The bilingual dictionary under review

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A hundred and twenty bilingual dictionary reviews published in scholarly journals over the last twenty years were examined to see what the major concerns of the experts are; the reviewers are evidently all linguists and/or language teaching methodologists and about one fifth of the group are known to have been involved in bilingual dictionary projects themselves. The reviews are of general purpose translating dictionaries (90), and of ethnological, philological and specialized (business, slang, etc.) dictionaries (the remainder). The reviewers' expectations will be presented under the headings of *equivalents, directionality, reversibility, alphabetization, retrievability, redundancy, coverage, currency* and *reliability*.

Equivalents. The basic task of a bilingual dictionary is to provide L2 equivalents of L1 items in the L1-L2 part and L1 equivalents of L2 items in the L2-L1 part. The equivalents should be of an insertable kind, i.e. capable of being used in actual texts and, preferably, monolexemic (Akhmanova 1975: 127). Moreover, the equivalents proposed should be carefully selected closest possible ones rather than cross-linguistic (near) synonyms "freely thrown about" (Liberman 1984: 285). Definitions are allowed only with "equivalentless" lexis. It has however been suggested that even these should be formulated in such a way (i.e. abbreviated) as to be substitutable (Wawrzyńczyk 1985: 215), a suggestion which ignores the common ways of referring to foreign realia − which such untranslatable items typically represent − in actual texts. In view of the fact that one-to-one lexical correspondences across languages are rare, use should be made of meaning (sense) discriminations. In a bidirectional dictionary (see below) these should be given in the source language and for every discrete meaning in the target language (Traupman 1981–82: 162).

Directionality. A two-language dictionary is monodirectional if it serves the needs of the native speakers of one of the two languages. It is bidirectional if it attends to the needs of the speakers of both languages. Thus, the L1-L2 part of a bidirectional dictionary would be a reading dictionary (for decoding texts in the FL) for the native speakers of L2 and a writing dictionary (for encoding texts in the FL) for the speakers of L1. The L2-L1 part, in turn, would be a reading dictionary for speakers of L1 and a writing dictionary for speakers of L2 (cf. Steiner 1984: 173). However, owing to the different nature of the reference needs associated with the receptive and productive language skills it is more convenient for the users to have two sets of monodirectional dictionaries (four parts in all)

than two bidirectional ones. The idea is not a new one and the argument is well known (cf. Steiner 1986 for an excellent recent exposition). What is really at issue in all discussions of this question (cf. e.g. Gold 1979: 157, Stavrou 1967: 113, 118) is the extent to which the reference needs associated with the productive skills are satisfied by published dictionaries. It turns out that, at best, only token attention is paid to them (e.g. Liberman 1984: 281). What we typically get in two-way bilingual dictionaries are, basically, a reading L1-L2 dictionary for speakers of L2 and a reading L2-L1 dictionary for speakers of L1 which, conveniently for the publishers, makes them saleable on two markets. It is still something of a curiosity that E. Wilson's English-Russian dictionary, which has "for English speakers" in the title (cf. Benson, in this volume), is on sale in the Soviet Union, where it was actually printed (Ryan 1985: 281).

Reversibility. Adequate lexicographic treatment of two languages requires that a bidirectional bilingual dictionary be made up of two complementary parts (Gold 1985: 311 ff., Frink 1985: 197). This is achieved by following the principle of reversibility: everything that appears on the right-hand side of the L1-L2 part should reappear — as far as the structure of the two lexicons allows — on the left-hand side of the L2-L1 part. Disregarding inconsistencies of the kind *mapmaking = Kartographie* but *Kartographie = cartography* (Liberman 1984: 285), whenever the principle is applied, the implication is that the dictionary is monodirectional, despite the editor's claim to the contrary (Gold 1982 passim). What we often get is a pair of dictionaries of which the L2-L1 part is noticeably larger and more complete than the L1-L2 part (Kao 1975: 88, Lansing 1984: 84), a situation that is not all that unjustified in monodirectional dictionaries (pace Frink 1985: 197) in view of the different nature of the receptive and productive needs (cf. Tomaszczyk 1981).

