

Bilingual Dictionaries — Visions and Revisions

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“And indeed there will be time (...)
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred *visions and revisions*
Before the taking of a toast and tea.”

The title of my paper was of course inspired by T.S. Eliot, but we shall not be dealing with *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*: the “visions and revisions” described here are strictly lexicographic. The “visions” discussed in this paper are the dreams and aims of dictionary compilers as stated on the title pages and in the prefaces of a selection of German-English bilingual dictionaries, and I shall indicate how far the promises made and expectations aroused can actually be confirmed by the user. The “revisions” refer to the revised editions of these dictionaries, and we shall see whether they really provide new insights or additional advantages when compared with the previous editions. The five dictionaries under scrutiny are:

(1) WILDHAGEN-HÉRAUCOURT (English-German/German-English Dictionary in two volumes) by Dr. Karl Wildhagen, revised and enlarged by Dr. Will Héraucourt, 1963, published by Brandstetter (Wiesbaden) and Allen & Unwin (London), reprint 1973.

(2) CASSELL'S WÖRTERBUCH DEUTSCH-ENGLISCH/ENGLISCH-DEUTSCH, the edition published in 1984 for the German market by the Compact Verlag, Munich, of the Cassell's Dictionary, edited by Karl Breul from 1909 and revised by Harold Betteridge from 1948.

(3) LANGENSCHIEDTS HANDWÖRTERBUCH ENGLISCH by Heinz Messinger and Werner Rüdberg in the revised edition of 1977.

(4) HARRAP'S CONCISE GERMAN AND ENGLISH DICTIONARY (English-German/German-English) edited by Robin Sawyer, 1982.

(5) PONS/COLLINS GLOBALWÖRTERBUCH ENGLISCH-DEUTSCH/DEUTSCH-ENGLISCH in two volumes, by Roland Breitsprecher, Peter Terrell, Veronika-Calderwood-Schnorr and Wendy Morris, 1983, published jointly by Collins and the Klett Verlag, Stuttgart.¹

To test the lexicographic *visions* I shall concentrate on WILDHAGEN, PONS/COLLINS and HARRAP'S CONCISE, quoting specific information from title page and preface, along with the intended coverage and envisaged users; as *revisions* I shall use CASSELL'S and LANGENSCHIEDTS HANDWÖRTERBUCH and again refer to WILDHAGEN, quoting the specific aims of the revision concerned. The investigation was based on empirical tests carried out during university seminars on the basis of authentic texts and concrete assignments from the differing viewpoints of (a) the professional translator and (b) the advanced language learner.² Such tests are of course both labour-intensive and time-consuming, and the limited scope of

this paper will not allow me to do justice to them; the results are however available in detail in two empirical studies: in a diploma thesis by Hanno Holzheuser (Holzheuser 1986) written from the viewpoint of the trainee translator, and in a seminar paper by Karin Gut (Gut 1988) who examines five bilingual dictionaries from the viewpoint of the language learner.³

Wildhagen's Vision and Héraucourt's Revision

The dictionary presented by Karl Wildhagen in 1938 reveals lexicographic visions of truly gigantic dimensions. Dedicated "To the growth of international understanding", it is described on the title page as "An encyclopaedic and strictly scientific representation of the vocabulary of the modern and present-day languages, with special regard to syntax, style and idiomatic usage."⁴ This is then expanded in the Preface as follows: "The object of this book is to present, in the whole diversity of its social and individual structure, the vocabulary and usage of modern and present-day English, i.e. of the XIX. and XX. centuries, thereby including standard speech (as basis), the conversational language of the educated classes, colloquial speech, slang, the poetical language, and dialect. The language of the United States of America, which has constantly and largely influenced English slang, has been taken into account as far as possible."

