
Why should a theoretical book on lexicography as an area of scholarly interest, written in German, be of relevance to readers of this journal? Can it offer anything that has not already been said on the subject? Yes, it is, and it does. This is the largest single monograph on the theory of lexicography ever attempted: not just a few hundred pages, but 1162 (with a further 129 of bibliographical and other appendices); not just one volume, but (the first of) two.

Its author, Herbert Ernst Wiegand, has almost single-handedly created this specialization of *Wörterbuchforschung*, or ‘dictionary research’, in Germany. Just over 20 years ago, he teamed up with the Duden lexicographer Günther Drosdowski and the linguist Helmut Henne to produce a slim volume, *Nachdenken über Wörterbücher: Theorie und Praxis*. By then, he had already edited, with Henne and Althaus, the encyclopedia *Lexikon der Germanistischen Linguistik*, which was reissued in a completely revised edition in 1980. Since 1982 Wiegand has been one of the general editors of the comprehensive series of, so far, fourteen volumes, entitled *Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft* of which the 3-volume encyclopedia *Wörterbücher/Dictionaries/Dictionnaires* (jointly edited with Hausmann, Reichmann and Zgusta, 1989–91) formed such an important and influential part. In the 1980s Wiegand also edited a run of six thematic issues of the periodical *Germanistische Linguistik* on the subject of German lexicography and three more on bilingual lexicography with German, and kick-started the double series *Lexicographica* (over 90 volumes of the Series Maior and 14 volumes of the *International Annual* have been published since 1984). And as though all this were not enough, Wiegand has himself contributed numerous
papers and monographs to these and other publications (most recently on topics such as the monolingual dictionary for foreign learners of German and the text structure and cross-reference systems of dictionaries), attended relevant conferences and convened seminars in addition to his duties as Professor of German Linguistics at Heidelberg.

All these activities have given Wiegand an unrivalled vantage point from which to survey the growing field of dictionary research. Never satisfied with received dogma, he does not take anything for granted. In his own inimitable quizzical style, he takes us step by step through one critical exploration after another, showing up old cliches, pointing out new possibilities, and dazzling the reader with an array of 17 principles for structuring the subject, 31 conventions for creating new terms, 98 citations from relevant authors, 129 examples of lexicographical problem situations, 144 extracts from dictionaries, 159 diagrammatic or tabular figures and 175 definitions of crucial concepts.

Naturally enough, the discussion starts with the notion of ‘lexicography’ itself. Wiegand demonstrates first what lexicography is NOT (a science, a craft, part of linguistics, applied lexicology) and then what it IS (a calculable, analysable, checkable, manageable, testable and teachable practical process aimed at producing dictionaries to satisfy the reference needs of their users). If lexicography is a ‘cultural practice’ rather than a fully-fledged academic discipline, what is the point of pursuing its theoretical foundations? Where does the theory come from, what is its nature, and what are its benefits? There has always been reflection, of course, in and out of academic and commercial dictionary departments, by conscientious lexicographers, especially by those engaged in scholarly dictionary projects, who (like Hulbert, Zgusta, Burchfield, Landau, Rey and Wahrig) have written informative textbooks, but genuine progress towards a scientific approach can only be achieved if more academics like Wiegand devote themselves seriously to the theoretical foundations and train a new generation in the principles underlying the practice. Dictionary research thus becomes the scientific metafield of lexicography, or conversely, lexicography becomes the empirical object of dictionary research.

Wiegand agrees with the often stated opinion that linguistic knowledge (about words) and world knowledge (about things) are difficult to keep apart (e.g. in definitions), but claims that it is nevertheless possible to draw clear boundary lines between the ‘language dictionary’ (Sprachwörterbuch), the ‘technical dictionary’ (Lexikon) and hybrids like the ‘encyclopedic dictionary’ (Allbuch). The three resulting specializations (Sprachlexikographie, Sachlexikographie and Allbuchlexikographie) can then be subjected to separate or joint ‘metalexicographic’ theorizing. Dictionary research (Wörterbuchforschung) is the interdisciplinary field (which according to Wiegand has not yet achieved the status of a ‘scientific discipline’) that builds upon the principles of Sprachlexikographie and pursues the investigation of all aspects of practical (language) dictionary-making and dictionary use, in four sub-fields (my English equivalents are functional approximations):

- research on dictionary use (Wörterbuchbenutzungsforschung);
- research on dictionary criticism (Kritische Wörterbuchforschung);
research on dictionary history (Historische Wörterbuchforschung);
research on dictionary structure (Systematische Wörterbuchforschung).

