

## Oponentský posudok na habilitačnú prácu

### Review of Habilitation Thesis

**Téma/Theme:** In Search of Usage Labels in English Lexicographic Theory and Practice/Hľadanie používateľských označení v anglickej lexikografickej teórii a praxi

**Typ záverečnej práce/Type of Thesis:** Habilitation Thesis / Habilitačná práca

**Autorka/Author:** Anna Stachurska, PhD.

**Oponentka/Reviewer:** doc. PhDr. Adela Böhmerová, M.A., PhD.

The habilitation thesis *In Search of Usage Labels in English Lexicographic Theory and Practice* (Hľadanie používateľských označení v anglickej lexikografickej teórii a praxi), submitted by Mrs. Anna Stachurska, PhD., is aimed at a theoretically and pragmatically topical area. Adequate systemic and usage labelling of dictionary entries is highly needed for learners and users of a foreign language. With regard to English, this need, as well as the usefulness of sources, is intensified by the dominant position of English in international communication where, above all in professional and academic spheres, often a native-speaker's command, or at least a close-to-native-speaker's command, is expected or even required. For that purpose, reliable English lexicographic sources with relevant marking of the usage of lexical items are of paramount importance. English lexicography has been enjoying high prestige and respectability as one of the internationally leading lexicographies, due to its long history, high quality, and intensive current developments and achievements. For EFL dictionaries it is the foreign users who can best identify their own linguistic needs as to the entries and adequate usage labels. In this respect, the author focuses on a linguistically and inter-culturally important area. Investigating lexicographic labelling from a non-native-speaker's perspective is undoubtedly of relevance, so the author has selected an interesting as well as useful theme for contributing to the advancement of lexicographic production and the usage level of English.

The thesis is written in English. As to its formal structure, after the Abstract and the Introduction, it is classically divided into three chapters followed by Conclusions, Slovak Summary and Bibliography. For the author the theme of English lexicography and lexicology is not new as, from various aspects, she has authored or co-authored several publications (mostly articles).

In the Introduction comprising only a bit more than two pages, the author stresses the importance of dictionaries for their "aiding the user in encoding correct and natural sentences in the target language" (p. 5), as well as the importance of usage restrictions in them for the intended dictionary user and the type/purpose of the reference work (p. 6). On the same page she includes a sentence enumerating the contents of the chapters. In the last brief paragraph she states that on the basis of wide lexicographic data, both a synchronic and diachronic "attempt is made to provide an overall usage-oriented account of a group of semantically related nouns that share the feature of having been female-specific throughout the development of the English language", and that a "system of labelling conventions is proposed in Chapter 2, and put to practice in Chapter 3 ... which differs substantially from the systems and conventions that are offered by ELT dictionaries that are published today". Regretfully, by its contents the Introduction could at best qualify as a Preface, but certainly not as an Introduction to a research work, as by the basic standards of academic writing, an Introduction is expected to contain a

concise and clear statement of the aims of the thesis, the author's hypotheses, a well-argued definition of the criteria of the selection of the material to be investigated, and an outline of the methodology used for the research of the data. However, none of these is present in this Introduction, and so the thesis fails in specifying the basics of its very reason of being, which throws a rather adverse light on the submitted work. Consequently, it is also considerably problematic to try to assess the possible merits of the thesis.

As to the main chapters of the thesis, each is introduced by what the author termed an Introductory, although in English this word only functions as an adjective.

Chapter 1 presents an outline of the selected aspects and problems of lexicography, also in relation to lexicology. It is based on the author's earlier publications on which, as stated in a footnote on p. 8, she enlarges in the chapter. In her survey of the disciplinary status of lexicography, types of dictionaries and definitions in them, and in outlining the "tailoring" of entries to the user, numerous statements on the theme made by various authors are incorporated (among others Ščerba 1940, Malkiel 1962, Zgusta 1971, Weinreich 1980, Hartmann 1987, Hausmann 1989, Geeraerts 1996, Wiegand 1998, Svensén 2009, Béjoint 2010), with comments by the author of the thesis, which, however, are often difficult to identify in the text, as the extent of the material incorporated from these or other authors or referred to is mostly not indicated. The survey manifests a considerably extensive and in-depth familiarity of the author with the existing sources, as well as her ability of systematic presentation of information, as a result of which she offers a well-informed picture of the rise and development of theoretical multi-aspectual lexicography, presenting the principal issues from the recent history of dictionary-making, which since mid-20<sup>th</sup> century has become of interest also to linguists, with the ensuing involvement of some of them in lexicography. Pointed out is the importance of the notion "user perspective" introduced by Zgusta, which is inherently present within the theme of the thesis. The lists of questions related to lexicography (p. 15), to dictionary types (p. 19), the classification of lexical works by range, perspective and presentation (p. 21), the dictionary types according to the needs of the users (p. 22-23), etc., as well as the classifications of the types of lexicographic definitions (25-30), etc., including also the "rounding up" (p. 35), are taken over from the sources, but provide a rather compact survey. With regard to the achievements of British lexicography and its international prestige, brief mention of some of its early history could perhaps have been made (the author only includes examples of entries from Samuel Johnson's dictionary of 1785, which, however, was for the first time published already in 1755, representing the beginnings of lexicography as a respected academic profession).

