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WORK ON DICTIONARIES

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A B S T R A C T	K E Y W O R D S
This article discusses the issues of working with dictionaries. Also, the specific aspects of the development of technological dictionaries are considered.	Dictionary, lexicon, method, technology.

Introduction

Lexicographers have always understood the importance of working with authentic language data in describing language. Before the advent of computers, serious dictionary-making involved an arduous process of manually collecting millions of citations from literature. Dictionary-makers were sometimes assisted in this task by the educated public through special reading programs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the 1980s, dictionary-making underwent a major revolution thanks to the pioneering COBUILD project. This was the first lexicographic project to make systematic use of text corpora, and the corpus revolution was thus initiated with learners' dictionaries. From there, it gradually spread to other types of lexicography as well as kick- started the development of corpus linguistics.

The COBUILD team had assembled an electronic collection of 7.3 million words of text for the compilation of the dictionary, and this number grew with the addition of further text, to reach 18 million words for the final editing phase. The corpus — initially known as the Birmingham Collection of English Text and later renamed the Bank of English — seemed huge at the time, but compared to today's corpora holding billions of words, it is very small.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In a bilingual dictionary project, two single-language corpora may be used, much as in compiling a monolingual dictionary. Another approach involves the collection of comparable or parallel corpora of the two languages involved. Comparable corpora contain texts in the two languages that are functionally equivalent and in similar proportions. Parallel corpora consist of text pairs, with one (at least) usually being a translation. Parallel corpora may be aligned (synchronized), so that the lexicographer can quickly assess what words and structures are typically used in analogous contexts. With the help of specialized NLP tools, one can attempt to extract typical word-to-word equivalents

between the languages. This works best for (scientific) terms, and is useful in the compilation of specialized dictionaries.

Technology has revolutionized not just the ways in which dictionaries are compiled, but also how they are packaged; at this time we are witnessing a transition from the traditional print medium to the electronic medium. More and more language learners around the world are starting to use electronic dictionaries, such as PC-based applications, handheld stand-alone products (particularly popular in Asia), online dictionaries, mobile-phone applications, or dictionaries on e-book readers.

Online dictionaries, in particular, call for a new approach to dictionary-making. The traditional stages of dictionary compilation no longer obtain as they did for printed titles. Since online dictionaries can be incrementally upgraded as often as needed (even on a daily basis), the development cycle may now include simultaneous feedback from dictionary users. For example, if many users begin to search for a particular item, it may be added to the dictionary promptly without waiting for a traditional new edition [2].

Well-designed electronic dictionaries offer a number of advantages over the traditional print format, although not all e-dictionaries will actually incorporate the features afforded by the electronic medium. Besides the traditional phonetic transcription, dictionary users (particularly language learners) may be able to listen to the headword (possibly also example sentences) being pronounced by a native speaker. Spelling the searched item incorrectly no longer needs to result in failure, as electronic dictionaries will try to guess at the item actually meant [3].

A known problem of paper dictionaries (for languages with alphabetic writing systems) is that they are traditionally organized around single orthographic words. This creates specific difficulties for dictionary users trying to find multi-word lexical units (such as idioms). A well-designed interface to an electronic dictionary will make it possible to locate a multi-word unit without having to know under which headword the expression is nested, even in cases when the dictionary user is not in fact aware that a multi-word unit is involved, as frequently happens with language learners struggling to understand a text in the foreign language.

When reading texts in electronic format, dictionary consultation can be facilitated once the software for reading and the dictionary can "talk" to each other. For example, on an e-book reading device all that the user should have to do is tap on the word which they believe is problematic, and this word should be looked up automatically. Ideally, the smart dictionary should then examine the textual context for evidence of multi-word expressions and for clues to the particular sense that the search word is likely to be used in. Then, the entry presented should reflect the outcome of these findings by suppressing information which is likely to be irrelevant, and selectively presenting the data that may be of value in this particular comprehension problem.

Electronic dictionaries do not need to be restricted to a single static view, as is the case with printed dictionaries. Presentation of lexicographic data may be adjusted depending on uses and users. In the simplest case, detailed information on grammatical complementation, collocational behavior, or synonyms is superfluous for someone consulting a dictionary while reading a text in a foreign language. But the same detailed data would be very useful for someone writing an essay.

CONCLUSION

Modern technology blurs the traditional distinctions between different types of dictionaries, and dictionaries versus other lexically-based tools. To refer to two examples already given above:

ForbetterEnglish.com is an automatically generated dictionary of collocations, illustrated with examples selected from a corpus — also automatically; Just the Word (http://www.just-the-word.com/) is an interesting lexical profiling tool capable of correcting non-native-like collocational choices based on corpus evidence. Today, dictionaries may be integrated as part of larger software suites for language learners or translators, such as writing assistants (software designed to provide support in writing tasks). It is likely that this trend will continue, with dictionaries of the future being rather different from the ones we know.

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