What can a social network profile be used for in monolingual lexicography? Examples, strategies, desiderata

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to introduce the phenomenon of social network tools used in contemporary European e-lexicography. Because of their central role in this field of lexicography the monolingual dictionaries of national and regional languages have been chosen as the corpus for this study. The analysis of the Lexilogos portal resources (namely an alphabetical list of the European dictionaries) has shown that social media tools are used in 21 dictionaries. Concerning the list of arguments to be presented, firstly, the linking of the dictionary website to social network profiles was analyzed (ways of linking: sharing and following, as well as some issues related to graphic matters). Secondly, the most important characteristics of social network profiles were introduced (number of users, frequency of entries, types of content and their marketing role). Thirdly, some of the advantages of lexicographical social networks were shown. In conclusion I have expressed the most important desiderata concerning lexicographical social media profiles.

Keywords: e-lexicography; social networks; linking dictionary resources; user-friendly lexicography

1. Introduction

Today for many of us it is hard to believe that just over 10 years ago there were no social network websites1. During the last decade they have become revolutionary facilities which help to maintain private social contacts as well as to send and receive various types of other personalized information. Because of their functionality they are undoubtedly indispensable marketing tools, and are very often used to communicate with public users, not only by commercial companies, but also by various public institutions.

Therefore, it is not surprising that social media are also being used by lexicographers and others involved in dictionary projects (e.g. marketing specialists for the production of big commercial dictionaries). Because of the effectiveness of social media and the lack of common information regarding this type of lexicographical initiative, I have decided to create an inventory of social media tools2 and particular

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1 For example Facebook was introduced in 2004, Twitter in 2006.

2 To avoid repetition, social media are also being called social networks in this paper; the same thing relates to social media tools which are also described as social media functions or facilities.
profiles connected with these dictionaries.

This paper constitutes an introduction to the subject; therefore, it will contain basic information. This will help us to comprehend the matter and locate our own projects in the existing lexicographical networking universe. Firstly, I would like to focus on graphic matters concerning linking resources, namely how dictionary pages (main pages and particular entry pages, and if there are differences between them) are connected within social media profiles. In this paragraph I will also show the variety of social media facilities used for lexicographical purposes. Secondly, I will focus on existing dictionary Facebook profiles by indicating their main characteristics, such as the number of followers, the frequency of entries and most importantly, the thematic content, including ways of linking to various dictionary resources.

2. Inventory

The first and most challenging part was to create a homogenous inventory of dictionary projects connected with social media profiles and facilities. For that purpose I have chosen one of the biggest existing resources of worldwide dictionaries: the Lexilogos Internet portal. It contains links to hundreds of dictionaries gathered accordingly to various criteria. For the purpose of this analysis I used an alphabetical order of languages. After a brief overview it became obvious that this portal, although very helpful and rich in terms of the content, is centred on European languages. Therefore, it cannot be used as a reliable source of information regarding worldwide languages. Because of this factor as well as a linguistic barrier, I have decided to analyze only European dictionaries in this paper.

Figure 1: Europe Political Map by Aotearoa – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons

This decision forced me to find a scientifically approved geographical division of the Earth’s continents. Therefore, in this paper I am using the Europe map specified by

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3 http://www.lexilogos.com/dictionnaire_langues.htm

4 It is worth mentioning that the Working Group 1 from the European Network of e-Lexicography is preparing an exhaustive inventory of European academic dictionaries. Further information can be found at elexicography.eu.
the International Geographic Union (see Figure 1). If a country belongs partially to
the European continent I also analyzed the corresponding linguistic resources in the
Lexilogo (e.g. Turkey, Russia).

The Lexilogo profile contains links to the various types of dictionaries (monolingual5,
bilingual, etymological etc.). Due to the homogeneity of the inventory, I have taken
into account only monolingual and general dictionaries of contemporary European
languages. In my opinion these types of lexicographical products create the central
part of this lexicography. Their task is to transmit not only the language itself but
also a kind of cognitive entity connected with the language. For the purpose of this
inventory I have analyzed both dictionaries of the official languages as well as
dictionaries of territorial languages (e.g. Asturian, Basque, Catalan).