Wildhagen died in 1945, and his work was continued by Will Héraucourt, whose enlarged edition of 1963 was justified both in the Publisher's Foreword and in the editor's Preface by the success of Wildhagen's dictionary, which "has found appreciative and lasting approval in all parts of the world" (1973). A specific aim of the revision was to keep pace "with the incredibly swift growth of scientific and industrial knowledge in the modern world as well as with the appearance of new vocabulary in almost every field of knowledge", and Héraucourt gives an extensive list of those "technical and scientific fields" which he claims are covered in the dictionary, ranging from atomic science and methods of warfare to numismatics and advertising. In the German-English volume of 1972 Héraucourt refers to the envisaged users of his dictionary, and here again the goal is ambitious indeed: the dictionary is intended, not only for school and university, for science, industry and commerce, but also for "the man in the street", the readers both of the classics and of illustrated weeklies, and "Where the rule is 'gentlemen only' it will serve its purpose just as well as amongst 'ladies only'". In fact we may conclude that the dictionary under discussion lays claim to being virtually universal, presenting the vocabulary of most fields of knowledge, of all representative language varieties, and aiming to satisfy practically every interlingual need.

Two Recent Dictionaries: Aims and Claims

In the points discussed so far, the PONS/COLLINS GLOBALWÖRTERBUCH represents the exact antithesis of WILDHAGEN. It carries no dedication, no extra information on the title page, and it does not even have a Preface (only a "Guide to the dictionary" and information on layout and abbreviations). The only part of the

dictionary where the compilers state what their aims were or what the user might expect, is the outside back cover, where some features of the dictionary are listed briefly in German, and these are expanded in an advertising leaflet describing all the PONS dictionaries. In the larger PONS-GROSSWÖRTERBUCH more information can be found on content and microstructure as well as on the working methods of the compilers, and this collected information will be summarized briefly here. The dictionary is presented as a reference work mainly for the learner (schools, universities, adult education) or for use in the office. It lays claim to a completely new concept and approach in coverage, method and structure of entries. The main stress is on the *extensive* presentation of the German and English languages as they are spoken and used today — the vocabulary of what is called the “educated non-specialist” (“des gebildeten Laien”). Archaic words are dropped, neologisms are numerous and include generally used items of the most modern specialist fields (“the language of computer technology and microchips”), and particular emphasis is laid on idioms, phrases and illustrative examples. The microstructure is characterized by detailed meaning discrimination and indication of usage (as for example in collocations), as well as a system of style labels. As regards methods of compilation, the lexicographer is here no longer the lone scholar presenting his collected knowledge, but one in a team of native speakers; we are informed that the text was compiled by lexicographers writing solely in their native language, and was then vetted bilingually.

The aims and visions of the smallest of the dictionaries under discussion, HARRAP'S CONCISE, are very clearly presented both in the Preface and in the publisher's blurb on the jacket, where it is announced as “an entirely new dictionary which offers more than any other German bilingual dictionary of its size”. Like the PONS/COLLINS GLOBALWÖRTERBUCH, it is new in that it is not based on any earlier work, though it is evidently aligned to other Harrap's dictionaries in formal aspects (such as the system of labels). The main innovation, as explained in the Preface, is however the relation of size to content: “Our intention has (...) been to provide a dictionary slightly smaller than the existing medium-sized volumes, omitting obscure or literary usage, but with more generous treatment of the entries — full grammatical information and pronunciation and plenty of examples.” (p. vi) This means that the editors concentrated on “the contemporary language as spoken (and written) by the man in the street”. Thus commonly used technical words were included, but not highly specialized terminology. A further new feature is the reduction of translations given, but with added emphasis on discrimination of meaning and usage.

For the language teacher the logical conclusion from all this would surely be that here we have a dictionary for the learner, especially in school or in intermediate classes. And indeed the editors see a special need for the dictionary “in schools and colleges”, though the circle of envisaged users is rather ambitiously extended to include the traveller, reference needs in the office and “even the university student or translator” (p. vi).

