学 位 论 文

汉英词典的问题与对策

CHINESE-ENGLISH DICTIONARIES:SOME PROBLEMS

AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

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A Synopsis

In the early 1970s, Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai showed their deep concern to the compilation of a comprehensive Chinese —English (C—E) dictionary of our own. An editing staff headed by Wu Jinrong and Wang Zuoliang soon began to work. Five years later, in 1978, they completed their great work ——《汉英词典》or *A Chinese —English Dictionary* (CED). This first comprehensive C—E dictionary of the Mainland, with its great excellence, has successfully filled the blankness in the C—E lexicography in nearly three decades (1949— 1978). This was only the beginning of the miracles. Within 21 years (1973—1994), the C—E lexicography had developped from naught to the present booming abundance of more than 30 kinds with all sizes and for different purposes. Among the influential ones are:

A Concise Chinese—English Dictionary (CCED), 1982

A Modern Chinese—English Dictionary (MCED), 1988

A Chinese—English Dictionary of Neologisms, 1991

SISU Chinese—English Dictionary, 1992

A Comprehensive Chinese—English Dictionary, 1993

A Chinese—English Dictionary [CED(1993)], 1993

But things were quite different a century ago. By the early 20th century, three foreigners had compiled three respective C—E dictionaries, none of which was successful. When it came to the 1930s, the three biggest publishing houses then presented four more C—E dictionaries. Despite their serious attitude, the editors of that time hardly produced any satisfactory work.

This situation did not change much until in 1972 when Lin Yutang published his《当代汉英词典》or *A Chinese—English Dictionary of Modern Usage* in Taiwan. Much improvement could be found in this great work, such as the invention of the Instant Index system and accurate understanding and presentation of Chinese language. But most of the words included in this dictionary are not parts of language currently used in the Mainland. That's part of the reason why we need our own C—E dictionary.

During the period when China was making important advances in its C—E lexicography, the world had also witnessed the development of some famous linguistic theories and practices such as the gramatical and semantic principles applied in British learners' dictionaries and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. In the light of modern linguistic theories, the following issues have to be treated in the compilation of C—E dictionaries:

（1）The addition of new words and expressions.

（2）The supplementation of grammatical, semantic and pragmatic information in the productional dictionaries.

（3）The criterion of deciding entries.

（4）the purpose of the dictionary.

（5）Explanatory equivalents vs translational equivalents

This paper will deal with the above questions in detail within 3 chapters.

The Typology of Chinese—English Dictionaries

First, we must decide the source language and target language. If we are making a C—E dictionary for the Chinese speakers, we must decide Chinese as the source language（ being translated）and English the target language（being taught or learned）. This decision of source and target language is important to the treatment of three issues: vocabulary selection, language of general directions and grammatical, semantic and pragmatic information.

Second, we have to decide whether it is a dictionary for production or for comprehension. A C—E dictionary for production is aimed at enabling learners in the source language to produce adequate sentences in the target language, thus it should include many things like a grammar of English language in the front matter, grammatical illustrations, semantic hints and pragmatic labels, etc.

Third, we have to decide whether the dictionary is to deal with literal or spoken language, whether the dictionary is lexical or encyclopedic and whether it is intended for general or special purpose.

Neologisms: An Urgent Task of Chinese—Engligh Dictionaries

Chinese language is changing rapidly especially after the Third Ses-

sion of the 11th Plentary Assembly of the Communist Party. The opening up to the outside world and the economic restructuring have brought drastic changes to China. Chinese language has timely reflected these changes and coined a great number of neologisms. A convincing evidence is the popular saying quoted by a British reporter in *Independent*："大腕"最喜欢带着"小蜜（秘）"到"卡拉 OK"歌舞厅参加"派对"，喝着杯中的"XO"酒，"O、K？"！ In fact，if you are too used to 吃皇粮（working in a state-owned company or institute），you won't savor the pleasure in 下海（going into business），and you will never be equipped with a 大哥大（moblie phone）or BP 机（beeper）.

