Ease of access in the new Afrikaans–Nederlands/ Nederlands–Afrikaans dictionary (2011) in the Dutch L2 classroom – a case study

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Abstract

In 2011 a new bilingual Dutch Afrikaans dictionary, popularly known by the acronym ANNA, was published. The dictionary stands out mainly because of its unique macrostructure - it has one amalgamated lemma list.

Ease of access has become an important criterion for a user-friendly dictionary which must meet certain information needs. The aim of this research is to ascertain to what extent users found the access process in ANNA easy and satisfying while completing a task set to them in the L2 (Dutch) classroom. Questions that the research will attempt to find an answer to are:
- What was the search word / expression?
- What was the search time?
- What was the search route that was followed?
- How many search steps were necessary to find the information?
- Was the task completed within a time acceptable to the user?

This paper will report on an empirical observation of dictionary use. The participants (5 – 8 Afrikaans students in the Dutch class) will be asked to produce five Dutch lexical items in a vocabulary test. The look-up behaviour of the respondents while they complete the task (one at a time) will be directly observed and monitored. The Think Aloud Protocol (TAP) will be used; that is, the students will be asked to vocalise their own mental processes by "thinking out loud" during the search process. An audio recorder will be used and the researcher will also make notes.

For the analysis use will be made of the terminology proposed by Bergenholtz & Gouws (2010) such as search route, search step and search time.

1. Introduction and problem statement

In 2011 a new bilingual Dutch Afrikaans dictionary, popularly known by the acronym ANNA, was published. The dictionary stands out mainly because of its unique macrostructure (it has one amalgamated lemma list) and was welcomed widely and enthusiastically in Belgium, the Netherlands and South Africa.

The inspiration for the research that this paper reports on was two-fold:

(i) the publication of ANNA and wondering how and with what success it could be used as an information tool in the L2 classroom;

(ii) an article by Bergenholtz and Gouws (2010) reporting on two case studies regarding the access process in dictionaries and other reference works.

This paper reports on a case study conducted with Afrikaans speakers in the L2 Dutch class. It hopes to contribute to the current metalexicographical research on the access process as a focal area of dictionary use. So far, no research has been done either on the use of Dutch dictionaries by Afrikaans speakers (either passive or active users of Dutch) or on the use of ANNA.

2. Aim

The aim of this research is to ascertain the ease with which a specific group of users found the requested information in ANNA.

3. Research questions

An overarching research question guiding this research was: to what extent does ANNA satisfy the information needs of "a specific type of users finding themselves in a specific type of extra-lexicographic situation" (Tarp 2007:171)? For the purpose of this paper, however, the question seemed too ambitious to answer and it was limited and rephrased thus:

Does ANNA provide quick and easy access to the information that the respondents in the research group had to find?

In attempting to concentrate on the access process itself, the following sub-questions were put:

- What was the search string that the students used in order to retrieve the requested information?
- What was the search time?
- How many search steps were necessary to find the information?
- What was the success rate, in other words, was the requested information found?

4. Contextualisation

4.1. *Ease of access*

The point of departure for this research is the following: a bilingual dictionary such as ANNA might be considered to be a useful information tool in the L2 classroom and as such it should be able to supply the users (L2 learners) with answers to questions in a real situation of dictionary use. When consulting the dictionary, users should ideally have a rapid and unimpeded access to data that will provide them with the information they need (Gouws 2001:102). One of the most important features of a modern dictionary therefore has to be its access structure – in Gouws' definition, the search route that the dictionary user follows during a data consultation procedure (Gouws 2001: 102).

4.2. *ANNA*

Although Afrikaans and Dutch are closely related languages, "the great similarity in vocabulary must be formulated with care. The word material of Afrikaans is ninety percent of Dutch origin, even if there are important differences in the words themselves (De Villiers 1983:29). This state of affairs called for an innovative lexicographical approach that makes provision for treating both the similarities and differences between Afrikaans and Dutch (Martin & Gouws 2000: 784).

ANNA can be described as a bilingual (translation) dictionary, but it is unlike any other bilingual dictionary Afrikaans users are likely to have come across before. Containing 60 000 lemmas, the one amalgamated list includes words that are found in both Dutch and Afrikaans, as well as words that occur in only one of the languages. As Martin and Gouws observe, this

creates "a dictionary consultation environment where both differences and similarities become apparent in an efficient and contrastive way" (Martin & Gouws 2000: 788). Since the Dutch course at the University of Pretoria is a contrastive one, one could assume that a contrastive dictionary would be a useful information tool in the classroom.

