# Monolingual accounting dictionaries for EFL text production

**Sandro Nielsen**

Aarhus School of Business, Denmark

sn@asb.dk

## Abstract

Monolingual accounting dictionaries are important for producing financial reporting texts in English in an international setting, because of the lack of specialised bilingual dictionaries. As the intended user groups have different factual and linguistic competences, they require specific types of information. By identifying and analysing the users' factual and linguistic competences, user needs, use-situations and the stages involved in producing accounting texts in English as a foreign language, lexicographers will have a sound basis for designing the optimal English accounting dictionary for EFL text production. The monolingual accounting dictionary needs to include information about UK, US and international accounting terms, their grammatical properties, their potential for being combined with other words in collocations, phrases and sentences in order to meet user requirements. Data items that deal with these aspects are necessary for the international user group as they produce subject-field specific and register-specific texts in a foreign language, and the data items are relevant for the various stages in text production: draft writing, copyediting, stylistic editing and proofreading.

**Key words**: specialised lexicography, foreign-language text production, communication-oriented functions, user needs, production dictionaries

## Resumen

### *Diccionarios monolingües de contabilidad para la producción de textos de inglés como lengua extranjera*

Los diccionarios monolingües de contabilidad son importantes para la producción de textos de información financiera en inglés en un contexto internacional, debido a la falta de diccionarios bilingües especializados. Dado que los grupos de usuarios a los que van dirigidos estos diccionarios poseen distintos grados de competencias lingüísticas y especializadas, cada caso requiere un tipo específicos de información. Mediante la identificación y el análisis de la competencia lingüística de los usuarios, de sus necesidades y situaciones de uso, así como de las etapas implicadas en la producción de textos de inglés como lengua extranjera, los lexicógrafos tendrán una base sólida para el diseño de un diccionario óptimo de contabilidad en inglés para la producción textos en inglés como lengua extranjera. El diccionario de contabilidad monolingüe debe incluir información sobre términos de contabilidad británicos,

americanos e internacionales, sus propiedades gramaticales, su potencial para ser combinados con otras palabras en colocaciones, así como frases para satisfacer los requisitos de los usuarios. Los datos que se ocupan de estos aspectos son necesarios para los usuarios internacionales en la producción de textos específicos según disciplina y registro en una lengua extranjera, y son asimismo relevantes para las distintas etapas en la producción de textos: escribir el borrador, edición de copias, edición estilística y corrección de pruebas.

**Palabras clave**: lexicografía especializada, producción de textos en una lengua extranjera, funciones orientadas hacia la comunicación, necesidades del usuario, producción de diccionarios

# 1. Accounting dictionaries must give a true and fair view

Irrespective of nationality large enterprises use English as a *lingua franca* when disseminating financial reporting information. Most of these enterprises produce their texts in English as a foreign language (EFL) and therefore need tools that help them produce idiomatically correct financial reporting texts. This implies the use of the correct terminology as defined and accepted within the field of accounting and financial reporting as well as the use of grammatically correct collocations, phrases and sentences. When producing such highly specialised texts in a foreign language, writers regularly consult bilingual dictionaries but often find that these do not fulfil their requirements. Most bilingual dictionaries lack the specialisation required by such users and few bilingual accounting dictionaries are available; this means that many producers of financial reporting texts have no bilingual accounting dictionaries to consult. Consequently, English accounting dictionaries will be tools that are likely to help the producers of such texts in preparing the information they need to convey to an international audience. In particular English accounting dictionaries prepared for international users and use-situations in a global setting are relevant, and they have a potential for catering for a large group of users.

The users of financial reporting texts make up a heterogeneous group. Enterprises publish their interim and annual reports in order to attract investors who may invest money in the firms. Lenders such as international banks base their decisions to grant loans and credit lines to enterprises on the basis of, *inter alia*, these reports. Similarly, suppliers use financial reports to assess the creditworthiness of companies, and customers are likely to need information about the future prospects and sustainability of the enterprises from which they buy their goods and services. The users of financial reports of multinational enterprises also include employees in and governments of various countries. It is imperative that enterprises are able to present fairly their financial position in a way that is both factually and linguistically correctly.

In order to produce the necessary function-related dictionaries, lexicographers must establish the lexicographic basis for an English dictionary of accounting designed for production purposes by international users. Such a dictionary must give a true and fair view of the factual, terminological and linguistic state of affairs within the subject-field. In this paper I will attempt to identify the lexicographic basis of a monolingual accounting dictionary designed for EFL text production by analysing the requirements of the user groups in terms of lexicographic functions, by briefly discussing the relevant stages in the production process and then establish the types of data needed by the users at different levels of text production.

## 2. The functions of monolingual dictionaries

In studying and describing a monolingual specialised dictionary it is necessary initially to determine its function(s) at a practical level. First, the function(s) chosen by the lexicographers provide the basis for all other lexicographic decisions, from the selection of entry words, over the selection of information types, to the selection of lexicographic structures. Second, the lexicographers must determine the basic needs of the users on the basis of the dictionary function(s) relative to the intended user group.