Statistics shows that Chinese new words increase at a rate of more that 1,000 items each year. Then how is their treatment in C-E dictionaries?

CED is strictly based on the Chinese dictionaries published then and consequently has only a spotty coverage of the neologisms（since Chinese dictionaries are rather conservative in the inclusion of neologisms）. MCED，however，unlimited by the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*，is quite outstanding in the establishment of new word entries. But the problem is that MCED was prepared early in the middle of 1980s and won't be able to meet the practical need of the readers in the middle of 1990s.

The two-volumn CED（1993）is the biggest and the only unabridged C-E dictionary. It boasts a total inclusion of 20,000 neologisms. Yet calculations show that only about 10% of these are general entries（the rest being encyclopedic）. That's why words as common as

运作、赞助费、政纪、中巴、洋倒、自选商场、大款 cannot be found in CED(1993).

The inclusion of proper neologisms makes the dictionary updated. What are proper ones? The author of this thesis suggests some criteria and classifies the new words and expressions into five categories. The causes of the change of meaning (adding new meanings to old words) are also discussed.

Grammatical, Semantic and Pragmatic Problems in the Chinese-English Dictionaries

The Dictionary user, after consulting the C-E dictionary, expects himself to produce adequate sentences in English without referring to other grammar handbooks. A dictionary for production is designed to help achieve this goal. Unlike a C-E dictionary for comprehension, a productional dictionary always furnishes detailed information on grammar, semantics and pragmatics.

1. Grammatical information   Since English has its unique ways of word formation ranging from gender, exceptional case forms to irregular plural number, various conjugations of irregular verbs, complicated declensions of nouns, prououns, adjectives and adverbs, it is the dictionary compilers´ responsibility to supply the necessary grammatical information in the dictionary so that the reader is safely guided in his production.

a. The C-E dictionary should label the headword entry and some compound sub-entries (which conceivably have more than one part of

speech) by part of speech.

b. The dictionary should label all the uncountable nouns and the irregular forms of the plural nouns among the equivalents.

c. The dictionary should provide informations on gender and should indicate the nouns which can be used in a vocative case.

d. The dictionary should indicate whether a verb is followed by a gerund or an infinitive without *to*.

e. Most importantly, the dictionary should have a clear indication of the preposition or adverb that is usually attached before or behind the equiv alent.

2. Semantic information   The semantic problems involved in bilingual dictionaries are different from and more complicated than those in monolingual ones because the latter are prepared for people who participate and understand the culture being described whereas the former describe a culture which differs, in various proportions, from the users.

Semantic information may be provided in the following approaches:

a. The C-E dictionary should supply both British and American spellings.

b. Efficient ways must be adopted to provide meaning discrimination to facilitate the user in selecting the appropriate equivalent and in judging the function of the equivalent in the contextual meaning.

c. The dictionary should always provide translational equivalents, but in the case of vocabulary (equivalent) vacancy an explanatory e-

quivalent will also do.

d. The dictionary should include the most often used connotative (or rather metaphoric or figurative) meanings of the entries.

e. Since meaning-discriminational devices are sometimes incomplete and too space-consuming, a synonym guide may be used in special columns.

f. The dictionary should also include word-forming affixes as separate entries like 非…,不…,双…,…化,…性,etc.

3. Pragmatic information　　Having been supplemented with adequate grammatical and semantic information, the dictionary could now be competent enough to enable the reader to produce sentences both grammatically and semantically correcct. But that is not enough. In order to prevent students from producing sentences like *Martin Luther King was a great nigger* or *Our foreign teacher Miss Mary was very talkative yesterday evening in the lecture*, the dictionary should be revised in the following ways:

a. Set up language notes —— special columns of directions explaining what phrases or sentences to be used in a particularly preset situation like expressing thanks, offering invitation, etc.

b. Attach usage notes behind the problem words (words that will probably be wrongly understood or used by Chinese learners) like *talkative*, *Thank you*, *nigger*, *gay*, etc.

c. Apply different kinds of labels like *infml*, *sl*, *euph*, *derog*, etc. to illustrate all levels of usage. Special attention must be given to the en-

tries which may have a euphemistic equivalent in English.

