

Ten years ago during a debate on the future of lexicography at EURALEX in Zurich, the representative of one of the better-known English language dictionary publishers pointed out that in a short space of time it would be possible to publish all of their dictionaries on one CD-Rom. The question was - what would happen to the dictionary as an instrument of knowledge and, more important to the publisher, what would happen to their business if the well-bound heavy volumes we associate with the word dictionary were to disappear into a small thin plastic disk?

"Well", said someone, "just use your imagination. Think how marvellous it will be not to be restricted by space. Instead of sitting here arguing whether we should fill the tiny space allotted to describing *elephant* with '*a very large animal with two tusks and a trunk*', or '*huge four-footed pachyderm with proboscis & long curved ivory tusks*', we shall now be able to describe it as fully as we like - and include a picture of it as well!". In fact, technology now allows us to add the sound it makes, and include a video clip of it moving in its natural surroundings. There is no longer any problem in adding whole texts to describe the collocations for expressions like *white elephant*, *pink elephants* and *an elephant never forge/s*. Nor should there be any problem in supplying plenty of information on how other languages lexicalise and collocate it.

Technology will also allow this information to be regularly updated without having to cut down a whole new forest to do so. Dictionaries and encyclopedias as investments are big, both financially and in relation to the space they occupy on the shelf Yet they have a limited shelf-life. If you doubt me, try writing a project on any well-

known city in the world using an encyclopedia over 15 years old, or try looking up the definition of *computer* or *CD-Rom* in a dictionary over 10 years old. We shall now be able to keep the old version for its historical interest if we like, but upgrade the facts we need for practical use.

Modern technology will encourage lexicographers, encyclopedia compilers, and everyone involved in supplying large quantities of information to use all their powers of creativity and imagination. The very concepts of *dictionary* and *encyclopedia* will probably take on quite different meanings and connotations. Whisper it loudly if you dare - the process of the acquisition of knowledge might actually become FUN!

Yes - but .... I know. There is something so comforting to those of us who love libraries about being surrounded by books. The greater the variety and quantity, the prouder we feel about the creativity of human nature. Books attract by their appearance and their touch and smell, and there is something very satisfying and almost sensual about curling up on a comfortable sofa with a good book. Technology may be all very well for supplying information, they say, but the imaginative world of fiction and poetry can never come out of a computer.

Yet the same technology that allows us to create 'virtual' books also allows us to create conventional books. Many people actually find the use of a computer helps them in the process of writing. Gabriel Garcia Marques claims that his output has increased from one book every nine years to one every three since he started writing with a computer. Rather than substituting the book and its relatives, the computer has allowed more and more people unprecedented

access to publication of their work. We already talk about desktop publishing and, like it or not, the main function of publishers could soon be that of distribution rather than production.

The radio, cinema and television have allowed new art forms to develop. Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* was intended for the radio, and it is pertinent to ask which is the true version of it - the written book, or the cassette of Richard Burton's lilting Welsh recording of it? Many conventional books can be acquired in spoken form, not to mention the film versions. The computer, too, will also lead to its own forms of creativity in the literary world, and the term multi-media may signal the form it will take.

Libraries are full of books because that is the way we have conveyed our knowledge and expressed our literary creativity for centuries. Although I by no means forecast the demise of the book in its traditional form, the time has come for us to widen our concept of *library* to include its emergence in other forms. In a library which is connected by technology to libraries all over the world, and receiving the written word through the Internet, different ways of storing knowledge will soon become routine. Psychologists tell us that learning is best acquired when all, or most, of the senses are involved. Cassettes, diskettes, videos, CD-Roms and other inventions of technology will simply provide alternative and equally - possibly more - fulfilling ways of exploring and interpreting the world.

Our library is the one area of our Faculty building which has merited praise from many people. I should also like to congratulate those who run it. May they take us into the 21st century using all the technology the modern world can

provide for the storing of knowledge and the expression of  
creativity.

*Belinda Maia*