Critical Lexicography

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Abstract
We highlight issues in bilingual lexicography (BL) as encountered in developing an online course for postgraduate students in applied linguistics as well as in translation and interpreting. Many of the challenges reflect those of bilingual dictionaries themselves, for example, can they provide equally well for pedagogical and translation needs? When the dictionary's microstructure is optimized for language learners, it may well be cumbersome for translators. What of the translator's need for an expanded macrostructure to cope with the wider variety of texts he/she deals with? Intertwined with these issues are those of directionality, and whether the dictionary can support encoding and decoding equally in both directions. With online students from various time zones, nationalities and language backgrounds, this Australian course embraces lexicographical material from Europe, Asia and the Pacific, and draws in the students' regional experiences of using bilingual dictionaries, to critique the range of contemporary BL practices.

1 An online course in bilingual lexicography

This poster describes an online course in bilingual lexicography (BL), designed for postgraduate students of applied linguistics and translation and interpreting, highlighting the challenge of meeting their rather different professional needs. It mirrors the challenges of designing bilingual dictionaries for multiple purposes, and the pedagogical and crosslingual demands that they present. These exist in addition to the well-recognized BL challenges of providing for multiple directionalities.

The students enrolled in the course are all professional users of bilingual dictionaries for a wide variety of languages – some engaged in full-time study at Macquarie University, NSW Australia, others studying part-time but connected via the internet from other time zones round the world. In both cases the bilingual or bilingualized dictionaries that are tools of the profession become the critical object of discussion. Though few students are likely to be employed in lexicography, their ability to critique bilingual dictionaries and the principles of BL will strengthen their hand in evaluating dictionaries for their own use, and in recommending them to others.

1.1 Students from Applied Linguistics

Students working in applied linguistics are typically teachers of English as a second or foreign language, less often teachers of languages other than English. Either way their pri-

mary interest is in pedagogical bilingual lexicography and the extent to which dictionaries meet the initial and developing needs of language learners. It is now widely recognized that small pocket bilingual dictionaries do very little to help build language knowledge when they merely provide glosses with minimal grammatical information from SL to TL (Atkins, 1985).

With the typical anisomorphism of languages, the word or words offered as glosses are at best only partial equivalents, and their limitations can signaled only approximately by met-alinguistic labels. The German *Entscheidung* is the least situationally constrained equivalent to the English noun *settlement,* being the nominalization of the verb *entscheiden* "decide", and is therefore likely to be the first gloss provided. But it is inadequate in the contexts of law and accounting, where words like *Vergleich* "judicial ruling" and *Bezahlung* "payment" would be needed to translate *settlement.* Labels such as *Law, Accounting* can of course be added to show those discriminations, though they raise further issues. One is that the label may itself be ambiguous: does it refer to a language register, or to a context of use? If *Bezahlung* is the accountant's term, can it also be used by anyone settling the bill in a restaurant? Leaving aside the semantic/pragmatic implications, the language of the dictionary labels indicates a presumed directionality of use – *Law, Accounting* = from English to German, while *Recht, Buchhaltung* = from German to English) – which may or may not be right for the particular language learner, at his/her level of language competence.[1] So language teachers of English or any other language should be encouraged to inspect the bilingual dictionary (or dictionaries) available to their students, to see whether it supports them appropriately in terms of their directionality and competence.

The grammatical information provided in bilingual dictionaries is often minimal, and again reflects assumptions about directionality and decoding/encoding. With synthetic languages, information about inflections is needed for accurate decoding as well as encoding, though smaller bilingual dictionaries do not usually duplicate such information in both halves of the dictionary. Instead they attach English inflections to headwords in the English half, and say German inflections to the German headwords in the other half. With this presentation the dictionary works better for the English decoder of German and the German decoder of English, who get the word's meaning and morphology in one hit. Encoders from either starting point have to use both halves, starting with the translation equivalent in one half and extracting the inflections from the other. Language teachers can of course provide supplementary grammatical materials, but they would do well to see how easy or otherwise it is to gather such information from the bilingual dictionary alone. For highly synthetic languages such as Turkish, with more than 100 inflected forms for common words, it is virtually impossible to present the range within the confines of a lemma, and supplementary grammatical appendices are essential.[2]

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[1] Dictionaries such as Langenscheidt which use icons to represent contexts of use, e.g. a set of scales for the register of law, avoid this problem, so long as the icons work across cultures.