A dictionary is a tool that has been designed to fulfil one or more functions. These functions are related to specific types of use-situations and a lexicographic function is one that can assist the user in a given situation of use, i.e. the focus is on what the dictionary is intended to inform about, not its data types. Two main types of lexicographic function apply to monolingual accounting dictionaries. Communication-oriented functions are those that help the user in situations of ongoing or planned communication such as the understanding of texts in the user's native language (L1) or in a foreign language (L2), the production of texts in L1 or L2, and the revision and editing of texts in L1 or L2. These functions focus on the transfer of a message from a sender to a receiver and are predominantly text-dependent. On the other hand cognition-oriented functions are those that offer assistance in use-situations where the user is deriving and verifying propositional knowledge as well as the acquisition of information such as the acquisition of factual and/or linguistic knowledge generally about the L1 or L2 culture, or in connection with a specific issue in the L1 or L2 culture, for instance in a learning context (such as a course on accounting): When and how do you recognise goodwill as opposed to badwill? These functions focus on knowledge, i.e. data that have become information with a use or purpose through a cognitive mental process; they are predominantly text-independent functions. The distinction between these two main types of function allows the lexicographers to

make monolingual accounting dictionaries with a plurality of functions and this is especially interesting in a context involving EFL text production (Bergenholtz & Kaufmann, 1997: 98-99; Bergenholtz & Nielsen, 2002: 5-6).

The lexicographers of a multifunctional English accounting dictionary will invariably have to give different priorities to the functions, as –for practical reasons– its data will support some functions more or better than others. A monolingual accounting dictionary for EFL text production may be designed to assist non-native English-speaking users in connection with one primary function, two secondary functions and one tertiary function:

- • Primary function:
    - - Production of texts in English
- • Secondary functions:
    - - Revision and editing of English texts
    - - Understanding of English texts
- • Tertiary function:
    - - Knowledge acquisition concerning English accounting issues

As already indicated, the type of dictionary discussed is one that assists its intended users in producing financial reporting texts in English as a foreign language. Following Tarp (2004: 304-306) the term "foreign-language text production" consists of L2 text production based on a native-language outline and free text production without a native-language outline. In this context, it is important to appreciate that EFL text production is a multi-stage process involving writing a first draft followed by revision and editing and therefore, the dictionary needs to be polyfunctional. Furthermore, a particular data item may support more than one function; for instance definitions support the production, revision, editing and understanding of English texts as well as knowledge acquisition. Lexicographers must relate these functions to the intended user group, the users' linguistic and factual competences, and user needs in the relevant situations of use (Nielsen, 2002: 2-3). Failure to do so will leave the lexicographers with an insufficient basis for determining which types of data they have to include in their dictionary.

## 3. Identifying user needs

Linking dictionary functions to user needs involves the identification of user competences. The factual competence, which concerns the accounting competence

in an international environment, and the linguistic competence, i.e. English accounting and financial reporting language, determine how the user will actually use a dictionary in a particular type of situation. Bergenholtz & Kaufmann (1997: 98-99) propose a distinction between three general groups of users: experts, semi-experts and interested laypeople. This triadic grouping is an appropriate starting point for any specialised dictionary but needs to be supplemented by a user profile to form a practical basis.

The purpose of a user profile is to identify the major characteristics and lexicographic needs of the intended users, taking into account their factual and linguistic competences in an international context. An English accounting dictionary for EFL text production may have the following user groups:

1. Accounting experts
2. EFL experts
3. Student accountants
4. Communication experts and journalists disseminating financial reporting information

A single dictionary is unlikely to provide the same amount of help in the same number of situations to all four user groups. Consequently, it is suggested that the lexicographers should give different priorities to these groups. The primary user group will be accounting experts, who are persons with considerable factual competence and small to medium linguistic EFL competence, as they are the prime candidates for producers of financial reporting texts in English as a foreign language. The secondary user group will then consist of secretaries and language experts with considerable linguistic EFL competence and small to medium factual competence, as they are likely to assist experts in producing English financial reporting texts; EFL experts are generally semi-experts in relation to both types of competence, as they are experts within the field of English language but not within the specialised language of accounting and financial reporting. Student accountants, communication experts and journalists are interested laypersons, occasionally semi-experts at best, in terms of factual and LSP competence, but may have a significant language competence in terms of language for general purposes.

Accordingly, the English accounting dictionary for EFL text production will have to contain information about linguistic and factual aspects relating to English as a foreign language to fulfil its functions as a production dictionary. Linguistic and factual information is relevant to all user groups but to various degrees. The primary

user group needs more linguistic information, such as morphological and syntactic information, than the secondary group. Both groups need the same factual information specifying the difference between English terms, especially in those cases where it is necessary to distinguish between variants, depending on meaning and context. Failure to include such information will seriously impair the dictionary's potential for fulfilling user needs.

In order to satisfy user needs, the lexicographers must make a dictionary that contains data supporting the functions of production, editing and revision in the relevant situations of use. A traditional monolingual specialised dictionary focuses exclusively on definitions (Nielsen & Mourier 2005: 91-94), but in any specialised text terms account for less than fifty percent of the words; such a dictionary does not help the user producing the remainder of the text. The optimal English accounting dictionary for EFL text production needs to give priority to the functions of producing, editing and revising accounting and financial reporting texts and must contain a variety of data types in addition to terms and their definitions. It should contain at least the following types of data supporting the primary, secondary and tertiary functions, all data types needed by persons producing accounting texts in English as a foreign language: orthography, grammatical irregularity, definition, usage note, collocation, phrase, synonymy and antonymy.

