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A 3-Part, Fully Trilingual Tri-Directional Dictionary

Abstract

More people are bilingual today than is often assumed. With the spread of English as the universal lingua franca, those bilinguals for whom English is not one of their two languages, will become trilinguals. A science of trilingualism is emerging, with special emphasis on third language acquisition and use. Lexicographers must give thought to the kind of dictionaries that are required by trilinguals. This paper describes some trilingual dictionaries and presents a new theory about trilingual lexicography.

1. The extent of bilingualism

It is often not realised how many people in the world today are bilingual. Bilingual may refer to those who use or understand two languages, with regard to any of the four linguistic skills: speaking, listening, reading or writing. Either of the languages may be a first language, or a second or foreign language, acquired at home, at school, or in any other way.

The reasons for this high occurrence of bilingualism are many and varied. For example, school education almost always includes the learning of a second language. EC nationals are encouraged to learn languages of EC member states. Members of minority groups are bilingual, in so far as they need to learn the language of their country, in addition to their own language. Inhabitants of former colonies would often learn the language of their administrators, in addition to their mother tongue. Most inhabitants of the former USSR, except for the Russian Republic, are bilingual, as they speak Russian in addition to their own national language. Immigrants and refugees must learn the language of their new country. Also, in some countries members of the majority are required to learn the language of the minority. For example, Finns learn Swedish even though it is spoken by only 5.5% of the population. English-speaking Canadians are required to learn French, and the learning of Arabic by Hebrew-speaking Israelis is common. Today many people want to learn the language of their neighbours, or even of distant countries, in order to travel or study abroad. And, as international barriers become less restrictive, the new media and business culture encourage more and more people to use a second language.

2. The global expansion of English

It is estimated that 300 to 400 million people throughout the world are currently learning English as the main international language for communication or for personal use, and that this figure will increase to one billion at the end of this decade. The status of English as the most important language for international use is undisputed. Before long every child in the world, as well as many adults, will be learning English. This will make all those bilinguals (for whom English is not one of their two languages) – trilinguals. Trilingualism concerns us here only in as much as it is related to lexicography.

3. The lexicographical needs of trilinguals

3.1. The new awareness of trilingualism

The first conference on trilingualism was held in 1993 at the University of Haifa in Israel. One of the topics discussed was trilingual lexicography, and out of this discussion grew a theory for a fully trilingual dictionary.

3.2. Trilingual lexicography

Since trilinguals may want to look up words in any one of three languages, they require dictionaries containing three word lists. As they may want to translate from any one of these three languages, each word listed must have a translation in each of the other two languages. Thus, there must be three separate sections to be fully trilingual. It is not enough that the translation in each language be a faithful equivalent of the particular meaning of the headword: each of the translations of a given headword must also be an accurate translation of each other. This may be diagrammatically represented by three triangles, each with one of the three languages at its apex, and the remaining two at its base. For example, a fully trilingual dictionary for Russian, Ukrainian and English can be diagrammatically represented as follows:



Fig.1 A fully trilingual English–Russian–Ukrainian dictionary represented diagrammatically

Notice that the arrow connecting the source language (the entry word) with each of the translations is one-way, whereas the arrow connecting the two translated languages is two-directional, as the translations must be compatible with each other. This means that each entry must be compiled by a trilingual lexicographer, not by two separate bilingual lexicographers. An actual case is described in 4.1.

4. Some approaches to trilingual dictionaries

4.1 One attempt at such a dictionary was published in Israel in 1993 by Kernerman Publishing and Lonnie Kahn: *Oxford Elementary Dictionary English–English–Hebrew–Russian*, having 10,000 words. It was intended to serve the needs of Russian immigrants in Israel, who are faced with the necessity of learning two foreign languages simultaneously: Hebrew, the language of Israel, and English, which is taught in Israeli schools as the first foreign language. The dictionary is based on *Oxford Elementary Learner's Dictionary of English*, and is thus an English encoding dictionary. An extract from the dictionary is shown in Appendix 1.

Four types of information are provided in the English text: headword, part-of-speech, definition and example of usage. The Hebrew and Russian texts are translations of the headword. The other three components of the English text are not translated. It is interesting to note that when the material for this dictionary was in preparation, the Hebrew translation was first done by an English–Hebrew lexicographer, and the Russian by an English–Russian lexicographer. It was then found that the Hebrew and Russian translations were not always compatible, so that it became necessary to engage an editor who was competent in all three languages to modify some of the translations.

