A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LEXICOGRAPHY

Aim of the book
This book aims at a readership ranging from students of linguistics and general readers to practising lexicographers and focuses in particular on ‘various aspects of the monolingual general-purpose dictionary’, though it also promises ‘separate chapters’ on the making of ‘bilingual or multilingual dictionaries’ (x). The latter promise, by the way, is not fulfilled: there is no extensive information on multilingual dictionaries.

Organisation of the book
The book is divided into two main parts: 1. The forms, contents and uses of dictionaries and 2. Linguistic corpora (databases) and the compilation of dictionaries. At the end there is a glossary, a bibliography and a general index. Part 1 has two ‘chapters’, one on Foundations, with five sections, one on Descriptive lexicography with six sections, and one on Special types of dictionaries, with two sections. Part 2 has four chapters: on Corpora for dictionaries (four sections), Design of dictionaries (three sections), Realisation of dictionaries (five sections) and Examples of design and production criteria for major dictionaries (four sections). The various sections were written by several authors, some of whom contributed more than one section. The authorship of the glossary is not disclosed to us.

The risks of multiple authorship are diverging approaches, repetition and different use of terminology. We shall see that these risks have not been completely avoided.

The language used (English) and other formal aspects of presentation (references & bibliography)
Most of the authors are non-native users of English, and inevitably this occasionally shows (though the preface claims some sections were translated for them), as in the repeated use of the awkward render(ed), presumably meaning present(ed) or provide(d) (p. 72ff.), the typically Dutch error of little where few is meant (p. 125), and the use of paragraph where section is the correct word (p. 353). Generally, of course, English written by native speakers is more fun to read, but this cannot be avoided.

Far more serious is the unacceptable way in which in some sections references and abbreviations are used to refer to well-known (usually English) dictionaries, and generally the organisation of the bibliography at the end. In some cases this seems to be due to the fact that some authors are apparently blissfully unaware of conventions and practice in (English) lexicography, in some other cases this is inexplicable. Thus, Piet Swanepoel, well versed in (English) lexicography and bibliography, refers to a certain Hartman (1983) [=Hartmann?] nowhere to be found in the bibliography. Even worse, on p. 65
he refers to Norris & Norris (1971), then a few lines down to Morris & Morris (1975), all the time apparently referring to a work by Morris & Morris (1985!), appearing in the bibliography under the title Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage (1985), abbreviated as HDCU, but the same work is also listed under Norris & Norris (1975), and this seems to be the correct reference. Which prompts me to remark that it has been useful practise in many publications on lexicography to separate the dictionaries and their abbreviations from the rest of the bibliography. For example: LDOCE = Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, etc. Which in its turn prompts me to add that some of the ‘some authors’ above (cf. the section by De Caluwe and Van Santen, pp. 71ff.) are so ignorant of these conventions that they blithely speak of ‘the Longman’ or ‘the Oxford’ and leave it to the reader to find out what on earth they are referring to (obviously to some - which? - edition of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of English, resp. LDOCE and OALD). Even more curiously, on the following pages these authors then proceed to call OED what first was referred to as ‘the Oxford’, quite unaware of the fact that OED always stands for the (multi-volume) New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (1884-1928) and its later editions (initially called NED but later renamed the O(xford) E(nglish) D(ictionary), because of its association with Oxford, where it was produced). This famous book, by the way, is neither to be found in the bibliography under OED nor under Oxford etc. Instead, I was absolutely astonished to find it under ‘Murray, J.A.H. et al (Ed.). (1993) The Oxford English Dictionary’, whose date of publication is of course utterly misleading.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. Burkhanov (pp. 102ff.) refers to a book called COB3, which given the context must mean Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary (1987), usually abbreviated as COBUILD or sometimes CC. However, this is its first edition, not the third and, again, it is not easy to find in the general bibliography (which here has at least two inaccuracies), unless one knows the book. This, by the way, is just one example of this section’s embarrassing bibliographical muddle throughout.

