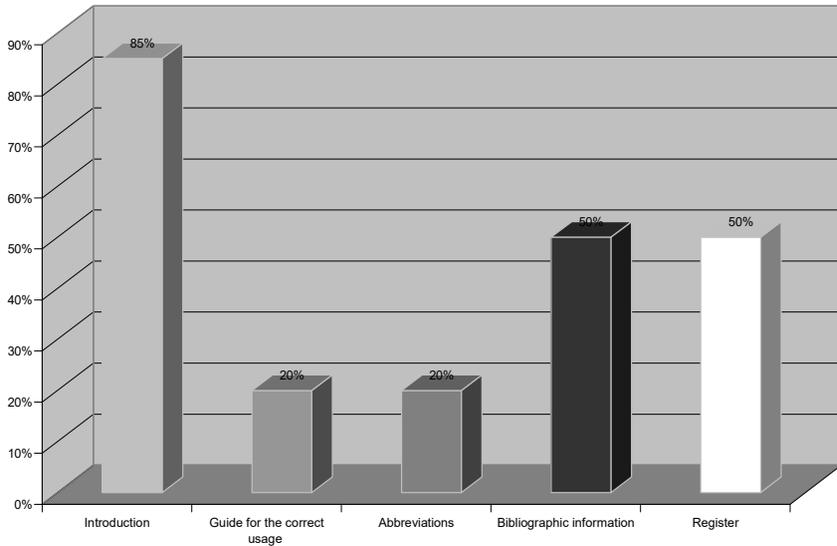
i) The copyright for most of them is shown through the symbol ©.

The analyses of the “outside matter” have shown a different situation when compared with written dictionaries, since there is much more flexibility in online usage.

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<sup>5</sup> Compared to the number of dictionaries of the general language, the number of published dictionaries of linguistics is very small.

<sup>6</sup> Only dictionaries of general linguistics have been listed. Specific dictionaries concerning only one subfield or similar works have been excluded. It was noted that there is a large number of grammatical dictionaries.



*Figure 1. Results from the analyses of the “outside matter”*

Figure 1 displays the results of our analyses of the “outside matter”. It shows that:

- Many dictionaries (85%) have an introduction (but only 50% have an introduction that follows lexicographic criteria; most of them are made up of only two sentences);
- Only 20% have a usage guide, but it is always very minimal;
- Only 20% have an explanation of the abbreviations (although usually quite simplistic);
- Only 50% have bibliographic information;
- Only 50% have a register or index.

We can conclude that there is a significant difference between written and online dictionaries. Written dictionaries are more academically sound, and they have a more complete macrostructure. Online dictionaries usually do not make use of the most important technological instruments, like querying tools, links, etc. About 70% of the online dictionaries are written dictionaries converted into an online form.

DIL uses as a model the dictionaries of linguistics in their written form, therefore it includes an introduction, an index, a list of abbreviations, a guide for the correct usage of the dictionary, guidelines for the addition of new entries; and bibliographic information at the end of the most important entries.

DIL also attempts to use the specific features of online dictionaries, in that it has querying tools, links (external to other related dictionaries and internal between the entries). Multimedia facilities are also planned.

#### 4. Criteria for the selection of entries and lexicographic basis

The function of the dictionary should always be kept in mind when deciding on the criteria for the selection of entries. These include the user group and the context of use (*cf.* Bergenholtz 1989; Beißenwenger and Körkel 2002; Kromann *et al.* 1984). Even though an LSP dictionary presents fewer problems than a language dictionary, the risk of being too subjective is high (*cf.* Haensch 1991: 2920).

In order to reduce this risk, a lexicographer can resort to:

- a) Computational analyses;
- b) Analyses of the entry list of other dictionaries of the same or similar type (Barz *et al.* 2005: 88; Bergenholtz 1989: 774);
- c) Creation of a corpus of LSP texts and books that belong to the lemmatized field and can be used as a guideline.

DIL used only b) and c) because a) was not suitable for our purpose.

In terms of the subfield of DaF, DIL used two types of sources:

1) General printed dictionaries of linguistics and their list of entries.<sup>7</sup> These sources have been analysed by identifying terms belonging to the lemmatized subfield. In the case of a term pertaining to more disciplines, only the sense belonging to the field of German as a Foreign Language (DaF) was taken into account.

