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'ACTIVE' AND 'PASSIVE' BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES:

THE ŠČERBA CONCEPT RECONSIDERED

In recent years it has increasingly been urged that dictionaries should be designed to meet the specific needs of the groups of users for whom they are intended; thus Cowie (1979) notes that "a plea which is made by several contributors to this volume is that the scope, organization and meta-language of dictionaries should more closely reflect the reference needs (and levels of sophistication) of the classes of user for whom they are intended", and Wiegand (1977) calls for 'eine Soziologie des Wörterbuchbenutzers', analyzes a number of 'Benutzungssituationen' and points out the important distinction between 'Produktion' and 'Rezeption'.

In this paper we wish to discuss the organization of dictionaries for the large class of users who translate from their native language into a foreign language and vice versa, activities identical with or similar to what has been called production/comprehension or encoding/decoding or, in Hausmann's (1977) apt terms, 'Hinübersetzung/Herübersetzung'.

How are the needs of this user group to be met? Let us consider for a moment the classic aids to translation: monolingual descriptive and bilingual dictionaries.

That the monolingual descriptive dictionaries are also helpful to translators, particularly when it comes to decoding activities, is indisputable; but clearly their usefulness is restricted by limitations resulting from their very nature. The major objections from the point of view of the user who is translating into the language in question are well known:

no direct access to equivalents;

explanations of the unfamiliar in the foreign language;

irrelevant etymological information;

superfluous lexical definitions and encyclopaedic information;

and, above all, the fact that monolingual dictionaries, as a result of the 'anisomorphism of languages', so excellently described in Zgusta (1971), must necessarily leave numerous users' questions - questions which are often quite unpredictable for the lexicographer - unanswered.

These limitations must naturally also apply in the case of those monolingual descriptive dictionaries which explicitly claim to take into account the special needs of foreign users, e.g. Klappenbach and Steinitz's WÖRTERBUCH DER DEUTSCHEN GEGENWARTSSPRACHE; DUDEN. DAS GROSSE WÖRTERBUCH DER DEUTSCHEN SPRACHE; Wahrig's DEUTSCHES WÖRTERBUCH, and others.

From the translator's point of view, the limitations mentioned also apply in principle to EFL dictionaries - despite very considerable progress in the form of information on verb patterns and specifications of the collocational range of dictionary headwords "aimed precisely at fostering the active use of language, and specifically at helping the foreign learner to construct sentences ..." (Cowie 1981). The class of users in question is, however, particularly heterogeneous, and no monolingual dictionary, not even an EFL dictionary, can solve in any systematic way the specific translation problems which result from the 'anisomorphism of languages'.

Compared with monolingual dictionaries, bilingual ones have clear (and acknowledged) advantages from the point of view of the translator, such as

direct access to equivalents;

orientation towards a specific language pair;

immediately insertable equivalents;

scope for an adequate meta-language;

no superfluous material in the form of etymology, lexical definitions and encyclopaedic information, etc.

but they are characterized in practice by a number of weaknesses which are here less due to their 'nature' than to the fact that their full potential has not been acknowledged, in so far as the lexicographer neglects the fact that the production and reception of foreign-language texts each make vastly different demands on translation dictionaries, cf. Harrell's (1967) remark that "it is clearly impossible to pay equal attention to both X-speakers and Y-speakers in one and the same work". The fact that the incompatibility of these two aims is to a great extent neglected is clear from Al-Kasimi's remark (1977) that "the vast majority of the existing bilingual dictionaries, old and new, examined by the writer claim that they are designed to serve the speakers of both languages".

How then can these deficiencies be remedied? As early as the 1930's, it will be recalled, Ščerba offered a suggestion for an optimal solution: preserving a rigorous distinction between dictionaries aiming to facilitate translation from the native to the foreign language and those conceived as an aid to decoding foreign-language texts, we compile for each language pair four bilingual dictionaries, as outlined here for the language pair Danish-English. With Smolik (1969), Duda and Müller (1974) and Lötzsch (1979) we name the two basic types 'active' and 'passive' dictionaries respectively:

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active dictionary:      native → foreign language
Danish-English:         for Danish users
English-Danish:         for English users

passive dictionary:     foreign → native language
English-Danish:         for Danish users
Danish-English:         for English users
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This solution, in our opinion an ideal one for enabling us to meet well-defined user needs, has also been pointed out by others (cf. Iannucci 1967, Williams 1960, J. Rey-Debove 1970, Bielfeldt 1956, Lötzsch 1979, Hausmann 1977, and Al-Kasimi 1977). While a detailed analysis of its implications is still required, we believe that such an analysis will succeed in demonstrating convincingly the superiority of the Ščerba concept.

