

## Particle Verbs in Bilingual Dictionaries: the Case of Estonian and English

Enn Veldi

Department of English  
University of Tartu, Estonia  
Maisi 20  
50407 Tartu  
Estonia

### Abstract

Phrasal verbs and related nouns and adjectives of the English language are well known. Similar verb combinations, however, exist also in non-Indo-European languages. Estonian, a Finno-Ugric language, has two types of phrasal verbs: particle verbs and expression verbs. Phrasal verbs pose problems not only for foreign learners but also for bilingual lexicographers. Analysis of the existing Estonian-English dictionaries shows that the treatment of Estonian particle verbs is often sketchy and inconsistent. If bilingual dictionaries pay too little attention to particle verbs, then it comes as no surprise that the learners have no good bilingual sources to consult. On the other hand, the now available linguistic resources enable bilingual lexicographers to improve the treatment of particle verbs and related nouns, adjectives, and adverbs to a considerable degree. The paper shows that an in-depth contrastive analysis of particle verbs is needed in order to improve their treatment in bilingual dictionaries.

### 1 Introduction

In the English-speaking world the dictionary of phrasal verbs is a dictionary category in its own right. Recent years have witnessed the publication of new monolingual dictionaries of English phrasal verbs by all the major publishers, for example, *Longman Phrasal Verbs Dictionary (LPVD)*, *Collins COBUILD Phrasal Verbs Dictionary (CCPVD)*, *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary (OPVD)*, and more recently *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus (MPVP)*. Some of them have also bilingual versions, such as *Diccionario Oxford de Phrasal Verbs: Inglés-Español (DOPVIE)* and *Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs: Anglais-Français (CIDPVAF)*. There is also a semi-bilingual version of *English-Estonian Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (EEDPV)* by Chambers. For all these dictionaries the source language is English, that is, the description proceeds in the direction from English into language X.

The present paper, however, proceeds from the fact that phrasal verbs occur not only in Germanic languages but can be found also in some non-Indo-European languages, such as Estonian, which is a Finno-Ugric language. The non-Indo-European perspective to the treatment of phrasal verbs could present considerable interest to bilingual lexicography. The focus of this paper is not the direction from English into language X but from language X into English. The treatment of phrasal verbs in the existing Estonian-English bilingual dictionar-

ies is analysed with the purpose of working out methods of improved coverage of phrasal verbs in bilingual dictionaries with a further aim of compiling an Estonian-English dictionary of phrasal verbs. Time is right for such an undertaking for a number of reasons. In recent years a number of Estonian linguists have focused on the study of core vocabulary in Estonian (see e.g. Trigel 2001; Trigel 2003; Kährik 2001). The findings of this research can be applied to bilingual lexicography. Also, a list of three thousand Estonian particle verbs has been compiled on the basis of the existing lexicographic sources. The database can be accessed at the following address: <http://www.cl.ut.ee/ee/ressursid/pysiyhendid.html>, and the authors describe its creation in Kaalep & Muischnek 2002; Kaalep & Muischnek 2003.

## 2 Particle verbs in Estonian

Estonian phrasal verbs are of two types: particle verbs and expression verbs (Erelt ed. 2003: 101-102). Particle verbs consist of an adverb particle + verb, for example,

(1) *alla kirjutama* lit. “down + write”, i.e. “to sign”.

The same sequence forms a single-word synonym *allkirjastama* “to sign” and the noun *allkiri* “signature”. Particle verbs can be non-idiomatic and idiomatic.

Expression verbs consist of a noun / adjective + verb, for example.

(2) *aru saama* lit. “reason + get”, i.e. “to understand”.

The same sequence occurs in the nouns *arusaam* “understanding, perception” and *arusaamine* “understanding”, the adjective *arusaadav* “understandable” and the adverb *arusaadavalt* “understandably”. Expression verbs are, as a rule, idiomatic.

The borderline between the two types is sometimes fuzzy and can be a matter of interpretation depending on whether the case form of a noun is regarded as an adverb in its own right or not.

It has been suggested that historically many Estonian particle verbs entered the language as translation loans from German (Hasselblatt 1990). Some similarities between Estonian and German are easy to spot; for example, the choice of the particle in the Estonian verb *üles kirjutama* (lit. “up + write”) coincides with the German *aufschreiben* (lit. “up + write”) but differs from the English *write down* and *put down*. However, the contemporary Estonian system of particle verbs is an extensive system in its own right with intricate relations between its components. At present about three thousand particle verbs have been recorded (Kaalep & Muischnek 2003: 103)

Particle verbs are important from the Estonian perspective for a number of reasons. First, both the particles and verbs that occur in these combinations belong to core vocabulary and are high-frequency lexical items. Second, they often have multiple meanings, which are poorly covered by bilingual dictionaries. Third, particle verbs reveal large numbers of related nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, which form families of related words. Fourth, particle verbs have synonyms, which can be either two-member or one-member verbs. Fifth, they reveal important differences with regard to formality / informality.

### 3 Treatment of particle verbs in the existing Estonian-English dictionaries

Although lexicographers generally realize the importance of particle verbs, their treatment in bilingual dictionaries is often sketchy and inconsistent. The ones with multiple meanings seem to be especially troublesome. The discussion below focuses on the particle verb *läbi lööma* lit. "through + hit", which has both non-idiomatic and idiomatic senses. Entries (3), (4), and (5) were written on the basis of corpus and web examples; also, monolingual dictionaries of both languages were used.