The principle is said to be inapplicable in the case of equivalentless lexis (Gold 1982: 250 n. 2; see however Gold 1985: 319 n. 2 and Tomaszczyk 1983: 48 ff.). It may also not be followed when the L2 equivalent of an L1 item is much less frequent (Liberman 1984: 285, Gold, op. cit.) Finally, entries are not reversed when one part of the dictionary (obviously monodirectional) is meant to be more prescriptive than the other (Gold, op. cit. both references). In such a dictionary e.g. the four-letter words etc. could be entered in the L2-L1 part but their equivalents could be euphemized, and they would not be entered in the L1-L2 part (cf. Dennis 1985: 317).

Alphabetization. If a piece of information is qualified for inclusion in a dictionary, it should be entered in a place appropriate for it in the alphabetical order to enhance the retrievability of the information sought by the users (Gold 1982: 243). This means that the types of information traditionally presented in the form of lists and tables as appendices should be scattered all over the dictionary proper. This applies e.g. to numerals, proper names and their derivatives, and abbreviations (cf. also Gold 1973: 26, Stavrou 1967: 113). The requirement

precludes the listing of e.g. German compounds within the main entry articles for base words, so that e.g. *Herdplatte* does not appear before *Herde* or *beinhalten* before *Beinschiene* (Lederer 1985: 417, Holliday 1983: 93). The space-saving practice of listing compounds in the article for the base is particularly confusing for the beginning learner who may not know a compound from a noncompound. The principle also requires that related but formally different items be entered in the appropriate place in the alphabetical list and cross-referenced with the base. This applies e.g. to suppletives *(go-went)* and to alternations of the type *goose-geese*. Where tone is distinctive, as in Cantonese, both alphabetical and tonal order should be observed (Kao 1975: 77).

Retrievability. For most people, dictionary buffs aside, looking things up is something they prefer to avoid if they can get away with it, and having to consult a dictionary several times to locate a single piece of information is particularly frustrating. One case in point are multiword lexical units, including idioms and set phrases as well as collocations (cf. Gates, Moon and Nuccorini, in this volume). A reasonable solution is to enter such items under all major constituents. They can then be glossed under the first component and cross-referenced at the others (Gold 1985: 313, Boguslawski, forthcoming).

Location of information can be considerably facilitated by clear organization of the dictionary and transparent entry layout. Very useful is the use of different, easy to read kinds of type, conspicuous spacing (including separation — within entries — between nominal, adjectival, etc. uses), and easily decipherable symbols and abbreviations, all listed and explained in the front matter or on front and back inside covers (cf. e.g. Nelson 85: 320, Holliday 1983: 93, Yang 1985: 408, Lewicka 1981: 113). In particular, it is suggested that — to avoid confusion — different kinds of gloss, i.e. ready translation equivalents, approximate (abbreviated) definitions, and full definitions and paraphrases be clearly distinguished (Gold 1979: 156).

In addition to ready location of the information sought, retrievability involves unambiguous interpretation of the information found. One pertinent problem here, which has yet to be solved, is distinguishing between the metalinguistic and nonmetalinguistic *or* and *and* (and their equivalents in other languages) as well as commas and slashes (Gold 1982: 234 f.). Much easier to implement is the proposal that explanations, definitions and illustrative examples — even if abbreviated — be written in "normal" language (no telegraphese, no ellipsis, etc.) (Gold 1986: 305).

Redundancy. To be an effective tool, a dictionary must be both informative and concise which, obviously, it cannot be, not at the same time (cf. Mithun 1978: 81). While insisting that a measure of redundancy is most desirable (e.g. Alexander 1975: 134), the reviewers suggest various ways in which space can be saved so that the dictionary does not become too large to handle.

