Dictionaries and Interpreters

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Abstract
The paper views use of lexicographical sources by a particular user group – interpreters, who resort to dictionaries and other lexicographical sources in two different situations – while preparing and during the interpreting process itself. The specificity of interpreters' work means that traditional lexicographical resources are often not useful – they are too broad, too general or outdated. The strategies in interpreting process employed by interpreters may be of some lexicographical interest and are worth considering for dictionary application. New electronic lexicographical means are being prepared to aid interpreters. Finally, community interpreters being a peculiar group need customized dictionaries.

1 Introduction

Interpreters constitute a particular and slightly odd category of dictionary users because of their peculiar needs and conditions of use of lexicographical sources. First, because professional interpreters have a high language proficiency in the respective language combinations (active and passive) and accordingly need mainly highly sophisticated and novel dictionary material. Secondly because the types of interpreting activities are quite varied (Alexieva 1997), including simultaneous, consecutive, whispering, community, audiovisual, legal, court, religious, remote, video, over-the-phone, online interpreting and other types many of which demand different degrees of background knowledge and different breadth and depth of lexicological precision. Thirdly, because of the particular, not to say extreme circumstances and manner inherent to the profession. Interpreters often need to resort to lexicographical material during their work when there is no time to study a dictionary, even no time to look up a word in the traditional sense. Lexicographical information for interpreters has to be user-friendly, personally customized according to pre-set criteria, and accessible on mobile information carriers.

Conference interpreters use lexicographical sources in two very different situations – one is the preparatory stage before interpreting and the other is during the work – mostly in the booth.

2 Dictionaries in the preparatory stage

When interpreters receive a commission, learn about the next assignment, they usually prepare for the event. In some cases, the organizers provide the interpreters with the documents, which greatly facilitate preparations. Interpreters' organizations (AIIC) even insist on document provision, yet reality is usually different. Quite often the interpreters have to proceed only from the title of the conference and preparatory work tends to be vague fumbling in the void. The preparation may involve reading up the subject, scanning and skimming various texts, talking with an expert, but mainly centres on getting acquainted with lexis and terminology of the particular sphere. This may take different forms but very often means resorting to all that is available.

Traditional resources include dictionaries (bilingual, monolingual), encyclopaedias, reference books, specialist documentation. Preparation normally also involves sifting through personal databases, glossaries, previous conference materials. More advanced preparation includes looking up texts and parallel texts in the internet (Veisbergs 2003), looking at internet subject lexicons, monolingual and bilingual terminological dictionaries, clearing up equivalents in the respective languages, preparing terminology lists for the use in the booth.

All in all this work is somewhat similar to that of a translator (Austermuehl 2001) working on a particular, previously unknown topic, the biggest difference being that it is future-oriented and carries a lot of uncertainty of how much of it is going to be useful. From experience it can be said that the hit ratio is not high – usually about 5-10% of unknown lexical items that come up in the conference have been predicted.

Use of online resources for downloading documentation and terminology from databases is most widespread today, yet interpreters generally complain that large databases (as only they would normally hold the highly specific information) are too big, contain too much information. Interpreters find it difficult to assess and often even to look through so vast a material. Huge databases of international organizations (Cabre, 1998) also tend to suffer from a certain lag behind as concerns novel linguistic material. They generally tend to have huge amounts of terms covering just as wide spheres – thus thousands of terms in EURODICAUTOM, EUTERPE, IATE (still in 11 languages though supposedly "migrating" to new shores) under the field *economy* is of little help for a specific seminar on *insurance within intellectual property sphere.* A possibility of smaller, more detailed sphere division would be more helpful, but frankly is hardly practicable. Databases also generally presume that one language input material is known. However, these problems are not that much interpreter-specific.

3 Interpreting stage

It is the second lexicography use stage that is truly interpreters' realm – dealing with unknown words and terms while interpreting. Interpreters in the booth generally resort to two dictionary types: source language monolingual explanatory dictionaries (to understand) and bilingual dictionaries of the respective language pair (to get the target equivalent). This does include, of course, various content type – terminology, specialized glossaries, encyclopaedias, etc.). Interpreters cannot wait for more than half a second for a missing word, first, be-

cause it is an unwelcome break in the narrative, second, it overburdens short-term memory. Time constraints and interpreting effort makes it almost impossible to use traditional resources (printed general monolingual and bilingual dictionaries) while interpreting. Colleagues in the booth may be of some help finding missing words and terms while the interpreter struggles on, but when hearing something unknown the interpreter is alone and nothing to resort to but his own memory and mind. There are **strategies** of how to deal with unknown words and terms that the interpreter understands (knows or guesses from context) but cannot provide the target language equivalent (also used for dealing with lexical gaps). These are loopholes, sometimes not accurate, but good enough. (The following examples are of a very simple nature to facilitate understanding the above). Interpreters can resort to:

Synonyms
magazines – periodicals, journals, press
MPs – parliamentarians, representatives, deputies

Negative antonym constructions
the poor – the unprosperous
adults only – not for children

Superordinate words; hyponyms
ferret – animal
ants and other hymenopterans – ants and other insects
novas and lodestars – stars
Baltic states – Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia

Converses
he was given a bribe – he received a bribe
this book is on loan – this book has been taken

Concretization
gun – pistol, cannon
vehicle – train, bus, car

Paraphrasing
irritate – to get on sb's nerves
kick off – start our work

Trope exchange, substitution, introduction
Big Apple – New York
Kremlin – Moscow, Russian government
betrayal – stab in the back

Transcription/transliteration (English-Latvian combination)
Leasing – līzings, speaker – spīkers, feeling – fīlings,
John – Džons, summit – samits, pagasts – pagasts

Zero translation
know-how
Sturm und Drang
Ars longa, vita brevis

Semantic loans (English-Latvian combination)
(Computer) mouse – pele
(Pop)star – zvaigzne

Loan translation (English-Latvian combination)
braindrain – smadzeņu aizplūde
big bang – lielais sprādziens

Descriptive translation (English-Latvian combination)
Big Board – Ņujorkas fondu birža (New York Stock Exchange)
money laundering – noziedzīgi iegūtu līdzekļu nelikumīga legalizācija (unlawful legalization of criminally gained proceeds)

The strategies in interpreting process used by interpreters are not their own invention – these are in fact standard lexicographic entry procedures in explanatory and bilingual dictionaries. Most of the dictionaries use some of the above strategies, while avoiding others.