Social multidictionaries such as Wiktionary, FreeDictionary and Wordreference were
not included in the inventory because of their secondary nature and the lack of
methodological basis.

As a result I have received an inventory consisting of 21 electronic dictionaries which
use social media facilities6:

1. Cambridge Advanced Learner`s Dictionary
2. Chambers Free English Dictionary
3. Collins English Dictionary
Danish Language)
5. Dex Online. Dicționare ale limbii română (Romanian Dictionary)
6. Diccionario de la lengua Española (Spanish Dictionary), Diccionario esencial de la
lengua Española (The Essential Dictionary of Spanish)7
7. Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa (Priberam Dictionary of Portuguese)
8. Diccionariu de la Llingua Asturiana (Dictionary of the Asturian Language)
9. ДИГИТАЛЕН РЕЧНИК НА МАКЕДОНСКИОТ ЈАЗИК (Digital Dictionary of the
Macedonian Language)
10. Dizionário Treccani (Treccani Italian Dictionary)
11. Duden (German Dictionary)
12. Грамота.ру (Gramota.ru, Russian Dictionary)
13. Gran diccionari de la llengua catalana (Great Dictionary of Catalan)
14. Larousse Dictionnaire de Française (Larousse French Dictionary)

5 In the monolingual dictionary the lemmas from language x are defined with the words from
language x; in the bilingual dictionary the lemmas from language x are defined with the
words from language y.
6 This paper reflects the state of the art in May 2015, as for the analysis of Facebook entries
gathered, data includes information from the last six months (XII 2014 – V 2015).
7 Both dictionaries are on the same website, they share the same social media tools.
3. General remarks

As we can see, social networks are used for linking resources not only in commercial dictionaries (Larousse, Oxford English Dictionaries, Van Dale etc.) but also in academic projects (Diccionario de la lengua Española, Diccionariu de la Llingua Asturiana, Wielki słownik języka polskiego). However, one must admit that the usage of social media is not common. Because of the enormous differences between European dictionary projects (financial background, number of employees, lexicographical tradition) I would not want to indicate the exact percentages. Conducting a profile is a relatively time consuming occupation. One must find the topic for a future Facebook or Twitter entry. It needs to be interesting for users and at the same time be connected with the particular dictionary resources (specific entry or a group of entries). It is not rare that after creating a social network post, users pose further questions, formulate remarks or express doubts, sometimes even involving themselves in some kind of dispute; therefore, constant attention by the administrator person is essential. Considering this, it is understandable that because of limited time or human resources, many dictionaries withdraw from using social media tools. In other kinds of projects, especially academic ones, user orientation does not exist while the main goal is to finish the project and satisfy scientific reviewers. To summarize, in my opinion, less than 10 percent of the European dictionaries linked to the Lexilogos use social media tools.

The most popular social networks are Facebook and Twitter (global tendency). The general rule is that if a project is commercial and relatively popular (in terms of the number of users), linking to social media is beneficial (e.g. sharing content buttons) and the lexicographic project itself consists of, aside from the website, a few social profiles. The less frequently used networks are also popular, however: Google+, Flickr, Instagram and YouTube. It is worth noting that in a few cases, the content of some dictionaries can be shared via national social networks, e.g. VKontakte for Russian (Gramota Dictionary), bgHot for Bulgarian (Rechnik Dictionary).

4. Linking from dictionary websites

If we look at the structure of dictionary websites, we can see that there are two ways
of linking lexicographical content to social media. One is sharing. In this case, somewhere on the page, usually at the top, we find buttons which enable us to share the content of the page on our private social network account. This facility is widely used especially in the case of particular dictionary entries (see Figure 1\textsuperscript{8}).

![Sharing buttons connected with the entry (bois), Larousse Dictionary.](image1)

We can also encounter pages where sharing buttons are located in the central part of the page (see Figure 2).