This thesis is majorly aimed at improving the present C-E dictionaries. It is the present writer´s sincere wish that some of the suggestions proposed in this thesis would be found to be of some value in the revision of CED or in the compilation of a new, updated Chinese-English dictionary.

KEY WORDS:

Chinese-English dictionaries   problems   solutions

Chapter Ⅰ An Introduction

It has been 16 years since the first comprehensive Chinese-English (C-E) dictionary-《汉英词典》or *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (*CED*) made its appearance in the newly soothed China. The aim of this dictionary, as its chief editor Wu Jinrong and his highly qualified staff members (including Wang Zuoliang and Liu Shimu) later declared in a commentary, was to meet the need of the unique time when China suddenly found herself academically and technologically disadvanced after four years of disastrous Cultural Revolution and when Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai showed their deep concern on the problem that there was not a satisfactory Chinese-English dictionary of our own then. With its excellence, it soon acquired a high academic status and set up a milestone in the history of China´s bilingual lexicography. Having successfully filled the blankness of Chinese-English dictionary compilation in nearly three decades (1949-1978), the Chinese lexicographers and linguists seemed to embrace a totally new era in this art. Four years later in 1982,《简明汉英词典》or a *Concise Chinese-English Dictionary*, (CCED) edited by a group of professors from Beijing Institute of Languages and designed mainly for the foreign readers, turned up in the prosperous cultural market. These two dictionaries stood out to be the prototype for the later products like《现代汉英词典》or *A Modern Chinese-English Dictionary* (*MCED*) published in 1988 by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and《汉英综合词典》or *A Comprehensive Chinese-English Dictionary* (1993).

The other influential Chinese-English Dictionaries published from 1985 to 1994 are (including philological dictionaries for general and special purposes)

《汉英逆引词典》 *A Chinese-English Dictionary In Converted Order* Commercial Press 1985

《简明汉英词典》 *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary* Shangdong University Press 1985

《语言大典》 *A Great Chinese Dictionary with English Equivalents* Tri-Circle Press 1990

《西索简明汉英词典》 *SISU Concise Chinese-English Dictionary* Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press 1992

《汉英大辞典》 *A Chinese-English Dictionary* Shainghai Jiaotong University Press 1993

《新汉英词典》 *A New Chinese-English Dictionary* Hainan Publishing House 1994

《汉英词林》 *A Chinese-English Dictionary of Idioms, Phrases, etc.* Shanghai Jiaotong University 1990

《汉英百科词典》 *A Chinese-English Encyclopedic Dictionary* Mechanic Industry Press 1992

《汉英新词语汇编》 *A Chinese-English Dictionary of Neologisms* Beijing Institute of Languages Press 1991

《汉英双解成语词典》 *A Chinese-English Dictionary of Chinese Idioms* Commercial Press 1982

Within 21 years (1973—1994), the Chinese-English lexicography has developed from naught to the present booming abundance of more

than 30 kinds with all sizes and for different purposes. The compilation and publication itself is unquestioningly a great success.

But things were quite different a century ago. When the Chinese-English dictionary first appeared in China, it was a time when frequent foreign invasions especially those from Britain had rendered the county a semi-colonial, semi-feudal one. Herbert A. Giles, a Consulate and sinologist working for the consulate office of U. K, compiled the first Chinese-English dictionary, majorly aimed at Old Chinese. Later, F. W. Baller and R. H. Mathews, in the early 20th century, both missionaries to China, produced another copy of C-E dictionary. Unlike Giles who researched deeply into the Chinese ancient *Four Books* and *Five Classics*, Mathews directed his work into the sphere of modern Chinese. These two dictionaries, though compiled by native speakers of English, did not constitute an indelible influence upon the later editors, nor did they enjoy wide readership among the general people. The reason lies in the fact that these foreign editors had never really mastered the Chinese language; being only temporary dwellers in the altogether alien country and motivated merely to translate the language for the purpose of a better economic and cultural advantage, they could never make a passable C-E dictionary for the native Chinese people. Take 面面相觑 for example. This simple idiom of Chinese was translated as "looking at one another" in Giles´ dictionary. Such being the case, how could the reader expect to find convincing equivalents for expressions like 面首、豪举、理屈词穷 or 沐猴而冠?

