Current theoretical issues in lexicography and its implications to Africa

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ABSTRACT

Lexicography has had a chequered history. Aside the traditional phonological, morphological, and dialectal challenges, theoretical issues have in recent times occupied a significant place in lexicographic forum. It assumed even a greater dimension in this era of continual evolution in internet and e-learning. It calls for urgency to streamline positions to enable African scholars inquisitive to make their mark in lexicography to cue in rightly. This paper examines the journey through the thorny part of the foundations and development of lexicography vis-a-vis the hurdles surmounted and the battles ahead. The study glimpsed through future lexicography in line with the present, x-raying its significance to Africa. It discovered that the central point of recent debate is whether theories should be ascribed to lexicography and their necessity. Some scholars hold that theories already exist in lexicography, that what should rather occupy lexicographers is the question of applicability of these theories to the surging e- dictionaries. On the other hand, those who deny the existence of theories in lexicography claim that such theories do not exist and are not necessary. For them, theories exist to explicate unknown facts which hitherto defy rationalization or a case of doubt of origin of a phenomenon. For them, issues in lexicography are practical and may not require much philosophising to understand. The authors opine that the presence or absence of theories in lexicography is dependent on what theories are; the varied conceptions of it; and the purpose(s) they are designed to serve. It is their view that developing languages like that of most African countries need theories as a framework to align to universally acceptable lexicographic patterns.
Keywords: Lexicography, Lexicon, Theory, Foundation, Implication, Africa

INTRODUCTION

Lexicography may be conceptualised as the art of researching on, writing, compiling, and editing special books such as dictionaries, encyclopedias or various other reference texts such as law, archeology, and medical dictionaries or abridged dictionaries designed for specific audiences, such as children or college students. Lexicography involves working on dictionary entries that cover matters such as pronunciation, definition of grammatical terms, various languages, dialectical variations and etymology [1-4]. While doing this, the dictionary writer considers several matters like understanding the nature of words, their meanings, how the vocabulary of a language is structured, how speakers use and understand the meaning of words, the structure and relationship of words in a language, etc. Many people use the dictionary or encyclopedia without a thought on its foundation or inception [5-7]. They rarely think of the challenges involved in compiling the dictionary or an encyclopedia, not to mention the theoretical debates surrounding dictionary making. This work is aimed at unraveling such knowledge to enable users to be more appreciative of the lexicon [8-9]. The article will help scholars to familiarise themselves with the rig ours of dictionary compilation and discovering ways of dealing with them. The dictionary is of everyday relevance to second language learners, non-language specialists, journalists, academics, native speakers and everyone that has a language need. This article also perused the issue of theories in dictionary making as a critical aid to facilitate the building of the lexicon and to enhance greater universal usage [10-13]. Compilation of the dictionary is not an easy task. Apart from the universal challenges of dictionary writing, there are phonological aboutissement such as cultural, regional, linguistic barriers and other issues that confront the making of the lexicon. The early compilers of dictionaries were faced with such challenges. As soon as they found solution to such problems, new ones rear its head. New words find their way into the lexicon on almost daily, weekly; monthly, and yearly bases. Accommodating such words in the language corpus and indexing them is never an easy task for the one who compiles the dictionary [14-16]. To make the dictionary up to date, it means managing these new entrants. Should the dictionary now be reversed on daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly bases? To choose any of the above options has far reaching implications. This and more are the challenges and hurdles facing the lexicographer. Dictionary compilers also face the problem of phonetic transcription of the words used in the lexicon. These transcriptions are usually made to enable readers and second language learners pronounce the words the way the native speakers do. The problem is made more complex as a result of the

existence of many dialects [17-19]. These dialects in some instances pronounce same words in varied ways with the addition of extra linguistic elements as allophones of a basic phoneme. Apart from this addition, some dialects pronounce same words with different tonality. Aspiration and nasalization are some of these dialectal features. To accommodate the various pronunciations is never an easy task, not to talk of the cost of enlargement or expansion of the dictionary [20-21]. Coupled with the above, readers of dictionaries find it difficult to interpret phonetic symbols and diacritic marks that accompany words indexed in dictionaries and encyclopedia due to poor knowledge of linguistics and phonetics. Dictionary compilers look for various ways to find solution to these problems including changing the character of certain letters or their positions. Some compilers go the extra mile of using colored prints to ease pronunciation, while some others use extra linguistic features below or above the cases especially to indicate tone or stress.

