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Concrete treatment of culture-bound terms and collocations in translational dictionaries

A basic distinction should be made between culture-dependent and culture-independent subject or knowledge areas. In **culture-dependent knowledge**, the subject-matter is culture-dependent, since it has developed its own specific features historically and culturally within delimited geographical areas. For this reason the subject-matter usually differs from country to country, from one language community to the other. Examples are politics, economics and law. In culture-independent areas, the need for **encyclopaedic information** is independent of native language, the choice of explication language remaining a lexicographical issue, however. But the frame of reference of the different users is the same, as are information requirements. Not so in culture-dependent knowledge, in which, other things being equal, dictionary users must be presumed to be in a better position to understand the subject-matter within their own culture area.

This problem is well known in metalexicographical contributions to translation LGP dictionaries (general language dictionaries). An instructive dictionary entry of this kind is one from two languages of two quite different cultures, here from Rakibolana Malagasy-Alema (1991) (Malagasy-German Dictionary), where you have such culture bound explications in about 5% of all dictionary entries:

famadihana Umwendung

zentraler und wichtigster Ritus der madagassischen Ahnenkultur auf dem zentralen Hochland. Nach einer angemessenen Frist (mehrere Jahre) wird ein Verstorbener aus der Familiengruft geholt und in neue Leichentücher gewickelt. Famadihana ist ein großes, frohes Familienfest, in dessen Verlauf auch Tiere (Rinder, Geflügel) geopfert werden. Es kann mehrere Tage dauern und wird von Musik, Tanz und Gesang begleitet.

famadihana turn around

central and most important rite of the Malagasy ancestor cult on the central highlands. After an appropriate period (several years) a deceased is taken out of the family tomb and wrapped into new corpse cloths. Famadihana is a large, happy family celebration, in which also animals (cattle, poultry) are sacrificed. It can take several days and is accompanied by music, dance and singing. (My translation, HB).

As a necessary addition to the explanation the dictionary gives an illustration of *famadihana*:



This dictionary is primarily made for Malagasy users as a tool for translation and text production in German; only secondarily is it conceived as a tool for German users. The Malagasy user knows what *famadihana* is, but he does not know the German translation and worse, the German equivalent is not instructive for German readers of his text. Therefore, the dictionary gives an explanation which can be copied when the term *famadihana* is used for the first time in a German text. In the user guide to this dictionary it is explained that there are two kinds of translation of culture-bound expressions: 1. not translation but the use of the Malagasy term connected with an explanation in German or 2. the use of the German equivalent. The first possibility is recommended for the primary user group. This topic is discussed in terms of foreign culture-bound lexicography vs. own culture-bound lexicography, e.g. Uchehukwu (2006, 16-28) with further references.

2. Culture-bound terms as a problem for bilingual specialized lexicography

Much less is known about culture-bound terms in LSP lexicography, because culture is too narrowly connected with folklore matters. Naturally, folklore plays a matter too in some specialized fields, but normally there are other kinds of differences between different political societies, s. Bergenholtz/Nielsen (2002) and Nielsen/Mourier (2005). But still there is a focus on the terms, not on other language items. This applies to LSP fields such as politics, economics and law in particular which means that there are considerable differences between, inter alia, Spanish and Danish law, because the former is based on Roman law, whereas the latter is mainly based on German law. The number of culture-dependent terms is considerably smaller in other LSP fields, such as music or architecture. Culture-dependent dictionaries therefore span a wide and non-homogeneous area that does not lend itself well to universally valid statements.

The main trait of an LSP dictionary is to describe and explain the way in which the people working in the relevant subject field structure their part of the world and the variety of language used to communicate about that field in order to help the dictionary user to understand or use the terms in the way used in the particular specialized field. The structure and the terminology have been established by experts

so they do not generally need an LSP dictionary treating their own field. If a real expert reads a text within his own field of expertise written in his native language, he will have no difficulty understanding the text, and if he produces a similar text in his native language, he is not likely to need the dictionary either. However, experts may need a foreign-language monolingual LSP dictionary or a translation dictionary for reception and production purposes if they read or produce texts in a foreign language, because the foreign subject field is structured according to principles of another culture, and the language used reflects the way in which the foreign culture is organised and structured. This suggests that most monolingual LSP dictionaries are intended for users who are no experts, but this leaves a very heterogeneous group of potential users for any LSP dictionary. For practical purposes, the potential users may be placed in one of two general categories, viz. laypeople and semi-experts. Laypeople are those who have no knowledge of the basic structure, organisation and theories of an LSP field, or have only the basic knowledge of persons with a higher education, whereas semi-experts have a higher level of knowledge of the basic structure, organisation and theories of an LSP field. Semi-experts include experts from related subject fields and persons in the public and private sectors who deal with information about a particular subject field on a daily basis. If the LSP field is family law, a commercial lawyer and a tax expert are both semi-experts as they do not know the finer points of detail concerning the structure, organisation, theories, practices, rules etc. of family law, but have a high level of general legal and fiscal knowledge, respectively. Monolingual LSP dictionaries are therefore particularly relevant for a person who has to understand a text or produce a text in his native language within a culture-bound LSP field where he is not an expert. Similarly, a layperson or semi-expert may need a dictionary when he reads or produces LSP texts in a foreign language, because he will be unfamiliar with the foreign culture and its related language and terminology.

