
Lexicographer, Linguist and Dictionary User: An Uneasy Triangle?

F.J. Lombard, *Bureau of the Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal, Stellenbosch, South Africa*

Abstract: Lexicographer, dictionary user and linguist constitute three important role players in any lexicographical activity. In this presentation they are depicted as three sides or angles of a triangle. Unlike a real mathematical triangle where the three sides always meet, lexicographer, linguist and user are often at loggerheads. Reasons for this phenomenon are ventured and I try to establish whether the lexicographer can reconcile the progressive and ephemeral outlook of linguists with the often conservative needs of users. Ways to reduce the tension between lexicographer, linguist and user are also discussed.

Keywords: LEXICOGRAPHER, LINGUIST, USER, USER-FRIENDLY

Opsomming: Leksikograaf, linguïes en woordeboekgebruiker: 'n Onge-maklike driehoek? Die Leksikograaf, die woordeboekgebruiker en die linguïes is al drie belangrik in enige leksikografiese aktiwiteit. In hierdie aanbieding word hulle voorgestel as die drie sye of hoeke van 'n driehoek. In 'n gewone driehoek ontmoet die drie sye mekaar altyd, maar leksikograaf, linguïes en woordeboekgebruiker kom nie altyd goed by mekaar uit nie. Redes hier-voor word aangevoer en daar word gepoog om vas te stel of die leksikograaf die progressiewe en efemere voorstelle van linguïes kan versoen met die konserwatiewe behoeftes van sy teikenge-bruikers. Maniere om die spanning tussen leksikograwe, linguïes en woordeboekgebruikers te ont-lont, word ook ondersoek.

Sleutelwoorde: GEBRUIKER, GEBRUIKERSVRIENDELIK, LEKSIKOGRAAF, LINGUIS

1. Introduction

A triangle is constituted by three angles and three sides. Normally a triangle is a clear-cut mathematical concept, but if I may be allowed the freedom of metaphor, I want to depict lexicographer, dictionary user and linguist as the three angles or sides of a triangle.

Because every side of a triangle is supported by the two other sides to which it is connected, a triangle has a high structural integrity. Under ideal conditions, the three metaphorical angles of lexicographer, dictionary user and linguist should form a well-integrated triangle. However, this is not always

the case and more often than not, these three sides or angles are at loggerheads. Exactly why that is the case, will be examined later.

The idea that lexicographer, linguist and dictionary user should be able to function and co-exist harmoniously, is not a new one. Neither does it seem an unfeasible notion. Gimson (1973: 115) points out that the lexicographer who wishes to revise pronunciation in his / her dictionary should not only take the theories of linguists into account, but that he / she should also consider the needs of the dictionary user.

This is a point of great importance, and the lexicographer would do well to heed this observation of Gimson. It is of course not only the presentation of pronunciation which should be subjected to such a balanced approach as Gimson is suggesting: most aspects of microstructural presentation in dictionaries are affected by the interlude between lexicographer, linguist and dictionary user. Moreover, every aspect of this presentation is subject to the potential tension which can develop in this triangle.

Lexicographers often are in a quandary because they try to satisfy both the linguist and the user. The fact that the lexicographer is not always able to reconcile the progressive, and dare one say ephemeral findings of linguists with the expectations and needs of ordinary users can be a serious threat to the stability of my metaphorical triangle. In the world of lexicography emotional forces can cause such severe pressure that the triangle's structural integrity can be threatened.

2. Dictionary Users and Lexicography

The first kind of tension threatening the triangle can develop between lexicographer and dictionary user. Lexicographers can be and often are guilty of creating this tension, inter alia by including features in the dictionary which are pleasing to them but baffling to their users, but I am firstly going to focus on the problems caused by the user, before suggesting what the lexicographer should do to help the user.

The reaction from users following the publication of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (hereafter W3), indicates that many dictionary users are rather conservative. This inherent conservatism often leads to unwarranted criticism. Many users expect the dictionary to be a guardian angel as far as language usage is concerned. The feeling is that a dictionary should not include certain lexical items, even though they may be used as a matter of course by users themselves. Uninformed users often see the role of a dictionary primarily as prescriptive rather than descriptive. Language is forever changing, and in a more informal and permissive world, language is becoming more informal. Whether lexicographers like it or not, they must take cognizance of this, and moreover, reflect this in the dictionary. This reflection

is part and parcel of the job, but the job does not entail guarding language by being dogmatic and prescriptive.

