

Trade Reference

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Commercial dictionary publishing is changing, for several different reasons publishers have encountered a loss of product relevance to their public. One of my former colleagues once mentioned: language and communication is very much alive, everyone communicates continuously and most of it is done in writing, however dictionary publishers have trouble meeting the needs of today's writers and finding a niche in the present writers' environment where people communicate. The reality, however, is that dictionaries are by and large not being used as an active writing or learning tool, but as a passive reference tool.

If language learning is defined as combining a grammar database with definitions and relevant phrases within, a dictionary could be an essential construct. If you define a dictionary as a functionality to assist you in writing texts in your own or another language, or as a tool you can use to acquire a language, there are several solutions, none of which include it being in book form. But the fact remains that for dictionary makers books are still the primary revenue base.

It seems as though, for the last thirty years digital reference sources have always held the promise that the market would shift from dictionaries as books to digital media. Up to now this promise has not been fulfilled, however recently in Germany the situation has shifted. Duden Verlag has gone online, publishing their main dictionary *Die Deutsche Rechtschreibung* on the internet for free, and other publishers such as Macmillan and Pons have done the same. The number of internet hits indicates they are doing fairly well, but they were more reserved when inquiries were made about their revenue. The fact is, however, that doing nothing means an ultimate decline and finally – discontinuation.

Examining the matter more closely, it is clear that there are some divisions to be made. There are the different platforms upon which you can publish dictionaries, including online, smartphones and tablets, desktop computers or integrated dictionaries, as well as adding dictionary functionality to other applications. But it is also interesting to consider different users: a student or pupil, learning the language, is a different user than a professional translator or a staff member in an internationally-operating company – they all have different needs.

The international community increasingly uses the English language in global business communication, and this tendency is the most obvious reason behind the increase in the trade in English bilingual dictionaries and the decline in demand for German, French or Spanish bilingual dictionaries. Added to this are also internal issues, concerning the way dictionary publishers were organized in the past. Most traditional dictionary publishers still originate from book publishing and lexicographers, while the real innovations are now coming from computer programmers. This all depends of course on how dictionaries are defined.

Dr. Robert Amsler, an American computational linguist, wrote the following on this matter (in the email discussion following Macmillan's announcement on replacing print entirely by digital publication):

The work I did on the analysis of dictionary definitions demonstrated that there was an imperfect, yet intriguing, taxonomy of definition texts and showed that the alphabetic organization of dictionary entries was outmoded except under special circumstances. I.e., for example, you had to know how to spell a word to look it up; you had to know a word existed that dealt with the meaning you were trying to express to know how to look it up; and when you did look a word up you were given a tiny view of the dictionary's contents that didn't show you the other words whose definitions were related to the entry you were examining in terms of taxonomic relatives. Sure, some dictionaries did an excellent job of including information on synonyms... but NONE gave taxonomic or part/whole related headwords.

In many discussions there is no clear differentiation between the market position of bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, but the differentiation is there, especially in the Netherlands and Belgium. Monolingual dictionaries have lost considerable market share to spell-checkers, Google and free online dictionaries, spell-checkers have taken over the spelling function that not so long ago were provided by dictionaries. Google is also used as a resource for looking up word definitions, another function formerly provided by dictionaries. Bilingual dictionaries have a *must have* aspect, as they have become essential while writing

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and translating texts in languages other than your native one.

There is also the promise of the dictionary being included within a computer application that translates or otherwise helps users with different language tasks. For instance, we frequently spoke of the opportunities in selling dictionaries in digital form with Microsoft products. Looking at past initiatives, the most successful enterprises were having our content combined with software, packaged with hardware, or offered with that of other publishers. While we probably sold over a million digital dictionaries, the revenue per product was always extremely low. On the other hand, we also observed that software products, especially when developed and marketed as a single product, had only a very short life-cycle.

If we look at all the available platforms there is a difference:

eBooks: you cannot switch easily between the book you are reading and the dictionary. A dictionary for this platform is therefore not efficient. In the beginning it was also difficult to have a useful search function, but nowadays the possibilities have evolved, including widgets, and a user-friendly interface is workable on certain platforms.

CD: not as a stand-alone product, we combine cd-rom with books. The interest of the public is waning, however, and selling a product as a download seems a better solution.

Apps: developing for tablets and smartphones is an interesting development. Prisma recently entered this market with a steep sales rise, I am curious to see how it will continue.

Online: there is potential with subscription for organizations, whereas offering content behind a login (even free) has limited commercial value for private users. The only digital products people seem to want to spend money on are those that can be placed on their own device as an app, but most dictionaries on the internet are free.

Books: we still earn 95% of our income through books, and not digital dictionaries. The number of books sold is still the same as several years ago. This is led by the number of students, and not the economy, which however forces us to use different distribution channels, with correspondingly different prices.

With an eye to the future, it is clear that there will always be a need for well structured and well edited lexical data. The way we earn our money, though, will be completely different. The development of free online dictionaries by the traditional dictionary publishers (as well as newcomers) is unstoppable, and we will be selling more of our products in the slipstream-online and increasingly less often in stores. What we need is a new entrepreneurship to create new products for new users, doing what we have always done: helping people to write, learn and understand language, working closely together with scientists and programmers to finally step into the digital future.

Prisma Dictionaries

Prisma dictionaries and language publishers are a market leading school dictionary publisher and language learning publisher in the Netherlands and Belgium. Most important products are a series of pocket dictionaries and a series of language learning books for self study.
<http://prisma.nl/>

ASIALEX 2013 in Bali

The 8th International Conference of the Asian Association for Lexicography (ASIALEX) has attracted participants from 35 countries. It will be held in Bali, Indonesia, on 20-22 August 2013, and its theme is **Lexicography and Dictionaries in the Information Age**.

The conference is expected to contribute to the development of lexicography and dictionaries in Indonesia, as well as in Asia in general, where the number of languages is significantly higher than that in other parts of the world. According to data from Ethnologue.com (accessed on 21 May 2013), out of 7,105 living languages in the world, 2,304 are in Asia. Indonesia has 706 living languages, of which only 21 are institutional, 97 are developing, 248 are vigorous (i.e. used for face-to-face communication), 265 are in trouble, and 75 are dying.

The conference topics include the evolution of dictionaries into multiple information sources, lexicography as an interdisciplinary research field, development of online and mobile dictionaries, features of pocket electronic dictionaries, printed dictionaries in the information age, dictionaries for minority languages,

advances in dictionary user surveys, and dictionaries as language learning resources

Featured speakers include Dr. Diah A. Arimbi (Indonesia), Prof. Henning Bergenholtz (Denmark), Dr. Adam Kilgarriff (UK), Prof. Robert Lew (Poland) and Prof. Yukio Tono (Japan), and there are 75 parallel papers and software demos.

The conference is jointly organized by ASIALEX and the Faculty of Humanities of Airlangga University in Surabaya. The proceedings will be published by Airlangga University Press and distributed to selected universities in Indonesia and worldwide.

The conference will be held at Bali Dynasty Resort, a premier beachside resort at Kuta Beach, renowned for its warm Balinese hospitality. The conference room is very spacious and has high teakwood ceilings, a permanent stage, and the latest in audio-visual equipment – to ensure the comfort of the presenters and the participants. For further information see <http://asialex2013.org/>.

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