

To Define and Inform



To Define and Inform:  
An Analysis of Information Provided  
in Dictionaries Used by Learners of English  
in China and Denmark

By

Saihong Li Rasmussen

**CAMBRIDGE**  
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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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# CONTENTS

Preface .....	viii
Acknowledgements .....	ix
Abbreviations .....	xi
Lists of Tables .....	xii
Lists of Figures .....	xiv
Introduction .....	1

## Part One

Chapter One.....	10
Dictionaries and Definitions	
1.1 Bilingual Dictionaries: Problems	
1.2 Receptive and Productive Uses in Dictionaries	
1.3 Lexicography, Linguistics and Computer Technology	
1.4 ‘Semantic’ and ‘Pragmatic’ Information of Learner’s Dictionaries	
1.5 The Need for Research into lexical definitions for Chinese and Danish Learners of English	
Chapter Two .....	39
Pedagogical Considerations	
2.1 Pragmatics and Pedagogical Lexicography	
2.2 Research in Pedagogical Lexicography	
2.3 The User’s Perspective in Pedagogical Lexicography Research	
2.4 Discussion	
Chapter Three .....	72
Methodological Considerations	
3.1 Methods of Data Collecting	
3.2 Pilot Study One	
3.3 Pilot Study Two	
3.4 The Structure and Contents of the Main Study	
3.5 Pilot Study Three	
3.6 Discussion	

## Part Two

Chapter Four .....	108
A Perspective on Users and Their Needs	
4.1 Statistical Tests: Parametric or Non-parametric	
4.2 Statistic Test of Online Survey and Printed Paper Survey	
4.3 Discussion of General Questions	
4.4 Proficiency Tests and the Use of Dictionaries	
4.5 Correlations of English-Chinese Dictionaries and English-Danish Dictionaries	
4.6 User's Evaluations: A Comparison	
4.7 Analysis and Discussion	
Chapter Five .....	141
A Perspective on Bilingual English-Chinese Dictionaries	
5.1 Bilingual Lexicography in China	
5.2 "Pragmatic Information" in Bilingual English-Chinese Dictionaries	
5.3 Feasibility of "Pragmatic Information" in a Bilingual Learner's Dictionary	
5.4 Discussion and Suggestions	
Chapter Six .....	198
On Bilingual English-Danish Dictionaries	
6.1 Bilingual Lexicography in Denmark	
6.2 English-Danish Bilingual Dictionaries	
6.3 Pragmatic Information in Bilingual English-Danish Dictionaries	
6.4 Pragmatic information from the User's Perspective	
6.5 Discussion and Suggestions	
Chapter Seven.....	230
Major Findings and Implications	
7.1 Analysis of Users	
7.2 Information in Dictionaries Used by Learners of English	
7.3 Implications of this Research	
7.4 Limitations of this Research	
7.5 Recommendations for Future Work	
Bibliography .....	249
A. Dictionaries	
B. References	

Appendix 1 .....	267
Evaluation Test and Questionnaires of Dictionary Use and Features	
Appendix 2 .....	279
Selected Words and Phrases in the Survey	
Appendix 3 .....	282
Pilot Study Two	
Appendix 4 .....	285
The Sample Words/Phrases in MECD and MFEC	
Appendix 5 .....	293
The Sample Words/Phrases in OALD and LDOCE	
Appendix 6 .....	301
The Sample Words/Phrases in Politiken and Gyldendal	

## PREFACE

This book is the result of the enjoyment that I find in working as a lexicographer and as a linguist. What follows is a developed and modified form of the dissertation: 'Semantic-Pragmatic Information in Dictionaries Used by Chinese and Danish Learners of English' submitted for the PhD at the University of Copenhagen in 2009.

Like many lexicographers, I had assumed that the information in a dictionary could be distinguished by the categories of the semantic and the pragmatic. In the course of my research I came to realize the inadequacy of that distinction. What is now presented for publication is not so much a revised version of the dissertation as a complete reworking of its argument. There is no doubt that the information in learners' dictionaries does both define and inform. What is not clear is whether we can say that one part does the defining and can be called the semantic, while another part does the informing and can be called the pragmatic. I have therefore traced the history of the distinction between the semantic and the pragmatic and have tried to understand theoretically and conceptually how these two terms could work together. When the words semantic and pragmatic occur in a context that implies their mutual exclusiveness, they are usually found in quotation-marks, to indicate to the reader the need to hold the words under interrogation.

It was a pleasure to write the dissertation; its revision has been a considerable intellectual challenge, and I hope that the reader is able to sense and share something of that excitement.



