

**Review of the habilitation monograph**  
**by Stachurska Anna, PhD**  
**“In search of usage labels in English lexicographic theory and practice”**  
**Filozofická fakulta, Univerzita Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici.**  
**Banská Bystrica, 2017. – 186 p.**

*Dictionaries are like watches, the worst is better than none and the best cannot be expected to go quite true.* By this quotation of the outstanding British lexicographer Samuel Johnson I want to stress a crucial importance of the problem that Anna Stachurska tackles in her monograph, providing an outline of various methodological aspects of the theory and practice of dictionary making. The research covers a panorama of key issues related to typologies of lexicographic works, types of definitions that are employed, techniques of constructing dictionary entries, the issues related to dictionary use, as well as the ways of codifying usage by means of labels. The comprehensive study that is offered in the monograph provides not only the most up-to-date information, but also stresses the importance of what has already been done in the field of lexicographic theory and practice.

It should be pointed out that A. Stachurska's work is interdisciplinary. It lies on the borderline of lexicography, lexicology and semantics. The suggested synergetic treatment of a system of usage labels gives a complex picture of the specificity of the issue and opens up new vistas for even deeper probes into lexicographic theory and practice. The author approaches the research subject matter from the point of view of lexicography pragmatic orientation on the dictionary users' needs and reference skills, taking into account the recent achievements of the present-day lexicographic theory and practice. The major goal, successfully achieved by Anna Stachurska in her research paper, i.e. “to develop and employ a special internally coherent and unified labeling apparatus, formulated in terms of a system of LABELS” (p. 58), is absolutely relevant and timely. The suggested methodology definitely enables to transform the EFL dictionaries into a more reliable production tools and to make their use more efficient. The approach, that Anna Stachurska consistently pursues in her work, as well as the results obtained appear to be of immense topicality.

The empirical data is formed by a group of semantically related nouns that share the feature of having been female-specific throughout the development of the English language (*girl, maid/maiden, bird, cow, mare, tart, queen, wife*). These lexical units are subject to over-all analysis in terms of their use at different periods of the English language with the emphasis on their social value in Modern English. The author resorted to printed lexicographic works as well as selected electronic lexicographic publications and a number of specialized dictionaries, which should be approved of. Basing on lexicographic data, both historical and synchronic the author has chiefly relied on the information provided by the Oxford English Dictionary.

It can't escape the attention that the monograph represents a good balance of theory and data. The monograph numbers 186 pages and it consists of three main chapters, preceded by an *Introduction* and followed by *Conclusion*. Let me now compactly consider the contents of the monograph chapter by chapter.

In the *Introduction* to the monograph the author immediately introduces the scope of the problem under discussion, highlighting the need for developing effective language learning tools, lexicographic reference materials among them. A. Stachurska concentrates on the issue of encoding usage information, which is traditionally done by labelling conventions. The main aim of Stachurska's *In search of usage labels in English lexicographic theory and practice* is to provide the reader with a clear picture of how the problem of usage codification by labels is solved in lexicography, as well as to present the main trends, approaches, studies, representatives in this field, and, in the long run, to work out her own system of usage labels, which may be both successfully employed in language analysis and prove to be welcome in lexicographic theory and practice. The work is also to “shed some light on the question of the way words are used, and - in particular – what their usage in Modern English is” (Stachurska, A. p. 5).

Chapter 1 provides an intriguing insight into the contemporary state of knowledge in the given research area, basic research aims as well as overall methodology including a whole range of research questions. Among them is a disciplinary status of lexicography. In the outline of its development A. Stachurska brought into the open the dual character of lexicography, emphasizing its theoretical component known as metalexicography, and the practical component associated with the process of dictionary making. Providing some theoretical background to the analytical case studies in Chapter 3, the author addresses the problems of typologizing lexicographic works based on a set of distinctive classificatory criteria, defining semantic information in lexicographic sources of different types, the learner-oriented use of dictionaries. A. Stachurska comes to the conclusion that in case with advanced English language learners who make use of EFL dictionaries, the research into the contexts of dictionary use, and dictionary look-up strategies are of greatest importance. It is pointed out that an examination of EFL dictionaries reveals what type of information is obtainable to the user, as well as the data collection methods.

