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Tackling Lexicographical Anisomorphism in Front Matter Comments

ABSTRACT: This paper contains a presentation of areas, illustrated by examples from the Finnish language, where the inclusion of front matter notes concerning certain construction patterns typical of the Finnish language may be advisable. The present writer holds that similar problems may occur also in bilingual dictionaries involving other languages and thus proposes that comments on topics such as source language hypernymy without target language equivalency as well as common source language grammatical constructions of a lexicalized character, lacking one-to-one correspondencies in the target language may deserve preface comment.

1. Grammar and lexicon

The borderline between grammar on the one hand and lexicon on the other has traditionally seemed quite clear, perhaps even more so to the dictionary users than to lexicographers. There are, however, a number of aspects related to the phenomenon Zgusta so aptly described as lexicographical anisomorphism that make the line seem just as inconspicuous as a line drawn in water. The aim of this paper is to give an account of how lexicographical anisomorphism may occasionally compel editors of bilingual dictionaries to deviate from the principle of a strict separation of the realities of language into lexicon on the one hand and grammar on the other. Above all, the attention will be focussed on the existence of a kind of uncharted territory that does not fall within the purview either of lexicography or grammar, traditionally speaking. The examples will in the main be derived from the Finnish language, but the problems they bring to the fore will to some degree have a more universal application.

Three particular problems will be brought up, viz. those of source language hypernymy without target language lexical parallels, source language grammatical constructions lacking corresponding one-to-one equivalents in the target language and finally source language words containing a semantic whole that does not lend itself to one-word expression in the target language.

2. Hypernymy as an exponent of lexical anisomorphism

A rather special case of lexicographical anisomorphism can be seen in the fact that certain languages tend' to have a need for hypernyms in cases where other languages seem perfectly able to do without them. This point can be illustrated with some examples from the Finnish language. We may begin by considering a word such as **kestoviestintä**. This word is a compound word, made up of two derivations. First we have the noun **kesto**, derived from the verb **kestää** ["to last","to have a certain duration"] and then the noun **viestintä** derived from the verb **viestittää** ["to signal"]. However, translating the word as merely the sum total of its component parts would result in nonsense, pure and simple. The word is well-nigh impossible to translate into English - and, for that matter, into any other language I am familiar with. According to the definition given in the monolingual Suomen kielen perussanakirja [Basic Dictionary of the Finnish Language], this noun denotes any act of communication that leaves a permanent record, as opposed to such communicative acts as do not. Thus, the definition would cover for instance a written article or a tape-recorded radio talk, but not, say, an address given in public if it is presented only orally (and neither recorded on tape nor taken down in shorthand writing). - Or let us consider the slightly less complicated **kevytliikenne** a noun composed of the adjective **kevyt** ["light", "not heavy"] and **liikenne** ["traffic"]. This noun may itself form the first portion of several compound nouns like **kevytliikenneväylä** ("light traffic route"] and **kevytliikennesilta** ["light traffic bridge"]. The meaning of this seemingly apocryphal concept is that of "pedestrian, bicycle and moped traffic" (including some other similar modes of traffic). Here, it should be emphasized that the word **kevytliikenne** is not confined to the language of urban planning only, but instead, a word quite frequently encountered in Finnish-language mass media.

Words like the those two quoted above may easily reinforce some people in the belief commonly held in Finland that the Finnish language in some mysterious way is a richer language as far as possibilities of expression are concerned on the lexical level. For the sake of balance then it should be mentioned, by way of an isolated example among several others possible, that Finnish lacks a description for even such an everyday occurence of urban life as commuter traffic. The normal Finnish word is **työmatkaliikenne**, literally "work travel traffic", which serves fairly well to describe the phenomenon as such, but does not offer opportunities for conceptual expansions like the verb "to commute". And despite the sometimes heard gasps of surprise from laymen in the field of linguistics when confronted with the seeming lacunae in the lexical repertoire of a language, the Finns themselves obviously manage quite beautifully without such a word.

By way of stating the obvious, it may be pointed out that problems relating to such a lack of words occur only when texts have to be translated from a source language into a target language lacking such one-to-one equivalents. And when source-language core words, non-existent in the target language, themselves form the basis of compound words or derived construction, then not only the words but also the difficulties are compounded. How are we to render a word denoting all modes of communication leaving a lasting trace into English -or, for that matter, a word like **commute** into Finnish? Experienced translators will find a way, but what can a lexicographer do to help those with a less solid knowledge of the target language? To the extent the problem is one of

decoding, the solution is simple enough: provide the reader with as succinct and exhaustive a metalanguage explanation as possible and that is that. But what then about the dictionary's rôle in providing the users with means for encoding such items of the target language into a text produced in the source language?