It is impossible even within the scope of a review article to cover Wiegand’s treatment of these issues in detail. For readers of German, the following extract (from pp. 79–80) will give a flavour of the tasks involved.

In diesem Sinn kann die Wörterbuchforschung als die Gesamtheit aller, im Schrifttum nachweisbaren, wissenschaftlichen Bemühungen aufgefaßt werden, die darauf abzielen, diejenigen theoretischen, methodischen, terminologischen, historischen, dokumentarischen, didaktischen und kulturpädagogischen Fragen zu beantworten, die sich stellen
(a) bei der Planung und Erarbeitung neuer Wörterbücher,
(b) bei der Pflege älterer Wörterbücher,
(c) bei der kritischen Beurteilung und Leistungsprüfung von Wörterbüchern,
(d) bei der Feststellung von Benutzerbedürfnissen und -verhalten,
(e) beim Einsatz des Computers in der Lexikographie und Wörterbuchforschung,
(f) bei der Erarbeitung einer Geschichte der Lexikographie und Wörterbuchforschung,
(g) bei der Ermittlung der Funktionen von Wörterbüchern innerhalb der Sprach-, Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte,
(h) bei der systematischen Erforschung der Wörterbuchform,
(i) bei der Erforschung des Wörterbuchgegenstandes und seinen Beziehungen zur Wörterbuchbasis und dem Wörterbuchgegenstandsbereich,
(j) bei der systematischen Erforschung der Einteilungen von Wörterbüchern,
(k) bei der Ausarbeitung einer Wörterbuchdidaktik,
(l) bei der bibliographischen Dokumentation von Wörterbüchern und aller metalexikographischen Arbeiten und
(m) beim Aufbau einer allgemeinen Theorie der Lexikographie.

Volume I contains a 256-page introductory chapter on the whole field of dictionary research and the criteria necessary for defining its role(s), including an informative section on the computerization of the lexicographic processes. The rest of the book, from pp. 257 to 1031, deals with the first of the four sub-fields, which I myself refer to as the ‘user perspective’ (Hartmann and James 1998: 152). Volume II will be devoted to the three other sub-fields.

If it is true that the aim of lexicography is to compile dictionaries that meet the needs of users (the fashionable catchword of ‘user-friendliness’ has helped to focus this age-old concern, but it also tends to hide a universally low level of ‘dictionary awareness’), then the user perspective in dictionary research can be legitimized by the following formula, which appears in Chapter 2, a brief overview of research on dictionary use, on p. 260:

Ein Wörterbuch vom Typ_1 wird gebraucht im Bereich B_1 und zwar in Benutzungssituationen vom Typ SIT_1, SIT_2, ..., SIT_n.
(English paraphrase: A dictionary of a certain type is used as part of a certain cultural activity, in a certain context of use.)

Wiegand then elaborates a theory of dictionary use from these basic parameters: various types of reference works (such as general dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries and pedagogical dictionaries) are consulted by users engaged in various activity types (such as reading, translating and language learning) to obtain information needed for various situation types (such as filling a lexical
gap, finding an equivalent and checking a collocation). There is no direct
correlation, incidentally, between the respective exemplars of each of these	hree parameters.

