

Towards a More Grammatical Bilingual Dictionary

Abstract

Bilingual dictionaries could be more effective in helping learners if they contained more grammar: more grammar on the source language side could facilitate the learner's disambiguation task, more grammar on the target language side could prevent many ungrammatical or unidiomatic translations. Unlike traditional bilingual dictionaries the *Contrastive Verb Valency Dictionary* currently being developed by the CONTRAGRAM research team will aspire to exhaustivity on the grammatical level, and should become a tool that could both complement existing dictionaries and inform compilers of future dictionaries so that they become less selective. The paper illustrates the difference between the treatment of verbs in bilingual dictionaries and the CVVD by comparing the entry for the verb LOOK in four leading English-French dictionaries with its treatment in the CVVD.

1. Introduction¹

In the book accompanying the publication of the first edition (1987) of the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary*, John Sinclair (1987:106) explained the need for (monolingual) pedagogical or learner's dictionaries like it with the castigation that “[b]ilingual dictionaries can be made to look ridiculous if they are used to generate translations”. More than ten years earlier Iannucci (1976) had suggested that an *Advanced Learner's Dictionary* type of bilingual dictionary, with information on the syntactic patterning of the target language equivalents, would be a very welcome reference aid to all foreign language learners, a plea that was reiterated over a decade ago by Tomaszczyk (1983). But though Sinclair (1987:106) prophesied that “[i]t seems inevitable that nearly all dictionaries will gradually turn in the direction in which the pedagogical dictionaries are now pointing”, the grammatical coverage of recently published bilingual dictionaries (like, for instance, the French-English/English-French dictionaries Collins Robert (1993), Larousse (1993) and Oxford-Hachette (1994)) can at best be called patchy and is still a far cry from what monolingual learner's dictionaries are offering. As established by Noël, Defrancq and Devos (1995, 1996), it certainly does not come anywhere near the “productive L1/L2 dictionary” called for by Tomaszczyk (1983:47), with “exhaustive information about the syntactic properties of the equivalents offered so

that the student [knows] what to do with the words once they [have] been made available to him"².

It appears, therefore, that there still is a niche in the dictionary market for what we could term the "bilingual learner's dictionary". To contribute towards filling it, the Contrastive Grammar Research Group of the University of Gent (CONTRAGRAM) is currently developing a lexicographical tool that could both complement existing bilingual dictionaries and inform those who might one day feel called upon to start compiling a true bilingual learner's dictionary³. Because the patterning of verbs is without question the most encompassing problem area for language learners, it focuses on verbal complementation, and we have called it the *Contrastive Verb Valency Dictionary* (henceforth *CVVD*). The languages contrasted in it are Dutch, French, and English. The aim of this paper is to compare what traditional bilingual dictionaries like the ones mentioned above offer the user in the way of information on the syntactic patterning of verbs with what the *CVVD* will supply. To do this the entry for the verb LOOK in the English-French sections of these dictionaries will be put next to the entry for KIJKEN-REGARDER-LOOK in the *CVVD*⁴.

2. Looking for grammar in bilingual dictionaries

There are two places one could look for grammar in a bilingual dictionary: on the source language side of entries, and on the target language side. Explicit reference to grammatical patterns on the SL side could facilitate the user's disambiguation task, because if not all patterns go with all meanings, then the pattern a word enters into is a clue to its meaning (cf. Sinclair 1987:109–110; Noël *et al.* 1995, 1996)⁵. Explicit reference to patterns on the target language side could help to avoid many a translation error. Let's take each of these in turn.

LOOK is a frequently used verb. In a list of the most frequently used English verbs based on the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (LOB) corpus of written British English (compiled with the help of Hofland and Johansson (1982) and Johansson and Hofland (1989)) LOOK occupies the 20th place. As a result its syntactic and collocational potential, and the related meaning potential, is enormous (for an illustration of the relation between frequency of use and polysemy, see Devos, Defrancq and Noël (1996)), which is reflected in the sheer size of the entries for LOOK in the dictionaries. Grammar could bring some organization in the mass of information that needs to be presented. To what extent do the three very recent dictionaries already mentioned, as well as the

somewhat older but still considered to be authoritative Harrap's (1980), make use of it to organize their entries? All four dictionaries distinguish between phrasal and non-phrasal uses of LOOK, listing the phrasal uses (like *look about*, *look after*, *look around*, *look at*, *look away*, ...) separately after a set of intransitive ("vi" or "v.i.") and a set of transitive ("vt" or "vtr" or "v.tr.") non-phrasal uses, but apart from that there is no explicit reference to complementation patterns, the only exception being Collins Robert, which specifies the fourth intransitive use (but only this one!) as "+ adj or noun complement". Virtually all grammatical information must therefore be gleaned from the examples that are provided (all the more because the dictionaries do not agree on the difference between transitive and intransitive: *to look one's age* and *to look an idiot* are examples in the transitive set in Oxford-Hachette, but similar examples are listed as intransitive in the other three dictionaries).