Chapter 2 highlights the existing classifications of lexicographic labels and their definitions, and lists the ones used in five EFL dictionaries. These, with the exception of the third one, become the points of reference for the rest of the thesis, namely *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary*, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, and *Macmillan English Dictionary*. In both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, many references or quotes seem to be from secondary sources, e.g. the usage labels quoted on p. 36 from Landau (1989) are also included in Burkhanov's *Pragmatic specifications: Usage indications, labels, examples; dictionaries of style, dictionaries of collocations* (in van Sterkenburg's *A Practical Guide to Lexicography* 2003). Though the author of the thesis is evidently familiar with the above text by Burkhanov, which is listed in her Bibliography, this is not referred to here. As to the selected ELF

dictionaries, she points out that in most of them we encounter major variation in the way the labels are introduced and presented to the users, sometimes without clear distinctions (e.g. only as “dated”, “old-fashioned”, “old-use”), or with inconsistencies. She also states that the information content of various labels is rarely treated with equal attention, pointing out e.g. the frequent negligence of labelling dialect, namely regional dialect.

Such observations are fully grounded, and a higher degree of unification would certainly reduce the difficulties encountered in successfully consulting dictionaries and make them more user-friendly for non-native speakers, to which the author is aiming to contribute by her research. However, does the author really think that some universal labelling system can be expected to be formulated one day, as she states at several places in the thesis (see e.g. pp. 7, 57, 160)? Is such expectation realistic, considering the dynamism of languages, the not fully distinct boundaries of linguistic categories, and among others, the differing linguistic perceptions and preferences of lexicographers and publishers? As to the usage labels in EFL dictionaries, as presented in Table 2 on p. 54, is it really grounded to state that they differ substantially, if out of 63 labels, plus one absent, there are no more than 11 which differ from the most frequent label “informal”, while one of them merely by being intensified as “very informal”? The core of the chapter, though only of the extent of two pages, is formed by subchapter 2.4, where the author suggests five main categories into which labels could be grouped, namely those of usage, style, field, region, and finally the axiological label. It could be argued that with regard to the subsumed lexicographic qualifications, the label “usage” is rather non-specific, and by far does not explicitly indicate the semantic fields of “demeaning”, “disapproving”, “disparaging” or “derogatory”, hence it does not offer a sufficiently transparent hyperonym. Moreover, “usage” is related to any lexical item. Should it not be replaced by a more specific categorial label (e.g. “attitudinal”)? And should not the classification include e.g. also professionalisms?

It is only as late as at the beginning of Chapter 3 (p. 57) where the author formulates and defines the main goal of her research, i.e. to develop and employ a special internally coherent and unified systemic labelling apparatus as a contribution to more reliable and more effective production tools (the latter is probably meant in the sense of dictionaries). While most of her suggested labelling is non-problematic and, at the same time, rather self-evident, one cannot but wonder why the “stylistic” label also includes “Scottish” and “regional” (p. 58), later also e.g. “AE, BE”, which would not testify to the author’s expertise. In a linguistic research work on lexicographic labels one would not expect such proposals.

As to the data to be investigated, specifying the criteria of their selection is naturally a *conditio sine qua non* in academic writing, hence also a prerequisite to successful linguistic research. In the present thesis, this is not the case. With regard to data selection, just a cursory and literally merely a one-line note is present in the Introduction (p. 6, see also above), while the next mention of data selection appears only in Chapter 3 in the “Introductory”. There, rather generally and in an as if cursory way, but not as a definition, the author offers the statement that the words “have by no means been selected at random and without good reasons, primarily because the lexical items, the semantics and usage value of which are subject to examination belong to different stylistic categories, though they have certain features in common. Among others, the lexical items targeted here share the feature of having been female-specific throughout the development of the English language or, at least, they came to be female-specific

at a certain point of the history of English” (p. 57-58). In our opinion such statement by far does not sufficiently and convincingly define and give argumentation for the selection of the particular eight words for the given research. Could part of the reason of such selection lie in the fact that out of them, e.g. “girl” was the subject of, among others, a monograph by Kleparski (1997), and of an article by Łozowski (2015), who also published on the lexicographic aspects of “cow” (but in the thesis in the subchapter on “cow” no reference is made to his article), and with whom the author of the thesis co-published an article on “mare” (2015), and so the research on these words was available, hence could be included in the thesis? The footnote on p. 59 concerning the subchapter on “girl” states that it is an extended version of the analysis carried out by Łozowski (2015), but what extent of his text is taken over is not stated.

