

# **Social networks in monolingual lexicography**

## **Interaction between lexicographers (profile administrators) and users**

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### **User orientation**

One of the main characteristics of contemporary lexicography is the growing focus on user behavior, their needs and expectations. We could point out here some of the most important reasons for the crucial change in this lexicographical work. From the scientific point of view, post-structural linguistic paradigms, like cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics or psycholinguistics, underlined the role of common sense thinking. Users usually perceive and categorize their surrounding reality according to natural criteria (similarity, purpose rather than construction details etc.). This widely accepted conviction led lexicography to the development of user-friendly definitions and, what's more, encouraged some changes in dictionary microstructure.

Apart from significant shifts in linguistics itself, lexicography gained an alternative, less traditional and still changing image along with the immense growth of IT and Internet technology. Thanks to the IT revolution, dictionary writers and designers are able to experiment with the entry structure, an advantage almost unthinkable in the previous, printed dictionaries era.

Lexicographers still haven't reached the point where the level of our knowledge of user needs and behavior could be described as sufficient, especially in the context of dictionary designing and writing. There are, however, some well established and developed research methods concerning this problem. One can indicate questionnaires and surveys, filled by selected groups of users (e.g. Müller-Spitzer, Kopleinig 2014), experiments related to the presence or sequence of various dictionary sections, usually conducted on students or language learners (e.g. Lew, Doroszewska 2009), analysis of dictionary usage in real time, indicating physical (e.g. eye-tracking), demographical, temporal and content data (Internet analytics); finally, critical reviews of the existing state of art in a specific area of interest that are based on

relatively objective criteria (e.g. Abel, Meyer 2013; Biesaga 2015). These methods, used both by lexicographers and lexicography analysts, although not on the same scale, are gradually influencing dictionary writing and designing practice.

## Goals to achieve

In my speech I would like to use the last method, namely the review of the existing state of art. My aim is to describe the interaction between administrators and users of lexicographical Facebook profiles. What is the purpose of such scrutiny? Firstly, when we are discussing direct advantages, this kind of analysis will help us to choose social media content more consciously and carefully. We will discover what kind of posts are more popular and what kind of problems can arise while presenting users with this type of information.

Secondly, when thinking about indirect scientific benefits, research on interaction could give us valuable information which can be used in the dictionary microstructure designing process. In one of my previous papers, related to the types of data that are presented in contemporary English on-line dictionaries (Biesaga 2016), I have divided types of information included in the entry into two types. Firstly, the more typical, manually or automatically inserted way, relates directly to a particular lemma or meaning. This is information associated usually with traditional lexicography (e.g. definition, collocations, semantic relations, idioms etc.). During the last years, however, a new trend appeared along with the progress made in electronic lexicography. According to this approach, we also show our users data connected with the lemma in a more subtle way, usually formally, not semantically. This kind of knowledge is obtained automatically by database query systems and presented on the rightmost part of the entry website. According to the practice existing in contemporary Internet lexicography, key information is located in the center of the page, while additional data is placed below or on the rightmost part of the page. We can indicate, for example, such types of additional data presented in contemporary English dictionaries:

a. lemmas that share the same junction of letters as the look up word (e.g. in Related forms in Dictionary.com: base lemma - *term*, lemmas presented additionally: *termly*, *half-term*, *interterm*, *mistterm*);

b. lemmas that alphabetically precede and follow the entry word (e.g. Browse dictionary in Merriam Webster: base lemma: *terminology*, preceding lemmas: *terminist*, *terminize*, *terminological Platonism*);

c. additional lemmas that contain the look up word somewhere in their entry structure, for example in its definition or their note of usage (e.g. Dictionary.com: base lemma: *term*, additional lemmas in the section called Related words: *syllogism*, *woman*, *Asian*; if we type in the entry *Asian*, we will find the Note of usage containing the base word *term*: *Asian* is the most commonly used *term* referring to people in or from Asia, especially East Asia).

As we can see, this is a relatively new trend in lexicography, typical for electronic and online dictionaries. Assuming that lexicography will follow Internet design patterns,

the number of such additional data sections will increase and they might be in the future related to the entry lemma in a more subtle way or they might not be related at all. Along with these changes, it is also worth promoting among our users, behavior of a new kind. In traditional dictionaries, perceived as reference works, readers usually visit the look up entry and afterwards put down the book or exit the dictionary website. Those dictionary authors who use Internet analytics will probably agree that, a usual visit on the site of an Internet dictionary takes less than one minute. This regularity is definitely worth changing, especially in the context of Internet website designs, since graphic designers propose more extensive linking from one place of the page to another. This new kind of dictionary user could be called a lexicographic backpacker. He might start his journey with the look up word, but then we would like him to visit other entry sites.

