

## Introduction

This is the first global history of lexicography. There are, I think, two reasons why no such book has been written before.

The first reason is that there have been so many lexicographical traditions in the world over the past five thousand years: hundreds if not thousands of languages have been documented in wordlists of some sort, and scores of them have been documented in wordlists so numerous, and often so large, that their individual traditions are almost ungraspable by a single historian. There have been global bibliographies of wordlists since the eighteenth century, and, since at least the time of William Marsden's *Catalogue of Dictionaries* (1796), some of these have presented the wordlists of each language in chronological order.<sup>1</sup> Information of historical value is naturally present in such bibliographies even when the order is not primarily chronological. In Wolfram Zaunmüller's *Bibliographisches Handbuch der Sprachwörterbücher*, the last part of the entry for each language is, where appropriate, an overview of early dictionaries in reverse chronological order, century by century, from the nineteenth as far back as the fifteenth. Likewise, Andrew Dalby's *Guide to World Language Dictionaries* gives some very useful outline information about dictionaries of the past two centuries, and occasionally ranges back further, for instance to du Cange on Byzantine Greek or to the seventeenth-century Kikongo dictionary published as *Le plus ancien dictionnaire Bantou* in 1928. But a bibliography is not a history and, indeed, contributors to the present volume were asked from the beginning to treat the bibliographical record selectively enough for their chapters to have a narrative rather than an enumerative quality.

Likewise, a great encyclopedia of the late twentieth century, the three-volume *Wörterbücher/Dictionaries/Dictionnaires* edited by Franz Josef Hausmann, Oskar Reichmann, Hans Ernst Wiegand, and Ladislav Zgusta,

<sup>1</sup> Marsden, *Catalogue of Dictionaries*, 89–152.

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was rich in historical material (and is therefore cited extensively in the present work), as is the supplementary volume edited by Rufus Gouws and others. But an encyclopedia, like a chronological bibliography, is not a history, because it is not primarily in the business of narrative.

The present volume, by contrast, seeks to tell a story. A good way to read it would be as a story, starting at the beginning and going on to the end. And the story it tells is a truly global one: English is the language in which this book is written, and the lexicography of English plays an important part in the book, but the language to which the most chapters are devoted is Chinese (indeed, the commonest surname in the biographical appendix is Lǐ 李, with representatives from the third century BC to the present day), and, to give another example, after Indo-European, the language family of which most members are mentioned (albeit only in one chapter) is Pama-Nyungan, to which many of the languages of Australia belong. The story which this volume tells is also a long one: the lexicography of the twenty-first and twentieth centuries is widely surveyed, but sustained individual attention is paid to each of the five traditions which began more than two thousand years ago. No individual could write equally well about the emergence of the lexicography of Sumerian and about developments in the electronic dictionaries of modern Hebrew and Japanese: this book is the first collectively authored history of lexicography and, as such, it tells a story which has not been told with unity and authority before.

A second reason why there has been no global history of lexicography is that the concept of 'lexicography' is somewhat elusive. For the purposes of this volume, it means the making of lists of words and their equivalents or interpretations. This definition does not free us from all doubt. For one thing, not all makers of such lists have thought of themselves as engaged in an activity different from other ways of collecting and transmitting information: to put that another way, many people have done what we would call lexicography although they themselves had no word for 'lexicography'.<sup>2</sup> Another problem is that the distinction between the lexicographical and the encyclopedic is notoriously uncertain, and is, indeed, made differently in different learned traditions.<sup>3</sup> A borderline instance is that of the distinction between dictionaries of synonyms, which bring words of related meaning together (they have been very important in some Indian traditions, and are treated here) and thesauruses of the sort which are primarily oriented

<sup>2</sup> For a case study, see Considine, 'History of the concept of lexicography'.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Haß, *Große Lexika*, 1–2.

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towards mapping the relationships between concepts (Roget's *Thesaurus*, for instance, is not treated here). Yet another problem is that we may ask when a text – for instance, a poem about words, or a traveller's account of unfamiliar things and their names in a local language – becomes sufficiently list-like to be counted as lexicographical.<sup>4</sup> Here again, different learned traditions operate differently: the typical European dictionary is made up of entries in which the lemma, or headword, is 'an obligatory building-block of the text', but, for instance, a classical Tamil dictionary in verse may include statements of equivalence between words in which no one word seems to have headword status.<sup>5</sup> However, 'the making of lists of words and their interpretations' gives this volume a central subject. The word *dictionaries* might not have done so: many short lists of words are lexicographical, but can hardly be called dictionaries. So, this is a history of lexicography, not of dictionaries.

