

Principles and Practice of South African Lexicography

R.H. Gouws and D.J. Prinsloo



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*Aan Ilse Gouws en Michele Prinsloo:
woordeboekweduwees sonder weerga.*

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Preface

The last decade has witnessed the emergence of a new wave of professional lexicographers in South Africa. The establishment of the Pan South African Language Board's National Lexicography Units, one for each of the eleven official languages, and the growing interest in lexicographic principles and practice among academics, freelance lexicographers and publishers, created the need for a theoretically-based book directed at the needs of experts, both in the lexicographic practice and in the field of theoretical lexicography. *Principles and Practice of South African Lexicography* is a response to this need. The book endeavours to cover significant phases and features of a lexicographic process, with a focus on the historical orientation of theoretical lexicography, the preparation phases in the lexicographic process, including material collection and corpus building, and various aspects of the data distribution programme, e.g. different lexicographic structures. Different facets from the general theory of lexicography are applied to the lexicography of the South African languages and from the perspective of lexicographic challenges confronting the South African languages suggestions are made to enhance the general theory of lexicography. This book wishes to promote the desperately needed interaction between theory and practice in the field of lexicography.

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Rufus Gouws and Danie Prinsloo

The development of lexicography: A brief historical perspective

1.1 Introduction

In this modern age, characterised by a knowledge explosion and a sophisticated information highway, dictionaries are still used as utility tools and their users rely on them as authoritative containers of knowledge. Although dictionaries are not an invention of the twenty first century, the twenty first century still sees them as household products, fulfilling their role as practical instruments as they have done for many centuries, cf. McArthur (1986) and Al-Kasimi (1977) for a discussion of some aspects of the history of dictionaries.¹ Today the field of lexicography is seen as having a twofold nature, i.e. a theoretical component and a practical component. The theoretical component focuses on research regarding e.g. the form, contents and functions of dictionaries whereas the practical component leads to the compilation of dictionaries. Lexicography has not always had this twofold character and an overview of the development of lexicography will give ample evidence that the theoretical component can be regarded as a relative late-comer because lexicography has originally only been associated with the practice of dictionary-making. Although it is today widely accepted that any good dictionary needs a sound theoretical basis, this has not always been the case. Dictionaries are much older than lexicographic theory and for many years dictionaries developed in a pretheoretical era, cf. Gouws (1989).

One of the salient features of dictionaries throughout many centuries is their function to assist users with real problems. This tradition of practical assistance had already been introduced in the early dictionaries, e.g. those compiled on clay tablets by the Assyrians to assist children in understanding Sumerian writings, the early Egyptian dictionaries written on papyrus leaves and the Arabic dictionaries giving their users access to the holy scriptures of Islam. As practical instruments these dictionaries were sources of knowledge, directed at the specific needs of specific user groups. Likewise the *glossae collectae*, compiled in Christian monasteries during the medieval era, were attempts to assist the students, qualifying themselves for a clerical career, in their confrontation with the biblical and classical languages. The compilation of these reference works was motivated on practical grounds and no theoretical framework or model had an influence on either their content or their structure.

The practical component of lexicography developed well into the second half of the twentieth century before it was complemented by a theoretical component. The advent of theoretical lexicography led to a number of early publications but by far the most important work and the first major publication to establish theoretical

¹ This chapter is a revised, shortened and adapted version of Gouws (2004b).

lexicography as a research field was the monumental *Manual of Lexicography*, authored by Ladislav Zgusta and published in 1971.

Soon after the publication of the *Manual of Lexicography* the influence of Zgusta's ideas was already noticeable, resulting in the rapid growth of theoretical lexicography but also in an improvement in the quality of new dictionaries.

The *Manual of Lexicography* clearly linked lexicography with linguistics, e.g. when Zgusta (1971:15) states it categorically that "lexicography is a very difficult sphere of linguistic activity." Zgusta also argues that a lexicographer needs to be familiar with linguistics in a much broader sense and has to take into consideration not only the whole structure of the language in question but also the culture of the respective linguistic community. By referring to the culture Zgusta makes way for an approach which compels lexicographers to contextualise the language in terms of the more general world of the relevant speech community. The advent of theoretical lexicography had been positioned within the broader linguistic framework. This would demand that lexicographers take cognisance of developments in linguistic theory and that the data presented in a dictionary should result from a sound linguistic analysis.