It is the task of empirical dictionary research in this sub-field to study the
conditions of dictionary use in the real world by means of appropriate methods,
and Wiegand shows us how this can be done, not, as we might have expected,
yet another review of previous studies (of which he cites 86 explicitly), but
by gradually building up his own analytical model of reference acts based on
‘action’ theories developed in social science research. He does this by describing
a number of particular problem situations involving 5 fictitious staff and
student members of a research team at Heidelberg, regarding each dictionary
reference as an instance of an action type (Handlungstyp) which can be grouped
into ‘families’ of patterns and rules. The eventual aim is to produce a hierarchical
taxonomy of labelled ‘generic’ sentences, from the most all-embracing

HT-1 EIN WÖRTERBUCH BENUTZEN
(= USE A DICTIONARY)

to the most specific

HT-18Ra.8<FR.66]sHr DIE REGISTERANGABEN DES REGISTERS
DES IDIOMATISCHEN WBS ‘FRIEDERICH (1966)’ IM
REGISTERSUCHBEREICH VON herz MIT sich etwas vom
Herzen reden VERGLEICHEN
(= COMPARE DATA GIVEN IN THE INDEX OF THE DICTIONARY
OF IDIOMS ‘FRIEDERICH (1966)’ UNDER THE STRETCH Herz
[Heart] WITH THAT UNDER sich etwas vom Herzen reden
[pour one’s heart out]).

The ‘usual’ purpose of dictionary consultation acts is to search for data
which can be integrated as relevant information into the communicative activity
currently engaged in by the user, i.e. EIN WÖRTERBUCH ALS
NACHSCHLAGWERK BENUTZEN. However, Wiegand also recognizes
the fact that some less usual purposes are conceivable: to TEST and REVIEW
a dictionary, to COMPARE several dictionaries, to READ (in) a dictionary,
to PRACTISE dictionary skills, or even to USE a dictionary non-
communicatively as a prop for a lamp or door. (By the way, the word use is
ambiguous in English as it can refer either to ‘consultation’ (Benutzung) or
‘benefit’ (Nützen).) Needless to say, dictionary consultation can be successful
or unsuccessful, appropriate or erroneous, proficient or novice.

The 59 wh-questions underlying the issues isolated and described in
Chapter 3 are summarized in a table immediately prior to the start of Chapter 4,
which is on the methodology of user research. The emphasis here is on the
ways and means of collecting data. Wiegand claims, convincingly in my view,
that empirical observation is not possible until we have a reasonably good idea
of the kinds of objects we want to observe and the concepts we need to
interpret them. The theoretical framework of his ‘action types’ and their
associated terminology, Wiegand feels, qualifies best for this difficult task. Of
the dozen or so methods available, he prefers those based on direct observation
(direkte Beobachtung des Benutzers-in-actu), and again stresses the relevance of social science research.

After a brief orientation, five sets of methods are discussed and illustrated with particular reference to research projects tried out at Heidelberg, continuing the problem-based approach and the named persons and anonymous subjects introduced previously. Separate sections are devoted to ‘direct observation’, the ‘written questionnaire’, the ‘test’, the ‘experiment’, and ‘content analysis’. (Other methods, e.g. thinking-aloud and written ‘protocols’, are also, but only briefly, covered in Chapter 4.)

Under the heading of observation, an ingenious exercise with 15 foreign students of German is described in which two assistants log the choices made by the informants from among 40 dictionaries in the seminar library so that they can perform each of the 30 set dictionary-based tasks. The manner in which the students consult a particular dictionary, e.g. in the search for an appropriate antonym to be inserted in a sentence, yields interesting data on the reference skills displayed in relation to the dictionaries selected.

Under the heading of written surveys, problems with the design of a questionnaire are exemplified, raising fundamental issues about the nature and relative usefulness of this research tool. The questionnaire elicits important data from the Heidelberg student informants about (types of) dictionaries consulted, (types of) information categories searched and (types of) look-up situations experienced, e.g. the strong preference, noted also in other user groups surveyed elsewhere, for the bilingual over the monolingual dictionary. The questionnaire which is subsequently revised (twice) in the light of theoretical and practical considerations thus can be fine-tuned into a powerful method for establishing individual or collective ‘user profiles’.

The next section of Chapter 4 is devoted to the hitherto almost completely ignored technique of testing. Wiegand applies findings from personality tests in child psychology and diagnostic tests in education (especially language teaching) to two branches of dictionary research: user training and dictionary criticism. While dictionary criticism will have to wait for a more detailed treatment in Volume II, user instruction is shown to be essential if we want to bring about improvements in the teaching of dictionary reference skills (Wörterbuchdidaktik). Three types of user tests are explored here: tests of consultation skills in actu, tests of dictionary knowledge ex actu, and tests combining skills and knowledge. Each is illustrated by a range of experimental ‘polythematic’ exercises testing the students’ proficiency, e.g. in locating and characterizing macro- and microstructural data or in matching particular parts of entry structures with particular dictionary types. Whether they are ‘yes/no’, multiple-choice or more open-ended, the test items contain tasks related to achievable proficiency levels before or after courses on dictionary skills.

