

# Introduction: Nothing is more practical than a good theory

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Pages ix–xi of

**Lexicography in the 21st Century: In honour of Henning  
Bergenholtz**

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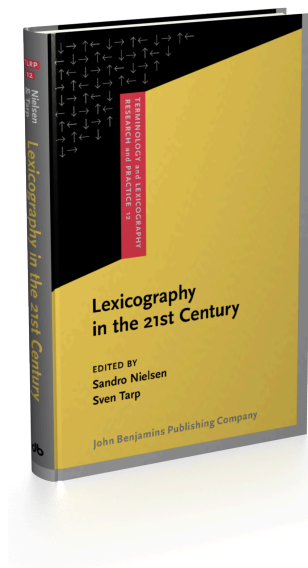
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# Introduction

## Nothing is more practical than a good theory

Sandro Nielsen and Sven Tarp

The history of dictionaries can be traced back several thousand years. During all this time a huge number of lexicographical products have seen the light of day, but many dictionaries have been relegated to obscurity whereas few have become part of the popular idiom. Similarly, the number of great lexicographers is small compared to the totality of lexicographers since the dawn of lexicography. Until the middle of the 20th century these household names included only lexicographical practitioners, who were primarily linguists, and lexicography was widely regarded as applied linguistics. However, during the last four decades in particular the academic community has realised that the scope of lexicography is not limited to linguistics, and academics started to develop general and specific theoretical principles that could explain the nature of dictionaries and help lexicographers to develop new and improved dictionaries. Since the 1980s, one of the prominent members of the lexicographical community is Professor Henning Bergenholtz, who is both a well-known dictionary author and theoretical scholar, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Henning Bergenholtz started his career as a primary and secondary school teacher and went on to study mathematics and German at the University of Aarhus in Denmark, but moved to Germany to study mathematical linguistics at Technische Universität in Berlin from where he got his master's degree in 1973. In 1975 Henning Bergenholtz was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and in 1978 was awarded the degree of *Doctor habil.* from the University of Essen. He has been professor at a number of universities in Europe and Africa and in 1986 he was appointed the world's first professor of lexicography at the Aarhus School of Business, University of Aarhus, and has since gone on to establish himself as a pre-eminent expert in lexicography. Through his work he has gained an international reputation as an expert in morphology, the use of computer readable corpora, the relationship between grammar and lexicography, and the development of the

theory of lexicographical functions for printed and electronic dictionaries. The *Bibliovita* shows that Henning Bergenholtz's contributions to lexicography are fundamental and span both theoretical and practical aspects.

It is difficult to give a full picture of a man with as much scope as Henning Bergenholtz, so this volume is dedicated to the field of lexicography, which has been greatly influenced by his extensive research and other activities, teaching of lexicography, dictionary reviewing and post-graduate teaching through the last four decades. He is also known as an organiser of conferences, editor and referee of lexicographical journals and most recently as director of Centre for Lexicography – Research into Needs-Adapted Information and Data Access, Aarhus School of Business, University of Aarhus. Coupled with his extensive contacts around the world, especially in Europe, Africa and Latin America, he has made his mark on the lexicographical landscape.

The encouragement and maintenance of excellent scholarly values and critical inquiry is a hallmark of his career. He takes genuine pleasure in interacting with intelligent and inquiring young minds, spurring them on to greater things and this has spawned close and lasting friendships all over the world. The contributions to this volume make up only a small proportion of them. This volume aims at describing the state-of-the-art in lexicography at the beginning of the 21st century and making proposals for future theoretical and practical work in the field.

Lexicography is now in a transitional period and needs to find its place in the research world. The work of Henning Bergenholtz can be seen as a bridge between lexicography as it was practiced in the 20th century and lexicography as it will be practiced in the 21st century. The contributors, given their various relationships with him and his work, have taken off from their own experiences and research journeys in the light of Henning Bergenholtz's rich work, and gone in many of their own exciting directions in this volume. The contributors are all highly regarded international scholars in the field of lexicography and have published authoritative theoretical works on lexicography as well as numerous printed and electronic dictionaries of high quality. Their contributions show how the new theory of lexicographical functions can extend the forefront of the discipline by focusing on dictionary functions and how these can meet the needs of users in various types of user situations. This emphasizes the proposition that the true object of lexicography is the dictionary as a tool that can help users solve problems they encounter in communicative, cognitive and operative situations.

We are greatly indebted to the contributors for taking time out of extremely busy schedules to honour Professor Henning Bergenholtz on the occasion of his 65th birthday. We are grateful for a diverse and excellent set of papers to honour

Professor Bergenholtz and are pleased that the papers also reflect the true spirit of Professor Bergenholtz's research in and dedication to lexicography as well as his wide network and influence in the international lexicographical community.