

# Filling the gap: The Pharos semi-bilingual *English Dictionary for South Africa*

Wanda Smith-Muller & Ilan Kernerman

Keywords: *Afrikaans, bilingual, English, monolingual, semi-bilingual.*

## Abstract

For more than a decade Pharos Dictionaries specialised in the publication of bilingual Afrikaans-English dictionaries, and Afrikaans monolingual dictionaries. The need for an English learner's dictionary that distinguished itself from the existing ones on the South African market became a growing urgency. With its small editorial capacity Pharos had to work and plan strategically to maintain its competitiveness in a fierce local market. For this reason, it entered into an agreement with K Dictionaries whereby it could utilise the data from the Kernerman Semi-Bilingual Dictionaries series to compile a dictionary that was uniquely suited to the South African market. The end product did not only fill the gap on Pharos's backlist. It also distinguished itself from the existing monolingual English learners' dictionaries on the market through its semi-bilingual character, as well as its uniquely South African flavour on both micro- and macrostructural level.

## 1. Pharos Dictionaries: a gap on the backlist

Pharos Dictionaries was established in 1997 as an imprint of NB Publishers, which in turn is part of Africa's leading publishing group, Naspers. With its inception, the publishing rights of a number of dictionaries from mainly two company-internal publishing houses, namely Van Schaik and Nasau Via Afrika, were transferred to Pharos. These titles included bilingual dictionaries with mainly Afrikaans and English as the treated languages, but also bilinguals with an African language, such as Xhosa, Zulu and SiSwati, and European languages, namely Dutch and German, as one of the treated languages. There were also Afrikaans monolingual dictionaries and specialised dictionaries mainly in Afrikaans among the transferred titles, as well as a few language-related reference works. More than half of the transferred titles were suitable for use in schools. That was basically how Pharos started its backlist.

During the past 15 years, Pharos established itself in the South African market with its quality-driven products and confirmed its status in 2005 with the publication of South Africa's most comprehensive Afrikaans/English bilingual dictionary (*Pharos Afrikaans-English/English-Afrikaans Dictionary*), and again in 2008 with the publication of South Africa's first cell phone dictionary application (the *Pharos Little Dictionary*).

However, a gap remained on the backlist: that of an English monolingual learner's dictionary. A product to fill this gap lingered on Pharos's to-do list, mainly because the market already offered such an outstanding array of English monolingual dictionaries published by international and South African publishers that were suitable for the South African market. Pharos was constantly confronted by the realisation that, in order to be successful, the dictionary had to set itself apart from these existing titles, and the question was how? It was during this time that the authors met in Cape Town and discussed cooperating on a semi-bilingual dictionary promoted by K Dictionaries (KD).

---

## 2. The semi-bilingual dictionary

The semi-bilingual dictionary (SBD) for foreign language learners was launched by Ari (Lionel) Kernerman for Israeli learners of English a quarter century ago. An edition for speakers of Hebrew appeared in 1986 (OSDHS), and one for Arabic speakers followed in 1987 (HEDSA). Many other language versions were published by various publishers worldwide since then, including a wide range of digital applications.

The main concept of the SBD is combining a pedagogical dictionary core of the target language along with brief translations in the learner's native language. Each sense of the entry comprises a definition and example(s) of usage in the L2, as in a monolingual learner's dictionary (MLD), which are complemented by an L1 equivalent of the meaning. The aim is to encourage the learner to first read the L2 information before reaching the translation, to enhance full immersion in the target language as advocated by the Direct Method. The translation offers psychological reassurance to the learner, as it helps to confirm understanding of the L2 meaning, clarify partial or no understanding, or rectify cases of misunderstanding (cf. Reif 1987).

Since in its early days the SBD tended to rely on existing English MLDs, it has often been referred to as a *bilingualised* dictionary (Nakamoto 1994). Its concept had an active role in undermining the taboo imposed by the MLD on applying the learner's mother tongue as an integral part of the foreign language learning process. Over the years new SBDs and other types of bilingual learners' dictionaries were developed taking into consideration the to-be-added translation, thus creating a more balanced equilibrium between the learner's language and the target language (cf. Adamska-Sałaciak 2005, Back 2005, Worsch 2005).