Wells (1973: 95) points out the futility of prescribing (as opposed to describing) in a dictionary: "To modern thinking the attempt to achieve conscious control of language is futile, for it is only by continuing adaptation to the needs of men that the language can fulfil its function". Dictionary users however, do not see the lexicographer's task in this light, as Gove, editor-in-chief of W3 found out: " ... Gove accepted into his dictionary without a label some phenomena ("ain't" was one of the lexical items targeted — FJL) hitherto explicitly admitted by lexicographers only in the spoken language, or labeled as slangy, substandard and similar. This possibly was not enough for some linguists, but it was far too much for the public, who saw in this an opening of the door to vulgarity" (Zgusta 1980: 8). This goes to show that Gove could not satisfy linguist as well as dictionary user.

The problem which Gove encountered is largely one of ignorance. This is clearly illustrated by the following: " ... In contrast to previous dictionaries, it (W3 — FJL) makes no pretense of being a guardian of the language, and does not pass judgment on what is correct. It collects, but does not discriminate; it simply records" (Sledd and Ebbitt 1962: 103). It is of course the primary function of a dictionary to record and not to act as a guardian, but many users are ignorant of this fact. Zgusta (1980: 8) points out that part of the problem which Gove encountered was a lack of intelligent discussion of all the relevant problems within the speaking community.

It is ironic that users often criticize a dictionary severely for including certain lexical items while they feel free to use those very items in their everyday speech. It is possible that the user can drive a wedge between lexicographer and linguist, because his or her ignorance and conservatism may prevent the lexicographer from reflecting real language, also as far as innovative ideas from linguistic sources are concerned. The conservative outlook of users may prevent the lexicographer from having a progressive touch. This in turn may lead to friction between lexicographer and linguist.

It is clear that many (most?) people are not well versed in the subtleties of dictionaries and that the real role of a dictionary is not well-understood. Clearly something should be done to inform dictionary users as to the role and nature of a dictionary. In this regard teachers should play a far more meaningful role. The fact that lexicographers must adapt their dictionaries to the needs of their users (Householder and Saporta 1967: 279) does not mean that the users themselves cannot be better informed about dictionaries and the use of dictionaries. Crystal (1986: 79) envisages the ideal users as follows: "Such users have been taught to understand dictionary conventions as a routine part of early education, starting in junior school ... They know their transcription symbols ... Playing with dictionaries for them is a leisure activity ... "

The linguist as pedagogue should be a partner in arms of the lexicographer because of the major role language researchers and teachers could play in

dispelling ignorance and bias as far as dictionaries are concerned. The lexicographer can also play a role here. The writers of American children's dictionaries have created guides for teachers using the dictionaries with their pupils (Ilson 1986: 70). This is not asking too much from the lexicographer.

The lexicographer must also help the user by compiling an authoritative dictionary. That means that ideally he / she should be working from a scientifically composed data-base, because citations provide the best foundation for definitions. It also means that the information in the dictionary is easily comprehensible and accessible to and in keeping with the target-users. The demands on lexicographers to keep abreast of the knowledge explosion are tremendous. It is therefore necessary that lexicographers should consult experts in certain fields of which they can not be expected to have enough knowledge.

Whitcut (1986: 111) points out the dilemma facing the lexicographer as far as the user is concerned: "We know who we are, but who are they?" The lexicographer should know the target user, and what the needs of those users are, even though it is extremely difficult to predict the performance limitations which constrain the user. The lexicographer should also try to envisage how he / she as a dictionary writer can make things easier for his / her users. This may mean that innovation rather than tradition be given the nod, for the learning burden that the lexicographer places on the user, is tremendous (Whitcut 1986: 112, 116). According to Crystal (1986: 78) the ideal lexicographer should go beyond the normal notions of his / her craft: "... An ideal lexicographer should ... discover whether there are other parameters of relevance to the user".

It seems that if a lexicographer can write a dictionary which can help the user to acquire the habit of using the dictionary regularly and with assurance (cf. Ilson 1986: 70), his / her task has truly been well accomplished.

3. Lexicography and Linguistics

In lexicography language is recorded as an aid to communication (Hartmann 1979: 1, 2). This process has always been a kind of codification between linguistic prescription and description. A great deal of the basic principles of lexicography is motivated by theoretical linguistics.

