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Learner's references: from the monolingual to the bilingual dictionary

ABSTRACT: The innovations of the English learner's dictionary are well-known and justly praised, but some authorities have begun to question the Anglo-Saxon ethnocentricity of these monolingual dictionaries and wondered if this genre is ideal for foreign learners. While we should avoid the extreme fallacy of the one-to-one lexical equivalent which constitutes the main limitation of the traditional bilingual dictionary, the commercial success of various 'bilingualised' types and other pedagogical diction-aries discussed in the literature of metalexicography ought to make us re-think the design features of the ideal learner's dictionary, for English and other languages.

1. Introduction

Several authorities (e.g. Hausmann 1989, p.15 and Ilson 1990, p.1972 in Volumes 1 and 2 of the encyclopedia WÖRTERBÜCHER/DICTIONARIES/DICTIONNAIRES) have commented on the relative neglect of the bilingual dictionary in comparison with the unilingual learner's dictionary. Indeed, one could easily get the impression that a budding pedagogical lexicography is concerned almost exclusively with monolingual EFL dictionaries.

I cannot hope to reverse this trend in my paper, but I can point out a few topics which may have been overlooked in the literature. I start by basing my title on that of a recent paper written by the first EURALEX President (Stein 1990), not because I disagree with her, but because I want to stress the other direction. (Incidentally, all my references are from the period since the first EURALEX Congress, held at my place of work in 1983.)

My aim is to discuss a particular compromise dictionary genre, halfway between the unilingual and the interlingual, which has been almost completely ignored in dictionary research so far. This will provide an opportunity to meet a new learner-oriented diction-ary type and examine it in the light of contemporary metalexicography. I hope that the exercise will broaden our perspective on a hitherto grey area of pedagogical lexico-graphy, and perhaps turn up a few useful principles.

2. Dictionary research

The recent completion of the International Encyclopedia of Lexicography (Hausmann et al. 1989-91) both motivates and facilitates an exploration of the learner's dictionary between the two poles of monoglot and polyglot reference. Many aspects of pedagogical lexicography are treated there, in relation to the four main branches of "dictionary research" (see Sections 3 to 6 below), and most of the relevant dictionary types in the major languages are exemplified and evaluated.

It is my contention that the distinction between unilingual and interlingual lexicography is logically, chronologically and practically false; if the artificial division is perpetuated, it could also be damaging. As I found in my own research on dictionary use among English learners of German (Hartmann 1983), there are many as yet unexplored cross-currents between the unilingual and the interlingual dictionary. Thus, I could not find any evidence for this language pair that learners were prepared to be weaned away from the bilingual dictionary to the monolingual, even if the latter were readily available.

Other authors have begun to question the barrier that still seems to separate monolingual and bilingual learner lexicography. Tomaszczyk (1983,47) approved of Iannucci's earlier suggestion "that an ALD-type bilingual dictionary would be a very welcome reference aid to all FL learners" and noted that (a) this was in line with theories proposed by Russian bilingual lexicographers and (b) such adaptations were already on the market, e.g. the bilingualised Chinese version of the OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNER'S DICTIONARY (Taipei 1966, Hong Kong 1984). Atkins (1985, 22) mentioned a similar "hybrid dictionary (one with both bi- and mono-features)" for Italian and proposed that this "is the direction we ourselves should be moving in". At the EURALEX Seminar on the Dictionary and the Language Learner, Reif (1987, 147) reported on the development of a 'glossed' version of the OXFORD STUDENT'S DICTIONARY OF CURRENT ENGLISH for Hebrew speakers, and Snell-Hornby (1987, 162) floated the idea of a learner's bilingual dictionary in the form of an 'active' parallel thesaurus.

Rundell (1988, 127) characterised the current monolingual learner's dictionary as "fundamentally flawed", because it has not yet been emancipated from the native-speaker dictionary model. One solution might be a "bilingual component". Stein (1990, 405), in the paper already referred to, distinguished three stages of dictionary use in foreign language acquisition (bilingual dictionary, monolingual learner's dictionary, native-speaker dictionary) and advocated a pedagogically conceived 'bilingual word book' to facilitate the transition from stage one to stage two. Finally, Battenburg (1991) devoted two of the 31 sections of his book on bridging and combining the features of the monolingual learner's dictionary and the bilingual dictionary, with comments on 8 bilingualised EFL dictionaries for 5 languages, Chinese, Hebrew, Arabic, Norwegian and Greek.

Many of the arguments in the above studies are tentative and inconclusive (they are also extremely difficult to extrapolate to languages other than English), but they are sufficient for two purposes: (a) to challenge the generally held belief that learner's dictionaries must by definition be 'monolingual' in nature (cf. Herbst 1990, 1379), and (b) to demonstrate the close interdependence of dictionary making and dictionary research (cf. Hartmann, forthcoming). It is the latter point to which I now turn.

Of the various sub-fields of metalexicography, or dictionary research, I shall pick out four – dictionary history, dictionary criticism, dictionary typology, and dictionary use – and discuss them in their relevance to our topic of bilingual(ised) learners' dictionaries.