In their attempt to meet user needs, lexicographers must develop a dictionary concept that differs from the traditional monolingual specialised dictionary. One focus point is the inclusion of syntagmatic information, which deals with word combinations and their relationship such as collocations, phrases and sentences. An accounting dictionary containing all these types of data offers considerably more help to users than the traditional monolingual specialised dictionary, because it supplements the factual, defining data. It is beyond the scope of this paper to comment on all the various data types the optimal English accounting dictionary for EFL text production may contain, so the following discussion will first describe elements of text production that are lexicographically relevant and will then go on to discuss data items such as grammar, definitions, collocations and phrases and how they support the primary and secondary functions with particular reference to the primary and secondary user groups.

# 4. Identifying stages in text production

It is necessary to prepare a general outline of the function of EFL text production in order to determine the other lexicographic choices that the authors of a dictionary

have to make. The writing of financial reporting texts in English as a foreign language shares its basic elements with the stages in writing a financial reporting text in one's native language. For the purposes of specialised lexicography it is relevant to establish the basic stages of text production, as a monolingual accounting dictionary is unlikely to provide help in all stages; therefore the lexicographers need to identify those stages where the dictionary may provide help.

In general, text production is the process of writing a text and involves a planning, an execution and a finalisation stage. By its very nature, the execution stage is the only one that is automatically relevant for lexicographic purposes, as this is where text production proper takes place. The finalisation stage is only partially relevant to dictionaries designed for EFL text production, as it concerns the proofreading, printing and copying of the final text; proofreading is the only element that has lexicographic relevance, as it is the last step before printing and copying, at which stage the text has in effect been completed. Rude (2002: 14-16) identifies the following elements in the planning phase: the definition of the project, the definition of readers, the definition of the scope, type and purpose of the text, the development of templates, design and style sheets. It is difficult to imagine a specialised production dictionary that can provide sufficient help in the planning stage, and this phase is better covered by a writing or style manual, though some of the elements, for instance design, may affect the execution stage, and may even influence the printing phase.

The lexicographers of a monolingual accounting dictionary for EFL text production should focus on the execution stage and the proofreading phase. According to Rude (2002: 15-16), the execution stage involves the writing of a draft text, the design of the text, the revision and editing of the text. A monolingual dictionary for EFL text production is a tool that can be designed to help users with drafting, revising and editing provided the lexicographers include the relevant data. The incorporation of such data is fairly straight forward, as most –if not all– the data can be placed in the dictionary articles, but the exact location will depend on the distribution structure adopted by the lexicographers.

It is argued that data dealing with the design of financial reporting texts may be difficult to include in a production dictionary, particularly in the articles, but if the lexicographers decide to include such data, it is proposed that they should be placed in the front or back matter. Nielsen (1994: 107-108) suggests that illustrative examples of subject-field specific documents can be placed in appendices, especially if they relate to several entry words. This approach was adopted by Collin Dictionary of Accounting, which contains examples of a profit and loss account and a balance

sheet showing the general layout and format of such texts, albeit in a simplified form. The primary reason for placing such illustrative examples in the back matter is their complexity and relatively large size, and it is important that they are legible if they are to be of any use. From a user's perspective, the best solution would be to provide illustrative examples in a non-simplified format as this would match the needs in real life use-situations.

Writing, editing and revision for the purposes of lexicographic functions can be divided into two levels. The macro-level concerns the relationship between paragraphs and larger units of text and only affect lexicographic functions as indicated above in respect of design, layout and format. In contrast, the micro-level concerns words, collocations, phrases and sentences, and this text level is particularly interesting for production dictionaries. First, the dictionary is an excellent medium for containing and presenting information about the micro-level elements of texts and, second, the users need information about the micro-level in particular when producing financial reporting texts in English as a foreign language. According to Mossop (2001: 11-12) editing and revision involves checking a text to make sure that generally accepted grammar and spelling rules are complied with (copyediting), that the terminology is consistent and the text unambiguous (stylistic editing), and generally checking the text for errors and amending it accordingly (revising). Based on Mossop (2001: 168) proofreading is an extension of editing and revision to the finalisation stage, in that it involves the comparison of the printer's proof with the manuscript and is limited to making corrections. As indicated by the factual and linguistic competences revealed by the user profile above, international users will face the most serious problems and challenges at the micro-level, and lexicographers should focus on this level when planning and compiling EFL production dictionaries.

## 5. Selecting the correct variety of English

One of the first things the producers of financial reporting texts need to consider is the selection of the appropriate variety of English. Most non-linguists and many linguists are unaware that different variants of English exist, but this fact is of great relevance in the field of accounting and financial reporting and for dictionaries dealing with this subject-field. The English spoken in the United Kingdom differs from that spoken in the United States, Canada and Australia, because each country has structured its financial reporting framework differently and this is reflected in the terminology and linguistic means used. This clearly affects the micro-level of production.

For the purposes of international financial reporting, the non-native English speaker has to choose between three varieties of English. It is generally accepted that financial information may be presented in British English, American English or international English, i.e. the variety of English found in the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS, formerly referred to as IAS). For European enterprises IFRS terminology and usage is particularly important in that the European Union has adopted rules requiring stock exchange listed companies to report financial data on the basis of these standards. The English accounting dictionary needs to contain data that explicitly informs the user of the existence of these three varieties of English wherever relevant in order to provide the non-native text producer with the necessary information.