Desirable redundancy includes ample, though carefully selected illustrative material (Liberman 1984: 286); cross-referencing of related items; in the case of rare items, provision of explanations in addition to ready equivalents so that the user does not have to consult an encyclopedia when the native language equivalent is as unfamiliar as the foreign language word (Gold 1986: 306); in the case of inflected languages, provision of exhaustive grammatical information indexed with appropriate tables in appendices (Zgusta 1986: 314); inclusion of compounds and other multiword units even when their meaning may be obvious (because the user may not be sure of their exact form) (Haugen 1967: 562); repetition of meanings under different related entries rather than the incessant use of 'see' (Remillard 1985: 413).

Space can be saved by excluding derivatives generated by regular processes which involve no spelling, meaning, or usage irregularities (Sehnert 1971: 174), and by eliminating all kinds of deadwood such as easily recognizable cognates (Pillwein 1966: 105) or examples that do not exemplify anything (Stavrou 1967: 120).

Coverage. The usefulness of small and medium size dictionaries being taken for granted, it is the very large tomes that command respect (cf. Gabrovšek 1986: 299, Nehls 1977: 165). But the enthusiasm for large dictionaries is by no means unqualified. In particular, quite a few of the reviewers object to the inclusion of excessive numbers of technical and scientific terms (e.g. Traupman 1980–81: 163, Sehnert 1971: 174, Lewicka 1981: 113). A possible solution is to include only those of the specialized items which can be presumed to be in reasonably widespread use, or at least known to a large segment of the educated lay public (Traumpan 1980–81: 163).

The compilers of no modern dictionary involving languages such as English, German, or Spanish think they can afford to ignore their major national varieties. The increasing attention given to them in recently published dictionaries – duly highlighted in the promotional material – is welcomed by all reviewers. But if the treatment of AE vis-à-vis BE (when English is the target language) is found to be far from satisfactory (e.g. Traupman 1980–81: 163 f.), the situation appears to be quite dramatic in the case of Latin American varieties of Spanish (Gold 1982: 241). It is evident that adequate treatment of varieties in dictionaries, in whatever form, requires extensive (socio-)linguistic research (Gold 1979: 155).

Almost all of the reviewers favour the inclusion of obscenities etc. because such items are as much part of language as anything else (e.g. Sehnert 1971: 173). If entered, they should be carefully labelled and provision of parenthetical explanations is found especially useful (Remillard 1985: 413, Vines 1985: 92). The one reviewer who opposes the inclusion of offensive vocabulary (Akhmanova 1975: 131) argues that not only are such items *not* part of the standard language but, in order to learn to use them appropriately, one has to internalize an amount of sociocultural knowledge that no dictionary of the traditional kind can ever convey.

Currency. The usefulness of items of historical and literary interest being generally recognized, it is the inclusion of the most recent additions to the lexical stocks that is often used as a test of the dictionary's excellence. Even though the reviewers do not make the latest items sound nearly as important as do the blurb writers and actually advise lexicographers not to overemphasize the latest neologisms at the expense of the established vocabulary (e.g. Benediktsson 1969: 85), it is considered the lexicographer's obligation to keep abreast of lexical developments in both languages and to record them, an absolute must with dictionaries involving languages such as Turkish, where the rate of lexical change is particularly fast owing to mass-scale replacement for foreign material with native element (Dubiński 1978: 282). The results of on-going language watching and analysis should be made available to the public every decade, if not at shorter intervals, in the form of a thoroughly revised edition (Jankovsky 1977: 379 and 1974: 604). For the updating to be done properly, the lexicographer must not rely exclusively on secondary sources but should resort to field work and native informants (e.g. Köhler 1979: 156).

Reliability. What makes reliability critically important is that, with the exception of language professionals – who know better but still expect it – the average dictionary user simply takes it for granted (cf. Koekkoek 1981: 533). The reliability of a dictionary can be greatly increased if its makers adopt a set of clearly defined principles and adhere to them *consistently* throughout the work. It is also recommended that both the general principles and the more particular practical solutions be explicitly stated in the front matter. Finally, native speakers of both languages, at least some of whom are bilingual in both, should collaborate on the projects from start to finish (e.g. Gold 1973: 30).

