

Lexical enrichment of bilingual dictionaries with a focus on conversion as a word-formation process

Enn Veldi

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the treatment of noun-to-verb conversion in English-Estonian and Estonian dictionaries. Because conversion is highly productive in English, it may pose some difficulty for compilers of bilingual dictionaries. It is argued that there is considerable room for lexical enrichment of bilingual dictionaries with regard to both inclusion of conversion verbs and the choice of translation equivalents. From the perspective of Estonian one has to take into account the possibility that an English converse verb could be rendered by means of conversion, suffixation, or a multi-word equivalent. The established equivalents can be used for the enhancement of symmetry between English – language X and language X – English dictionaries.

1. Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to explore the treatment of lexemes resulting from conversion in English-Estonian and Estonian-English dictionaries. One assumes that such lexemes might pose some difficulty for bilingual lexicographers. Analysis of their treatment with regard to the range of translation equivalents could lead to lexical enrichment of bilingual dictionaries and enhanced symmetry between English-Estonian and Estonian-English dictionaries. For reasons of space the discussion will be limited to noun-to-verb conversion. Verbs formed by noun-to-verb conversion can be divided into a number of semantic groups, such as ornative, locative, instrumental, privative, performative, and other verbs (see e.g. Adams 2001: 22–25; Plag 2003: 112; Lieber 2005: 422). This classification is helpful when searching for translation equivalents.

2. Conversion in English

Conversion is productive in English, especially between nouns, verbs, and adjectives (but is not limited to them). Conversion in Modern English is characterized by extensive homonymy (Bauer and Huddleston 2002: 1641); in fact, that is why part-of-speech labels are always needed in English-language dictionaries. Algeo claims that “not all languages have this freedom to change a word’s part of speech without using affixes or otherwise modifying its form” (Algeo 1991: 13). For example, when comparing English and French, van Roey notes that conversion in English “contributes to the constant enrichment of the vocabulary in areas where French may have a lexical gap” (van Roey 1990: 86). Could this observation be relevant also for Estonian, which is a Finno-Ugric language, and, more importantly, could it pose problems for compilers of bilingual dictionaries?

3. Conversion in Estonian

First, one should point out that conversion occurs in Estonian, too; its morphological nature, however, is different from conversion in English. Kastovsky makes a useful distinction between ‘word-based’ versus ‘stem-based’ morphology (see e.g. Kastovsky 2009: 158 ff.). According to this view, conversion in Modern English is mostly word-based, and conversion in Estonian is mostly stem-based. For example, in the case of *rohi* ‘grass’ n > *rohima* v ‘to weed’ -*ma* acts as the infinitive marker; this marker is regarded as part of the inflectional system, and the verb does not contain any derivational suffix. In this respect Estonian resembles Old English, which was a highly inflected language and classified as stem-based (see e.g. the examples. *cum-an* ‘to come’: *cum-a* ‘one who comes, a guest’ and *beorht* ‘bright’: *beorht-ian* ‘to make bright’ in Kastovsky 2009: 153). One can find also some examples in Estonian where a compound noun is converted into a verb, for example, *salakiütt* n ‘poacher, lit. secret hunter’ > *salaküttima* v ‘to poach’. In Estonian homonymy (word-based conversion) can be found in adjectives and nouns, for example, *noor* adj ‘young’ and *noor* n ‘young person’ or *kohalik* adj ‘local’ and *kohalik* n ‘local’. Conversion has been discussed in several Estonian grammars (e.g. EKG 1995: 419–420); however, the most comprehensive treatment can be found in Vare (2004). According to Silvi Vare, Estonian monolingual dictionaries provide evidence of about 1,000 conversion verbs in Estonian; recent decades, however, are characterized by an increase in both native and borrowed conversion verbs (Vare 2004: 41, 55). Reet Kasik has claimed that noun-to-verb conversion is more transparent and productive in Estonian (Kasik 2009: 10), cf. *saag* n ‘a saw’ > *saagima* v ‘to saw’, *kamm* n > *kammima* v ‘to comb’.

4. Treatment of conversion English-Estonian and Estonian-English dictionaries

Lexicographic evidence of the following dictionaries will be analysed. *SILVET 4* represents the best-known English-Estonian dictionary. Its first edition was published in 1939, which makes it a good source for studying the evolution of a dictionary in the course time; the main drawback, however, is that its three subsequent editions were not revised radically enough, whereby it is old-fashioned and contains outdated material. It is available in electronic format in combination with *EEDI*, which makes it convenient for analysis. *EEDI* and *Aule* represent recent Estonian-English dictionaries. *Saagpakk* (1992) remains the most comprehensive Estonian-English dictionary; unfortunately, it is outdated with regard to recent vocabulary. Each of the following examples represents a typical problem, which needs attention.

Example (1) represents asymmetry in bilingual dictionaries – an English conversion verb is listed in an English-Estonian dictionary but is absent from an Estonian-English dictionary.

- (1) *SILVET4*
microwave 1 *s raad* mikrolaine; mikrolaineahi (= **microwave oven**); 2 *v t*
mikrolaineahjus soojendama, süüa tegema

EEDI

mikro·laine·ahi microwave (oven)]

The verb *microwave* has a well-established equivalent *mikrolaineahjus soojendama* in Estonian. Such multi-word equivalents, however, are not listed in Estonian-English dictionaries, but they deserve inclusion. In the case of inclusion the English verb *microwave* would be listed in an Estonian-English dictionary. Also, one could consider inclusion of the fore-clipping *laineahi* < *mikrolaineahi*, which sounds fresh and is suggested by *ÕS 2006*.