To summarize this extended explanation, through analyzing social network profiles, this free, reliable and quite developed laboratory, we will receive information about that dictionary content especially preferred by our users and therefore worth presenting on the website in additional sections. Such sets of lemmas could be later on obtained automatically from the dictionary databases, for example by using thematic divisions of vocabulary or other kinds of markers typical for our data system.

## Corpus

In this paper I will analyze three Facebook profiles of contemporary English dictionaries:

- a. Cambridge Dictionaries Online (profile provided officially by the Cambridge English Dictionary),
- b. MacDictionary (profile provided officially by the Macmillan Dictionary),
- c. Oxford Dictionaries (profile provided officially by the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary).

As this paper will be presented during the ENeL workshop, I have taken into account these three social media facilities because of their European origin. I have excluded American projects, like Merriam Webster or Dictionary.com, due to the homogeneity of the obtained data, since these dictionaries might reflect other kinds of marketing strategies and interactions. American dictionaries, however, can also be analyzed additionally in the future as well as European dictionaries of other languages, rejected from this scrutiny because of the linguistic barrier.

Monolingual dictionaries of English were chosen because they are focused on two different groups of users. Since English is considered today's *lingua franca*, these reference works are used both by native speakers as well as foreign learners. Therefore the obtained material will reflect phenomena typical of general and learner projects. Because of the worldwide importance of English, many regularities connected with cross-cultural relations can also be observed when analyzing these social media profiles.

As for the temporal characteristics of this analyzed material, posts published

between the 1<sup>st</sup> of January and the 29<sup>th</sup> of February were included (a 2-month period). All three social media profiles are updated regularly, from once a day (MacDictionary) to a few times a day (Oxford Dictionaries). They also share a significant number of followers (Cambridge Dictionaries – 2.148K, MacDictionary – 91K, Oxford Dictionaries – 625K) that might interact, and they often do, with the profile administrators.

The first and most general remark concerning these profiles is that they are a part of a much bigger marketing structure. None of them is independent in the sense that their primary function is to encourage users to visit a dictionary website and its components (entry pages, blog etc.). Therefore these profiles should be characterized as supporting marketing tools, serving as part of the process of dictionary website promotion.

## Types of entries

All analyzed profiles, despite small differences in thematic content, share the same or similar types of key-entries that represent the majority of the posts. These are:

a. Word of the Day, in the case of MacDictionary BuzzWord – this kind of entry is dedicated to the presentation of a lemma, word or a phrase, which is also promoted on this particular day on the main dictionary website. Due to the site and profile space, secondary also to the user's span of attention, this lemma should have one meaning with a concise definition. As for the thematic characteristics, WOTD (BuzzWords) vary. Cambridge administrators often try to choose words weekly, all of them related to the same semantic field (e.g. people connected with politics: *governor, first minister, leader, prime minister, ruler, president* [15-20.02.2016]). MacDictionary administrators, according to their idea of BuzzWords, try to promote new words which are popular nowadays or became popular recently. Oxford Dictionaries specialists use words from very different thematic fields, they try, however, to chose lemmas which are uncommon and of an intellectual nature.

b. Linking to the blog entry – in these types of posts, administrators encourage readers to visit its dictionary blog, a vital part of more developed contemporary dictionaries. They are doing this by characterizing, usually in one sentence, what the blog entry is about and linking it to the website.

Less common types of social media content are:

a. Linking to the dictionary quiz website (MacDictionary, Oxford Dictionaries) – admins encourage readers to visit its quiz website, which they are doing by characterizing, usually in one sentence, the purpose of the test, subsequently adding a link to this quiz.

b. Advertisements (MacDictionary) – in these types of social media entries, new editions of printed dictionaries or other books and multimedia connected with this dictionary are presented.

e. Quote of the Day (Oxford Dictionaries) – here the social media entry is dedicated to

the quote which is also presented on the dictionary website.

f. Linking to the YouTube channel (MacDictionary) – administrators in these types of posts encourage users to visit the official YouTube dictionary channel and watch a particular film.