[2] Dr Petek Kortboke focused on the Turkish-English frontier in a recent (2006) seminar at Macquarie University. Other issues have been described for Afrikaans and Zulu by Kotze (1992).

The role of bilingualized dictionaries in supporting language learning is an important topic for language teachers working with students from the same mother tongue. At their best, the bilingualized dictionary offers the resources of a monolingual dictionary, with much more explicit grammatical, collocational and stylistic support, as well as mother tongue glosses and translations of other items within the microstructure. In fact bilingualized dictionaries vary considerably in the extent of bilingualization (Marello 1998), which would help to explain the somewhat equivocal findings from research on their use in Israel and in HK (Laufer and Kimmel 1997; Fan 2002). That apart, the existence of bilingualized dictionaries helps to show the kinds of pedagogical support which would ideally be built into bilingual dictionaries – at least for students with the same language background.

1.2 Students from Translation and Interpreting

Dictionaries with the full pedagogical apparatus may not have as much value for translation and interpreting trainees. They too are language learners in some sense, but their threshold for recourse to a bilingual dictionary is probably higher than typical language learner, and the linguistic information they need is of a different order. Although they are more likely to be seeking translation equivalents than definitions, matters of connotation assume considerable importance. These are rarely discussed within the lemma, which tend to embrace formal variants and phraseological extensions rather than individual nuances. Instead, stylistic labels such as "formal" and "informal/colloquial" may be used to provide generic characterizations of words, and a means by which to estimate their appropriateness for the translation in hand. Notes on geographical variation in usage for pluricentric languages, e.g. British versus American English, Austrian and Swiss German, are also important indicators of more and less appropriate usage for the translator, though not used in smaller bilingual dictionaries. More idiosyncratic aspects of words, such as the deictic orientations of English verbs like *take* and *bring,* are difficult to encapsulate, and often left embedded in the selection of translation equivalents. For professional translators, details on the registerial restrictions on the uses of words are also vital, among other kinds of metalinguistic information noted by Tarp (2004) as desiderata for bilingual dictionaries.

Translators typically work with translation units larger than the single word – usually collocations or phrases – whereas comprehensive bilingual dictionaries (as opposed to dictionaries of phraseology) are always organized as lists of individual words. This not only poses difficulties in terms of retrieval of the item, e.g. whether an idiom such as English *bite the dust* ("fail, be defeated") is to be sought under the verb *(bite)* or the noun *(dust),* but other questions as to whether the dictionary should gloss it word for word in the TL, or match it with the nearest idiom, even if quite unrelated in its content. The second method may capture the denotation of the SL idiom better than the first, but neither is likely to express its stylistic connotations very well. At any rate it is important for the bilingual dictionary to signal when a given collocation is idiomatic, as a way of suggesting to the translator that some kind of paraphrase may be necessary. Because of their relatively low frequency and highly specialized character, idioms and specialized collocations are often underrepresented in bilingual dictionaries. They are however an interesting challenge to BL on several fronts.

2 Critical analysis of micro- and macrostructure

Students from applied linguistics and translation/interpreting bring to the online course those different perspectives on BL, with their contrasting needs and demands on bilingual dictionaries. Between them they raise the most fundamental issue as to what needs and interests bilingual dictionaries can properly serve. Commercial considerations ensure that the publisher is likely to claim the widest possible utility for the bilingual dictionary, though the complexity of its contents and applications makes it somewhat difficult to evaluate.

