Elene Khuskivadze

"CONTROLLED VOCABULARY" AND ISSUES CONCERNING THE COMPILATION OF AN ENGLISH GEORGIAN LEARNER'S DICTIONARY

Abstract

The aim of the article is to represent the study that explores the necessity of the controlled vocabulary in a bilingual English-Georgian learner's dictionary and the necessity of the reduction of polysemantic meanings of a word based on the frequency principle in an English – Georgian learner's dictionary.

It is necessary to combine the two main methodologies of lexicography: on the one hand, to get acquainted with the methodology of learner's lexicography and on the other hand to study the needs of the dictionary users. An experiment was planned and conducted with the participation of school students, which revealed interesting results.

Thus, the study identified the need to create an English-Georgian learner's dictionary tailored for students' needs.

Keywords: learner's dictionary, controlled vocabulary, polysemantic meanings.

Introduction

Along with the traditional fields of lexicography such as comprehensive explanatory dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, terminological dictionaries, etc., a new direction - learners' lexicography - emerged in the second half of the 20th century (Cowie, 2007). The emergence of this direction was driven by the increasing popularity of the English language teaching (ELT)

around the world. Michael West, Harold Palmer, and Albert Hornby helped design and develop the learners' lexicography. The "Research Institute for the Teaching of the English Language", created in Tokyo in the 20s of the 20th century, played a major role in the development of the genre of the learners' lexicography. In 1927, the Institute was commissioned to create a "controlled vocabulary" for the English language, that is, to develop a list of 1,000 - 2000 English words that would enable a language learner to communicate successfully. This acted as the basis for the creation of the first 'controlled vocabulary'. Scientists devised various methods employed while creating lists that would make it easier for children to learn English. Later, the aforementioned scholars came up with the idea to develop new types of learners dictionaries in which word definitions would be based on the controlled vocabulary. This is how the first-generation of learners' dictionaries was born: 1. The New Method English Dictionary (West and Endicott, 1935) 2. A Grammar of English Words (Palmer, 1938) 3. A Beginner's English-Japanese Dictionary (Hornby and Ishikawa, 1940) 4. Idiomatic and Syntactic Dictionary (Hornby, 1942).

For a considerable time, only monolingual explanatory dictionaries were considered to be learner's dictionaries. However, quite recently people working in the education sphere and lexicographers have started talking about the need to develop bilingual learner's dictionaries, as well as about their special role in teaching foreign languages (Margalitadze, 2019: vi). In learner's dictionaries, besides the use of the controlled vocabulary, the second guiding principle is the frequency principle. Such dictionaries usually include the most frequently used words and most commonly actualised meanings of words, idiomatic expressions, and phrasal verbs.

Following the need for bilingual learners' dictionaries which has been emerging recently, we are interested in the following issues:

- Since equivalents of English words are already availabe in Georgian in a bilingual English-Georgian dictionary, is it still necessary to use the controlled vocabulary in illustrative phrases and sentences of an English-Georgian dictionary?

- Is it necessary to simplify word entries in an English-Georgian learner's dictionary and make them less polysemantic than they are in the "Comprehensive English-Georgian Online Dictionary", 2010?

Investigation of these issues through an experiment is the goal of this study. Our experiment falls in the category of the research of dictionary users. The methodology for this type of reasearch was developed in the 1960s and since then has become one of the important areas of theoretical lexicography (Bejoint, 2010).

The Study of the Dictionary users

The aim of the study discussed in this article was to explore the following :

1. Is it necessary to use the controlled vocabulary in a bilingual English-Georgian learner's dictionary?
2. Is it necessary to reduce polysemantic meanings of a word based on the frequency principle in an English-Georgian learner's dictionary?
3. How effective do these principles make a bilingual English-Georgian dictionary for the Georgian learners of English?

While planning the experiment, I partially used the methodology of the Laufer and Hadar experiment and its modified version suggested by Eugene Chen (Laufer & Hadar, 1997; Chen, 2007). However, there is one principal difference between the experiment conducted by us and the original methodology. Namely, Laufer and Hadar's research uses one meaning of a polysemantic word based on the fact that the researchers are interested in the efficacy of three types of dictionaries while learning new vocabulary. In our case, we used the whole polysemantic entry of a word, as we were interested in the principle of presenting the information in a learner's dictionary. Our experiment concerns the use of the controlled vocabulary in a bilingual dictionary, as the research of this type has not been conducted before.

Participants of the Experiment: 52 pupils of VIII and IX forms of Tbilisi Public School # 24 (average level of English - Intermediate).