The volume falls into four parts: a first on the lexicographical traditions of the ancient world; a second on those which originated in the next thousand years, and on their continuations up to the seventeenth or eighteenth century; a third on those of the past two or three centuries; and a fourth on the traditions which originated in European missionary activity from the sixteenth century onwards. One alternative to reading the whole volume from beginning to end would therefore be to read synchronically, across a given part, to get a picture of the lexicographical activity which was taking place at a particular time. Since each part is divided into chapters on different languages, or on geographical and cultural areas, and these chapters have been designed to fall into sequences, a third way of reading would be to follow one thread in the whole story from period to period, looking, for instance, at the three chronologically sequenced chapters on Chinese lexicography as a series (supplemented, perhaps, with the chapter on missionary lexicography in East Asia). Some key dictionaries – the Sanskrit *Amarakośa*, the Greek *Lexicon* of Hesychius of Alexandria, the Spanish–Latin *Dictionarium* of Nebrija, the Chinese *Kāngxī zidiǎn* – appear, viewed from multiple perspectives, in multiple chapters, though the aim has of course been to avoid extended duplication of treatment.

Reading widely in the volume will reveal that different chapters are handled in different ways. This is a good thing for the reader, because the

<sup>4</sup> The latter point is made in, e.g., Alston, *Bibliography*, XIV.vii.

<sup>5</sup> Wolski, 'Das Lemma und die verschiedenen Lemmatypen', 363, 'Das Lemma ist ein obligatorischer Textbaustein des Wörterbuchartikels'; Chevillard, 'On a 1968 incarnation of the *Piṅkalam*', 19–21.

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effect of thirty-two strongly isomorphic chapters would be monotonous. It is also a natural consequence of the great variety of material under discussion: an expository schema which would fit the printed dictionaries of contemporary France would not fit the lexicography of ancient Egypt nearly as well. And it reflects the perspectives of different contributors: one, for instance, may be particularly interested in the kinds of grammatical analysis done by lexicographers, and another in dictionaries as records of cultural contact. These perspectives could not all be equally weighted in a single chapter; the book as a whole gives an overview of different ways of doing the history of lexicography.

The first part begins in ancient Mesopotamia, where the oldest extant wordlists in the world were made, and then surveys the four other lexicographical traditions of the ancient world: those of Egypt – the Egyptian tradition, from the Old Kingdom to the death of Coptic, is the longest of all dictionary traditions – and of China, India, and the Greco-Roman world. (It is curious that one highly developed literate culture of the ancient world, that of the speakers of Hebrew, did not develop a lexicographical tradition, although learned Jews were doubtless well aware of Greek and Roman lexicography.)

The second part begins with chapters on two of the great traditions of lexicography which continued from the ancient world into this middle period: those of Chinese and of the languages of India. The next four chapters in this part remain based in Asia, surveying the Arabic and Hebrew traditions, those of the Chinese periphery, and those of the Turkic languages and of Persian, before the last three turn westwards, to the lexicography of the Byzantine world, that of medieval Latin Christendom, and that of early modern western Europe.

The third part of the book is the longest, and that is not surprising: the lexicographical production of the Eurasian intellectual world in the past three centuries or so has been enormous. Highly literate societies; print and, latterly, digital publishing technologies which have made the mass production of books easier than ever before; and a high degree of intercultural contact have all played their part. The first chapter in Part III presents the lexicographical tradition which, at the present day, has remained highly active for longest, that of the Chinese language as documented by its native speakers. It is followed by an account of Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese lexicography from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, a period in which these were no longer languages of ‘the Chinese periphery’ but had their own complex and vigorous traditions. The next two chapters take our

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gaze westwards and then southwards, to return to the lexicography of the Turkish and Persian languages, and then to survey that of South Asia. The next two address two Semitic traditions: the continuing one of Arabic and the revived one of Hebrew. Then the next five chapters turn to the languages belonging to four of the language families of Europe: one chapter on Slavic and Baltic together, three on Germanic, and one on Romance. The emphasis on Germanic is of course because English is a Germanic language, and one which is familiar to the readers of this book: so, after a chapter on the Germanic languages other than English, there is one on supra-regional varieties of English and one on regional varieties.

The fourth and final part of the main text of this book brings together seven chapters on missionary and subsequent lexicography across the world: in South America, Mesoamerica, and North America; in East Asia, India and Indonesia, and Africa; and in Australia. As recently as the late twentieth century, giving this much space to missionary lexicography in a global history might have seemed disproportionate, but the historical importance of missionary linguistics, including missionary lexicography, is now more widely appreciated than it used to be.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the chapters speak for themselves.

