Pedro A. Feurtes-Olivera and Seven Tarp: Theory and practice of specialized online dictionaries

**Walter De Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston, 2014, IX + 267 pp,
ISBN 978-3-11-034883-5**

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Received: 21 August 2015 / Accepted: 16 November 2015 / Published online: 25 November 2015
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This monograph gives an extensive account of various aspects of specialized (online) lexicography in the theory and practice. It begins with the defense of the academic status of lexicography and the establishment of key concepts. Followed by the description of a general theory of specialized dictionaries, it attempts to put forward a refined and updated version of function theory applicable to dictionary making with special reference to specialized online dictionaries. In the framework of the theory, it carries out an evaluation and criticism of current online dictionaries and elaborates on the compilation phrases of specialized online dictionaries from the planning, compilation, to the publication with reference to *Accounting Dictionaries*.

This book consists of 10 chapters. Chapter 1: Introduction gives a brief account of the background, rationale and significance of the research of specialized (online) lexicography, followed by the introduction of the main content of this book.

Chapter 2 clarifies what specialized lexicography is and the relation of specialized lexicography and specialized online lexicography, i.e. general and particular. Furthermore, it discusses some key terms and their relations in the lexicographical literature, e.g. dictionaries and encyclopedias. Then, it makes a tentative typology of specialized lexicography: printed paper dictionaries, paper dictionaries or paper-like dictionaries placed on the Internet or another electronic platform, and genuine e-dictionaries.

Chapter 3 defends the academic status of specialized lexicography by some convincing arguments and favors the discipline's independent status. On the basis, it further expounds on the relations between general lexicography and linguistics,

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between specialized lexicography and terminology, between general lexicography and information science, etc.

Chapter 4 focuses on the concept of lexicographical theory. It gives an overview of the heated debate on the topic “Is lexicography a science?” and claims that a general lexicographical theory is possible and feasible.

Chapter 5 is a substantial part of this book, which discusses the function theory put forth by distinguished lexicographers and then describes an updated version of the theory, as a general theory of specialized dictionaries. From the functional perspective, the book elaborates on the concept of user needs based on the fundamental postulate that dictionaries are utility tools. Then, the core concept of this book, i.e. lexicographical function, is thoroughly explored and defined. Furthermore, a general methodology has been developed for specialized dictionaries by presenting an example of how functional methodology can be applied in determining the user’s cognitive and communicative needs in various tasks. Finally, the principles of the selection and preparation of data for a dictionary and two lexicographical processes from the lexicographer’s perspective and from the user’s perspective are fully discussed.

Chapter 6 deals with special problems concerning specialized online dictionaries. To be specific, this chapter focuses on the description of relevant techniques, such as data filtering, the advanced information tools to customize dictionary data for a specific type of users in a specific situation or activity or even for an individual user in each consultation, and the use of corpora and the Internet. In addition, shortening the access route is also mentioned and regarded as an important criterion in the compilation of specialized online dictionaries.

Chapter 7 conducts a critical review of the theories of terminology, such as the General Theory of Terminology, the Communicative Theory of Terminology, the Sociocognitive Approach, Frame-based Terminology, and Knowledge Engineering. For the authors, the critical review of the theories can gain insights and offer implications for designing, making and updating specialized dictionaries.

Chapter 8 carries out a thorough analysis of 16 specialized online dictionaries with a list of criteria in the functional framework. It strengthens the authors’ belief that the Function Theory of Lexicography can serve as a way to guide the practice of designing, compiling and updating specialized online dictionaries.

Chapter 9 explores the practice of designing, making and updating specialized online dictionaries based on the tenets of the Function Theory with special reference to the whole compilation process of *Accounting Dictionaries*.

The final chapter offers the conclusions which sum up the main claims and contributions of this book and their implications.

After an overview of the book, some major features and strengths can be summed up as follows:

1. This book distinguishes itself with a well-designed theoretical construction and its proper practical application. It has offered a systematic and comprehensive description of the tenets of the function theory. Furthermore, it refines and updates the theory in many aspects based on the experience gained in the

compilation of practical lexicographical products. Underpinned by the ideas of quick access to a dictionary and supply of punctual information for potential users, the functional methodology has been formulated both as a guideline for the theoretical research, the making of specialized online dictionaries, and the criticism of the works. Particularly in the dictionary making, the functional approach can be used to determine the characteristics and needs of potential readers as well as the types and amounts of data required. With a view to proving the feasibility of the function theory, the authors describe and explain in detail the lexicographical practice of designing, compiling and updating specialized online dictionaries with special reference to *Accounting Dictionaries*. It goes without saying that the brilliant combination of theoretical construction and practical application in the book sets a good example for future writings of this kind.

2. The interdisciplinary nature of specialized online dictionaries has been emphasized in the current monograph. The authors have redefined and categorized lexicography as an information science to stress its interdisciplinary characteristics. In that way, dictionaries, especially specialized dictionaries, can be dealt with in a more sound and natural environment. That is also the reason why the compilation of specialized online dictionaries is regarded as an interdisciplinary activity and calls for the collaboration of lexicographers, specific subject-field experts and IT professionals.
3. Huge space has been devoted to the discussion and determination of lexicographical functions. The authors see the functions as the heart and soul of lexicography, by which the content and form, the data and their selection, preparation and accessibility of a dictionary as well as its potential users' characteristics are determined. Moreover, the two key ideas of function theory—regarding dictionaries as the utility tools and suiting the user's needs—are also realized by lexicographical functions. The former has much to do with the way specialized dictionaries quickly get users to the required data, which is undoubtedly the true focus of lexicography. The latter is a major challenge which requires more advanced techniques to offer multi-functional solutions in specialized online dictionaries for individual users.
4. Considerable importance has been attached to the development and use of advanced techniques and tools in designing, making and updating specialized online dictionaries. In the authors' eyes, to perform the lexicographic functions, lexicographers have to develop and employ advanced techniques, e.g. data filtering, to tailor the data to the specific needs, and provide customized information for individual users. Furthermore, they have to handle the online communication with the users and shorten the access route by those advanced techniques. In addition, the authors agree to adopt corpora and the Internet in the compilation of specialized online dictionaries, but they insist that the data from corpora and the Internet can be appropriately utilized only through the intervention of lexicographers or subject-field experts.

However, it cannot be denied that the book also has its own drawbacks. For example, the lexicographical function theory is required to handle the concepts of

various kinds of languages (general and specialized), for the purpose of establishing an integrated and general theory of the discipline, instead of a specific sub-field, i.e. specialized online dictionaries. In spite of the fact that the lexicographical principles seem to be the same, a specific language type often entails different methodological solutions to suit the look-up needs of potential users. Consequently, the general lexicographical theory ought to deal more widely with certain requirements of the languages: their epistemic constituents (namely, general and specialized knowledge), their variability (national, regional and local), and the kind of documentation describing them, as is mentioned in the final chapter of the present book on the *Accounting Dictionaries*. In addition, some concepts are not explicitly explained in the book. For example, Chapter 7 deals with the concepts of specialized lexicography and terminology, but it ignores the relation of the two disciplines. It is not clear to readers whether the two are overlapping, complementary or independent of each other.

In conclusion, though *Theory and Practice of Specialized Online Dictionaries* is far from perfect, it approaches various aspects of (online) specialized dictionaries from a novel perspective, such as users' needs and dictionary criticism from the functional approach. In a word, a well-designed theoretical construction and its proper practical application within this field of lexicographical research in this book deserve our attention, and various issues and topics with respect to the concept of specialized dictionaries are thoroughly discussed. Undoubtedly, this book is worth reading.