

Modern Approaches to Teaching English Lexicography at the University of Freiburg, Germany

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Abstract

Changes in the Russian system of higher education according to the Bologna agreement, the country's joining the European Higher Education Area make it necessary to redesign the existing university syllabi in accordance with the international requirements. Therefore the experience of European universities in organizing the process of education at the undergraduate and graduate levels has become of a great importance. The article aims at describing some methods of teaching lexicography, a particular aspect of linguistic education, which are used in Germany. It is based on the observations and the course analysis undertaken at the University of Freiburg (Germany). The article brings to light some modern approaches to teaching lexicography and organizing the research work of students. The facts mentioned in the given article can be employed in modernizing higher linguistic and teachers' training education in Russia as well as other countries.

Keywords: higher education, international experience, bachelor and master programs, Germany, English lexicography, research

1. Introduction

New realities of higher education in Russia which are being developed in a more open society bring to light a broader range of demands to the social and didactical status of foreign languages. As a result there arouse new demands to teachers of foreign languages and the linguistic and methodological training they get at universities. Innovative trends in this sphere are determined by the task to modernize the system of education in Russia as a whole and the system of linguistic education in particular. The main ideas and principles of the governmental policies on modernization of education are stated in the strategy 'Russian education – 2020' (Izotova, 2014; Mosina, 2014).

Transition of the Russian system of higher education to the three level pattern, introduction of ECTS involves considerable changes in the workload of students with the increase of individual and research work. That is also of a great importance for future specialists in foreign languages, teachers and linguists, who study now at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Most of the European countries including Germany have already undergone this process of transition and successfully implemented new bachelor and master programs in the field of philology (Reuter, 2012; Kehm, 2012; Meffert, 2010; Hofland et al, 1982). The best experiences of German universities in this area, analysis of modern informational recourses and scientific research methods may become a powerful tool in improving the system of higher education in Russia according to the Bologna Agreement principles. Implementing up to date methods and approaches to teaching foreign languages used at German universities will contribute to a better organization of the educational process at Russian universities on both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The University of Freiburg (Baden-Wuerttemberg) is famous for its language department which is believed to be one of the most distinguished in Germany. Well-known for its new undergraduate and graduate degree programs, the Department of English at the University of Freiburg offers students the opportunity to master a number of various courses of study in English linguistics, literature and culture. During its more than 120 year history the Department of English has become renowned for its researches including corpora studies, world Englishes, history of English, lexicology and lexicography and others (Kortmann et al, 2005; Leech et al, 2009; Lacoste, 2012). There are also courses on lexicography at the Department of English. Since lexicography is rarely a part

of a curriculum at Russian linguistic departments, this area of German experience deserves special attention.

This paper results from a research project, conducted at the English Department of the University of Freiburg (Germany) in September-November 2013 under a grant of the German Academic Exchange Service.

2. Methodological Framework

2.1 Literature Review

Lexicography is a science of dictionary-making, the writing and making of dictionaries (Lipka, 1990). One of the most outstanding British linguists Samuel Johnson defined a 'lexicographer' as a 'writer of dictionaries, a harmless drudge that busies himself intracing the original, and detailing the signification of words'. Partially it is true even nowadays. All the decisions lexicographers make have consequences, and those consequences are almost always political, reflecting the values of the individual editor and his or her context (Ogilvie, 2013).

Following the definition of Landau, a dictionary is a text that describes the meanings of words, often illustrates how they are used in context, and usually indicates how they are pronounced. He also states that dictionaries are powerful. If a reference book is called a dictionary it tends to sell better than it would if called by another name because the word suggests authority, scholarship, and precision (Landau, 1989).

Nevertheless Jackson stresses that though a dictionary is a reference book about words, it is a book about language. Its nearest relative is the encyclopedia, but this is a book about the 'real world', not about languages. The distinction between dictionary and encyclopedia is not always obvious, and there are often elements of one in the other. But they do not share the same headword list and they do not provide the same information for the headwords that they have in common. People consult dictionaries to find out information about words. It is also a record of the vocabulary of a language. It is distinguished, as a linguistic description, from the grammar book (Jackson, 2002).