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No acknowledgement would be complete without mention of my mother, my sisters, my son, Yubo Zhou Rasmussen, and my husband,

Claus Mark Rasmussen, who has shared not only his expertise in statistical analysis, I thank my whole family for their moral and spiritual support at every stage of my work in Denmark.

—Saihong Li Rasmussen  
29<sup>th</sup> April 2010, Copenhagen, Denmark

## ABBREVIATIONS

ALD	(Oxford) Advanced Learner's Dictionary
ANC	American National Corpus
ANE	Average number of examples (per sense)
ANP	Average number of phrases (per sense)
ANS	Average number of sentences (per sense)
ANTE	Average number of 'translation equivalents' (per sense)
BNC	British National Corpus
CALD	Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary
CET4	College English Test (Band 4) (in mainland China)
CET6	College English Test (Band 6) (in mainland China)
COBUILD	Collins COBUILD English Dictionary
CLEC	Chinese Learner English Corpus
EPT	English Proficiency Test (in mainland China)
Gyldendal	Gyldendal Store Røde English-Danish Dictionary
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L2 learners	Second Language Learners
LDOCE	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English
MECD	A Modern English-Chinese Dictionary
MEDAL	Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners
MFECD	A Multi-Functional English-Chinese Dictionary
OALD	Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English
Politiken	Politiken Engelsk Dansk med Betydningsforklaringer
PCEC	Parallel Chinese-English Corpus
SPSS 17.0	Statistical Package for Social Science (Version 17.0)
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TNE	Total number of examples
TNP	Total number of phrases
TNS	Total number of sentence examples
TNTE	Total number of 'translation equivalents'
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

# LISTS OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Matching Test A
Table 3.2 Matching Test B
Table 3.3 Matching Test C
Table 3.4 Reliability Statistics and Scale Statistics
Table 3.5 Comparison of Mean Score of Correctness Answers
Table 3.6 English-Chinese Tested Dictionaries
Table 3.7 English-Danish Tested Dictionaries
Table 3.8 Distributions of the Sampled Population
Table 4.1 Online and Paper Survey
Table 4.2 Mann-Whitney Statistic Results of Gender and Evaluations
Table 4.3 Kruskal-Wallis Test: Participants' Age Group
Table 4.4 Kruskal-Wallis Test: Participants' Education Background
Table 4.5 Kruskal Wallis Test: Length of Studying English
Table 4.6 Evaluations of the Eight Proficiency Tests
Table 4.7 Positive and Negative Evaluations of the Six Tested Dictionaries
Table 4.8 Chi-Square Tests of the Overall Evaluations
Table 4.9 Evaluations: English-Chinese and English-Danish Dictionaries Compared
Table 4.10 Chi-Square Test of Significance
Table 5.1 Mann-Whitney Test of Sociolinguistic Information
Table 5.2 Mann-Whitney Test of Avoiding Common Errors
Table 5.3 Mann-Whitney Test of Contextual Features
Table 5.4 Statistics for the Sampled Nouns in the Tested English-Chinese Dictionaries
Table 5.5 Statistics for the Sampled Verbs in the Tested English-Chinese Dictionaries
Table 5.6 The Pronoun in Chinese and English
Table 5.7 Statistics for the Sampled Adjectives in the Tested English-Chinese Dictionaries
Table 5.8 Statistics for the Sampled Adverbs in the Tested English-Chinese Dictionaries
Table 5.9 Statistics for the Sampled Conjunctions in the Tested English-Chinese Dictionaries
Table 5.10 Statistics for the Sampled Prepositions in the Tested English-Chinese Dictionaries

Table 5.11 Mann-Whitney Test of Translation ‘Equivalents’
Table 5.12 Statistics for the Examples of the Tested English-Chinese Dictionaries
Table 5.13 Usage Labels in the Tested Bilingual English-Chinese Dictionaries
Table 5.14 Mann-Whitney Test of Style Labels
Table 5.15 Mann-Whitney Test of Statistics of Geography and Subject Labels
Table 5.16 Mann-Whitney Tests of Attitude Labels
Table 6.1 Statistics for the Sampled Nouns in the Tested English-Danish Dictionaries
Table 6.2 Statistics for the Sampled Verbs in the Tested English-Danish Dictionaries
Table 6.3 Statistics for the Adjectives in the Tested English-Danish Dictionaries
Table 6.4 Statistics for the Adverbs in the Tested English-Danish Dictionaries
Table 6.5 Statistics for the Conjunctions in the Tested English-Danish Dictionaries
Table 6.6 Statistics for the Prepositions in the Tested English-Danish Dictionaries
Table 6.7 Statistics for the Examples in the Tested English-Danish Dictionaries
Table 6.8 Evaluations of Contextual Information between POLITIKEN & GYLDENDAL