Research process: At the first stage of the research, the following 15 words were selected for the study: *bleak, abrupt, hectic, remote, slender, burden, bout, asset, brink, assumption, avert, rage, abuse, suppress, appeal*. Out of these words, there were 5 adjectives (*bleak, abrupt, hectic, remote, slender*), 5 nouns (*burden, bout, asset, brink, assumption*), 5 verbs (*avert, rage, abuse, suppress, appeal*). These words were supposed to be unknown to the students participating in the study. Students were given printed lists with these words three weeks before the experiment to determine whether they were familiar with any of them. Some of the students mentioned that they were familiar with several words. Due to this, these words were deleted from the list.

At the next stage, the following 7 words were selected from the original list of 15 words: abrupt, hectic, slender, bout, asset, rage, suppress. As mentioned above, all words familiar to students, were excluded from the study.

At the next stage, the following 7 words were selected from the original list of 15 words: *abrupt, hectic, slender, bout, asset, rage, suppress*.

Two types of word entries were prepared for the experiment: complete word entries taken from the "Comprehensive English-Georgian Dictionary" (www.dict.ge) for one group of participants. For the second group, I compiled simplified word-entries for the same words. In the word-entries compiled for this experiment, we used controlled vocabulary in illustrative phrases and sentences, and on the other hand, we reduced the number of meanings of polysemantic words to 4 or 5 senses. The meanings were selected based on the frequency principle.We needed these two groups to obtain the answers of the study questions specified above.

Four different types of exercises were designed for the experiment and given to the participants. Specifically, (1) the participants were expected to translate the English sentences containing the words used in the experiment into Georgian. This tested the comprehension of

the word in question; (2) the participants were given sentences with gaps to be completed from the list of the study words. This exercise was production-oriented and checked the accuracy of the use of the word; (3) The third task involved a multiple-choice exercise. Students were given two different definitions of the research word or its synonyms out of which one was right and the other - wrong. Clearly, this exercise was oriented on the correct usage of the word (production). The participants had to decide on the correct option; (4) Finally, the participants of the experiment had to put the missing word in the appropriate gap in sentences. This assignment was focused on the retention of the meaning. Exercises were made separately for all the participants, with a total of 220 samples.

The research process was planned and carried out as follows:

Stage One: The students participating in the experiment were divided into two groups: A and B. Before the participants were assigned tasks, for the purposes of verification and objectivity, they were given a list of words on the printed-out sheets and asked to write down their definitions. The number of the participants initially was 55, but three students recognized the meaning of words (of one word each) and therefore they left the experiment room. A total of 52 students remained: 26 (VIII – IX forms) students in Group A and 26 (VIII – IX forms) students in Group B.

Stage Two: Students in group A were given the list of test words and unchanged word entries from the "Comprehensive English-Georgian Dictionary". Group B students were given test words and simplified word entries compiled by us. Participants were asked to familiarize themselves with these words and their Georgian equivalents to comprehend each of the words on the list.

Stage Three: At this stage, the participants were given the first exercise to do the translation and identify the meaning of the polysemantic word used in each of the sentences. They were explained that in the following exercises, the polysemantic words would be used in that particular meaning.

Stage Four: The second exercise where the gaps had to be filled in correctly was given to the participants of the research at this stage. While doing this exercise, the participants had word-entries taken from the dictionary and translations of the exercises made by themselves.

Stage Five: The students were given exercise N 3 - they had to circle the correct option from two alternative definitions and a synonym. At this point, the participants had the dictionary and exercises made by themselves.

Stage Six: All the materials (words, word meanings, completed exercises) were taken from the participants of the experiment at this stage. They were given the fourth exercise. The participants were expected to insert the missing words correctly in the sentence. This exercise focused on remembering the word correctly.

After this assignment, the participants left the room. The experiment lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Findings and Results of the experiment:

A total of 208 tests were marked for the experiments (52 participants and 4 assignments each). The papers were marked based on the following principle. The maximum score for the comprehension exercise was - 7 (the exercise consisted of 7 sentences). The test was considered excellent if it was given 7 or 6 points, good with 5 correct answers; fair with 4 correct answers and weak with 3 or less correct answers.

The maximum score for word production exercises was 14 (2 exercises, each with seven tasks). The answers in these exercises were graded as follows: the test was considered excellent with 14 or 13 correct answers, good with 12 or11 correct answers, fair with 10 or 9 correct answers, weak - with 8 and less correct answers. The maximum score for the word retention exercise was 7 (the fourth exercise also had 7 sentences). In this case, the work was considered excellent if it had 7 or 6 correct answers, good with 5 correct answers, fair with 4 correct answers, and weak - with 3 or less correct answers.

