

Lexicography at the Society for Danish Language and Literature

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Introduction

The making of dictionaries has been an ongoing activity at the Society for Danish Language and Literature (Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, DSL) for just over one hundred years. In 1915, the Society was encouraged to take the responsibility for the compilation of an ambitious dictionary project, *Ordbog over det danske Sprog (Dictionary of the Danish Language)*. The outline of this dictionary had already been sketched over the previous decades by Verner Dahlerup, a professor of Nordic philology at the University of Copenhagen. His inspiration came from the grand projects initiated for German, English, Dutch and Swedish, but when he signed a contract to compile the dictionary, in 1901, the plan was for a more modest publication, twice the size of the standard dictionary of the time, Christian Molbech's two-volume *Dansk Ordbog (Danish Dictionary)*, but still in the format of a concise dictionary. In the following years, he had to revise his plans, now aiming at an estimated 8-12 volumes. Eventually, Dahlerup realized that the task was beyond the working capacity of a single man and thus, in May 1915, he turned to the Society, which had been established only four years earlier.

Foundation and objectives of the Society

The Society was led by a remarkable woman, Lis Jacobsen, who had also been the driving force in founding the institution. Jacobsen (nee Rubin) hailed from a Jewish family and was the daughter of the national bank governor. She had been the first woman to obtain a doctorate in Nordic philology, and only the seventh female doctor in the country at the time, with a dissertation on the earliest manifestations of the Danish language. About one year later, on 29 March 1911, she gave a lecture on the "means and ends of Danish linguistic research", arranged by the Society for German Philology. She had imagined her dissertation to be just the opening volume of a more ambitious documentary work of the entire history of the Danish language, but had found herself forced to discontinue her work due to the lack of satisfactory source material. Scholarly editions of the source material were scarce and their systematic studies correspondingly few. In her lecture, she stressed the need for both, concluding: "The means to obtain this are twofold: we

need *money* and we need *labour*. Money to publish the source material and labour to process it". Present in the audience that day was Kristian Erslev, a professor of history and one of the pioneers of historical criticism and the modern science of history. More importantly in this connection, however, he was also head of the university at the time and in addition a prominent member of the Carlsberg Foundation, later to become its President. He envisioned the perspectives of Jacobsen's message and realized that an institutional framework was needed. His advice to her was to form an editorial society: "If you can provide the labour, I will provide the money". Only one month later, on 29 April 1911, the Society for Danish Language and Literature became a reality.

With that, several important traditions had been established: the goal of the Society was to create scholarly editions of the source material for the study of Danish language and literature through all historical periods and, equally important, a long-term cooperation had been set up with the Carlsberg Foundation as an important and generous sponsor of the Society's activities.

Private foundations as culture bearers

Today, the Society for Danish Language and Literature functions as an independent scholarly institution receiving annual funding from the Ministry of Culture. This covers the administration and operation of services, whereas most scholarly activities are sponsored by external donors for specific projects. Among these is the Carlsberg Foundation, owner of the Carlsberg Group and the world's third largest brewing company. Established in 1876, this industrial and commercial foundation is among the oldest of its kind worldwide. The statutes stipulate that part of the company's profit must be channeled back to society through donations to science and culture, and in this way, Carlsberg has left its mark on many aspects of Danish society. The same is true for a number of other commercial foundations that have financed or co-financed lexicographic projects within the Society: a Swedish-Danish dictionary was sponsored by the foundation owned by A.P. Møller–Maersk Group, the largest company in Denmark and a world

leading container ship operator; the Velux Foundation, producer of windows and skylights, sponsored the digitization of the Old-Danish Dictionary archive, and the Augustinus Foundation, majority share holder in the Scandinavian Tobacco Company, recently gave a donation to *Den Danske Ordbog* (*The Danish Dictionary*). In addition to the private foundations, projects may also receive donations from special allocations provided for in the Finance Act. The two large monolingual dictionaries, *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* and *Den Danske Ordbog* were both mainly sponsored jointly by the Carlsberg Foundation and the Ministry of Culture.

The Dictionary of the Danish Language *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* marks a turning point in Danish lexicography which, prior to its publication, had been dominated by the prescriptivism inherited from the tradition of the French Academy. Dictionaries of the 19th century were preoccupied with educating the public, more specifically by protecting it from what was considered bad linguistic influence. The dictionaries should only contain, according to Molbech in Dahlerup's reading, "good" words, "the most beautiful flowers of the language". For a word, it was a mark of honour to be included in the dictionary, much in the same way as it is an honour for a work of art to feature in the nation's art collection. Dahlerup broke away from this tradition and insisted on greater professionalism, declaring: "I cannot ask first of all: "should this or that word be used?", but rather: "is it used, or has it been used?"; if this is the case, I include the word in so far as considerations of space permit" (Dahlerup, 1907).