3. Dictionary history

We now know much more than we used to about the lexicographical traditions of various countries and languages. However, a full history of the learner's dictionary has still to be written. What is certain is that learners' concerns (or their assumed potential needs) figure prominently throughout lexicographic history, and that the interlingual format in this is at least as important as the unilingual, although the debate on which of the two came first has yet to be settled (cf. Boisson et al. 1991).

Readers of any historical account of language teaching through the ages (such as Howatt's for English, 1984) will be struck by the lack of specialisation among early practitioners. Pioneers like Comenius, Holyband and Florio moved easily in and out of textbook writing, dictionary compilation and translating, and distinctions between published genres were equally fluid, e.g. alphabetic and/or thematic, unilingual and/or interlingual (even polyglot), phrase-books and/or picture-books, grammar-books and/or vocabulary guides.

Of particular interest is the history of pedagogically motivated and interlingually presented dictionaries arranged in systematic or topical or thematic or lexical-field order. Zöfgen (1991, 2890) mentions some early forerunners and lists no fewer than 8 such 'subject-matter' dictionaries for each of the language pairs French/German and English/German; these often incorporate considerations of 'basic' vocabulary frequency and utility, and sometimes grammatical and cultural information as well. The bilingualised general learner's dictionary arrived relatively late, although some 'quasi-bilingual' types have been reported as having a long and distinguished ancestry, from an ongoing academic Welsh dictionary with English glosses, through various dictionaries of exotic or extinct languages, such as Akkadian whose words are paraphrased in terms of another language (like English), right back to the early dictionaries of European vernacular languages which used Latin as the object- or meta-language, such as the very first German dictionary, which explained alphabetically arranged Latin synonyms by their German equivalents.

From this brief glance at dictionary history we take away not only the impression that 'we have seen it all before', but the first and foremost designing feature of learners' dictionaries: language coverage and mode of presentation are less important than didactic effectiveness!

4. Dictionary criticism

Historical studies shade into critical studies when they compare and evaluate (one or more) dictionaries against some criterion. It is of course true that objective standards are still rare, and consequently critical reviews are very often symptoms of the personal opinions of the evaluator rather than genuine attempts at measuring quality in terms

either of the compiler's own principles or of degrees of user satisfaction. An example of how underdeveloped the critical spirit is is given by Jehle's (1990) fascinating analysis of 210 reviews of seven English and two French dictionaries for foreign learners. Jehle not only shows that the authors of such reviews have a long way to go in elaborating consistent criteria, but also develops a framework for judging the relevance of such criteria. In a similar vein, Steiner (1984) has worked out a set of guidelines for reviewers of bilingual dictionaries.

Nevertheless, criticism can often lead to a reevaluation of conventional designs and the emergence of new ones. All the great language teachers and lexicographers are known to have spotted faults and demanded improvements in the dictionaries of their day. A. S. Hornby was dissatisfied with the native speaker dictionary and argued that foreign learners' needs are different, and L. V. Ščerba questioned the very foundations of the bilingual dictionary by insisting that such factors as mother tongue of the user, directionality and type of activity all determine the shape of the reference tool required by foreign learners.

As a result of intensive experimentation, we now possess, at least for English and a number of other 'world' languages, a much better range of monolingual and bilingual learners' dictionaries. But we must not be complacent. Snell-Hornby (1990, 232) has argued, on the basis of a critical comparison of five German-English dictionaries, that completely new dictionaries usually prove superior to revised editions of older works. What we need, then, are more critical studies, in our case of the relatively new category of the bilingualised dictionary, so that further improvements can be suggested and carried out, and even entirely new types developed.

Dictionary criticism has also contributed to a refinement of the design features. Depending on the reference needs of the foreign learner, the dictionary should provide information that is relevant and suppress information that is not. The bilingualised dictionary is thus clearly better suited for passive decoding, i.e. interpreting texts or translating them from the foreign language into the learner's mother tongue, than for active encoding, i.e. producing texts or translating from L1 to L2, which has wide-ranging implications for the presentation of meaning discrimination, grammar and collocational detail.

5. Dictionary typology

The problem of how to classify the enormous diversity of existing dictionaries into types or genres can only be satisfactorily solved if we take into account all the various factors, such as language(s), information categories, and intended functions. For the learner's dictionary, additional considerations such as directionality, proficiency level and activity context are important. Thus, Zöfgen (1991, 2889, following Hausmann) distinguishes 'primary' learning dictionaries for – selective or extensive – vocabulary expansion from 'secondary' learning dictionaries for wider reference, and equates these with the thematic and alphabetic formats, respectively.