The SBD attempted to be a *learner-friendly* dictionary. For example, it was the first to uncrowd entries in print dictionaries by starting each sense on a new paragraph; it focused on smaller-size vocabulary arguing that the majority of learners are intermediate-level rather than advanced ones and do not require (or refer to) so much information; or, it added an L1-L2 index to enable learners to use the dictionary for production purposes. In addition, it enabled the editors of local language versions to modify the English entry as may be appropriate to better suit it to the subtleties of the learner's mother tongue (Coleman 1998). For markets with higher awareness of gender discrimination it revised the examples in equal parts between female and male references. For others it introduced new entries for words on the local ministry of education's curriculum or to better cater for specific cultural emphasis of those users.

The publication of the Afrikaans version marks a new dimension in this evolution, by adapting the entries to the particularities of the English language in South Africa.

## 3. Changes implemented to the existing dictionary

Besides filling the gap on Pharos's backlist, the focus of this project remained the compilation of an English learner's dictionary that displayed a truly South African character and thus creating a product that distinguished itself from the available English dictionaries on the local market. In order to realise this objective, changes were made to KD's existing learner's dictionary core on both micro- and macrostructural level.

---

### 3.1 Macrostructural changes

Changes to the macrostructure of the existing dictionary had to be treated with caution and managed carefully. Whole existing entries could not be deleted randomly: the main reason being that the XML-formatted data included sound files and links that were part of the electronic version (CD-ROM) of the dictionary that was developed simultaneously. However, Pharos added almost 300 South African English headwords, and embedded phrases and expressions to the existing macrostructure. These included entries such as *be jacked up*, *muti*, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* (SA's national anthem: lit. 'God bless Africa' in Xhosa), *now-now*, *ruggerbugger* and *Zola Budd* to name but a few. Entries for South African English words were treated similar to the example of the entry **Zola Budd** here provided:

- (1) **Zo•la Budd** [zəʊlə bʌd] *noun* (South African, informal)  
a minibus taxi: *My 40-minute ride in a battered old  
Zola Budd cost me a mere R4,50!* □ **Zola Budd**,  
**minibustaxi**

### 3.2 Microstructural changes

All Pharos's dictionaries that have been newly compiled or updated since 2005 display the syllabification and primary stress of each headword and its derivatives explicitly, and the aim was to maintain this feature in this dictionary. Therefore, the existing document type definition (DTD) of the dictionary had to be adapted to include a display field for this purpose. A drop-down menu was developed from which the lexicographer could choose syllabification or primary stress to be added to the entry word. In addition, Pharos provided KD with a marked-up list of those headwords for which syllabification and primary stress already existed in other Pharos dictionaries. KD matched those words with their entries in the existing data and returned a new set of data in which the syllabification and primary stress for about 80% of the entry words were embedded in the display field.

A substantial change involved the Afrikaans translations. Although the original data we received from KD already included one Afrikaans translation per sense, Pharos decided to discard these translations altogether and start anew. One of the reasons was to approach the presentation of the Afrikaans translations in such a way that a native speaker of English (and not only a native speaker of Afrikaans) could equally benefit from the use of the dictionary. In each case, we offered a translation for the defined sense of the entry word. In cases where this translation was not suitable in the context of the illustrative sentence that followed the definition, we offered one or more suitable translations for the entry word used in the specific context(s). Translations that were interchangeable were separated by commas and those that were not interchangeable by a semicolon. Example 2 illustrates the use of these punctuation marks:

- (2) **both•er** ['boðə(r)] *verb* ❶ to annoy or worry: *The noise bothered the old man.* □ **pla, hinder**  
 ♦ *noun* [...]  
 ❷ something or someone that causes bother:  
*What a bother all this is!* □ **(iets) las; (iemand) laspos**

