CHAPTER FIVE

USES AND USERS OF THE BILINGUAL DICTIONARY

5.0 Introduction

There are numerous types of dictionaries and they are used by millions of people for various purposes. Dictionaries generally have a good image. Almost everyone learning a second or foreign language owns one or more dictionaries. It seems to be a common generalized notion that bilingual dictionaries are generally employed in the initial stages of language learning. The learner then moves on to learners' and then other unabridged monolingual dictionaries. Baxter (1980: 325-336) concludes that prolonged dependency on bilingual dictionaries probably tends to retard the development of second language proficiency. While this may be true, it is also true to say that it is not possible to produce any dictionary that will meet all the needs of all its users. In the terms used by Sarcevic (1989: 277-291) a useful dictionary is one that is "user reliable" and "user-friendly" - be it a bilingual or any other dictionary.

5.1 Uses of the Bilingual Dictionary

Among the many functions that a bilingual dictionary can have, the following are the most well-known (even for monolingual dictionaries): (1) for translation, (2) for second language or foreign language learning; (3) to settle spelling and meaning matters; (4) to help the linguistically insecure in their choice of words; and (5) to guide pronunciation.

Malone (1967: 111) states that translation is the main function of a bilingual dictionary. "A bilingual dictionary, then may be called a two way translation aid".

For his fifth postulate for lexicography, Hartmann states that

> "Ultimately all dictionaries are motivated by and judged against the lexical needs of the language user whom they serve" (1983: 5).

He adds that codifying usage is an important but not the chief objective of dictionaries. Other situations which make people turn to dictionaries are definition and range of meanings of words, uncertainties in spelling and pronunciation, curiosity about etymology of the word or expression and the search for suitable synonyms and for translation purposes.

In the long history of lexicography questions about purposes of dictionaries have been asked again and again. In 1747, Samuel Johnson gave this reply:

> "The value of a work must be estimated by its use. It is not enough that a dictionary delights the critic, unless at the same time it instructs the learner".

Over a century (1854) later Jacob Grimm had this to say:

> "What is a dictionary for? According to its all-embracing generality it must be given a great, wide purpose".

One of the earliest studies on dictionary image was carried out by Randolf Quirk and reported in 1972. One of the findings was that

dictionaries were used for looking up meanings and synonyms and checking spellings.

Later studies on dictionary use carried out by Quirk (1974: 154) and Jackson (1988: 194) show that college students consulted dictionaries (monolingual in these cases) mainly for meanings and checking spellings. Quirk remarks that "some of the dictionary features which seem of particular centrality to lexicographers are decidedly peripheral to the ordinary user" (1974: 154). Jackson's study showed that a third reason for looking up a dictionary was to see if a word exists. Users had little interest in pronunciation, parts of speech and etymology. A dictionary is therefore viewed as the arbiter and authority of all matters of vocabulary and vocabulary usage.

Jackson, (1988: 204-205) in a survey of the prefaces and front matter of some current monolingual dictionaries found that the general emphasis of dictionary writers and editors is on `reflecting' and `surveying' and that the editors intend their dictionaries to provide a `guide' or `aid' to the user, not a prescription. Dictionary writers and editors appear to view their works quite differently from dictionary users. Dictionary writers emphasize "on making a record of the language, reflecting its variety and richness", being "catholic and broadminded" in their policy of inclusion, but at the same time providing "guidance", presumably by appropriate labeling or usage notes for the linguistically insecure (Jackson 1988: 205). Today most dictionaries do not claim prescriptivity. Their aim is to describe the language as it is used. Using the analogy of driving etiqutte, Jackson says that "dictionaries attempt

to record and describe the variety of linguistic manners that exist, rather than be manuals of linguistic etiquette". (Jackson 1988: 206).

5.2 The Users of the Bilingual Dictionary

Over the centuries, many aspects of dictionary writing have changed. One thing, however remains the same: the shape of the dictionary is determined by the practical needs of the user (Osselton : 1983: 21). The user is as much as the linguist or lexicographer, entitled to his vision of what a dictionary should be. Is the dictionary viewed as lists of words and meanings or as a scholarly systematic record of language or languages? Does the dictionary have an authouritarian/ normative function or a descriptive/realistic function? These are questions a user might want to ask.