Two Recent Revisions

Unlike all the dictionaries discussed so far, both CASSELL'S WÖRTERBUCH and LANGENSCHIEDTS HANDWÖRTERBUCH are descendants of quite a lengthy lexicographical dynasty. In the case of CASSELL'S, as Harold Betteridge informs us in his Preface, the so well-known work which bears the names of Betteridge and Breul, was actually based on the now forgotten NEW GERMAN DICTIONARY of 1889, which was compiled by a now unknown woman scholar, Elizabeth Weir. In 1948, after numerous revisions and enlargements, the publishers decided that the work edited from 1909 by Karl Breul (who died in 1932) was to be completely overhauled, and the ensuing edition by Harold Betteridge, with a copyright of 1957, is apparently the volume offered in 1984 to the German public (with a new jacket, a German title page and a preface by a German professor) as CASSELL'S WÖRTERBUCH. When the editor informs us in his German Preface that „Das Wörterbuch ist vollkommen neu geschrieben worden“ (p. ix), we must therefore think in terms of the early 1950s. The aim of the revision was to offer a helpful guide to modern usage, and every entry was checked to ensure this. Secondly, the literary predominance of earlier editions—previously necessary for use in schools and universities—was dropped and the coverage extended to include special language terms for economists, engineers and lawyers (and others). In his *Geleitwort*, Gerhard Cordes also points out the increased interest in idioms and items absorbed into the standard language from dialects; he stresses the usefulness of the dictionary for both German and English readers (p. vii).

LANGENSCHIEDTS HANDWÖRTERBUCH, in the revised edition of 1977, has two Prefaces by author and publishers, one for Part I (English-German) and one for Part II (German-English), but the information given is basically similar. The HANDWÖRTERBUCH was based on what is called in the Preface to Part I “the largest English dictionary of our generation” (p.8) and in the Preface to Part II “the largest German-English dictionary in existence” (p.8), the “New Muret-Sanders”, which itself goes back to the dictionary compiled by Professors E. Muret and D. Sanders in 1901. Here too, the revision consisted of a word-for-word checking of entries, modernizing the content by replacing obsolete words with “more important modern vocabulary” (p.8), including neologisms and generally used technical terms, and by extending the coverage to include modern idioms, slang and vulgar usage and Americanisms. Evidently size was also a key factor: this dictionary is proudly described as a „Wörterbuch der goldenen Mitte“ in the Langenscheidt range of seven sizes, “comprehensive—being double the size of our well-known Pocket Dictionary—yet handy; rooted in tradition—based as it is on the New Muret-Sanders—and yet fully up to date” (p.9).

Users' Verdicts

So much for the aims and claims of editors and publishers, and now, in a brief summary, some verdicts from the users. For the advanced language learner, Karin Gut carried out two types of test on the basis of the dictionaries discussed above.⁵ Firstly, in a “word test”, which simply checked on the basis of randomly chosen items whether the areas mentioned in the Preface really were adequately covered in

the dictionary, hence whether the promises made were in fact kept. In all she tested 20 areas (modern scientific and other specialist fields, slang, neologisms, Americanisms, idioms) on the basis of 75 items.

The best coverage was found in the PONS/COLLINS GLOBALWÖRTERBUCH, where 57 of the 75 items were presented, followed by the HANDWÖRTERBUCH with 47.⁶ In WILDHAGEN, despite the sweeping claims made in the Preface, only 39 were found, where HARRAP'S CONCISE, with its far more modest claims, offered 37.⁷ CASSELL's, with only 18, has by far the lowest results. Figure 1 shows a selection of the specialist fields, Figure 2 the results for American English and neologisms.⁸ American English seems to be well covered, except in CASSELL's, but despite explicit promises in the HANDWÖRTERBUCH, only HARRAP'S and PONS/COLLINS do well on the neologisms, which obviously became common currency only after the other dictionaries were compiled, showing how dangerous it is to make rash promises about a rapidly changing lexicon. Gut's second test was a typical learner's translation test into the foreign language (German-English): on the basis of words, collocations and phrases she checked how far the dictionary actually helped the language student (i.e. in instances where the translation can be fairly clearly identified as "right" or "wrong"). WILDHAGEN and CASSELL's were both found to be confusing and generally unhelpful, due to their long lists of undifferentiated synonyms, with little or no discrimination in meaning and usage. CASSELL's was judged as outdated,⁹ and some suggestions in WILDHAGEN were thought to be "strange English". The 4-volume ENZYKLOPÄDISCHES WÖRTERBUCH (LANGENSCHIEDT) also offered numerous equivalents, but with better meaning discrimination; the structure of the entries was sometimes unclear. With HARRAP'S CONCISE, which offers fewer equivalents, it was easier to find a suitable translation, but there is the danger that some areas of meaning and usage are completely neglected and hence in numerous situations the dictionary offers no help at all. Once again, the PONS/COLLINS GLOBALWÖRTERBUCH fares best: although some gaps are found, it proved to be up-to-date and easy to use, with clear meaning discrimination (Gut 1988:26 ff.).