Wiegand is not satisfied just to adapt given formats, but raises penetrating questions about testing theory and practice in general, e.g. about the reliability of statistical procedures in test marking, the relevance of text linguistics to the design of test items, or the piloting and systematic production of test item banks.

Three more observational methods are mentioned, but not discussed in detail
here: replicable (laboratory) experiments, content analysis of descriptive texts (such as those based on interviews), and verbal (sound-recorded or written) protocols. Much more interesting, however, is the final section of Chapter 4 in which Wiegand attempts nothing less than a comprehensive theory of reference contexts (Wörterbuchbenutzungssituationen). This is the most promising (and difficult) part of Volume I of this book, as it combines the work on action types with that on methodology in an effort to exhaustively chart and classify the reasons that lead to dictionary consultation in the first place.

To operationalize the notoriously hard notion of context or situation in user research, the three basic parameters of the ‘user’, the ‘dictionary consulted’ and the ‘reference act’ have to be carefully specified in their interrelation(s) and where necessary supplemented by such other factors as ‘occasion’, ‘reason’ and ‘search question’.

For the purpose of modelling the relationships between the main parameters, Wiegand adapts the conventions of predicate calculus, regarding them as instances of ‘entities’, ‘attributes’, ‘relations’, ‘facts’ and ‘temporal order’, together with their graphic representations by means of rectangles, circles and diamonds connected by lines, with and without arrows. Such flowchart or network diagrams can then be used to depict situations as belonging to one of several types, e.g. a foreign learner, while reading (or composing) a German passage, does not comprehend a particular idiom (or is unsure about a particular noun plural form), therefore consults a particular (monolingual or bilingual) dictionary from which, if he is successful, he learns the appropriate meaning (or form), which helps him to understand (or compose) the passage in question, thus also increasing his proficiency in this respect.

Using the predicate calculus notation in combination with the HT patterns developed in the previous chapter, Wiegand constructs a system on the basis of which more exercises for testing the specific conditions of success or failure can be designed. Factors considered here are communicative conflict and competence, text reception and production, usage ignorance and insecurity, grammatical rules and lexical choices and the like. It is only fair to point out that although the system is impressive, the problem situations are ‘invented’ and therefore the classifications must be tentative. The hope is, nevertheless, that the more we learn about these consultation contexts and their typologies, the more obvious is their relevance to such problem areas as user education, dictionary planning and dictionary criticism.

Some reference contexts are only sketched, such as ‘non-communicative’ ones associated with academic course planning, linguistic analysis or lexicographical processes; others, Wiegand admits, are capable of alternative treatment, such as dictionary use in translation tasks or in critical reviews of dictionaries. Chapter 4 ends with some further thoughts on the use of ‘protocols’, which can be performed by trained observers or users themselves, recorded in the form of written diaries or think-aloud transcriptions, administered with or without supervision, structured or unstructured, etc. I have one minor quibble here: it is not true that Krings’s (1986) study of the translation process has not been followed up by dictionary researchers; at least one PhD
awarded at Exeter (Al-Besbasi 1991) has utilized thinking-aloud protocols to test the use of dictionaries in English-Arabic translation.

Chapter 5 offers a 5-page summary of the (underdeveloped) state of contemporary user research and ends with a plea for more and better Teamarbeit. Wiegand (and his publisher) is to be congratulated on this exemplary book, which is essential reading from now on for anyone specializing in dictionary research and/or dictionary use. Now that we have a workable scheme for Wörterbuchforschung, I look forward to the day when a further expanded ‘reference science’ will allow us to study ALL reference works (not just the ‘lexicographical’ ones) produced by ALL reference professionals (not just lexicographers) to meet the reference needs, and challenge the reference skills, of ALL users!

References