In the following years, quite a number of Chinese scholars and publishing houses had strived to give birth to a more worthwhile dictionary. The three biggest publishing houses in Old China, challenged by the time and the competition among one other, all presented new works. The Commercial Press published Zhang Zouxing's《汉英辞典》in 1921 and Li Yuwen's《汉英新辞典》in 1933. The Chung Hwa Publishing House printed Lu Feizhi and Yan Duhe's《中华汉英大辞典》. In 1931, the World Press put forward Sheng Guwen's《世界汉英辞典》. Despite their serious attitude and hard efforts, however, these compilers hardly brought to the reader's vision satisfactory dictionaries because more contents could still be added and the stylistic rules and layout need also be furnished.

This situation did not change much until in 1972 when Lin Yutang published his《当代汉英词典》or *A Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage* in Taiwan. Much improvement could be found in this great work. First of all, to solve the problem in locating the exact word the reader wants, Lin Yutang invented the Instant Index system used together with the Fifty Radicals. This system, taking the peculiar features of the Chinese characters into consideration, greatly facilitated the searching of words in the dictionary in a time when *pinyin* system was not widely popular in China, especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Secondly he boldly adopted the labelling of part of speech for each entry, regardless of single characters or compound ones. This device, though disputed a great deal today, has its obvious advantage at least as far as

meaning discrimination is concerned. Labelling of part of speech will be discussed later in this thesis. Thirdly, Lin´s Dictionary has a quite complete inclusion of words and expressions active at his age and also of terms that are literal, archaic, regional and obsolete. Fourthly and most importantly, Lin Yutang had a more accurate understanding and presentation of Chinese language in his Dictionary. Taken as a whole Lin Yutang´s *A Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage* is an important and valuable work in the history of China´s bilingual lexicography.

Lin Yutang was a serious linguist, but he had his limitations most unbearable of which is that his dictionary does not seem to serve most of the Chinese-speaking people. Ninety-five percent of the entries he listed in the dictionary were not the current language used in the Chinese Mainland after liberation, according to a calculation.[①] As a result, Lin´s Dictionary will not be a major concern of this thesis.

Looking back on how things were in the years gone by, we now have better understanding of the efforts that the forerunners of dictionary compilers made towards the language communication between China and the English speaking countries. And at the same time, we realize the difficulty in the job. By the word difficulty I mean the compilation of a dictionary is notoriously intricate, complicated and consequently loaded down with trivial details. It is an art, a brain-exhausting art. It is also an experiment, between two drastically varying semiotic systems. Moreover it is a challenge to the maximum ability of the human brain in building up the bridge between the tremendously different cul-

tures. Still again, it is something of everything and everything of something. Some modern linguistic theories, based on the human language acquisition process, have revealed more astonishing aspects. During the period when China was making important advances in its C — E lexicogrophy, the world had also witnessed the development of some famous linguistic theories and practices such as the grammatical and semantic principles applied in British learners´ dictionaries and Halliday´s Systemic Functional Grammar. Struggling out of the pits and traps, we have gradually framed the craft. With the new advances in linguistic research and the sharpening and deepening of the recognition into the nature of the craft, the following issues have to be put on top of the agenda and given considerable attention respectively:

(1). The addition of new words and expressions.

(2). The supplementation of grammatical, semantic and pragmatic information in the dictionary for production.

(3). The criterion of deciding entries.

(4). The addition of pictorial illustrations.

(5). Explanatory equivalents vs translational equivalents.

(6). The purpose (or the reader) of the dictionary.

(7). The labelling of colloquial vs dialectal.

All the above points will be dealt with in this paper within three chapters except the fourth which involves a great number of drawings, protographs, charts etc. and will only be mentioned in the last chapter as something for further research.