In short, in the first half of the book there are some sections making an absolute dog’s breakfast of references, and the general bibliography has consequently undergone the same treatment. Let me say no more about it.

The glossary
It was a good idea to compile a glossary of terms commonly used in writings about lexicography, even though we already have Hartmann and James’s (prohibitively expensive) Dictionary of Lexicography (Routledge: London & New York, 1998) with its sometimes rather abstruse definitions. I assume that most of the definitions are accurate, though I do have some misgivings. A random check revealed the following: hypernym should be hyperonym; a learner’s dictionary should mention that it is a monolingual dictionary and then of course one can no longer speak of its target language since this implies it is a bilingual dictionary; metaphor seems to confuse the thing with the lexical item (or concept rather), cf. the following entry of metaphorical meaning; reverse dictionary is defined as being the same as a retrograde dictionary, but this term is, for example, on p. 134 also used as being the same as an
onomasiological dictionary; the definition of style label as referring to ‘aesthetically distinctive’ lexical items is in my view odd and unenlightening.

The separate sections
The chapter on Foundations opens with a section by Piet van Sterkenburg on the definition and history of ‘the’ dictionary. Though well-written, the reader might have profited from a survey of the many kinds of books calling themselves ‘dictionary’ and the manifold types of information found there. The space devoted to the history of dictionaries is so cramped with facts that it really becomes uninformative. Čermak’s contribution on source materials is a succinct and clearly presented brief introduction to the field, which can also be said of Paul Bogaard’s summary of user surveys. Rufus Gouws’ section on ‘types of articles, their structure and different types of lemmata’ is all of a sudden much meatier stuff, which the uninitiated general reader will find rather challenging, due to the rather abstruse formalistic presentation and rather subtle distinctions, as between niching and nesting. Next, Piet Swanepoel provides us with an adequate survey of types of dictionaries and their contents.

Chapter 2 Descriptive lexicography opens with De Caluwe and Van Santen’s discussion of phonological, morphological and syntactic ‘specifications’ in monolingual dictionaries. These authors are obviously not really at home in the field of English lexicography, as already betrayed (cf. above) by their curious use of for example the abbreviation ‘OED’. Though the information they provide will serve as some kind of introduction to this area of lexicography, really knowledgeable authors would have been able to give the reader a much more interesting and detailed state-of-the-art account of the developments in the fast developing field of English learner’s lexicography (for this is in fact what they really write about). In the following section Dirk Geeraerts writes about meaning and definition, to me one of the most intriguing problem areas of lexicography. The section is brief, to the point and lucid. Perhaps I should not complain, but a few more details and simple examples might have been welcome for the not too advanced reader. Personally, I fail to see the usefulness of Prédota’s piece on dictionaries of proverbs, a rather specialised corner of lexicography, which I would not have missed in a general introduction to the field. It moreover manages to discuss the subject without defining what a proverb really is. In the general bibliography one looks in vain for many of the books referred to here. Speaking of bibliographical details, in the next section Burkhanov is one of the worst sinners in matters bibliographical (or someone has done the sinning for him...). His contribution on pragmatics is a ragbag of subjects ranging from labels to collocations (I do not see the logical link - in my view the section on labels by Verkuyl, Janssen and Jansen (pp. 297ff.) is far more useful and practical). Though the subject of morphology in dictionaries had already been dealt with, it returns at greater length in a contribution by De Caluwe (again) and Taeldeman, who give an adequate survey of the formal and semantic aspects of morphology in dictionaries. It remains to be seen how practical and effective their suggestion is to show the morphological make-up of words by means of a symbol like ‘*’, as in attract*ive (p. 122). As it is, dictionaries are already sufficiently cluttered with symbols usually completely ignored by the user. I agree, though, that awareness of the ‘morphological history’ may often
be useful, especially for learners. The final section in chapter 2, by Piet van Sterkenburg, discusses onomasiology (from concept to word) and onomasiological dictionaries. The phrase ‘from concept to word’ does not really summarise this process adequately, since in order to start the search process one always needs at least one word. Books catering for this need are e.g. thesauruses, synonym (and antonym) dictionaries and pictorial dictionaries and it is already possible to search the definitions in dictionaries on CD–ROM on certain words, but results are often rather unpredictable due to inconsistent defining techniques. In future we may expect greater systematicity in defining (Van Sterkenburg refers to a promising project by Van Moerdijk).

