

Monika Bielińska. *Lexikographische Metatexte. Eine Untersuchung nichtintegrierter Außentexte in einsprachigen Wörterbüchern des Deutschen als Fremdsprache.* 2010, 375 pp. Danziger Beiträge zur Germanistik 32. ISBN 978-3-631-60500-4 (Hardback). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. Price: €61.50.

This book, which is based on the doctoral dissertation of Monika Bielińska, investigates the outer texts of several monolingual learners' dictionaries for German as a foreign language. She maintains that German learners' dictionaries constitute a fairly young addition to German lexicography, the first one only having been published in 1993 by Langenscheidt (1993). This is in stark contrast to countries such as France and England, where the publication of learners' dictionaries has long been established.

Bielińska selected thirteen dictionaries which she considers to be representative of the genre of monolingual learners' dictionaries for German as a foreign language. These include different editions of the same dictionary, and smaller dictionaries as well as more comprehensive ones. Her main aim with the investigation is to contribute to "dictionary care" with the idea that her comments could help lexicographers to plan outer texts more carefully in order to fulfil users' needs to a greater extent. The primary users of dictionaries for German as a foreign language are, of course, learners of German. The secondary users are lexicographers and metalexicographers who research the properties of dictionaries as a field of study.

Bielińska draws up lists of criteria for learners' dictionaries which she uses in her analysis of the outer texts of the German dictionaries in question. In her analysis, she not only looks at the outer matter of these dictionaries, but also takes into account comments made in dictionary reviews and analyses, and the vast metalexicographical literature as a whole. The "catalogue of questions" (p. 308) she draws up reflects the expectations of lexicographical researchers.

Some of the aspects which Bielińska investigates are (a) the target group (or the addressees) and the extent to which differentiation was made between beginners and advanced learners; (b) the needs of the particular users; (c) the principles according to which the dictionary was conceptualised (which have to do, among others, with explanations and guidelines pertaining to the layout of the dictionary and its outer texts, the way in which the presentation of data in the word list is dealt with in the outer texts, the extent to which the selection of lemmas was justified in the outer texts, and the way in which the outer texts inform the user about finding and interpreting the data types given in the dictionary articles); and (d) the user-friendliness of and the functions of the outer texts with regard to situations of dictionary use.

The contents and form of lexicographical outer texts could have a profound influence on the successful use of dictionaries, even though research has shown that most dictionary users never consult the outer texts. For example, Kipfer (1987: 45) in a study of American students, established that "the only explanatory matter students felt a need to refer to was the pronunciation key"

(p. 60, note 36). Bielińska (p. 60, note 36) refers to Svartvik (1999: 283) who mentions that it is "most atypical of the run-of-the-mill user" to read user's guides. Hartmann (2000: 387) also points out that 70,9% of users admit to "manage without front-matter notes altogether", and that "information contained in the appendices of dictionaries is rarely consulted" (p. 60, note 36).

According to Bielińska (p. 53), there are different types of outer texts. The first type, which should be placed in the front matter, should help users to successfully and effectively consult the dictionary. These outer texts should include the list of contents, the introduction, the users' guide (which should contain sample articles explaining the structures and contents of the different article types), the abbreviations used in the articles to denote different item types, the system used in the alphabetical ordering, and a list of phonetic signs.

The second type of outer texts should support users in their language acquisition and language use, including theoretical information on language. These outer texts could inter alia deal with information about inflections and the formation of tenses on the one, and semantic relations, lists of idioms, and empty formulae on the other hand. In addition, monolingual learners' dictionaries for foreign users should give information on the geography, culture and history of the language area. Such texts could either be in the front matter or in the back matter, or they could appear as insertions into the word list throughout the dictionary. With regard to this second type of outer texts, Bielińska refers to Gouws (2004), who distinguishes between outer texts with *knowledge-orientated functions* (e.g. texts giving encyclopedic non-language information as well as theoretical information on language) and those with *communication-orientated functions* (e.g. giving information on how to actively deal with the language). This distinction would also be applicable to monolingual learners' dictionaries for foreign learners. Bielińska (p. 54) expands the communicated-orientated functions to include outer texts of the first type, namely, texts which enhance *the effective use of the dictionary*. Outer texts dealing with the layout and use of a particular dictionary have a *metatextual* relation with the word list, whereas other outer texts, such as the ones giving geographical information, can be considered as being of a *paratextual* nature. Using Bergenholtz and Tarp's (2005) classification, Bielińska (p. 55) identifies metatexts as *non-integrated outer texts* and paratexts as *integrated outer texts*.

Integrated outer texts are for example diagrams, tables and illustrations which could range from lists of irregular verbs to lists of measurements and weights, lists of numbers, and the names of the days and months, and many more. The function of these lists is to enhance systematic expansion of the user's vocabulary within the given contexts, because the context disappears in an alphabetical ordering system. These integrated outer texts are not the main focus of Bielińska's work.

