General Dictionaries and Students of Translation: A Report on the Use of Dictionaries in the Translation Process

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In this paper we will present an outline of a research project at the Dutch State School of Translation and Interpreting in Maastricht, The Netherlands. The paper will be organized as follows. In section (1), we will briefly discuss the structure of the Dutch State School of Translation and Interpreting, followed by our motivation for the project in (2). Section (3) gives a description of the translation process as we envisage it. In section (4) the project itself will be discussed, and here the following topics will be dealt with: (a) short history of the project, (b) the texts used, (c) the items selected, and (d) the test procedure. Our preliminary results will be discussed in section (5) and in section (6) we will outline our plans for the future.

1. The Structure of the Dutch State School of Translation and Interpreting

For a good understanding of our project it is necessary to know more about the Dutch State School. First of all, the Dutch State School is the only institute of its kind in the Netherlands that trains technical and scientific translators. Our students take two foreign languages plus their mother tongue. We aim at an integration of language and subject field. The subject fields are economics, medicine and biology, law and politics, and science and technology. Formal teaching is limited to a minimum. We have adopted the problem-oriented approach. Students are actively engaged in project work in small groups. The total programme is four years.

2. Motivation for the Project

For some people a dictionary is a resource of data for the structuring of the theoretical lexicon, for others it is a commercial product. And then there are people who consider it as a user's manual for achieving a good translation. There are, of course, many more views on dictionaries. In our project we see a dictionary as a user's manual, and this is, of course, not surprising since we train students to become translators. In practice, however, we find that these users do not use dictionaries in the right way.
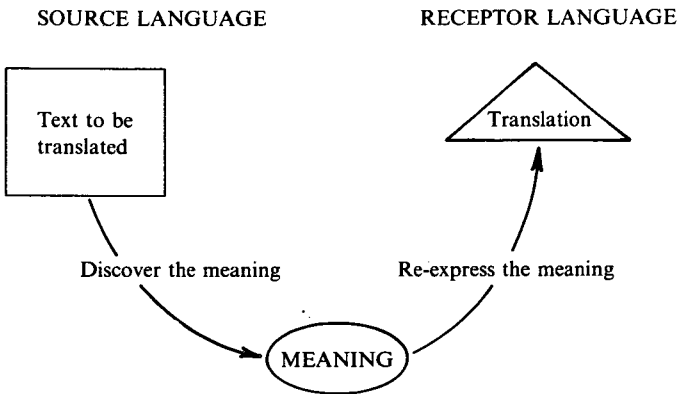
For students of translation, dictionaries (and other reference books) are indispensable tools in the learning process. It is, therefore, of cruical importance that first they learn how to use these books properly, adequately and most efficiently. To this aim these books should be organized well so as to be of any help.

For a dictionary to be helpful, it should be organized in such a way that the information contained in it is easily accessible on the one hand, and as exhaustive as possible on the other. These premises formed the basis for our project.

The aim of our project is twofold: 1) to find a way to teach students of translation to use dictionaries properly, adequately and most efficiently in the translation process, and 2) to find out whether dictionaries are organized adequately and whether they are helpful for students of translation.

3. The Translation Process

For the translation process, we based ourselves on Larson (1984). She makes a strict distinction between form and meaning of a language item. The first can be compared with surface structure and the latter with deep structure. She illustrates the process with the following figure (1):

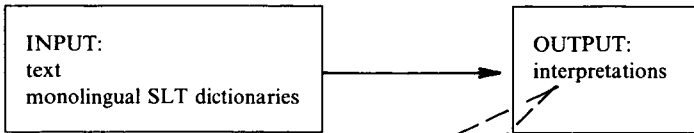SOURCE LANGUAGE   RECEPTOR LANGUAGE

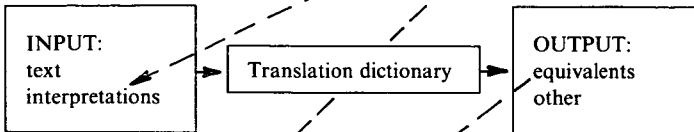**Figure 1:** The Translation Process according to Larson (1984).

The two texts involved differ in form only, they have, or at least they should have, one and the same meaning. The form of the translation should comply with the structures, rules and constraints of the receptor language.