We will now try to outline some of the most conspicuous consequences of this concept both for the presentation of the headword and of the equivalents in dictionary entries, and for the selection of lexical items.

As is well known, a dictionary entry in a translation dictionary consists of a headword and one or more equivalents; over and above these there can be added user-orientated information concerning, among other things, meaning discrimination, idiosyncratic constructions, and grammar.

Let us first look at the presentation of the equivalents themselves. Monosemous headwords with corresponding monosemous equivalents which do not require meaning-discriminating glosses do of course exist. In such cases it seems sufficient to cite the corresponding unambiguous equivalent both in an active and a passive dictionary, as in E_1 and E_2.

E_1: (Eng.) neigh (v.i.) ... (Germ.) wiehern

E_2: (Eng.) neigh (v.i.) ... (Dan.) vrinske

But when this example is turned round so that the German wiehern and Danish vrinske respectively become headwords, the active/passive typology comes into effect:

E_3: (Germ.) wiehern ... (Eng.) neigh, whinny

E_4: (Dan.) vrinske ... (Eng.) neigh, whinny

In the passive German-English and Danish-English dictionaries, this way of presenting equivalents is fully acceptable, as the English-speaking user will normally be equipped with the competence to distinguish between neigh and whinny. But a German or Danish user would normally lack the competence in the foreign language to distinguish between the applications of the words; if they did not, they would have no need of dictionaries. The lexicographer ought therefore to distinguish between the two equivalents in the active dictionary as follows:

E_5: (Germ.) wiehern ... (Eng.) neigh; (leise) whinny

E_6: (Dan.) vrinske ... (Eng.) neigh; (daempet) whinny

The examples show that different requirements must be satisfied by the organization of a dictionary entry, depending on whether it is in an active or passive translation dictionary. The passive dictionary can take for granted the dictionary user's native-language competence to choose among the equivalents; in the active dictionary a precise and careful glossing of the equivalents is necessary so

that the user can be given clear information about the semantic conditions under which he may use each of the possible equivalents in the foreign language. The accumulation of equivalents in an active dictionary, without any meaning discriminating glosses, is one of the deadly sins of lexicography, but accumulation is possible in a passive dictionary. We will content ourselves for the moment with letting this simple example stand as a representative of the greater number of examples in general-purpose translation dictionaries, but it should be added that the example suggests that meaning discrimination is related to a specific language pair in question. In the language pairs German-English and Danish-English, meaning discrimination is necessary in this case in the active dictionary, while for the language pair German-Danish it is necessary neither in the active nor the passive dictionary.

The anisomorphism between the semantic subdivisions of the words in each language pair means that full equivalence cannot always be established between the sub-meanings of words in the given pair of languages. For example, English and French distinguish lexically between snail and slug, escargot and limace respectively, while German and Danish simply have the words Schnecke and snegl respectively for the same denotatum. Depending on which language one takes as the point of reference, one could perhaps speak of interlingual hyperonyms and hyponyms, respectively (Schnecke - snail, slug; snail - Schnecke) or synonyms (snail - escargot; slug - limace; Schnecke - snegl).

Let us for example imagine an English-Danish dictionary entry running as follows:

E_7: aunt ... moster, faster, tante

The Danish dictionary user can easily decide from the context in which aunt occurs which equivalent should be preferred, but an English-speaking user will be dependent on meaning-discriminating glosses when he is translating into Danish, i.e. in the active dictionary entry E_8.

E_8: aunt ... (maternal) moster,
(paternal) faster, (also) tante

Above, we asked for meaning discrimination in the active, but not in the passive dictionary. But in cases of interlingual hyperonymy or hyponymy it will be proper for the passive dictionary also to contain semantic glosses which compensate for the information loss due to the lack of full equivalence. In a passive dictionary for English speakers we should thus find entries like E_9.

E_9: moster ... (maternal) aunt

As far as the language pair English-German is concerned, there would be no need for glosses in this case (aunt ↔ Tante).