In the example above, the two Afrikaans translations 'pla' and 'hinder' for the verb 'bother' are separated by a comma and are thus interchangeable within the context of the illustrative sentence. Two translations are given for the noun 'bother', namely '(iets) las' and '(iemand) laspos'. The bracketed, italicised information [(iets), (iemand)] gives context guidance and follows the pattern of the 'something' (i.e. 'iets') and 'someone' (i.e. 'iemand') contained in the definition. These two translations are separated by a semicolon, which implies that they are not interchangeable in the given illustrative sentence. The illustrative sentence demonstrates the use of the headword in its sense: 'something that causes bother' (i.e. 'iets'). In this instance, the first translation 'las' will be suitable for the context. The second translation 'laspos' will be suitable if the context applies to 'someone that causes bother' (i.e. 'iemand'). The use of a colon and semicolon is clearly explained in the usage guidelines that are included as part of the front matter of the dictionary in both Afrikaans and English.

Another microstructural change that was implemented to make this dictionary especially suited to the South African market, involved the preference to the *-ise* spelling of a verb and the *-isation* spelling of a noun to their *-ize* and *-ization* spelling. The *-ize* and *-ization* spellings were treated as variant forms of the headword, as shown in example (3). In similar vain, we added the optional [r] to the phonetic transcription of those words that can be pronounced in South African English with or without an *r* at the word end [see example (4)].

- (3) **fa•mil•iar•ise, fa•mil•iar•ize** *verb* (with **with**)  
 to make something well known to (someone):  
*You must familiarise yourself with the rules.*  
 □ **(jou) vertroude maak**  
**fa•mil•iar•isa•tion, fa•mil•iar•iza•tion** *noun*  
 □ **die vertroude maak, die vertroude raak**
- (4) **lac•quer** ['lækə(r)] *noun* ❶ a type of varnish:  
*He painted the iron table with black lacquer.*  
 □ **lak(verniss)**

Furthermore, in order to establish a South African familiarity for the user, all references to non-South African concepts, such as references to monetary units, measure of capacity, linear measure, unit of weight, reference to places and people were changed to reflect its South African equivalent or equal. Examples (5)-(8) reflect such modifications as compared with the original English entries.

- (5) **for** [fo:(r)] *preposition* [...]
  - ⑤ in return; as payment: *He paid R20 for his ticket.*
  - ⑤ in return; as payment: *He paid \$2 for his ticket.*
- (6) **it** [it] *pronoun* ① [...]
  - He decided to run a kilometre every morning but he couldn't keep it up.*
  - He decided to run a mile every morning but he couldn't keep it up.*
- (7) **land** [lænd] [...] ♦ *verb* ① [...]
  - She fell three metres, but landed without injury.*
  - She fell twenty feet, but landed without injury.*
- (8) **of** [əv] *preposition* [...] ② [...]:
  - within five kilometres of Cape Town; [...]*
  - within five miles of London; [...]*

#### 4. Distinguishing features

Pharos had more in mind with this title than merely filling the gap on its backlist. A product was needed that would distinguish itself from the existing ones on the market. The changes on micro- and macrostructural level, as discussed above, already added to the discerning character of the dictionary, which was greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an electronic version on CD-ROM. The value of this product lies especially in the fact that it does not merely represent a copy of the printed dictionary. Figure 1 shows some of the additional features that it offers, such as:

1. Back/forward paging that keeps track of all the entries that were previously loaded, which may be erased and restarted at any point;
2. Appendices with grammatical information with full hyperlink of the words used in the dictionary to their appropriate entries;
3. Hyperlinks from illustrations to their relevant dictionary entries;
4. Dual display of various dictionary sections on the same screen, and full linkage between the two with easy transfer from one to the other;
5. Audio pronunciation, including self-recording;
6. Various search options in either language, such as advanced, wildcard and soundex searches, on different components.

In addition, users can transform the visual aspects of the interface to their liking, find help and installation instructions on the same screen, and consult the dictionary while they are using other applications.