Lexicography and linguistics should therefore not represent totally divergent entities. Malkiel (1980: 44) points out that there was a good balance between the grammatical and lexical during the nineteenth century, but this has changed dramatically: "The American linguistics of the twentieth century displays a singular lack of interest in lexicography" (Zgusta 1980: 7). More of this will be discussed later.

Healthy lexicography needs a linguistic base and Hartmann (1983: 4) supports that view: "Much of the recent literature in lexicography has consciously

and explicitly related itself to linguistic theories in general and to theories of lexical semantics in particular". Most dictionaries use grammatical criteria to describe lexical items accurately and it is therefore desirable that dictionary and grammar should not represent two divergent and exclusive compartments. They should rather complement each other as ways of describing language. Neither grammar nor dictionary should have the monopoly on language (Odendal 1961-62: 52).

Hudson (1988: 308) and Gleason (1967: 89) point out that an interaction or interdependence should exist between grammar and dictionary. The lexicographer can help the grammarian with the description of the lexicon while the grammarian can help the lexicographer with grammatical categories. It is therefore imperative that there is something of a cross-pollination between dictionary and grammar and that lexicographers should present grammatical laws governing the lexicon in a meaningful manner (Weinrich 1985: 260). It should therefore not be uncommon to have lexicographers and linguists working together; both parties can contribute equally well as partners towards linguistic standardization: "Dictionaries and grammatical statements can profitably be designed as parts of a unified program of language description" (Gleason 1967: 101).

Another partnership in which the lexicographer must be involved with the linguist concerns the reflection of language usage. Every individual's language usage is unique, but it is impossible for the lexicographer to describe this individually. The presentation of language in a dictionary must reflect that which is common and collective to the language of all speakers of a particular language. This can only be done if the lexicographer studies the findings of sociolinguists and experts on language variation.

That the presentation of grammatical information forms an integral and important part of a dictionary, cannot be denied. Al-Kasimi, quoted by Jackson (1985: 53), even intimates that a dictionary should provide a foreign speaker with all the information concerning grammar he / she needs without having to resort to handbooks. Eksteen (1965: 32) believes that only the presentation of grammar in a dictionary differs from that in a grammar handbook.

A dictionary often represents the point where the ordinary user meets grammatical criteria. One of the most important tasks of a lexicographer is to give guidance to dictionary users, many of whom are uninformed or ill-informed. A substantial part of this guidance concerns grammatical criteria, and Mufwene (1984: 6) suggests the following: "A good dictionary, as a tentative printed representation of a community, must be expected to include information which is relevant to grammar". It would appear that lexicographers can be an ideal interface between linguistic theory and language practice because they must take cognizance of both and indeed deal with both.

Because of the linguistic base of dictionaries it is important that metalexigraphy should focus on those aspects of linguistic theory that can be applied to dictionary making. In this process lexicographers must be open-minded

enough to accept that their linguistic colleagues have much to offer; it is detrimental to lexicography to cling to outmoded and archaic ideas. Unfortunately lexicographers more often than not are a conservative force that can impede linguistic progress on a broader scale (Wells 1973: 92, 93). Cowie (1983: 107) supports this: "The grammatical treatment of entries in English dictionaries reflects the deeply rooted conservatism of lexicographical theory and practice". Unsatisfactory lexicographical practices usually stem from ignorance or insufficient guidance from metalexicography.

Lexicography, like language, cannot be static and modern lexicography is characterised by an evolutionary process. Earlier dictionaries were more or less consulted for two things: the spelling or meaning of a word. Modern dictionaries offer much more than their previous counterparts. Two factors helped to wring this change: A new-found interest in vocabulary and its teaching, and the increasing realization from lexicographers that their work has a considerable linguistic foundation.

Ilson (1985: 1) maintains that dictionaries are the most significant books concerning language. Because of the linguistic base of dictionaries, and their significance, dictionaries should be beyond reproach as far as the presentation of linguistic criteria are concerned. It is in the lexicographer's own interest to stay abreast of linguistic notions which have a bearing on his / her work. Malkiel (1980: 53) supports this view and points out that a modicum of theoretical underpinning which demanded continuously renewed familiarity with the latest trends in linguistic thinking became necessary when Linguistic atlases began to rival old-style lexicography.