![The main page of the dictionary with sharing buttons is in its central part, Rechnik Dictionary](image2)

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\textsuperscript{8} To make figures more readable, commercial frames were framed with grey and filled with white.
Another alternative technique of sharing is observed in the Cambridge dictionary. On the main page we find a separate frame with a Word of the Day and additional sharing buttons (see Figure 3). As can be expected, it is not a random word but one chosen in advance by the lexicographers (for example the word must have only one meaning to fit to the frame). This strategy can be considered very useful because it gives the user the opportunity to read an entry he probably would not have searched for, but which might be interesting for him (in Figure 3, a rare verb *warble* is introduced that could enrich the user’s vocabulary). In this way, the dictionary team strives to maximize the attention of the user and promote additional entries apart from the one methodically searched for. As we will see below in the text this strategy, called “Word of the Day”, is also very common in social network profiles themselves.

Figure 3: Alternative sharing content technique – Word of the Day, Cambridge Dictionary

Besides sharing content we can also follow (subscribe) to this dictionary social network profile which means that on our private social media account we will see the entries published regularly by someone from the dictionary team (lexicographer or marketing specialist). The frequency of the entries varies between different dictionaries. This problem will be discussed below as related to the example of Facebook profiles.

In the inventory I have discerned two main techniques of following dictionary profiles. One of them could be called a voluntary following. In this method we will have social media buttons somewhere on the page. If we click on them we will be led automatically to the dictionary profile. In this case we can see the content and subsequently, if we like the dictionary profile, we can subscribe to it by clicking a button dedicated to this purpose. Opposite to where the sharing buttons are located, following buttons can be located in many other places on the page. We see them at
the top of the page (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Following buttons at the top of the page (Asturian Dictionary)

They can also be located at the bottom of the page (see Figure 5):

Figure 5: The following buttons at the bottom of the page, Sproget

Apart from simple buttons (an icon with a social network symbol) we can also encounter a special frame consisting of a following button with the total number of profile followers (individual subscriptions). It is one of many marketing tricks to show
that there are a certain number of people who subscribe to the profile so the profile itself is valuable and should be subscribed to.

Figure 7: Facebook following button with the number of subscriptions and the selected photos of the followers (left side, bottom of the page), Chambers dictionary

In the inventory I have also found another, less used technique connected with following buttons. In this case we have a separate frame which enables us to see the latest entries from the social network profile and the total number of followers (see Figure 8). This way, users do not need to enter the profile to see its content. They can read and make a decision concerning the subscription without leaving the main or entry page.

Figure 8: Separate social media frames with latest updates (bottom of the page), Larousse Dictionary
Instead of a voluntary subscription (the user enters or recognizes a social media profile via the dictionary page and decides whether he wants to subscribe to it) a few dictionaries use involuntary following. In this case if the user clicks on the network profile button he would automatically subscribe to the content and become a follower. This technique is used for example by the Collins Dictionary (see Figure 9).

![Collins Dictionary](image)

Figure 9: Involuntary following buttons example (“Join us” at the bottom of the page), Collins Dictionary

5. The content of dictionary social media profiles (Facebook example)

As aforementioned, the total number of dictionaries which use social network facilities (there is a link from the dictionary website) is 21. Among them, two do not have any visible button or frame which would lead us from the dictionary page itself to the separate social media profile (SLex. Elektronický lexikón slovenského jazyka and ДИГИТАЛЕН РЕЧНИК НА МАКЕДОНСКИОТ ЈАЗИК). This means that these two dictionaries enable their users to share information about the dictionary on the user Facebook profile; however at the same time, the lexicographical team does not provide a separate social network profile. In such cases we can observe a simplified link between the dictionary website and the social network.

On the other hand, if the dictionary team decides to launch a social medium there is usually more than one social network involved. In most cases we can encounter Facebook and Twitter profiles, however Google+, YouTube, Flickr and Instagram are also quite popular. By multiplying profiles, the lexicographical team can achieve many goals. First of all every social network has its own characteristic (e.g. Twitter is used mainly to communicate via short messages, Flickr and Instagram are used for sharing elaborated photos and graphics). Therefore, each network might appeal to a slightly different group of users. Multiplying profiles also helps in the website
positioning process. Furthermore, the content of any particular social network (very specific) can be linked to in a simplified form on another social media profile. For example, the dictionary team creates an entry on the blog, and later informs users about this content on their Facebook profiles. This strategy leads the user to the impression that this particular dictionary is a very dynamic entity with a rich content and strong focus on the user’s needs.