According to Bailey and Weiner, traditions in English lexicography are probably the most important influence on their present scope and on their conventional contents. Bailey remarks that some linguists treat it as a reflection of the purist tradition in which correct usage is of a greater importance than effective English (Bailey, 1989).

Weiner goes even further saying that no English lexicographer starts with a blank sheet of paper, but rather stands in a tradition of dictionary making that reaches back more than six centuries. While some lexicographers revise and update existing dictionaries to produce editions, others try innovations and hack a fresh path for lexicography. But even in this case, they employ the work of previous generations of lexicographers, both in determining the headword list and in deciding what kinds of information to provide (Weiner, 1987).

The idea of traditions can also be traced in the works of Bejoint when he points out the three factors that have been shaping English dictionaries since the middle of the twentieth century and will probably continue to shape them as well as the dictionaries of other languages. They are the study of how dictionaries are used, the application of linguistics to the lexicographic description of the language, and the use of the computer in the preparation and in the consultation of the dictionary text. He continues saying that linguists can show lexicographers what should be done, the computer provides them with better means of doing what they have decided to do, and user studies tell them how well they have done it (Bejoint, 1994). According to his words, modern dictionaries have the goal to become objective records of the language and indicate the values and attitudes of the public at large rather than the views of some individuals (Ibid).

Weiner in his works devoted to the Oxford English Dictionary states that the New Oxford English Dictionary project differs from most previous dictionary projects that the Oxford University Press has undertaken not merely in its scale, but also in the quality and extent of the planning that has been devoted to it (Weiner, 1987).

2.2 Teaching Lexicography at the University of Freiburg (English Department)

A special course has been designed at the English Department to provide future linguists with the basic knowledge and skills of dictionary research. The name of the class is 'Empires of Words – Lexicographical, Cultural and Ideological Aspects of the Major English-Language Dictionaries'. Within the German academic classification it stands under the heading 'Hauptseminar/Masterseminar', which means that it is an advanced class or a class for graduates. It can be attended by both undergraduate and graduate students who major in English and American Studies, English Language and Linguistics, European Linguistics, and future teachers of English. The idea of a joint class for students with various levels of education might sound ambiguous, but it is well compensated by different exam requirements for these students. While all of them need to present a research project at the end of the term, for graduates its length must be 12 to 18 pages and for undergraduates and future teachers – only 10 to 15 pages. Consequently, the number of ECTS points the students obtain for their papers is

different: 10 and 8. Such dual requirements are widespread at the University of Freiburg and can be explained by the recent transitions in German higher education towards bachelor and master programs within the framework of the Bologna Agreement. Some seminars, e.g. in Literary Studies are already offered for undergraduates or graduates only (Studienverlaufsplaene fuer die Faecher im Studiengang Bachelor of Arts, 2013; Studienverlaufsplaene fuer die Faecher im Studiengang Master of Arts, 2013; Martynova, 2014).

The aim of the class 'Empires of Words – Lexicographical, Cultural and Ideological Aspects of the Major English-Language Dictionaries' is to learn the origins of English and American lexicography, to revise the main stages of development of the Oxford English Dictionary – one of the most renowned dictionary of English, to give an outline of the World English lexicography, to compare and contrast German-English and English-German dictionaries, to analyze modern electronic dictionaries in order to find out about ongoing changes in present-day English vocabulary and discourse conventions. The seminar presumes a detailed discussion of the major classical and new English language dictionaries such as OALD (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary), LDOCE (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English), COBUILD (Collins Birmingham University International Language Database), CIDE (Collaborative International Dictionary of English) and Macmillan. The class has a strong research component, with participants carrying out their own projects on various fields of lexicography.

