LEXICOGRAPHY IN ITALY: SPECIFIC THEMES AND TRENDS

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I. Lexicography in Italy

Lexicography as practised in Italy is almost exclusively the domain of Italian scholars who usually publish their work in Italian in books and journals which circulate in Italy. The purpose of this special issue of IJL is to continue, integrate and update some of the articles that appeared in the meritorious encyclopaedic work edited 15 years ago by Hausmann et al. (1989–1991), along with papers which have been published more recently in miscellaneous works and international journals.

We have sought to highlight aspects of lexicography connected to special characteristics both old and new of the Italian linguistic and cultural scene therefore not restricted to the national language. The papers in this issue concern mainly historical lexicography, dictionaries of synonyms, problems in giving etymological information in reference tools for Italian, dialect dictionaries and linguistic atlases. To complete the picture, an analysis of Italian synchronic monolingual dictionaries, should be provided and will hopefully appear in the near future.

We could have given more room to highly interesting lexicographers, as was done in the special March 2002 IJL issue dedicated to French lexicography, or to CD-ROM dictionaries or to dictionary exercise books, since both are plentiful on the Italian market and some are top grade, but we feel that the topics selected focused better on the peculiarities of compiling dictionaries in Italy.

Bilingual lexicography of Italian, which is quite lively for European languages and targeted almost exclusively at Italians, is not included in this issue since it is not very different from European bilingual lexicography of other ‘minor’ languages: furthermore Italian bilingual lexicographers usually provide news at the international level.

Italian bilingual lexicography has shown major improvements at least in the treatment of collocations and multi-lexical expressions, both based on recent monolingual Italian lexicographic and corpus linguistics research and independent of it. We will mention only some works: good dictionaries are the bilingual German-Italian dictionary of Giacoma and Kolb (2001), the Dutch-
Italian one by Lo Cascio (2001) and the Italian-Polish one by Ciesla et al. (2001–…). A peculiar translators’ dictionary is Blumenthal and Rovere (1998; see also section 4)).

2. The glorious tradition of historical lexicography

Some contribution devoted to historical lexicography could not be omitted in this showcase. Since 1612, when the Accademia della Crusca published its Vocabolario, historical lexicography of Italian has always had a high standard. The Vocabolario was a model for modern dictionaries of five European languages: French, Spanish, Portuguese, English and German (see Parodi 1983).

In Italy, historical lexicography enjoys uncontested prestige and it is the area in which most work is conducted at the university level. In 2004, the electronic version of both Tommaseo and Bellini (1865–1879, 8 volumes) and the first edition of the Vocabolario dell’Accademia della Crusca supported by a new anastatic print were put on the market. Leaving aside the intrinsic value of this operation, the publishing company Zanichelli, which edited the electronic version of Tommaseo and Bellini, explains in the introduction to the Zingarelli (2004) how this new support has enhanced the lexicographic content in a general dictionary which is not historical: « the CD-ROM was already used to compile this reprint of the Zingarelli, enabling the back dating of the first written statement of over 1,800 words. »

An electronic version of the 1st edition of the Vocabolario della Crusca was prepared in 2001, and it was published on the Internet with a rich query programme, fruit of the joint work of the Accademia della Crusca and the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Now there is a brand new CD-ROM of the first edition and a new anastatic reprint. The electronic version of all five editions (1612; 1623; 1691; 1729–38; 1863–1923, summing up to 22 great printed volumes!) is ready and it will be on the Internet. Upon consultation of the electronic edition of Crusca we realise that more knowledge can be found not only concerning the Italian language but for instance also about Renaissance art lexis which the Vocabolario reports. As Nencioni (2001) comments, thanks to this sophisticated reading of Cosimo Bartoli (a follower of the Alberti tradition) and of Vasari, the space allocated to architectural terminology of the 16th century proves to be well above expectations.

The attention paid to the living Florentine use by the Accademici della Crusca appears more widespread, if the dictionary can be turned inside out and be read as a whole text and not just starting from the headwords. Consultation of the Vocabolario della Crusca in its electronic edition will be a benefit also for metalexicographic research and for the history of lexicography.
3. Why speak of special dictionaries?