The tests carried out by Hanno Holzheuser from the viewpoint of the professional translator were more sophisticated and can only be dealt with here in the broadest outlines. Also working into the foreign language, but using difficult newspaper texts of the type frequently used to examine trainee translators in the FRG, he tested how far four bilingual dictionaries (those discussed above, but without HARRAP'S CONCISE) could be said to help the professional translator. His test items were the three German descriptive verbs *bimmeln*, *hausen* and *geizen* (cf. Snell-Hornby 1984), which have no real lexical equivalent in English, and three nominal compounds very recently lexicalized in German, *Gelbsünder*, *Geldwaschanlange* and *Hafturlauber*. Although the results vary among the four dictionaries, Holzheuser comes to the devastating conclusion that in fact bilingual dictionaries are of no great help to the translator at all (1986:114): the fixation on presenting, or attempting to present interlingual equivalents at lexical level means that, especially where such equivalents are not readily available, the dictionary is not a suitable tool to help recreate texts.¹⁰ On the basis of his analysis, Holzheuser classifies CASSELL's as a "passive dictionary for English-speaking users" (1986:114) and describes it as the weakest reference tool. WILDHAGEN likewise proved of little help, as it

bewilders the user with its undifferentiated abundance of information (Holzheuser 1986:115), and Holzheuser attributes such unhelpful abundance to the compilers' very aim expressed in their Preface to provide everything for anyone. He also describes the dictionary as completely outdated (1986:115). LANGENSCHIEDTS HANDWÖRTERBUCH and PONS/COLLINS GLOBALWÖRTERBUCH fare better, although neither of them do justice to complex semantic structures or culture-bound elements (as present in Holzheuser's compounds); of the two, PONS/COLLINS was found to have a clearer layout and to offer better help specifically for the German user working in English (1986:115 ff.)

"And indeed there will be time
To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and 'Do I dare?'"

By way of conclusion, I should like to return to Eliot's *Prufrack* and reformulate the overwhelming question: "Do I dare disturb the lexicographic universe?" — a world neatly ordered from A to Z, systematic and consistent throughout, and arranged, or so it is hoped, absolutely symmetrically by means of equations, whether between definiendum and definiens, or between "equivalent" words. In his review of the *ZüriLEX '86 Proceedings*, John Gallagher praises those contributors who have "divested themselves of old-school preconceptions" such as these, and who "do not hesitate to challenge some of the basic assumptions of traditional lexicography," thus "opening up entirely new lines of investigation". The focus in Zürich was mainly on monolingual lexicography, but the challenge, as the Translators' Colloquium in Innsbruck in 1987 showed and has been demonstrated in both the empirical studies discussed here, must be extended to bilingual and contrastive work. Given the now widely accepted anisomorphism of languages, the concept of the equation or the equivalent as a ready-made insertable item should be abandoned as the guiding principle of all bilingual lexicography in favour of *purpose-specific differentiation*. For the tourist or traveller, pocket dictionaries with simple equivalents for easy everyday communication will remain indispensable; for the language learner up to intermediate level approximate equivalents with meaning discrimination and a guide to usage are invaluable, and the bilingual equivalent is here to stay in terminology, but for the sophisticated needs of the professional translator, as we heard repeatedly at Innsbruck, new concepts and new designs are necessary: contrastive dictionaries of synonyms in semantic fields, for example, or a thesaurus layout, where factual information and paradigmatic monolingual analysis take priority over the vain search for an interlingual equivalent. This means that the bilingual dictionary, like its monolingual counterpart, will become increasingly user-specific, and the range of users envisaged in the prefaces should be more realistic and more modest. A final comment on revisions: as we have seen, both in coverage and in the structure of the entries, the two newest dictionaries proved superior to the revised editions of older works — quite apart from the more user-friendly layout, which has only in recent years been given prominence. One is tempted to conclude that, where the updating extends beyond purely formal matters such as spelling and labelling, and where the basic conception of the dictionary, along with layout and presentation, prove outdated, the user is better served by a completely new dictionary.