The publication of Zgusta's book heralded a new approach towards lexicography. The first four chapters of his book are not primarily concerned with lexicography but rather with linguistics, focusing on topics like lexical meaning, formal variation of words, combinations of words and variation in language. By including chapters on the formal variation of words and variation in language Zgusta gave a clear signal that linguistic influence does not only, or even primarily, run along the lines of formal grammar but the dictionary needs to reflect the real language usage and not only the language of the ideal speaker-hearer. In this regard lexicography constituted a form of opposition to the ideas of the Transformational Generative Grammar and could rather be seen as a forerunner of some of the ideas of sociolinguistics. Zgusta (1989) yet again focuses on the role of dictionaries in the development of the standard and in reflecting linguistic change. This emphasises a descriptive approach in lexicography in stead of the prescriptive approach that played such a dominating role in dictionaries.

Given the then scepticism prevalent among some linguists regarding the position of lexicography as a subdomain of linguistics this effort by Zgusta gave a clear signal that a sound lexicographic theory utilises sound linguistic principles. Zgusta's book, however, went further than this. Already in the introductory chapter Zgusta indicates the bivalent approach needed by a lexicographer when he says that the lexicographer is doing scientific work but publishes it for users whose pursuits are always more practical (Zgusta 1971:16). Once again one has to negotiate the very real distinction between the theoretical lexicographer and theoretical lexicography on the one hand and the practical lexicographer and the lexicographic practice on the other hand. Important in this statement by Zgusta is the fact that lexicography may not be regarded as a theory merely for the sake of theory. The broad and inclusive domain of lexicography has to be regarded as directed primarily at the process of dictionary compilation. Theoretical lexicographers devise theories aimed at enhancing the efforts of the practical lexicographer in his/her process of dictionary compilation. A dictionary can, among other things, rightfully be regarded as the display-window

of linguistics. The people looking at these display-windows are not trained linguists but rather the average members of the relevant speech community.

By referring to the fact that a dictionary is prepared for users whose pursuits may be more practical Zgusta introduced a point of view which would become a driving force in the lexicographic research of the nineties, i.e. the user-perspective. Lexicographic theory would contribute to models which would allow practical lexicographers to compile dictionaries aimed at a well-identified target user group, taking cognisance of their specific needs and reference skills. Yet again, lexicography is not working on an abstract level but provides in the real needs of real users. In a much later publication Zgusta (1988:vi) says that lexicography is one of the few areas in which linguistic activity has an immediate impact on many people. Lexicographic theory has to negotiate this issue in a very real way.

1.2 Within a linguistic fold

Zgusta's book heralded a period which saw lexicography moving into a linguistic fold. Unfortunately some lexicographers did little to ensure an optimal utilisation of this situation and rather tried to maintain a theory-free practice. Even the title of a popular text book on lexicography, i.e. Landau (1989), does not help the cause of lexicography very much but plays into the hands of sceptics by referring to the "art and craft of lexicography". One of the reasons why the lexicographic practice still partially eschewed a stronger theoretical linguistic influence could be found in the commercial success of dictionaries. As long as it sells there is no need to change it. That this approach diminishes the linguistic authority of dictionaries did not convince enough publishers to give serious attention to a stronger linguistic and theoretical basis for their dictionaries.

Since 1971 varying degrees of proximity has prevailed between lexicography and linguistics with different theories and schools of thought in linguistics having a lesser or a bigger influence on both lexicographic theory and the lexicographic practice. Different linguistic theories, cf. Geeraerts (1984; 1986) and Gouws (1989), had an influence on e.g. the explanation of meaning in monolingual dictionaries. Different approaches to lexical semantics, the way in which the influence of structural linguistics led to a distinction between semantic and encyclopedic data and the much more lenient approach following from cognitive linguistics had an impact on the contents of the lexicographic definition.

The varying influence of linguistics on lexicography as seen in general dictionaries has primarily been noticeable in the nature and extent of the presentation of semantic data. General language dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual ones, have displayed a strong semantic bias, cf. Gouws (1996), and this has been to the detriment of other data categories. Burkhanov (1998:136) states a widely accepted belief that lexicographic practice belongs to the domain of applied linguistics whereas metalexicography forms part of theoretical linguistics. He indicates that this belief has led to the assumption that linguistic semantics should provide the theory for lexicography. This would virtually equal linguistic semantics and metalexicography.

