USER-FRIENDLINESS IN SPECIALIZED BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES

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A*bstract: This paper deals with the notion of user-friendliness in specialized bilingual dictionaries with a special emphasis on one target group of potential dictionary users, namely layman translators. It discusses the needs of translators with regard to the kind of information items provided in dictionary articles and touches upon the issue of lexicographical presentation. Theoretical considerations are accompanied by references to English-Polish dictionaries of computer science.*
Key words: *bilingual dictionary, specialized dictionary, translator, user-friendliness*

1. INTRODUCTION

Computer specialists frequently complain about the bad quality of translations into Polish in their field, and point to the fact that many publications are translated by qualified translators who, however, lack knowledge of the field in question. Two questions arise in this connection. Is it impossible for a qualified layman translator to produce a satisfactory target language text in a technical field if the target language is also his native language, or do the existing dictionaries not meet translators' requirements? This paper is an attempt to discuss an answer to these questions by highlighting aspects that contribute to the issue, though it does not fully answer them.

The dictionaries under consideration were selected by means of a computer search from the library collection of the Technical University of Rzeszów, Poland, under the subject heading: 'English-Polish dictionary – computer science'. In order to limit the number of publications found, only general dictionaries of computer science were subjected to analysis, i.e. those not restricted to any particular sister discipline or subfield. Moreover, due to the

rapid development of the discipline in question, only dictionaries issued after 1990 were taken into consideration. What is more, in the course of preliminary examination, it turned out that only one dictionary, namely *Słownik Informatyczny angielsko-polski* by A. Marciniak and M. Jankowski (SIA-P), was compiled with translators, among others, as the target group in mind. Other dictionaries are, according to the preface information, addressed to computer science experts and are primarily intended for text reception. Consequently, the problem in question is discussed mainly in connection with this particular dictionary, whereas others are referred to only occasionally.

2. DICTIONARIES AND TRANSLATORS

The notion of user-friendliness came to the attention of lexicographers only recently. Piotrowski (1994:31) defines it as 'the adjustment of dictionaries to their users', adding that 'to make a dictionary more user-friendly it is imperative to know who the users are and what they use dictionaries for'. To provide a satisfactory answer to the first question, it is by no means enough to state that the users are translators; further investigation of their skills is indispensable.

Translators can be assumed to possess a good knowledge of both foreign and native language. However, these two skills combined with knowledge of translation techniques will not ensure the understanding of a specialized text and its proper rendering in the target language. To produce an adequate translation in a technical field, it is essential to be familiar with both the lexicon used to deal with it and its subject matter. As for the lexicon, there are several competing theories concerning the relationship between general and specialized languages, often referred to as languages for special purposes (LSP). However, for the purposes of this paper it is enough to say that, although LSP shares many characteristics with a given general language, it is also distinguished from it by specific features.

The importance of knowledge of the subject matter is stressed by Bergenholtz and Tarp (1995), who divide potential users of specialized dictionaries into four categories on the basis of a distinction between linguistic and encyclopaedic competence. By competence they mean fluency in a foreign language and knowledge of the subject field respectively. Thus, translators are characterized by a high level of linguistic competence, but they can be either experts or laymen as far as the subject matter is concerned. However, as Burkhanov (2003:134) claims, 'specialisation [expert knowledge of subject matter] is feasible only when the translator is employed full-time at a (…) company (…). Specialisation in a particular domain seems to be predominantly out of the question in the case of free-lance translators'.

Consequently, qualified translators are rarely experts in any field of technology and rely to a great extent on lexicographic reference works.

To sum up this short presentation of the user profile, a vast number of translators in Poland dealing with texts in computer science are characterized by a fluent knowledge of general language and a lack of subject field knowledge. Thus, an ideal dictionary first of all has to account for features specific to the LSP in question, and secondly present expert knowledge.

The most striking feature peculiar to each LSP is its lexicon, often referred to as 'terminology'. As far as the language of computer science is concerned, it is, as in any other technical discipline, at least to some extent culture-independent and strives at standardisation. Thus, theoretically there should be a nearly one-to-one correspondence between the units of English and Polish. However, rapid development of the discipline results in uncontrolled, constant enrichment of its specialized terminology. In consequence, several Polish-language units may exist simultaneously as equivalents of one English lexical unit, and vice versa. On the part of translators, this phenomenon necessitates the specification of relevant information in dictionary articles. First of all, in the case of synonyms, translators need help with regard to the choices they have to make from among them. This problem is satisfactorily dealt with in SIA-P. Synonyms are separated by commas, and, as the authors explain in the preface, the first item provided is recommended and is, if possible, consistent with the Polish Standard. If there was no official standard, the authors consulted computer professionals. If no item is favoured, presentation of all existing translational equivalents accompanied by statistical information on the frequency of their occurrence could additionally serve another purpose, namely facilitation of the standardization process.

Some English terms have no Polish equivalent. In SIA-P, they are accompanied by an explanatory note. Such a note is perfect for text reception, but it is certainly not sufficient for text translation. With a plain note, the translator is left at a loss as to how to render the term in the Polish text. Thus, co-operation between dictionary authors and terminologists seems essential in order to coin an equivalent expression rather than leaving the term without a translation. Homonyms are also a stumbling block for a translator. If, as it is the case in SIA-P, they are only separated by lexicographical indicators, but no further explanation follows, the translator has to refer to other sources for the relevant information. Here, again, a short note could help.