The dictionary user's retrieval task would moreover be made easier if a word's different uses would be listed according to frequency of use⁶. To assess whether our dictionaries take this into account, let's see how easy or difficult it would be for the dictionary user to retrieve information on a pattern a frequency study based on the LOB corpus has shown to be the second most common one, viz. LOOK + AdjP (almost a fifth of all tokens). (The most frequent pattern is LOOK + *at* + NP, with almost a quarter of all tokens, but as already mentioned all our dictionaries list phrasal uses separately, and in three out of four cases in a typographically prominent way, so that the fact that they are listed **after** the less frequent patterns might have a less detrimental effect.) The pattern with the adjectival complement is fairly hard to retrieve, because in addition to the problem of the absence of explicit reference to complementation patterns (as said, only Collins Robert makes explicit reference to this pattern, but only to this one!), this very common use of LOOK is never listed early on in the intransitive set. In Larousse it is only the fourth of the intransitive uses listed; in Oxford-Hachette, which first lists transitive uses, it is only the third of the intransitive uses; and in Harrap's, which includes two sets of intransitive uses, separated by a transitive set, the adjectival pattern only constitutes the second set.

On the target language side of entries there is even less grammar to be found. Here the user is not even told whether the translational equivalents offered are transitive or intransitive. For instance, three of our four dictionaries simply offer *regarder* as a translation of LOOK *at* without warning the user that unlike the English verb the French one is not complemented by a prepositional phrase but normally takes a noun phrase complement (the exception is Harrap's, which offers *regarder* (*qn.*, *qch.*)). The examples which are supplied can hardly be treated as a

substitute for explicit grammatical information because they are invariably illustrations of special, idiomatic uses of LOOK *at* that, if they can be rendered using REGARDER at all, also require it to have a special complement. The first example in Oxford-Hachette, for instance, is *look at the state of you!*, which receives a translation in which REGARDER is completed with a WH-construction: *regarde un peu de quoi tu as l'air!*

3. Grammar in the CVVD

In contrast to traditional bilingual dictionaries, the CONTRAGRAM *Contrastive Verb Valency Dictionary* will be a) grammatically explicit and b) non-reductionist, i.e. it will aim at grammatical exhaustivity on all sides, resulting in the disappearance of the distinction between source and target language. To be able to be exhaustive about possible types of complementation, however, it is necessary to replace the traditional dictionary's one-to-many approach (usually more than one translational equivalent is offered in the target language) with a one-to-one approach, so that one single verb in one language is comprehensively contrasted with one single verb in the two other languages of the trilingual CVVD. The choice of these – what we have termed – ‘proto-equivalents’ then, naturally, becomes extremely important and an empirical procedure was devised to ensure that the proper equivalents will be selected (for an outline of this procedure see Defrancq 1995). In the case of our example, this means that the CVVD will list and exemplify all meanings of all patterns English LOOK, French REGARDER and Dutch KIJKEN can enter into, aligning them to make clear which sense-form combinations must be put on a par with which, so that all grammatical (and broad semantic) similarities and differences are displayed. If the proto-equivalent cannot be used, an alternative verb will be offered, which will be a cross-reference to another entry in the dictionary where its full grammatical potential will in turn be contrasted with that of its own proto-equivalents. In an appendix (Table 1) we have included the entry for KIJKEN-REGARDER-LOOK as it stands now in the current stage of the development of the CVVD.