Larson distinguishes three types of meaning: (1) Referential Meaning (the information content, what the text is about), (2) Organizational Meaning (the way in which this information content is expressed in language forms), and (3) Situational Meaning (the setting and cultural background of the information conveyed in a text). On the basis of this model, we distinguish four steps in the translation process (Fig. 2):
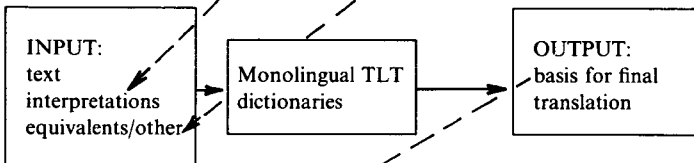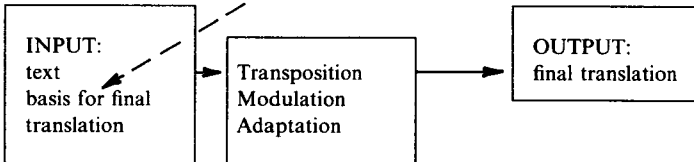
STEP 1: DISCOVERING MEANING

STEP 2: FINDING RECEPTOR LANGUAGE EQUIVALENTS

STEP 3: CHECKING MEANING OF RECEPTOR LANGUAGE ITEM

STEP 4: FORMULATION OF FINAL TRANSLATION

Figure 2: Survey of the Project

Steps (2), (3) and (4) are labelled "Re-express the Meaning" in Larson's model. Step (1) is individual work, and the other three are subgroup work.

Our representation leaves some aspects open (as does Larson's), namely the three types of meaning. In our project, we did not further specify them, but left them as implicit as Larson does. Our project concentrates on the translation from English into Dutch. It is our intention to incorporate "the other way around" later.

4. The Project

a. Short History

In an earlier stage of the project, we had some 30 test subjects. They had to fill in ten pages of A3 format, one additional page for subgroup work and a questionnaire of

some ten pages. This was all rather detailed, perhaps too detailed and too difficult for students to fill in. And what was more important, it was too time-consuming for them. Therefore, we decided to leave out the questionnaire and to design new forms to be filled in. But we maintained the procedure.

In this present round, 34 students participated. For our initial project we selected first-year and second-year students, for the present set-up we tested third-year and fourth-year students. Later we will try and test as many students as possible from all four years.

b. The Texts

The texts were fairly general, though some of them are clearly related to the subject fields of the curriculum. For an example see Appendix (A).

c. The Items Selected

The items for the project were selected at random. Later we will include items of all parts of speech, as well as collocations, phrasal verbs, standing expressions, phrases etc. and distinguish between context-independent and context-dependent items. With context-independent we mean that the items in question can be found as such in dictionaries, and with context-dependent that they are not given as such in dictionaries, but that their meaning may be *derived* from what dictionaries give.

d. The Test Procedure

In this section we will discuss step by step what the test subjects had to do. The input for Step (1) is an actual text, and a monolingual English dictionary. Each student in the subgroup (of 3 students) had to look up the item to be processed in the particular dictionary assigned to him or her. The dictionaries to be consulted were the OALD, LDOCE and the CED. On the basis of the context and the information given in the dictionary in question, the student had to formulate an initial interpretation in Dutch. This interpretation had to be written down on the form provided. For an example see Appendix (B). As we only concentrate on meaning, students were asked to indicate whether the definitions, examples, style and other were helpful. By "other" we understand collocations, explicit cross-references and etymology.

The output of Step (1), i.e. the individual interpretation, is the input to Step (2), and, of course, the text. Each student had to bring in his or her interpretation in the subgroup. All these interpretations were then written on the form. For each interpretation the students of the subgroup then checked in the translation dictionary VAN DALE ENGLISH-DUTCH (which we labelled "Van Dale I") whether this interpretation was given literally as a translation equivalent. If so, they indicated this on the form under EQUIV by means of the particular number in the dictionary entry. This number could be the number of the equivalent itself and/or of the example context given. If there was no literal or identical equivalent in Van Dale I, they put a dash. Then they had to see whether other translation suggestions were given that resembled their initial interpretation and write these under OTHER. The output of Step (2) thus was a number of equivalents and other suggestions given in the translation dictionary.

