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THE PUBLIC AS LINGUISTIC AUTHORITY: WHY USERS TURN TO INTERNET FORUMS TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN WORDS

Abstract This paper addresses the question of why we face unsatisfactory German dictionary entries when looking up and comparing two similar lexical terms that are loan words, new words, (near)-synonyms, or confusables. It explains how users are aware of existing reference works but still search or post on language forums, often after consulting a dictionary and experiencing a range of dictionary-based problems. Firstly, these dictionary-based difficulties will be scrutinised in more detail with respect to content, function, presentation, and the language of definitions. Entries documenting loan words and commonly confused pairs from different lexical reference resources serve as examples to show the shortcomings. Secondly, I will explain why learning about your target group involves studying discussion forums. Forums are a valuable source for detailed user studies, enabling the examination of different communicative needs, concrete linguistic questions, speakers' intuitions, and people's reactions to posts and comments. Thirdly, with the help of two examples I will describe how the study of chats and forums had a major impact on the development of a recently compiled German dictionary of confusables. Finally, that same problem-solving approach is applied to the idea of a future dictionary of neologisms and their synonyms.

Keywords Internet forums; synonyms; confusables; sense discrimination; problem-solving approach

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