Chapter 3 (Special types of dictionaries) starts with a short, succinct and well-written section by Mike Hannay on types of bilingual dictionaries. Next, Lynn Bowker writes about dictionaries for special subject fields, in – too – a succinct and well-written piece. By the way, should not Prédota’s section on dictionaries of proverbs have been placed here – if at all? Moreover, what is so ‘special’ about bilingual dictionaries that it warrants inclusion in this chapter? The definition of specialised dictionary in the glossary certainly does not justify this. This field is so vast (terminology, synonyms, abbreviations, pronunciation, idioms, collocations, slang etc. etc.) that this chapter must be considered disappointingly short.

Part 2, Chapter 4, sections 1 and 2 (respectively on corpora for lexicography and the design of electronic dictionaries) were written by John Sinclair, one of the leading experts in this field. In section 3 in this chapter Truus Kruyt discusses the multiple use of linguistic databases like corpora, digitalised dictionaries and thesauruses, from which various types of data can be extracted, either because this was planned in advance in their design (multifunctional databases) or because this happens to be one of the accidental possibilities after the event (reuse of databases). In section 4 Daniel Ridings describes a ‘lexicographic workbench’, i.e. specialised software for creating dictionaries. This entire chapter offers the reader general introductions, without going into great detail.

Chapter 5 (Design of dictionaries) in reality deals with the design of electronic dictionaries. Lineke Oppentocht and Rik Schutz first discuss developments in dictionary design. Electronic dictionaries have numerous advantages: improved and highly flexible access, almost unlimited space making awkward space-saving techniques superfluous, adjustable selection and representation of data, an onomasiological approach in addition to the familiar semasiological approach, integration with or incorporation of other sources, etc. etc. Krista Varantola somewhat more informally then goes over part of the same ground, it seems to me. Hers is admittedly a well and nicely written piece, but I wonder if it had not been better to have one well-organised section on this subject instead, the more so since Burke’s following section (design of online lexicons) also repeats much of the preceding two contributions.

Chapter 6 (Realisation of dictionaries) starts with Booij’s discussion of the coding of phonological, morphological and syntactic information, a subject already treated in sections 2.1 and 2.5 (by the way, this section repeats an earlier section on labels, 2.4.). This section does not offer much news after chapter 2 (Descriptive lexicography) and uses mainly Dutch examples in a
relatively rather overly general discussion. John Simpson next offers an equally readable but likewise rather too general survey of the production of examples. By contrast Fons Moerdijk, in his discussion of the codification of semantic information, delights us with a detailed, instructive and entertaining demonstration of the practical and theoretical problems the lexicographer encounters when trying to distil, describe and present the meanings of a word (in this case school) as found in the multifarious examples in his or her material. As far as I can see, all major issues and their solutions are touched on in this section. As already pointed out above, Verkuyl, Janssen and Jansen present the second (and far better) treatment of labels in this volume. Since labels are, sadly, usually totally ignored by users, one can sympathise with their suggestion that they may be abolished and somehow be replaced by information in the sense definitions (p. 310) (cf. e.g. COBUILD’s defining style). Nicoline van der Sijs concludes this chapter by discussing the codification of etymological information, a subject that is in my view really rather specialist and not so suitable for a short introduction.

It is, finally, not clear to me why we must have this chapter at all as a separate chapter, since its sections would have fitted perfectly in chapter 2. Now they repeat part of the discussions there.