Variation was also noticeable in the nature, extent and treatment of other data types in general dictionaries. Data types like pronunciation, morphology, etymology and

even syntax have been presented and treated in a fairly consistent way. Although the outer texts of a dictionary displaying a frame structure, cf. Kammerer & Wiegand (1998), Gouws (2001a; 2002; 2004), often include a mini-grammar or even a brief explanation of some of the productive rules of word-formation or syntactic constructions, the articles in the central list still display an insufficient account of syntactic and morphological data. However, in line with the lexicographer's assignment to record the real language and not to set its style, cf. Sledd & Ebbitt (1962:92), modern-day lexicography has emphasised the importance of examples as an integral part of the treatment of a given word. Fox (1987:137) says that the use of examples forms an integral part of the learning of a word. These examples have to come from a corpus and have to represent real language (Fox 1987:138). The use of examples plays an important role in dictionaries and the influence from sociolinguistics has made a definite impact on the way in which lexicography deals with this type of entry.

During the seventies and eighties theoretical lexicography was performed and studied largely within a linguistic context. Many publications in the field of metalexigraphy focused on linguistic aspects of dictionaries resulting from a situation where many researchers working in the field of metalexigraphy were linguists by training and attached to university departments of linguistics or languages.

1.3 The Wiegand era

Metalexigraphy in the eighties and nineties was dominated by the work of the German scholar Herbert Ernst Wiegand. In his early work he already signalled the importance of the formulation of a general theory of lexicography, cf. Wiegand (1983; 1983a; 1984). Wiegand (1984:13-15) argues that lexicography is neither a branch of applied linguistics nor a branch of lexicology and it is by no means theoretically determined by lexicology alone. He regards linguistic lexicography as a scientific practice aimed at the production of reference works on language, whereas the field of metalexigraphy is constituted by the four components, i.e. the history of lexicography, a general theory of lexicography, research on dictionary use and the criticism of dictionaries. This approach of Wiegand to the lexicographic practice is ascertained and confirmed in Wiegand (1998:62, 254). Wiegand (1989:251) maintains that lexicography is a practice, aimed at the production of dictionaries in order to initiate another practice, i.e. the cultural practice of dictionary use. Wiegand (1998:256) also confirms the status of theoretical lexicography, he uses the term *dictionary research*, as a scientific research area and a discipline with a clearly identifiable academic existence, and maintains that dictionary research can be divided into four research areas, i.e. research on dictionary use, critical, historical and systematic dictionary research.

Although he recognises the importance of linguistics for lexicography Wiegand has initiated an approach that lexicography has to be regarded as a discipline which is influenced among others by linguistics but not to such a degree that it should still be regarded as a subdiscipline of linguistics. Linguistics has language as its study object. Practical lexicography is aimed at the process of dictionary-making whereas theoretical lexicography deals with dictionary research, cf. Hartmann & James (1998), Wiegand (1984; 1998) and Hausmann & Wiegand (1989). Although

linguistics is an important influence in lexicography, the object of lexicography is not language but dictionaries. Consequently lexicography cannot be regarded as a branch of linguistics, although it does overlap with various subdisciplines from the field of linguistics.

In his prolific portfolio of publications Wiegand has focused dictionary research not only on the contents of dictionaries and dictionary articles but also on the structure of dictionaries. Since Wiegand (1983b) numerous of his publications have dealt with wide-ranging issues regarding the structure of dictionaries. This, yet again, ascertained his approach that metalexicography is no branch of linguistics. By analysing and discussing the structure of dictionaries Wiegand has added a component to his successful attempts of formulating a general theory of lexicography that emphasises the formal features of dictionaries. The Wiegand era has been characterised by the identification of the different components of dictionary articles and by a meticulous description of their specific structure and function. In this process Wiegand has also made numerous suggestions in order to improve the quality of the lexicographic practice and to ensure that the genuine purpose of a specific dictionary can be achieved. The description of the structure of dictionaries has not been done in such a way that a theoretical model is formulated and then imposed on the lexicographic practice. Wiegand rather took a critical look at existing dictionaries to identify and describe their structural features. He has moved from the practice to the theory so that the theory could be applied to enhance the practice.

