

**LO VECCHIO, Nicholas (2020): *Dictionnaire historique du lexique de l'homosexualité. Transferts linguistiques et culturels entre français, italien, espagnol, anglais et allemand*. Strasbourg: Éditions de Linguistique et de Philologie (ELiPhi), 515 p.**

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texts,” which, in addition, is part of a series on “Translation History.” The prevailing perspective simply stems from the asymmetrical relationship that obtains whenever Spanish comes into contact with any of the languages discussed here. For the most part, they can be labelled “minority languages,” but that notion needs to be put in perspective. As we saw, writers in Catalan bend under the weight of Castilian but do not have to bend over backwards as much as their Basque compatriots, not to mention their *herman@s* writing in Abya Yala. When considered from the bird’s-eye view provided by the “world language system” (De Swaan 2001), the relative nature of minority statuses becomes even clearer. The most recent edition of Calvet’s “World languages barometer” (Calvet and Calvet 2017) lists Spanish in third place, behind English and French, but ahead of Catalan (in 23rd position) and even more so of Galician (50th) and Basque (52nd).

In all minority contexts, self-translations are a double-edged sword. They lend visibility but in doing so downplay the fact that the work was first created in a “minor” source-language, thereby reinforcing the dominant position of the “major” target-language. But there are important differences between “minorities.” Catalan, Galician and Basque are officially invisible in the European Union because their recognition within the Spanish State is on a regional instead of a federal (national) level—as opposed to Irish, which (with far fewer native speakers than any of them) has official status in the EU because it does so in Ireland. However, in terms of cultural funding, educational possibilities (including at the post-secondary level) and literacy policies more generally, the position of Spain’s minority languages is infinitely more comfortable than that of any of America’s original languages, only half a dozen of which even register on the Calvet dial. Quechua (in 143rd position, almost one hundred steps “lower” than Basque) is closely followed by Aymara (146) and Guaraní (147). Mapudungun (223), Nahuatl (253) and Mayan from the Yucatán peninsula (281) appear even farther removed from the English Sun of this Solar system (to use De Swaan’s original metaphor of the “galaxy of languages”) and are much less able to resist the formidable force of Spanish.

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Eleanor Rosch would probably say that dictionaries are like birds: just as some birds are more birdlike than others—think robins versus emus—some dictionaries are more dictionarylike than others. The general language dictionary might be the prototypical robin for English speakers or sparrow for French. The dictionary we have here is perhaps closer to a penguin, if we have been listening to Juliette Gréco<sup>1</sup>: it swims rather than flies, being highly adapted to its environment and what it does, it does very well.

Most dictionaries have lots of words. This one only has twelve. But they are keywords. They are the words that designate the concept of homosexuality, starting from Biblical *sodomy* through to contemporary *queer*. In fact there are twelve *pairs*

of keywords, one for homosexuality, the other for the homosexual person. And in five languages. This means there are 143 different keywords, but if you look at the index, there are nearly two thousand words which are analysed.

Most dictionaries are alphabetical. This one does supply an alphabetical index, but the progression is chronological and thematic. So after Old Testament *sodomy* we have mediaeval *buggery* and progress through the centuries via *bardash*, *tribade*, *pederasty*, *saphism*, *lesbianism*, nineteenth century *uranism*, *inversion* and *homosexuality* to present-day *gay* and *queer*.

Most dictionaries are meant for looking up in rather than enticing the user in for a good read. The chronological/onomasiological presentation however invites the reader to explore how the concept has been constructed over the centuries in the different language communities, each new term building on the older... or calling it into question.

Most dictionaries, indeed all correctly functioning dictionaries, have fields, that is a structured series of slots which are systematically filled with the same class of information: headword, pronunciation, number, gender, etc. This dictionary certainly has its fields, which differ from the conventional format, but which are just as strict. Firstly, for each major term there is an introduction explaining how the concept arose and how it spread—generally through translation—to the other language communities studied. Then come fields accounting for the development of the term in each of the languages, followed by an extremely detailed series of fields devoted to the lexical classes identified for each term: morphological precursors, adaptations from other languages by various means, shortenings, etc., and a field for follow-up discussion.

Most bilingual dictionaries... and multilingual dictionaries even more so—have the primary function of providing an equivalent. Here the issue is not so much the search for an equivalent, since one of the originalities of this word field is that the concepts are to a large extent common to most European languages, as to explain how this happened. This, in general terms, is a real exception when it comes to taboo words, as the author quite rightly points out. What the dictionary does do particularly well is to highlight the many specificities typical of each language community covered. For example, it gives a very neat account of the largely complementary distribution of *gay* and *schwul* in German, a distribution which has no equivalent in the four other languages of the dictionary, though this is probably a coincidence: Anglicism-prone Danish uses *gay* and *bøsse* in a way that is comparable with though not identical to German.

