

Preface

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The HEL-LEX symposium was held over three climatically unforgiving days in Helsinki in March 2005. It was from the outset somewhat experimental in that the declared area of interest was new in being restricted to the English lexis, and it was not all clear what kind of scholar might respond to the call for papers. The resounding success of the International Conference on Historical Lexicography and Lexicology, first held in Leicester and then in Gargnano del Garda, was however an inspiration, as were the continuing biennial conferences of the Dictionary Society of North America, which are always such a congenial and informative event. Delegates came from far and wide, including Russia, Poland, England, Spain, Japan, the United States, Hungary, Canada and Germany, and the event created considerable interest among local scholars as well.

In the event, neither the sub-zero temperatures nor the crusty spring snow proved a disincentive. Indeed, a heroic group bound for the conference dinner spurned the offer of free tram tickets and crunched through a kilometre or more of what remained of the Finnish winter, arriving flushed with their endeavour and with whetted appetites.

The scholarly endeavour was nicely summarised by Professor Zoltán Kövecses, one of three splendid plenarists, who declared that the time was ripe to combine cognitive linguistics with historical linguistics. It was gratifying that both historical linguistics and cognitive linguistics met and interacted with professional lexicography. After all, as for many languages, the most influential and practical descriptions of English, as well as the oldest and most extensive, are dictionaries. This being so, lexicography and the ramifications of its practice deserve more scholarly attention than they have sometimes been accorded.

The papers eventually read at the symposium, a majority of which appear here, were a combination of many interests, from Old and Middle English to issues in cognitive semantics and problems of lexicographical practice. Plenarities by Professor Gabriele Stein and Professor Ian Lancashire dealt at length with neglected sixteenth century lexicographers, Richard Howlet (Huloet) and John Rastell, while Professor Kövecses offered a broader account of theoretical issues in cognitive semantics which relate to metaphor and words for emotion.

A number of papers deal with individual lexemes or small groups of lexemes in detail, a departure from the broad-brush approach to the lexicon so often adopted in the past which is proving increasingly influential and providing new discoveries. The pervasive imprint of the *OED* both as a dictionary and as an electronic corpus was apparent in many papers, but other dictionaries were accorded some space as well. The influence of electronic corpora as a source of data and a force in linguistics is now widely acknowledged—the electronic versions of major dictionaries will increasingly be so as the riches of the English *wordhord* continue to be explored. The symposium demonstrated that much is being achieved in many locations scattered around the world, but the field is large, and more co-ordinated endeavours might achieve much more in the long run. The symposium has put many of its delegates in touch with new work and new people if the animated discussions in corridors between sessions are any guide.

It only remains for me to thank various people and institutions most gratefully: The Variation and Change in English Research Unit of the Helsinki University English Department, under whose aegis the symposium was held, and which underwrote it and gave it both material and moral support; the Unit's Director, Professor Terttu Nevalainen; the Academy of Finland, which funds the VARIENG unit as a Finnish Centre of Excellence, and which provided a generous grant to the symposium itself; to the University of Helsinki for its assistance, which ranged from an elegant reception, conference bags and other materials, to the kindly and unstinted assistance of the porters at the conference venue.

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Riikka Tuomi, who took over as the conference secretary, was a tower of strength. I also wish to thank the symposium helpers who generously gave their time when it was needed and in whatever they were asked to do. Finally I wish to thank the organising committee which it was my privilege to chair, and who made it all possible. They worked tirelessly, gave invaluable advice, and were happy to undertake whatever menial task I despotically imposed on them, all without so much as a cross word. They cannot be sufficiently thanked.

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