Although lexicography is not regarded as a subdiscipline of linguistics the strong link between linguistics and lexicography, both theoretical lexicography and the practice of the compilation of especially language dictionaries, may never be ignored. Consequently, Wiegand had been instrumental in seeing to it that lexicography also featured as a topic in the authoritative HSK series (*Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft / Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science*) resulting in the impressive state-of-the-art three volume *Wörterbücher. Dictionaries. Dictionnaires. An International Encyclopedia of Lexicography* (Hausmann et al 1989-1991). This work focuses on a number of relevant topics in lexicography, e.g. dictionaries and their public, dictionaries and their users, the history and theory of lexicography, components and structures of dictionaries, problems of description in the general monolingual dictionary, dictionary types, dictionaries dealing with language varieties, procedures in lexicographical work, lexicography of individual languages and the theory of bilingual and multilingual lexicography. A fourth volume of this book is currently being compiled and focuses on recent developments in lexicography, with special reference to computational lexicography, cf. Gouws et al (in preparation).

One of the noticeable features of developments in theoretical lexicography during the Wiegand era has been the strong bias towards the needs and the reference skills of the target users of dictionaries. In this regard the attention given by Wiegand to the structure of dictionaries played no mean role. His research regarding the access structure of a dictionary, i.e. the search route a user follows to reach the desired data, and the detailed discussion of aspects like the data distribution structure, the micro-architecture and the different search fields in dictionary articles, cf. Bergenholtz, Tarp & Wiegand (1999), as well as the use of integrated and non-integrated outer

texts, helping to constitute the frame structure of a dictionary, cf. Kammerer & Wiegand (1998); Gouws (2002), places the focus yet again on the user-perspective, so prevalent in modern-day metalexigraphy. Wiegand's contribution to the development of a general theory of lexicography has culminated in Wiegand (1998), the first volume of a comprehensive account of some of the most salient aspects of his research in the field of lexicography. The biggest part of this first volume focuses on research in dictionary use, including an exposition of the methodology of usage research and different types of dictionary consultation situations.

The focus on the structure of dictionaries during the Wiegand era emphasised the fact that as containers of knowledge, cf. McArthur (1986), both the contents and the form must be regarded as extremely important. From a purely linguistic perspective little interest exists in the structure of dictionary articles or the use of front and back matter texts and inserted inner texts. Neither does the layout of a dictionary fill mainstream linguists with excitement. The metalexigrapher, however, may not ignore the significance of these formal properties of a dictionary. Too often in the past dictionaries have not achieved an optimal transfer of data due to an insufficient presentation and a less than satisfactory form to accommodate the good contents. During the last decade the emphasis on both the contents and form of dictionaries has found another realisation, as pursued in publications like Bergenholtz (1995) and Almind & Bergenholtz (2002), i.e. a focus on problems relating to dictionary layout.

Almind & Bergenholtz (2002:261) indicate that layout is not a cosmetic issue but rather contributes to the access structure of a dictionary. A good layout enhances both the outer and the inner access structure. The choice of various typographical and non-typographical structural indicators is employed to ensure an optimal retrieval of information. Yet again the theory of lexicography goes further than purely linguistic procedures.

1.4 Specialised lexicography

Wiegand's arguments, cf. Wiegand (1984; 1989; 1998), that linguistics is only one of many disciplines influencing lexicography is illustrated by the attention in theoretical lexicography to the development of special-field lexicography, cf. Bergenholtz & Tarp (1995). Bergenholtz & Tarp make a distinction between language for general purposes (LGP) and language for special purposes (LSP). General dictionaries primarily deal with LGP, although some LSP items will also be included and treated in these dictionaries. Specialised dictionaries treat the various special fields of the lexicon. The compilation of LSP dictionaries presupposes collaboration between the lexicographer and the subject expert. The influence from the relevant subject field will determine the nature of the specific dictionary.

In the development of dictionaries for special purposes, theoretical lexicographers have been involved in devising models for a number of special field dictionaries. In this regard the work done by Henning Bergenholtz and Sven Tarp in the Centre for Lexicography at the Aarhus School of Business in Denmark needs to be mentioned. Their theoretical publications, cf. among others Bergenholtz & Tarp (1995), Tarp (2000), have played an important role in making practical lexicographers aware of salient theoretical issues. Their theoretical work has been complemented by a

variety of high quality and exemplary LSP dictionaries – both in printed format and on the internet. These publications display a sound theoretical base and reiterates the importance of a continued interactive relation between theoretical lexicography and the lexicographic practice.