The greater part of Bielińska's book is dedicated to her analysis of the non-integrated outer texts in the thirteen selected German monolingual dictionaries for German as a foreign language. She evaluates three aspects of the *contents* of

these texts. Firstly, she looks at the *conceptual background* of the metatexts. Secondly, she determines whether the metatexts give an appropriate description of the different parts of the dictionary as a whole, and of the structures of the dictionary articles in the word lists (p. 90). An explanation of the structures of dictionary articles is usually done by means of sample articles. Thirdly, the *meta-textual treatment* of the individual types of lexicographical data in the word lists is examined. Bielińska draws up a "catalogue of questions", some of which are only relevant to users, some only to researchers of dictionaries, and some relevant to both these groups. This catalogue of questions will briefly be discussed in the rest of this review, in order to whet the reader's appetite for this book.

Incorporated in the issue of the *conceptual background* of dictionary metatexts is the question whether these texts clearly mention the envisaged target group (or group of addressees). Bielińska (p. 115-116) reveals that most of the dictionaries are quite vague on who their addressees are ("all learners of German"), and that the smaller dictionaries are more precise than the more comprehensive ones (p. 290). Especially advanced learners are usually not mentioned as addressees, because of the vagueness regarding the identity of the users. It is, of course, of crucial importance that users will know whether a dictionary is targeted at them before they buy it.

Another conceptual issue is whether the metatexts mention *the functions* of a particular dictionary. The selected dictionaries are not totally inadequate with regard to mentioning the dictionary functions in the metatexts, although some of them only state the functions implicitly which entails that one has to look for them in different metatexts as well as in the advertising text on the cover, within one and the same dictionary. Users might want to know the functions of the dictionaries before they buy them, so it is important that they can find *inter alia* information whether the dictionary is meant for passive or active language use.

Information on the *dictionary basis* also resorts under the conceptual background of dictionaries. Bielińska poses questions about whether text corpuses, other dictionaries, literature on grammar and other linguistic works were used in the planning and compilation phases, and if so, which ones, and whether they are mentioned in the metatexts of the analysed dictionaries. An interesting phenomenon is that many of the dictionaries claim on their covers that they were "completely reworked" or "totally newly developed" — a claim which almost always proves to be incorrect. Bielińska (p. 138) admits that the issue of the dictionary basis is not interesting to the average user, even though researchers of dictionaries would definitely want this information. Of crucial importance to the user, however, is the question whether a particular dictionary is based on a previous one which the user may already possess. This implies that giving false information in this regard will confuse users and could waste their money.

Another aspect which Bielińska investigates is whether criteria for the outer selection of lemmas and for the selection of data types, as well as the illustrations, were justified in the metatexts (p. 139-146). Even though she admits

that average users may not be interested in these criteria, dictionary researchers may need them. The smaller dictionaries mostly do not give any information on the dictionary basis in their metatexts, whereas the more comprehensive ones do give some information, although in a very general and hardly informative way.

Regarding the mentioning of the *text compound* in the particular dictionaries, Bielińska looks at issues such as whether the metatexts present the reader with information on and search paths to all the direct constituents of the dictionary, and whether the macrostructural ordering and problems of finding certain lemmas were mentioned. In addition, she tries to determine whether the dictionaries unambiguously stated the number of lemmas they contain. Whereas the first cluster of questions could be given a positive evaluation, Bielińska states that most of the dictionaries gave a less than satisfying report on the number of lemmas included in the word list. Many of the dictionaries contain far fewer lemmas than they claim to have, because they would give vague counts which include not only the lemmas themselves, but also the examples and the idiomatic expressions. This makes it impossible to ascertain the exact number of actual lemmas, which in its turn makes it impossible for users to compare the range of different dictionaries with each other.

With regard to the information and the help metatexts give on the structures of dictionary articles, Bielińska (p. 170) detects two theoretical principles: (a) a lexicographer can decide to discuss as many item types as possible, or (b) he/she can decide to discuss only the ones most frequently needed by users. Bielińska is of the opinion that the dictionaries which only discussed a smaller number of sample articles treated these with greater care. For example, in spite of the existence of ample metalexicographical literature on the treatment of sample articles, the latest edition of the Langenscheidt dictionary (2008) did not make use of this, which resulted in inadequate sample articles. The presentation of more precise and more useful sample articles will not necessarily take up more space in outer texts; on the contrary: Bielińska suggests that one simply has to select the sample articles more carefully and more purposefully (p. 170).

In her investigation of the treatment of spelling in the metatexts of the analysed dictionaries, Bielińska (p. 178-179) concludes that only the more comprehensive dictionaries give sufficient information. Pronunciation is mostly treated sufficiently in all the metatexts (p. 186-187).

With regard to expositions in the metatexts of the grammatical information given in the dictionary articles, Bielińska (p. 299) finds that, apart from the *Wörterbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (2000) from the De Gruyter publishing house, which mentions one textbook on grammar, none of the dictionaries mention any grammatical textbooks they used in the planning and compilation of their dictionaries. Her conclusions on the treatment of parts of speech (p. 211-212), inflection (p. 220), morphology (p. 232-233), and syntax (p. 243-244) are summed up on page 305, where she claims that the more comprehensive dictionaries give more useful and informative details on these gram-

matical aspects in their metatexts than the smaller ones. This does not mean, however, that the larger dictionaries are complete in all respects.