By providing the interlingual hyperonyms or hyponyms with insertable semantic glosses the lexicographer ensures that the translator need not lose information in the translated text; he can insert the compensatory gloss where appropriate. There are, however, cases where the lexicographer cannot give an equivalent and a com-

pensatory insertable gloss, but must make do with a non-insertable gloss. We are thinking, for example, of regionalisms, as in E_{10} and E_{11}.

E_{10}: (Eng.) <u>streetcar</u> ... (Germ.) ⟨US⟩ Strassenbahn

E_{11}: (Eng.) <u>loch</u> ... (Germ.) ⟨Scot.⟩ der See

In such cases the non-insertable gloss belongs in the passive dictionary, while it can be omitted in the active dictionary. The user's native-language competence is thus a crucial factor for deciding when such glosses should be provided.

To sum up: the way equivalents should be presented in translation dictionaries is in our view determined by the type of dictionary, i.e. whether it is an active or passive translation dictionary. This typology determines presentation irrespective of the size of the dictionary and whether it is a specialist or general-purpose dictionary. Subsequently, the semantic relations (synonymy, hyperonymy, hyponymy) between headword and equivalents decide which of the dictionary types should be provided with glosses. Finally, the third determining principle for the presentation of equivalents is the specific language pair in question.

In our opinion, not only the presentation of equivalents, but also the presentation of idiosyncratic constructions is determined by the dictionary type, and to a certain extent by the language pair. Finding the right combination of words in the foreign language can seem almost hopeless for the user when he looks up a given construction word by word. Let us, for example, suppose that an English speaker wants to translate the sentence "He changed his mind" into German, and that the English-German dictionary supplies him with the following information:

E_{12}: <u>change</u> ... verändern, ändern;
(money) wechseln; (trains) umsteigen

E_{13}: <u>mind</u> ... Verstand, Geist;
(opinion) Meinung

On the basis of this dictionary information the English speaker can produce two sentences in German, "Er veränderte seine Meinung" or "Er änderte seine Meinung".

German usage has settled for die Meinung ändern, not die Meinung verändern, which from the point of view of denotation would be just as good an expression. Idiosyncratic constructions like these are exceedingly important in the active dictionary, while they can be dispensed with in the passive dictionary to the extent that they are transparent in meaning. A German user of the same dictionary entries would without hesitation construct the correct sentence ("Er änderte seine Meinung") precisely because he is himself able to produce genuine idiosyncratic constructions in his own native language.

To sum up: when we keep the translation direction between two languages constant, e.g. from English to German, the user's native-language competence is seen to provide guidelines for the extent to

which a detailed specification of the idiosyncratic constructions is required in the dictionary. In the passive dictionary, where the native-language competence is on the equivalent side, there is no need to include transparent idiosyncratic constructions, whereas the same idiosyncratic constructions are necessary in the active dictionary, because the user does not have sufficient competence on the equivalent side. The distinction between active and passive translation dictionaries thus also proves to be an immensely useful one as far as this aspect, so vital for the user, is concerned.

The presentation of grammatical information in the dictionaries likewise follows the fundamental principle of the typology. In a passive dictionary there is a need for detailed grammatical data on the headword itself, while in the active dictionary it is first and foremost the equivalents which should be supplied with the morphological and syntactic information the user requires in the translation situation. When an English speaker translates English texts into a foreign language, e.g. German, the English-German dictionary should not provide bare equivalents only for the English words in question, but should assuredly also supply the necessary morphological facts about the equivalents.

E_{14}: <u>tooth</u> ... der Zahn, -s, ⸚e

The plural form <u>teeth</u> need not be cited in the active dictionary for English-speaking users; they can reconstruct the basic form <u>tooth</u> by virtue of their native-language competence. Conversely, we believe that it is appropriate to include <u>teeth</u> in a passive dictionary for Germans. Not all German users can be assumed to be able to identify the basic form from the plural form. On the other hand the morphological information on the German equivalent can be left out of the passive English-German dictionary:

E_{15} <u>tooth</u> (pl. <u>teeth</u>) ... Zahn

Similarly, this basic principle applies to the syntactic complementation of each of the lexical items. While the complementation of a headword in a given sense can be left out in a passive dictionary to the extent that it is transparent for the given language pair, exactly the same supplementary information must be considered indispensable to the user of the active dictionary. In the active dictionaries equivalents ought to be provided with any grammatical information which cannot be considered as belonging to the basic grammar which the user can reasonably be expected to know. Given, for example, an English-German dictionary article running as in E_{16}

E_{16}: <u>arrive</u> ... ankommen

this may indeed be acceptable in a passive dictionary for Germans, but it lacks essential grammatical information for the English-speaking user, namely that the German verb is strong, separable, and can be complemented using one of those prepositions which take either the accusative or dative, and that the prepositional phrase in that case must be in the dative ("Er kam im Hotel an").

