

The Seminar on Computer-Mediated Lexicography, Castelló

Maria Carmen Campoy Cubillo

The seminar on Computer-Mediated Lexicography was held on 19-21 May 2003 at Universitat Jaume I (Castelló, Spain). Its aim was to offer a forum for discussion on how the latest developments in computerised dictionaries may challenge and change current practices in the language learning context, both in terms of content and technological advances.

Among the issues discussed, criteria to describe computer-mediated dictionaries according to the features that differentiate them from paper dictionaries was a major concern. An important aspect is that of typology, which is undergoing significant changes, particularly for online dictionaries. Dictionary typology is in need of a major revision that takes into account new computer-mediated products, and these may in turn be studied according to agreed criteria, such as genre boundaries, degrees of customisability, and functionality.

The issue of customisability was examined in relation to the teacher's and the student's roles (by Krajka). On the one hand, students may decide which dictionary and look-up modes are suitable for their purposes and styles, thus promoting learner autonomy. On the other hand, the possibility for the teacher to decide on which customisation to use for a particular learner group could be of interest within syllabus design. These perspectives are not excluding, in both cases computer-mediated dictionaries were seen as flexible tools. Although training in dictionary skills still largely depends on the teacher, now it also involves the program designer (who may be a teacher, a computer expert, or both), and on how new features are implemented in order to be taught and learned.

It was also argued (by Tono) that the electronic dictionary interface may reduce difficulties posed by paper dictionary macrostructure, which seems to be the case for hand-held and CD dictionaries. Also, computers allow for a much easier tracking of users' look-up behaviour as well as of note-taking possibilities that appear mostly with CD dictionaries.

However, this is not the case for online dictionaries, some of which provide very complex designs that add new features to the traditional macrostructure, such as links to various databases, educational pages, new terms, simultaneous search in several reference works, links to topic-related pages, etc. Likewise, as pointed out by Luzón, online dictionaries have developed

functionality features such as informational and interpersonal interactivity, which traditional dictionaries could not provide and which may turn dictionary consultation into a very complicated task.

In any case, it was clear that there is a need for both longitudinal and contrastive studies. Nesi's proposal (2000:108) "to investigate the use, not of purpose-built value glosses for a few selected texts, but of flexible support for all texts in the form of independent electronic dictionaries," could be extended to all kinds of computer-mediated dictionaries both for value and signification glosses as described by Roby (1999). Research is needed, I believe, not only in the use of actual dictionaries (as opposed to partial ones designed for specific tasks) but also in the promotion of dictionary-use skills as part of metacognitive learning strategies. In so doing, dictionaries should be considered as part of the learning process rather than as a learning tool for solving problems or a compensatory strategy.

Research on computerised dictionaries should also be concerned with aspects that are typical in the new genres. For example, taking into account that sound files are included in most products, and that the majority of learners find the sound option attractive, research should be carried out on how audio files are used – not only to know how a word is pronounced, but to understand spoken texts.

For most (young) learners, the integration of dictionaries into the world of computers has endowed them with a new attraction. This engaging new look appears to be leading to a more frequent enjoyable use and greater familiarity with the dictionary, while helping learners improve their vocabulary and language knowledge. Learners' motivation should be taken advantage of on the side of the teachers, while encouraging them to examine their students' needs and the new ways to present them with lexical information.

References

- Nesi, H. 2000. 'On screen or in print: Students' Use of a Learner's Dictionary on CD-ROM and in Book Form.' In P. Howarth and R. Herington (eds), *EAP Learning Technologies*. Leeds University Press. pp. 106-114.
- Roby, W.B. 1999. 'What's in a gloss?' *Language Learning & Technology*, 2.2. <http://llt.msu.edu/vol2num2/robby>.



Maria Carmen Campoy Cubillo teaches English and ESP at Universitat Jaume I. She initiated and coordinated the seminar. campoy@fil.uji.es

Lectures at the seminar:

- Computer-mediated dictionaries: an insight into online dictionary features. M^a Carmen Campoy
- Digital genres: transforming and adding value to the dictionary genre. M^a José Luzón
- Making ends meet: dictionaries, learning and the information age. Ilan J. Kernerman
- Research on the use of electronic dictionaries for language learning: methodological considerations. Yukio Tono
- Pragmatics and cognitive linguistics: practical applications in LSP lexicography. Santiago Posteguillo
- Computer-mediated dictionaries as teaching and Learning Tools. Jarek Krajka
- ADELEX: using computer-mediated dictionaries online to enhance vocabulary acquisition. M^a del Mar Sánchez Ramos and Carmen Pérez Basanta
- Phonetic keywords in EFL dictionaries revisited. Włodzimierz Sowkowiak
- The acquisition of English in a multilingual and multicultural world: the use of multi- and bilingual dictionaries by bilingual learners. Pilar Safont and M^a José Esteve