The difference between the three varieties of English is easily seen in the terminology used. This implies that lexicographers must take into account the possible existence of language variants for each lemma in the wordlist. Whenever such different terms exist the lexicographers should lemmatise each term and explicitly make the user aware of the variant(s), because the user is likely to know only one, and this will be the term he will search for. Existing accounting dictionaries treat such variants differently, but the following examples are representative:

> **profit and loss account (P&L)** Annual summary of a
> company's financial operations, required by law to be
> submitted to the UK Registrar of Companies by every
> trading company over a certain size [...].
> **income statement** US term for a ***profit and loss
> account***.

Examples 1 and 2. Excerpts from articles in Dictionary of
International Accounting Terms.

These examples inform the user implicitly of the correct British and explicitly of the correct American terms, but only one article indicates the American term through the use of a diatopical label. An unsuspecting user who looks up the term "profit and loss account" will never realise that there is an American variant; a similar treatment of the two terms is found in Oxford Dictionary of Accounting. Other examples are:

> **profit and loss account (P&L account)**
> ...
> (NOTE: the American equivalent is the **profit and loss
> statement** or **income statement**)
>
> *US* **income statement**
> ...
> (NOTE: the British equivalent is the **profit and loss
> account**)

Examples 3 and 4. Excerpts from articles in Collin Dictionary of
Accounting.

These two articles give the user sufficient information to select the term belonging to either of the two English language varieties, though the first article does no help the user choose between the two American synonyms. The articles from the two dictionaries do present one practical problem: Which of the two variant terms should the user select if he wants to produce a text using international accounting terminology? Only one article in each dictionary contains a diatopical marking and this leads the user to conclude that the term "profit and loss account" is the correct British and IFRS term. Nothing in the articles or the metatexts of the dictionaries indicates otherwise.

The above articles illustrate the general treatment of financial reporting terminology in English accounting dictionaries, as they give no indication as to the correct IFRS term, which is "income statement". In order to be as helpful as possible the EFL accounting dictionary must explicitly tell the dictionary user which is the correct British, American and IFRS term, so that the user can select the correct one for his text. The following excerpt illustrates of how this may be done using diatopical labels that leave no room for doubt:

**profit and loss account** UK
...
Synonyms:
income statement US IAS/IFRS
P&L account UK
profit and loss statement US

Example 5. Excerpt from article in English Dictionary of Accounting.

The lexicographers should take into account that the distinction between three varieties of English extends to word classes other than nouns, notably verbs and adjectives. It is relevant to the international user to know that the verb "to invoice" is used in British and IFRS English, and that the equivalent American verb is "to bill"; the American equivalent to the British and IFRS adjective "share-based" is "stock-based".

There is a final caveat, however: Not only does the selection of an English language variety impact on the writer's choice of other terms in his text but it also affects the choice of syntactic structures, in that there may be different syntactic options in a particular context depending on whether the text is written in British or American English. A truly crafted monolingual accounting dictionary for EFL text production must address such aspects and provide the relevant information to its users.

# 6. Linking data types and levels of text production

When the writer of financial reporting texts has selected a variety of English, his focus will be directed towards the actual production of the text at the micro-level. A monolingual accounting dictionary whose function is to assist the user in a specific use-situation of this sort should contain and present the data for micro-level text production relevant for writing, editing and revising. Consequently, the lexicographers need to identify appropriate types of data that the user is likely to need taking into account the international context in which the dictionary is rooted together with the factual and linguistic competences of the intended user group. This may be done by organising the analysis hierarchically based on more or less discrete levels corresponding to the elements of the text micro-level: words, collocations, phrases and sentences. The discussion below may be seen as a proposal for data types to be included in a monolingual accounting dictionary for EFL text production by the user groups identified above.

Using a bottom-up approach, the lexicographers will start with the smallest unit, i.e. the word. The user of the English accounting dictionary will require various types of information about words, here defined as the lemmatised entry words, in order to produce an idiomatic text. Generally, the production of idiomatic texts in English requires grammatical knowledge. As pointed out by Mugdan (1989: 129) only few specialised dictionaries contain grammatical information, and the most likely reason for the lack of grammatical information is that the dictionaries were not compiled for text production, or that the lexicographers failed to recognise the needs of the users. Data dealing with the grammatical properties of English accounting terms and the associated language usage needs careful consideration by lexicographers. Depending on how detailed the writer works, grammatical data are particularly relevant for copyediting, revising and proofreading, but may also be helpful at the phase of writing the draft text and the phase of stylistic editing.

The entry word inherently contains orthographic information about its correct spelling, but the optimal dictionary is prescriptive, i.e. indicating the recommended spelling in case of alternatives. When the user consults the dictionary in a text production situation he is not primarily interested in knowing all the existing spelling variants, but wants to know which one to use. For instance, the spelling of the noun "cash-generating unit" exists alongside "cash generating unit". In such situations the dictionary should recommend one of the alternatives; in this case the spelling "cash-generating unit" should be recommended as this is the most modern spelling. Both spelling variants should be lemmatised as the user may search for either, and one way of presenting the information is the following:

**cash generating unit**
noun <a, the, -s>
Not recommended, use instead: cash-generating unit

Example 6. Article from English Dictionary of Accounting.

In such cases only the entry word is given with the relevant grammatical information and after the note "Not recommended, use instead" the user finds a cross-reference to the recommended word where he will also find a definition, collocations etc. This illustrates how lexicographic structures, *in casu* the mediostructure, may support data and dictionary functions.