Most dictionaries nowadays—the most reliable ones at any rate rely on corpora—indeed are based on corpora, and this is certainly the case for the dictionary in hand. There are in fact two main sets of corpora, primary and secondary. The latter is made up of dictionaries, historical and contemporary, and other reference works. What the dictionaries of the past said about the concepts developed here provides privileged witness of attitudes of the time. These are followed up by literary and other extracts which set the terms in a genuine social context. The evidence assembled here demonstrates the importance of translation in the spreading of the vocabulary of homosexuality, by far the most potent vector.

Most dictionaries can be judged by the way they perform what they are supposed to do, which the followers of Wiegand call their “genuine purpose” or “genuiner Zweck,” usually framed in terms of language use: encoding in the mother tongue, translating into the foreign language, etc. (Bergenholtz and Tarp 2003: 173). Here the genuine purpose could be characterized as mediating the cultural proximities, gaps and overlaps between language communities who largely agree on the construction of what homosexuality might be at different times and in different settings, but which vary widely in the ways it can be expressed. And to do this we need to have access to the relevant writings of the past and the present and a good guide to help us through.

The author has carefully chosen the descriptors of his dictionary: we have seen that his claim that it is a dictionary is largely justified. He sets out to cover the basic vocabulary (*lexique de base*) of homosexuality and how it came into being, excluding for example in-group jargon and homophobic insult, two extremely plethoric categories. The approach is historic, thus the chronological progression. He is also at pains to justify the descriptive and philological approach adopted. The wealth of documentation put to the reader is impressive, though the author's presence is felt, explaining and putting into perspective. The philological dimension is also very much in evidence with the acute attention to detail that characterises the approach. This is not without its downside: the references to dictionaries and other erudite sources is generally coded in arcane acronyms. Similarly the reader is supposed to master several languages—Latin, Old French as well as the five languages of the dictionary, which can make for a challenging read.

In some ways this dictionary looks back with its uncompromising philological stance, but it also looks forward. One innovation is a multi-dimensional approach to what is still called (for want of a better term) lexical borrowing, where

different forms of influence from varied—mostly written—sources are conflated. The philological/lexicographical approach also provides a rebuttal to those who claim that the days of the dictionary are counted. This is particularly the case in translation studies, where advances in corpus linguistics are claimed by some to have rendered the dictionary redundant (Loock 2016: 35<sup>2</sup>; Gautier 2020). Lo Vecchio shows us that the dictionary can be successfully transformed to take into account advances in corpus linguistics but still doing the scholar's job of guiding and interpreting and indeed in continuing the research. For example, the entry *homosexuality* containing all the medically inspired terms formed on these Greek and Latin roots contains several hitherto neglected words such as *homosexuel*, which never seem to have been described and explained in context. This is just one of many examples of original research incorporated into the dictionary, making it less prototypical for what is thought of as secondary sources.

There are other dictionaries with similar orientations in all the languages covered here and it is to be regretted that lack of space precludes an in-depth comparison with some of the major works<sup>3</sup>. None of them however proposes analyses based on exceptionally thorough documentation in five languages (more in fact if those not systematically exploited are counted too), which alone guarantees an intercultural interpretation. As with most dictionaries, some things have to be left out: the very long entry of *homosexuality* virtually ends at the beginning of the twentieth century, simply because the volume of material produced after that date would have been too great to include.

One last question concerns the dictionary's commitment: to what extent can it be considered an example of "militant lexicography"<sup>4</sup> (Gaudin 2013)? This could be considered a doubly legitimate question, as several of the key terms, including *homosexuality*, were themselves militant coinages. The author positions himself quite clearly on this point, explicitly denouncing "...propos racistes, sexistes, xénophobes et LGBTQ-phobes, dans un certain discours politique employé à de basses fins manipulatrices dans le hideux spectacle dont nous sommes trop souvent les malheureux témoins" (p. 6). It would indeed be interesting to compare the many dictionaries with the same or similar content along the lines of their degree of militancy. But be this as it may, the commitment shown in this dictionary in no way impairs the objectivity of the treatment, guaranteed by the upfront use of an exhaustive documentation, enabling all viewpoints to be expressed.

The real originality is perhaps in the demonstration that a philological approach, based on thorough documentation, can play a major role in the history of ideas.

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## NOTES

1. "...les pingouins sont plus gais qu'les pingouines alors que les pingouines sont tristes, on le devine." Juliette Gréco (1970), *Les Pingouins*.
2. "Ce [les corpus parallèles] sont de véritables dictionnaires de nouvelle génération [qui] exploitent des corpus regroupant des traductions segmentées généralement au niveau de la phrase" (Loock 2016: 35).
3. These would include Rodríguez González (2008), Eribon (2003) and Courouve (1985) for starters.
4. Mazières (2015: 147), quoting Alain Rey, characterizes militant dictionaries by "la volonté de propager des idées, l'action de propagande qu'implique le militantisme, par définition combattant."

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