With regard to the lexicon, another information item to be included in dictionary articles are typical word combinations, i.e. collocations. These semi-fixed expressions are

often restricted to LSP only, and thus a layman translator may not be acquainted with them. Strangely enough, the presence of collocations in general-language dictionaries is frequently stressed, whereas authors of specialized dictionaries seem to forget about this part of the lexicon. What is missing in the dictionaries examined are typical noun-verb or noun-adjective combinations. These could be introduced into articles by means of definitions accompanying terms or short citations from specialized literature. Both definitions and citations can be found in *Słownik Komputerów i Internetu* by Collin. However, they are in English, and consequently, in accordance with the preface information, they are of more assistance for language teaching than for translating. In the case of dictionaries intended for translation into Polish, it seems advisable to provide definitions or citations in Polish.

As Grucza (1992:7-27) stresses, LSPs are also distinguished by a specific grammar and a certain style. Consequently, it is not sufficient to know the relevant lexicon in order to produce an adequate translation. As for grammar, it differs from general language in the frequency of certain constructions, and a qualified translator may be expected to know at least the general grammar rules which are binding for technical texts. Nevertheless, short citations from specialized literature could serve as exemplary texts in this respect as well. With regard to grammar, SIA-P provides grammatical labels indicating the parts of speech that accompany English terms. This piece of information seems to be superficial for a translator. As far as stylistic features of the LSP in question are concerned, it must be noted that computers have entered nearly every domain of our life. Thus, they are largely used not only for professional activities of many kinds, but also by laymen for individual entertainment. Consequently, within this particular LSP, we can distinguish formal as well as colloquial styles with a very rich vocabulary. However, in none of the examined dictionaries can any indication of register be found. This can partly be attributed to the fact that written translations will most often be characterized by formal style. However, when translating an article for a teenagers' magazine, the translator will frequently encounter colloquial expressions.

Translators may also be occasionally requested to act as interpreters. In this case, in addition to the above mentioned items of information, they will be expected to know the correct pronunciation. In general, LSPs correspond in phonological features to the general language of the given community. The Polish language of computer science, however, displays some peculiarities in this respect. They result from a specific method of forming terms, most of which are different kinds of loan-words. With regard to etymology, four types of computer terms can be distinguished in Polish. These are terms of Polish origin, translations from English, English terms with Polish spelling and, terms with the English

spelling preserved (Sikorski 1996). Of these four groups, the last one, i.e. terms with original or nearly original English spelling, is highly problematic. Some of terms in this group are pronounced with a sound pattern similar to the English one, whereas others are given a typically Polish pronunciation. Thus, transcriptions of selected Polish terms provided in relevant dictionary articles would first of all fulfil interpreters' needs, and what is more, they could contribute to standardization as well. In SIA-P, transcriptions are provided, but they refer to English terms. None of the dictionaries includes transcriptions of Polish loan-word-terms.

I have only dealt with data of linguistic relevance up to now. However, according to the aforementioned division between linguistic and encyclopaedic competence, another issue to be discussed is the presentation of subject knowledge. Traditionally, this type of information is furnished by encyclopaedias. However, the inclusion of encyclopaedic information to specialized dictionaries would certainly be appreciated by a number of translators. There are different forms of introducing encyclopaedic information into dictionaries. It is most frequently done by means of definitions referring to separate articles. This arrangement has the advantage of reducing the access time to a necessary information item. SIA-P provides brief comments of chosen terms in brackets, which is mostly a further specification of the term which is necessary for understanding it. However, it does not furnish any definitions regarding meaning, and this is a considerable drawback from a translator's point of view. Definitions of this type can be found in the Collin's dictionary. They are provided in English, but what matters to the translator is their content, not their language, and consequently, the translator's needs are fully satisfied. Encyclopaedic information can also be presented by means of drawings, diagrams or tables, either within individual entries or in a separate dictionary component. In the Collin's and Heyduk's dictionaries drawings and tables form a separate component at the end of dictionary. Other dictionaries do not present information in this way at all.

At this point, it seems essential to mention an alternative form of lemma arrangement, namely one which follows a system based on mutual relationships between concepts rather than on the alphabet. Dictionaries with this kind of macrostructure are called ideographic (Burkhanov 1999), but they are also referred to as systematic or thematic. This type of presentation has the advantage of enabling a holistic view of the hierarchical structure of terms within the discipline, and it thus enhances understanding of interdependencies and processes. However, information in a dictionary with purely conceptual classification of the lexicon would have little, if any, accessibility especially for a layman translator. In order to

reduce this inconvenience, an alphabetical list of all items could be added to the main body of the dictionary, thus serving as a starting point for a search. Ideally, lemmata presented in an ideographic dictionary should at the same time not be deprived of exhaustive linguistic information. Unfortunately, such reference works do not exist in Polish lexicographical practice.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The above analysis has served to highlight the needs of translators regarding specialized dictionaries for translation from the foreign language into the mother tongue of the translator. As has been proved, none of the existing dictionaries can be considered fully satisfactory. Strangely enough it is the Collin's dictionary rather than the SIA-P by Marciniak that can be considered more translator-friendly, mostly due to definitions accompanying translational equivalents. At the end, please let me present two exemplary articles referring to the same term in both dictionaries:

addressability [transcription] adresowalność (Marciniak)

addressability [transcription] *noun* the control available over pixels on screen **adresowalność** (Collin)

To sum up, an ideal specialized dictionary for a qualified layman translator still remains wishful thinking and should be a matter for further research. A detailed specification of the lexicographical parameters of a user-friendly bilingual specialized dictionary is beyond the scope of the present paper and merits a special study of its own.

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