The difference between American, British and IFRS English also affects the correct spelling of words: The spelling "amortisation" is the correct British and IFRS variant, whereas the correct American term is spelt "amortization"; the verb "recognised" is thus spelt in British and IFRS English, but is spelt "recognize" in American English; in British and IFRS English the correct spelling of the adjective is "labour", whereas the American equivalent is "labor". If a word can be used in all three types of accounting English, this should either be marked explicitly by diatopical labels or implicitly, i.e. without any diatopical labels. The latter solution requires that the user is explicitly told in the user guide or elsewhere that the lack of a diatopical label means that a word can be used irrespective of language variety.

A user who consults a monolingual accounting dictionary when producing an English accounting text also needs grammatical information such as word class information, as well as information about inflectional and derivational morphology. One reason is that English is a syntactic language, whereas the native language of many users will be analytic or ideographic. Briefly stated word class information is used to disambiguate homonyms, such as the noun "contract" and the verb "contract", and serves the dual purpose of facilitating lemma search and providing general linguistic information. Data on inflection is particularly important in cases of irregularly inflected words because the user can only be expected to know regular EFL inflectional patterns at best. Inflectional information is relevant because of the difference between analytic and syntactic languages, and the primary user group is unlikely to know anything about this. For instance it is imperative to know that the plural of "measurement basis" is "measurement bases" (the second word inflects irregularly) and that the plural of "date of disposal" is "dates of disposal" (the plural is indicated on the first word) in order to produce a grammatically correct text. Such information can be presented as follows:

**measurement basis**
noun <a, the, measurement bases>

Example 7. Excerpt from article in English Dictionary of Accounting.

The distinction between different varieties of English may also affect the inflection of nouns. This aspect is highly relevant to the phases of copyediting and proofreading and the user cannot be expected to know when the grammatical rules differ from one language variant to the other. Accordingly, lexicographers must identify such differences with specific reference to the register-specific context and present the information in a clearly and easily comprehensible way. One problem is that such information is often difficult to present within the schematic framework adopted for the presentation of grammatical information, so the lexicographers may have to resort to special means such as usage or grammar notes, for instance:

**expenditure**
noun <an, the, -s>

**Grammar note**
The plural form expenditures is used in American English but not in British English.

Example 8. Excerpt from article in English Dictionary of Accounting.

What the user needs when producing texts is an accounting dictionary that contains information about the inflection of all word classes lemmatised. The comparison of adjectives is an area that deserves treatment in a foreign-language production dictionary, as the rules differ from one language to another. In English some adjectives are compared morphologically, some syntactically and others irregularly. Which type of comparison that goes with which adjective is something that the lexicographers cannot expect the user to know, which means that they must incorporate this information in the dictionary. None of the printed English accounting dictionaries examined contained such information, nor did any of the twelve Internet accounting dictionaries examined in Nielsen & Mourier (2005: 101-102). However, if the linguistic competences of the users of a dictionary designed for EFL text production so require, the lexicographers must include data showing the inflected forms of adjectives; otherwise they will not be true to the lexicographic function and the users' needs. Morphological comparison may be presented as follows:

**severe**
adjective <severer, severest>

Example 9. Proposal for the presentation of morphological comparison in dictionary article.

Information about the syntactic comparison of adjectives should be presented in a similar vein, for instance:

**economical**
adjective <more economical, most economical>

Example 10. Proposal for the presentation of analytical
comparison in dictionary article.

In the same way, the user needs information about the inflection of verbs, whether regular or irregular. The lexicographers may elect to explicitly indicate irregular inflection and leave it to the user to deal with regular inflection. This option is only appropriate for the second user group but is insufficient for the primary and tertiary user groups. Accordingly, a well-designed English accounting dictionary for EFL text production should indicate both regular and irregular inflection patterns for verbs. Only two of the dictionaries examined contain information about inflected forms. The authors of Collin Dictionary of Accounting have taken a minimalist approach by only presenting inflected forms in few cases, mainly for irregular verbs, for instance:

**wind up** [...] *verb*
...
(NOTE: **winding – wound**)

Example 11. Excerpt from article in Collin Dictionary of
Accounting.

The authors of the other dictionary have opted for a more user-friendly solution by explicitly indicating inflected forms for all verbs and in addition showing whether, and if so how, a verb can be used in both the active and the passive, for instance:

**accept**
verb <-s, -ed, has –ed, -ing>
passive <is –ed, was –ed>

Example 12. Excerpt from article in English Dictionary of
Accounting.

The article in example 12 tells the user that the verb "accept" inflects regularly in the active: "accepts", "accepted", "has accepted", "accepting"; in the passive the verb inflects as follows: "is accepted", "was accepted". Information about the passive in English is highly relevant to the users of the EFL production dictionary as the passive is formed by linguistic means and according rules that differ from one language to another and this type of information primarily supports the functions of copyediting and revising.

A grammatical aspect that is a source of much confusion is that a technical term or other word is countable in the native language of the user but uncountable in English, or *vice versa*. It must be assumed that the language competence of accounting experts will fail them in such situations; the language competence of EFL experts enables them to produce idiomatically correct English texts, but as they are not

experts within the field of accounting, the relevant terminology and language usage, the dictionary must make it possible for the second user group to produce texts in idiomatically correct English within the subject field in question. One way of solving this problem is to include the appropriate data as follows:

**authority**[1]
noun <no indefinite article, the, no plural>

Example 13. Excerpt from article in English Dictionary of
Accounting.