The emergence of computers and other high-grade systems that trailed the industrial revolution of the West added its own values and tasks to the making of lexicon. All the above leave no one in doubt that the making of the lexicon is an onerous task. In attempt to wriggle out of the enormous challenges, some dictionaries now appear in online mode and in prints. The new words and new registers that appear on daily or periodic bases are accommodated in new versions of dictionaries.

Foundations of Lexicography

The practice of lexicography is as old as many religions if not older. It followed the organising of human speech into more systematic form in prints. The first model of a dictionary dates back to the BCE in West Asia. In its early stages, these lexicographic works were more like a line up of items. These lists of words were used to create bilingualism by putting down the similar words of two languages after land conquests began mixing different cultures [8]. It, however, took millennia, for the initiation of the alphabet arrangement system before the dictionary was formed the way we know it to be presently. While many other continents were well underway with the concept of 'lists' as a language reference, it took Europe a little longer. Beginning in the 15th century, the first popular dictionaries were lists of Latin words with English entries. These were written to encourage the study of Latin, especially for those who could not read it. These English-Latin dictionaries are the first example of lexicography in the English language. Within a century of their publications, lexicography became a very popular means for learning emerging languages such as French. The first English-only dictionary written in 1604, *A Table Alphabetical*, by Robert Cow-drey, contained a little less than 3,000 entries. It was more than a century after, that *The Dictionary of the English Language*, written by Samuel Johnson was published in 1775. The dictionary was regarded as standard. It enveloped over 42,000 items. From this very time, other classic dictionaries continued to emerge until the modern era of internet or online dictionaries. It should be noted that attempts at dictionary compilation did not just start with the above English dictionary. Many countries at earlier times, even as remote as 2nd and 3rd centuries BC attempted dictionary compilations. Though, some of them never called them dictionaries, but present knowledge reveals that they were lexicons in their own rank. It should be noted, however, that some of them never intended to compile or publish dictionaries but to solve emerging problems of everyday life. Unknowingly, they were laying the foundation of a great aspect of knowledge and civilization. Some of the works, like the Chinese Er-ya (Near Correctness) are explanations of words, phrases, and cloudy concepts for easier understanding and application [9]. In India and Persia, Sanskrit dictionaries and thesauruses were put together. Other civilizations that made effort at compilation of lexicons at earlier times include: Greece, Rome [10], Arab, Hebrew [11], Middle East [12], etc. Lexicon appeared in medieval Europe as linear glossaries in Latin texts arranged with its vernacular counterpart. In Africa, lexicography like formal education is in its tender age compared with those of Europe and Asia. The early missionaries put up glossaries that aided them spread the Gospel message. That marked the inception of dictionary making in Africa.

AFRICA

Lexicography in Africa like Formal Education is in its infancy compared with Europe and Asia. Many Languages in Africa are still at the verge of development and standardization [1-3]. Many dialects are yet to be studied. Lexicographic development in most of those languages can be counted in decades. The minute available dictionaries are mostly bilingual, though; monolingual lexicons of some African Languages are gradually sprouting up. This is not to say that the attempt at dictionary compilation in Africa dues not have a long history as some of their counterparts in Asia and Europe. The major difference may be the rate of development and sustainability [4-5]. The early missionaries to Africa before the colonisation and partitioning of Africa did compile glossaries that aided them in evangelism. Many of them were not trained in lexicography or linguistics but they made significant contributions to lexicography in Africa. They had fewer registers that supported their Mission. De [6] posited 1652 A.D as possible earliest date that one can trace Bantu Lexicography. [7], categorised approaches to lexicography in Africa. The first approach according to them, is the Eurocentric Approach in which dictionaries of African Languages were written by Europeans and authors of non-African descent. The second is the Afrocentric Approach in which indigenous Africans compile Lexicons of African Languages applying their native-speaker knowledge and intuition. Both approaches face the theoretical challenges of modern lexicographic studies [8].