# LISTS OF FIGURES

- Figure 4.1 Participants' Gender Status
- Figure 4.2 Participants' Gender and Evaluations
- Figure 4.3 Participants' Age Group
- Figure 4.4 Participants' Age Group and Evaluations
- Figure 4.5 Participants' Education Background
- Figure 4.6 Participants' Education Background and Evaluations
- Figure 4.7 Length of Studying English
- Figure 4.8 Monolingual or Bilingual Dictionaries
- Figure 4.9 Information Sought from Monolingual Dictionaries
- Figure 4.10 Information Sought from Bilingual Dictionaries
- Figure 4.11 Dictionary Format
- Figure 4.12 Dictionary Function
- Figure 4.13 Evaluations of Test 1
- Figure 4.14 Evaluations of Test 2
- Figure 4.15 Evaluations of Test 3
- Figure 4.16 Evaluations of Test 4
- Figure 4.17 Evaluations of Test 5
- Figure 4.18 Evaluations of Test 6
- Figure 4.19 Evaluations of Test 7
- Figure 4.20 Evaluations of Test 8
- Figure 4.21 Evaluations of Avoiding Language Errors: Chinese & Danish Users Compared
- Figure 4.22 Evaluations of Style Labels: Chinese and Danish Users Compared
- Figure 4.23 Evaluations of Geography & Subject Labels: Chinese & Danish Users Compared
- Figure 4.24 Evaluations of Attitude Labels: Chinese & Danish Users Compared
- Figure 4.25 Evaluations of Cultural Information: Chinese & Danish Users Compared
- Figure 4.26 Evaluations of Contextual Information: Chinese & Danish Users Compared
- Figure 4.27 Evaluations of Translation 'Equivalents': Chinese and Danish Users Compared
- Figure 4.28 Evaluations of Frequency Information: Chinese & Danish Users Compared

Figure 5.1 Evaluations of Cultural Information by the Chinese Participants

Figure 5.2 Evaluations of Sociolinguistic Information by the Chinese Participants

Figure 5.3 Evaluations of Avoiding Language Errors by the Chinese Participants

Figure 5.4 Evaluations of Contextual Information by the Chinese Participants

Figure 5.5 Evaluations of Style Labels by the Chinese Participants

Figure 5.6 Evaluations of Geography & Subject Labels by the Chinese Participants

Figure 5.7 Evaluations of Attitude Labels by the Chinese Participants

Figure 5.8 Evaluations of Frequency Labels by the Chinese Participants

Figure 6.1 Evaluations of Common Errors by the Danish Participants

Figure 6.2 Evaluations of Style Labels by the Danish Participants

Figure 6.3 Evaluations of Geography & Subject Labels by the Danish Participants

Figure 6.4 Evaluations of Attitude Labels by the Danish Participants

Figure 6.5 Evaluations of Cultural Information by the Danish Participants

Figure 6.6 Evaluations of Contextual Information by the Danish

Figure 6.7 Evaluations of Translation ‘Equivalents’ by the Danish Participants

Figure 6.8 Evaluations of Frequency Information by the Danish Participants





# INTRODUCTION

This monograph investigates how information is provided in dictionaries, specifically in bilingual learner's dictionaries of English-Chinese and English-Danish. In this study, I have argued strongly that learner's dictionaries should put special emphasis on the close interweaving of 'semantic' and 'pragmatic' information: the meaning of an English word will need to be defined in one way for a Danish user, in another for a Chinese user, and in another for a native speaker. There is no purely 'semantic' definition, nor yet can 'pragmatic' information be regarded as an optional supplement. The meanings of words are effective and valid only in particular situations.

The present study draws on research in which four bilingual English-Chinese dictionaries are examined, together with two bilingual English-Danish dictionaries; among these are three bilingual and three bilingualized dictionaries. All learners' dictionaries focus on the user's perspective and the needs of those not yet proficient in the language. Monolingual learner's dictionaries explain the words of a language by means of the same language; they normally define or paraphrase each word, and therefore assume a fairly high degree of proficiency among learners. Learners at the highest level of proficiency will of course use a monolingual dictionary not specifically designed for learners at all: the Oxford English Dictionary, or Webster's Dictionary. Bilingual learner's dictionaries provide the definition and/or paraphrase in the learner's source language. A 'bilingualized' dictionary is a hybrid dictionary; it is a monolingual dictionary in the target language (one not necessarily designed for learners, though usually Oxford Advanced Learners or COBUILD) with definitions, paraphrases and examples; to these are added translation 'equivalents' in the source language. The bilingualized dictionary is a monolingual dictionary with a bilingual supplement; it 'seeks to combine the advantages of both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries' (*Kirkness* 2005:75). It is now acknowledged that one vital element in the acquisition of a new language is its presentation in terms of one's native tongue. The best way for a Chinese speaker to learn English may not be the best way for a Danish speaker to learn English. In China, more English learners (and more advanced ones) use bilingualized dictionaries, while bilingualized English dictionaries are rare at all levels

