Scarcity of Illustrative Examples in Bilingual Dictionaries (English-Arabic)

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Abstract:

This research paper sheds light on the problem of scarcity of illustrative examples in bilingual (English-Arabic) dictionaries compared with monolingual (English-English) dictionaries.

Due to scarcity of illustrative examples, bilingual dictionaries proved to have been inefficient in rendering meanings of words. Arab users, having been misled by vague meanings and usages, are becoming less trustful of bilingual dictionaries, but highly opinionated of monolinguals. As a result, Users are tempted to shift to monolinguals, and this undoubtedly weakens their ties with their mother tongue.

The researcher employs a questionnaire and a number of examples taken from both types of dictionaries to illustrate the difficulty of understanding meanings of words in isolation from their contextual examples.

Introduction:

(English - Arabic) bilingual dictionaries generally tend to offer their definitions in single, confusing and multi-semantic words, which creates great hardships for the learner to choose. In contrast, monolingual dictionaries, oddly enough, have proved to be of much use, even to the Arabic learner for their extreme generosity in offering illustrative examples, disclosing both denotation and connotation of lexis, which undoubtedly makes the choice of words for the learner much easier and, by far, more accurate.

The significance of this research lies in the fact that, though classical (English- Arabic) dictionaries are published annually for decades in new editions, they do not incorporate sufficient numbers of illustrative examples in their definitions of words, which makes the Arab learner more attracted to monolinguals.

Given that most of these classical works were raised and funded by individual compilers, not by institutions with enormous budgets as the case is in the west, it is natural that shortcomings could not have been avoided. Therefore, special tribute, nevertheless, should be paid to them.

Background of the study

Dictionary compilation, nowadays, has become a very complicated business run by specialized institutions with hundreds, if not thousands of specialist from different sectors and fields of study. It is no longer a one person job as was the case in the remote past. New approaches and insights have been introduced by great lexicographers, such as Samuel Johnson, Charles Richardson, Nathan Bailey and others.

When the Standard Dictionary by Funk &Wagnall's came into light in 1962, it was a huge leap in the history lexicography. The product had been a product of seventy-five years of experience in the field. Its Editorial Advisory Board, chaired by Professor Alan Walker Reid, Professor of English at Columbia University, consisted of twenty-seven Ph.D. holders, who were working in

American universities in different fields. Besides, there was also another body of advisers consisted of thirty-six experts in various disciplines, most of them were heads or deputy heads of major companies, such as the head of New York Central Railroad, the Vice President of the U.S. Steel company and the Vice President of Chrysler Corporation and a member of the Senate and other prominent figures.

Concerning the invested capital, suffice to say that the American GC Merriam has spent three and a half million dollars on its effortful third dictionary which came into light in 1961 after the publication of the second one. The company recruited more than three hundred experts and advisors in almost all disciplines. The company had also gathered more than 10 million illustrative examples from 24.000 authors, taken from thousands of books, magazines, newspapers, catalogs and scientific journals. The examples had been extensively used in the definition of the dictionary entries. (Assayed: 1978, p.178, 198, 223, 237).

Along the history of lexicography, illustrative examples proved to have been extremely useful in defining the exact meanings of words, unfolding their denotations and connotations as well, and presenting different ways of word usage. Among other benefits, illustrative examples have the ability of showing the register of words, language style or its social level where they belong to, or the situations where they could be used, i.e. whether a word is formal, informal, colloquial, slang, ironic or sarcastic as seen from the implications of words or the hints read within the illustrative examples.

IEs have a long history. Samuel Johnson was the first who introduced them in 1755 in the well-known Dictionary of the English Language, as well as Oxford Dictionary, which he started working on in 1858 and ended in 1933 under the supervision of the philological association.

When Richardson had published his New Dictionary of the English Language, it was backed with illustrative examples. This innovative approach had attracted the attention of the British philological association urging to make, among its priorities, a plan to collect illustrative examples. In 1858 the association started appealing to readers to assist in reading books for the collection of examples. A wide range of readers had responded to the calls. Yet, there was more need to more examples for the huge intended work. In 1879 the association issued another call to a thousand volunteer to read more books for the collection of more examples for the new dictionary. Titles of books to read were sent to volunteer readers. As a result of that campaign, by the year 1881 the editorial board had received (656900) examples from readers.

To imagine how tremendous the effort spent in collecting and using these illustrative examples was, suffice it to say that when the Oxford Dictionary was being compiled, it took more than forty days only to digest the countless number of examples used to clarify the many meanings of the verb (set) (Ibid, p.102,104).