(3) **läbi lööma**

1 MAKE A HOLE punch *talongi läbi lööma* punch one's ticket *naela lauast läbi lööma* drive a nail through the board

2 SUCCEED IN LIFE (*edu saavutama*) get ahead, make it (to the top), make it big, make good, succeed, establish oneself (as sth) *Noored õpivad tööturul läbi lööma*. *Young people learn how to get ahead in the job market.*

3 WASTE MONEY / PROPERTY (*ära raiskama*) run through sth, fritter sth ↔ away, squander *Mees lõi läbi tohutu varanduse ja suri vaeselt*. *The man squandered a huge fortune and died poor.*

As can be seen, the particle verb *läbi lööma* has three basic meanings; sense 1 is non-idiomatic and senses 2 and 3 are idiomatic.

There is also a noun and an adjective formed from sense 2:

(4) **läbilöögivõime** competitiveness *Välismaalastest juhid suurendavad läbilöögivõimet*. *Foreign managers increase competitiveness.*

(5) **läbilöögivõimeline** competitive

Three dictionaries were selected for analysis. *EED1* and *EED2* are medium-size dictionaries; the *Estonian-English Dictionary* by Paul F. Saagpakk (*Saagpakk*), however, is a comprehensive dictionary.

An important question to be considered is where to place particle verbs in a dictionary. As they consist of two parts, there are, in principle, four possibilities: 1) according to the particle, 2) according to the verb, 3) both according to the particle and the verb, 4) as headwords in their own right.

The compilers of *EED1* have chosen the third possibility; they provide the particle verb *läbi lööma* both under the particle *läbi* "through" and under the verb *lööma* "hit":

*EED1*

(6) (under the headword *läbi* "through")

**läbi lööma** (*raha*) run through; (*edukas olema*) hit off

(7) (under the headword *lööma* "hit")

**läbi lööma** break through

*EED1* provides the related noun *läbilöögivõime* but does not list the related adjective *läbilöögivõimeline*.

- (8) **läbilöögivõime** perforation ability; *piltl* assertiveness

The problem with this approach is inconsistency. The number of senses and the equivalents do not coincide in different parts of the dictionary. In (6) the phrasal verb has two meanings: 1) waste / squander money and 2) be successful; in (7) it has one meaning. Moreover, the suggested equivalents do not coincide either and are, in fact, of doubtful value.

*EED2*

- (9) (under the headword **lööma** "hit")  
**läbi lööma** punch; make one's way

*EED2* lists particle verbs according to the verb. This dictionary covers only the first two senses. The provided equivalent for the second sense is too short; it should be *make one's way in the world*.

*Saagpakk* lists *läbi lööma* according to the first component but provides a reference in the verb article *lööma* "hit". However, the dictionary does not provide the related noun *läbilöögivõime* and the related adjective *läbilöögivõimeline*.

*Saagpakk*

- (10) **läbi lööma** (under the headword *läbi*)  
1. (*auke*) to punch, to perforate; to knock (a hole) through, (*vaadile, paadile*) to stave; (*naela*) to drive a nail through;  
2. (*ennast*) to fight one's way in life (*or* in the world), to make one's way in the world, to succeed, to hit it off, to win through; to become important (*or* popular);  
3. (*raha jne.*) to run through (*or* squander) (one's money), (*sl.*) to blow, to blow; *see mõte läi läbi* this idiom became accepted

Despite the fact that *Saagpakk* is an old-fashioned dictionary by contemporary standards, it covers all the three main senses of and provides a number of useful equivalents.

#### 4 Discussion

It is clear that there is not enough space in a print dictionary to list particle verbs both according to the particle and the verb. The best policy is to give the headword status to the most important particle verbs. This approach enables the lexicographer to pay due attention to the multiple meanings of particle verbs, to point out the synonymous two-member and one-member verbs, and to provide example sentences to illustrate the meanings. The only Estonian monolingual dictionary that has adopted this policy is the *Dictionary of Correct Usage* *ÕS 1999* (Erelt ed. 1999). No bilingual dictionary has followed suit as yet. Another ad-

vantage of this approach for Estonian is that in that case the related nouns, adjectives, and adverbs are alphabetically close to the particle verb. However, it would be helpful to provide a reference to the particle verb in the dictionary article on the verb.

At the moment the situation is far from satisfactory in middle-size dictionaries, where lexicographers tend to regard particle verbs as a nuisance that has to be dealt with somehow. On the other hand, middle-size dictionaries are the type of dictionary that most foreign learners own. Ten years ago Glennis Pye suggested that "don't give up, look it up" (Pye 1996). Unfortunately, if bilingual dictionaries fail to treat particle verbs properly, foreign learners and also translators simply have no bilingual resources to look them up. Another serious problem is trustworthiness of the suggested equivalents. Sylvie De Cock lists six problems with regard to the use of phrasal verbs by foreign learners: 1) avoidance, 2) style deficiency, 3) semantic confusion, 4) lack of collocational awareness, 5) using 'idiosyncratic phrasal verbs, and 6) syntactic errors (De Cock 2005). One might suggest that improved treatment of particle verbs in bilingual dictionaries is a necessity that will help foreign learners to master phrasal verbs in English.

## 5 Conclusions

The paper shows that phrasal verbs pose problems not only for foreign learners but also for bilingual lexicographers. Analysis of the existing Estonian-English dictionaries shows that the treatment of particle verbs is far from unsatisfactory in middle-size dictionaries. It is recommended that the more important particle verbs should be given the headword status in bilingual dictionaries, which enables the lexicographer to focus on multiple meanings, synonyms and antonyms, and to provide example sentences.

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