Electronic Dictionaries in Translation Classrooms in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:

178 students majoring in translation at the College of Languages and Translation and 10 translation and interpreting instructors were surveyed. It was found that 45% of the students use an electronic dictionary (ED). 99% of those use a general English-Arabic ED, 68% use an Arabic-English ED, 27% use an English-English ED and only 2% use a specialized ED. The students gave 12 reasons for not using an ED in specialized translation courses. It was also found that 70% of the translation instructors do not allow students to use an ED in class or test sessions. Reasons for that are given.

1. Introduction:

Computer technology has been used in translation for about five decades in the form of machine-assisted human translation, human-assisted machine translation and terminology databanks. Access to the latter was not made during the translation of the text but performed before. Many translators could not have access to them in particular if they were not working on-line. Some databanks were not accessible to the translator on-line at all because they were limited to the production of a printed glossary in a particular subject area. They offered access to technical terminology -- not common words. Further, they had advantages over traditional dictionaries as their terminology was always up-to-date and they contained more entries (Nirenburg, 1987).

The development of hand-held electronic dictionaries, spelling checkers, grammar checkers and dictionaries on CD-ROM's in the past decade made them accessible to many more translators and students all over the world (Gray, 1986; Heather and Rossiter, 1988; Spring, 1995; Subirats-Ruggeberg, 1994; Eleuterio et al, 1995; Sharpe, 1995, Ford, 1996; McDermott, 1996). In Saudi Arabia the number of ESL translation students using an electronic dictionary has increased considerably. Results of a recent study by Al-Jarf (1999) have indicated that in 1999, 64% of the students at the College of Languages and Translation use an ED as opposed to 15% in 1995.

The use of pocket hand-held electronic dictionaries (ED), spelling and grammar checkers and mini-electronic language translators in foreign language learning at the secondary and undergraduate college level has been the focus of a few recent studies (Tang, 1997; Aust, 1993; Zupanicic, 1995; and Lamb, 1991; MacArthur, 1996; Zahner, 1990; Leffa, 1993). However, the use of pocket hand-held ED's, spellers and mini-electronic translators in translation has been the subject of very few studies. A single study by Pearson (1996) examined ways in which language corpora and concordancing tools can be used in translation classes. She presented a profile of graduate-level translation students at Dublin City University and outlined the level of expertise they are expected to achieve.

The present study aimed at investigating the views of both undergraduate translation students and translation instructors on the adequacy of electronic dictionaries for specialized English-Arabic translation purposes. The study aimed at finding out the following: percentage of college translation majors who use an ED in specialized English-Arabic translation, kinds of ED that students use, i.e., monolingual, English-Arabic, Arabic-English, general or specialized ED, limitations of ED's in specialized English-Arabic translation, and reasons for not using an ED in specialized English-Arabic translation, whether instructors allow students to use their ED's in class and test sessions and the reasons given for that.

2. Subjects:

Subjects for the present study consisted of two samples: student and instructor. The former consisted of 178 undergraduate students majoring in translation at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in levels five to ten. The translation program at COLT is a 5-year program in which the first four levels (2 years) are devoted to developing students' language skills in both English and Arabic. Students in levels five to ten take specialized translation courses in the humanities, religion, medicine, agriculture, media, engineering, physical science, business administration, military, education, commerce, computer science, law, oil industry, literature, social sciences, in addition to 2 levels of simultaneous, consecutive and liaison interpreting courses. In all translation and interpreting courses, students are required to translate texts from English (L2) into Arabic (L1). In a few courses, they are also required to translate texts from Arabic into English.

The instructor sample consisted of ten instructors who teach practical translation and interpreting courses to students. Four instructors hold a Ph.D. degree and six hold an M.A. degree in Translation. Their teaching experience in translation ranges between 2-12 years.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using two open-ended questionnaires: student and instructor. The student one was administered to all the students participating in the study: those who use an ED in translation and those who do not. The latter group was asked to write reasons for not using an ED in translation. ED users are those students who use an ED in translation either all the time or occasionally, whether they solely depend on an ED in translation or use it in combination with a book dictionary (BD). On the other hand, non-users of ED's are those students who have stopped using an ED in translation, those who use an ED for other purposes other than translation, or those who do not own an ED. It was found that users use the following kinds of ED: *Franklin, Oxford, Atlas, Al-Mawrid and Saleh*. The study was limited to the use of pocket electronic dictionaries. Mini-translators and dictionaries on CD-ROM were not the focus of this study. It did not aim to compare the adequacy of the different ED brands in translation. The other questionnaire was administered to the instructors who were asked to give reasons for not allowing or not allowing students to use an ED in a class or test session.