Figure 1: Word test: Specialist fields

Field	Test words	<i>Wildhagen</i>	<i>Cassell</i>	<i>LED</i>	<i>Harrap</i>	<i>Pons</i>
technology	Echolot Differenzial- sperre Servolenkung	echo-sounder x	echo-sounding apparatus, sonic depth-finder X	echo (depth) sounder (x) servo-, power- (assisted) steering	x power steering	naut: echo-sounder aviat: sonic altimeter power, servo (-assisted) steering
economics	Bruttosozial- produkt Nachfrage- funktion Preiselastizität	x	X	(x) gross national product [demand curve]	gross national product	gross national product
politics	Gulag Pogrom Gipfeltreffen			x pogrom summit (conference)	summit meeting	pogrom summit (meeting)
sports	windsurfen Gabelbaum Hauptmast	main mast	main mast	x [main mast]	x	windsurfing
electronics	Modul Relais	math: modulus relay	modulus relay	x modulus, module relay	module relay	archit: module math: modulus relay

Figure 2: Word test: AE; Neologisms

Field	Test words	<i>Wildhagen</i>	<i>Cassell</i>	<i>LED</i>	<i>Harrap</i>	<i>Pons</i>
neologisms	Videorecorder	x		x	x	x
	Teletext Katalysator	catalysator, catalyser, catalyst	catalyst, catalytic agent	video [recorder, reproducer] catalyst, catalyzer, catalyst	video (tape) recorder (chem: catalyst)	video cassette recorder, video set teletext (lit., fig. catalyst)
	Frisbee skateboard compact disc	x		x	x	x
American English	Lift	US: elevator		elevator (no: US)	only: lift	US: elevator
	Trottoir Kinderwagen	US: side-walk US: baby- carriage	sidewalk	US: sidewalk US: baby carriage	US: sidewalk US: baby carriage	US: sidewalk US: baby carriage
	railroad mailman center	US: see railway listed under centre	no: US; see railway	US: Eisenbahn US: Briefträger US: Zentrum	US: Eisenbahn US: Briefträger	US: Eisenbahn US: Briefträger US; see centre; centre: US: center
American pronunciation	lieutenant	US: [lu:'tenənt]		US: [lu:tenənt]	US: [lu:-]	US: [lu:'tenənt]

Notes

- ¹ This is an abridged version of the PONS GROSSWÖRTERBUCH (*Collins German and English Dictionary*) with front matter in German and aimed at the German market.
- ² These two seminars were: (1) "Translation and Lexicography, or: Translating with (which?) dictionaries?" at the Institute for Translators and Interpreters at the University of Heidelberg (1984) and (2) "Dictionaries and Language Learning" at the Department of English, University of Zürich (1987/88).
- ³ See too Standop (1985) and the „Wörterbuchtest“ by Dieter Zimmer in *Die Zeit*, 16. 05. 1986.
- ⁴ Front matter is given in both German and English; all quotations here are taken from the English version. The pages of this front matter are not numbered in the dictionary.
- ⁵ She originally used the 4-volume ENZYKLOPÄDISCHES WÖRTERBUCH however, and the corresponding figures have been added for the HANDWÖRTERBUCH.
- ⁶ In the 4-volume ENZYKLOPÄDISCHES WÖRTERBUCH 59 items were found, hence only two more than in the 2-volume GLOBALWÖRTERBUCH.
- ⁷ In the Preface it is stated: "Highly specialized words and phrases are not to be found here, but the user may be surprised by the amount of technical vocabulary included." (p. vi)
- ⁸ Items only found in the ENZYKLOPÄDISCHES WÖRTERBUCH, but not in the HANDWÖRTERBUCH, are put in square brackets. See Gut 1986:15 ff.
- ⁹ Cf. Kromann's comments on the CASSELL'S entry for *Braut* in Kromann (1989), which confirms this observation.
- ¹⁰ This was later confirmed at the specialist Colloquium "Translation and Lexicography" held near Innsbruck in July 1987 (see Snell-Hornby and Pöhl 1989).

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