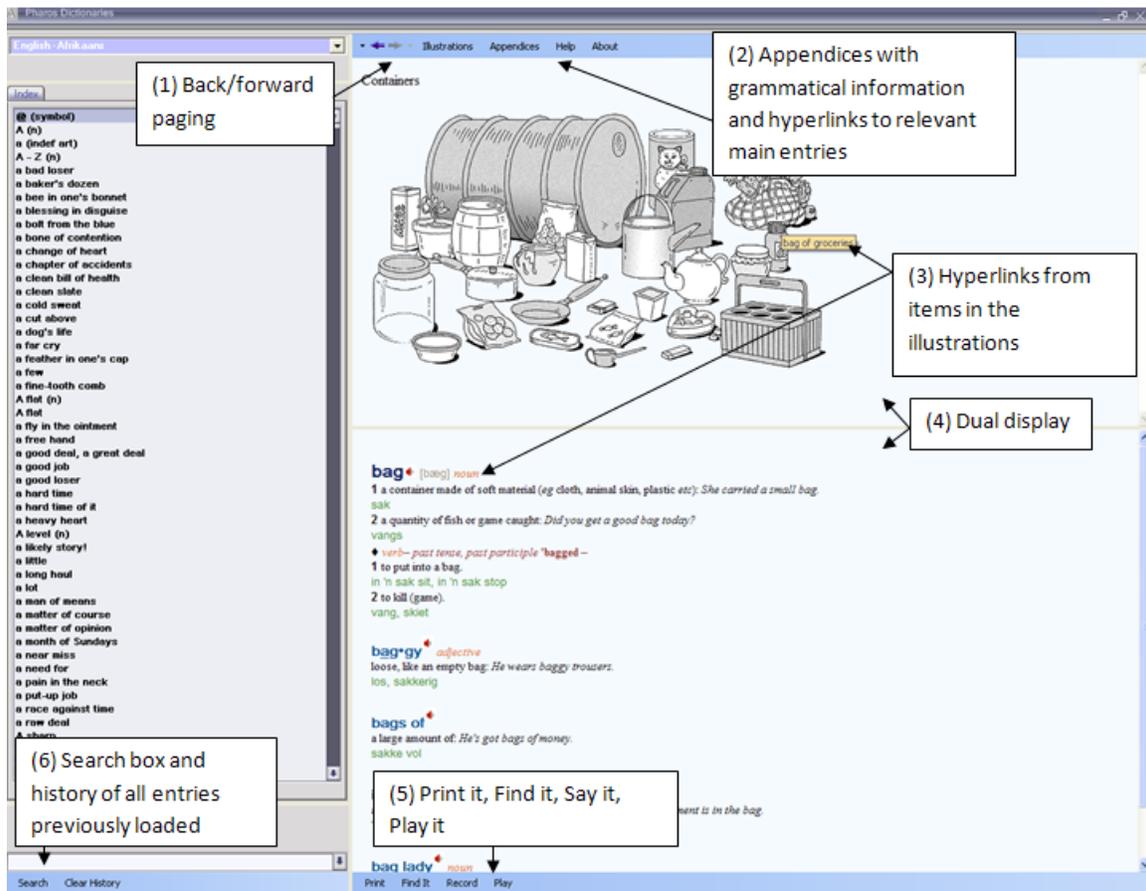


Figure 1. A display from the electronic version.

## 5. Cross-Africa cooperation

The challenges that were experienced during the project were never insurmountable. Neither did the physical distance between Cape Town and Tel Aviv, nor the difference between Afrikaans and Hebrew create or contribute to any challenge.

For the lexicographers at Pharos, the single greatest challenge was to get used to a new XML environment, thus losing their familiarity with their own method of work. Pharos uses the lexicographic software programme TshwaneLex, but had to switch to KD's XML editing software for the duration of the project. Unfortunately, migration of the data to TshwaneLex was not an option: besides the fact that the migration process would have been time and cost ineffective, KD needed its own data format for the development of the electronic version. However, daily contact between the technical system specialist at Pharos and the technology manager at KD ensured stability on a technical level and thus created an environment conducive to the lexicographers. The project was completed within ten months and the dictionary was published in November 2011 under the title *English Dictionary for South Africa*. The title may seem biased because no mention has been made to Afrikaans in the main title. However, much thought has gone into choosing an apt title for the publication. The decision was mainly based on the following facts: firstly, the title was published to fill the gap of an *English*

