

DICTIONARY News

Dictionary *n.* *Obsolete?*

Ilan Kernerman

Kernerman Dictionary News has offered various views on the changing world of dictionaries and lexicography since the turn of the century (cf. p.4), and more recently the related processes and impacts have accelerated and become clearer. The topic has preoccupied me for some time and last year I put together a paper called 'Dictionary *n.* *Obsolete?* Before and afterwords', first presented at the Dutch Institute of Lexicology in November and since then this year on several other occasions. Also last November, Macmillan's announcement of ending dictionaries in print and going only digital stirred animated debate on email lists and expressed a new awareness. The main focus of this discussion and others seems to be print vs. electronic – basically revolving around practicality, economics and innovation as opposed to culture, personal taste and force of habit – but the question is not so much whether there will be dictionaries *in print* but would there *be* dictionaries, and how.

Paraphrasing Frank Zappa's quote on jazz (1974), one could say *dictionaries are not dead, they just smell funny*. While more are available (freely and easily) than ever before, dictionaries also lose their autonomous identity and disappear in language technology. Machine translation, word processors, search engines, learning aids and the like incorporate dictionary content and apply it in new forms and tools that go beyond the

dictionary as end-product per se. There will of course always be language enthusiasts and others who look up *a dictionary*, but mainstream usage without linguistic passion might be satisfied by broader communication and information solutions, such as talking on the phone in one language and hearing in another. As big dictionary names die out or dwindle and others struggle to survive, lexicography blooms in the technology world that recruits experts and invests in language R&D. We also see language companies selling specialized services to corporate, education and public sectors, beside national bodies (as well as academic and private initiatives) involved in innovative projects that are offered for free. Still, the major revolution today is perhaps linked to the reader-turned-user who gets involved in the creative process with the advent of crowd-sourcing in relation to expert authority (reflecting worldwider social, technological and political changes). At the background is a devaluation of the dictionary as *book of words* against growing needs for *full language* lexicography and new generation computational lexicographers.

The full paper is finally not published anywhere, but its list of main trends appears on p.7 of this issue, which is mostly devoted to more views from dictionary makers and lexicographers. Thank you to all the authors.

- 1 Dictionary *n.* *Obsolete?* | **Ilan Kernerman**
- 2 The future of dictionaries | **Judy Pearsall**
- 5 Redefining the dictionary: From print to digital | **Michael Rundell**
- 8 Make me a match: Putting learners in touch with dictionaries | **Colin McIntosh**
- 9 Free dictionary & Free lunch
- 10 Trade reference | **Sander Bekkers**
- 11 ASIALEX 2013 in Bali | **Deny A. Kwary**
- 12 A sweetshop for lexicographers | **Jaap Parqui**
- 13 X International School on Lexicography – Life Beyond Dictionaries | **Olga Karpova**
- 14 Paragon Software: Turning gigantic print reference content into light-weight apps with cutting-edge features | **Alexander Zudin**
- 16 A brief account of Dutch lexicography | **Tanneke Schoonheim**
- 22 Matthias de Vries Genootschap | **Anne Dykstra**
- 24 The new *Lighthouse* dictionary | **Kaoru Akasu**
- 27 Why do we need pattern dictionaries (and what *is* a pattern dictionary, anyway)? | **Patrick Hanks and Jane Bradbury**
- 30 Fortunes of National Cultures in Globalisation Context | **Vera Budykina**
- 32 Patrick Hanks. *Lexical Analysis: Norms and Exploitations* | **Orion Montoya**
- 33 *KERNERMAN Japanese* dictionaries by Seiko
- 35 Launching of *LEXOCOGRAPHY: Journal of ASIALEX* | **Ilan Kernerman**
- 36 **Paul Bogaards** 1940-2012 | **Wolfgang Worsch** 1953-2013

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