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## REVIEW

Bo Svensén. *A Handbook of Lexicography. The Theory and Practice of Dictionary-Making*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2009. xvi + 535 pages. ISBN: 987-0-521-88180-7 hardback. Price 70 GBP. 978-0-521-70824-1 paperback. Price 2999 GBP.

Since its first appearance in 1987 (in Swedish) and 1993 (in English translation), Bo Svensén's *Practical Lexicography* has been an indispensable companion to many practitioners in the field. In the decades that have since elapsed, conditions for lexicographers have changed considerably due to the rapid theoretical development in the discipline and to the technological advances and tools employed in linguistic analysis and dictionary-making. As a natural corollary, a handful of new introductory textbooks and readers have appeared within a relatively short span of time, the latest addition to the family being the revised and updated edition of Svensén's standard work.

The Swedish second edition appeared in 2004 and was reviewed in IJL by Krista Varantola (2006). In the present review, the focus is on the English edition and how it differs from the Swedish original, but some general remarks are also made.

The basic structure from *Practical Lexicography* is preserved but revisions and updates have been made throughout the book. In size, the current work has almost doubled, with the number of pages rising from 285 to 535, and the number of chapters from 22 to 28. Chapters have been added on new relevant topics while some of the original chapters have been expanded and split into separate chapters. Changes and additions are both plentiful and substantial, and even if the change of publisher from Oxford to Cambridge University Press may have played a part, it is nevertheless fully justified that the book appears under a new title in its own right. For that reason, no acquaintance with the first edition is required in the following.

In the early chapters, Svensén gives an introduction to basic lexicographical concepts and a thorough overview of the various types of existing dictionaries. A chapter is devoted to the collection of texts as a descriptive source for data selection. Another chapter describes the main components and structure of the dictionary entry, followed by a series of chapters on the individual elements: lemma, orthography, pronunciation, morphology, part of speech, construction, collocations, idioms and other multi-word units, definitions, equivalents, linguistic examples, encyclopaedic information, illustrations, linguistic labels and etymology. Then follow four chapters on the structural aspects of the dictionary: microstructure, macrostructure, megastructure and reference structure, and finally there are chapters dealing with aspects that are central for dictionary-makers: the planning and carrying out of dictionary projects, and

the aforementioned new topics: judicial and ethical aspects, the electronic dictionary, dictionary use and dictionary criticism.

Given the large number of dictionaries and lexicographic products available today, it is worth mentioning that not all types receive equal treatment in the book. The typology presented in chapter 2 covers most products in the lexicographical world but the author informs us at the end of the chapter that his book aims primarily at the most common and important dictionary types. Priority is given to monolingual L1 dictionaries with definitions for production and reception, to bilingual dictionaries for reception and translation from L2 to L1, and finally to bilingual dictionaries for production and translation from L1 to L2. In my opinion, this is both a necessary and sound priority but it should also be a warning to lexicographers working on the outskirts of the field: they will not find much on specialized lexicography, on the making of telephone books, directories or product manuals, which also – at least according to some definitions of lexicography – belong to the discipline.

On p. 452, Svensén observes that

‘different types of dictionaries are used by different types of users through different types of strategies in connection with different types of linguistic activities in order to find different types of information needed in different types of situations.’

In a similar manner, it can be said of Svensén’s own book that it is used for different purposes by different users, and one may ask oneself what is the primary target group. A connected question is whether the book is primarily an introduction to lexicography as an academic discipline or a reference book for practitioners in the field. The book itself does not provide the answer. It claims to have both purposes and to address several user groups.

The structure of the book is such that each chapter addresses one component of the dictionary entry and analyses it in relation to the various types of dictionaries. This is the result of a choice made by the author and it has the advantage that all the components can be described exhaustively in their own chapters and by the use of comparative analysis. In my judgement, this structure is more expedient in a textbook for metalexicographers and students of lexicography but less attractive when used in a handbook for dictionary practitioners. The latter are not likely to be interested in comparative analyses of how the same dictionary element is treated in different dictionaries. More likely, they want to learn what kind of data they should include in their dictionary and how to present it in the concrete project at hand. Imagine a lexicographer writing a bilingual L2-L1 dictionary: she would have to read through the whole chapter on the relevant element, carefully picking out those passages that are relevant for her L2-L1 dictionary. This makes it

more difficult for her to use the book as a handbook for quick reference in everyday situations. The impatient reader who wants a quick overview of a specific problem will have to try his luck via the initial table of contents or the 15 pages subject index at the end of the book.