Two appendices follow: one giving a brief account of each of the languages of which the lexicography is discussed in this volume, and one giving a brief account of each of a generous selection of the lexicographers whose work is discussed. The latter is, as far as I know, the first biographical survey of lexicographers on a global scale.

Much has had to be omitted from this book. By no means, for instance, does it refer to all of the languages of which interesting dictionaries have been made. Many natural spoken languages have had to be omitted altogether, as in the cases of many of the Caucasian and Malayo-Polynesian languages, or to be represented only by references to part of their lexicographical tradition, as in the cases of Irish and Tibetan. In particular, recent dictionaries have had to be treated very selectively, with the result that, for instance, more is said in this book about the early lexicography of Malay than the modern lexicography of Malay and Indonesian.<sup>7</sup> Dictionaries of signed languages have not been treated; nor of invented languages such as Esperanto and the languages of J. R. R. Tolkien's fictions. A chapter on learned lexicography in Europe after 1700 formed part of the initial plan of this book, but could not in the end be included.

<sup>6</sup> For recent activity in the field, see Zwartjes, 'Historiography of missionary linguistics'.

<sup>7</sup> For the latter, see Echols, 'Presidential address: dictionaries and dictionary-making', 16–24.

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The bibliographical side of the study of lexicography has only been touched on lightly. So, for instance, little has been said of the writing media with which lexicographers have worked, though they have sometimes been mentioned for their effect on the lexicographical record, as in the contrasting cases of the highly durable clay on which Mesopotamian word-lists were inscribed, and the relatively short-lived palm-leaf manuscripts of the classical Tamil tradition. The relationship between lexicography and papermaking alone would be a topic for a fascinating chapter, starting with the advantages enjoyed by early Chinese lexicographers, to whom paper was available as a writing material from the first century AD onwards, and exploring the spread of paper across the literate world, for instance to Mesoamerica, where Antonio de Ciudad Real could fill two sacks with the discarded working papers of his Maya dictionary at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

The relationship of lexicography and other kinds of language study has likewise been touched on very lightly. The making of dictionaries and of grammars often went hand in hand: the missionary lexicographers in South America who pointed out that the *Vocabulario* of a given language must be used in conjunction with the *Arte* which accompanied it, often in the same volume, exemplify a relationship of widespread importance. The making of dictionaries and of translations could likewise be presented as a single story: an account of lexicography in Anglo-Saxon England which includes the interlinear glossing of texts in Latin might do more justice to the subject than one which is confined to the listing of words.

To give a final example, the constraints of space have rarely permitted a lively picture of the experience of making dictionaries. The Urdu lexicographer Sayyid Aḥmad Dihlavī recalled that, in his youth,

a passion appeared in my heart for the science of language and the compilation of dictionaries. Although at first glance . . . it was considered pointless and unworthy of serious regard, nevertheless that irresponsible beloved spirit of passion made peace with me as one human does with another.<sup>9</sup>

Not that all the human dramas of lexicography lead to a good peace: 'More stunned than suicidal', wrote Robert Laughlin of the Smithsonian Museum, recalling a computational meltdown as he worked on the *Great Tzotzil*

<sup>8</sup> For the early use of paper as a writing material in China, see Tsiē, *Paper and Printing*, 86; for Ciudad Real and the dictionary of which 'los borradores llenaua dos costales', see Smith-Stark, 'Lexicography in New Spain', 28.

<sup>9</sup> Translated by Hakala, *Negotiating Languages*, 127.

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*Dictionary*, ‘I trundled my rubbish back to Washington. My dictionary became known around the museum as *The Great Tzotzil Disaster*.<sup>10</sup> It was successfully published in the end, and Laughlin ended the acknowledgements of another dictionary on a merrier note, imagining a party to which everyone connected with the dictionary should be invited, from Calepino onwards: ‘What fun it will be to toast to the long life of the *Diccionario grande* . . . You who read these lines are now associated, too, whoever and whatever you are. Thank you. Welcome to the party. Let it be great!’<sup>11</sup> As those words remind us, the experience of reading dictionaries has also had, for the most part, to be excluded from the present volume.

But these exclusions were inevitable if the *Cambridge World History of Lexicography* was to appear as a single volume, capable of being handled without discomfort, and capable of being read from end to end by a not abnormally chalcenterous reader.<sup>12</sup> Despite the omissions, the story of the history of lexicography is told more fully in the following pages than it has ever been told before in a single volume.

<sup>10</sup> Laughlin, *Great Tzotzil Dictionary of San Lorenzo Zinacantán*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Laughlin, in *Great Tzotzil Dictionary of Santo Domingo Zinacantán*, I.xiii.

<sup>12</sup> For *chalcenterous* and lexicography, see Gilliver, *Making of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 432–3.