How special are dictionaries of synonyms or of dialects in the Italian panorama? They are special since they do not concern Italian lexis or dialect in its entirety: the latter regards Italian in particular because it intrinsically is a unidirectional bilingual endeavour, even though, as Barbato and Varvaro explain in their paper, the direction has changed in time. Previously their purpose was to make an inventory of a heritage and convey dialectophones towards the national language; today their purpose is to bring educated Italophones closer to a language which is endangered so that it comes back to life. They are special because they have special functions as compared to general dictionaries: the linguistic work which goes into them (see for this aspect Sgroi, 1990: 15-136) makes them special in another sense, too; as Marazzini and Crevatin try to show in their contributions, the problem of synonymy (diachronical sediment plus regional synonyms) and the role of dialects are pervasive in the history of the Italian language and culture.

Marazzini’s work on dictionaries of synonyms has not been translated: even the best translator would have weighed it down, because he/she would have had to find heterosynonyms for Italian synonyms.

4. Dictionaries, concordance, and the use of corpora

The term *Corpus linguistics* comes to us from English, but curiously the initial steps of this practice of electronic sorting were taken by an Italian scholar on a number of Latin texts (see Busa 1951), the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

The lexicographer who in the paratext of his Italian dictionaries and in particular in GRADIT explained more thoroughly the criteria with which he chose the headwords and the usage markers is the linguist Tullio De Mauro. Even before De Mauro became involved in general dictionary editing as such, he was the most active researcher in the field of the applications of lexicography on quantitative bases. His first lexicographic work setting out from a corpus was VELI (1989), followed by LIP (1993); but they are lists of words, as was the list called *Vocabolario di base* published by De Mauro (1980). His first dictionary with definitions and examples was the DIB, which came onto the market in 1996. His lexicographic works are corpus-based, particularly the choice of multiword entries which he discussed with Annibale Elia and his team from the University of Salerno, i.e. one of the centres in Italy with the longest experience in corpus linguistics. Usage labels such as CO (common) AU, BU (respectively Alto Uso and Basso Uso, ‘very frequent or not very frequent’) for each meaning of a word are corpus-driven.

A considerable number of papers collected in the miscellaneous work edited by De Mauro and Lo Cascio (1997) show how research on corpus evidence and dictionaries – envisaged as structured data bases in line with Fontenelle (1997)
have been widespread in the metalexicographic work of Italian linguists for quite some time.

However, even those in the literary field and in education supply lexicography with significant materials. Giuseppe Savoca compiled his *Vocabolario della Poesia Italiana del Novecento* (1995), from a corpus of 73 works by 16 twentieth century Italian poets: it is a concordance dictionary, that is, exhaustive concordance, lemmatised, and with grammatically classified headwords. Compared to an ordinary dictionary it does not have the semantic definitions of headwords, but it does report indexes of absolute and relative frequencies. Although this is a magnificent source of inspiration for teaching Italian lexis by way of the language of poets, this *Vocabolario* only provides a very narrow context of each verse, even though it has 1,150 pages set out in three thickset columns. This weakness could be overcome by a CD-ROM edition. Marconi et al. (1994) supply detailed lists of the words used by pupils in Italian elementary schools in their compositions but not found in their readings, and vice versa of the words which pupils did not use in their writing but which appeared in textbooks, children's books and comics. It is a very useful tool to compile children's dictionaries which may also be exploited to select the language to be used in the defining section of a learner's dictionary entry.

Though not based on an electronic corpus, the Italian monolingual dictionary by Sabatini and Coletti (2003) is based on a thorough study of texts in order to supply valency patterns of more than 10,000 verbs, and to document the 'textual' and pragmatic value and collocations of conjunctions, pronouns and adverbs above all when they occur in ancient texts, to prove the fact that their textual use was not an exclusively modern development of spoken Italian.

The dictionary by Blumenthal and Rovere (1998), which is based on an Italian newspaper corpus, is a bilingual dictionary into German, with syntactic constructions and a wonderful selection of Italian contexts which are ample enough to give a good idea of the use of 1,729 Italian verbs with all their shades of meaning. Unfortunately, even though it could be considered as one of the best bilingual lexicographic works dealing with Italian, a CD-ROM version is not available yet. Indeed, whoever might think of a new edition of a monolingual or bilingual Italian dictionary would be advised to check the entries against these 1,729 verbs and the selection of collocators by the Giacoma and Kolb (2001) for language items such as verbs, nouns or adjectives.