This input together with the output of Step (1) plus, of course, the text form the input to Step (3). In this Step, the students had to check in the monolingual mother tongue dictionary VAN DALE DUTCH (which we labelled "Van Dale III") whether the various individual interpretations, but also the equivalents and other suggestions of the Van Dale I, could be maintained as a basis for a final translation. If not, they wrote a dash under FINAL TRANSLATION (which, by the way, should be relabelled BASIS FOR FINAL TRANSLATION). If yes, they gave the item in question. They based their decision on the meaning definitions and/or examples given in the Van Dale III, and wrote these under EXPLANATION(S)/ EXAMPLE(S). The output of this Step was a list of possibilities serving as a basis for a final translation. This list could consist of zero, one or more items.

The output of Step (3) serves as the input to Step (4) in which the group of students had to apply the translation procedures of transposition, modulation and/or adaptation (if necessary and possible) in order to make the particular possibility they had chosen for their final translation comply with the grammatical and lexical rules and cultural conventions of te target language. The end product is a final translation.

5. Discussion of Preliminary Results

Because of the rather small number of items selected and participating students, our results can hardly be called conclusive. For an example of how we handled our data, see Appendix (C) where we visualized them and where ITEMS = items (to be) processed, D = definition, E = example, S = style, O = other, + = helpful, and — = not helpful.

We have done some calculating. We calculated the number of times that the initial interpretation was confirmed by the Van Dale III. The same we did for the literal equivalents and other suggestions given in the Van Dale I. And we expressed in figures the number of times that the initial interpretation was given literally in the Van Dale I, as well as the number of other suggestions given there. None of these figures made significant distinctions between the dictionaries used in the project. Apparently, we shall have to test more students and expand the number of items to be processed considerably. To try and express possible differences by means of figures is perhaps not the appropriate way to compare the various dictionaries. Being aware of this, we started to analyze the dictionary entries more closely on differences in definition, examples, style, and other, and to compare these findings with the interpretations the testees formulated and the assessments they gave on the various dictionaries. This, we found, is more promising. At this stage, we are still working on this analysis.

Another aspect we have to consider is the nature of the dictionaries included. The dictionaries are not all equal; the Van Dale III, for example, gives rather archaic definitions and examples, whereas the others do not. Unfortunately, however, the Van Dale III is the only appropriate monolingual Dutch dictionary that can serve our purposes. In the follow-up of our project, we will try and incorporate this aspect.

6. Future Plans

With this approach we feel we can trace the thinking process of our students when translating and using dictionaries. At the same time, this approach may pinpoint where dictionaries are not helpful and in what way: is it a lacking definition, is it the wrong examples, etc. This, and the comments of the test subjects afterwards encourage us to go on with our project and to expand it further. We intend to incorporate the COLLINS COBUILD into our research project.

References

Cited Dictionaries

COLLINS DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (CED). 1979. Patrick Hanks et al. (eds.). London and Glasgow: Collins.

LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH (LDOCE). 1978. Paul Procter et al. (eds.). Harlow and London: Longman.

OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNER'S DICTIONARY OF CURRENT ENGLISH (OALD). 1974. A.S. Hornby (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

VAN DALE GROOT WOORDENBOEK ENGELS-NEDERLANDS (VAN DALE I). 1984. W. Martin & G. Tops (eds.). Utrecht/Antwerp: Van Dale Lexicografie.

VAN DALE GROOT WOORDENBOEK NEDERLANDS-ENGELS (VAN DALE II). 1986. W. Martin & G. Tops (eds.). Utrecht/Antwerp: Van Dale Lexicografie.

VAN DALE GROOT WOORDENBOEK DER NEDERLANDSTE TAAL (VAN DALE III). 1984. G. Geerts & H. Heestermans (eds.). Utrecht/Antwerp: Van Dale Lexicografie.

Other Literature

Larson, M. 1984. *Meaning-based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence.* Lanham/New York/London: University Press of America, Inc.

Appendix (A)

The 1986 Reith Lecturer

A politician turned judge

R.D. Kernohan outlines the life and career of the Scottish judge Lord McCluskey, of Churchhill, this year's Reith Lecturer.

Lord McCluskey once suggested that a written Bill of Rights was something Lord Hailsham, the Lord Chancellor, inclined towards in Opposition and away from in Government.