in Denmark. (However, when Danes learn Chinese they do make use of bilingualized dictionaries.) In this study, I will insist on the distinction between bilingual and bilingualized dictionaries.

All of the dictionaries analysed in this study have been published within the past twelve years.

Four are English-Chinese dictionaries:

- 1) Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: English-Chinese Version 2004 (hereafter LDOCE);
- 2) Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English: English-Chinese Version 2004 (hereafter OALD);
- 3) A Modern English-Chinese Dictionary Version 2003 (hereafter MECD);
- 4) A Multi-Functional English-Chinese Dictionary Version 2003 (hereafter MFECD);

Two are English-Danish dictionaries:

- 5) Politiken Engelsk Dansk med Betydningsforklaringer 1999 (hereafter Politiken);
- 6) Gyldendal Store Røde English-Danish Dictionary 2003 (hereafter Gyldendal).

The focus throughout is to investigate whether the user's evaluations correspond to the lexicographer's intentions. This research leads to suggestions about improvements in the quality of information offered in dictionaries used by learners of English. The project combines theoretical studies on the production and reception of lexical meaning with empirical data drawn from questionnaires sent to university students of English in Denmark and China.

The statistical results consistently show that users are dissatisfied, on two levels: the format, at the level of macrostructure, is not conveniently structured; and in each definition (the level of microstructure). The cause of their dissatisfaction lies in the distinction between 'semantic definition' and 'pragmatic information'. This distinction should be regarded as a lexicographical fiction. The conclusion of my argument is that it would not be very difficult to improve the presentation of information in any dictionary used by learners of English. My main proposal is that lexicographers should ignore the distinction between pragmatics and semantics.

The present study situates itself globally, among learners and users of English in Denmark and China. It draws on the lexicographical theories and practices largely drawn from the English-speaking world; it has been

institutionally shaped within the Danish academic sphere, while its implicit foundations may be traced to the author's upbringing and education in China. Even though English and Danish are philologically similar languages, and their speakers share a common European culture and history, some 'pragmatic' information is still necessary for Danish users of English dictionaries. In the case of Chinese and English, there is no common philological basis, nor a shared cultural tradition; much more 'pragmatic' information is therefore needed in a dictionary used by Chinese learners of English.

It should be stressed that the present research is not merely yet another statistical survey that combines a questionnaire, an evaluation, and a proficiency test; some six hundred learner's dictionaries have been the object of statistical investigation into their users' level of satisfaction. The present work is not yet another of these: it is rare in taking on English and *two* other languages, by comparing English-Chinese with English-Danish dictionaries: though all the dictionaries examined are bilingual, this is a three-cornered study which, exceptionally, takes on two languages from within the Indo-European group and one outside it.

This distinctively globalizing feature raises interesting theoretical issues. Lexicographical theory in English (and in other western languages) has mainly been concerned with Indo-European languages, and to a lesser extent with Semitic and Sinitic languages; it has seldom made its generalizations or grounded its theoretical insights with reference to more 'exotic' or remote languages. The point is that the difference between any two languages is not stable or constant. The difference between Danish and English is lexically, culturally, and contextually, quite small, whereas the difference between Chinese and English is, in all these respects, large. Yet contemporary Chinese lexicographical theory takes English (or another Indo-European language) as the normative 'other language' in the making of a bilingual dictionary. This breaks with the traditional practice of bilingual lexicography in China where another language within the Sinitic family would be the target language. That is why the concept of 'the bilingual dictionary' needs to be analyzed and refined; it is not the same concept when applied to English-Danish and to English-Chinese dictionaries. Working in Denmark, I found that the normal pairing in thinking about bilingual dictionaries is English-Danish; yet in China the normal pairing is 'also' Chinese-English. The difference between those two pairings is at the centre of my own lexicographical reflections.