5. A crucial moment for Italian language and its lexicography

In the last fifty years the Italian language has tumultuously become a spoken language and as such it runs the same risks as all living organisms. So, what about Italian lexicography in the next 20 years? Will it continue to be an excellent diachronic museum-style lexicography, or will it become like today's dialectal lexicography (i.e. meticulously descriptive)? Or will it be an excellent general and special lexicography because it adapted to the needs of a
community which was strong enough – despite centuries of motionless written use – to speak, write, and conduct scientific research in Italian and to make others learn its living language?

Italians have always considered dictionaries as mirrors which reflect the health of the language, but there is a gap between those who use Italian, i.e., 95%, and those who have learnt at school how to use the required tools – monolingual dictionaries above all - to make good use of the language and understand what others wrote.

Lexicographers and teachers can play a major role in transmitting to the Italophone community in Italy and in the world (Italian is the fifth language studied worldwide) the conscious knowledge of a living language, with the right words for all occasions, from a serenade to a scientific presentation. Lexicographic tools in the hands of linguists and their students on the one side and too commercial dictionaries on the other, end up falling short of one major function, that is long life training of native speakers. Both in fact are missing out on something: the former lack immediateness and usability, the latter do not have scientifically grounded innovation.

In the debate about the future of Italian and other ‘lesser spoken’ language entered recently the European Federation of National Institutions for Language, a body consisting of the central or national institutions for research, documentation and policy relating to the officially recognised standard languages within the states of the European Union. The Federation ‘recognises that education, the media and public discourse play central roles in the dissemination and development of national languages’. Representing Italy in the Federation are the Accademia della Crusca and the Opera del Vocabolario Italiano (a National Research Centre (CNR) Institute), two profoundly lexicographic institutions (see Beltrami and Fornara’s contribution in this issue of IJL) which, contrary to what their history might lead to think, are not interested in the museum-like conservation of Italian. Francesco Sabatini, the President of the Accademia della Crusca, has stated that ‘each individual has to be given the opportunity to learn a second foreign language’ (in addition to English) and that ‘the choice of the second foreign language must be made freely’. (2004:2)

The Italian state is 150 years old, but the idea of Italy as a country with a national language was freely formed, eight centuries ago, by artists, scientists, men and women of letters belonging to a truly European dimension. At the start of this third millennium, if Italian is to be chosen freely by Europeans and other foreigners interested in learning it, Italian native speakers must become more aware of how they speak and write in their native language and contribute actively to the growth of dictionaries as aids to successful communication.

Notes

1 Translation into English by Marylin Costa. This study is part of the FIRB 2001 national research project: The impact of diachrony, text-type and special languages
variation on models and methods of corpora annotation and query, coordinated by Carla Marello (http://www.corpora.unito.it). The project funded revision of the English and French papers for this special issue.


3 See Di Donna Prencipe (1996) for interesting details about Nicola Zingarelli and his dictionaries and Beccaria and Soletti (2004) for up to date contributions about Tommaso’s work and life.

4 Marello (1989, 2003) is to be completed at least with Salerno (1999), and with the papers about bilingual dictionaries with Spanish, French. English and German which are in Ferrari and Pulcini (2002).


6 The initiative was announced by Giovanni Nencioni in IJL 14 no 1 (2001).

7 In Barbera and Marello (in print) there is an attempt to explain through terminological discussion the relations between corpus linguistics and some portions of Italian lexicography.

8 Such an adaptation can start also by gender studies applied to electronic onomasiological lexicography: see Manera 2000 and Bazzanella et al. 2000.

9 Quoted from the site http://www.eurfedling.org

References

A. Dictionaries


Savoca G. 1995 Vocabolario della poesia italiana del Novecento. Le concordanze delle
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poesie di Govoni, Corazzini, Gozzano, Moretti, Palazzeschi, Sbarbaro, Rebora, Ungaretti, Campana, Cardarelli, Saba, Montale, Pavese, Quasimodo, Pasolini, Turoldo, Bologna: Zanichelli.


B. Other literature