This article explicitly informs the user that the term "authority" in the sense "power to act on another's behalf" cannot be used with the indefinite article and cannot be used in the plural, but with the definite article. This information is particularly relevant to the user in all phases of text production, especially as this dictionary presents it consistently for nouns. First, the user who produces financial reporting texts in English as a foreign language cannot be expected to know when and when not the definite and indefinite articles can be used. Second, the lexicographic choice of presenting this kind of information is practically and theoretically interesting, as it breaks with tradition in both general and specialised dictionaries. Most importantly, the data meet the requirements of the users in relation to the lexicographic function of EFL text production (see also examples 6, 7 and 8 above).

Sometimes the entry words may have grammatical properties that cannot be shown schematically. In such cases the user needs to be informed about these properties in a clear and unambiguous way and several options are available to lexicographers. One solution is to present the information in a special usage or grammar note such as in the following article:

**stock** [2] US
noun <no indefinite article, the, no plural>

**Grammar note**
Stock is semantically plural, grammatically uncountable singular. To state a given number of shares of stock the terms share(s) or X shares of stock are applied.

**Definition**
Stock refers to the legal capital of a corporation divided into basically two types of shares of stock: common stock and preferred stock.

Example 14. Excerpt from article in English Dictionary of
Accounting.

Definitions are important in dictionaries designed for the production of accounting texts by an international user group. Definitions are particularly helpful in the writing and copyediting phases, but also when checking a text for consistency of terms and proofreading. If the user is in doubt whether a word can be used in the sense

contemplated, the definitions can prove him right or wrong; in other words, the user can be confirmed in his belief that the word he is about to use is the correct one. It is imperative that lexicographers are aware that definitions must be written with the users' different factual and linguistic competences in mind, which means that the focus is on quality not quantity (or length). An accounting expert producing a text is likely to need a relatively short definition as long as it contains the correct factual details, as his factual competence will assist him; the definition will then supplement his own competence. In contrast, a semi-expert, such as an EFL expert, is likely to need a relatively long definition that supports and supplements his somewhat weak factual and special language competences.

In order to be as useful as possible, the definition should be written in easily understood language. This may be a challenge as the intended users make up a heterogeneous group with varying degrees of factual and linguistic knowledge. Some accounting definitions found in the International Financial Reporting Standards as well as the UK and US regulatory frameworks may be difficult to grasp by the user group because of their complex syntax; therefore, complex wording should be rephrased and simplified to meet the requirements of the user group at large. However, as pointed out by Bergenholtz and Nielsen (2002: 12-14), the lexicographers must not sacrifice the factual contents of definitions at the expense of (too) simplified definitions. Definitions must be true and faithful to the subject field of accounting otherwise the requirements of accounting experts (and the professional readers of their texts) would not be met.

When writing definitions lexicographers should pay attention to the distribution of the explanatory data. This involves both the distribution structure and the mediostructure; the former decides where a data item is to be placed in relation to other data items, and the latter mediates an otherwise non-existent relationship between two or more data items by linking them according to semantic potentiality (Nielsen 1999: 92). This requires that lexicographers take a conceptual rather than an alphabetical approach; i.e. they should consider the lemmatised entry words in conceptual groups and make sure that the definition of each entry word within this group is fine-tuned to those of the other entry words. The definition in the following article may serve as a point of departure:

> **amortizable** [...] *adjective* which
> can be amortized; **the capital cost is amortizable**
> **over a period of ten years**

Example 15. Article from Collin Dictionary of Accounting.

This entry word belongs to a conceptual group dealing with amortisation generally and the definition should be seen in this light. *Prima facie* the definition is easy to

understand, provided that the user knows what the verb "to amortize" means and this can be checked by consulting the lemmatised verb, which reveals the following article:

> **amortize** [...] *verb* **(a)** to pay off (a debt) by instalments or by putting money aside regularly over a period of time **(b)** to depreciate or to write down the capital value of an asset over a period of time in a company's accounts; ***the capital cost is amortized over five years***; *see also* SINKING FUND

Example 16. Article from Collin Dictionary of Accounting.

A user who is in doubt as to the actual meaning of the adjective "amortizable" and who looks up the verb "amortize" faces the problem of understanding what "amortizable" means: Does it refer to meaning (a) or meaning (b)? Based on the almost identical example sentences in the two articles, the user may conclude that the adjective "amortizable" can only be used in meaning (b), whereas it can in fact be used in both senses. The lexicographers should have adjusted the definition in example 15 so as to be in line with the two definitions in example 16, so that the definition of the adjective would have explicitly referred to the two meanings indicated under the verb. As a consequence, there should also have been a cross-reference in the article "amortizable" referring the user to the article "amortize".