2) LSP dictionaries and glossaries of applied linguistics. Two types have been analysed:

- specific LSP dictionaries or glossaries, such as Balboni (1999) and Homberger (2005);
- small glossaries, that can usually be found at the end of important books and compendiums, such as Balboni (1999) (74 entries), Ciliberti (1994) (40 entries), and Frabboni (1992) (51 entries).

A small corpus of LSP texts was created. General books of applied linguistics and more specific books of DaF<sup>8</sup> were analysed for key words. These were then imported into *Excel* tables that were consulted for the compilation of the final list. The main criteria for the selection of the entries were conceptual relevance and frequency; semantic maps were also of great help.

Lacunae are a typical problem of dictionaries, but in the case of online dictionaries, the gap can easily be filled. In DIL it was decided not to lemmatize the following types of entries:

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<sup>7</sup> *Cf.* Lewandowski (1994), Glück (2000), Bußmann (2002), Beccaria (2004), and Bußmann (2007).

<sup>8</sup> *Cf.* Bausch *et al.* (1995), Ciliberti (1994), Freddi (1994), Helbig *et al.* (2001), Huneke and Steinig (2005), Ricci Garotti (2004), Roche (2005), Rösler (1994), Storch (1999), Wierlacher (1980).

- a) terms that overlap with other disciplines;
- b) terms which belonged essentially to the practical teaching;
- c) terms that are not real LSP words.

In the case of polysemous words, the different meanings are listed in the explanation of the entry. In the case of synonyms, all of them were listed as entries, but the definition itself is located only under the more frequently used term; the others are linked to this.

## 5. Conclusion

Two main criteria were used for the selection of entries, *i.e.* conceptual relevance and frequency. A small and ad hoc corpus of texts was thus created consisting of 242 lemmas pertaining to the section of DaF (German as a foreign language). Some sections of the dictionary concerning historical syntax, text linguistics, morphology, language for special purposes and lexicography are currently being prepared, whereas others have been planned (phonology, syntax etc.).

DIL is an encyclopaedic dictionary which, however, wants to give additional information to the potential user on the basis of the needs mentioned in Section 2. So every entry is followed by grammatical information about number<sup>9</sup> and genre, the Italian equivalent or equivalents, the field of linguistics to which the term belongs in an abbreviated form, the definition and explanation, the code corresponding to the author of the entry, related terms and the bibliography. Examples and possible synonyms can also be found.

Figure 2 is an example of an entry taken from the dictionary.

### Medien, audiovisuelle

(Plural)

#### Materiali e strumenti audiovisivi

**(DaF)** Termine che identifica il materiale e gli strumenti glottodidattici di tipo audiovisivo. Sono caratterizzati da una strumentazione tecnologica e un supporto audiovisivo. Strumenti tecnologici utilizzabili sono il televisore, il videoregistratore, il lettore dvd, mentre supporti audiovisivi sono video, dvd ecc.. I materiali e gli strumenti audiovisivi hanno un influsso positivo sull'apprendimento, in quanto conferiscono autenticità alla dinamica di classe. Funzioni principali sono: informazione sul paese straniero, presentazione di modelli comportamentali sociocomunicativi adeguati alla situazione, stimolo delle abilità sia ricettive sia produttive. (cf)

Vedi anche: ▶Video

Fonte: BRANDI, M.L. – HELMLING, B. (1985): *Arbeit mit Video am Beispiel von Spielfilmen*. München, GÜGOLD, B. (1991): *Zu Theorie und Praxis der Arbeit mit Video im Bereich Deutsch als Fremdsprache*. In: *Info DaF* 18, 1, S. 34-39, LONERGAN, J. (1989): *Fremdsprachenunterricht mit Video. Ein Handbuch mit Materialien*. Ismaning, SCHWERDTFEGGER, I.C. (1989): *Sehen und Verstehen. Arbeit mit Filmen im Unterricht Deutsch als Fremdsprache*. Berlin

Figure 2. Example of an entry of DIL  
([http://www.humnet.unipi.it/dott\\_linggensac/glossword/](http://www.humnet.unipi.it/dott_linggensac/glossword/))

<sup>9</sup> In the case of plural instead of mentioning the article the user will find the word *Plural*. This to avoid misunderstanding because in German the feminine article and the plural article are identical.

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