No barriers should separate dictionary and grammar. By the same token no barriers should separate those people who practice lexicography and linguistics: the lexicographers and linguists. Unfortunately such an ideal position does not exist, and there are quite a few differences between the work of a lexicographer and that of a linguist.

According to Gleason (1973: 27), the linguist can choose the subject material to be researched, the methods to be employed and the degree to which the subject must be exhausted. Lexicographers do not share this luxury, but have far greater limitations governing their work than linguists (Gleason 1973: 27). The lexicographer must present the lexicon without bias, and according to a rather strict and stereotyped method. He / she must cover the lexicon without giving certain lexical items unnecessary prominence or neglecting other items. This must be done in accordance with an editorial policy and all the while the return date must be taken into account.

Like a linguist, the lexicographer tries to present the lexicon in a certain logical way according to a certain pattern. The linguist however, normally presents the norm, or that which fits into a pattern (Gleason 1967: 89), but the lexicographer has to deal with the prickly issue of norm and deviations from the norm, created by the users of language.

One of the great challenges confronting lexicographers is to give a comprehensive yet coherent description of language. According to Stein (1984: 124) linguists expect this of lexicographers while they themselves have not yet been able to produce the goods. The lexicographer faces the problematical situation that the linguists' view must be reconciled with the particular demands of a conventional dictionary, which is to a great extent determined by the needs and expectations of the user who is not interested in esoterica (Cowie 1983: 99). In fact, many users do not care much for the experimental ingredient of modern linguistics, and they are at a loss to understand why linguists change their philosophy and terminology as a matter of course (Gleason 1967: 55).

The question is where does this leave lexicographers? Must they side with the linguists, or with the users? In a sense lexicographers are caught in the middle because they understand something of linguistics, and they should be conversant with the needs of the users. But being trapped in the middle can also mean that the lexicographer is neither here nor there. Lexicographers cannot ignore the needs and expectations of their target-users. If that should be the case, the dictionary can hardly succeed.

The progressive and informed lexicographer on the other hand, does not want to be indifferent towards new and meaningful disclosures from linguistic colleagues. This dilemma facing the lexicographer is pointed out by Cowie (1983: 100): "Devising a system which properly reflects the grammatical complexities but which is at the same time clear and usable calls for great ingenuity".

Lexicographers are sometimes confronted by a discrepancy between new linguistic terminology and the "traditional" terminology to which dictionary users are used. On the one hand progressive lexicographers want to reflect new notions and on the other they want to be user-friendly by reflecting that which the users understand and are used to. The dilemma facing lexicographers is that if they choose to reflect a newer terminology, their dictionaries are often inevitably user-unfriendly because this terminology is not necessarily available at school level and most users do not understand it.

It would be ideal if there is no terminological discrepancies between dictionary and grammar (Gouws 1989: 225). Because such an ideal situation does not exist, the lexicographer must make a choice. This choice must be governed, not by sentiment and tradition, but by sound linguistic considerations, and it is therefore desirable that terminology which is widely accepted and well motivated, be reflected in the dictionary.

4. Lexicographer and Linguist

In the introduction I have mentioned that there can be tension between lexicographer, linguist and dictionary user. Some of the tension does not involve all three sides, but only two. Tension can exist between lexicographer and user

because of a user-unfriendly dictionary. A case where tension also seems to be limited to two sides only, is that between lexicographer and linguist.

During a recent overseas visit the editor-in-chief of the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (hereafter WAT) was told by several lexicographers that they do not really pay too much attention to linguists because linguists have nothing to say to them. In South Africa there has also been a long standing feeling of unease between lexicographers and linguists.

There could be many reasons for this distrust between lexicographer and linguist. The fact that lexicographers often cling to outmoded ideas and unsatisfactory lexicographical practices and that the advice and findings of linguists are seemingly ignored, and that cognizance is not taken of the latest trends in linguistic thinking probably is very irksome to linguists. The great difference regarding the constraints governing the work of lexicographer and linguist can also play a part in the feeling of animosity which sometimes prevails. The fact that the lexicographer cannot always reconcile the views of linguists with the needs of dictionary users is probably also a factor which leads to alienation. In the past clashes of personality also played their part.

On the other hand there is often dissatisfaction among lexicographers because of the confusing and contradictory statements some linguists often make in their dictionary reviews or comments on dictionaries. Gleason (1967: 88) concedes that many descriptive linguists show little understanding of the constraints under which lexicographers work, and he goes on to say the following: "I think it is on the whole fair to say that some of the most vociferous critics (of dictionaries — FJL) have been those with the least actual experience in dictionary making".