The challenges of working with three languages have also shaped the conceptual structure of the present study. As every language teacher knows, a sentence may be grammatically correct while being pragmatically

improper. It is not enough to be correct; a learner must be taught how to avoid the improper and, for this, ‘pragmatic’ information is of vital importance. We might be tempted to say that the semantic defines the correct meaning, while the pragmatic supplies the proper or appropriate meaning. The findings of the present study take us further, for they suggest that no such division is sustainable. ‘Correct, but inappropriate’ may be meaningful in correcting a student’s paper, but it is meaningless in a communicative act.

Pragmatics, a relatively new area of linguistics, may be defined as the recognition that there is no linguistic meaning outside of usage. It thus attempts to describe how people use language, and the relationship between a language and its users. Pragmatics has anticipated and pointed the way to many of the issues which are of major importance to lexicography today, as it was rightly said almost thirty years ago: ‘Well-formed sentences produced by native speakers are mostly ambiguous when taken out of context’ (*Corder* 1981:39). We must always ask what the context of any sentence is. Ask a native speaker for the meaning of any word, and the usual response is: ‘But you must tell me the sentence (or context) in which it’s used.’ What happens to the ‘proper’ meaning of a sentence when that sentence, lexically and syntactically unchanged, has changed its context? Is there in fact any residual meaning at all? Lexicography has traditionally been based on the fiction that a word in isolation has a fixed meaning.

Yet every lexicographer would agree that, because of the differences in conventions and cultures between any two languages, bilingual learner’s dictionaries need to provide some ‘pragmatic’ information to facilitate understanding. A word has no proper meaning unless it is placed in context; the illustrative phrases and sentences bring the word to semantic life by setting out an appropriate context. However, there has been no theoretical basis for the distinction between the semantic and the pragmatic; therefore there has been no systematic application of pragmatics to lexicography: ‘dictionary compilers have paid little attention to the pragmatic aspect of communication, merely giving unsystematic indications via usage labels’ (*Hartmann & James* 1998:111).

The concept of ‘pragmatic perspective’<sup>1</sup> in learner’s dictionaries is based in the present work on the following assumptions:

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<sup>1</sup> According to Verschueren, the pragmatic perspective focuses on the mega-structure of a language; the understanding of meaning should be based on the ‘pragmatic perspective’.

1. 'Pragmatic' information is of the highest importance and should be thoroughly integrated into lexical definitions, examples, usage notes, usage labels, illustrations and translation 'equivalents';
2. 'Pragmatic' information, such as warns against common errors, and provides cultural, cross-cultural and sociolinguistic information (as well as details about politeness principles, speech act verbs and indexical expressions), is indispensable to illustrate the meaning and use of words;
3. 'Pragmatic' information is where the lexicographer's intentions respond to the user's expectations.

To test these assumptions, this study provides theoretical models and carries out empirical research. The theoretical models are based on the contents of sample words or collocations in the selected dictionaries, while the empirical study uses corpus-based methods and includes six surveys from the users' perspective. For the surveys, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 17.0 (hereafter SPSS 17.0)<sup>2</sup> is the software used for data analysis. The six surveys shed light on lexicographers' views on 'pragmatic' information, and they demonstrate how dictionaries might meet or fail to meet users' expectations.

This study is divided into two parts. Part One concerns theoretical and methodological considerations of 'semantic' and 'pragmatic' information in learner's dictionaries, which includes Chapter One, Chapter Two and Chapter Three. Part Two consists of three chapters concerning the problem of distinguishing between 'semantic' definition and 'pragmatic' information; Chapter Four undertakes a comparative study of the users; in Chapters Five and Six the focus is on the dictionaries.

Chapter One presents some fundamental postulates of the productive and receptive use of learner's dictionaries, and discusses the influence of linguistics and computer technology on the development of lexicography. Some of the major theoretical and practical (not least, economic) problems for bilingual lexicography are outlined and considered; and we look at the usefulness and theoretical coherence of the terms 'semantic' and 'pragmatic'. I argue that the definitions and the information provided in learner's dictionaries should not be regarded as universally valid, but should be adjusted according to the first language of the learners for whom each dictionary is intended.

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<sup>2</sup> SPSS was first released in 1968, and is among the most widely used programme for statistical analysis in the social sciences. SPSS version 17.0, the newest version in 2009, is used for this study.

Chapter Two reviews the lexicographical literature, and summarizes the study of pedagogical lexicography from both an empirical and a theoretical point of view. Some major studies of learner's dictionaries from 1990 to 2008 are reviewed in order to bring out the weaknesses of existing studies and theories of lexicography, and to demonstrate the need for an enhanced pragmatic emphasis in learner's dictionaries.

