WORKSHOP of the Seminar of 23 January 2012

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Topic: **Wiktionaries and eLexicography: current trends**

Introduction

Electronic tools have revolutionised not only data processing in lexicography, but also its whole organization and workflow. The websites whose content is created by users include various dictionaries; their number, size and reliability is growing. But there is also a growing number of traditionally compiled dictionaries that are freely accessible online. Discuss the current trends with the following in mind:

How quickly can you find lexical information online? How do you evaluate its reliability?

Will wikis outperform traditional lexicography? Where are their limits?

Have you ever contributed to a (lexicographical) wiki project? Why/why not?

KEYWORDS for DISCUSSION

1. Organization of the dictionary making process

2. Free online dictionaries

3. Reliability of online content

CONCLUSIONS and SUGGESTIONS

When searching for information online, professional users such as translators and interpreters first rely on websites related to governments, universities and similar establishments. Wikis can be a valuable source for a first/quick glance into a term/idea etc., especially when in hurry, or as a last resort, when relevant information cannot be found elsewhere. However, they are generally regarded as unreliable unless they cite scientific or governmental sources.

Still, the workshop has revealed a number of **advantages**, inherent in the wiki model:

- "swarm intelligence" – a large number of contributors reduce the probability of error;
- open to public scrutiny, including experts;
- more readily updated, faster inclusion of new words/terms;
- offers a quick introduction into a subject and a starting point for further research;
- enables language cross-checking (multilingual wikis only);
- appropriate model for slang dictionaries.

The main **setbacks** of wikis can be summed up as follows:

- inherent unreliability, difficult to filter for common users;
- very few users actually contribute;
- smaller languages cannot benefit from swarm intelligence.

It has been revealed that some editing and/or supervision in wikis are necessary to maintain a certain level of credibility and to avoid vandalism. On the other hand, the advantages of the **wiki model can and indeed have been incorporated into traditional lexicography** for reasons of better adaptation to new circumstances. The examples, with various levels of "wikiness", include:

- **Oxford English Dictionary**: one of the most comprehensive dictionaries to date has been compiled with the help of readers sending in quotation slips.
- **Store Norske Leksikon (SNL)**: since it went online in 2000, the largest Norwegian encyclopaedia allows its users to suggest changes to its articles, with a group of experts assigned to verifying them.
- **IATE**: entries are created by employees of the European institutions (i.e. users), albeit the wider public cannot directly contribute. The institutions themselves have different approaches to editing the database and a desire has been expressed for greater flexibility and harmonization.