Directly above the word level we find collocations, i.e. the habitual co-occurrence of lexical items. They constitute an important part of the syntactic properties of many words and the linguistic rules and restrictions applying to collocations are highly language specific (Tarp 2004: 315). Therefore, the users need an English accounting dictionary that clearly indicate acceptable collocations as many of the rules and restrictions applying to collocations in the user's native language are unlikely to be mirrored by those applying to collocations in English. The main criterion for including collocations is their importance to the user in the use-situations contemplated and the collocations to be incorporated should be those that show the typical register-specific use of the entry word. The collocations are necessary in order to produce texts in a foreign language that are factually and linguistically correct. Based on the factual and linguistic competences of the primary and secondary user groups, the monolingual accounting dictionary should contain those collocations that are important and relevant in accounting and financial reporting texts. Lexicographers should pay particular attention to collocations that have restricted collocational range in a foreign language, as the users cannot be expected to be familiar with such limitations. As there are various options available when combining words, the production dictionary must contain a combination of register-specific terms of art and ordinary words, for instance:

adjective + noun, e.g.: depreciable asset
verb + noun, e.g.: transfer ownership
verb + preposition, e.g.: measure at cost
verb + adverb, e.g.: measure reliably

Information about collocations assists the user at different stages of text production: draft writing, copyediting, and proofreading. It is imperative that the user gets it right when producing his financial reporting text in English, otherwise he risks being misunderstood or not understood at all. If this is the case, the whole production process was in vain.

Linked to the discussion of collocations is the matter of phrases. The term "phrase" is generally used to mean any combination of two or more words, but in this context "phrases" are combinations of words that are clauses and sentences, in whole or in part. This type of syntagmatic information may be illustrated by the following examples, which are phrases that are likely to be used in financial statements:

1)  land and buildings are shown at fair value (alternatively: show land and buildings at fair value);

2)  exchange differences are taken to shareholders' equity (alternatively: take exchange differences to shareholders' equity);

3)  foreign exchange losses at the balance sheet date were recognised in shareholders' equity (alternatively: recognise foreign exchange losses in shareholders' equity at the balance sheet date).

These examples indicate that the lexicographers have at least two options when presenting phrases. The lexicographers may elect to present phrases in inflected forms, which means that the user may copy them directly from the dictionary and paste them into his text, or they can present phrases in their "uninflected" form as indicated by the alternatives. Based on the linguistic competences of the primary and secondary user groups, the better solution is to present phrases in both inflected and uninflected forms. The primary user group can use the inflected phrases without changing syntax, and the secondary user group can use both inflected and uninflected phrases without difficulty.

A few aspects in relation to phrases are of theoretical and practical interest. Printed dictionaries are restricted in space so here some phrases may be presented in inflected form and others in uninflected form, whereas electronic dictionaries have no such restriction and may offer both forms of the same phrase. However, the latter solution may result in data "overkill" and thereby frustrated users. The really advanced and well-designed electronic accounting dictionary will allow the user to decide whether

he wants the phrases presented in inflected or uninflected form. Finally, lexicographers and publishers should be aware that the use of inflected phrases may attract copyright claims if they have been extracted from printed sources (for instance an electronic corpus of financial reporting texts) in unaltered form. This may lead lexicographers to prefer uninflected phrases with the associated negative consequences for some users.

In this context it is important to note that if the lemmatised entry words are primarily made up of terms of art, the phrases will contain a significant number of LGP (language for general purposes) words that typically occur in financial reporting texts. Lexicographers must keep this in mind when selecting the phrases and try to balance the selection of phrases against user requirements, user competences and lexicographic functions. Experience shows that non-linguists and language experts with a low degree of factual knowledge have a tendency to think in terms of their native language structures when they communicate in English, orally as well as in writing. The result is the production of ungrammatical – and at the same time unidiomatic – texts in the foreign language. The lexicographers therefore need to allow for various grammatical aspects that may help the users produce texts in English (Nielsen & Mourier in print).

Information about phrases predominantly supports the functions of draft writing and stylistic editing, but may also be relevant to proofreading. As pointed out by Nielsen & Mourier (2005: 102) a dictionary designed for EFL text production with no collocations or phrases illustrating the use of nouns with special verbs and prepositions or other fixed contexts within accounting language is of little and very limited use in connection with text production. This is especially evident when taking into account the competences of the user groups identified by the user profile.

Example sentences, i.e. full sentences also referred to as text examples, may serve as model sentences that facilitate the production of a foreign-language text. Only few English accounting dictionaries present such sentences that may assist the user in his production of a text, in particular in connection with the functions of draft writing and stylistic editing. Example sentences may be presented in various ways, for instance:

> **profit-taking** (...) *noun* selling investments to realize the profit, rather than keeping them; ***share prices fell under continued profit-taking***
>
> > **Quote** some profit-taking was seen yesterday as investors continued to lack fresh incentives to renew buying activity
> >
> > *Financial Times*

Example 17. Article from Collin Dictionary of Accounting.

In example 17 the lexicographers have used two ways of presenting sentences; one inside the article and highlighted by semi-bold italics, the other inside a middle-matter component, *in casu* a text box. Neither presentation form has an inherent advantage over the other, but the use of text boxes with an indication of the source from which the sentence has been retrieved lends the example authority. Nevertheless, examples that contain complete sentences in which the entry word is used as found in financial reporting texts serve as inspiration for anyone writing accounting texts.

