

# **Ways of life, communication and the dynamics of word usage**

**How did German dictionaries cope with  
socio-cultural aspects and evolution of  
word usage and how could  
future systems do  
even better?**



# Three perspectives

- 1 Word usages and their development as well as the organization of the lexicon and its dynamics are both intimately related to aspects of social and cultural evolution in a broad sense.

Two questions:

- 2 How did traditional dictionaries of German cope with both the structure and the evolution of word usages in their socio-cultural settings? And how about vocabulary zones?
- 3 What might be fruitful perspectives for future digital lexical systems?

# The structure of this talk

- A Ways of life, communication, word usage  
interrelations, structures, evolution
  
- B Socio-cultural aspects of word usage in  
German dictionaries and digital lexical systems
  
- C Future perspectives

# A Ways of life („culture“) and word usage interrelations and evolution

- Word usage and its dynamics are intimately related to social, political, cultural and intellectual structures and to changes in all major aspects of ways of life (Wittgenstein’s „Lebensform“, ‘way of life’)
- words and senses
- “zones” of vocabulary  
e.g., nutrition, health, sports, sex, technology, the “ecology” of ideas, controversial public topics like immigration, abortion, nuclear energy or climate change, views on beauty or health, tourism, ...  
and many others

## Example I: public administration

- ▶ Words and senses
- **Regierungsrat Dr. Thomas Heiniger**  
*Gesundheitsdirektor Kanton Zürich*

What is an X?

How is/was the word „X“ used?

- *Dispatcher*

Uwe Johnson: „Mutmassungen über Jakob“ (1959)

„und oben in dem mächtigen Turm sassen die **Dispatcher** mürrisch und überreizt vor den Lautsprechern, denn am Ende waren alle Strecken verfilzt und verknotet mit wartenden überfälligen Zügen“

- <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Dispatcher>
- <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispatcher>

- ▶ Vocabulary zones and their internal structures
- Journal „Behörden-Spiegel“ (2022)
- **fahrradfreundlich** („bike-friendly“), netzwerkfähig, Sperrmüll, **Multimobilität** („multi-mobility“), Geschäftsbereichsleiter, **Teamleiterin** („teamleader“), Beschwerdeverfahren, **Open Source**, Best Practices, Bürgerdienste, CEO, Cyber-Angriff, Fallbearbeitung, Steuerbetrügereien, **Steueridentifikationsnummer** („tax identification number“), **Changemanagement**, Verwaltungsvereinbarung, Cloud, Interimslösung, **Großschadenlage**, („major incident“), Einsatzkommunikation, Transportflugzeug, Transformation, ...
- topics around the digital (*Digitalisierung, Open Source, Best Practices*)
- internal organization (*Changemanagement, Teamleiterin*)
- task sectors (*Großschadenslage, Cyber-Angriff*)
- tax administration (*Steueridentifikationsnummer*)
- expressions for goals (*Multimobilität*)

## Example II: discourse-related vocabulary

- ... the use of specific words plays a crucial role in formulating and supporting positions, in propagating views and in following specific goals in controversies
  - Annexion vs. Grenzberichtigung*
- Discourse studies with a lexical focus, e.g.
  - Stötzel/Wengeler, “Kontroverse Begriffe” (1995)
  - Projects of Heidrun Kämper
- *Generationengerechtigkeit*
  - ‘intergenerational equity’
  - Duden: ‘gerechter Ausgleich der zu tragenden gesellschaftlichen Lasten (z. B. Rentenbeiträge, Staatsverschuldung) zwischen den Generationen (2)’ (22.7.2022)

## Example III: vocabulary of jazz since the 1920s

- *Negermusik*
- words, senses, vocabulary zones and the „system“ of jazz
  - styles: e.g. *Cool Jazz, Bebop, Fusion*
  - locations: e.g. *Jazzkeller, Jazzclub*
  - events: e.g. *Jazz matinee*
  - theory: e.g. *Off beat*
  - instruments: e.g. *Sopransaxofon, Bassklarinetten, Hi-Hat*
  - musicians: e.g. *Bassklarinetttistin,*
  - Formations: e.g. *Klaviertrio, Quartett*
- Foreign influences; word formation, ...
- an ever growing „cosmos“ of texts



## **B Word usage, culture and cultural evolution in dictionaries of German**

- ... one can start from the dictionaries and ask what they (can) contribute in respect of the relation of word usage to social and cultural aspects, also in an historical perspective;
- ... one can look from specific words, senses or vocabulary zones and ask what different dictionaries (can) contribute to their description and to the documentation of their social and cultural aspects.
- Four questions (sections B1-B4)

## B1 (How) Are words and senses pertaining to social, cultural and discourse developments documented in German dictionaries?