Discussion. Bilingual dictionaries appear to generate more than a fair amount of sympathetic interest and critical appraisal: If the languages involved are both languages of wider communication, it is not at all difficult to locate 3–5 reviews of a single work even if one does not enjoy unlimited access to review-carrying journals. While it is uncommon for a reviewer not to find fault with one or another feature of the work examined, only in a very few cases is a dictionary disqualified on overall evaluation (e.g. Gold 1982, Mühlhäusler 1985, Zwolski 1980), much higher standards being as a rule expected when the dictionary is one of many for the given language pair (cf. esp. Koekkoek 1981). Even though specialized (technical, business, etc.) dictionaries far outnumber the general-purpose ones, the former attract noticeably less attention of reviewers.

The topics discussed above constitute the recurring themes of all the reviews examined, underlying the majority of the comments made in them. If much of what the reviewers say is common knowledge, it should be recognized that dictionaries continue to be published which fall far short of any received standards (cf. also Joseph 1987 and Beeson 1987) and even the best ones are hardly be-

yond reproach, the most common sin being lack of consistency. On the other hand, it also means that the reviewers are well familiar with the principles of the trade; only one of them regards a well-established principle as an innovation (cf. Lubensky 1985: 195 on meaning discriminations). Although quite a proportion of the reviews are indeed small essays on topics in lexicographic methodology (cf. Steiner 1984: 167), for the most part it is methods/principles/solutions that had already been proposed. Side by side with fairly uncontroversial proposals there are those which stand in obvious and *unavoidable* conflict with some others. General purpose lexicography thus appears to be doomed to remain an art involving a number of compromises. One way out of this might be a wider range of dictionaries restricted as to the target audience.

Of the nine general topics most frequently taken up only the first three are specific to bilingual dictionaries: a greater part of what is said in bilingual dictionary reviews could just as well be said in reviews of other dictionary types. There is, of course, nothing wrong with that as the last six requirements hold for any dictionary project. Nevertheless, granted that there are distinct *complementary* roles to be played by L1, L2 *and* bilingual dictionaries in the process of FL learning and use (Atkins 1985), a point not one of the reviewers questions, one wonders whether it is in the users' best interests for dictionary critics to tacitly accept the situation where the bilingual dictionary is often regarded as – at best – an *alternative* to the L1 or L2 dictionaries, if not as a necessary evil and a poor relation to the other types (cf. Ard 1982). What seems to be called for in bilingual lexicography is not so much continued competition with monolingual dictionaries as increased concentration on precisely those aspects of the lexicographic description which fall outside the scope of nonbilingual dictionaries. These include above all contrastive lexical semantics, contrastive word grammar, and culture-specific vocabulary. Some very promising work in these areas has already been done (cf. e.g. Snell-Hornby 1983, Martin 1983, Vereščagin and Kostomarov 1980) but it is hardly the case that the results of such and similar studies are being incorporated in actual dictionaries on a wide scale. It is perhaps up to reviewers to put pressure on publishers to make sure that they are (cf. Gold 1973: 30). After all, FL learners and speakers not only universally accept the bilingual dictionaries but actually prefer them to e.g. the L2 ones, even though they might consider them inferior to the latter. This negative evaluation may well be due to teacher indoctrination but it happens to be justified, for even the best of the bilinguals are clearly deficient in just those respects which are uniquely their province (cf. e.g. Snell-Hornby 1987).

Bilingual dictionaries of the familiar conventional kind will no doubt continue to be published and used for some time to come, and reviewers can hardly be blamed for accepting them for what they are. By no means are the remarks made in this section intended to convey any criticism of their generally highly useful work. All I want to suggest is that in evaluating bilingual dictionaries reviewers consider shifting the focus of their attention from 'dictionary' to 'bilingual'.

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To save space, references to the dictionaries reviewed are abbreviated and include the editor's or principal compiler's name (if available), the languages involved, and place and year of publication, all enclosed in square brackets.

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