In an active dictionary for English speakers, the German equivalent should thus be provided with the relevant grammatical information, e.g.:

E_{17}: <u>arrive</u> ... an.kommen (strong verb) (<u>at</u> = <u>in</u> + dat.)

As a parallel to this example, our dictionary typology requires that nouns and adjectives be supplied with the relevant morphological and syntactic information:

E_{18}: (Eng.) <u>arrival</u> ... (Germ.) Ankunft (passive dictionary)

E_{19}: (Eng.) <u>arrival</u> ... (Germ.) die Ankunft, ⸚e; (<u>at</u> = <u>in</u> + dat.) (active dictionary)

We hope thus that we have demonstrated that the active dictionary requires a maximum of grammatical information about the equivalents, while the passive dictionary can get by with a minimum of information on equivalents. With the headword the opposite is true, with certain qualifications which we cannot go into at present.

The selection of headwords on the basis of the active/passive principle leads to various results in several areas of the vocabulary. If, for example, we turn back for a moment to the grammatical area, at a certain level of user competence there will be reasonable grounds for entering <u>teeth</u> as an independent headword, giving the German user the chance to identify the form, just as there can be reasonable grounds for compiling German-English dictionaries where irregular German forms occur as headwords. However, this type of accessing procedure would be superfluous in an active dictionary. As a parallel to these examples it can be mentioned that accepted orthographic variants in a given language (e.g. Eng. <u>colour/color</u> or German <u>Foto/Photo</u> should be headwords in a passive dictionary but need not be cited as variants of the equivalents in the active dictionary.

In similar fashion it seems obvious to us that regionalisms should be included in the passive dictionary, for example in a German-English dictionary for English speakers words like <u>Schlachter</u>, <u>Metzger</u>, <u>Fleischhauer</u>, <u>Fleischhacker</u>, while in the active dictionary for English speakers the following is sufficient:

E_{20}: <u>butcher</u> ... der Fleischer, -s, -

If one wished to include the above-mentioned variants of <u>Fleischer</u> in the entry for <u>butcher</u>, one would also have to specify the region where each word is in use, but this presupposes a translation situation which is hardly likely to occur.

Several areas could be mentioned where the selection of lexical items for a bilingual dictionary is determined by the fundamental principle outlined above of distinguishing between active and passive dictionaries. For example, it can be asserted that the principle has far-reaching consequences for compounds and derivatives, which, to the extent that their meaning is transparent, can be left out in the passive dictionary, but not of course in the active dictionary, as the user can never feel sure that the word he wants actually is what he thinks it should be in the foreign language.

However, we will refrain for the moment from going into any more aspects of the dictionary types outlined, and content ourselves with referring to our more detailed and well-exemplified discussion of the matter (Kromann, Riiber, Rosbach forthcoming). We will maintain that Ščerba's dictionary typology for bilingual dictionaries must be considered an eminently suitable point of departure for bringing out all the implications to be considered in deciding how a bilingual dictionary should present itself to the user. To this we will add the principle that the presentation of information must as a matter of course be oriented towards the relations between the specific language pair in question, as suggested by some of our examples. It is true that most dictionary editors and publishers state that their dictionaries can be used by both user groups of the language pair concerned; exceptions are Weinreich's MODERN ENGLISH-YIDDISH, YIDDISH-ENGLISH DICTIONARY and Lötzsch et al.'s DEUTSCH-RUSSISCHES WÖRTERBUCH. But surely the time is now ripe for bilingual lexicographers and publishers to focus on the user and his competence along with the relations between the specific language pair in question in the compilation of future bilingual dictionaries, instead of perpetuating a tradition which runs contrary to the very nature of these dictionaries.

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