Student and instructor responses were sorted out and categorized. Frequency counts, percentages and inter-analyst reliability coefficient were calculated.

4. Results and Discussion

Of a total of 178 undergraduate students who participated in the study, 45% of them do use an ED in specialized translation courses. However, many ED users indicated that they use an ED only occasionally, or they use it in combination with a BD.

Secondly, Table (1) shows that 99% of ED users use a general English-Arabic ED, 68% uses an Arabic-English ED and 27% use an English-English ED. It seems that ED users prefer to use a bilingual ED, whether English-Arabic or Arabic-English, rather than an English-English ED. This is closely related to the kind of task they are required to perform. In all translation courses, students are required to translate specialized texts from English (L2) into Arabic (L1). That is why they need to use an English-Arabic dictionary. Since fewer courses require students to translate specialized texts from Arabic (L1) into English (L2), a lower percentage of the students use an Arabic-English dictionary. Another interesting finding is that only 2% of the ED users use a specialized ED, probably because most ED's are general. Very few students indicated that they have CD's for specialized vocabulary. This could be a major reason for finding an ED inadequate for translating specialized texts.

As to adequacy of ED's in translation, Table (2) lists 12 reasons for not using ED's in specialized translation courses presented in order of importance as perceived by all the subjects whether they use or do not use an ED. 83% of the students indicated that an ED gives few senses of the word. Most of the time they do not find the meaning that they need. 62% pointed out that an ED contains fewer entries than a BD. They do not find many of the words they need. 57% stated that an ED gives inaccurate Arabic equivalents. 57% pointed out that an ED is not as comprehensive as a BD. It contains neither front matter nor a back matter like a BD, no references, and no lists of verb forms. Translation students find the front and back matter in a dictionary necessary in translation. 49% indicated that an ED does not give the specialized meanings of technical terms. There are not as many specialized ED's as BD's. 40% indicated an ED gives word meanings out of context. ED's do not show the domain in which a particular meaning is used. 36% reported that an ED gives inadequate linguistic information about the required word. It does not give information about word origins, verb forms, singular and plural forms, whether a noun is count or non-count and whether a verb is transitive or intransitive. 31% stated that illustrative examples in an ED are inadequate. 29% indicated that an ED gives very brief definitions and explanations. 14% pointed out that an ED does not give the meaning of phrases such as compounds, idioms and collocations. It does not give the meaning of derivatives, prefixes, suffixes and roots. 8% indicated that an ED contains no pictorial illustrations that are essential for clarifying the meaning of technical and scientific terms in particular. 8% indicated that display of meaning on the screen is inconvenient, because the multiple senses of a word cannot be displayed on the screen all at once. They have to be scrolled one by one by pressing the up and down keys. In an ED, the senses are usually displayed one by one in a random order. Sometimes the required sense is at the end. Waiting for the last sense to be displayed is a waste of time. On the other hand, a BD gives the multiple senses together and they can be compared. In addition, a BD organizes word senses either historically or according to frequency of their use.

As to instructors' views on the use of ED's in specialized translation courses, it was found that 70% of translation instructors do not allow students to use their ED's during a class or a test session. They prefer students to use traditional BD's. They do not allow students to use an ED because some students own an ED, others do not and because different ED's have different features. They believe that students should be equal and should have equal opportunities especially during a test. They pointed out that ED's are noisy when used in a test session. An ED has no specialized meanings, does not give meaning in context, gives brief definitions, and few senses. An ED is limited in the number of entries. It gives no illustrative examples. Since the ED screen is small, the students cannot view all senses at the same time to compare them. They use it irrationally as they pick the first meaning they see on the screen.