Example (2) represents the situation where an English-Estonian dictionary lists the noun *headline* but does not list the conversion verb.

(2) *SILVET4*

headline s pealkiri; veerutiitel; *trük ka* päistiitel

LDOCE5 provides two meanings for the verb:

(3) **headline²** verb

1 [intransitive and transitive] to appear as the main performer or band in a show :
Eminem is headlining at the festival this year.

2 [transitive usually passive] to give a headline to an article or story

Here one might wonder whether suitable Estonian equivalents can be found. After some work with web resources and monolingual dictionaries I came up with the following suggestions:

(4) **1** (*nt festivali*) peaesineja olema

2 pealkirjastama, pealkirjaks panema, pealkirjaga varustama

EKSS does not list *peaesineja*, which shows that primary data is needed in addition to monolingual lexicographic resources. It is true that Estonian lexicographic resources are may be inadequate and do not sometimes represent actual language use. Another problem is that *ÕS 2006*, which was prepared by language planners, includes words that have not been used in Estonian-language texts; in fact, such words should be regarded as usage recommendations.

Example (5) shows that the analysed dictionaries provide a multi-word (analytic) equivalent for the English verb *to veto*.

(5) *SILVET4*

veto 1 s (*pl -oes*) veto, keeluõigus; keeld; **2** v t (*-oes, -oed*) (millelegi) vetot peale panema, (autoriteetselt) ära keelama • **to put a (or one's) ~ upon** ära keelama, vetot peale panema

EEDI

veto veto <*pl -oes*> • **vetot peale panema** veto

Saagpakk

veto 327 (*keeluõigus; keeld*) *s. lad. veto (pl -oes); (millelegi) ~t pale panama to veto*

However, in this case Estonian has to offer a suffixed (synthetic) equivalent *vetostama* (= *vetot panema*), which is listed by *EKSS* and *ÕS 2006*. The example shows that a lexicographer should consider the inclusion of both synthetic and analytic equivalents. Examples (6) and (7) show that borrowings from English and international words may be a potential trap for lexicographers. In the case of *krool n* ‘the crawl (of swimming)’ > *kroolima v* Estonian has developed a conversion verb while English prefers ‘do the crawl’. However, compilers of several Estonian bilingual dictionaries have assumed by analogy a similar verb for English.

(6) *EED* **kroolima** *sport* crawl

Aule **kroolima** *sp* crawl, swim* with a crawl stroke

Saagpakk **kroolima** [-in] 492 *v.i. (krooli ujuma) to crawl, to swim the crawl*
]

Example (7), which represents *prognoos n* ‘forecast, prediction, prognosis’ > *prognoosima v* ‘to forecast, to predict’, shows that the lexicographers have focused their search on etymologically related equivalents and have failed to come up with ‘to forecast’ and ‘to predict’.

(7) *EED* **prognoosima** prognosticate, give* a prognosis

Saagpakk **prognoosima** [-in] 492 (*ennustama*) *v. t. to prognosticate*

Example (8) represents a situation where two currently competing word-formation processes are involved in Estonian – conversion and suffixation. In recent decades Estonian language planners have promoted the use of converse verbs instead of verbs with the suffix *-eeri-*. In example (8) one can find the suffixed verb *sertifitseerima* but not the converse verb *sertima* (derived from the back-clipping *sert* < *sertifikaat*). In fact, both should be listed.

(8) *SILVET4*

certify *v t & i (-ies, -ied; -iable, -ier)* tunnistama, tõendama; tagama; tunnistusega tõendama (midagi to); sertifikaati välja andma, sertifitseerima; (arstlikult) hullumeelseks tunnistama • **this is to certify that** ... käesolevaga tõendan, et ...

5. Discussion

The previous examples show that the treatment of noun-to-verb conversion in bilingual dictionaries calls for a comprehensive analysis. On the one hand, because conversion is a

productive process of word-formation, a bilingual dictionary is expected to list a fairly large number of such verbs. Thus, the principles of inclusion are important. In addition to English-Estonian dictionaries, it is also important to provide English converse verbs in Estonian-English dictionaries. At present this is not so; for example, the electronically searchable *EEDI* does not list the verbs *blacklist*, *keyboard*, *network* or *weekend*. Moreover, since new conversion verbs are emerging, a lexicographer has to keep his/her finger on the pulse of language change. On the other hand, a bilingual lexicographer has to come up with good translation equivalents, which are reversible. Sometimes words that seem simple at first sight are not that easy at all for lexicographic treatment in bilingual dictionaries, for example, in the case of *shop* n > *shop* v the treatment of the verb is not that easy at all for English-Estonian dictionaries. From the perspective of Estonian, one has to analyse whether a converted verb can be translated by means of conversion, suffixation, or a well-established multi-word combination. It is also important to take into account that in many cases one can find both synthetic and analytic equivalents, and one has to decide which of them should be included. In the case of Estonian, one has to consider the possibility that language planners may have suggested a conversion verb that competes with its suffixed counterpart. Finally, one has to stress the need to analyse both primary data and secondary data (the existing lexicographic resources).

6. Conclusion

There is considerable room for lexical enrichment of English-Estonian and Estonian-English dictionaries with regard to noun-to-verb conversion. On the one hand, lexicographers have to pay more attention to the problem of inclusion of English conversion verbs both in English-Estonian and Estonian-English dictionaries. On the other hand, the task of finding good translation equivalents is equally important. From the perspective of Estonian, one has to take into account the possibility that an English converse verb could be rendered by means of conversion, suffixation, or a multi-word equivalent. The established equivalents can be used for the enhancement of symmetry between English – language X and language X – English dictionaries.

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