---

learner's dictionary on Pharos's backlist; secondly, English is the main treated language in the dictionary; and thirdly the term 'semi-bilingual' or 'English-English-Afrikaans dictionary' means little in a South African market in which a dictionary culture has not yet been fully established. Furthermore, the Afrikaans translations were treated in such a way that the dictionary would equally benefit speakers of both languages. It was also decided that the title *English Dictionary for South Africa* can become Pharos's own series title for similar dictionaries in which Afrikaans is substituted by one of the other official languages in South Africa. Although Afrikaans is not mentioned in the main title, it is used in the subtext to the title, namely "**English** entry words with **English** definitions Plus **Afrikaans** translations" and special focus is given on the front cover to the fact that the dictionary contains an "**Afrikaans-English** index". Should this dictionary be extended to include other official South African languages, the series title would remain, and the subtext information adapted accordingly. In this way, the Pharos series of English semi-bilingual dictionaries, each treating a different L1 language, could be established in the South African market. The Afrikaans translations, the enhanced headword list with South African English headwords, together with the free electronic version of the dictionary, are seen as features which distinguish this title from the existing ones in the market.

## 6. Conclusion

The lexicographic fraternity in South Africa is small. A higher level of competitiveness in the market and the worldwide economic slump compel publishers to plan and work more strategically. Partnerships and networking seem to be functional, as well as strategic ways for publishers to build backlists in order to remain active competitors in a fierce market.

Pharos's partnership with KD was a positive experience that culminated in the publication of a new backlist title that offers the didactic advantages of the traditional monolingual English learner's dictionary with the easy-to-use translation of bilingual dictionaries, thus displaying a semi-bilingual character. The end result did not only satisfy Pharos's need for an English dictionary on its backlist. Its unique semi-bilingual character, combined with its truly South African flavour, distinguishes it from the existing English dictionaries on the South African market.

## References

### A. Dictionaries

- Collin, P. H., Kassis, N. and T. Angel. 1987.** *Harrap's English Dictionary for Speakers of Arabic*. Tel Aviv/Toronto: Kernerman. (HEDSA)
- Du Plessis, M. 2005.** *Pharos Afrikaans-English/English-Afrikaans Dictionary*. Cape Town: Pharos Dictionaries.
- Hornby, A. S., and J. A. Reif. 1986** *Oxford Student's Dictionary for Hebrew Speakers*. (Second edition 1993, third edition 2001.) Tel Aviv: Kernerman and Kahn. (OSDHS)

---

**Kromhout, J. 2008.** *Pharos Klein Woordeboek/Little Dictionary*. (1997 edition adapted as cellphone application.) Cape Town: Pharos Dictionaries.

**B. Other literature**

**Adamska-Salaciak, A. 2005.** 'Longman Słownik Współczesny Angielsko-Polski, Polsko-Angielski: The First Active Bilingual Dictionary for Polish Learners of English'. *Kernerman Dictionary News* 13: 23–26.

**Back, M. 2005.** 'Bilingual Dictionaries for Learners'. *Kernerman Dictionary News* 13: 27–29.

**Coleman, N. L. 1998.** 'A PASSWORD for Norway'. *Kernerman Dictionary News* 6: 1–3.

**Nakamoto, K. 1994.** 'Monolingual or Bilingual, that is *not* the Question: the 'Bilingualised' Dictionary'. *Lexicon* 24.

**Reif, J. A. 1987.** 'The Development of a Dictionary Concept: An English Learner's Dictionary and an Exotic Alphabet'. In A. Cowie (ed.), *The Dictionary and the Language Learner: Papers from the EURALEX Seminar at the University of Leeds, 1-3 April 1985*. Lexicographica Series Maior 17. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 146–158.

**Worsch, W. 2005.** 'Power to the Learner: an Approach towards Pedagogically-Oriented Bilingual Dictionaries'. *Kernerman Dictionary News* 13: 30–32.