Things become really difficult when the interpreter does not understand the source text unit and cannot guess it from the context either. If it concerns an odd adjective, or some other less important word, it can be omitted, but when it is essential for grasping the message, a real problem is at hand. Resort to some form of lexicographic source is needed.

4 New technologies

New technical means are being tried out to be of help and assistance for such cases (www.lookup-online.de). Many conferences offer internet access in the booth, which can be very useful for the currently "idle" interpreter. Having a personalized and well targeted glossary on laptop or palmtop can be useful. Computer software design can provide the closest approximate word in the electronic dictionaries as soon as you type some of the initial letters of the word. With some practice interpreters get the word in half a second which is as fast as it can be. Yet this is no panacea – typing the word takes an additional effort and compounds the already existing "effort" sum (Gile 1995, 1997) hindering listening effort, memory processes and speaking ability. This may result in so called spill-over effect, when the following text is lost or damaged. Getting the word on the screen does not yet mean that it can be smoothly incorporated in speech. And of course the word might not be there, so the whole process would have been in vain and had taken valuable time.

Also the traditional lay-out of most databases is not very conducive for interpreter work, as it often inundates one with information, providing multiple variants, e.g. a Latvian multilingual database of terminology (www.termnet.lv) (comprising about 150 000 terms) when looking up English *reference* provides about 20 Latvian counterparts. It may be useful for the translator who has more time to dwell on the study of semantics of the item, to study the la-

bels, fields of meanings and the dates of term acceptance. Yet for an interpreter this creates more problems than solutions. Scrolling down two pages of text is a luxury that no interpreter can afford. Again limiting the fields of search seems very important. This however raises new problems of lexical field division and interface issues. Having all senses on one screen seems preferable (www.tilde.lv), though putting new reading related stress on the interpreter. Paradoxically, however, some space-saving strategies (Correard, 2002), like cross references, can create additional problems.

This returns us to the first stage – the laptop will have only that material which has been fed in. Interpreters, of course, can make use of the software of the numerous accessible termbase varieties thus tailoring their own specific mini-dictionaries. Yet, it is worth pooling resources with other interpreters' glossaries, uploading all paper notes that the interpreter has worked with so far, focussing of particularly difficult issues characteristic for interpreting. Pooling resources means that one compatible system is to be used by all interpreters interested. SCIC (Joint Interpreting and Conference Service of the European Commission) has been working on its own termbase (TIARA) which would differ from heavy EURADICAUTOM, EUTERPE or their follower IATE.

One can hardly expect lexicographers or companies to produce general or even bilingual dictionaries aimed at interpreters solely. Though a community that is highly linguistically oriented and ready to pay, the interpreters in most language combinations constitute too small a group of customers to be of commercial interest for lexicographers. But some aspects of information e.g. subjects spheres in electronic dictionaries, could be formatted in such a way that would allow easy customization according the users needs. The same refers to the various special language corpora where better extraction tools could optimize their use by the interpreter community.

5 Community interpreters

There are specific issues (Wadensjo, 1998) facing community interpreters (many of whom specialize in interpreting between the majority official language of the country and small, diverse and rare minority languages). These interpreters often face the huge problem of not having a bilingual dictionary for the respective language pair at all. Globalization also means that often it is not even clear what language some people might be speaking. This was the case when a group of Somalian asylum seekers happened to come ashore in Latvia and there was no one to interpret, no one to judge where they came from until an interpreter with some knowledge of several African languages was brought in from neighbouring Estonia.

Community interpreters need highly customized dictionaries that can be relatively small (both for compilation reasons and for ease of taking along for an assignment). These dictionaries have to be highly economical, exclusively synchronic and normally covering basic areas where most of the interpreting assignments take place – education, welfare, police, medical care, law and administration.

6 Interpreters as creators of terminology.

Often interpreters are the first people of a language community that confront new notions and new terms in the source language that do not exist in the target (usually interpreter's na-

tive) language. Thus diffusion of novel terms often starts with interpreting (Banhamida 1989), as interpreters control a channel of communication and often speak to a large and /or influential audience which having heard the new word/term would "carry it home", use and spread it. Often returning to the next conference they would already make use of the term they have heard before. It can also happen within the same day, thus strengthening the (false) conviction of both sides that what is used is the correct term. It should not be forgotten that quite often there is cooperation between the interpreters and their users. Being the agents/channel of new information they may also create parallel terminology, because of ignorance or because of conviction that their term is better, or because the audience has informed them that they prefer this term. Sometimes back-translation wish inspires such choices. In every sense it is most advisable that terminologists and translators are in good contact with interpreters as often the linguistic material is the same. Nowadays this is possible through centralized databases that national authorities should sustain. Especially in smaller languages interpreters seriously affect the language development, terminology and word-stock that finally enters the dictionaries.

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