Apart from the possible above reasons of selection, do the words selected really represent a semantic group *per se*, or are there any other words that could qualify for selection, but just did not happen to be selected (e.g. “chicken”, “lamb”, or “pigeon”)? And was there any reason why the derogative polysemization was nearly exclusively dealt with in connection with words referring to females? If a prevailing tendency, could this be related to any linguo-cultural and socio-historical developments, or, to put it in a lighter tone, is it just in line with an attitude expressed by *cherchez la femme*? Are male references better off? Or have not also words as “wolf”, “shark” or “pig” undergone analogous negative semantic developments as references to people, or males in particular? At least some consideration of the position of the selected words in the lexical and semantic system of English would certainly have been welcome.

Chapter 3 is subdivided into 8 subchapters, based on the selected words denoting female beings (it should be added that only some of them are primarily references to females). First, the etymology of the word is given, and then a survey of meaning changes within its historical development is presented. The etymologies are mostly literally taken over (with some omissions only) from *Oxford English Dictionary; The Definitive Record of the English Language* available online. For some reason, also quotes in Old English are given (always the first sentence from *OED*, though this is not stated in the thesis) with each, without any explanation, followed by the most recent quote from *OED*. Such procedure can be viewed as at least redundant, though amply contributing to the extent of the thesis. It is true that etymological and historical-semantic data are most intriguing in their own right and provide an interesting reading, but there is still the question of the relevance of their very extensive inclusion from the sources into a thesis on labelling contemporary lexis for users of EFL, moreover, when some of their meanings and their usage are rather or even highly marginal. Subsequently, each meaning is assigned a lexicographic label, including the category of axiological labels.

In Chapter 3 each subchapter includes a table featuring the meanings and lexicographic labels listed in the four selected dictionaries. The tables are designed with vertical columns for each dictionary, though a horizontal presentation would have been more reader-friendly and less space-consuming. As to the data, does *CCAD* really define meaning 2 of “queen 1” as “a woman who is for being very good at it” (p. 134)? Several subchapters also include a section on word-formation and phraseology of the given word, but the appropriateness of the presence of such data is at places questionable, as most of these sections are not related in the thesis to labelling (e.g. “mare’s nest”, p. 121). Similarly, in the final part of the subchapters the author includes examples of usage of the particular word. Moreover, in line with much textual redundancy, these are, again and again, preceded by “VERBAL ILLUSTRATION”, which in

our opinion did not have to be preserved from the source, as it is evident from italics that these are example sentences. Although Chapter 3 covers 87 pages of the thesis, i.e. about two thirds of its main body, in its subchapters no conclusions concerning the research are made.

The following part entitled Conclusions has only 4 pages (144-147) and entails mostly only a descriptive recapitulation of the contents of the thesis, and no synthesizing statements about any findings are given. Actually, the formulations presented are more to the detriment of the thesis than a contribution to its value, as manifested e.g. by the following statement saying that in Chapter 3 “we put to use alphabetical dictionaries rather than ideographic dictionaries, and the many of the lexicographic works were historical in nature (the OED, dictionaries of etymology). As to the parameter of range, we made use of a great number of dictionary works with great depth of coverage, that is a number of individual senses listed under each lemma. As to the other dictionary types, apart from occasional remarks practically no use was made of prescriptive or facetious dictionaries, but rather the nature of our enquiry made it necessary to put descriptive dictionaries to practice. Likewise, we found no use at all for either bilingual or multilingual dictionaries” (pp.145-146). On account of labelling, the author repeats the statement from Introduction that “the labelling conventions developed in this work differ substantially from the various conventions offered by dictionaries discussed” (p. 147). In this respect it should be noted that conventions of course result only from usage, not from a proposal, however well meant, and that the statement that the proposed labelling differs “substantially” from that in ELF dictionaries can be viewed as being rather exaggerated.

