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Introduction

Hölgyeim és uraim, kedves kollégák és vendégek!

Engedjék meg, hogy az EFNIL nevében meleg és őszinte hálámat fejezzem ki magyar barátainknak e konferencia előkészítéséért és megrendezéséért. Nagyon örülünk, hogy itt lehetünk Budapesten. A meleg vendégszeretet, amely körülvesz minket, nagyszerű környezet az EFNIL tagok tizedik plenáris konferenciájához. Egyben arra ösztönöz minket, hogy elmélyedjünk az idei év általános témájában és kicseréljük véleményünket és tapasztalatainkat a lexikográfia helyzetéről.¹

Dear colleagues and guests,

Let me hope for your leniency and understanding for my clumsy attempt to thank our Hungarian friends in their own language for their hospitality. I also thank our friend and colleague Istvan Kenesei, the director of the hosting institute, for the stimulating opening of this session. We are glad to have a representative of the European Commission with us. Thank you very much, Monsieur Durand, for conveying the greetings of your director general and for contributing to our general topic with a report on the practice of interpretation for the Commission. I welcome Uwe Mohr, the president of EUNIC and the Civil Society Platform for European Multilingualism. I consider his visit to our conference as an answer to the engagement of our delegates Bessie Dendrinis and Johan Van Hoorde in the activities of the Civil Society Platform. I also welcome the representative of Meta-Net, Georg Rehm, and thank him for his brief introduction to the activity programme of Meta-Net that in several respects coincides with the aims of EFNIL. When I attended the Meta-Forum in Brussels last June, I said in my plenary address that because of our interrelated aims and activities I could not decide whether Meta-Net could be considered as a technological arm of EFNIL or EFNIL as a linguistic branch of Meta-Net. Of course, I also welcome our guest speakers and the guests from the local academic scene and from abroad. And last, but by no means least, let me welcome all the delegates of our member institutions. This is somehow a confusion of addressees, since I am myself one of the EFNIL delegates. However, I only want to express how glad I am that you all have come to the 10th annual conference of EFNIL. It is indeed the 10th one if we count our founding conference in Stockholm in 2003 as the first one. Our 10th anniversary, however, cannot be celebrated before next year.

Please, allow me to use the opening of the conference for a brief comment on this year's general theme: *Lexical Challenges in Multilingual Europe*. The attribute *lexical* sug-

¹ Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and guests!

On behalf of EFNIL, I want to give my warm and sincere thanks to our Hungarian friends for preparing and organizing this conference. We are all glad to be here now in Budapest. The generous hospitality that is being offered to us is a pleasant context for the 10th plenary meeting of the members of EFNIL. It is also an incentive for us to get deeply involved in this year's general theme and to exchange our views and experiences in the field of lexicography.

gests that the conference will be mainly concerned with lexical units, with words, words of the various European languages. Why should we care about words? Why are words important? I hesitate to answer with the first sentence of St. John's gospel: *In initio erat verbum. In the beginning was the Word.* This would lead to theological arguments that a simple linguist like myself could not meet. Let me instead make use of another classical quote. In one of the scenes of Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* (II, 2), Polonius asks the prince who is reading a book: "What do you read, my Lord?" Hamlet answers: "Words, words, words." He could have answered even more generally: *a text* or *a book*, because Hamlet does not want to be interrogated by the old bore Polonius and, therefore, meets the question evasively by a generality. However, Hamlet's answer is in its general sense true, because everything that we speak and hear, that we write and read consists of words.

I will not enter a long discussion of what words are in a strict sense of modern linguistics. There are various attempts to come to a definition of words as units somewhere between the structural levels of morphology and syntax. Distinctions are made between lexical words and grammatical words, between autosemantic and synsemantic words, between phonological and graphematical words, between simple and compound words, between indigenous words and loan words, between the various word classes and so on and, of course, between words of different languages. Distinctions like this must be made and observed by grammarians and, more important in our present context, by lexicographers. For my brief deliberations, however, it suffices to look at words from the perspective of a language user as the units of speech or writing that native speakers of a language usually regard as the smallest isolable meaningful elements of the language. More naively, words can be seen as items that can be looked up in a dictionary, provided there is a dictionary.

The repetition of isolated words is the beginning of the language acquisition of a child. The use of single words and, perhaps, our hands are the first steps to communicate in a foreign language. Structural linguistics considered syntax as the core of a language. However, syntactic structures by themselves convey little meaning. Lexical units, words, are always needed to make an utterance meaningful.

Since ancient times, the collection of the words of a language in a list or a wordbook was an important means to stabilize a language, to establish and codify a standard variety of the language. A dictionary was, therefore, often considered as a linguistic treasure, a metaphor still used, for instance, for the modern *Tresor de la langue française*. In German, we use the expression *Wortschatz* (treasure of words) when we refer to the vocabulary of a language. These days, one of our member institutes, the Accademia della Crusca in Florence, celebrates the 400th anniversary of its *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* of 1612, a lexical treasure that became a model for similar authoritative dictionaries of other European languages.

