LEXeter in Japan: A joint lecture by Dr Tom McArthur and Dr Reinhard Hartmann

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Lexicography is in full bloom not only in Great Britain but also here in Japan. Seeing is believing — visit a large bookshop in central London or Tokyo, and you'll see piles of dictionaries, monolingual or bilingual, brand-new or outdated, seriously compiled or only cobbled together.

Lexicography is an ambiguous term. It covers both 'compiling dictionaries' and 'studying dictionaries' (cf. Svensén 1993: 1). The latter is sometimes called 'metalexicography', though both Tom and Reinhard prefer another term, 'dictionary research'.

Lexicography in the sense of 'dictionary-making' has a long history both in the UK and Japan, and the two countries have influenced each other in compiling various word books. English-Japanese dictionaries have learned much from British EFL dictionaries, and British lexicographers must also have learned something from Japanese colleagues who are renowned for their kindness. Am I boasting too much if I say many of the 'user-friendly' access structures in the learner's dictionary originated in *Eiwa-jiten*?

Lexicography is young, however, in the sense of 'dictionary research', said Reinhard. I partly agree and partly disagree with him. If lexicography is compared with, say, philosophy, it is still an infant, or possibly a toddler. However, if we take into account that the Iwasaki Linguistic Circle, even though it is not a lexicographical society, has devoted itself to dictionary research for 35 years, it is almost as old as me! In the very first 'dictionary analysis' by the circle (Ito et al. 1968), such topics as dictionary typology and theory and practice of lexicography were discussed, and as for the 'user perspective', it argued that 'lexicographers must always remember their users' (p. 184, my translation). I have to admit, however, neither lexicographers nor dictionary researchers have seriously studied how their dictionaries are actually used by the average user. This fact brings us a question: Who does this job? Who studies dictionaries from the user perspective? If nobody does, all I can do is to repeat Reinhard's hope in his optimistic tone:

> Who needs dictionaries? We all do, linguists and learners, laymen and experts, mothers and children. Let us hope that the next generation of users will be even better served than ours. (Hartmann 1979: 8).

Lexicography may only be a tiny portion of the cosmos or what Tom calls a 'reference science'. For him the dictionary isn't the only reference tool, even though it does occupy the central position. If the encyclopaedia is the closest sibling, the song book provided in a karaoke parlour is a newborn granddaughter. Newspapers, Yellow Pages, and even web site homepages share some common features with the dictionary.

Lexicography might have put on a little too much fat. New dictionaries, new monographs, new journal papers, and new lexicographical societies appear every year somewhere on the Earth. We are floating in the sea of information on lexicography in both its senses. Besides, a single dictionary may be packed with too much information. I liked Tom's metaphor — he compared Shinjuku to a huge reference book overloaded with information. The poor gentleman who came to Japan for the first time in his life had to be escorted to his hotel by a kind but a little inquisitive Tokyoite. Who can blame him for his ignorance of geographical knowledge (and that of the exotic language)? Lots of skyscrapers, railway lines, underground passages, shopping complexes (as well as strange Japanglish expressions!) all surrounded him. Now imagine you are in the world of lexical, morphological, phonetic, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, cultural etc. information. Are you sure you can go to the place where you want to go and find and decode the necessary information successfully? Surely, various kinds of information should be sorted out and presented in a 'user-friendly' fashion, just as the poor *gaijin* could have enjoyed walking around the megalopolis all by himself if he had had a 'foreigner-friendly' map.

Lexicography throws the lexicographer into a dilemma. If the lexicogra-

pher broadens the scope too much, s/he may get lost in the lexicographical universe and may never be able to solve problems s/he faces every day. If s/he only desperately tackles those problems, on the other hand, s/he never knows where lexicography comes from and where it is heading for. In this sense, it would be helpful and amusing to the lexicographer if there were

> a Museum of Reference and Information. It is an intriguing possibility. Future generations could go into the complex at one end, as they go today into Disneyland . . .
> . . . As we move from the third to the fourth great shift in the information skills, we shall need such things to help us keep our balance, to remember where we have come from, as well as how far we still have to go. (McArthur 1986: 185)

Lexicography is a promising infant. The fourth shift in the information skills has already begun, and reference 'books' in an electronic format are near at hand, even if they may still be, in a sense, primitive tools. I have a dream of being an honourable owner of a gizmo that tells me everything: from the meaning of a word, the correct pronunciation, collocation, and grammatical construction, through a biography of a famous lexicographer, and the name of the road on which Queen's Building of Exeter University is located, to the e-mail addresses of Tom and Reinhard. Perhaps this is a childish dream, but how about this: an electronic dictionary specially designed for the dictionary researcher who tries to know how the dictionary user actually uses a dictionary. It automatically records the following facts: what kind of information the user wanted, what word s/he looked up, which sense of a polysemous word s/he read, what collocation s/he needed, how long it took him/her to understand the information provided, and so on. Such a dictionary may also be a future product, but am I too enthusiastic a Star Trekker?

Lexicography fascinates both LEXeter scholars and Iwasaki members, and we at last got together at the Kenkyusha English Centre in Tokyo on the 1st of September, 1997. The joint lecture attracted 57 people from inside and outside the circle, including lexicographers, linguists, publishers, English teachers, and those who are interested in dictionaries and reference science.

On behalf of my fellow old LEXonians, may I thank Dr Tom McArthur and Dr Reinhard Hartmann for their lectures, Kenkyusha Ltd for its support, and the National Language Research Institute for inviting the two scholars to Japan. Finally, I proudly mention that this joint lecture celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Iwasaki Linguistic Circle and the 90th anniversary of Kenkyusha Ltd.

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