All these facts and figures clearly demonstrate the importance of using illustrative examples in the lexicography industry. IEs are indispensible in lexicography as they form the basis of a new popular approach called the semantic change approach, as opposed to the old one, called the standard formula, where words were defined in single words and without resorting to IEs. What is truly regrettable is that traditional English-Arabic dictionaries have been heavily depending on the old method, which had made them repeatable and less useful. Thus, the Arab learner has long been deprived of one of the most useful tools in the history of lexicography.

Problem of the research:

The researcher has observed that traditional bilingual dictionaries (English - Arabic), such as Al-Mawred Dictionary and Atlas Encyclopedic Dictionaries among many others, are mostly using the standard formula approach, where entries are defined in single words only, mostly vague, confusing and often devoid of connotations.

Moreover, our bilinguals have been tediously copying themselves year after year without any radical changes in the approach, which makes the learner seek resort in monolingual dictionaries.

Meanwhile, monolinguals have been making tremendous progress by extensively adopting the semantic change approach, investing great amount of illustrative examples in the definition of entries.

The researcher thinks our dictionaries should make more use of the semantic change approach, for the more IEs to be put into use, the more accurate words would be defined and best absorbed, for words in action reveal most of their inner shadows of meaning and stylistic nuances, let alone the benefits of demonstrating different kinds of usage when a word combines with other words and structures.

Justifications and objective of the research:

Learners of foreign languages are expected to be mediators between their mother tongue &culture and the foreign language(s) they learn, but when reality shows that Arab learners seem to have been showing marked preference to monolingual dictionaries over their own bilinguals, this phenomenon deserves urgent research, otherwise this practice threatens to weaken the mediating role Arab learners of languages should play, which in the long run threatens to keep them somehow distant from their mother tongue, and can eventually lead to weakening their ties with it. The objective of the research is to explore the extent of the bilinguals' shortcomings by analyzing different examples, as well as analyzing students' opinion collected through a questionnaire designed for this purpose. The researcher also hopes to form some practical recommendations to be taken into consideration upon compiling future dictionaries.

Questions of the research:

The researcher hopes to find answers for the following questions:

1. Are our bilingual dictionaries successful in carrying out their mission?

2. What are their shortcomings?

3. What recommendations could be formed to improve the quality of our bilinguals in the future?

Procedures and methodology:

The researcher used both the descriptive method for relevance to the nature of the research as well as the survey method for analyzing the students' opinion collected from the questionnaire. The survey method has been employed merely as an auxiliary tool for enhancing the Research quality.

Population and sample of the study

The researcher has designed a six question close-ended questionnaire (Supplement1) designed especially for the purpose of this study. The society of the research is fourth level English majors in both the faculty of Education and The Women' Faculty at Hadramout University of the educational year 2005-2006. The following table illustrates this point:

Number	Fourth year English majors at the Faculty of Education	Fourth year English majors at the Women's Faculty
Number of the research society	40	39
Sample of the research	34	36
The proportion of the sample to the society	%85	%92.307

Validity of the tool:

The questionnaire has been presented to a group of the staff members working at the Faculty of Education in Hadramout University, with whom the tool has been thoroughly discussed for validation. Some changes have been suggested and introduced. The tool then was experimented with independent samples at an interval, and has shown a consistency of 86% on Cronbach's alpha, which is considerably a good indicator for carrying out the research study.

The discussion:

As was mentioned before, English-Arabic dictionaries tend to define entries in single words, which is a major drawback as most of the essence of the meaning cannot be disclosed through this method. Besides, the given words can be easily confused with, or understood as other ones.

For instance, when Al-Mawred Dictionary defines the word hygienic as (صحي), this definition, though correct, may mislead the learner into using it to make false collocation, putting it into phrases of his own, say, (hygienic food*) for example, which is totally nonsense and unacceptable, while the intended phrase should be (nutritious food).

Learners do commit such mistakes because of the wrong approach adopted by our bilingual dictionaries. Al-Mawred Dictionary is not an isolated case for Atlas Dictionary almost follows the same method. To explore the depth of the problem, let us see how definitions would look if the Arabic word (صحي) were to be used within illustrative examples, say:

<u>nutritious</u> food غذاء <u>صحي</u>

<u>hygienic</u> paper tissues محارم <u>صحية</u>

Thanks to the clarifying examples, the learner comes to understand that though the two words (nutritious, hygienic) have the same Arabic definition, they cannot be used interchangeably.

As we have seen, words best show their accurate denotations only when collocating with others; this means we cannot trust the single- word definition method adopted by our bilingual dictionaries.

It is clear that the Arabic word (صحي) has two different irrelevant contextual denotations. The word (صحي) in the first one has the denotation of (healthy), while in the second example, it has the denotation of (sterile). The misunderstanding and, consequently, misuse of words often happens when they have different denotations and/ or connotations, and, thus, they can be interpreted and used in two or more different ways in the other language.