These four tasks were then grouped into two groups of indicators of positive and negative outcomes: Positive outcome group comprised excellent and good works whereas negative outcome group - fair and weak works.

The tables below (Table N 1 and Table N 2) clearly show the results of the study. Table N 1 reveals that the number of excellent works in all three types of assignments is higher in group B compared to the group A. On the other hand, the number of weak works in group A is higher than in group B.

As for table N 2, it is also clear that the positive results are much higher in group B than in group A.

Table N 1

Group A

Task	Excellent	Good	Fair	Weak
Comprehension of the word	9 tests	10 tests	4 tests	3 tests
Production of the word	8 tests	9 tests	3 tests	6 tests
Retention of the word	9 tests	3 tests	4 tests	10 tests

Group B

Task	Excellent	Good	Fair	Weak
Comprehension of the word	24 tests	1 tests	1 tests	0 tests
Production of the word	19 tests	4 tests	2 tests	1 tests

Retention of the word	16 tests	4 tests	4 tests	2 tests

Table N 2

Positive and negative results according to Group A and Group B

Group A	Comprehension of the word	Production of the word	Retention of the word
Positive	73 %	65,4 %	46,2 %
Negative	27 %	34,6 %	53,8 %

Group B	Comprehension of the word	Production of the word	Retention of the word
Positive	96,2 %	88,5 %	76,9 %
Negative	3,8 %	11,5 %	23,1 %

Analysis: From the results above it is clear that participants of the group A who were given word entries from the "Comprehensive English-Georgian Dictionary", must have had more difficulty performing tasks than participants of the group B who had simplified word entries specially prepared for this experiment. The results are unambiguous both in terms of the results of the group work as well as of overall performance.

We were interested in the participants in Group A who performed the exercises well and showed high performance. Interviewing with the students showed that they had the skills to use the dictionary and loved to look up words in a dictionary.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that schoolchildren found it easier to work and make exercises with simplified word-entries. As mentioned above, simplified entries used controlled vocabulary in illustrative phrases and sentences, as well as reduced number of polysemantic meanings.

Thus, the study identified the need to create an English-Georgian learner's dictionary tailored for students' needs.

The study also revealed that students who were familiar with the polysemantic nature of English words, also scored better even if they were given word entries from the Comprehensive English-Georgian dictionary.

The experiment revealed once again that there is a great need to teach skills how to use a dictionary. The results of this study coincides with the research conducted in other countries revealing the necessity to teach the same skill, that is, the user who has been taught to search for information in a dictionary is better able to extract relevant and necessary information from a dictionary (Bejoint, 2010).

The study also revealed that it is necessary to continue study of the needs of the school children concerning the use of dictionaries.

From my experience, when planning such experiments, it would be advisable to consider the following recommendations:

1. Before conducting the experiment, it is necessary to conduct a 'placement test' to ensure that the level of students in each study is more or less homogenous.

2. When conducting a similar experiment in future, it would be advisable to give the same student test words from both the "Comprehensive English-Georgian Dictionary" and the simplified word-entries.

3. Simplified word-entries of the following types can also be given to the participants : a) An entry with one illustrative example for each meaning; b) a word-entry with several (two or three) illustrative examples for each meaning;

4. It is advisable to further explore the necessity of employing the "controlled vocabulary" in a bilingual English-Georgian learner's dictionary.

References

1. *The Comprehensive English-Georgian Dictionary*, 2010   www.dict.ge. Tbilisi State University, Lexicographic Centre.

2. Cowie, A.P. 2007. *English Dictionaries for Foreign Learners: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3. Bejoint, H. 2010. *The lexicography of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 223 – 262.

4. Chen, Yu. 2007. A Survey of English Dictionary Use by English Majors at Chinese Universities. *Lexicography Studies,* 2: 120-130.

5. Laufer, B. and Hadar, L. (1997). Assessing the Effectiveness of Monolingual, Bilingual, and Bilingualised Dictionaries in the Comprehension and Production of New Words. *The Modern Language Journal.* 81/2: 189-96.

6. Margalitadze, T. (ed.) 2019. *English-Georgian Learner's Dictionary.* Tbilisi : Lexicographic Centre, Tbilisi State University.

7. Online resources: https://www.sketchengine.eu/

Author's email: ekhuskivadze@gmail.com
Author's biographical data

I am a PhD student of Philology (lexicography) at Tbilisi State University, currently working on the article how to develop the skills of the dictionary users of English learners. I work on the exercises that will help the English learners to study polysemous words as well. I teach English as a second language at public school #24. I have the extensive experience of teaching English. I have been teaching English for eighteen years. I taught English the children who were involved in inclusion studies.