One of the goals of advanced seminars is to provide students with the research tools and topics which they would further employ in their bachelor and master theses. The class on English lexicography is not an exception. The skills the students acquire while making their own projects help them in the future in their work as teachers of English and linguists and also to complete more detailed term and final papers.

All the topics covered in the class 'Empires of Words – Lexicographical, Cultural and Ideological Aspects of the Major English-Language Dictionaries' are subdivided into five groups. Students learn important facts about the foundation of English Lexicography, the history of the Oxford English Dictionary, lexicography beyond the British Isles, dictionaries for foreign learners and make a summary concerning usage of dictionaries and standardization of English.

The first session is given to organisation and introduction. Topics for further discussions are distributed among the students. Usually one topic is presented by 2-3 people. In their presentations students devote approximately 30 minutes to major fact of the topic and 30 minutes to discussion and hand-out activity. During the last 30 minutes conclusions are made together with and guided by the professor. Before this session students get the task to consult several dictionaries to find out whether or not they have entries for the following words, senses or expressions: 'put down', 'dis', 'ute', 'madras', 'copacetic', 'farrow', 'oats', 'to read smb the riot act', 'up the spout', 'wen', 'wonky', 'skank', 'offshoring', 'Los Angeles', 'plc'. The dictionaries to be used are Oxford English Dictionary Online, Webster's 3rd, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, COBUILD, Encarta World English Dictionary, Oxford-Duden bilingual. Students are also asked to name dictionaries that would alert the foreign learner to the fact that it is 'avoid doing something' (and not * 'avoid to do something') and 'possibility of doing something' (and not * 'possibility to do something').

The second session entitled 'Prelude to 1755' is a discussion from the beginnings of English lexicography to Dr. Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language. It provides a brief history of English lexicography (semaseological dictionaries), semaseological lexicography, onomasiological dictionaries, direct ancestors of European dictionaries, Greek-Latin glossaries, Latin-Latin glossaries, Alfric's Glosary – the oldest glossary giving English equivalents, 'The New World of English Words: or a General English Dictionary' by Edward Philips, 'The New English Dictionary' by John Kersey) and some general information about Dr. Samuel Johnson and his 'A Dictionary of the English Language'.

The hand-out activity for this session in October 2013 involved comparing the initial plan of Samuel Johnson's 'A Dictionary of the English Language' (1747) and the preface to the first edition of his Dictionary dated 1755. Each passage contained four quotations. The class was divided into two groups. One was to analyze quotations from the plan, the second – quotations from the preface. All the students had to answer the same three questions: 1). What does Johnson think of the lexicographer occupation? 2). What are his views on language in regards to language change? 3). How does he assess and evaluate his work? The ideas described in the extracts are different, they illustrate the transition of Johnson's view on lexicography, which gave plenty of thoughts and judgments for discussion.

The next three sessions are designed to the study the history and development of the Oxford English Dictionary. The first topic is entitled 'From Sir James Murray to Chester W. Minor: the people who produced the first edition'. Students learn about the appeal of the Philological Society made in 1857, the reasons for creating a

dictionary of the English language, James Murray, Chester W. Minor and their contribution to English lexicography. At this stage students also learn how various linguistic, business and technical and ethical problems were solved when the first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary was been prepared for publication.

During the first session of this block in November 2013 the students were suggested to study the appeal of the Philological Society to read books and make extracts for the new English dictionary. Then the students were to answer two questions: 1). How did they collect information? 2). What problems could this method have brought about? The students were encouraged to dwell on the work of volunteers involved in compiling the Oxford English Dictionary, th advantages and disadvantages of this procedure.

‘Taking the Oxford English Dictionary into the electronic age: the second and third editions’ is the topic of the second session. It is devoted to the development and changes the Oxford English Dictionary had to undergo during the 20th century, including creation of the second supplement, first illustrative quotations, scientific and taboo words, transliteration of foreign words, replacement of Murray’s system of phonetic transcription with International Phonetic Alphabet, conversion of text to electronic tape, digitalization, advanced search tools in the current online version. The online version of the Oxford English Dictionary is demonstrated to students in order to show them all the advantages of its search tools including etymology.