The final chapter, Examples of design and production criteria for major dictionaries, opens with Wim Honselaar’s discussion of bilingual dictionaries. Inevitably, this repeats (part of) Mike Hannay’s earlier contribution, while the business plan at the end is so short as to be useless for those really interested. Willy Martin and Hennie van der Vliet then proceed to discuss the design and production of terminological dictionaries in such a detailed and abstruse way that only the already initiated will (I am afraid) have the stamina to read on to the end. Ferenc Kiefer and Piet van Sterkenburg (section 7.3), in one of the better parts of this book, manage to deal with most relevant aspects of monolingual lexicography. Their remarks on planning are, as in the case of Honselaar, no more than a token attempt to cover this aspect of monolingual lexicography. The book ends with Stefania Nuccorini’s study into a number of English dictionaries of collocations. I have no quarrel with her remarks, which are to the point and helpful. Some people, though, will tend to raise their eyebrows when confronted with the abbreviation OCD, nowhere to be found in the bibliography, though obviously standing for (the excellent) Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English (2002), which likewise is nowhere to be found in the bibliography. It does appear, however, under ‘Runcie, M. (2002)’, which is nice for Moira, but it does remain a fact that she is only the last-named of the ‘advisory board’ (she did write the preface). From what I can gather from the title page, the real editors (‘managing editors’) are Jonathan Crowther, Sheila Dignen & Diana Lea (the last named is unaccountably named as the sole editor in a number of internet catalogues....). Nuccorini, as I have made abundantly clear above, is not alone in this unfortunate aspect of the editing of this book.

General assessment
It is now time to take stock and come to a general conclusion. The organisation of the book into parts, chapters and sections is none too transparent in that some sections might with equal justification have been placed elsewhere. Moreover, there is a certain amount of repetition and
The several sections differ in quality, difficulty and amount of detail, so that some are in fact more suitable for the beginner in this field and some others for the (far) more initiated. These different approaches cause the book to lack real unity. The language of the book being English it is natural for most of the examples to have been drawn from English too. However, some authors – though experts in or at least knowledgeable about Dutch lexicography - betray a not unexpected ignorance of English lexicography, its achievements and conventions, most revealingly emerging in their use and abuse of bibliographical references and abbreviations. The (chaotic, highly inconsistent and error-ridden) general bibliography has consequently suffered as well, though the general editor should be held equally responsible - somehow and sometime things must have been let slip out of control. The general editor of course need not be envied for his job, for getting together such a large number of authors and making them follow instructions and meet deadlines cannot have been a sinecure. Personally, my own wish list of topics would have included more on the many types of dictionaries and in particular on one of the glories of British lexicography: the monolingual learner’s dictionary, with to date at least five major contenders for the adjectives ‘excellent’, ‘ground-breaking’ and ‘innovating’.

Does this mean that the book as a whole is unusable? Certainly not. There are few up-to-date general introductions to lexicography written in English and if the book is used selectively it will still be an adequate introductory text. Personally, however, I can well imagine that university instructors teaching future courses in (English) lexicography would still prefer Sidney Landau’s Dictionaries. The Art and Craft of Lexicography (completely rewritten 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2001 – not listed in the bibliography, though the first edition is mentioned twice (!), for 1984 and 1989......). If such instructors were to add a couple of chapters from Bo Svensén’s still mostly relevant Practical Lexicography, etc. (Oxford University Press, 1993) and some from the present volume, for instance Moerdijk’s interesting discussion of semantic discrimination, they would be offering students a solid foundation to build on. The advantages of Svensén and Landau (and perhaps also Howard Jackson’s general introduction, Lexicography, Routledge, 2002) are that they give a survey of all major problems, presented by one author with hands-on experience systematically and without overlap and at the same level of difficulty throughout. Moreover, the focus will then be more consistently, and less superficially, on English and English lexicography.

It must be admitted, though, that not all readers will be students. Many different categories of readers will no doubt find this book quite useful and instructive, at least in places. In the latter respect the book does indeed, in my opinion, taste like the well-known curate’s egg.