If we want to analyze the level of interaction typical for these social media profiles, I propose dividing our attention into two distinct parts. In the first one I would like to indicate what kind of social media content is more popular, and subsequently what kind of topics are more appreciated by users. I will be doing this by analyzing the number of Facebook appreciation markers (so called “likes” and “sharings”). When a user clicks on the icon “Like it” this indicates the first level of appreciation. If she/he clicks the sharing button, that shows the second level of appreciation, and the willingness to present on her or his private profile, this particular content.

In the second part of this analysis, I would like to focus on a more subtle phenomena, namely the types of interaction between admins and users which are reflected in posts and comments that follow the posts.

### **Appreciation interaction (“like it” and “share”)**

If we look at the number of “likes” and “sharings” and relate them to the types of entries enlisted above, we can see some interesting regularities. Naturally, the most popular are Words of the Day and posts linked to the dictionary blog. The first reason for this is that they represent the majority of all posts in general. Administrators and users of lexicographical profiles also intuitively choose words from dictionary resources, which are more attractive in promoting the project in their opinion. On the other hand, during the last few years, blogs became, especially in English – learner centered lexicography, an important addition to the dictionary. Their role is to summarize content which is of practical importance, and dispersed in different parts of the website.

As for the other types of content, used in one or two analyzed projects, linked to quizzes and the “Quote of the day”, they too have received quite significant appreciation. Other types of posts (linked to the YouTube official channel and advertisements) are not perceived by users as interesting.

When analyzing the number of appreciation markers concerning WOTD and BuzzWords, we can see that the most popular are intellectual words, somehow important to users. For example, vocabulary connected with states of mind receives a lot of “likes” and “sharings” (e.g. *dysphoria* [Oxf<sup>1</sup> 100 L, 40 S], *stuffocation* [Mac 64 L, 27 S], words related to cultural phenomena, especially important today, are also well

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<sup>1</sup>Abbreviations used in this part of the text: Cam – Cambridge Dictionaries Online profile, Mac – MacDictionary profile, Oxf – Oxford Dictionaries profile; L – likes, S – sharings. Due to the different number of profile followers and different levels of interaction in relation to each social media profile I have used different measures to indicate the level of appreciation (Cam – more than 100 likes means greater appreciation, Mac and Oxf – more than 50 likes).

regarded (*avant-garde* adj. [Cam 299 L, 21 S], *cosplay* [Oxf 103 L, 32 S], *hipster* [Cam 117L, 15 S]. Users value words that are practically important and can be used in argumentative discourse (*outstanding* [Cam 176 L, 12 S], *mumpish* [Oxf 101 L, 27 S]. They are also interested in linguistic terminology that can be used in everyday conversation (*colloquialism* [Cam 182 L, 22 S], *jargon* [Cam 183 L, 16 S], *solecism* [Oxf 74 L, 32 S]. In comparison, intellectual words not related to the life of readers are not “liked” and “shared” that often (e.g. *float* `a large vehicle with a flat surface that is decorated and used in festivals` [Cam 73L, 3 S], *llano* `in South America: a treeless grassy plain` [30 L, 12 S], *madarosis* `absence or the loss of eyelashes` [Oxf 35 L, 14 S]; also synonyms of standard words and phrases or other words that are simply too sophisticated (e.g. *decennium* `decade` [Oxf 27 L, 1 S], *initiant* `a person about to be initiated` (Oxf 19 L], *longevity* [Cam 75L, 3 S], *progression* [Cam 77 L, 2S]). Lastly, when a word is too simple and well known, the entry might be not appreciated (e.g. *tourism* [Cam 59 L, 1 S], *stamp* v. [77 L, 1 S].)

As we can see, it is always better to present words that are somehow exigent, and intellectual, but close to the life of our user and her/his needs. Words that are too simple or, on the other hand, too weird and sophisticated, also not connected with everyday communication needs, are not appreciated.