The advantages of this grammatically explicit, non-reductionist, one-to-one approach are manifold. First of all, the grammatical explicitness can help the learner to disambiguate meanings: the CVVD will tell the user that a LOOK + AdjP⁷ pattern must mean something like “to seem to be” and cannot mean something like “to turn your eyes towards something in order to see it”. Second, the explicit grammatical informa-

tion will warn the learner when verbs that are prototypically equivalent meaningwise behave syntactically different: the *CVVD* will inform the user that the English V + PP pattern LOOK *at* NP corresponds to the French V + NP pattern REGARDER NP. Third, because the *CVVD* is non-selective and all meanings of all patterns each equivalent can enter into are juxtaposed, each dictionary entry will create a picture of the conceptual range of each of the equivalents, revealing to what extent they cover the same conceptual area: the *CVVD* entry for KIJKEN-REGARDER-LOOK will visualize that the conceptual range of the English verb (seven meanings) is wider than that of the Dutch and French verbs (five meanings each). This will not only help the language learner to establish precisely to what extent supposed equivalents are 'true' or 'false friends' (Noël (1995) has shown that bilingual dictionaries can create false impressions about the 'friendship' of prototypical equivalents), it will also be of interest to the cognitive linguist, who, because of the *CVVD*'s grammatical explicitness, could use the dictionary to make generalizations about the relationship between semantic extension and syntactic potential (Devos, Defrancq and Noël (1996) is an illustration of this).

A drawback of the non-selective one-to-one approach, however, is that it will be impossible to fit all the information it generates between the covers of a normal-size one-volume book, though in the age of CD-ROM technology considerations of space are likely to become much less important – a point also made by Herbst (1985:331), and by Fillmore and Atkins (1994) with relation to their proposal for a semantically richer type of explanatory dictionary.

Notes

1. The reported research was sponsored by the Research Fund of the University of Gent (*Bijzonder Universitair Onderzoeksfonds* contract no. 12052095).
2. For a similar conclusion about English-German/German-English dictionaries, see Herbst (1985), and for English-Dutch/Dutch-English dictionaries Noël, Devos and Defrancq (1996).
3. See also Zöfgen (1985:158), who concludes "daß es prinzipiell wünschenswert, ja dringend notwendig erscheint, wenn möglichst viele der im Konstruktionswörterbuch gemachten Aussagen in die Gesamtwörterbücher eingehen. Vorrangig in solche, die sich nicht an irgendwelche hypothetischen Benutzermassen wenden, sondern die unter starker Berücksichtigung des fremdsprachigen Benutzers konzipiert sind und die dann die Mikrostrukturen nach syntaktischen Prinzipien organisieren."
4. For an outline of the methodology employed in the compilation of the *CVVD*, see Devos (1996).

5. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, though, and it is a matter for experimental user research to determine to what extent users are helped by explicit pattern information. See also Janssens (1991) and the references therein.
6. This would be in line with Kilgarriff's (1994) "concept of importance".
7. Represented by "NP_C" under II.1 in the lemma, where C stands for 'subject complement', a grammatical relation that can have more than one form in all three languages.

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Table 1. *The CVVD lemma for KJKEN - REGARDER - LOOK*