The theoretical models devised by metalexigraphers have been applied successfully in the lexicographic practice. Lexicography should also benefit from this expertise. At present a project is underway to compile a special-purpose dictionary with lexicography as its object: the *Wörterbuch zur Lexikographie und Wörterbuchforschung / Dictionary of Lexicography and Dictionary Research*, cf. Beißwenger et al (in preparation). Theory is once more put to practice. An important contribution of this dictionary will not only be the explanation and standardisation of more than four thousand lexicographic terms but one of the front matter texts of this dictionary will be a systematic introduction to the field of lexicography and dictionary research, cf. Wiegand (2003). This will enable the target user to ascertain a brief overview of the subject field of this dictionary.

1.5 Lexicographic functions

The development of lexicography shows some interesting themes appearing, disappearing and, sometimes, reappearing. One such a theme which is particularly relevant in modern-day lexicographic thought is that of lexicographic functions. The notion of functions is nothing new – it had already been introduced in 1940 by the Russian linguist Scerba. Following the suggestions made in Scerba (1940) some theoreticians in the field of dictionary research hold the view that for any given language pair at least four and perhaps even eight bilingual dictionaries have to be compiled to meet the diverse needs of the users coming from both language groups. According to them provision has to be made for separate dictionaries aimed at the active and passive use by source and target language users respectively, cf. Kromann et al. (1984, 1984a). The active/passive principle focuses on the function of dictionaries in text production and text reception respectively, cf. Hausmann (1977; 1986). Certain applications of the active/passive principle imply that four different functions can be identified for each member of a language pair and that each one of these functions should be dealt with in a separate dictionary. Even the most sophisticated system cannot work with four to eight dictionaries per language pair. From a user-perspective it also is an unattainable objective.

Lexicographic theory may not be formulated at the cost of a successful lexicographic practice. Therefore Wiegand (1996a:XV) emphasises the fact that the formulation of a theory for bilingual dictionaries, and it also applies to monolingual dictionaries, may never be isolated from the lexicographic practice. Consequently Wiegand (1996:2) pleads for the accommodation of different functions within one dictionary and even one dictionary article. He argues convincingly in favour of the compilation of only one polyfunctional bilingual dictionary for any given language pair.

During the last few years lexicographic functions once again came to the fore in lexicographic research, cf. Tarp (1994; 2000; 2002; 2002a), Bergenholtz & Tarp (2002), Wiegand (2001) and Tarp & Gouws (2004). In their respective publications on lexicographic functions Bergenholtz and Tarp have a different approach compared to that of Wiegand.

Modern-day lexicographic theory has an underlying assumption that dictionaries are utility products. Consequently Tarp (2002:67) argues that the methodology for planning a dictionary should make a typology of potential users, user situations and problems that might arise for each type of user in each type of user situation. The profile of the users must be determined, and eventually the relation between the needs of each type of user in each type of user situation and the data included in a dictionary to satisfy these needs constitute the basis for the theory of lexicographic functions. According to Tarp (2002:70) a lexicographic function represents the assistance that a dictionary provides to a particular type of user to cover the needs of that user in a specific user situation. Bergenholtz & Tarp (2002) distinguish between knowledge- and communication-orientated functions. These functions are discussed in par. 2.5.2.

The function of a dictionary is not only determined by the users but also by the usage situation and this situation in which a dictionary is used should have a definite influence on the data distribution programme and on the function of that dictionary. The focus on lexicographic functions emphasises the user-directed approach in modern lexicographic theory ever so strongly.

1.6 Electronic dictionaries

The last decade has witnessed tremendous developments in the field of electronic dictionaries. The electronic medium has become increasingly important for the transfer of knowledge and lexicography had to respond to this. Developments in the field of lexicography saw numerous dictionaries being produced on CD ROM and on the internet. One of the major problems in the production of electronic dictionaries is an insufficient utilisation of the possibilities offered by this medium. Too often electronic dictionaries are little more than electronic variants of printed dictionaries. The electronic medium allows lexicographers a wholly new approach to dictionaries without space restrictions and the limitations which macrostructural ordering and the access structure put on printed dictionaries. A challenging endeavour for metalexigraphers is the development of a tailor-made model for the compilation of electronic dictionaries. A comprehensive research project focusing on such a model is currently in progress at STIAS, the Stellenbosch University Institute for Advanced Study.