Chapter Three presents the empirical research methods and the corpus-based evidence that is deployed. It starts with a description of Pilot Study One and Pilot Study Two, concerning the selection of words for testing and the feasibility of the research in the empirical study. On the basis of the findings of Pilot Study One and Two, I present the empirical framework and improvements of the empirical methods in the main empirical study. Pilot Study Three discusses the feasibility and reliability of the particular online survey technology. The results indicate that the available online survey technology is not always suitable. Rather than dropping this section from the publication, I have retained it for the simple reason that it shows something too often overlooked: that there is no such thing as neutral technology. Computer programmes, like dictionaries, represent and give expression to a certain ideology. They are made according to the presuppositions of particular cultures and traditions. This therefore provides some confirmation on the technological level of my argument about the cultural limitations of linguistic and lexicographical theories.

Chapter Four focuses on how and where the user's main needs are provided for in bilingual dictionaries, both English-Chinese and English-Danish. I look for statistical correlations in the data derived from the evaluations of users of English-Chinese dictionaries and those from users of English-Danish dictionaries. SPSS 17.0 is utilized in this chapter to find out how and where the user's main needs are provided for in both English-Chinese and English-Danish dictionaries. In developing the optimum mode for deriving significant statistic results, I introduce parametric and non-parametric statistic tests and discuss the reasons for choosing the appropriate statistics for this research.

Chapters Five and Six investigate elements of 'pragmatic' information in bilingual English-Chinese and English-Danish dictionaries and assess the quality and level of this information. These chapters analyze 'pragmatic' information both statistically and theoretically at several different levels.

Chapter Five provides an overview of the development of bilingual lexicography in China. It discusses the presentation of information in bilingual English-Chinese dictionaries in terms of its cultural and cross-

cultural references, sociolinguistic information, warnings against language errors and contextual features. It closes by discussing the feasibility of 'pragmatic' information at the levels of microstructure and macrostructure. The microstructure refers to those elements that can be thoroughly integrated into what goes below the head-word: definitions, exemplifications, usage notes, usage labels, illustrations and translated equivalents. The macrostructure refers to the way in which the 'frame' or paradigm of each dictionary is constructed, usually on the basis of cognitive, functional or philological views of how to make a bilingual dictionary.

Chapter Six offers a summary of the development of bilingual lexicography in Denmark; it then investigates 'pragmatic' information from the user's perspective in the two tested English-Danish dictionaries. We then shift our perspective to take an overview of the development of bilingual lexicography in China, and to consider how best to present 'pragmatic' information in bilingual English-Chinese dictionaries in terms of cultural information and other problems of context.

Chapter Seven contains the analysis and summary of the major findings in the research and makes its case for a challenge to the hegemonic and globalizing practices of lexicographical principles developed in the English-speaking world.

In preparation for a more systematic and coherent explanation of the framework of a bilingual dictionary, some fundamental postulates that characterize the main elements of approaches to lexicography in both empirical and theoretical perspectives have been introduced. In discussing the major theoretical and practical problems (not least, the economic constraints) for bilingual lexicography, I argue that it is crucial to provide sufficient 'pragmatic' information. This is not possible if one works with a general model that includes all learners of English: for different learners in different parts of the world there is simply too much to explain. However, adequate levels of explanation are achievable if a dictionary is designed for learners with a specific source language. The provision of such information would lead to a shift not only in lexicographical practice but in the theory of lexicography, broadly conceived. We would be working towards a truly global understanding of language and lexicography.





# **PART ONE**

# CHAPTER ONE

## DICTIONARIES AND DEFINITIONS

Dictionaries have different purposes according to their size, their audience, and their kind. In terms of size, a dictionary can aim to present all the recorded words of a language, or to record most of them, or those most often used. In terms of audience, a dictionary can be for general use, or can be directed towards a specific group. Among kinds of dictionaries, there are monolingual and bilingual. A monoglot dictionary can provide a historical record, with a philological and etymological emphasis, or it can offer guidance on contemporary usage. Bilingual dictionaries can be further divided as serving the needs of those proficient in both languages, and those aimed at people proficient in one language that are learning the other. The purposes of dictionaries are unlimited: every user can have her own. But in general one turns to a dictionary either, passively ('decoding'), to learn the meaning of a word, or to learn more about the range and development and phrasal context of a word's meaning, or, actively ('encoding'), to learn how a word can be used, semantically and syntactically, or collocationally.