kijken - regarder - look	Dutch (NL)	French (FR)	English (EN)	
<p>I.</p> <p>'de ogen richten op, de gedachten richten op, zien, aankijken, bekijken, onderzoeken'</p> <p>'viser, penser, contrôler, voir examiner, vérifier'</p> <p>'to turn the eyes towards something in order to see; to think, see, examine, watch'</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>NP__naar NP</p> <p>2.</p> <p>NP__ (LOC) <LOC → NP in NP ['lichaamsdeel']></p> <p>3.</p> <p>NP__ Pfin[wh]</p> <p>4.</p> <p>NP__ Pfin[of]</p> <p>5.</p> <p>NP__ 'Imp' NP Pinf / ⇒ 3.</p> <p>6.</p> <p>NP kunnen__</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>NP__ NP</p> <p>2.</p> <p>NP__ (LOC) <LOC → NP dans NP['partie du corps']></p> <p>3.</p> <p>NP__ Pfin[wh]</p> <p>4.</p> <p>NP__ Pfin[si]</p> <p>5.</p> <p>NP__ NP Pinf</p> <p>⇒ voir</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>NP__ at NP</p> <p>2.</p> <p>NP__ (LOC) <LOC → NP in NP['body part']></p> <p>3.</p> <p>NP__ Pfin[wh]</p> <p>⇒ see</p> <p>⇒ 3.</p> <p>⇒ see</p>	<p>NL</p> <p>1.1. <i>Wordt er gekeken naar marktaandeelen, dan blijft televisie het grootste medium met een aandeel van 30,6%. • Hij draagt een wit pak en kijkt lachend naar de fotograaf.</i></p> <p>1.2. <i>Kijk, dan is er iets fundamenteel mis. • Even nog blijft Menno kijken. • We kijken achter de schermen van het actie voeren. • Ein als je goed tussen de bomen kijkt, vang je inderdaad een glimp op van het landhuis. • Ik keek hem in de ogen</i></p> <p>1.3. <i>Maar vandaag werd een ramp in scène gezet om te kijken hoe het de hulpverleners vergaat als er echt iets zou gebeuren. • Ik ben bijna in staat naar zijn huis te fietsen, en voor de deur te gaan staan, om te kijken hoe ze eruitziet.</i></p> <p>1.4. <i>Ofwel ontwikkelt men vanalles rond ruimtevaart en kijkt of men daarmee op de maan geraakt.</i></p> <p>1.5. <i>Kijk hem knoeien!</i></p> <p>1.6. <i>De jonge katjes kunnen nog niet kijken.</i></p> <p>FR</p> <p>1.1. <i>Pourtant, il faudrait s'habituer à regarder la littérature dans son ensemble. • [.] elle a regardé les personnes âgées dans les rues[...]. • (⊗ forme pronominal peut être "y": La France ne fait aucune objection de principe à ce projet américain, mais elle considère qu'il faut y regarder de plus près.)</i></p> <p>1.2. <i>Regardez, si les Européens avaient été moins mous à l'égard des nazis, ils auraient pu éviter la guerre. • [...] le polar a le mérite d'être fédérateur: toute la famille regarde. • Dans une enquête à consommer de préférence après le repas, Emmanuel Cham [...] regardait, en un mot dernière l'assiette. • Elle devrait aussi regarder ailleurs [.]. • Une caméra est très intime et vous regarde droit dans les yeux.</i></p> <p>1.3. <i>Il suffit de regarder qui a constitué depuis 1972 les commissions successives et comment elles ont travaillé. • Le film permet de regarder, comme avec une loupe, comment sont associés les infirmières, les</i></p>

				<p><i>malades, les familles dans le choix [...].</i></p> <p>1.4 <i>Personne ne regarde si les infractions déjà existantes sont sanctionnées.</i></p> <p>1.5 <i>Il ne lui restait plus qu'à regarder des Japonais, des Russes l'expulser du podium, le repousser à la huitième place</i></p> <p>EN</p> <p>I.1. <i>If you want evidence of that look at the wrangle now going on in Brussels over the common market tariffs. • "As all retailers know," Mrs Beddis goes on, "customers don't come to look at a pretty shop."</i></p> <p>I.2. <i>Look, Lisabelle, you're to go back with me next week, I'll guarantee you'll have a good time. • "Look!" • We look behind the scenes of modern broadcasting. • On such days I looked upon that man with more than ordinary political hostility. • He looked her in the eyes.</i></p> <p>I.3. <i>Look how he wanted a kitten for his birthday, and you gave him football boots. • Look what I've got.</i></p>
<p>II.</p> <p>'eruitzien, lijken'</p> <p>'sembler, avoir l'air'</p> <p>'to have a certain appearance'</p>	<p>I.</p> <p>NP__C[AdjP] uit NP ['de ogen']</p>	⇒ sembler/avoir	<p>1.</p> <p>NP__ (like) C (to NP[h]) <NP__ → it __ + to Pinf)</p>	<p>NL</p> <p>II.1 <i>Sommige vergadelaars keken niet al te fit meer uit hun ogen.</i></p> <p>FR</p> <p>EN</p> <p>II.1 <i>He looked formal and stiff to her. • He looked (like) a fool to her. • This fight looks like being the survival of the fittest. • It might look premature to say he's disappeared. • One of them looked as though he was asleep.</i></p>
<p>III.</p> <p>'zoeken naar, uitkijken naar'</p> <p>'chercher'</p> <p>'to search for'</p>	<p>⇒ zoeken/uitkijken</p> <p>⇒ zoeken/uitkijken</p>	<p>⇒ chercher</p> <p>⇒ chercher</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>NP__</p> <p>2.</p> <p>NP__for NP</p>	<p>NL</p> <p>FR</p> <p>EN</p> <p>III.1. <i>I've looked, sir</i></p> <p>III.2. <i>A British firm of business consultants has been engaged to look for suitable candidates.</i></p>