Different remarks can be formulated after the analysis of posts which are linked to the blog. What is interesting is, these kinds of entries are even more appreciated than WOTD and BuzzWords. Most willingly liked and shared content is the one that meets practical expectations of users, especially English language learners, who are interested in such topics:

a. phrasal verbs and idioms

*In her blog this week, Kate Woodford provides several helpful phrasal verbs you can use to describe how much or how little you are working or studying (Cam 1.7K L, 63 S)*

b. thematic lexis that can be used in everyday situations

*Language tip of the week: words that mean `angry` (Mac 102 L, 32 S)*

*Language tip of the week: having a conversation (Mac 114 L, 32 S)*

*In part 2 of her `talking about illness` series, Liz Walter brings you more words and phrases you may need to understand on a visit to the doctor`s (Cam 1.3K L, 51S)*

*Business English – tips & techniques (Mac 127L, 78 S)*

c. Techniques useful when writing a text

*How to avoid redundant expressions in writing... (Oxf 109 L, 45 S)*

*4 things to do before you start writing an essay (Oxf 142 L, 64S).*

Users are also quite interested in etymology and linguistic curiosities:

*Do you know what Mrs and Ms are short for? Our blog post explains all (Oxf 146L, 46 S)*

*13 words that are innocent in their own language, but sound rude in English... (Oxf 173L, 94S)*

It might also happen that entries connected with a person or other phenomenon important for contemporary culture are appreciated. However, it is difficult to point out the right person or the right phenomenon, maybe because of generation gaps. Let's compare the level of appreciation:

*This week Kate Woodford looks at the words we are using to depict the life and times of one of the most influential and "revered" musicians of all time, David Bowie (Cam 1.5K L, 27 S)*

with:

*What is the linguistic legacy of Margaret Thatcher (Oxf 63 L, 16 S).*

As we can see, linking to blogs is appreciated especially by language learners who are seeking practical information about the English language. However, such topics like etymology or linguistic curiosities, which serve mostly to learn through entertainment, are still a vast field that might be further cultivated in the future.

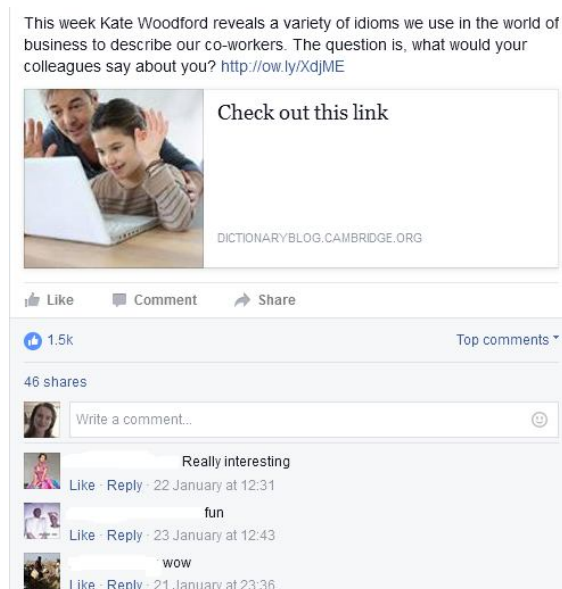
## **Verbal interaction**

First of all, I would like to divide verbal interaction between profile administrators and social network users into two types. The first one gathers together all interactions where there is a thematic junction between entry text and comments. The second type will be represented by those entries in which basic text, written by admin, receives a response, related however to other topics. To be more exact, in this kind of interaction, the space for comments serves as a kind of empty form that can be filled in with different kinds of information sent to the administrator. One shouldn't confuse this second type with nonsense comments - hence the last ones are implicitly hidden by Facebook IT mechanisms (e.g. emoticons, things written in different languages, commercials, user linking etc.). They can be seen after choosing a special option.



Picture 1: Commenting section with nonsense messages not hidden (Cambridge Dictionaries profile)

Probably the most simple type of interaction between users and administrators, actually very similar to the “liking” and “sharing” mechanism, is to show off verbal appreciation (extremely rare “dissatisfaction”).



Picture 2: Interaction types: verbal appreciation (Cam)

Another type of interaction is connected with various questions about the entries that are sent by users. For example, if in relation to the “WOTD” strategy, there is an example of a sentence but there is no explicit definition, readers then tend to ask for this information.