4.3. *Usage situation*

The usage situation (compare Tarp 2008, Tarp 2009) in this case was a communicative situation where mainly production needs were relevant. In the task (compare paragraph 7.2) the students (actual users in an actual situation) were asked to produce 5 Dutch lexical items. Although not explicitly tested, reception was also important because the respondents had to understand the Dutch sentences in order to provide the correct lexical items.

5. Terminology

The terminology that Bergenholtz & Gouws (2010) propose, like **search route, search string, search step** and **search time**, was used

6. Methodology

The research was empirical. In a controlled case study 6 students were asked to complete the task. Obviously, the study does not claim to be valid or representative, but certain conclusions pertaining to the specific groups of users were drawn, nevertheless.

6.1. *The research group*

Afrikaans speaking students in the Dutch course "Leer Nederlands" at the University of Pretoria were asked to participate voluntarily and 6 students presented themselves. The research was undertaken during the first week of the new academic year in February 2012. All the students knew their way around bilingual dictionaries but were unfamiliar with ANNA. They also had never seen a Dutch text before but were willing to try to complete the task set to them.

6.2. *The task* (see the Addendum)

The participants were be asked to find five Dutch lexical items in a vocabulary test.[1] They were instructed to rely on their intuition regarding their knowledge of the Afrikaans lexicon, to use ANNA to confirm their guesses or to help them find the words if totally unknown, and to think aloud while conducting the search. To successfully complete the task, the students needed to use Dutch orthography (which differs markedly from Afrikaans), find the correct form of the word (the infinitive or plural form for instance) and the correct meaning (homonymous and polysemous words occurred in the task).

6.3. *The method*

Observation was chosen as the most reliable method of collecting data on dictionary usage (Tarp 2009:286, quoting Hatherall). The look-up behaviour of the respondents while they completed the task (one at a time) was directly observed and monitored. The Think Aloud Protocol (TAP) was used; that is, the students were asked to vocalize their own mental processes by "thinking out loud" during the search process. An audio recorder was used and the researcher made notes. The duration of the search was measured and ended when the student chose to end the look-up process, either out of frustration or because they found the answer (according to them).

7. Analysis and conclusion

7.1. *Findings*

The findings presented here report on the research questions put in paragraph 3.

Student A

Consultation Total search time	Information (word) that had to be found	Search string	Search steps	Result (Success rate)
1 2'43"	bril	Bril	1	Positive
2 3'7"	denk	denk, dink	2	Positive
3 7'58"	geloof	verstaan, glo, geloven	3	Positive
4 2'59"	vertrekken	vertrek	1	Positive
5 7'33"	ontslag	kreeg, afdanking, bedank, afdanking	4	Negative

Student B

Consultation Total search time	Information (word) that had to be found	Search string	Search steps	Result (Success rate)
1 2'47	bril	bril, zetten. wc, bril	4	Positive
2 2'27"	denk	Is, zie	2	Negative
3 3'43"	geloof	zegt, zeer, sê, glo	4	Positive
4	vertrekken	verwarming, loop, seisoene,	4	Negative

		tye		
3'38"				
5 44"	ontslag	werk	1	Negative

Student C

Consultation Total search time	Information (word) that had to be found	Search string	Search steps	Result (Success rate)
1 56"	bril	zetten, WC, sitplek	3	Negative
2 48"	denk	dink, denk	2	Positive
3 Gave up after 2'54"	geloof	zeer	1	Negative
4 Gave up after 6'10"	vertrekken	dat, compendium, kunnen	3	Negative
5 4'17"	ontslag	bedanking, kennisgewing	2	Negative

Student D

Consultation Total search time	Information (word) that had to be found	Search string	Search steps	Result (Success rate)
1 2'50"	bril	wc	1	Positive
2 Gives up after 1'43"	denk	zullen, vaak	2	Negative
3 Gives up after 54"	geloof	zeer	1	Negative
4 Gives up after 1'6"	vertrekken	verwarming	1	Negative
5 12'28"	ontslag	kreeg, klap, aange-, akkoord krijg, afdanken	6	Negative

Student E

Consultation Total search time	Information (word) that had to be found	Search string	Search steps	Result (Success rate)