On the other hand, instructors who allow students to use an ED during a class or test session believe that an ED is like a BD. Since it is fast, students will spend less time looking up meanings of words and will have more time to focus on translating the text and revising and editing the translation. They think that using an ED should be the student's choice. They care about the translation output not the kind of dictionary that they use.

All Translation instructors agreed to the fact that an ED is not helpful at all in translating specialized texts which is essential in the translation program at COLT.

Table 1: Kinds of ED's That Translation Students Use

ED Types	Percentage
English-Arabic	99%
Arabic-English	68%
English-English	27%
General	99%
Specialized	02%

N users = 8

Table 2: Limitations of ED As Perceived By Users and Non-Users of ED

Limitations	%
Gives few limited senses (no required Meanings)	83%
Contains fewer entries (no required Words)	62%
Gives inaccurate Arabic equivalents	57%
Not comprehensive (no back matter)	57%
Insufficient specialized meanings, specialized D	49%
Gives meanings out of context	40%
Gives inadequate information about W	36%
Illustrative examples are inadequate	31%
Gives brief definitions	29%
No meaning of phrases (compounds, idioms)	14%
No pictorial illustrations	8%
Inconvenient display of meaning on screen	8%

N users = 80
N non-users = 97

5. Conclusion:

Undergraduate translation students at COLT in Riyadh take 24 specialized translation and interpreting courses over 5 semesters. Although students use an ED to keep up with recent advances in technology, most of them (even those who use an ED) find it inadequate for their translation. They need an ED that provides as many senses of the word as possible, covers as many technical terms as possible, gives the meanings of a word in context, indicates the domain in which the word is used, gives many illustrative examples that clarify the different senses of the word, gives the equivalent of idioms, compounds, collocations, derivatives, prefixes, suffixes and roots. Other linguistic information about the word such as pronunciation, etymology, derivatives, part of speech, singular and plural forms, whether a verb is transitive or intransitive, verb conjugation, whether a noun is countable or uncountable, and spelling are not as important for specialized translation.

Although ED's are fast, practical, easy to use and they can be used any time and anywhere (Al-Jarf, 1999), they cannot compete with BD's. Since many users and non-users find ED's inadequate for the translation of specialized texts, many indicated that an ED should be used in combination with a BD. Users and non-users stated that an ED is helpful in occasions requiring speed like a test situation, to look up a general word they come across while watching T.V. or reading. A BD is superior in its word coverage, availability of all kinds of up-to-date specialized dictionaries, coverage of all kinds of information needed about a word, the way it displays the senses, its pictorial illustrations, front and back matter, list of references, and meanings of prefixes, suffixes, roots, idioms, collocations and compounds.

It is recommended that manufacturers of ED's take into consideration the needs of translators and the problems translators have with ED's in the later versions of ED's. In order for ED's to be useful for specialized translation, later versions of ED's should contain the following: many senses of the word, many technical terms, the meanings of a word in all contexts, the domain in which the word is used, many illustrative examples that clarify the different senses of a word, and the Arabic equivalent of idioms, compounds, collocations, derivatives, affixes and roots. Manufacturers of ED's should periodically release an updated version of the ED. ED's should be supplemented by CD's for specialized terminology in many disciplines.

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استخدام القاموس الإلكتروني في الترجمة في المملكة العربية السعودية

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ملخص البحث

تم استفتاء آراء 178 طالبة من طالبات الترجمة و10 أستاذات للترجمة بكلية اللغات والترجمة حول مدى استخدام الطالبات للقاموس الالكتروني في الترجمة. وتبين أن 45% فقط من الطالبات يستخدمن القاموس الالكتروني، 99% يستخدمن قاموس إنجليزي–عربي، 68% يستخدمن قاموس عربي–إنجليزي، 27% يستخدمن قاموس إنجليزي–إنجليزي، و2% فقط يستخدمن قاموس متخصص. وأعطت الطالبات اثني عشر سببا لعدم صلاحية القاموس الالكتروني للاستخدام في مقررات الترجمة المتخصصة التي تدرسها الطالبات. بالنسبة للأستاذات، تبين من نتائج الاستبانة أن 70% من الأستاذات لا يسمحن للطالبات باستخدام القاموس الالكتروني في الترجمة سواء في الفصل أو الاختبار. وقد أعطت الأستاذات عدة أسباب لذلك.