Where the editors of the 19th century dictionaries had been generalists with mainly educationalist concerns, the editors of *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* in contrast were specialized philologists with intimate knowledge of the language described. At the centre of their work lay a large collection of notes with excerpts from a range of texts. Even if the technology was different and the texts dominated by exemplary literary and journalistic efforts, the methodology used was not much different in nature from the modern corpus-based approach of descriptive lexicography: from the underlying language material they extracted whatever facts of form, meaning and word patterns they could observe about the linguistic units.

With more than 225,000 entries, *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* is the largest monolingual dictionary compiled for Danish. It is, admittedly, not as

comprehensive as its sister dictionaries in Germany, Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands, but the 28 volumes were completed within 40 years, later increased by 5 supplementary volumes, and even to this day, it is, for its size, quite uniform and easy to read and use.

The Danish Dictionary and other dictionaries

Its successor, *Den Danske Ordbog*, was launched in 1991 as the first, and so far only, corpus-based monolingual dictionary for Danish. Originally conceived as a paper dictionary (6 volumes, 2002-2005), it has seen its greatest success as an online dictionary, with nearly 100,000 visitors on a normal day (May 2016). It has been online since 2009 on the Society's modern dictionary website (<http://ordnet.dk/>) along with a digital version of *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*. Unlike the historical *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, *Den Danske Ordbog* is being updated on a regular basis.

In line with the statutes, the Society aims to provide dictionary coverage of the Danish language across all historical periods. A dictionary of Old Danish, covering the period 1100-1515, has been underway for more than 60 years and is now drawing near its conclusion. The period between Old Danish and Modern Danish is the weakest in terms of coverage, but a series of mainly bilingual Latin-Danish and Danish-Latin glossaries from the Danish Renaissance have been published, and just a few years ago the Society was able to publish for the first time ever the earliest comprehensive dictionary of Danish, compiled around 1700 and describing the language in the latter half of the 17th century. Until then, Matthias Moth's dictionary had only existed as a manuscript in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, but a long-cherished wish for publication was at last made possible through a gift donation from the Carlsberg Foundation in connection with the Society's 100th anniversary in 2011.

In addition to these comprehensive dictionaries, the modern period is also represented by the recent publication of a Danish thesaurus, *Den Danske Begrebsordbog*, as well as two bilingual dictionaries with Swedish and Icelandic as the respective source languages. Furthermore, the Society has recently retro-digitized and published online some of the more important Danish dictionaries, either compiled by the Society itself or by others, taking advantage of the experience gained from the retro-digitization of *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, by means of double-keying following the model of



Verner Dahlerup



Lis Jacobsen



The DSL building in Copenhagen

Deutsches Wörterbuch of the Brothers Grimm in Germany. Digitized dictionaries of this kind include the *Holberg-Ordbog* (*Holberg Dictionary*), a dictionary of the complete works by the Danish-Norwegian author Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) published in 5 volumes in 1981-1988, and *Meyer's Fremmedordbog* (*Meyer's Dictionary of Loan Words*), based on the 8th edition from 1924. Most recently, the *Ordbog til det ældre danske Sprog* (*Dictionary of Older Danish*), edited and published by Otto Kalkar in 1881-1918, is being digitized as part of an ongoing project examining the Danish language and literature in the Middle Ages.

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Towards Peoplex

Ilan Kernerman

I was thrilled to take part in the Dictionaries in Asia conference and the inauguration of Asialex. The need for a forum of this kind has long been felt, and the event lived up to expectations.

It might seem strange no such framework existed so far, since Asia was the cradle for dictionary-making thousands of years ago, and its lexicographic tradition has flourished through the ages to modern times. The 20th century's prominent milestones in pedagogical lexicography stem from the work of Michael West in India and A.S. Hornby in Japan. Some of the world's finest dictionaries are made in Japan and its neighbors, as well as valuable research carried out, but these are little known of elsewhere.

In addition to economic-political factors, this lack may be mainly due to Asia's inherent diversity, not being a homogenous entity of any sort. Linguistically, unlike most European tongues that pertain to the Indo-European family, Asian languages share no common background, apart from being human.

That natural human link is true just as well for the entire world. Asia can project a microcosm of it and, thus, establishing Asialex is a significant step toward forming a global lexicographical constellation.

A future GLOBALEX (or Unilex, in the words of Tom McArthur) concerns globalization and co-existence in multilingual societies, English as the international lingua franca,

localized Englishes, effects on the mother tongues, etc, as well as repercussions from hi-tech and tele-communication, online interactivity and automatic translations, *Dictionizers* and *Quicktionaries*, and so on.

This forthcoming forum should not replace national or regional LEX's, but accommodate the varied issues. As such, geography is no sound base for its foundation, nor for the soon-to-come dictionaries that will hardly be what we imagine now.

Beyond countries and behind computers there are people. First of all, and after all. People are the most common denominator for lexicography all over the world. (Reprinted with slight amendments from KDN 5, 1997.)