That, of course, was when Lord McCluskey was still a political animal (he was Solicitor-General for Scotland under two Labour governments). For the past two years, however, since he was made what he describes for the benefit of outsiders as a 'Scots High Court judge' at the age of 55, he has had to avoid party politics and concentrate on more purely legal matters. It is this experience both of making laws and of interpreting them that makes him particularly qualified to talk about the role of the judiciary in a modern democracy (including that question of a written Bill of Rights) in this year's Reith Lectures.

John McCluskey was born in Glasgow and educated in Manchester and Edinburgh. It was at Edinburgh University, where he took the year's legal prizes, that he decided to become an advocate. He went on to gain wide civil and criminal experience at the Bar and on the bench. His posts included those of advocate-depute and sheriff principal (two all but untranslatable Scots terms which can be roughly rendered as 'standing prosecuting Crown counsel' and 'recorder').

But John McCluskey was not just a barrister with pinkish views. In 1956 Suez made him 'sign up' with Labour'. In 1963 he narrowly missed a safe-seat nomination at Dunfermline. Four years later he was lucky to be passed over at the Hamilton by-election, where the Labour candidate had to face the first tide of Scottish nationalism.

He held the post of Solicitor-General for Scotland in the second Wilson government and in the Callaghan one, becoming a life peer in 1976. It was his time in the harassed and besieged Callaghan government that provided him with experience at what he calls the 'interface' (he winces a little at the jargon) between legislation and law in action. He was the government spokesman in the Lords on European Community matters, and piloted a number of Bills through the Lords, also speaking on nationalisation Bills on shipbuilding and the aerospace industry. Now he has become a judge, he cannot become involved in political arguments, though he can, he believes, take part in debates 'suggesting better ways by which the objects which the Government seeks may in fact be obtained'.

Lord McCluskey's Scottish background helps him to provide a fresh perspective on the problem of the proper relationship between judges, the law and the law-makers. The most unionist Scots lawyer may have a nationalist streak over legal matters, particularly if the sovereignty of Parliament seems to take precedence over the Treaty of Union, which is arguably a kind of written constitution. (John McCluskey was a pragmatist over devolution, arguing that the ill-fated Callaghan Bill was only a first step that could have been modified.) He claims that Scots judges never lost the tradition of looking closely at the powers of Parliament and the executive. On Scots law, he says that 'there's no point in going on' about it, but he thinks its 'speed, flexibility and common sense' stand comparison with any other legal system.

His theme for the Reith Lectures takes him beyond the problems of interpreting the will of Parliament into wider areas of constitutional law in Britain and of theory and practice elsewhere in the English-speaking world. His research took him to study what the US Supreme Court has made of the Founding Fathers' doctrine of the 'separation of powers'. It has long been a commonplace to demonstrate that the doctrine was based on misconceptions (notably by followers of Montesquieu) and much modified in practice, especially as the Supreme Court learned the art of creatively reinterpreting the constitution.

He also went to see where the Canadian Supreme Court is heading; it is still a stripling in comparison with its American cousin, with not much more than a dozen human rights judgments behind it since the Canadians 'repatriated the constitution' in 1982. And he will be examining the Bill of Rights debate in New Zealand, another former British colony with 'a history of trampling on the rights' of the indigenous people.

Lord McCluskey hopes to break new ground in the Reith Lectures. He wants to treat the kind of theme generally argued by lawyers among lawyers and for lawyers—often with words and concepts that only lawyers understand—and make it accessible to the layman.

Appendix (B) 1

T E X T	It was his time in the harassed and *besieged* Callaghan government that provided him with experience at what he calls the "interface" (he winces a little at the jargon) between legislation and law in action.	SUBJECT FIELD OF TEXT: politics

OALD	LDOCE	COLLINS
be·siege /bɪˈsiːdʒ/ *vt* **1** [VP6A] surround (a place) with armed forces and keep them there; attack from all sides: *Troy was ~d by the Greeks for ten years.* **2** [VP14] ~ *with,* crowd round (with requests, etc): *The teacher was ~d with questions and requests from her pupils,* be·sieger *n*	**be·siege** /bɪˈsiːdʒ/ *v* [T1] **1** to surround with armed forces **2** [(*with*)] to press with questions, requests, letters, etc.: *The. crowd besieged the minister with questions about their taxes.*	*They were besieged with invitations to parties* **3** to cause worry or trouble to: *doubts that besieged him*	**be+siege** (bɪˈsiːdʒ) *vb.* (*tr.*) **1.** to surround (a fortified area, esp. a city) with military forces to bring about its surrender. **2.** to crowd round; hem in. **3.** to overwhelm, as with requests or queries. — **be+ˈsieg+er** *n.*