A dictionary is not a list of words but a double-entry register in which every word is matched by a definition. In compiling a dictionary, a lexicographer must have a sense of the likely users, and the purposes for which those users will be turning to this particular dictionary. The lexicographer's sense of the dictionary's audience includes a 'semantic equivalent' together with indication of word-class. Some dictionaries will provide evidence of the historical record of usage through citation from written sources; others will provide examples of contemporary usage through phrases, whether actual or composed. (The development of corpora over recent decades means that most dictionaries can now rely on actual instances.) A learner's dictionary will aim to discriminate clearly among different meanings of a word, and to illustrate both contextually and collocationally the ways in which a word can be used. Even in these introductory remarks we can see how hard it is to distinguish between a definition and the information that is needed if the learner is to understand and to use the word correctly.

## **1.1 Bilingual Dictionaries: Problems**

Theoretical issues and practical problems — notably, economic factors concerning space (size) and time (deadlines) — are the two main sources of difficulties in bilingual dictionaries. The size and scope of a dictionary have always been the primary practical or economic consideration for lexicographers. The main theoretical problems in bilingual dictionaries have two aspects. First, language anisomorphism: the internal problems specific to any single language and the culture specific to any language. Second, meaning discrimination: into how many senses should a word be divided? No two monolingual dictionaries will agree on this question. The problem is compounded when the lexicographer must mediate between meaning discrimination in two languages.

### **Practical and Economic Problems**

Practical and economic problems cause difficulties not only in obvious practical ways; they also interfere with lexicographical principles. This means that the number of headwords and the number of senses ascribed to each headword can be determined rather by economic than by strictly linguistic factors. The publisher, in order to reduce the cost, has to limit the number of pages in a dictionary; thus fewer sense-discriminations with a limited number of context words (or very concise phrases) are preferred; these restrictions on context words are one explanation for the inadequacy of information in a printed dictionary. There is now an alternative to printed dictionaries. The unprecedented capacities of an electronic dictionary bring many new opportunities to lexicography. Whatever technology can achieve, ought to be achieved. Lexicographers are now confronted with an enormous range of new possibilities, which we hope will be realized. However, digitalization also brings challenges. At present lexicographers in general have limited experience of electronic dictionaries; the format of e-dictionaries is still generally modelled on the principles and possibilities of paper dictionaries. The dictionary of the not very distant future may be unimaginable to lexicographers today.

### **Theoretical Problems: Language Anisomorphism**

Languages are not lexically isomorphic; each language divides the world of things, ideas, emotions, and everything else, into different lexical sets. The term isomorphism describes a one-to-one correspondence between the elements of two sets. The word derives from the Greek *iso*,

meaning ‘equal’, and *morphosis*, meaning ‘form’ or ‘shape’. Isomorphism has been used in linguistics to indicate ‘a set of oppositions in one language that could at an abstract level correspond to, or be ‘isomorphic with’, one in another, only the forms by which they are realized being different’ (Matthews 2007). This would be a rare case, and is mentioned only to explain more clearly the contrary, anisomorphism. The anisomorphism of languages has been widely studied by linguists such as Boas, Sapir & Whorf, Hjelmslev and Lyons. Research into linguistic anisomorphism looks at ‘the arbitrary nature of languages with the logical consequence of a different division of semantic fields’ and ‘different distribution of grammatical categories or of compulsory and optional features’ (González-Jover 2006: 215–234).

Language anisomorphism, the mismatch between languages due to their syntactic, grammatical, semantic or social and cultural differences, is foregrounded as a major problem in bilingual dictionaries, for it greatly complicates the presentation of translation ‘equivalents’. Take the word ‘bed’, whose meanings as a noun can range from a piece of furniture in which one sleeps to an area of soil in which flowers or other plants are cultivated. The word for ‘bed’ in any other language does not have precisely this range of semantic discriminations. ‘Plant’ can be something that grows in soil, or it can be a factory or a mechanical installation. The word for plant in another language will not cover these senses. Anisomorphism draws our attention to the impossibility of fitting the set of head-words in a dictionary in one language to the set of head-words in a dictionary in any other language.

The anisomorphism between any two languages (even, say, between languages as close as Danish and Norwegian) will affect the definitions and types of information that can be provided in a bilingual dictionary. Meaning discrimination is already problematic in a monolingual dictionary, and becomes much more so in a bilingual dictionary. Language anisomorphism and meaning discrimination should be matters of central concern to compilers of bilingual learner’s dictionaries, as they are of course major theoretical problems for theorists of lexicography.