We encourage students to seek explicit and implicit evidence on the intended purposes of the bilingual dictionaries they use, as a basis for critiquing their contents. The dictionary's prefatory matter may identify the anticipated users, though many bilingual dictionaries are elusive on this, no doubt to avoid limiting the size of the potential market. While language learners may be mentioned, the level/levels of learner rarely is/are, nor whether the dictionary can assist students from the two language backgrounds equally well with decoding and encoding. That apart, it is interesting to see whether the preface or back cover provides any quantitative or qualitative comments on the range of vocabulary included. In fact quantitative information (e.g. the numbers of words) is not particularly meaningful unless couched in terms of headwords or lemmas. Many dictionaries provide inflated figures that include run-ons – word forms added at the end of a lemma to complete the set of derivatives that are not actually glossed. In any case it is difficult for the average dictionary user to know how many words might be needed for an intermediate to advanced command of the language, or to support translations of, say, newspaper articles.

Evaluation of the macrostructure of bilingual dictionaries can nevertheless focus on the range of more and less specialized words on an average page, and in terms of whether the dictionary tends towards "lumping or splitting" – providing extended lemmas with derivative words and phrases grouped together, or giving them separate coverage. The extent to which words used in one half of the bilingual dictionary are glossed or explained in the other is a further line of investigation. The comparability in size of the two headword lists is another macro-consideration, since the core vocabulary in any two languages is differently distributed over semantic fields (anisomorphism again). In any case the vocabulary needs of the decoder are greater than those of encoders at the same level of proficiency, and the dictionary's bias towards one directionality of use can be identified this way, whether or not it is made explicit.

Critical analysis of the microstructure takes up issues discussed in the previous sections. Does the bilingual dictionary provide more than translation equivalents, i.e. definitions which help to interpret a word's sense relations with others, using synonymy, hyponymy, synecdoche etc.? Where/how is specific grammatical and stylistic information given? How are collocations, multiword units and idioms handled? Where are they treated? The answers to such questions engage students with both the lexicographical quality of individual entries, and more general issues of dictionary policy and orientation.

3 Perspectives on bilingual lexicography round the world

Among the course materials we provide students with online samples of the microstructure and local macrostructure for comparison and contrast. The samples come from

European bilingual dictionaries, as well as the Middle East, India, China, Japan, Korea, Fiji and New Zealand, including historical samples which document the history of bilingual dictionaries. The basic glossaries of linguistic fieldworkers in the Pacific, documenting unwritten languages are contrasted with those produced in the most elaborate pedagogical tradition, to identify the full range of lexicographic description. This range allows us to discuss both parallel and independent advances in BL in the eastern and western world. Exposure to dictionary material from outside the western world also enables us to discuss other fundamental issues such as the organization of bilingual dictionaries for languages using non-alphabetic scripts (Chinese, Japanese), and those written from right to left rather than left to right (Arabic, Hebrew).

4 Bilingual lexicography, corpora and the electronic frontiers

Being already online, students are encouraged to seek out electronic corpora of the TL into which they are translating, as a means of validating the collocations they intend to use. This also helps them to transcend the limitations of small bilingual dictionaries, and more advanced learners gain a better sense of the prevailing tone and style of documents into which a given translation equivalent may fit. Corpus data is now highly valued as contextualized raw material for language teachers, and as a resource to help translators finesse their outputs, thus for both kinds of student within our clientele. Translation students gain further insights into lexical polysemy and alternative translation equivalents (Alsina and De Cesaris, 2002) through the various parallel corpora now available on websites from Gutenberg to Canadian Hansard.

The great value of corpus data for both kinds of professional raises the question as to its place in BL in the future. Its very bulk is too much for traditional printed bilingual dictionaries, but it would be well within the capacity of online dictionaries to maintain links to corpus resources. The same could be achieved within pocket electronic dictionaries, with downloads of corpus data, systematically updated. Questions about the scope of the electronic dictionary, not much used in Europe, yet very familiar to students in Asia, are a further critical dimension of the course.

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