Kipfer (1984:6) says that a dictionary user expects from a dictionary correct spelling and pronunciation, definitions and parts of speech. The user would expect (being familiar with dictionary organization) that the first sense given is the most current (which though, may not always be the case). Some dictionary users do expect the history of a given word.

Jackson (1988:198-199) states that dictionaries in general contain a vast amount of information which is of little use to a majority of the users. Such information includes grammatical information (part of speech labels), etymology and pronunciation. He imputes that a large number of "common words" could be dispensed with. It is possible that most users of dictionaries lack the abilities for extracting information from dictionaries. Jackson (Ibid: 199) adds that the user's expectations are of meaning and

spelling in dictionaries. Bejoint (1981: 215) notes that for the students in his study "the dictionary is basically an inventory of words with glosses". He proposes that reference skill for dictionary use must be taught.

It is important to ask if a user of a bilingual dictionary should apply introspective processes for getting at the meanings of words or intuit them. Introspection would take more time as the user has to question the use of the word for the information he needs. Introspection is subjective, partial and unreliable. To intuit the meaning of a word the user has to evaluate the evidence and filter out the irrelevant meanings.

Several factors could affect the learner's use of a bilingual dictionary. Among them are the following: (1) the culture specificity of the vocabulary; (2) mother tongue-foreign language interference; (3) the foreign language learner's dictionary use habits and preference and (4) implications of making interlingual contrasts. (Tomasxzyk, 1983: 43-45).

Hartmann (1983: 3-11) notes that dictionaries are motivated and judged against the lexical needs of the user on one hand, and related to linguistic theories in general and theories of lexical semantics in particular, on the other. The user of a dictionary would want an appropriate semantic profile of a word so that s/he will be able to operate the words at different levels and interact words in and across levels. An appropriate semantic profile for a bilingual dictionary would include (a) reference to phonology. (b) grammar; (c) componential semantics (meaning), (d) lexical collocation, and (e) association with communicative contexts and with cultural and

ideological codes. Such associations and connotations are measured by the semantic space of the lexical item.

Evans (1969: 212-223) speaking from the point of view of the ordinary user and his needs states:

> "He wants - and has a right to - the truth, the full truth. And the full truth about any language..... is that there are many areas in which certainty is impossible and simplification is misleading".

It has been said (Scerba: 1936) that every language pair needs four dictionaries because each of the languages needs an encoding and a decoding dictionary. While this may be theoretically efficient, it would not be practical for the user of such dictionaries. Economic reasons would prevent him from acquiring such dictionary types.

Hartmann (1983: 10-11) proposed that when user's needs are to be assessed, four factors have to be taken into account: (a) information, (b) operations, (i.e. the activities and skills that users rely on when they perform reading, writing and translating tasks); (c) the users themselves and (d), what they want to achieve (i.e. learning, explaining, analysing and playing). The four factors can be diagramatised as seen below :

INFORMATION	OPERATIONS
meanings/synonyms pronunciation/syntax spelling/etymology names/facts etc.	finding meanings finding words translating etc.
USERS	**PURPOSES**
child pupil/trainee teacher/critic scientist/secretary etc	extending knowledge of the mother tongue learning a foreign language playing word games composing a report reading/decoding F L texts etc

Figure 5-1 The factors of dictionary use

(From: Hartmann 1983: 11)

Based on the factors above a generalized Input-Output model of dictionary use could look something like that shown in Fig 5-2 below:

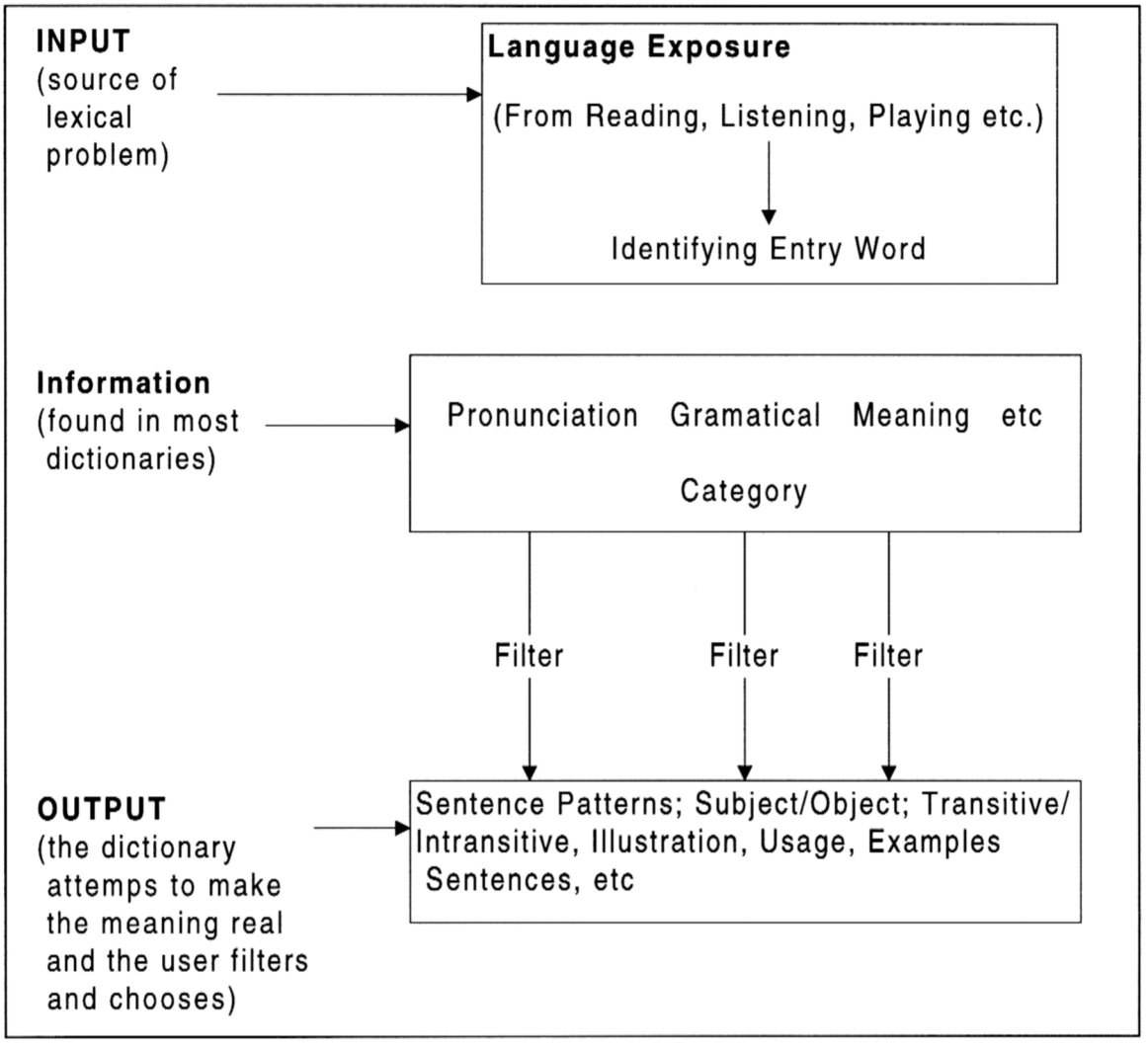

Figure 5-2: A generalized input-output model of dictionary use.

Such a simplified model suggests that the relationship between a dictionary and its users is not a static one but a dynamic one. To get the most out of a dictionary, the user has to understand the dictionary as much as the lexicographer or editor has to understand the needs of the users in

general. One tends to agree with Sapir when he said that "The linguistic student should never make the mistake of identifying a language with its dictionary" (1930: 234). It can also be agreed that learning language from a dictionary is one of the ways of language learning.

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