Pending further detailed investigation, I regard the bilingualised dictionary (e.g. the OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNER'S ENGLISH-CHINESE DICTIONARY) as a sub-type of the interlingual with hybrid features of the monolingual learner's and the bilingual learner's dic-

tionary (e.g. DICTIONNAIRE DE L'ANGLAIS CONTEMPORAIN). It also lies uncomfortably between the general dictionary for multi-purpose use and the more specialised learner-oriented reference works concentrating on particular information categories, such as basic vocabulary, synonyms, pictures, errors and faux amis, collocations, idioms, word families, technical terms, pronunciation etc.

I have located about 20 general bilingualised dictionaries aimed at foreign learners of English from the following language backgrounds: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Malay, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish. They tend to be produced by the publishers of EFL dictionaries (such as Oxford and Longman) or by Kernerman in Israel in association with Chambers or Harrap. (Two do not follow this pattern, the AL-MISBAH for Arab students of English and the American DICCIONARIO INGLES.) But there are also several bilingualised dictionaries for special purposes; these tend to be published in the countries of the learners - which perhaps explains their relative unfamiliarity to English-speaking authors.

One comes away from surveying these various bilingualised learners' dictionaries, many of which have never been adequately analysed in the metalexicographic literature, with the feeling that all the typological possibilities and permutations have not been exhausted, and, although their numbers and current impact may be small, experimentation of this kind is healthy and cannot be but beneficial for their users.

Again, we have gained some insights into real and potential design features that learner's dictionaries of this type ought to exhibit. The stress on vocabulary selection appears strong, but also the realisation that word frequency to be an effective didactic resource must be tempered by utility and ease of learning. This is often linked to the desideratum that vocabulary should be presented in thematically organised groups rather than alphabetically ordered lists. Alternative formats (such as pictures and diagrams) may also have to be explored for the depiction of grammatical, semantic, stylistic and cultural information.

6. Dictionary use

The reference needs of their users are the ultimate justification for dictionaries. If the users happen to be learners of foreign languages, dictionary compilers have special responsibilities and opportunities to select and present the information in ways appropriate to their particular reference skills.

Research into dictionary users and uses is of relatively recently vintage, but it has already produced enough knowledge about various uses of various dictionaries by various users in various circumstances to warrant the frequently stated opinion (Hartmann 1989, 103) that the "analysis of users' needs should precede dictionary design". Fortunately for dictionary publishers and dictionary researchers, learners form a 'captive audience' in this respect, and it is not surprising that they have been subjected to a number of different surveys, using a wide range of methods from opinion polls and questionnaires to tests and interviews, and more recently even direct observation by film and protocol.

In their report on one of the most comprehensive studies ever attempted (over 1000 learners in seven European countries), Atkins & Knowles (1990, 385 & 389) confirm that bilingual dictionaries still outnumber monolingual learners' dictionaries by 3 to 1, but

that the latter were often more successful in helping users find the relevant information. In the absence of comparable evidence about the use of 'bilingualised' dictionary types, we can assume that we have here an indirect case for combining the best features of the unilingual and the interlingual dictionaries.

A model for research into users' reference skills is Müllich's (1990) analysis of the protocols produced by his German school pupils while using English and French monolingual learners' dictionaries for translating texts into their mother tongue. Here is a record of actual difficulties experienced at each of the 5 phases of the look-up process (*OMEGA*: '*o*ption' or choosing the right dictionary, '*m*inimisation' or determining the appropriate headword, '*e*lection' or picking the correct sub-entry, '*g*enesis' or recognising the relevant sense, and '*a*daptation' or integrating the item into the context), together with a set of recommendations for deliberate instruction in dictionary reference skills (cf. also Stark 1990 on the promises and imperfections of dictionary 'workbooks').

The user perspective has also widened the scope for further improvements in the design features of pedagogically oriented reference tools. Of these, the nature and form of the definition of entry words (or their translation equivalents), the use of examples (and their collocational range), and the overall transparency of the dictionary text are most paramount.

7 Conclusion

Although the 'bilingualised' type of learner's dictionary has not yet been fully topicalised in the literature, dictionary research – in its four aspects dictionary history, dictionary criticism, dictionary typology and dictionary use – shows us clearly that this genre is not entirely unexpected, and that it deserves to be taken seriously.

I hope my paper has presented sufficient detail to derive three implications:

- for lexicographic theory, a greater awareness of the various (proto)types of bilingualised learners' dictionaries (cf. Lamy 1985) is likely to improve our understanding of their design features;

- for lexicographic practice, a greater awareness of the wide diversity of such dictionaries (cf. Zöfgen 1991) is likely to lead to more refined principles of compilation and thus to better products;

- for language teachers and language learners, a greater awareness of these tools (cf. Battenburg 1991) is likely to lead to better proficiency.

Already it is clear to me that we have seen the end of the definition of the learner's dictionary as an exclusively 'monolingual' type, and we may yet see an increasing interest, even among Anglo-Saxon lexicographers, in the problems of interlingual dictionaries (cf. Svensén 1991, 155).

My overall conclusion is that pedagogical lexicography is slowly being developed in interaction between language teachers and dictionary makers. However, this development can only succeed if it is accompanied by ever higher standards of professional training and academic research.

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