4.2 A more serious trilingual dictionary is *Super Dictionary*, published in Israel in 1993 by AD Publishing. It has 50,000 words and a large number of appendixes (235 out of almost 1,000 pages). It is a Hebrew learner's dictionary, giving in Hebrew the headword, part-of-speech, definition, example of usage and inflexions, with brief translations of the entry word in English and Russian. The other components of the Hebrew text are not translated. It is intended for Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel who are learning Hebrew and English. An extract is reproduced in Appendix 2.

4.3 Trilingual glossaries can frequently be found in tourist guides, phrase books, and in technical and professional terminology lists. They are usually simple translating vocabularies, such as the extract reproduced in Appendix 3, taken from *Guide de Conversation Français–Catalan–Espagnol*, published in Spain in 1992 by Ediciones de la Magrana.

5. A first attempt

In October 1993 preparations were made to compile the first fully trilingual dictionary. The project, initiated by Kernerman Publishing, was to be carried out under the auspices of the Kharkov Polytechnic Institute and Kharkov Lexicographic Society in the Ukraine. The first stage planned was the Russian–Ukrainian–English section, which was to contain some 25,000 headwords. This was to be a prelude to a fully trilingual three–part 60,000 headword dictionary, whose compilation would have needed several years. Its intended market was Ukrainians living in their own independent state, most of whom are more fluent in Russian than in Ukrainian.

The original purpose of this paper was to report and discuss the progress of that project, which, by now, should have been under way for almost one year. Unfortunately, this project has been postponed.

6. The alternative

However, a different project was begun this year in the Ukraine – not a fully trilingual dictionary, but one section of such a dictionary. This particular variation is not English–Ukrainian–Russian, but English–English–Ukrainian–Russian. Its base is English–English, and it is taken from *Chambers Concise Usage Dictionary* (an English learner’s dictionary). Its potential market is speakers of Ukrainian and/or Russian who are learning English. It is a wholly commercial venture, to be published by OKO Publishing House in the Ukraine, and is in fact part of the Kernerman Semi–Bilingual Dictionaries series, even though a third language (Russian) is being added. It is patterned structurally after OED–EEHR, differing mainly in size. It has 25,000 entries and is intended for secondary and tertiary school students, and more advanced users.

7. Multi–language dictionaries and the problem of space

Because of the great amount of space required, multi–language dictionaries usually do not provide more than the headword, and a brief translation into each of the other languages. Their use and reliability are limited, as they usually give just one sense per headword, and the translation may be ambiguous, inaccurate or just misleading. Appendix 4 has an extract from *Europa Wörterbuch Simultan Dictionary, Deutsch–Englisch–Französisch–Spanisch–Italienisch*, published in 1991 by Eurobooks.

Harrap’s Five Language Dictionary, English–French–German–Italian–Spanish, published in 1991, although based on the one–to–one translation method, incorporates a clever space–saving device (see Appendix 5). Whereas other multilingual dictionaries have headwords listed in only one of the languages contained therein, Harrap’s FLD has one alphabetical wordlist containing all the words in all five languages. This makes for an

exceedingly long word list, but the user does not have to look first for the desired language section and then for the headword. Thus there is one combined list for all five languages. This method is possible in this particular case, as all five languages employ the same Roman alphabet. It is not possible for dictionaries of languages that have different alphabets.

A combined Russian-Ukrainian word list incorporating the concept employed in Harrap's FLD was planned for the tri-directional dictionary whose compilation was temporarily postponed. This would have been possible, since two of the three languages – Russian and Ukrainian – use the same, Cyrillic alphabet. That would have produced a trilingual dictionary with not three, but two word lists.

It is clear that this essay deals with a paper-based technology and the subsequent restrictions imposed by the nature of printed books, mainly the problem of space. This can be overcome only by the use of electronic means. CD ROMs, computers and hand-held sets can contain a word list for each language. The ultimate in multilingual dictionaries is the CD ROM, which contains, at present, 13 languages, and in which each word list can be accessed separately. (Appendix 6)

References

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- Chambers Concise Usage Dictionary*. 1985. Edinburgh: W&R Chambers.
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- Harrap's Five Language Dictionary, English-French-German-Italian-Spanish*. 1991. London: Harrap Books.

Appendixes

refreshments *n.* snack; food or drink that you can buy in a public place: *We had refreshments in the interval.*

закуска ארוחה קלה; כיבוד קל

refrigerator *n.* cold cupboard for food.

холодильник מקרר

refuge *n.* place where you are safe from danger, trouble, etc.

убежище מקלט; מפלט

take refuge from something. go to a safe place to get away from something: *The bird took refuge from the cat in the tree.*

находить убежище למצוא מחסה מפני

refugee *n.* someone who is running away from danger and trying to find a new, safe home.