However, the problems of misunderstanding definitions almost do not exist in monolingual dictionaries as they provide the learners with a great number of IEs, as an essential part of the semantic change approach, which has become the proffered method among most dictionaries.

For comparison, Let us have a look at how the words (hygienic, nutritious) are defined in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English:

1. hygienic:

clean and likely to prevent bacteria, infections or disease from spreading.

An inspector ensures that food is prepared in hygienic conditions.

2. *nutritious*:

food that is nutritious is full of the natural substances that your body needs to stay healthy or to grow properly :

Wholemeal bread is more nutritious than white bread.

Nuts and fruit make nutritious snacks.

The cookbook contains many simple yet highly nutritious meals.

Thus, IEs give the learner a clear idea about the exact meanings of words, besides, they keep the learner informed about how words correctly collocate, by providing him constantly with ready- made expressions, phrases and sentences, benefitting him in two ways:

1. It enlarges his arsenal of vocabulary, and, thus, makes his speech efficient and more natural.

2. It keeps him always alarmed of the risk of making his own phrases relying only on his mother tongue, which is a common phenomenon among learners of foreign languages leading them often to funny situations, if not catastrophic.

With this useless approach, our bilinguals go on, confusing and misleading learners. The verb (involve), for example, in Al-*Mawred Dictionary is defined in the following way:*

(٣) يغلّف ، يحيط بِ (٢) يستغرق ، ينهمك ﭕ "ج". يورط "ب" . يستخدم "أ" (١)
يؤثر ﭕ. "ج" يستلزم، يقتضي ضمناً. "ب" يشمل، يتضمن. "أ" (٤) يصل ،يربط،

Such information for learners of languages is not only confusing, but misleading and too insufficient. The drawback of such definitions is that they are devoid of IEs, which makes their exact meaning and usage vague and hard to guess, a fact leading the Arab learner, on the long run, loss of confidence in their knowledge.

Not only Al-Mawred Dictionary but also Atlas Encyclopedic Dictionary adopts the same approach. Atlas Dictionary renders *the same verb (involve) in the following way:*

١) يتضمن أو يشمل كجزء ٢) يستلزم ٣) يورط ٤) يؤثر ٥) يستحوذ على الاهتمام ٦) يعقد، يشابك ٧) يغلف، يطوي ٨) يلف، يلوي (مصطلح قديم).

Upon making comparison between the definitions of the two dictionaries, we can easily find differences not only in the order, but also in the content of the definitions as well. The following illustrates this point:

1. Al-Mawred mentions some definitions which have not been mentioned in Atlas, such as: *يستخدم/ يستغرق/ ينهمك/ يربط، يصل.*

2. Atlas mentions other definitions which have not been mentioned in Al-Mawred, such as: *يستحوذ على الاهتمام/ يعقد، يشابك/ يلف، يلوي.*

3. Both dictionaries agree on the following meaning:

يتضمن أو يشمل/ يستلزم/ يغلف.

Yet, they do not make any use of illustrative examples to further clarify the meanings to make them more vivid. The absence of IEs gives the learner full right to use the above-mentioned definitions in alien concepts to them. The learner, for example, may easily use the verb (involve) in place of the following underlined verbs relying on the given definitions (يتضمن أو يشمل):

The speech implied/ carried hidden threats لقد تضمّن الخطاب تهديدات دفينة

Seven articles are included in this issue يتضمن هذا العدد سبعة مقالات

Linguistics embraces many subjects تشمل اللسانيات علوماً كثيرة

Monolingual dictionaries, on the other hand, employ a great number of IEs to support and illustrate their definitions. Longman Dictionaryof Contemporary English, for instance, utilizes the following examples to support of definition of the verb (involve):

1. What will the job <u>involve</u>?

2. Running your own business usually <u>involves</u> working long hours.

3. These changes will <u>involve</u> every one of the staff.

There is no doubt that monolinguals have the upper hand over our bilinguals in clarifying their definitions for being enriched with IEs. It's also quite obvious from the above comparison that IEs not only have the ability of revealing the exact essence of the word meanings by using it in different contexts, but they also benefit the learners by enriching their language arsenal with useful expressions, phrases and sentences, which undoubtedly makes their communication ability higher and more natural.

Due to these facts, it's regretting that the Arab learner seems to have been showing obvious preference using monolingual dictionaries over bilinguals, a fact which has also been confirmed by the results of the questionnaire.

Thus, the Arab learner, instead of assist bridging different culture gaps by establishing ties between the two languages, he tends to cut them.

A clear and funny manifestation of this is when the learner knows how to use a word in English but hesitates to say its equivalent in Arabic.