1 1'50"	bril	bril	1	Positive
2 1'22"	denk	dink	1	Positive
3 2'10"	geloof	verstaan, zeer, geloof, glo	4	Positive
4 5'26"	vertrekken	kunnen, verwarming, vertrek	3	Positive
5 2'39"	ontslag	aangeboden, aanbod, bedanking	3	Positive

Student F

Consultation Total search time	Information (word) that had to be found	Search string	Search steps	Result
1 2'42	bril	bril wc	2	Positive
2 46"	denk	dink denken	2	Positive
3 5'51"	geloof	verstaan begrijpen teenwoordigheid invloed hoor geloof	6	Positive
4 46"	vertrekken	vertrek	1	Positive
5 2'43"	ontslag	bedanking ontslag	2	Positive

Student G

Consultation And total search time	Information (word) that had to be found	Search string	Search steps	Result (Success rate)
1 3'11"	bril	wc zetten	2	Positive
2 3'23"	denk	denk denken	2	Positive
3 5'40"	geloof	verstaan geloof	2	Positive
4 8'8"	vertrekken	kamer loop	5	Negative

		gang gaan kunnen		
5 3'40"	ontslag	bedanking	1	Positive

7.2. *Analysis*

The students found the task difficult but not impossible and managed to find the correct answers in the majority of cases. In every instance ANNA was used to confirm their initial guesses. Part of the time taken up by each consultation went into figuring out the possible answers. The respondents often found it necessary to look up more than one word before the correct answer to each question was found. It must be emphasized that ANNA, if it were used correctly and optimally, would have provided the students with clear and unambiguous help with all the questions.

No student bothered to read the front or back matter.

The search route followed by all students was not systematic at all, but rather haphazard. Initially, all respondents found the macrostructure very confusing. When trying to look up the Dutch equivalent of an Afrikaans word, they searched in the first part for the dictionary and vice versa. They kept looking for the Afrikaans-Dutch or Dutch-Afrikaans sections and also asked me where the Dutch Afrikaans section, for example, starts. This especially bothered respondents C, E, F and G. Only one student remarked after a while that she can't find the Dutch-Afrikaans section and concluded that the reason for this is because the Dutch and Afrikaans spellings are so similar.

The students tended to scan the articles of each lemma very superficially. They rarely read them through carefully and therefore missed important and helpful information such as example sentences.

The Dutch phrase **zie compendium** (*cf. compendium*) was not understood correctly by all respondents and respondent B even thought it was a translation equivalent for the Afrikaans word **is** ("to be"). No student consulted the compendium section when referred to it.

No student was able to find the 5 words in less than 15 minutes and one student took 33'45" to complete the task. The results were positive in the majority of cases and these students were on the whole satisfied with the time that it took them to find the correct answers. (They were under no pressure to complete the task within a set period of time.) Only one student simply gave up and stopped using the dictionary with three of the five questions.

8. Conclusion

The data suggests that the information retrieval process was not easy and definitely not swift. If ANNA is to be used optimally in the L2 classroom, students will have to be given a full demonstration of how information can be accessed easily and swiftly. The macrostructure as well as the microstructure will have to be explained in considerable detail. Students' attention will also have to be drawn very explicitly to the valuable grammatical information that is to be found in the back matter.

Note

References

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Addendum

Vul 'n Nederlandse woord in wat in **beide sinne** pas. (*Fill in a Dutch word that fits in **both sentences**)*:

Voorbeeld (*Example)*:

Het ___ van die zon is mij te sterk vandag. (**licht**) (*The **light** of the sun is too strong for me today.)*

De tas is heel ___, die kan ik makkelijk dragen. (**licht)** (*The suitcase is very **light,** I can carry it easily.*

1   Ik kan niet meer lezen zonder _____

Mannen zetten altij de _____ omhoog in die wc.

2   Ik _____ nog vaak terug aan die mooie tijd in Indonesië.

_____ je dat er veel mensen naar het feest zullen komen?

3   Ik _____ niet alles wat hij zegt.

Het katholieke _____ is nog altijd zeer sterk in Polen.

4   Als iedereen klaar is kunnen we _____

In dat oude kasteel brandt niet in alle _____ de verwarming.

5   Gisteren heeft de minister van economische zaken zijn _____ aangeboden omdat hij niet langer akkoord kon gaan met het gevoerde beleid.

Toen hij op 57 jaar zijn _____ kreeg bij de firma , was dat een harde klap voor hem.