Because of its immense impact and the various possibilities of sharing content on the profile, I have chosen the Facebook network as the subject for further analysis. What is very interesting is that not all Facebook profiles which are linked to the dictionary website lead users to the dictionary networks. Some of the dictionaries are also linked to the institutions that provide this lexicographical work for the Facebook profiles (Academia de la Llingua Asturiana profile in the case of Dicionariu de la Llingua Asturiana, Real Academia Española in the case of Diccionario de la lengua Española). Other sources link to the Facebook profile of a general product also consisting of particular dictionaries (Gran dicionari de la llengua catalana and Enciclopédia Catalana profile) or the publishing house profile (Treccani publishing house related to Dizionàrio Treccani, Priberam company related to Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa, Van Dale related to Van Dale Dutch dictionary).

In these types of Facebook profiles, the kind of dictionary content varies. There are institutional profiles which do not reflect any kind of dictionary content (therefore in this case we have only one side called “blind” linking). To this group belongs, for example, the Treccani publishing house profile (there is no information about the dictionary itself, although we can read about various cultural facts, meetings with the authors and discover interesting quotations), Academia de la Llingua Asturiana profile (concerned mostly with events connected to the popularization of the Asturian language) and Real Academia Española (a profile focus on institutional events as well as the latest books published by RAE).

In the other non-dictionary profiles, lexicographic interests play a crucial or at least significant role. This method is used by the Priberam publishing house (we have “Word of the Day” content with a link to the dictionary entry, also guessing the subsequent day’s word) or Enciclopédia Catalana (besides information about Catalan history and culture we can also acquaint ourselves with the various facts presented in the dictionary, e.g. grammar information, interesting phrasal verbs, correct word forms from Catalan; naturally each profile entry is linked to the dictionary page).
In the second analyzed group, dictionaries have their own Facebook profiles and this appears to be the dominant tendency. The first thing that should be discussed is the number of followers. In my inventory this measure varies from over 2 million (Cambridge Dictionary) to 2,000 followers of the Chambers English dictionary profile. The most important factor is probably the role of the language in international communication connected with the popularity of the lexicographic project (it is very visible in English dictionaries, e.g. Cambridge and Oxford Dictionaries vs. Chambers and Collins dictionaries). However, even if we are discussing the less used languages on the European scale (e.g. Danish, Romanian, Polish or Bulgarian), the number of followers always exceeds 2,000. This provides visible information regarding the popularity of interest in vocabulary among Facebook users.

The second measure concerning Facebook profiles is the frequency of entries. Relating to lexicographical projects, the keyword would probably be “irregularity”. Most profiles follow a particular pattern; for example, some are updated a few times each day (Oxford Dictionaries, Macmillan Dictionary; in such cases someone is definitely responsible for project promotion), others once a day (Romanian DexOnline), three or four times a week (Duden dictionary) or even more rarely (Wielki słowniki języka polskiego). However, every profile has moments when the gap between the entries becomes bigger. That gives valuable human resources information. Usually there is one person in the lexicographical project responsible for social networks. If this person is not present or is simply overwhelmed by other duties the social network is left without an update. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to delegate at least two people to work together or interchangeably to give a more professional impression.

When it comes to dictionary profiles, it must be mentioned that each and every lexicographical profile is a unique entity with a separate universe of its own (user
orientation, aesthetics, content, techniques for linking resources). However, there are also strategies which are quite common despite the diversity of the analyzed projects.

Probably the most popular and “lexicographical-like” technique in the European dictionary profiles is to publish the “Word of the Day”. This technique is used by the Oxford Dictionaries, Cambridge Dictionary, Macmillan Dictionary, Collins Dictionary, Priberam Dictionary and DexOnline.