The following Summary (pp. 148-160) again recapitulates, sometimes literally, the contents of the previous parts of the thesis, pointing out that the idea of labels used not for the description of language, but for helping the users of language, is not new, and has been dealt with e.g. by Ptaszyński (2010). It is evident that the linguistic level of much of the Summary is markedly different from that of e.g. Introduction or Conclusions, and it makes the impression as if it were not written by the same author, including the fact that most of its text (pp. 150-159), with only one exception (on p. 149 quoted above), is without any mistake.

On the whole, in contrast to the title of the thesis, its main focus, as well as its merit, can actually be seen in the area of historical lexicography and historical semantics. Although the thesis presents some interesting material and some relevant observations, its conception with regard to its theme lacks clear goal-orientedness and conciseness. It is a pity that the structure of the thesis is rather hybrid and some of its parts seem to be mechanistic compilations from the sources, whether linguistic or lexicographical. The account on lexicography, typology of dictionaries and labelling is coherent and of merit, the proposed classification of labels is acceptable and authorised, but in connection with the selected words and their labelling, the author has not presented synthesizing findings. As no hypotheses were formulated for the research, in this respect no evaluation of the findings can be made. Although some partial contribution to the existing research is evident, numerous other aspects of the thesis leave much to be desired.

Parts of the thesis are written in good English, which can be due also to the sources used, including the author's own previous (and probably edited) publications, while above all the Conclusions in many places lack linguistic correctness and formulaic artistry (see e.g. above quotes from pp. 145-146). However, numerous graphical or linguistic flaws, either minor or quite substantial, are also present in most of the thesis. Some occur already in the Abstract

("...the main objective of this part of work is to presenting objectively... ", p. 3) and in the Introduction ("In this work, basing on wide lexicographic data", p. 5). Many other mistakes include redundant or missing spaces, missing commas, missing or redundant articles, e.g. ("let us now see how the distinction introduced above words", p. 28; "in the Chapter 2", p. 5; "during the World War 2", p. 69), missing words ("not an easy task, which due to the fact that not only", p. 27); typos ("on the boarder line", p. 144); grammatical mistakes ("someone who does not already understands it", p. 27; "when we to start to make enquiries", p. 37; "for which, – it remains to hope – the system proposed here may...", p. 149); lexical and structural mistakes ("on the first sight", p. 120; "it continues author's interest", p. 144; "Basing on lexicographic data, both historical and synchronic – is an attempt...", p. 149). These and many other mistakes do not do justice to the thesis. In addition, regardless of the level of English of any author or the attention paid by the same to proofreading the text, most mistakes can easily be done away with thanks to the availability of spell-check, which can thus assist in the author's complying with the indispensable requirement of linguistic correctness of the academic text, in particular a linguistic one. On the other hand, although it is a pity that the efforts of the translator of Zhrnutie have not resulted in a fully correct Slovak text, which at some places is actually on the verge of incomprehensibility, with regard to the foreignness of the candidate, this can be viewed as only a minor issue. As to Bibliography, an alphabetical list of the abbreviated forms of the names of dictionaries referred to in the text would have been welcome for their easier identification, as in Bibliography these sources are listed according to their authors only.

In conclusion it can be stated that in spite of the reservations, though some of them serious, presented in this Review, the thesis submitted by Mrs. Anna Stachurska, PhD. can be considered to be a partial contribution to the selected theme. In view of the above, I can recommend the thesis for its defence, and in the case that the defence is successful, I propose that the thesis be accepted as basis for awarding to Mrs. Anna Stachurska, PhD., the academic-pedagogical degree Associate Professor in the field of General Linguistics.

#### Summa summarum

Ako to vyplýva z vyššie uvedeného posudku, k habilitačnej práci, ktorú predložila pani Anna Stachurska, PhD., mám viaceré podstatné výhrady najmä pokiaľ ide o jej pomernú nekoncepčnosť v zameraní na tému, istú nekoherentnosť jej spracovania, nevyužitie možnosti syntetického vyhodnotenia materiálu a istú sporosť dosiahnutých výsledkov, ako aj pokiaľ ide o množstvo odborných a jazykových nedôsledností či chýb. Napriek tomu sa domnievam, že predloženú prácu predsa len možno považovať za čiastočný prínos k skúmaniu zvolenej problematiky, na základe čoho ju odporúčam k obhajobe. Len v prípade, že sa kandidátke podarí úspešnou obhajobou kompenzovať najpodstatnejšie nedostatky a výhrady uvedené v posudku a osvedčiť svoju odbornosť, navrhujem, aby dr. Anne Stachurskej bol udelený vedecko-pedagogický titul docent v študijnom odbore všeobecná jazykoveda.



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