The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Polish Lexicography for Children and Young Adults

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The paper is devoted to references to Classical Antiquity in Polish dictionaries for children and young adults. The subject may seem uninteresting, but in fact the information and comments contained in dictionaries can be astonishing. And the issue is important, especially if we take into consideration the role of dictionaries in the education of young people, in conveying knowledge not only about a modern language, but also about ancient times. They are also important in shaping their consciousness of traditions and their attitudes toward their cultural heritage.

Dictionaries as Cultural Texts

It is not universally accepted that dictionaries—like literary works—are influenced by sociocultural factors, because traditionally dictionaries have been treated as purely practical and objective works (although they are clearly not objective). Indeed, the approach of scholars to lexicography has only begun to change recently in Poland. It is significant, for example, that Ewa Szczęsna included dictionaries under the category of cultural documents in 2002, even though her study provides no justification for such a categorisation.1

Of course the cultural determinants in lexicography in some cases are obvious, but in others much less so. However, we can find something that may be called a *signum temporis* in every dictionary. Ulrike Hass, the editor of an impressive book about European lexicography,2 simply and logically justifies the necessity of taking this factor into account in contemporary metalexicographical studies:

Research on lexicography has to include the cultural background and its impact on lexicographical methodology, because lexicographers as well

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as dictionary users are social beings and dictionaries are texts which have communicative functions.3

But it is not enough to say that sociocultural factors influence the shape and content of dictionaries. Rather, this is a two-way relationship. Dictionaries also influence their users, and thus indirectly influence linguistic and extra-linguistic reality. We need to keep in mind that dictionaries are the products of specific people who, while they admittedly do not have the same freedom of expression as other writers, can nevertheless create new meanings of words, annihilate meanings, or even remove words which they deem unnecessary. And what is more, they can also manipulate someone else’s texts and in this way use persuasion on readers or even manipulate them, by taking advantage of the widespread belief in the objectivity of dictionaries.

Thus, on the one hand dictionaries bear the mark of time, place, culture, national customs, and sometimes even the mark of ideology (they “succumb” to reality), and on the other they influence and mould our linguistic awareness (they “shape” reality). They are important and interesting documents and mirrors both of the language as well as of the perception of culture and the world. They are also a specific means of intergenerational communication (because it is usually adults who prepare dictionaries for children and young people). And young readers are a special kind of audience.

Polish Monolingual Dictionaries for Children and Young People

Polish monolingual lexicography for children and young adults is quite diverse so far as the types of dictionaries and their level of difficulty is concerned. The decision about choosing proper research materials therefore needs to be preceded by a very careful study of the content of library catalogues.

There are three hundred and two books categorised as dictionaries for children (aged approximately 0–6) in the catalogue of the National Library of Poland, however, this number considers not only first editions but all editions

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