Synonyms and antonyms may serve a dual purpose in a production dictionary. First of all synonyms may supplement the definition and thereby assist the user in finding the right term; a synonym may be the final confirmation the user needs. Secondly, synonyms may provide alternative words that can be used in the text for the purpose of variation. In both instances synonyms support the writing, copyediting and proofreading of accounting texts. On the other hand antonyms may also supplement the definition and assist the user in finding the correct term; an antonym may be the final confirmation the user needs. Moreover, antonyms may help the user forming a mental picture of the conceptual hierarchy between related terms. In either case antonyms primarily facilitate the writing, copyediting and proofreading of a text. One way in which to present synonyms and antonyms is the following:

> **increase** [2]
> verb <-s, -d, has -d, increasing>
> passive <is –d, was -d>
>
> **Definition**
> To increase means to make something larger in amount, degree, level or number.
>
> **Collocations**
> increase a value
> increase the carrying amount of goodwill
> increase convergence of accounting standards around the world
> increase to an amount equal to or greater than the asset's carrying amount
> increase loss per share from continuing operations
> increase earnings per share or decrease loss per share from continuing operations
>
> **Synonyms**
> raise
>
> **Antonyms**
> decrease

Example 18. Article from English Dictionary of Accounting.

# 7. Concluding remarks

There is no doubt a need for a dictionary that can assist international users in producing financial reporting texts in English. It is also clear that most existing English accounting

dictionaries lack the necessary types of data to facilitate the production of such texts, mainly because the lexicographers did not explicitly intend their dictionaries to help with this function. In order to meet user requirements, the lexicographers of existing and future English accounting dictionaries would benefit from identifying relevant communication-oriented and cognition-oriented lexicographic functions and design their dictionaries so that they contain the data types needed by the users in the relevant use-situations. This requires careful study of the factual and linguistic competences of the dictionary's user group so that the lexicographers can select and present the types of factual and linguistic data necessary to assist the users. As indicated above, this lexicographic exercise will result in multifunctional specialised dictionaries that can assist the user in different use-situations.

A production dictionary that is true to its function(s) and user needs will have to contain syntagmatic information in addition to factual and traditional linguistic information. Syntagmatic information focuses particularly on the combination of words in collocations, phrases and sentences and provides useful and necessary information about text production above the word (or term) level. Syntagmatic information about English accounting and financial reporting language is necessary because the lack of knowledge as to combining words in a foreign language within a register-specific context leads to unidiomatic texts, for instance because the collocational patterns of the user's native language and English differ. The users' need for this type of information is reflected in only two of the accounting dictionaries examined but lexicographers are encouraged to plan, design and compile defining and syntagmatic English accounting dictionaries for the production of financial reporting texts. Such dictionaries will provide the user with a true and fair view of the facts and language usage within the field of accounting.

*(Paper submitted in April 2006)*

**REFERENCES**

Bergenholtz, H. & U. Kaufmann (1997). "Terminography and lexicography. A critical survey of dictionaries from a single specialised field." *Hermes* 18: 91-125. http://www.regnskabsordbogen.dk/Lit /Hermes/H18_05.pdf (last accessed 24 April 2006).

Bergenholtz, H. & S. Nielsen (2002). "Terms in the language of culture-dependent LSP dictionaries." *Lexicographica. International Annual for Lexicography* 18: 5-18.

Collin Dictionary of Accounting = P. H. Collin, D. York & A. Joliffe (2001). *Dictionary of Accounting.* London: Peter Collin Publishing.

Dictionary of International Accounting Terms = J. O. E. Clark (2001). *Dictionary of International Accounting Terms.* Canterbury: Financial World Publishing/Chartered Institute of Bankers.

English Dictionary of Accounting = S. Nielsen, L. Mourier & H. Bergenholtz

(2005-2006). *English Dictionary of Accounting.* http://www.regnskabsord bogen.dk/regn/gbgb/gbregn.aspx (last accessed 24 April 2006).

Mossop, B. (2001). *Revising and Editing for Translators.* Manchester/ Northampton: St. Jerome Publishing.

Mugdan, J. (1989). "Grammar in dictionaries of Languages for Special Purposes (LSP)." *Hermes* 3: 125-142.

Nielsen, S. (1994). *The Bilingual LSP Dictionary. Principles and Practice for Legal Language.* Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Nielsen, S. (1999). "Mediostructures in bilingual LSP dictionaries". *Lexicographica. International Annual for Lexicography* 15: 90-113.

Nielsen, S. (2002). *Lexicographical Basis for an Electronic Bilingual Accounting Dictionary: Theoretical Considerations.* http://www.sprog. asb.dk/sn/lexicographicalbasis.htm (last accessed 24 April 2006).

Nielsen, S. & L. Mourier (2005). "Internet accounting dictionaries: present solutions and future opportunities." *Hermes* 34: 83-116.

Nielsen, S. & L. Mourier (in print): "Design of a function-based Internet accounting dictionary" in H. Gottlieb & J. E. Mogensen (eds.), *Dictionaries, Lexicographical Options and User Needs.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Oxford Dictionary of Accounting = J. Law & G. Owen (eds.) (2005). *Dictionary of Accounting.* Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Rude, C. D. (ed.) (2002). *Technical Editing.* New York [etc.]: Longman.

Tarp, S. (2004). "Reflections on dictionaries designed to assist users with text production in a foreign language." *Lexikos* 14: 299-325.

Dr. **Sandro Nielsen** is affiliated with Centre for Lexicography, Aarhus School of Business, Denmark. He is the author and co-author of numerous publications on lexicography, including *The Bilingual LSP Dictionary. Principles and Practice for Legal Language* (1994), two law dictionaries, five accounting dictionaries, and a major contributor to the *Manual of Specialised Lexicography* (1995).