

The usage of different approaches to etymological dictionary making

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Abstract: No other linguistic subfield as closely linked to lexicography as etymology. Indeed, whilst significant work on synchronic lexicology is done without any reference to dictionaries, major etymological breakthroughs, be they factual or methodological, are mostly expressed through lexicographic work, and when they are not, it is their subsequent acceptance by a reference dictionary which ultimately lends them support.

Keywords: linguistic subfield, lexicographic description, dictionary making.

Introduction

The lexicographic description of words, phrases and other language units as purposeful activity in compiling any type of dictionaries, such as etymological dictionary making can be both solitary and systematic. Solitary dictionary making is compiling isolated dictionaries without any account of how they correlate with those, which are already available or will be. The overwhelming majority of existing etymological dictionaries and those, which are in the process of being compiled are representative of the solitary approach to this kind of dictionary compilation. Systematic dictionary making, on the other hand, consists of compiling etymological dictionaries, which are considered elements of an inwardly connected aggregate of lexicographic and quasilexicographic works.

Main part

Such activity includes as an indispensable element so-called lexicographic designing (constructing). Lexicographic designing is engineering and philological activity which consists of inventing dictionaries, dictionary systems and dictionary series; determining their optimum form and component composition; and elaborating the procedures which permit the lexicographer to impart the highest possible informational value and user friendliness to a dictionary. There are three main principles regulate the content of lexicographic designing: (a) the principle of effectiveness, (b) the principle of simplicity and (c) the principle of harmony.

To take into account the principle of effectiveness means to determine the optimum number of etymological dictionary entrances, to assign qualitative and quantitative diversity of appendices, to work out special lexicographic devices, conventional signs, type and colour markings, etc., which make using the dictionary easier.

In accordance with the principle of simplicity, the lexicographer, when choosing from all possible ways of exposing certain linguistic information, should always choose the least complicated and most obvious method of doing so.

And finally the principle of harmony demands that the lexicographer constructs a dictionary in such a way that it's composition, the logic of it's structure and the interdependence of it's parts give the user a certain aesthetic pleasure.

Systematic approach to etymological dictionary making rests on several linguistic, pragmatic and lexicographic propositions. In a broad spectrum of such linguistic propositions the most significant, from the point of view of systematic dictionary making is (1) distinguishing between linguocentric and anthropocentric approaches to the description of language facts, (2) postulation of the existence of so-called units of a lexical system (not to be confused with lexical units), and (3) the notion of system generative strength of language units.

The opposition of lingua-centric (object-centric, system central) and anthropocentric approaches to the description of language formulated in a conceptually distinct form in the middle

of 1980's. From the point of view of linguocentric approach the language is a given object which is represented by available texts, that is without regard to a person who speaks it. The objective of the linguocentric approach is to analyse speech evidences about the language, to generalise them and to describe in consecutive order typological diversity of phenomena and processes that in total form language mechanics. From the standpoint of an anthropocentric approach, language appears to be an acquired appurtenance of a person's consciousness and therefore as a forming and manifesting essence. The ambition of the anthropocentric approach is, first, to describe a language as an object of interiorisation, acquisition and, second, to ascertain the type of interaction between language and a man. One of the most important lexicographic implications of the aforementioned opposition consists in the fact that lexicographers more and more often come to the conclusion that a user requires specifically targeted dictionaries, which help him learn a certain language phenomenon, a certain register of speech, rather than works featuring an enormous but focusless vocabulary. In this connection with it etymological dictionary making occupies a prominent place within the framework of systematic approach.

Malkiel (1976) offered us a book-length typology of etymological dictionaries, analyzing them through eight autonomous criteria:

1. Time depth (period to which the etymologies are traced back,)
2. Direction of analysis (prospection or retrospection),
3. Range (languages dealt with),
4. Grand strategy (structural division of the dictionary),
5. Entry structuring (linear presentation of the chosen features),
6. Breadth (information given in the front- and back-matter vs. within the individual entries),
7. Scope (general lexicon vs. parts of it, e.g. borrowings),
8. Character (author's purpose and level of tone).

Amongst these criteria, It can be useful, to distinguish not so much between different types of etymological dictionaries (although that will also be the case), but between three grand etymological classes, which each make their own different demands of an etymologist, and which are sometimes dealt with in different dictionaries: inherited lexicon (20.2.1.), borrowings (20.2.2.), and internal creations (20.2.3.). For each of these classes, there can be given a general idea of the (methodological) state of the art, mostly on the basis of etymological dictionaries of European languages, and to draw attention to the most profitable approaches within the field.

Amongst the three major etymological classes, inherited lexicon clearly gets the most attention in terms of etymological dictionaries devoted to its study. One defining feature of this kind of etymological dictionary is its comparative character. Indeed, as

the inherited lexicon is typically etymologized by comparative reconstruction, whole language families (or branches of them, also called families) are usually mobilized.

Conclusion

As a consequence, the arrangement of these dictionaries is prospective rather than retrospective (Malkiel 1976: 25-27), i.e. their lemmata pertain to the reconstructed protolanguage rather than to the individual languages the comparison is based on. Usually, the underlying question these dictionaries set out to answer is where the inherited lexicon of currently spoken languages comes from, and their ultimate goal is to reconstruct the lexicon of a protolanguage.

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