2. 1. Models for solving the problem of hypernym-related anisomorphism in bilingual dictionaries

The first solution that springs to mind is that of making the metalanguage as suitable as possible for use in lieu of an equivalent in a situation of actual language production. All too often, however, this is evidently an impractical way. The metalinguistic explanation turns out too cumbersome to use in source language production and may even come across as something that transcends the fluid border between the erudite and the ridiculous. Here, of necessity, the explanation needs to be backed up with illustrative phrases. Finding such phrases should not be an insurmountable problem to the extent that the phenomena referred to by the seemingly untranslatable lexemes are common to the cultures of both the source and target language. More concretely then: a lexicographer involved in bilingual lexicography should have a possibility for taking the time needed to find target language ways of expressing a reality essentially similar to that which his supposedly untranslatable source language lexemes describe.

Here, however, we immediately hit upon a new difficulty. It may well be that the source language uses only ad hoc constructions to illustrate the extralingustic reality thus described. Should then a lexicographer assume the responsibility for selecting a few of these constructional possibilities for inclusion in a bilingual dictionary, well aware of the fact that in doing so he may well, nolens volens, come to bestow upon the lexical items thus selected a kind of semi-official status as the right and proper modes of expressing a given content of meaning, to the exclusion of other equally likely possibilities? Or should he content himself with giving a mere metalinguistic explanation, signalling implicitly to the dictionary user in need of guidance for encoding that here he is left to his own devices? - In my opinion, the answer must first of all depend on the format of the dictionary in question. A pocket-size bilingual dictionary will probably be precluded even by such considerations as those of space from illustrating usage in cases of the above-mentioned type. With respect to a major general dictionary - containing, say, one hundred thousand or more headwords, the matter appears in a different light. To my way of seeing things, the inclusion of some illustrative phrases, preferrably culled from real life, does merit consideration, on the understanding that they should be seen merely as contextually conditioned translation options. Perhaps the introduction of some notational device may come in handy here, like for instance the use of the abbreviation EX to denote that the given translations should be viewed more as suggestions than indisputable facts. Such a notation could be followed up by some kind of information, either in the front matter or down at the foot of the page, indicating in explicit terms the fact that the translations given in the example phrases should be seen as suggestions for encoding and not as hard and fast rules, allowing of no parallel ways of expression.

3. Anisomorphism resulting from differences in grammatical structure

Another problem of bilingual dictionaries related to that of "untranslatable" lexemes is the presense of grammatical constructions that do not lend themselves systematically to analogical translation into the source language. Here we hit upon an interesting area of overlap between grammar and lexicon, one that probably becomes even more evident when the source and target languages are structurally wholly unrelated, as is the case with Finnish and Swedish. An introductory illustration to this problem is furnished by a device often employed by the Finnish language for the nominalization of adjectives, namely derivation by means of the suffix -uus/-yys [the difference in surface structure realization is due to the rules of vowel harmony, a salient feature of the Finno-Ugric languages]. Basically, any Finnish adjectives can be nominalized through the use of this device, and the adjectives thus nominalized are often themselves derived from verbs or nouns, which further serves to complicate the underlying syntactic pattern. This is a tendency in Finnish word formation that can be illustrated for instance by such adjectival nominalizations as **kiehtovuus** from the adjective **kiehtoa** [=fascinating] and **kielevyys** from **kielevä** [= glib-tongued]. From a purely syntactic point of view, they would translate into English as *fascinating-ness" and *glib-tongued-ness" respectively.

These two examples go a long way towards proving that with the syntactic devices at its disposal the Finnish language often manages to express a content corresponding to that of a whole subordinate clause in languages such as English or Swedish . The present Finnish-English General Dictionary has often omitted Finnish lexemes of the above-mentioned kind from its stock of headwords, probably acting out of a conviction that such items are a matter of grammar rather than of syntax.

During work on the Finnish-Swedish General Dictionary, however, a different course of action has been adopted. First of all, the words have been included among the headwords to the extent that they can be regarded as part of the basic Finnish vocabulary, rather than merely occasional constructions. Secondly, it was decided to be uneconomical to provide the dictionary users with a number of relatively similar example phrases for each one of these suffix-derived adjectives. Instead, a solution was found whereby every such adjective which does not readily lend itself to a translation into Swedish on the purely lexical level is provided with a reference note ks *mallis-uus. The letters ks. are short for "katso", the Finnish verb for "see" and the word **malli** stands for "model [article]". The reference thus points to a model article concerning the treatment of such words in Swedish translation, placed within the front matter of the dictionary.