Many dictionary reviews reveal a real ignorance on the part of the reviewers, most of whom are linguists. In a recent review, volume IX of the WAT was criticized for not including certain lexical items which appeared in standard dictionaries. The standard dictionaries however, were at fault because those items simply do not exist in Afrikaans. It is therefore not strange that some lexicographers feel that they will never completely satisfy the linguists, whatever they do.

In creating a new editorial policy the Bureau of the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* organized a meeting between its editorial staff and linguists with an interest in lexicography. Several contradictory recommendations were made. I will give a couple of examples. Some linguists felt that fewer citations must be given while some supported the idea of using citations liberally in order to illustrate the use of the lemma as widely as possible. It was also recommended that the editors should use the category "graadwoord" (an adverb denoting degree) as distinguished from the category adverb, but this was later revoked when practical problems which the lexicographers experienced led the linguists to the conclusion that the game is not worth the candle. This can also contribute to tension. Lexicography is not a terrain in which you can experiment from one day to the next.

The fact that some linguists have had questionable success as the authors of standard dictionaries in South Africa as well as overseas (cf. Gleason 1967: 88) also strengthens the hand of some lexicographers who feel that those linguists should not have a high-handed approach to lexicography and their (the lexicographers') handiwork. Even incompetence on the part of lexicographers is blamed on either poor teaching at university level, or teaching that is concerned only with theory and with no concessions towards practicality.

Something which also creates tension, is that linguists blame lexicographers for not taking cognizance of something which they themselves have only just uncovered. The lexicographer is not responsible for writing grammars; his / her task is to furnish linguistic colleagues with enough material to be able to do so. According to Malkiel (1967: 57), lexicographers must seize the initiative to convey user's interest in word problems to linguists ... "after sharpening this curiosity through *fresh, incisive formulations* which invite and stimulate basic lexicological research".

The tension between many lexicographers and linguists can result in an unsavoury cycle of events. Unfortunately the rule of thumb of all triangles also applies here: if two of the corners become bigger than they should be, the third must, in order to still be part of the triangle, become smaller. The bigger the difference of opinion between lexicographer and linguist, the more adversely the user can be affected. The tension between lexicographer and linguist is therefore only seemingly bipolar, because the user is often affected.

The corner which the user represents in my metaphorical triangle may not be smaller than those of the lexicographer or linguist. Both those corners exist because there is something like a user. Linguists have long been under the impression that their work has got nothing to do with the public, but that is not entirely true, as Malkiel (1980: 50) points out. Because linguistic and lexicographical activity do not take place in a vacuum, the tensions between lexicographers and linguists must, for the sake of the user, be settled.

Lexicographers, particularly the younger generation, want to change. Proof of that is a willingness to further their linguistic qualifications. What lexicographers expect of linguists, and I would think that is not asking too much, is to enter into a partnership with them with a view of improving language description. I think it would be a healthy situation if linguist and lexicographer realize that they can actually work together: the lexicographer can provide the linguist with the raw material from which new linguistic criteria can be formulated. The lexicographer, on the other hand, will ultimately benefit from those criteria.

5. Normalization and Co-operation

The fact that there is tension between lexicographer and linguist, is an intolerable situation. Both are involved in the description of language and the two dis-

ciplines have much in common. As far as I am concerned language description will be more effective if there is better co-operation and less animosity between lexicographer and linguist.

Linguistics have much to offer lexicography as language profession. For lexicographers it is of particular importance that new thoughts should emerge from linguists involved in metalexigraphy, because lexicography needs a sound theoretical foundation. The sounder this base, the sounder the dictionary which uses this base. Lexicographers would also benefit greatly if linguists can standardize terms and dispose of ephemeral terms. It is also important for lexicography that aspirant-lexicographers should have a competent training. In this regard the role of the linguist as pedagogue is crucial.

A great deal of the basic lexicographical principles are motivated from theoretical linguistics. It is also the case that lexicographers and dictionaries can present linguists with a systematical source of real language for the solution of practical problems. Lexicographer and linguist therefore have much in common and indeed have much to share. In the interest of linguists and lexicographers, and ultimately in the interest of the dictionary user, it is time to achieve real synergy.

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