There are therefore two factors that need to be considered in relation to the language of description. Firstly, laypeople and semi-experts lack different amounts and types of knowledge which has a direct bearing on the actual contents of the explanations and definitions of a dictionary. Secondly, it is necessary to phrase the explanations and definitions differently, because laypeople and semi-experts have different levels of knowledge of the vocabulary and usage in an LSP field. Consequently, the language of description should reflect these characteristics.

An example of a dictionary entry of this kind is an accounting dictionary for semi-experts; it is a family of dictionaries with a Danish, a Danish-English, an English and an English-Danish accounting dictionary, the first example from the Danish-English accounting dictionary:

resultatopgørelse noun <en; -en, -er, -erne>

income statement IAS/IFRS US noun <an; the, -s>

profit and loss account UK noun <a; the, -s>

Definition: Resultatopgørelsen består af indregnede indtægter og omkostninger, hvor forskellen mellem disse udgør periodens indtjening, dvs. årets resultat. (The income statement shows revenues and expenses recognised arriving at the earnings for the accounting period, i.e. net income.)

The labelling IAS/IFRS stands for International Accounting Standard, US for terms according to the regulations in the United States and UK for those according to the

regulations in Great Britain. For the Danish term you have to use different translations for the same meaning depending on the translation into a certain national or international accounting regulation. It should be added that the British term is polyseme with two different equivalents in Danish:

profit and loss account¹ UK noun <a, the, -s>

resultatopgørelse noun <en; -n, -r, -rne>

Definition: The profit and loss account shows income recognised with the deduction of costs recognised resulting in earnings for the period i.e. the profit or loss for the period.

profit and loss account² UK noun <a, the, -s>

overført resultat <et; det overførte resultat, overførte resultater, de overførte resultater>

Definition: Profit and loss account is an asset item in the balance sheet under capital and reserves representing the profit and loss reserve or retained earnings transferred from the profit and loss account after deduction of any dividends.

3. Culture-bound lexicography does not only deal with encyclopaedic matters

Culture-bound lexicography does not only deal with encyclopaedic matters, but also with orthography and grammar. In the case of accounting dictionaries for different variations of English you have general orthographical grammar differences, but also field dependent differences, which mean differences in that field, but not necessarily in all kinds of American and British English. In the following entry you have a general inflexional restriction for British English:

environmental expenditure noun <an, the, -s>

Grammar note: The plural form environmental expenditures is used in American English but not in British English.

miljøudgift noun <en; -en, -er, -erne>

Definition: Environmental expenditure refers to the costs of an enterprise, which are related to its activities and measures taken in order to prevent environmental harm and pollution.

In other cases you have orthographical differences, e.g.

horizontal group <a, the, -s>

Grammar note: In both UK and US English, "horizontal group" spelled with "z" tends to take precedence over "horisontal group".

horisontal koncern <en; den horisontale koncern, horisontale koncerner, de horisontale koncerner>

Definition: A group consisting of enterprises involved in the same stage of the production or distribution process of a particular product is designated a horizontal group

When translating and producing text in a foreign language it is well known that the main problem is to translate and use the right collocations. Therefore, it is not easy to explain that only rarely are contributions to collocational problems found in LSP metalexical literature. One of the reasons could be that most LSP dictionaries have only a few or no collocations at all. In the above cited accounting dictionary you will find many collocations, totally about 20.000 compared to 5.000

lemmas. In cases with differences between variants of English you therefore have more than one translation of a certain collocation:

resultatopgørelse

income statement IAS/IFRS US noun <an; the, -s>

profit and loss account UK noun <a; the, -s>

Definition: Resultatopgørelsen består af indregnede indtægter og omkostninger, hvor forskellen mellem disse udgør periodens indtjening, dvs. årets resultat.

Collocations:

artsopdelt resultatopgørelse

income statement classified by nature (US IAS/IFRS)

profit and loss account classified by type of expenditure (UK)

en post i resultatopgørelsen

an item in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

an item in the profit and loss account (UK)

funktionsopdelt resultatopgørelse

income statement classified by function (US IAS/IFRS)

profit and loss account classified by function (UK)

indregne straks i resultatopgørelsen

recognise immediately in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

recognise immediately in the profit and loss account (UK)

indregning i resultatopgørelse

recognition in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

recognition in the profit and loss account (UK)

indvirkning på resultatopgørelse

the effect on the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

the effect on the profit and loss account (UK)

kvartalsvis resultatopgørelse

quarterly income statement (IAS/IFRS US)

quarterly profit and loss account (UK)

medregne i resultatopgørelsen

include in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

include in the profit and loss account (UK)

modregning i resultatopgørelsen

offsetting in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

offsetting in the profit and loss account (UK)