- *Generationengerechtigkeit*
  - so far no entry in DWDS, OWID
  - But: rich corpus findings in these digital lexical systems
- Are vocabulary zones covered systematically?
  - We don't know
- Word formations?
- „socio-cultural“ vocabulary zones
  - a criterion for lexicographic coverage
  - a strategy for corpus design

## B2 Are the social, cultural, discourse-related aspects of the use of words part of their description and documentation?

### – *Laubhüttenfest*

DWb: two quotations, no descriptive text

FWb: Cross-reference „Laubhütte“; early quotations; knowledge presuppositions

DWDS: „Jewish religion -- seven-day festival celebrated by Jews in September or October to commemorate the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. -- Synonymous with *Sukkot* -- The festival is celebrated from the 15th to the 21st day of the first month of the Jewish lunar calendar (Tishri), five days after Yom Kippur, with the erection of a temporary leaf hut in which to eat and, if necessary, spend the night, and other customs.“ (> next slide)

### – definitions, usage, descriptors

textual quotations and their sources

## Bedeutung

DWDS-Vollartikel

- ✓ **jüdische Religion** im September oder Oktober von den Juden begangenes siebentägiges Fest, das an den Auszug der Israeliten aus Ägypten erinnert **Das Fest wird vom 15. bis 21. Tag des ersten Monats des jüdischen Mondkalenders (Tischri), fünf Tage nach Jom Kippur, mit Errichtung einer provisorischen Laubhütte, in der gegessen und gegebenenfalls genächtigt wird, und weiteren Bräuchen begangen.**

Synonym zu [Sukkot](#)

KOLLOKATIONEN:

*mit Adjektivattribut:* das jüdische **Laubhüttenfest**

*als Akkusativobjekt:* das **Laubhüttenfest** feiern

*als Genitivattribut:* der Beginn des **Laubhüttenfests**

BEISPIELE:

So erinnert das **Laubhüttenfest**, das auf den 15. des siebten *[religiösen, bzw. weltlich ersten]* Monats festgelegt ist, an die Wüstenwanderung nach dem Auszug der Israeliten aus Ägypten und das Wohnen in Laubhütten[...]. [Badische Zeitung, 09.07.2013]

Bei öffentlichen Treffen mit Interessierten soll es [...] um jüdisches Leben und jüdische Feste gehen – etwa um Pessach, das eng mit dem christlichen Osterfest verwoben ist, oder das **Laubhüttenfest**. [Saarbrücker Zeitung, 12.12.2020]

Im Judentum gab es zwei Erntefeste im Jahreskreislauf: das Pfingstfest als Getreide-Erntefest und das **Laubhüttenfest** als Wein- und Gesamt-Erntefest.

[Mittelbayerische, 02.10.2020]

... [3 weitere Belege](#)

## B3 Do we get information about interrelations between words that belong to specific cultural, social, discourse-related vocabulary zones?

- explaining the cultural background of one word/sense

vs.

It is a **different task, however**, to make clear in a dictionary or lexical system what are the other words and senses that belong to the same field/vocabulary zone

e.g. Jazz, humoral medicine

- diasystematic predicates like „Jagdsprache“
- no systematic characterization

e.g. *Laubhüttenfest* vs. *Sukkot*

future: systematic markup and search facilities

## **B4 Are there ways of searching for or accessing culture-specific vocabulary zones and their elements?**

- no, not usually
- Indices to dictionaries
  - Hermann Paul
  - Friedrich Kluge
- The OED's historical thesaurus
- onomasiological dictionaries
- culture- / discourse-related works, e.g.
  - Heidrun Kämper
  - Schirmer, Vocabulary of merchants (1911)
  - Kluge, Vocabulary of seafaring (1911)
  - Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch: Vocabulary of law and justice

## **C Future perspectives: socio-cultural aspects of word usage in next-generation lexical systems**

- 1 Describe word usages in ways that explicitly include the social, cultural and/or discourse-related background of specific “senses” of words;
- 2 If available, give links to encyclopedic information on cultural fields in which word usages are embedded;
- 3 One can combine the dictionary with contributions that focus on specific aspects of word usage across individual articles  
e.g. Wortschatz-Miniaturen (‘small portraits of voc. zones’);
- 4 Provide a faceted search framework  
markup each sense with “culture-related” descriptors  
provide search facilities for combined searching
- 5 “Cultural” aspects as criterion for lexical coverage and Corpus design
- 6 Narrative formats in historical lexicography: talk by Volker Harm

# To conclude

- Words and their usages are in many cases closely related to or embedded in social, cultural, technical, discourse-related, ideological etc. contexts.
- words, senses
  - vocabulary zones
- lexical developments and cultural evolution
- This talk
  - connections between word usage and the socio-cultural
  - How are cultural aspects treated in dictionaries/DLS
  - A few suggestions for future systems



Keep walking ...