![Figure 11: Examples of the “Word of the Day” strategy, Priberam, Oxford Dictionaries, DexOnline](image)

It is worth mentioning that in every entry representing this technique, we have a visible link to the dictionary website concerning this word. Also, the technique of creating attractive graphics or uploading visual illustrations seem to be very valuable, hence it encourages users to share the Facebook entry on their own private social accounts. The only aspect that causes concern, and not only in the case of the “Word of the Day” illustrations, is the lack of attribution. Sometimes photos and illustrations of a very high artistic quality are uploaded on dictionary profiles with no any caption. The person responsible for social networking should always consider the issue of royalties.

The second technique, typical not only for dictionary profiles but also for social network profiles in general, is to devote an entry to the subject that will be fully presented on a separate website (there is a link attached). This method has two variants. The first and more valuable comes from a marketing point of view (the number of users), and comprises mentioning our self-created content and resources. Depending on the project it could be a paper from the blog or from another part of our website (apart from the entries). This technique is widely used in English dictionaries (see Figure 12). Once launched, it could probably encourage lexicographers to write short essays commenting on dictionary resources.
Figure 12: Examples of linking different dictionary resources in a social network profile, Oxford Dictionary, Macmillan Dictionary, Collins Dictionary

As well as linking to our self-created dictionary resources, social network profiles also consist of many outside links connected to broadly defined linguistics. The type and intellectual level of the linked content depends on the person editing the profile. Probably the most entertaining technique is to gather different photos illustrating actual language errors (see Figure 13).
One of the lexicographical goals, even in the case of monolingual and descriptive dictionaries, is to present correct and appropriate language usage: in the inventory I have found many interesting examples of entries devoted to this subject. There, such phenomena as idioms, paronyms, rare words and their meanings, common grammar and spelling mistakes, etc. were discussed. In the case of regional languages (Catalan) correct regional word forms were mentioned.

Among the techniques used, there were two which strongly encourage interaction. One is to give a short linguistic test, usually of only one question (see Figure 14). This technique is used for example in the Chambers, Van Dale Dictionary, Priberam and Duden Dictionaries. In the case of commercial and published dictionaries there could also be the possibility of winning a book.
The second highly interactive technique is to ask the users for help; for example in the case of rare meanings which are not well illustrated in the dictionary corpus (professional usages, meanings connected with strongly spoken jargons). This method is used in the Oxford Dictionaries and can be found to be very fruitful in the case of problematic lemmas which are corpus resistant (see Figure 15).

![Figure 15: An example of asking for lexicographical help technique, Oxford Dictionaries](image)

6. Advantages and desiderata

As was shown in the above examples, various techniques connected with social networks are being used in European monolingual lexicography. All have one goal: to increase the number of active users of the dictionaries. Aside from this, profiles can fulfill other important functions. It is a topic for further discussion whether social media profiles should educate or rather entertain. Is marketing our only goal or do we also feel obliged to share our knowledge with users? This question is also raised when considering the intellectual level of our entries. Is it ethical to laugh at somebody’s lack of education by posting photos of wrongly written words or phrases? If we focus only on education will we, by doing so, deprive ourselves of the users who are focused purely on internet entertainment?

Concerning the lexicographer, profiles could enable us to think differently about dictionary resources and the needs of our users. The role of social network profiles in contemporary electronic lexicography seems to be irreplaceable; hence they offer a unique opportunity to connect and link various lexicographical data.

While administering social network profiles is only a small part of our lexicographical work, it could also be useful to create an inventory of dictionaries using networking techniques. This way we could share our experiences, influence and inspire each other.
As for the future, it could also be interesting to repeat the analysis of social network profiles for bilingual dictionaries and other types of monolingual dictionaries (e.g. historical, etymological dictionaries or dictionaries of discontinuous units like textual units or idioms). While this paper focused mainly on matters important to the lexicographer acting as the social network administrator, it would be useful also to analyze feedback from Facebook or Twitter users. This would bring us closer to the relatively complete picture of the user-oriented contemporary lexicography.

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7. References

Websites

Facebook Profiles


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