беженец; эмигрант פליט

региональный אזורי

register¹ *n.* list of names, etc.: *a register of voters.*

список; реестр מרשם; רשימה

register² *v.* 1 put a name, etc. on a list: *New guests must register in the hotel book.*

регистрировать(ся) לרשום; להירשם

2 point to a number: *It was so hot that the thermometer registered 40°C.*

показывать להראות

3 send a letter or parcel by special post so that you will get money back if it is lost.

посылать заказной почтой לשלוח בדואר רשום

registration *n.*

регистрация הרשמה; רישום

Appendix 1: Extract from *Oxford Elementary Dictionary, English–English–Hebrew–Russian*

упомянутый מוזכר מוזכרת

mentioned (adj.) שהוזכרו אותו, הוזכר, שנאמר קודם; הביבליוגרפיה מחקרת בסוף הספר. מוזכרת, מוזכרים, מוזכרות

уменьшенный מוזל, מוזל

reduced (adj.) שהורידו את המחיר שלו; הבנדים נמקרו במחירים מוזלים. מוזלת, מוזלים, מוזלות

объявление מודעה, מודעה [מודעות]

advertisement ידיעה או פירסום בעיתון, ברחובות או על לוח מיוחד לך;

ראיתי מודעה בעיתון על קודם מחשבים.

траурное объявление / obituary מודעת אבל

сознание, осведомленность מודעות, מודעות

awareness מה שמודעים לו, כששמים לב למשהו; המודעות שלו לעצמו גדלה, לאחר שלמד פסיכולוגיה.

Appendix 2: Extract from *Super Dictionary, Hebrew–Russian–English*

Dessert	postres f pl	pastre	Dîner (n)	sopar
Desserts et entremets	postres i plats dolços	pastres y platos dulces	Dîner (v)	sopar
Dessin	dibuix	dibujo	Diphérie	diffèria
Dessin animé	dibuixos animats	dibujos animados	Diplôme	diploma m
Destin	destí	destino	Dire	dir
Destinataire	destinatari, -ària	destinatario, -a	Directement	directament
Destination	destinació	destino	Directeur, -trice	director, -a, gerent
Détachant	llevataques	quitamanchas	Discipline sport	modalitat f
Détergent	detergent	detergente	Disciplines alpines	disciplines alpines
Devoir	deure	deber	Discothèque, club	discoteca
Deux	dos, dues	dos	Dispensaire	dispensari
Deux cent	dos-cents, dues-cents	doscientos, -as	Disque	disc
			Disque compact,	compacte,

Appendix 3: Extract from *Guide de Conversation, Français-Catalan-Espagnol*

Deutsch	Englisch	Französisch	Spanisch	Italienisch	Deutsch
höchst	highest, topmost	le plus haut, maximum	el más alto, máximo	il più alto, massimo, supremo	höchst
höchstens	at the most	au maximum	a lo sumo, como máximo	al massimo	höchstens
Höchstgeschwindigkeit f	maximum speed	vitesse / maximum	velocidad / tope	velocità / massima	Höchstgeschwindigkeit f
Höchstleistung f	top performance	rendement m maximum	rendimiento m máximo	rendimento m massimo	Höchstleistung f
Höchststand m	highest level	niveau m maximum	nivel m máximo	livello m massimo	Höchststand m
höchstwahrscheinlich	in all probability	très probablement	muy probablemente	con tutta probabilità	höchstwahrscheinlich
hochverdient	well-deserved	de grand mérite	de gran merito	di gran merito	hochverdient
Hochverrat m	high treason	haute trahison f	alta traición f	alto tradimento m	Hochverrat m

Appendix 4: Extract from *Europa Wörterbuch Simultan Dictionary, Deutsch-Englisch-Französisch-Spanisch-Italienisch*

	D	E	F	I	Es
maestro' (f)	Lehrer m	teacher	professeur m	—	profesor m
maestro' (f)	Meister m	master	maitre m	—	maestro m
magasin' (F)	Geschäft n	shop	—	negozio m	tienda f
magasin' (F)	Laden m	shop	—	negozio m	tienda f
magasin' (F)	Lager n	store	—	magazzino m	farmacén m
magasin d'alimentation' (F)	Lebensmittelgeschäft n	grocer's	—	negozio di alimentari m	tienda de comestibles f
magasin de chaussures' (F)	Schuhgeschäft n	shoeshop	—	negozio di scarpe m	zapateria f

Appendix 5: Extract from *Harrap's Five Language Dictionary, English-French-German-Italian-Spanish*