The inclusion of structural information in the front matter opens up interesting possibilities for wider applications of a kind not commonly found within lexicography. Drawing on experiences from the Finnish language the present author finds it possible to claim that some languages may go further in dividing up reality into categories of hyper- and hyponymical relationships by means of the lexicon. As the editor-in-chief of the most recent monolingual Finnish general dictionary contended, it appears as though the Finnish language has a particular predilection for hypernyms, serving as blanket concepts for a number of phenomena other languages would not find it necessary to lump together in a similar fashion. The word **kestoviestintä** mentioned previously is thus not only a mere example of such lexicographical anisomorphism as can certainly be found be-

tween any two languages. Instead, it is rather emblematic of a more widespread tendency towards hypernymical expressions on the part of the Finnish language. This tendency once led a Finnish lexicographer to the both drastic and illustrative conclusion that sometimes it seems as though users of Finnish want words that could be superimposed simultaneously as hypernyms onto referents as different as a bicycle and a coffin! And quite conceivably, this tendency may not be restricted to the Finnish language only.

In view of the above fact, it seems reasonable to presume that a two-tier editing policy in bilingual dictionaries might be of great assistance to prospective users. The first element of such a policy would consist of finding out whether there are marked and systematic differences in the hierachical structuring of reality in the lexicon of the source and the target language. The second and by far the more difficult step consists of finding a way of presenting the dictionary user with information concerning these aspects of language.

Here, the most economical solution may be to include a kind of conventionalized remark that would inform the reader that the entryword is a concept operating on a taxonomic level unparallelled in the target language. The remark could then be enlarged upon in the front matter for those interesting in finding out more about the reasons behind the lack of correspondence between source and target language, who could then resort to these introductory notes for further information. Such a note would have to include a sufficient number of source language examples with attendant explanations in the target language. Although it goes without saying that the provision of such explanatory notes would not help a prospective encoder solve any problems relating directly to target language representations of source language lexemes, it would at least mentally alert the nonspecialist user to the prevalence of occasional "untranslatabilities".

In conjunction with work on the Finnish-Swedish General Dictionary, by way now proceeding from lexicological theory to dictionary editing practice, a solution of the kind proposed above has been adopted in the entries [although not in the front matter, at least not yet while work is in progress] with respect notably to items of botanical nomenclature in the source language. Thus, a lexeme like keltajäkälä is given an explanation "sammelnamn för lavar av familjen Xanthoria" i. e. "blanket term for lichens of the Xanthoria family". The word of "sammelnamn" ["blanket term"] could in similar cases be taken as a kind of key word included when needed at the end of an entry with a further reference made to front matter comments of the kind discussed.

4. "Information density" as a lexicographical problem

A final point worth making in reference to problems pertaining to Finnish as a source language in bilingual dictionaries is the marked "information density" in many Finnish words, notably nouns. By that is meant tendency to include elaborate syntactic relationships of meaning within the confines of one single lexeme. Two graphic illustrations to this tendency are provided by the words siirtymishalukkuusilmoitus ["declaration of one's willingness to relocate"] and omatarvepaino ["printshop producing only for the internal needs of the company or institution that owns it"], both of which have been excerpted from Finnish publications in the 1990s. Owing to the fact that words of this kind have a markedly occasional character it would not be feasible to include them among the dictionary headwords. For the benefit of the observant dictionary user, how-

ever, it might nonetheless be advisable to insert a front matter note about the underlying construction pattern of the Finnish language that serves to generate such words and also inform the user about possible ways of rendering them into the target language. Since this phenomenon is not only confined to the Finnish language – for an illustration we may consider the problems inherent in rendering such a German word as **handelsüblich** [appr. "generally available in open trade"] into English – lexicographical issues of this kind may be of relevance also to bilingual dictionaries other than those involving the Finnish language.

5. Concluding remarks

By way of a conclusion it may thus be stated that an expansion of the front matter to encompass information about what may be termed the twilight zone where the fields of word formation, grammar and lexicon intersect may be an option well worth considering in larger dictionary, notably when the source and target languages differ markedly from each other in a structural sense. Granted: a dictionary user has sometimes been characterized primarily as someone who never reads a preface. Even so, in the light of today's increased emphasis on user-orientedness in dictionaries, it is an effort well worth considering with a view of bringing bilingual dictionaries at least a small step forwards on the long and tortuous path towards the goal of being as ideal tools of language understanding and production as possible.

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