The had-out part of the second session of this block held in November 2013 consisted of analyzing two words, Nazi and pussy, the all the three editions of the Oxford English Dictionary. The class was provided with paperback dictionaries published in various decades of the 20th century. Their task was to trace the changes that these the words ‘Nazi’ and ‘pussy’ had passed through and to connect the changes with historical events.

The final part of this block is entitled ‘The potential of an electronic dictionary: illustrations and applications from historical syntax to cultural studies’. While presenting this topic in November 2013 the students divide it into four sections. The first one, the Oxford English Dictionary and Popular Culture, included an extract from the cartoon ‘South Park’. In this extract the word ‘faggot/fagot’ is used not correctly. The students were instructed to listen to the extract and to say how much of the episode was correct, and how much fictional using the definitions of the word ‘faggot/fagot’ from the Oxford English Dictionary. In the second section, the Oxford English Dictionary and History, the students heard a part of Martin Luther king’s famous speech ‘I Have a Dream’ were the word ‘Niger’ is repeated many times. Then they were suggested to analyze the definitions of this word in all the three editions of the Oxford English Dictionary and mark their changes throughout the time. The third section, the Oxford English Dictionary and the History of English, was devoted to the origin of French words in the English language. In the forth section, the Oxford English Dictionary and Linguistics, the students were given the task to trace progressive forms in English on the examples from the Oxford English Dictionary, and to answer the question whether it can be used as a linguistic corpus.

The third block of the seminar ‘Empires of Words – Lexicographical, Cultural and Ideological Aspects of the Major English-Language Dictionaries’ is devoted to lexicography beyond the British Isles and encompasses English-language dictionaries in the USA and outside Britain and the United States. Discussion opens with Noah Webster: students are suggested to talk about his life, the historical period he lived in, and his major achievements. A special stress is made on Webster’s Third and the scandal which arouse around that edition. Finally there is a discussion about Webster and its rivals, i.e. the American lexicographical scene today. One session is planned for World English lexicography, dictionaries from outside Britain and the United States. Students are encouraged to compare and contrast dictionaries published in different countries, to analyze how word definitions differ from country to country.

The forth block – ‘Dictionaries for foreign learner’ - is of the utmost importance for future teachers of English. It comprises analysis of classic and new dictionaries such as OALD (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary), LDOCE (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English), COBUILD (Collins Birmingham University International Language Database), CIDE (Collaborative International Dictionary of English) and Macmillan. Students discuss various possibilities these dictionaries provide for EFL learners and study different ways of choosing the right dictionary depending on educational needs. German-English and English-German dictionaries are also analyzed from the point of their authenticity. During the third session of this block students are asked to conduct a survey and find out what dictionaries are mostly used by their friends. The last session of this block is devoted to web-based dictionaries, translators and databases.

Only during the first session some basics, mainly concerning organization of the seminar are provided by the instructor. The class is indeed strongly practically oriented while the students are encouraged to obtain new data about dictionaries through their own experience and presents their findings to the fellow students.

The information on which they should talk is generally quite new and unfamiliar to the students. They really

must use all their skills first to get familiar with sometimes totally new information and then to present it in a clear cut manner to the others. It is suggested to the students to start working on their projects as early as possible. First they together work out a plan and distribute responsibilities within the group. This plan should be approved by the professor as well as the intermediate and final versions of the presentation. Designing their projects the students also acquire extra team work skills which are indeed precious while the class is an international one.

50 to 60 minutes detailed topic presentations open all the sessions. The students who talk during a class prepare and distribute hand-outs involving their peers in active work and discussion during all the time. Students are welcome to come forward with questions and comment on the new topic.

