Monolingual electronic legal dictionaries: advantages and prospects

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Abstract.

Today electronic dictionaries are gaining more and more popularity as their advantages considerably outweigh the downsides. The article is aimed at revealing the main features of monolingual electronic legal dictionaries that make them more convenient as compared to their printed counterparts, as well as determining the possible areas of their further development. The research is based on analyzing and synthesizing the theoretical literature on the subject, empirical methods (observation) and the method of classifying the obtained results. The analysis showed that the main advantages of electronic dictionaries from the compilers or editors' point of view include unlimited capacity for storing information, selective and frequent update, automatized procedures of organization, systematization, rearrangement of information and data verification, possible use of hypertext. The users, in their turn, benefit from electronic dictionaries due to the speedy, flexible, convenient and user-friendly search. Although electronic legal dictionaries share many of these features, they still require wider hypertext usage, word-list enlargement and dictionary entry upgrade. The results of the investigation can be used to confirm the necessity to develop electronic legal lexicography as a promising field of linguistics.

Keywords: electronic lexicography, dictionary, monolingual dictionary, legal dictionary, dictionary entry

Introduction. For a long time, lexicography was considered one of the most conservative fields of linguistics as compiling a paper dictionary used to take many years. Contemporary lexicography is becoming more progressive and promising because modern technologies make it possible to collect, compress, store, accumulate and process large amounts of lexicographic information faster and easier [Chumarina, 2010].

In the era of printed dictionaries, cryptic lexicographic content used to be hard to decipher for the user. Robert Lew and Gilles-Maurice de Schryver admit that if dictionary users had problems while consulting traditional printed sources, "they tended to blame themselves rather than the work". The so called "revolution in lexicography" happened due to the introduction of the computer and the internet. As dictionaries gradually moved from the bookshelves onto various e-reader portable devices, and soon after, mobile devices, they became more productive and pragmatic and less ideological or dogmatic. R. Lew and G.-M. de Schryver opt for the term 'digital' rather than 'electronic' because "modern dictionaries in the form of apps or online services are probably better seen as collections of structured data and code, rather than hardware" [Lew, De Schryver, 2014].

Methods. The research is based on analyzing and synthesizing the theoretical literature on the subject, empirical methods (observation) and the method of classifying the obtained results.

Results. Despite the fact that electronic dictionaries have a considerable number of advantages over printed ones such as unlimited word-list size and dictionary length, high speed and flexibility of search, dynamic nature, possibility of user research, the potential of the contemporary information technologies is not used to the full in the existing electronic legal dictionaries, which are digitized versions of printed lexicographic resources in their majority. As a result, hypertext is only used to show the connection of the headword to some related terms, while it also can be used to refer to 1) legal documents and other original sources where the term was used, 2) the explanation of the terms which the user comes across within the definition of the headword, 3) various graphic, audio and multimedia tools. As concerns the word-list size and entry length, they frequently remain unchanged after the digitization.

Discussion. As S. Granger states, electronic lexicography, or computer lexicography, started to develop in 1950-s and early 1960-s [Granger, 2012]. At that period, the capacity of the computer did not enable lexicographers to create dictionaries from start to finish, but it was able to facilitate organization, systematization, rearrangement of information, data verification and printing the text. According to E.V. Dzugaeva, even modern dictionaries printed over the last decades can be considerably different from traditional ones in the word-list structure, entry structure, placement of sections, tables, schemes. This is explained by the fact that modern lexicography uses machine-

readable databases, which leads to creation of new types of lexicographic information [Dzugaeva, 2005: 19].

The above mentioned fact emphasizes the necessity of distinguishing between two types of electronic dictionaries:

1) a digitized version of a printed dictionary;

2) an independent electronic dictionary (offline and online).

Consequently, the range of functions fulfilled by these two types differ considerably. B.T.S. Atkins and M. Rundell note that until recently dictionary entries were first compiled in a printed version, and only then given to IT experts for digitization. This emphasizes the insufficient use of computer functions in dictionary compiling [Atkins, Rundell, 2008]. G.R. Chumarina also stresses the fact that modernization of lexicographic systems requires specific technologies to be developed to cater the needs of dictionary users rather than simple switching to electronic versions [Chumarina, 2010].

The analysis of works devoted to electronic dictionaries, as well as the experience of using electronic dictionaries of various types, revealed a number of advantages to electronic dictionaries as compared with printed ones.

The first and foremost advantage of electronic lexicography is the possibility to use **hypertext** in dictionary entries, which changes the traditional linear structure of a dictionary. What is more, hyperlinks can be utilized not only to direct the reader to a related term within the dictionary, but also to some external resources: 1) original texts, in which the concept is discussed; 2) the sources on which the article was based; 3) related concepts; 4) the concepts whose definitions can arouse the user's interest [Rubleva, 2010].

In fact, the above-mentioned feature predetermines the subsequent ones to a certain degree. Dictionary compilers are now enabled to use **various graphic, audio and multimedia tools** to represent different kinds of information.

Another important advantage is **speed of search,** which is enormously higher in electronic dictionaries due to the availability of various search options, the possibility of using advanced software and hyperlinks in dictionary entries. Moreover, electronic dictionary search tends to be user-friendly. For instance, many of them enable users to require an entry structure adapted for their needs.

