Exploring, Analyzing, and Describing Variation: From the Dictionary to the Lexicological Research Platform

Stefan Engelberg (Invited speaker)

Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache (IDS), Mannheim

engelberg@ids-mannheim.de

Dictionaries contain a huge amount of information about variation within or across linguistic varieties. However, by looking up single entries in print dictionaries, this wealth cannot easily be explored. Online dictionaries offer many more options, if they can be accessed by means of detailed search functions. But even online dictionaries are mostly static representations of a particular set of lexicographic descriptions. The next generation of online lexicography will interweave lexicological data analysis, lexicographic description, and lexicographic searches, and thereby turn the dictionary into a lexicological research platform, in which researcher, lexicographer, and dictionary user are not necessarily different agents anymore. Online lexicological research platforms will be characterized by the following features:

- integration of dictionary and corpus (and possibly other types of empirical data); the user can verify and enhance lexicographic information using corpus analysis tools that are integrated into the dictionary
- dynamic publishing and dynamic structuring: articles are published on the fly and the dictionary can be altered by adding new levels of information
- opening-up of the dictionary to the research community by collaborative information gathering on the basis of digital rights management
- multi-faceted searches that allow to widen and narrow down searches using all possible kinds of feature combinations
- integration of dictionaries into dictionary nets and lexicological portals that combine numerous interrelated resources

These conceptual changes will be illustrated by several lexicographic products that are currently under development at the Department of Lexicological Studies at the Institute for German Language in Mannheim: a portal for lexicological exploration of corpora, a portal for loanword lexicography, a dictionary of spoken German, and a portal for lexicological analysis and lexicographic representation of contact varieties of German.

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