noter til resultatopgørelse

notes to the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

notes to the profit and loss account (UK)

opstille en resultatopgørelse

present a profit and loss account (UK)

present an income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

opstillingsform for resultatopgørelsen

format for the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

format for the profit and loss account (UK)

præsentere i resultatopgørelsen

present in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

present in the profit and loss account (UK)

resultatopgørelse i beretningsform

income statement in report form (US IAS/IFRS)

profit and loss account in vertical format (UK)

resultatopgørelsens prognoseværdi

the predictive value of the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

the predictive value of the profit and loss account (UK)

sammendrage omkostninger i resultatopgørelsen

aggregate expenses in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

aggregate expenses in the profit and loss account (UK)
sammenligningstal for resultatopgørelsen
 comparative figures for the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)
 comparative figures for the profit and loss account (UK)

In order for the users to be able to produce correct accounting texts in English and translate Danish accounting texts into English, they must be given not only definitions of lemmata and information on grammar, but also information relating to collocations. This applies to all word types, not only to nouns:

resultatføre

recognise in the profit and loss account UK

recognize in the income statement US IAS/IFRS

Collocations:

resultatføre en regnskabspost med et års forskydning

recognise an item in the profit and loss account with a one-year interval (UK)

recognize an item in the income statement with a one-year interval (US IAS/IFRS)

resultatføre finansielle instrumenter lineært over instrumentets løbetid

recognise financial instruments in the profit and loss account on a straight-line basis over their lives (UK)

recognize financial instruments in the income statement on a straight-line basis over their lives (US IAS/IFRS)

resultatføre gevinster og tab

recognise gains and losses in the profit and loss account (UK)

recognize gains and losses in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

resultatføre omkostninger

recognise expenses in the profit and loss account (UK)

recognize expenses in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

resultatføre årets aktuelle og udskudte skatter

recognise current and deferred tax in the profit and loss account (UK)

recognize current and deferred tax in the income statement (US IAS/IFRS)

The importance of collocations and phrases in syntagmatic dictionaries is further illustrated by this excerpt from the entry **retvisende billede** (example and argumentation from Nielsen 2005):

retvisende billede

true and fair view UK

fair presentation IAS/IFRS US

Collocations:

opfylde kravet om et retvisende billede

meet the fair presentation requirement (US IAS/IFRS)

meet the requirement of a true and fair view (UK)

oplysninger af betydning for det retvisende billede

information of importance to the fair presentation (US IAS/IFRS)

information of importance to the true and fair view (UK)

...

Besides noticing the diatopical labellings IAS/IFRS, US and UK, we here see the importance of collocations as different sentence structure is used dependent on whether you express yourself in American, British or international English, something which the users cannot be expected to know and therefore need to be made aware of. Finally, the translations of the second collocation show that the countable Danish plural noun *oplysninger* must be translated into the uncountable noun *in-*

formation in all three variants of English. This is a common problem for Danes who need to express themselves in English, and this piece of information is particularly important to business journalists and experts with a limited knowledge on English specialized language and usage.

4. The moral of all this

Culture-bound LSP lexicography does not only deal with encyclopaedic information, but also with orthography, grammar and collocational language use in different cultures.

5. Literature

Danish-English Dictionary of Accounting = Sandro Nielsen/Lise Mourier/Henning Bergenholtz: *Regnskabsordbogen dansk-engelsk*. København: Thomson 2004.

English-Danish Dictionary of Accounting = Sandro Nielsen/Lise Mourier/Henning Bergenholtz under medvirken af Mia Johnsen, Rie Bobjerg Nielsen, Jóna Ellenderson, Amalie Kofoed Stender og Vibeke Vrang: *Den Engelske Regnskabsordbog/English-Danish Dictionary of Accounting*. Database og design: Richard Almind, implementering og kodning af hjemmesider: Caspar Thomsen. <http://www.regnskabsordbogen.dk/iasgb> Århus: Handelshøjskolen i Århus 2006.

Nielsen, Sandro/Lise Mourier: Internet accounting dictionaries: present solutions and future opportunities. In: *Hermes* 34, 2005, 83-116.

Nielsen, Sandro: Udarbejdelse af regnskabsordbøger til internettet. In: *LEDA nyt*. 2005, 40, 8-17.

Rakibolana Malagasy-Alema = Henning Bergenholtz miraka amin'i Suzy Rajaonarivo, Rolande Ramasomanana, Baovola Radanielina sy Jürgen Richter-Johanningmeier, Eckehart Olszowski, Volker Zeiss ary Hantanirina Ranaivoson, Nicole Rasoarimanana, Raymonde Ravololomboahangy sy Mavotiana Razafiarivony: *Rakibolana Malagasy-Alema*. Antananarivo: Leximal/Moers: aragon 1991.

Uchechukwu, Chinedu: *Grammatiktheorie mit lexikographischem Ausblick. Grammatiktheoretische Grundlagen der zweisprachigen Lexikographie der Sprachen Igbo und Deutsch*. München: Lincom 2006.