Furthermore, **the word-list size** of an electronic dictionary is not limited by the physical parameters and can be expanded, while the large glossary volume of a printed dictionary can create difficulties in its publication. In the age of printed dictionaries, updating was mostly motivated by the necessity to accommodate the vocabulary that had appeared in the language since the previous

publication. This involved the change of the target size of the dictionary, so the editors had to sacrifice some important elements to make space for the new entries [Lew, de Schryver, 2014]. This may lead to the increase in the so called 'lexicographic information cost'. The term was coined by Sandro Nielsen and implies difficulties and inconveniences, which the user can associate with the use of a specific dictionary or entry, for example, excessive use of abbreviations to economize space may seem inconvenient and difficult to read [Nielsen, 2008]. In the electronic dictionaries age, the unlimited glossary volume has solved this problem, and due to the use of hypertext the lexicographic information cost is gradually decreasing.

M. Rundell also points out that a dictionary accessed on a computer or a mobile device has considerable advantages over its predecessors, and another obvious benefit is related to **entry length** [Rundell, 2013]. According to Y. Gao, "unlimited space offers the lexicographers a variety of choices, such as the addition of many entries, the multimedia content, the listing of related words, and the inclusion of more than one language in the dictionary, etc." However, according to Robert Lew, it is very important to make a distinction between storage space and presentation space in a dictionary resource [Gao, 2013]. Thus, in a mobile dictionary a large entry also cannot be convenient, but the usage of hypertext can help the lexicographer to compress the information without any considerable reduction.

The electronic dictionary is **dynamic**, it can be **constantly updated**, corrected, edited. Moreover, dated information can be easily removed. Meanwhile printed dictionaries are "static" in their nature as they stay unchanged until the next reissue is published. As R. Lew and G.M. de Schryver state, owners of paper copies do not tend to buy an updated edition every time it is published, so even if the dictionary had been considerably improved, users would still stick to the earlier printed version. Similarly, offline "dictionaries on optical media (CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, USB stick, etc.) or standalone handheld dictionaries are not that easily upgraded". Online dictionaries and smartphone applications can be updated as often as necessary, and all users can benefit from the improvements immediately [Lew, De Schryver, 2014].

On top of that, electronic lexicography makes it possible to **do user research**, which may, for example, reveal the words users search for if they are missing from the dictionary [De Schryver, Joffe, 2004]. As the lexicographer's main goal is to satisfy the information needs of the users, they are primarily interested in the type of information users look up in dictionaries, e.g. to choose the right headwords to be edited first [Müller-Spitzer, Wolfer, Koplenig, 2015]. Since the beginning of electronic dictionary era, it has become enormously easier to elicit feedback from the users, or even involve them in the process of creating a dictionary. As Lew and De Schryver claim, since "users

themselves started getting involved in bottom-up dictionary-making", these products tend to be recognized as even more practical [Lew, De Schryver, 2014].

Legal dictionaries are "important aids in communicative and cognitive usage situations", as S. Nielsen claims [Nielsen, 2015]. Due to their specific nature, the majority of electronic dictionaries of legal terms are digitized versions of some authoritative printed editions, thus they can lack some features of a proper electronic dictionary. For example, being one of the most popular electronic dictionary of legal terms, 'The Law Dictionary' freely available on the Internet consists of the digitized entries of the famous Black's Law Dictionary (2nd Ed.). On top of that, the editors warn the users about possible typos because the entries of the source dictionary remained unchanged. Although only alphabetical search is available, the electronic resource is still more convenient to use because the entries are provided with the hyperlinks to related terms and even articles on related topics.

Another example of a popular resource worth mentioning is Dictionary.Law.com, based on The People's Law Dictionary. The user of this dictionary can select different types of search: by term, by definition and by the initial letter (alphabetical search). Despite being digitized versions, the entries are provided with hyperlinks to related terms ('see also'), which also contributes to its convenience as compared to a printed dictionary.

Today, electronic resources consisting of several dictionaries and one search engine are also very widespread on the Internet. For instance, Yourdictionary.com contains digitized entries of Webster's New World Law Dictionary (2010), which is the authoritative printed dictionary of American legal terminology. Although the entries of the legal dictionary are not provided with hyperlinks and consist only of the headword, the mark of the part of speech, the definition of the headwords, and several definitions of related terms, the search engine shows the results from all the dictionaries the website comprises. Thus, the user can benefit from all their features simultaneously: they can obtain the information about the origin of the headword, possible grammatical forms and usage examples. Besides, the users can leave comments under the entries, which can either focus the other users' attention on certain aspects of the entry or help the developers in updating the dictionary.

Given the above, we can conclude that electronic legal dictionaries have many positive features including high speed of search and using hyperlinks to the definitions of related terms, etc. However, being digitized versions of the existing authoritative printed lexicographic resources in their majority, they still tend to lack certain advantages a proper electronic dictionary can provide: constant update of the entry structure, addition of new terms and usage of graphic, audio and multimedia tools in the entry. The use of hypertext still tends to be limited to related terms and 'see

also' section, with no reference to original texts, legal documents or source articles, while the definition itself does not contain any hyperlinks.

Conclusions. To summarise, it can be said that electronic dictionaries have a sufficient number of advantages over printed ones to determine them as more promising in terms of compiling and use. Their main advantages from the user's point of view are speed, flexibility, interaction and convenience of search. From the point of view of the lexicographer, the work on compiling an electronic dictionary is much simplified in comparison with the creation of its printed analogue. Moreover, information technology provides an opportunity to embrace unlimited amount of information in one source, establish numerous connections between the items of information by means of hypertext and update it selectively. However, the potential of the contemporary information technologies is not used to the full in the existing electronic legal dictionaries. We strongly believe that all the above mentioned facts determine the prospects of their further development.

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