While a wordbook of an individual language, that is, a monolingual dictionary, is especially important for the cultivation and preservation of the language of an ethnic group or a nation; bilingual and multilingual dictionaries that confront the words of two or more languages are aids for the learning of other languages, for understanding foreign texts and for the communication between speakers of different languages. Bilingual glos-

saries and dictionaries are historically even older than monolingual ones.² Within the context of EFNIL and especially under the heading of this conference, we emphasize that bilingual and multilingual dictionaries are indispensable tools to overcome the borders between the different European languages and to maintain the linguistic diversity of Europe. For some people, dictionaries are even tools to enjoy this diversity. Dictionaries are indispensable for translators and interpreters, for teachers and learners of foreign languages, for the authors of textbooks and other learning material, for the scholar, scientist, or engineer who tries to understand a foreign text as well as for the tourist in a foreign country who wants to know what a sign or a public warning is about.

The importance of words as essential elements of our various languages and the undisputable benefit that our languages and their speakers have from dictionaries were the motives for EFNIL to put this year's general conference under the title *Lexical Challenges in Multilingual Europe*. I use the word *dictionary* not only for printed books but as a cover term for collections of words in all media in which lexical data are being presented nowadays.

I would like to distinguish between three interrelated kinds or aspects of lexical challenges. The first challenge is directed as ever towards the lexicographers in our institutes and publishing houses in our countries to produce and to present reliable information on the words of our language and their use. More than in the past, the linguistic diversity in present Europe demands, however, that the vocabulary of each individual language is not only described for itself and by itself but also within the context of other European languages.

A challenge in a second sense is directed towards the participants of this conference. We should feel challenged to learn from each other about modern methods and aims of lexicographic projects in the various countries and forward this knowledge and experience to our own language institutions and publishers in order to stimulate and improve their lexicographic activities. This exchange of information on theoretical concepts, practical methods, and experiences should not be limited to the ways of extracting lexical units from corpora and other sources and ordering and analyzing them but should also include, beside traditional ways of publication, modern means and media of presenting and distributing lexical information. This again should presuppose the study of the actual needs people have and the ways they use dictionaries and other lexical sources: What kind of words do people look up, and what information on words do they want? How and for what purposes do they use dictionaries in conventional forms or digital media? The challenge to us to learn from each other about modern developments and experiences in lexicography will be at the core of this conference.

We should, however, not forget a third kind of challenge, a challenge directed towards the authorities in our countries and on the European level. It is more a demand than a challenge which should be felt and accepted by the addressees. In current international discussions, the compilation of dictionaries in various media and their distribution is usually subsumed under the term of *language industries*. This suggests that dictionary

² The oldest known dictionary consists of tablets with bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian wordlists, dated roughly 2300 BC.

making is a commercial industry, a business like many others. However, the financial gain that can be made by selling dictionaries is in most cases very small in relation to the amount of research and lexicographic efforts invested in their production. In some countries, the production of standard dictionaries of the national language or languages is, fortunately, not considered as a profit-oriented business but as a cultural task and is, therefore, financially supported by the governments or other public institutions. This is not the case for dictionary projects on all our official languages. Some lexicographic projects are left solely to the care of publishing houses that, of course, live on the profit they can make with their products. The development of a comprehensive or even authoritative dictionary of one of the so called smaller languages does not offer much profit. The economical situation is especially difficult for the production of bilingual dictionaries, not to speak of multilingual dictionaries. Governments and other public institutions may feel obliged to support dictionaries of their own national language but have little interest in supporting projects in bi- or multilingual lexicography.

Here, the support of the European authorities must come in. If multilingualism is still on the agenda of the European Union – and an impressive conference in Cyprus last month seemed to confirm this – the Union should give more support for the development of modern bilingual and multilingual dictionaries in all appropriate media as tools for us Europeans to cope with the diversity of our languages and to preserve this linguistic and cultural wealth. Special support is needed for lexicographic enterprises on languages and language pairs, the results of which are not economically rewarding but necessary to enable and ease interlingual communication in Europe. Our own project EFNILEX is a modest attempt to develop an exemplary model for this kind of dictionaries. One of the results of this conference that I hope for could be an appeal addressed to our national governments and to the European authorities to increase the support for current lexicographic projects and to provide the necessary funds for the development of a European lexicographic infrastructure. This is one of the issues the General Assembly of EFNIL will discuss tomorrow.

Well, let us get to work now! As stated in the announcement of the conference, we will at first hear overview descriptions and general discussions of international developments in modern lexicography by several experts in this field. In advance, let me thank Patrick Hanks and Willy Martin for their contributions. Thanks in advance also to Gábor Prózský for contributing to the panel. Representatives of several member institutes of EFNIL or specialists of their choice will give a series of reports on important lexicographic projects in their countries. The thematic part of the conference will end tomorrow with a panel discussion on central questions concerning present lexicography in Europe. I appeal to all speakers and chairpersons to allow some time for the other participants to ask questions or contribute their ideas on the various topics. Altogether, I am confident that we will hear informative and stimulating papers and have lively discussions over these two days.

Thank you for your attention!

Vielen Dank!

Merci beaucoup!

Köszönöm szépen!