Theories and Lexicography

Theories are ideas or principles explaining an aspect of nature or phenomenon. Scholars have approached the concept and issues relating to theories from varied perspectives ranging from scientific to humanistic approaches. Different diciplines state what they consider to be theories in academics and real life. Longman dictionary of contemporary English, for instance, defines theory as an idea or set of thoughts meant to explain a thing concerning life on earth especially a thought yet to be proved as true. It further states that it is a universal rule and views around a subject. Some scholars regard theory as a method used to provide understanding and to answer the question 'why?'(skillsyouneed,com). Others regard it as a statement that explains how certain phenomena work. It is also seeen as a set of laws on which the practice of an activity is based etc. (google.com). The authors allign with this last definition as a base to the present work. Scholars are divided in opinion as to the place of theories in lexicography. While some are unequivocal on the existence and significance of theories in lexicography, others are skeptical about it. Some other scholars and academics do not wish to crack their brain on such academic jamboree and simply decide to play a lasses-faire attitude or simply overlook the issue and continue to deal with lexicography on a pragmatic level. [6] had defined "theoretical lexicography" as a body of knowledge related to lexicography and drawing inspiration from the title of [8]

to depict lexicography as "the art and craft of dictionary making." Theoretical lexicography is about areas of lexicography that targets to create principles capable of improving the quality of future lexicons (wikipedia.org). Lexicographic theories have continued to be a point of departure among lexicographers and linguists alike. [9] already connoting a theory explicated that he knows no other scientific exercise with so many interdisciplinary relationships as does lexicography. According to him, functions, contents and structure assumed the three dimensions of a dictionary. He goes further to state how these three are integrated in \the dictionary. [10] made a case that lexicography is in the middle of a challenging but also a troublesome transition to electronic dictionaries. According to him, the question that has been raised in this process has been whether it is necessary to formulate a new theory that may serve as a guide to the birth and progress of lexicographical e-tools or to make use of the theories that were developed during the time of the printed materials. By the above statement, Tarp has taken it for granted that theories of lexicography already exist, in which case what should concern scholars of lexicon is the need to marshal out new theories for the emergent online glossaries or to continue with the existing theories of the print dictionaries.

In response to the concern of Tarp, some scholars before now held divergent views on the existence of theories for lexicography and the need for it. The Anglo- Saxons are among those that reject theories for lexicography [12]. In 2010, Henri Benjoint in his writing denied the idea of theory or theories for the lexicon. On the contrary, [17] posits that a theory of lexicography is required. This line of argument is toed by Russian tradition exemplified in [13, 16]. The same applies to German lexicographic tradition shown in [21, 23]. The argument goes on and on, with different traditions and authors taking different stands. Henri Benjoint wrote in a current book that he does not casually think that theories of lexicography exist just as he doubts the possibility of the existence of any. For him, those that have proposed a general theory have not proved their stand beyond reasonable doubt. Buttressing his argument further, Benjoint asserts that a theory is a system of thoughts that is rolled out to explain phenomena that are not otherwise easy to elucidate. According to him, a science has a theory, a craft does not. Commenting on the above, Tarp held that whether lexicography should be considered a science or otherwise is an argument that generally has to deal with the notion of science as used by the particular academic. Weygand published his general theory of lexicography in 1984 titled: *Weygand's theories of the kinds of meaning knowledge.* This he did in addition to his illuminating on existing theoretical pattern (oup.com). According to Louw, it is evident that when theories are referred to by lexicographers, they are not at all times talking about theory in/of lexicography, rather, what they are inclined to is either linguistic theory in general or a specific theory made within the realms of linguistics [25]. Not minding the above debates, some authors have propounded theories on various aspects of dictionary making that engage scholars of lexicography. [27], for instance, analysed Weygand's theories on the integration of the "semasiological" and "onomasiology" presentation of semantic information in the microstructures of general monolingual dictionaries. He evaluated them to see their relevance. He explained and exposed these theories making illustrations using two Africans general monolingual dictionaries. Louw made a conclusion after his analysis that the "semasiological" presentation of meaning is most fittingly placed in the item giving the meaning bref which should build part of the semantic remark in a combined microstructure. He went further to clarify that in the semantic comment this entry must be followed by clearly distinguished items presenting "onomasiology" data especially about words of same meaning (p.121).