<p>IV '(niet) letten op' '(ne pas) faire attention à' 'to (not) mind, to (not) pay attention to'</p>	<p>1. NP__<i>op</i> NP 2. NP__MAN[AdvP]</p>	<p>1. NP__<i>à</i> NP ⇒ faire</p>	<p>1. NP__<i>at</i> NP ⇒ mind/pay</p>	<p>NL IV.1. <i>Mijn respect voor hem is groot want hij deed inzake buitenlandse handel alles wat hij kon en keek daarbij op uur noch tijd.</i> IV 2. <i>De oliebaronnen kijken niet zo nauw.</i> FR IV.1 <i>Il remuait les millions et regardait aux centimes.</i> • <i>Quand elle achète, elle n'y regarde pas</i> EN IV 1. <i>He didn't look at the expense</i></p>
<p>V. 'uitkijken op, uitzien op' 'être orienté, voir sur, donner sur' 'to be oriented towards, to overlook, to look out on'</p>	<p>⇒ <i>uitkijken/uitzien</i></p>	<p>1. NP[nh] __ LOC</p>	<p>1. NP[nh] __ LOC</p>	<p>NL FR V.1. <i>Pays qui regarde vers la mer.</i> • <i>Autrefois, l'Auberge des temples, dont il ne reste que l'enceinte, regardait Angkor-Vat.</i> EN V 1. <i>The principal living-rooms, library and drawing-room, looked the other way, west towards the lake, through undistinguished but serviceable bays.</i></p>
<p>VI. 'aanbelangen' 'concerner' 'to concern'</p>	<p>⇒ <i>aanbelangen</i></p>	<p>1. NP[nh] __ NP</p>	<p>⇒ <i>concern</i></p>	<p>NL FR VI.1. <i>C'est une affaire qui ne me regarde en rien</i> • <i>Un mensonge qui regarde l'avenir.</i> EN</p>
<p>VII. 'van mening zijn, zien, bekijken, beschouwen' 'considérer, juger, penser'</p>	<p>⇒ <i>beschouwen/zien/bekijken</i></p>	<p>1. NP__ NP <i>comme</i> C (NP → <i>de</i> Pinf)</p>	<p>1. NP__ <i>upon</i> NP <i>as</i> C</p>	<p>NL FR VII.1. [...] <i>le premier bâtiment culturel contemporain que l'on regarde aussi comme un monument</i> • <i>Le droit de la concurrence est regardé comme salutaire.</i> • <i>Ils regardent comme un crime de tuer un seul des enfants qui naissent.</i></p>

'to have the opinion, to consider'				EN VII.1 <i>He seemed to look upon her as a mere dictating machine.</i> • <i>What is it that makes people look upon local government as dull, unexciting and unrewarding?</i>
VIII. 'aan bod komen, gepaard gaan met' 'entrer en jeu' 'to come into play'	1. NP[nh] komen ___ bij NP	⇒ entrer	⇒ come	NL VIII.1. <i>Kortom, in vergelijking met tien jaren geleden wordt de job hoe langer hoe interessanter en komen er steeds meer verantwoordelijkheden bij kijken.</i> FR EN
IX. 'zich richten tot' 's'adresser à' 'to turn to someone'	⇒ richten ⇒ richten	⇒ adresser ⇒ adresser	1. NP ___ to NP[h] for NP/on NP 2. NP ___ to NP[h] to Pinf	NL FR EN IX.1. <i>Indeed it is a most interesting sign that so many non-Christians look to Christians for a lead.</i> • <i>Constituency labour parties in Middlesex now have to look to Hemel Hempstead on party organisation questions and to the London labour party on other matters.</i> IX.2. <i>Here we should look to a judge or a retired and senior Treasury official, or to parliament, to provide such services if they are required.</i>
X 'verwonderd zijn' 'être bouche bée' 'to be surprised'	1. NP staan ___ van NP	⇒ être	⇒ be	NL X.1. <i>Daar stond ze van te kijken.</i> FR EN

Abbreviations used in Table 1

C	subject or object complement	NP ___	subject + lemma verb	()	optional but frequently occurring constituent
h/nh	human/non-human	Pfin	finite subclause	[]	semantic or grammatical restrictions
LOC	place complement	Pfin[wh]	finite subclause introduced by a question word	< >	rewrite rule
MAN	manner complement	Pinf	infinitival subclause	→	"can be replaced by"
		Imp	imperative	⇒	reference to other (part of) lemma