The discussion included in Chapter 2, being essentially theoretical, revolves around the main focus of the monograph, i.e. those aspects of lexicographic research that contribute to a better and exhaustive account of the usage of words. The author provides a comprehensive discussion on such a highly significant issue connected with research, as the codification of usage by labels, namely (i) label classifications, (ii) labels in EFL dictionaries as well as (iii) possible ways of optimization. Sharing interesting observations concerning the lexicographic labelling techniques in dictionaries of different types, the author states that the *EFL* dictionaries selected for analysis tend to employ different - both quantitatively and qualitatively - sets of labelling systems. Besides, they employ them differently in the dictionary macrostructure. The author provides convincing results of the lexicographic analysis stressing that "*one may hardly speak of any consistency of either the system itself, or the usage of labelling systems in the dictionaries of current English*" (Stachurska, A. p. 54). Thus, the author, following various suggestions made in the literature earlier, devised a set of information labels that are meant to determine style, register and attitude that characterize various individual word applications. The set has been extended at the expense of new labels that are justified by the nature of the material analysed. A. Stachurska singled out the following five main categories according to which labels could be grouped: USAGE LABEL, STYLE LABEL, FIELD LABEL, REGIONAL LABEL, AXIOLOGICAL LABEL. The author provides a number of exemplifying instances to illustrate the points raised in this chapter.

Chapter 3 embraces a skillful analysis of lexicographic account of the semantics, compounding, idiomatic and paremiological potential of a group of English female-specific nouns, namely *girl, bird, cow, maid/maiden, mare, tart, queen, wife*. By means of lexico-semantic analysis A. Stachurska not only highlights that these words have a number of features in common, but claims that all of them at a certain point of their history became human-specific and became associated with the element (+FEMALE). The author traces all the cases at various stages of their diachronic evolution, proves that they became loaded with various, usually negative, axiological elements and characteristics, and provides illustrative examples and lucid evidence of the highlighted phenomena at each point in a thorough and explicit fashion. Successfully blending the theoretical data and practical results the author skillfully illustrates the process of historical polysemisation of the nouns under study, with due attention to the rise of the regional variant senses and their current stylistic value in various regional varieties of English.

Chapter 3 may be viewed as a proposal of a new type of lexicographic account that includes both new type of information, but also various elements of traditionally provided information that are encoded in a novel and unified way.

The monograph ends up with a detailed and convincing summary of the crucial results obtained and the main observations made in the course of the analysis. The research outcomes answer the key research questions, which are explicitly formulated in the introductory part of the habilitation monograph.

With *In search of usage labels in English lexicographic theory and practice* A. Stachurska has provided language researchers, lexicographers and educators with an invaluable tool, which will

help to navigate in lexicographic theory and practice. One must give a special credit to the author for the quality of the language, precise and clear style of the research paper. The explanations of concepts are clear, concise, and the examples are enlightening.

What raises some questions and requires certain comments on behalf of the author is as follows:

1. I would recommend providing the examples in Chapter 2 in a more explicit fashion in order to see the place of the label discussed in the structure of the dictionary entry, which enables to identify the ultimate function of the label.
2. One would expect more illustrative context-based explanations of the discussed material in Chapter 3.
3. In Chapter 2 (p. 55) A. Stachurska explains the difference in usage labelling practices in the *EFL* dictionaries under study by *the very system employed by individual lexicographic editorial teams* (p. 55). What are the differences in the systems that the author means? Can such deviations be explained by the existing gap between lexicology and lexicography (e.g. in the treatment of the phenomenon of connotation or evaluation or stylistic stratification)?

Regardless the questions mentioned above, I have grounds to say that this specialized research proves to be exceptionally useful. The habilitation monograph is an invigorating contribution to lexicography, historical semantics, and a worthy impact to linguistic education in particular. It has every potential to become a highly instrumental tool not only for the English language lexicographic explorations, but for a cross-linguistic lexicographic investigation, too. Aside from that it might be used as a didactic material for university lecturers in teaching lexicography.

This contribution by Anna Stachurska will proudly complement the achievements of the highly authoritative lexicographic school of the Slovak Republic.

Olga L. Byessonova

Doctor of Philology, Professor

Professor of the British and American Studies Department,  
University of Ss Cyril and Methodius University in Trnava,  
Slovakia

I recommend Anna Stachurska to be awarded the title "docent".