The alternative is to use the main types of dictionaries as an organizing principle, giving the reader easy access to just the kind of dictionary he or she is interested in. However, the user-friendliness of such an organization comes at a price: a certain amount of redundancy cannot be avoided as the same lexicographic element would have to be described for each dictionary type. But for quick reference, this alternative is to be preferred. The reader should be aware that Varantola arrives at the opposite conclusion:

‘It is difficult to imagine that the book could as such be used as a textbook for language students as it is too detailed in its lexicographical classifications. On the other hand, the book could be gainfully used as a reference work and additional reading material for lexicographical projects in language studies’ (Varantola 2006: 117).

Overall, the tension between the function as textbook or handbook is felt throughout the book and may lead to changes of style. The level-headed textbook author accounts matter-of-factly for the current state of affairs in the field, with all due reservations taken and without committing himself to a particular point. As an example of this detached, descriptive style, see p. 129:

‘In some dictionaries, pronunciation is shown only under the base form: **mouse** [maʊs] pl. *mice* [maɪs], in other dictionaries under both forms.’

In contrast, the experienced handbook author offers guidance and advice to a new generation of lexicographers using a more personal, engaged style. An example of the latter style is found on p. 193:

‘In L2→ L1 dictionaries, information about source-language idioms and their target-language equivalents is absolutely necessary; on the other hand, one can safely refrain from indicating usage restrictions.’

Probably as a reflection of the dual purpose of the book, these sudden changes of style are common.

References in the body text are plentiful, well-placed and relevant, both to various monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and to the theoretical literature within the subject being described. The same is reflected in the voluminous 32 pages bibliography at the end of the book.

As a new feature, the book has at the end of each chapter a section with suggested further reading, not just in the form of a list of titles and authors but an annotated list with specifications on the subject, on model examples or on

theoretical discussions of a particular aspect. Surely, no single author has a complete overview of the entire literature in a field and no doubt one could find the odd gap, but overall I highly applaud the initiative. Svensén is well-known for being an industrious and many-sided scholar of wide reading, and here the reader benefits to the full of his learning. The value of this feature can hardly be exaggerated and will undoubtedly save a lot of time and effort for lexicographers and students on the lookout for relevant literature.

The English edition is much more than a translation of the Swedish original. Many content revisions have been made to cover the developments that have taken place in the five-year period between the two editions. The most obvious difference, however, is the large number of examples that have been replaced to cater for the change in readership from Scandinavian users to the English-speaking international world. The Swedish examples used for monolingual dictionaries have largely been replaced by English ones, and bilingual examples are usually between English as L1 and French or German as L2.

Similarly, the bibliographical references have been adapted to an international audience, dominated by English texts with a supplement of German and French texts and only a few selected texts in a Scandinavian language.

Combined with the fact that the English translation from Swedish is, to my judgement, accurate and idiomatic, conscientiously rendering the author's precise and sober-minded style of writing, there is no reason, neither with respect to focus nor to language, why the book should not find the large and responsive audience it deserves.

A single point of criticism stands out, however: the book is bound to be more or less out of date from the very day of its appearance. This is of course often the case with publications in a rapidly changing field and cannot be helped. Unfortunately, the situation is in this case aggravated by the time spent on translation and the adaptations needed for international publication: Svensén began working on the Swedish edition some years before it appeared in 2004 and it took another 5 years before the current English edition came out. When he set out it may well have seemed appropriate to maintain the print dictionary as the centre of attention, with a special chapter devoted to electronic dictionaries. Even though the author has no doubt invested considerable effort to incorporate many new aspects pertaining to e-dictionaries throughout the book, the book cannot avoid a bias towards the printed medium. The next generation of lexicographic textbooks will, at least in this reviewer's opinion, have to reflect the two-sided nature of modern dictionary-making: on the one hand, it must deal with the compilation, organization and storage of dictionary data in a database independently of the channel of publication and, on the other hand, it must discuss how those data are presented to the user, whether in a printed book or on a screen. That would lead to the inclusion of chapters on database architecture, data markup and schemas and it would lead to other chapters dealing with topics such as web design and user

customization for e-dictionaries, and space-saving strategies such as the use of abbreviations and symbols for print dictionaries. And in return, chapters on micro-, macro- and cross-reference structure are more or less irrelevant for e-dictionaries and would have to be rewritten to be compatible with the dual model of data organization and data presentation.

Although this last point of criticism is substantial it should not obscure the impression of an excellent piece of work, judged on its own terms, admirably combining the learned scholar's analytical acuteness with the gentle guidance of the mentor concerned about passing on his legacy to a new generation. The reader will find a wealth of knowledge and advice through the maze of lexicography but can safely enter into perhaps unknown territory as someone else has already trodden the paths.

### References

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