The second part of any class on lexicography is a practical one when the students are suggested to analyze vocabulary entries, to work with both paperback and online dictionaries. Preparing such a task is obligatory for the presenters, and bears a strong didactical component. Students get familiar with various methods of presenting new scientific facts to their fellow students in a interesting way.

The listeners, in their turn, become more skilled at team work as they are usually divided into larger or smaller groups while completing practical tasks. Groups are formed at random, and active participation is obligatory. Problem solving helps the students to better understand and memorize new facts and eliminates the possible subject knowledge gap between them and the presenters.

Professor's role during the whole session seems to be the one of a common onlooker, but this is just an illusion. In fact, the professor's role is crucial. He is the one who backs up, gives additional facts and guides the students. Besides he controls all the stages of initial preparation for a seminar. Being at the very center of the process, the professor lets the students conduct sessions sharing the responsibility.

By the end of the semester all the students attending this class are required to turn in their term papers on various aspects of lexicography as a part of the exam. Written works is an essential component of higher education in Germany (Ahlstrand et al, 2002). In most cases the students build their papers upon the class presentations developing some aspects and making deeper analysis of corpus linguistics phenomena. The individual research skill they get during at the seminar contributes greatly to the successful completion of their term papers.

3. Results

As a result of the analysis of the course 'Empires of Words – Lexicographical, Cultural and Ideological Aspects of the Major English-Language Dictionaries' taught at the Department of English, University of Freiburg, it is possible to identify certain up-to-date conditions of teaching English lexicography at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Firstly, the syllabus should cover the major stages in the history and development of the English language dictionaries. It should contain information not only about British and American dictionaries and lexicographers, but also the latest trends in the lexicographical research of the World Englishes and the results if this research.

Secondly, a deep involvement of students in the class and syllabus design results in a high degree of creativity. Students need to be encouraged to prepare scientific material and conduct classes under the supervision of a professor. Team work and peer education make a considerable contribution to their research and teaching skills. Only being plunged into the subjects students understand and learn them better.

Thirdly, hand-out should be an essential part of a lexicography class. Students should have opportunities to touch old dictionaries, to see and to work with copies from ancient folios. The use of visual aides can be called a key to success of a lexicography class. Only employing computer and online technologies can help students feel the present state of art on linguistics and dictionary making.

Fourthly, as this course is available to both undergraduate and graduate students, it is a valuable example of how students with different background can attend one and the same class. A carefully selected and organized set of additional assignments supplemented to the course helps to make it diverse for different students with the quality of education remaining at a high level.

4. Conclusion

Teaching lexicography and working with dictionaries is a complex task. Working with modern dictionaries requires both linguistic and computer skills, the ability to search for necessary facts in a vast amount of information concentrating only on relevant details. Modern online dictionaries have already become a powerful tool in the hands of teachers of foreign languages, providing not only the basic information about words, but also vast data on their history, etymology and usage, as well as vocabulary exercises. And yet it is already difficult to

imagine modern linguistics without the data obtained by means of corpora research. It has become vital for a linguist to apply, or, at least, to be familiar with corpus research methods. The project helped to witness how these methods are successfully taught at the University of Freiburg. Serious and difficult tasks, problem-based learning and team work boost the students' activity, help them plunge into the world of lexicographical research and quickly become professionals. Ideas of peer education employed at the seminar help them to develop their communicative skills and, again, get a deeper insight into dictionaries. The University of Freiburg approaches of teaching lexicography to undergraduate and graduate linguistics students are worth considering and successful, giving the students a deeper insight into the world of dictionaries.

5. Recommendations

The results of analyzing the course 'Empires of Words – Lexicographical, Cultural and Ideological Aspects of the Major English-Language Dictionaries' can be used in compilation of syllabi for undergraduate and graduate college and university students who major in English Philology and EFL. These data can be applied to the Russian system of higher education and the new programs for bachelors and masters of education.

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