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## **Gilles-Maurice de Schryver (ed.). *A Way with Words: Recent Advances in Lexical Theory and Analysis. A Festschrift for Patrick Hanks***

This *Festschrift for Patrick Hanks*, like Hanks's own career, covers a period of extraordinary interest and technological change for the practice of lexicography. As Yorick Wilks, looking back to the early 1980s, points out, "Computational search within large corpora ... was simply an aspiration." Dictionaries were compiled in hard copy (in 1978, only storage in fireproof cabinets saved fourteen years' worth work for the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary*, when the Glasgow premises were gutted by fire). Real-language evidence was similarly likely to exist only in the form of citation-based handwritten files. By 2010, dictionaries and reference had moved online, and the existence of significant corpora is now taken as a norm. *A Way with Words* charts some of the paths between the two extremes in the thirty years covered by the book. Understandably for a

festschrift, papers come from those (many of them long-term friends, colleagues, and associates) who have found Hanks's work particularly fruitful as representing the contribution of a key mover and shaker in the field.

### **Introduction**

In "Getting to the Bottom of How Language Works", Gilles-Maurice de Schryver sets the scene by outlining Hanks's career and significant publications (for example, 'Word Association Norms, Mutual Information, and Lexicography', co-authored with Ken Church in 1989). The three divisions of the book, theoretical, computational, and lexicographic, reflect the main areas of that career. This explicit connection provides a linking thread between the papers—as good a way as any of achieving a level of homogeneity for the book. A few of the links

are a little tenuous: for example, Jonathan Green's enjoyable article "ARGOT: the Flesh Made Word", on the development of Francophone slang, apparently had its genesis in a request by Hanks for a similar piece for the Elsevier *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (2005). However, the piece itself is so interesting that no-one could cavil at its presence. It is perhaps to be regretted, given Hanks's work in names lexicography, that there is no article which reflects this specific area.

As an addendum to the Introduction, sixteen pages are devoted to a bibliography of Hanks's publications, ordered chronologically. One of those listed as 'forthcoming' is also one of the most warmly referenced: *Lexical Analysis: Norms and Exploitations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), which Wilks describes as "his forthcoming magnum opus". de Schryver writes with understandable admiration of his subject's continuing productivity: there is clearly no question but that the next few years are likely to be busy ones as 'forthcoming' is replaced by publication dates.

### Theoretical aspects and background

The first two papers in the theoretical section underscore the chronological reach of the book. The first of them, "Defining the Definiendum", is actually the last paper (unfinished at his death in 2007, and lightly edited here by Rosamund Moon) written by John Sinclair. Starting with the typical treatment in a dictionary of idiomatic phrases (appearing at the end of an entry, with citation forms that are likely to be ad hoc), Sinclair argues that corpus evidence offers a strong case for multi-word units of meaning to be given the status of headwords. Yorick Wilks's paper on "Very Large Lexical Structures", on the other hand, introduces a seminal paper from the past: it was first published in 1977, and opens a fascinating window on what is now a vanished world, since (as Wilks puts it) the text "refers to a thesaurus where one would now refer to WordNet".

### Computing lexical relations

Ken Church's paper "More is More", which opens the section on computational lexicography, takes a backward glance at the pioneering days when he "mocked up" something similar to the COBUILD corpus using the AP (Associated Press) newswire. ("I chose the AP wire merely because it was handy.") However, it swiftly comes up to the present day, engaging with Adam Kilgarriff's contention that "Googleology is bad science." The paper provides a stimulating overview of what (even allowing for provisos about dirty data) can be achieved, before coming to a

positive conclusion: "Everyone has more access than they ever had before. Life is good." Other papers in this section deal with computational approaches to the lexicon in English, German, and Czech—springing from Hanks's activities in the United States, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

### Lexical analysis and dictionary writing

Rosamund Moon opens the section on lexical analysis and its impact on dictionary-writing with "Words that Spring to Mind", a paper which presents a corpus study of the phraseology of *spring to mind*. Starting with an examination of contrasting dictionary treatments of the item, her contribution exemplifies her quotation from Hanks on the necessity for "patient studies at the word-face" as a prerequisite for demonstrating systems and formulating explanations. Sue Atkins provides a detailed account of the development of a recent and major database, the DANTE project, as developed for the *New English-Irish Dictionary* (2010), and considers its possible application to FrameNet. Other papers in the section include Kilgarriff and Richly's reflections on a possible route from corpus to dictionary: "Semi-Automatic Dictionary Drafting".

Human beings seek certainties. *A Way With Words* concludes with Michael Rundell's thought-provoking paper "Defining Elegance". In it, Rundell looks back to the early days of corpus lexicography, when real-language examples could replace lexicographers' constructs. He recalls the plaintive protest "But it was in the corpus" when he had to "confront members of the team with outlandish examples in text they had compiled". The point may seem an obvious one, but it is a useful corrective: Rundell has captured a moment at which what in any terms represented an exponential shift in resource was for that very reason being given a status beyond question. Every advance needs to be welcomed with an element of testing and scepticism.

### Conclusion

This is an enjoyable and thought-provoking volume, which brings together accounts of the early days of computational lexicography, with speculation as to where the future might take us. It will be of interest both to those who are intent today on exploring the latest developments, and those whose focus lies in tracing the changing history of lexicography over the past thirty years.

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