OALD	YES	NO		LDOCE	YES	NO		COLLINS	YES	NO	
DEF.		XX		DEF.	3			DEF.		XX	
EX.		XX		EX.	3			EX.		XX	
STYLE		XX		STYLE		XX		STYLE		XX	
OTHER		XX		OTHER		XX		OTHER		XX	
- - - - - -				belagen en daardoor in problemen brengen				- - - - - -			

V. D A L F E - D	be·siege [bɪ'si:dʒ] ⟨ov. ww.⟩ 0.1 *be-legeren* 0.2 *bestormen* ◆ 1.2 doubts ∼d him *hij werd door twijfel overvallen* 6.2 ∼s.o. with questions about *iem. bestormen met vragen over;* be∼d with invitations *overspoeld worden door uitnodigingen.* be·sieg·er [bɪ'si:dʒə‖ -ər] ⟨telb. zn.⟩ 0.1 *belegeraar* 0.2 ⟨fig.⟩ *bestormen.*	DICT.	INTERPRETATION	EQUIV.	OTHER
		OALD	- - - - - -		
		LDOCE	belagen	- - - -	belegeren
		COLL.	- - - - - -		

	EQUIVALENT/OTHER	EXPLANATION/EXAMPLE(S)	FINAL TRANSLATION	ASS:
V. D A L E D - D	belagen *	iemands leven, vrijheid op arglistige wijze bebedekte bedreigen, in h. bijz.	- - - - - -	
		aanslagen op de deugd van vrouwen doen		
	belegeren	fig. aan alle zijden omringen;	- - - - - -	
		example; de ministers werden na de conferentie door persfotografen belegerd.		

ITEMS	OALD					LDOCE					COLLINS					VAN DALE I	VAN DALE III
	D	E	S	O	INTERPR.	D	E	S	O	INTERPR.	D	E	S	O	INTERPR.		
2 political 1) 1 animal 2)	+ –	+ –	– –	– –	dier 1) - - - - 2)	– +	– +	– –	– –	- - - - 1) in politiek 2) geinteresseerd politiek geengageerd	– +	– +	– –	– –	- - - - 1) politiek 2)	dier11) beest in politiek 2) geinteresseerd politiek geengageerd politiek	dier - - - - in politiek geinteresseerd politiek geengageerd politiek
besieged	–	–	–	–	- - - -	+	+	–	–	belaagd (en daardoor in problemen gebracht)	–	–	–	–	- - - -	- - - - belegerd	—— - - - -
harassed	+	+	–	–	gekweld verontrust	+	+	+	–	verontrust aangevallen	+	–	–	–	gekweld geplaagd	gekweld aangevallen voortdurend bestookt	- - - - - - - - aangevallen - - - - - - - -

ITEMS	OALD					LDOCE					COLLINS					VAN DALE I	VAN DALE III
	D	E	S	O	INTERPR.	D	E	S	O	INTERPR.	D	E	S	O	INTERPR.		
interface	+	+	+	−	raakvlak	−	−	−	−	- - - -	+	−	−	−	raakvlak raakpunt	raakvlak grensvlak	raakvlak - - - - raakpunt
3 2 safe-seat 1)	−	−	−	−	- - - - 1)	−	−	−	−	- - - - 1)	−	−	−	−	- - - - 1)	1)	
1 nomination	+	+	−	−	voordracht	+	+	−	−	voordracht	+	−	−	−	voordracht kandidaat-stelling	voordracht nominatie kandidaatstelling	voordracht nominatie - - - -
2)	+	+	−	+	zetel 2) plaats	+	+	−	+	zetel in parlement 2)	−	−	−	−	- - - - 2)	zetel 2) (zit) plaats	zetel - - - -
3)	+	+	−	−	zekere 3)	+	−	−	−	zekere 3) gegaran- deerde	+	+	−	−	zekere 3) veilige	zekere 30 veilige	zekere - - - - - - - -