Research has shown that the meaning of the lemma is the item type most often looked up in dictionaries (e.g. Ripfel and Wiegand 1988: 512, Ripfel 1989: 192; Köster and Neubauer 1994: 225). According to Bielińska (p. 244), it is therefore very important that the meaning descriptions are understandable to someone who is only learning a language: the descriptive language should be comprehensible. The metatexts of the analysed dictionaries were satisfactory in helping users where to find the meaning descriptions, how the typographical and non-typographical markers work, and what different terms were used to describe the treatment of meaning descriptions (p. 246-247). One problem remains that the user sometimes has to look for the information in several metatexts, which is of course not user-friendly (p. 315, note 182).

Context is another aspect of a dictionary article which requires close attention, especially if the dictionaries claim that they are meant to help users in the *production of texts*. Bielińska (p. 263-264) finds that most of the dictionaries gave guidelines in their metatexts on their treatment of context, and their presentation of these items typographically and/or non-typographically. Sometimes, this information could only be obtained by means of the sample articles. The metatexts were not very helpful in giving guidelines on the ordering of items providing the context, or information on the descriptive language used to present this demonstrative part of the dictionary article, and in what ways the items giving the collocation differ from the items giving the examples (p. 263-264).

Fixed expressions and idioms are not sufficiently discussed in the metatexts of the dictionaries which Bielińska (p. 274-275) analysed. There are so many studies in literature on the phenomenon of fixed expressions and idioms in lexicography that it is hard to understand why the analysed dictionaries gave so little attention to it in the metatexts. No criteria for the selection of fixed expressions and idioms were given (which may only be important to researchers and not to the learners). The notation techniques for the presentation of these items were usually not introduced, which is important for the user-friendliness in the dictionary. In addition, there were no clear indications of the basic morpho-syntactic form of fixed expressions, which is of course important information for learners of a foreign language for producing texts.

The system used for marking is also very important in learners' dictionaries. In this context, Bielińska's first question was to determine whether the *system of marking* used by the dictionary was systematically and fully explained in the metatexts. The answer was "no" in all of the cases, which points to a serious shortcoming. The *format* and the *position* of the markers, on the other hand, were given by all the dictionaries.

The users' guidelines differ greatly from dictionary to dictionary. On page 123, Bielińska gives some examples of useless guidelines in a particular dictionary. It offers to help students in finding the right words, but instead, some of the headings are as follows: "Learn some new words early in the morning

when getting up and in the evening before going to sleep", or "Tape notes in your home or at your office to the furniture with the words on them that you want to learn", or "Listen to German music, and try to understand the individual words". These "tips" do not really contribute to the learning process of users or to guaranteeing successful dictionary use.

One aspect which Bielińska mentions time and again throughout her book is the fact that many lexicographers themselves do not believe in the usefulness of metatexts, or the outer matter, of the dictionaries they write. She suggests (p. 308) that they might perhaps think that they are wasting their time and effort, because users will in any case not read the outer texts. She quotes for example Landau (2001: 148), who writes: "it is widely believed among lexicographers that no one reads it [the front matter]."

The question remains as to what extent dictionary writers take into account the reviews on their dictionaries and the research into dictionary use, and why they ignore the suggestions made by researchers. Could it be that theoreticians have too high expectations of future dictionaries, or do they make suggestions which are impossible to put into practice? In addition, considerations outside of lexicography, such as market-related requirements, also have an influence on the making of a dictionary. The more commercial a dictionary is, the more influence "time, space and money" will have (p. 309).

Bielińska (p. 311) asserts that, if a dictionary clearly and explicitly indicates *where* the information can be found in the different metatexts, users will notice that, and will also start using the metatexts according to their purposes.

Bielińska's insistent requirement that there should be information for *researchers* of dictionaries in the metatexts (p. 311-312), makes one wonder whether that is really necessary. Although this may be an ideal situation, commercial interests of the publishing houses may always regard this as unnecessary. She therefore suggests that one might publish these theoretical expositions in a separate booklet or journal article, and just refer to this publication in the list of sources (p. 313), so that researchers can still have access to the information, without the dictionary becoming too thick and heavy.

It needs to be mentioned that Bielińska has an impressive list of references at the end of her book, which provides evidence of the thorough research that she has undertaken. In addition, she gives excellent theoretical overviews of matters regarding dictionary planning, especially on dictionary use and outer texts, and her use of lexicographical terminology is precise and consistent.

Even though Bielińska uses the acknowledged German metalexigraphical terminology, this book is written in straight-forward German. Her analyses are accompanied by comprehensible and user-friendly tables containing pluses, minuses and zeros indicating whether a particular feature is present in a dictionary or not. The book is a must-read for lexicographers compiling monolingual learners' dictionaries for foreign students. When used as a checklist of aspects in the metatexts, it could help improve the usefulness of such dictionaries for potential users.

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