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The bilingual learner's dictionary and its uses

R. R. K. HARTMANN

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The bilingual learner's dictionary and its uses

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Zusammenfassung

Mit der immer breiteren Streuung verschiedener Fachzwecke wächst auch das Angebot an Wörterbüchern stark. Dieser Beitrag plädiert für den Typ des Erwerbswörterbuchs und seinen Einsatz in verschiedenen Bereichen des Fremdsprachenunterrichts. Die Ergebnisse eines Forschungsprojektes werden vorgeführt, das die Verwendung des zweisprachigen Wörterbuchs durch britische Deutschlerner untersuchte. Eine umfassende Umfrage unter Schulen und Hochschulen in Südwestengland ergab, daß den Lernenden eine große Zahl von Wörterbüchern zur Verfügung steht; andererseits erhalten sie aber kaum Anweisungen zur Auswahl und zum Gebrauch. Das zweisprachige Wörterbuch wird häufig benutzt, um diverse Informationen nachzuschlagen, vor allem Bedeutungen und grammatikalische Angaben. Weitere empirische Forschungen werden erforderlich sein, um das Erwerbswörterbuch im Inhalt und in der Darbietung zu vervollkommen.

Abstract

The range of available dictionaries has become very wide as more and more distinct purposes are established. This article argues the case for the pedagogical dictionary and its various uses in the context of foreign language learning. It presents the findings of a research project which surveyed the use made of bilingual dictionaries by British learners of German. A questionnaire sent to a large number of schools and colleges in southwest England revealed that learners have a wide choice of dictionaries; however, they receive little guidance on how to select and use them. The bilingual dictionary is consulted frequently for several different types of information, most prominently meaning and grammar. More empirical research is needed before the learner's dictionary can be improved in terms of content and presentation.

Résumé

Les différents domaines d'étude étant devenus de plus en plus nombreux, la gamme des dictionnaires disponibles s'est également étoffée de façon considérable. Le présent article plaide en faveur du dictionnaire de base et de ses différentes utilisations dans le cadre de l'apprentissage de langues étrangères. Il présente les résultats d'un projet de recherche sur l'utilisation des dictionnaires bilingues par des élèves britanniques apprenant l'allemand. Il ressort du questionnaire envoyé à un grand nombre d'écoles et d'établissements d'enseignement supérieur du sud-ouest de l'Angleterre que les élèves se voient proposer un grand choix de dictionnaires, mais qu'ils ne sont guère conseillés quant à la façon de les sélectionner et de s'en servir. Le dictionnaire bilingue est fréquemment consulté pour toute une série d'informations, essentiellement sur le plan de la lexicographie et de la grammaire.

Bilingual dictionaries are not what they used to be. The more ambitious compilations published recently for the major language pairs have introduced a number of features worth noting, for example their comprehensiveness, their coverage of many text genres, their attention to labelling of levels and styles, and their legibility. Most important of all, there has been an increasing awareness of the potential users' likely needs. This article will explore whether and to what extent the general, undifferentiated dictionary for translation has begun to cater specifically to the requirements of the foreign language learner. Has the pedagogical bilingual dictionary arrived, and what are its roles in developing bilingual skills?

We may want to place our topic in a triple scenario in order to break it down into manageable components, each with its own problems and perspectives. One distinction that I find useful is related to the three basic lexicographical functions of 'recording', 'description' and 'presentation'. Recording or documentation deals with the gathering of a suitable data base or archive of texts; description or processing deals with the analysis and classification of the material collected in terms of such categories as semantics or meaning, syntax or form, and pragmatics or context; presentation or publication deals with the way the information is arranged for the benefit of particular user groups.

Several problems in bilingual dictionary making have been tackled afresh recently, using new perspectives under each of the three headings I have outlined. *Recording* presents problems for the bilingual lexicographer since he has to match vocabulary items from two different linguistic systems. He thus will want to ensure that the samples of language on which his dictionary is based cover corresponding register ranges. Contrastive textology (cf. Hartmann 1980) may offer a suitable framework for assessing a corpus of 'parallel texts'. *Description* poses the difficult problem of how the editor can establish equivalence between lexical units from often very divergent language pairs. The difficulties are compounded by various interlingual and intercultural factors some of which have not been adequately studied.

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