Considering the above arguments, one may opine that whether there are no theories of lexicography or that theories of lexicography exist or that there will be a theory of lexicography will be dependent on approach to lexicography from the conceptualisation or conceived meaning of theory. If theory is conceptualised as the explanation of the origin of a phenomenon that hitherto had no explanation, then, one might state that lexicography does not need one for its genesis is known and might not require a theory to state the history. To, however, compare its development pattern vis-a- vis other areas of knowledge might require some theories of evolutionary patterns. If on the other hand, a theory is taken as general principles, progression, building, or idea of a subject, lexicography can be said to be in need of one. Generally, lexicography is in evolution considering the changes that trail dictionary making. These changes need to be harnessed and enveloped with a theoretical framework. In spite of the gigantic strides in dictionary making especially in developed nations, many cultures and languages are still in their infancy stage of dictionary making and may require guidelines in form of theories to make meaningful progress. Theories or guidelines are also required to steer those intending to make a career out of lexicography. Since unprecedented advancement in technology takes place more rapidly in this era more than anticipated, theories should be set in place to accommodate new discoveries and technological breakthroughs. Many African Languages for instance, that are beginning to develop their lexicon require serious theoretical framework to undertake and accomplish the onerous and painstaking task of lexicography in line with the current trend. As the transition from Print to Digital and E- Dictionaries is on the fast lane, theories are needed to accommodate the changes and even take care of future developments. The evolutionary trends put in theories will no doubt be of much benefit to "young lexicographers" as it exposes them to what to expect in the field. Many disciplines or areas of knowledge more curiously desire a dictionary or dictionaries that will capture registers in their departments of study. Those to compile such registers may be non-linguists who may require theories of dictionary production as a guide. A framework emerging from these theories is expected to take care of entry patterns such as: historical entries, word glossaries, lexis, phrases, clauses, and diverse structures. The theories should have provisions or templates to take care of current and future technological upgrades and advances. It should be visionary, accommodating, dynamic, and elastic in order to keep pace with the fluidity of the linguistic world.

The lexicographic theories should peruse and accommodate the synchronic and diachronic ways of dictionary making and its evolutionary signs and degrees of universality. The encyclopedias and the online expository catalogues must not be left out in a synergy of the theoretical frameworks of lexicography. For instance, a theory should be able to answer some basic questions such as: What makes or qualifies a material or book to be labeled a lexicon? What differentiates the different kinds of lexicon? What types of entries should be associated with an encyclopedia? What differentiates the online dictionaries with the printed forms? What is the best format for the varied lexicographic entries? What makes for a good dictionary and why? When the above questions and others are stringently and technically answered, the necessity for a theory or theories of lexicography will

no longer be in doubt. Non experts can thus to a very high extent differentiate a good dictionary from a bad one. Scholars in other disciplines other than language can have bases for initiating dictionary projects in their various disciplines.

As areas of knowledge are increasingly compartmentalised, so is the need to have lexicons to accommodate the ever-increasing new registers and new discoveries. Theory/theories of the lexicon should take care of patterns of such entries. A theory of lexicography should take care of the way a word should be classified. Some words are classified on functional basis while some others are defined on the basis of lexis. A statement on which way to go and the consequences associated with the different procedures is already theoretical in nature. Should spoken words be identified by sounds or syllabic patterns? What about morphological combinations or extensions? In what way(s) can words be regularly formed by free and bound morphemes? What is the place of derivation and compounding? What about grammatical constructions and inflections? The needed answers to the above questions and many more make theories in lexicography not only advantageous but basic. Good theories of lexicography will unite the different perspectives and to a considerable extent streamline concepts and issues in lexicography. Theories and Paradigms are great and essential tools in scholarship, and lexicography should not be an exception. It is envisaged that time shall come when principles of lexicography and dictionary studies will be taught to High School Students and as a general course in universities and higher institutions. This is due to\ the increasing importance of the dictionary on the daily activities of man. Whether in the social, religious, or academic milieu, lexicons are needed to elucidate concepts or regurgitate historical facts.