Anisomorphism in lexicography was first addressed in 1971 by Zgusta (1971:294) who claimed that the fundamental difficulty in making bilingual dictionaries is ‘caused by the anisomorphism of languages and by other differences between languages’. Explanatory and descriptive equivalents at the level of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations are normally given in order to explain and ‘compensate for’ linguistic anisomorphism. By extension we can talk less precisely of ‘cultural anisomorphism’ which involves what is specific to the culture of the users

of any one language. This accounts for the differences that emerge when cultural groups are compared. For bilingual dictionaries, the presentation of translation ‘equivalents’ will be a huge challenge, because anisomorphism means that there can be no translation equivalent. Therefore, the better solution for anisomorphism is the provision of both literal translation and transliteration supplemented by pragmatic and cultural explanations. The sentence ‘She put the plants in the bed’ is a sentence that becomes ambiguous when taken out of context. To translate this one needs to find the word in the target language for plants as organisms and the word for *bed* as in ‘flower-bed’, thus discriminating the senses of both these English words in a way that is anisomorphic with any other language. A learner of English needs to understand both ‘She put the plants in the bed.’ and ‘She was so busy at work that she went to bed at the plant’. Obviously both *bed* and *plant* will need to be translated into two different words if these sentences are to be understood; yet the learners must also understand that in English it is the same word that is used in these different senses.

### **Theoretical Problems: Meaning Discrimination**

The best way to handle meaning discrimination in any given dictionary should be determined by the kind of use for which the dictionary is intended.

—*Iannucci* 1957: 272

The level and the extent of meaning discrimination are mainly determined by practical and economic considerations. However, once this is established, the lexicographer is free to arrange meaning discrimination according to principles and theories. Meaning discrimination is visible to the user of a monolingual dictionary as ‘the division inside a dictionary entry of distinct senses of a word or phrase’ (*Hartmann & James* 1998: 125). Each sub-sense may be marked not only with a sense number, but by additional means. In a bilingual dictionary, each of these senses will normally (on account of anisomorphism) be given different translation ‘equivalents’. In 1957 (before anisomorphism had been introduced into lexicography), *Iannucci* studied meaning discrimination in bilingual dictionaries. According to his study, meaning discrimination is ‘handled very inadequately and inconsistently’ in bilingual dictionaries. *Iannucci* argues that meaning discrimination belongs primarily to the word in the source language, and therefore, its different senses should be laid out in full before the user comes to the different words in the target language. He

further suggests that mono-directional bilingual dictionaries should provide ‘meaning discrimination only on the native-foreign side’ while ‘the foreign-native side can omit meaning discrimination altogether’ (Iannucci 1957:272-281).

In 1977, Al-Kasimi stressed the importance of meaning discrimination for a bilingual dictionary and strongly recommended that a bilingual dictionary should ‘provide meaning discriminations which enable the user to select the appropriate equivalents or the proper sense of an equivalent’ (Al-Kasimi 1977: 68). He suggests that meaning discrimination should be provided both ‘systematically’ and ‘consistently’, even though the term anisomorphism indicates precisely an absence of either system or consistency.

Meaning discrimination is obviously necessary whenever the word in the source language is polysemous. By definition, a polysemous word has more than one sense, and each of several senses may have a different translation equivalent. In the Oxford English Dictionary we find an example of an early use of the word ‘polysemy’: ‘1930 *Soc. Pure Eng. Tract* XXXIV. Even the names of concrete things are nearly always polysemic, though this may not be perceptible until we compare them with corresponding words in other languages. The word *leg*, for instance, may be applied to the supports of a table or chair, and the legs of an insect in English, but not in French. As we can see, polysemy identifies the same set of problems that would subsequently be addressed through the term anisomorphism. These two words are used so frequently in lexicographical studies (and in linguistics) that it is worth discriminating between their own senses. Most words have more than one meaning and are therefore polysemous. It is especially interesting that the writer in 1930 (cited by the OED) notes that polysemy is often unnoticed until we try to translate a word into another language: polysemy in the words of one language becomes salient precisely as a consequence of anisomorphism between two languages. If I translate ‘leg’ into Danish (rather than into French), I can say *ben* and mean both a part of the human anatomy and the support of a chair. Both English ‘leg’ and Danish *ben* are polysemous, and they are both polysemous (at least in these two senses) in the same way. Thus we can say that while ‘leg’ and *ben* are both polysemous, they are not (in these two senses) anisomorphic. By contrast ‘leg’ and *jambe* (French) are both polysemous and anisomorphic; both ‘leg’ and *jambe* have more than one sense, but *jambe* cannot be used for the support of a chair.

In Chinese, many words (if not almost all, as in English and most languages) are polysemous. But here the word ‘word’ is exposed as problematic through the anisomorphism of English and Chinese. For a