**#WOTD lingo (noun):** *In Italy, of course, Stef can speak the lingo (Cam).*

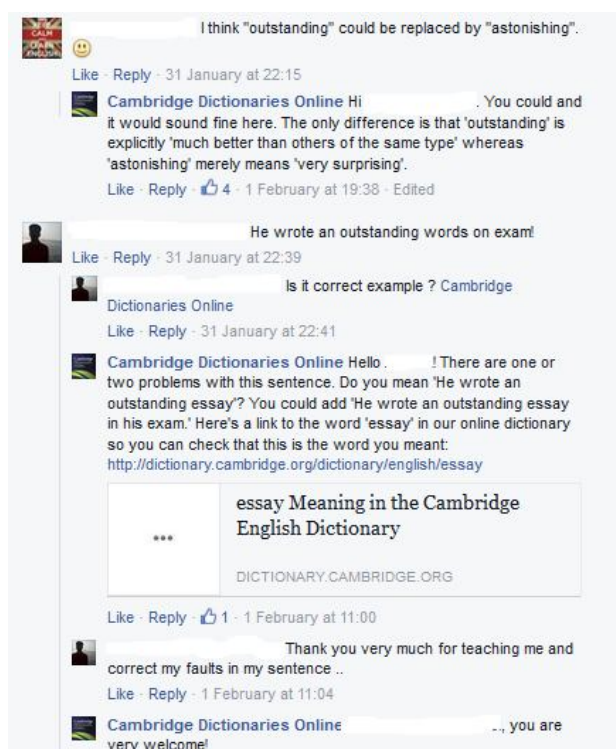




Picture 3: Interaction types: questions concerning entry (lack of understanding)

One can also very often encounter questions about synonyms, when the synonym is already known to the user.

**#WOTD** *outstanding (adj): It's an area of outstanding natural beauty (Cam)*



Picture 4: Interaction types: questions concerning entry (synonyms)

Next, in a very interesting type of interaction, users create a sentence which includes the word analyzed in the entry.

**#WOTD** *fire-eater (noun): The crowd cheered as the fire-eater came on stage (Cam)*



Picture 4: Interaction types: inventing examples of usage

In the case of entries linked to the dictionary blog, one can also see a more developed form of comment, especially if the topic is interesting to users and they want to contribute somehow.

*13 words that are innocent in their own language, but sound rude in English...* (Oxf)



Picture 5: Interaction types: adding new information to the entry

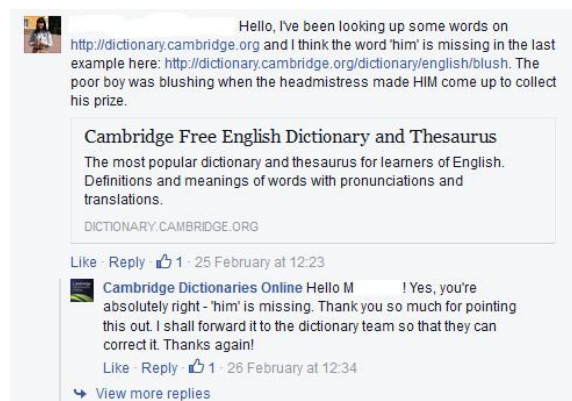
Sometimes the entry topic is so interesting that it provokes some of the users to make more philosophical and elaborate comments.

*Learn about the curious linguistic history of the word 'toilet' (Oxf)*



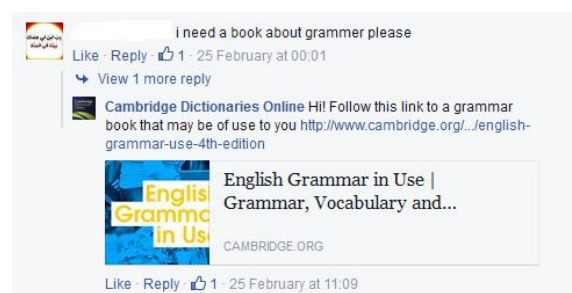
Picture 6: Interaction types: elaborated comments

The second type of interaction, where there is no semantic connection between the entry topic and a comment, is represented by two types of reactions. It is a quite common situation when users treat the comment section as a place where they can write about the mistakes they have found on the dictionary website or express doubts concerning lexicographic descriptions.



Picture 7: Interaction types: reporting errors

It is also not surprising that a dictionary profile is perceived as a valuable source of linguistic information. Therefore, many users ask administrators for different kinds of advice concerning language.



## Summary

The types of interaction between administrators and users that were characterized in this paper are the most common ones. As we can see, this communication is not very dynamic. One could explain this by the particular status that dictionaries have. They are seen as reliable, academic sources, therefore connected with moderate, official communication.

As for advice to the administrators of social networks and microstructure designers, they should always bear in mind that users appreciate things which might be useful to them. Since they are interested in intellectual words, related to contemporary culture, discourse techniques, lifestyle, psychological states of mind, as well as thematic vocabulary useful in the language learning process, these topics should be presented in social media and highlighted in additional sections of dictionary entries. Hopefully, thanks to this strategy, higher level of usage and interaction could be gained in Internet lexicography.

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