IMIPLCATIONS TO AFRICA

The place of theories in knowledge and human development cannot be over-emphasized. Apart from providing the tool to categorise or group observations under an umbrella, it helps to analyse the connections that exist between concepts or ideas. It makes more vivid the perception of an observed phenomenon. Theories help to explain a fact that is observed and sieves out differences and similarities when juxtaposed with other facts. Thus, it helps the observer make changes where necessary, or to push further, frontiers of investigation. A theory can help in identifying a problem and also provide a framework for its solution. On this basis, African writers who are venturing into dictionary compilation need theories for guidance. They should be abreast of current theoretical issues so that they do not operate on a terrain overtaken many years back. The current theories and the current linguistic debates will provide a safe landing for their virgin discoveries and ease result presentation/ project analysis. Aware that many African Languages have not being studied, they have every opportunity to make their marks and develop those languages via available theoretical tools. Lexicography is a very significant branch of Language Studies and development. Generally, lexicography like many areas of knowledge began in simple ways before metamorphosing into complex areas of study. For Europe and some parts of Asia, it has had some hundreds of years of history, growth, and development. M\any languages and dialects in Africa are still battling to have fully developed orthography and other illustrated linguistic features. Language scholars of such languages are challenged to work harder using the available lexicographic tools to improve their languages. They should realise that language development is not meant only for language scholars of developed European and Asian Languages. Even as a great number of African Languages are yet to be developed, linguists and lexicographers of African descent should be constantly aware of the challenges and live up to it [10].

 The current advances in communication technology and the extant progress in dictionary making provide enough tools and materials for publishing of books and production of various kinds of lexicon. The scholars of African Studies should maximize the opportunity provided by these tools to make progress. They are called to contribute their own quota in the universal linguistic upliftment and theoretical development. They should be on the fast lane especially now that technological advancement is offering many tools to ease learning and further the frontiers of knowledge. Some African Languages that have crossed the primary hurdles of language advancement and are at the nursery level in the establishment of their lexicon, should study the dictionaries of some developed languages of the world and from that background develop theories that will enable them uplift African Languages and its lexemes. Many of the available dictionaries are written within the realm of semantics of words and word glossaries in which case they are majorly bilingual with limited words. Scholars of these languages should increase the entries in such dictionaries and cue in, in the universal movement of establishment of language universal rules. They will thus, lay a solid foundation of compilation of African monolingual dictionaries. Progress achieved in the development of lexicography should spur them to greater efforts in formulating theories of lexicography from the perspective of African Languages as a contributory quota in the universal linguistic and glossary bank.

African scholars and lexicographers must engage in massive, active, and aggressive intellectual development and acquisition of knowledge especially as it affects the making of the lexicon. [4], distinguished between what he termed 'Active Learning' and Passive Learning. 'According to him, Active Learning consists of a system of investigation into special areas of knowledge that involves finding and utilization of information, analysis and interpretation of the data, examination of the issues with the goal of making demanding conclusions. On the other hand, he stated that Passive Learning is associated with exposition to facts through lectures, seminars, and discusses. He concludes that this type of learning mostly leads to spoon-feeding and memorisation or rote learning. Active Learning on the other hand evolves to exploration or research. African Language Scholars should do their best to engage in active lexicographic research that will help to liberate many languages in Africa still under the shackles of non – description and non-development of their Lexicon.

CONCLUSION

Academics and scholarship is a continuous and progressive phenomenon that require constant search, analyses, redefinition, and retesting. That a particular fact has not been unraveled does not negate its existence. Lexicography like many other areas of study is still evolving to greater heights and complexities. Many branches of learning presently accommodate theories with greater intensity. Lexicography cannot be an exception considering the place of the lexicon in the radical transmission and evolution of knowledge and information. Lexicography cuts across subjects and times. It continues to be relevant in academics, commerce, and industry. Theories enhance knowledge and add value to subjects matter. It provides raw materials for hypotheses and its testing. There is no doubt that theories in dictionary making will make more robust the subject matter of lexicography. African linguists and compilers of glossaries need good theories to guide them in their onerous task of giving the

world good dictionaries of African Languages, culture, and heritage. Lexicography can no longer be taken for granted in the world's search for knowledge and fulfilment. Following the availability of the internet lexicography, dictionaries will continue to enhance knowledge, researches, and discoveries in all spheres and all manners of life. The current debate on theories of lexicography is a testament that lexicography has become a serious, solid, and complex area of knowledge.

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