Al-Mawred Dictionary, however, recognizing the learner's difficulty to guess meanings from single words only, tries effortlessly to provide some meanings in synonyms. The verb (set), for instance, is defined as:

١ (أ) (يُقعد، يُجلس)

١٢ أ (يشحذ، يسن)

٣٣ (محدد، معين)

But, when the user takes to this standard, the dictionary abruptly deviates from it, adding more pressure on the user. Examples of the deviation can be found also under the very same entry:

٨ (ب) (يقرّر، يضع قاعده)

١٦ (ب) (يدير، يعمل)

٢٨ (يجمد، يتخثّر)

The only cases where Al-Mawred has fully succeeded in its purpose were when it refers to illustrative examples. For example, it mentions among the many meanings of the verb (set) that it has the meaning of:

١٤ (أ) (يعتبر، يضع)

But this definition raises the following problems:

1. What is meant by putting the two words in brackets?

   Are they meant to be synonyms as in the examples 1, 12, 33?

   Or just two separate meanings as in 8, 16, 28?

2. it's absolutely difficult in both cases to guess exactly what's meant by this definition. In other words, the learner cannot confidently put the verb (set) in a sentence of his own according to his understanding of the definition. However, if he does, he has the right to consider the verb (set) as the verb (regard), and, instead of constructing a correct sentence like:

I regard cheating dishonest.

 He writes:

* I <u>set</u> cheating dishonest.

Yet, the author, seeming to understand the problem, he decides to come to the learner's rescue with the following illustrative *example:*

Kamal sets duty before pleasure.

The IE explicitly shows that the usage requires comparison between two things and requires also using the preposition (before). These facts show that without using the above IE, it would not have been possible to reveal the inner denotations of that verb.

The question now is why should learners be deprived from IEs if IEs are so indispensible for disclosing meanings?

It's a well-known fact that most of the vocabulary of the English language is of multiple meanings. In addition to that, words in English tend to acquire new other meanings when collocating with other words. The new hybrid meanings cannot be accurately defined in isolation and without illustrative examples. To illustrate this point look at the multiple meanings of the verb (hold):

1.Hold one's tongue ....يحجب عن الكلام

2.Hold a meeting...يعقد اجتماعاً

3. Hold an election..يجري انتخابات

4.The room holds 100 person ....تتسع الغرفه لِمائة شخص

5. Hold one's ground ....يتشبّث بموقفه

6. Hold something under control ....يسيطرعلى موقف ما

7.Hold somebody in high esteem ....يكن تقديراً عالياً لِ

8. Hold strange opinions ....يحمل أفكاراً غريبة

9.The future holds a lot of surprises.....يخبئ المستقبل الكثير من المفاجآت

Another example of Al-Mawred's confusing way can also be found in the definition of the participle (involved):

(١) ملتف أو ملتو (٢) "ا" معقد "ب" مشوش، متشابك،"مشربك" (٣) متورط ـفي

Now, if the learner, according to the above definitions, tries to

translate the word (involved) in the following sentences:

Ali is <u>involved</u> in many jobs.

We find out that none of the given definitions suits the correct translation, which is:

علي <u>مرتبط</u> بالكثير من الوظائف.

The same also happens while translating the sentence:

Tom Cruise was one of the artists <u>involved</u> in the film.

كان توم كروز واحداً من الممثلين <u>المشاركين</u> ــِّ الفيلم.

The above examples reveal an unexpected problem, which is totally beyond the scope of this study. This problem concerns the credibility of our bilingual dictionaries as two main meanings (مرتبط) and (مشارك) have not been listed in the dictionary's definitions.

In opposition to all that, Longman Dictionary brings up many similar examples along with the definitions, which makes the process of translation easier and more accurate. Here are some of the IEs mentioned in it:

Carol was actively <u>involved</u> in the local sports club.

More than 30 firms were <u>involved</u> in the project.

Fathers are encouraged to be more <u>involved</u> with their families.

What makes matters worse with our bilinguals is that the two missing meanings in Al-Mawred Dictionary have also not been listed in Atlas Encyclopedic Dictionary, which means this is not an isolated case with Al-Mawred Dictionary, but obviously a common feature of our bilinguals. which puts even greater question mark about the credibility of all bilinguals. Atlas Dictionary defines the participle (involved) as follows:

١) معقد، متشابك ٢) ملتف، ملتو ٣) مشوش، مضطرب ٤) مرتبط عن طريق ٥) مرتبط عاطفياً ٦) منخرط ـِّ علاقات جنسية.

Comparing the definitions of (involved) in the two dictionaries, we find out that they differ in the following:

Al-Mawred mentions the definition (متورط), which is not mentioned in Atlas. Meanwhile, some definitions in Atlas are not listed in Al-Mawred, such as:

مرتبط عن طريق/ مرتبط عاطفياً منخرط في علاقات جنسية. مرتبط عن طريق/ مرتبط عاطفياً منخرط في علاقات جنسية.

Both dictionaries agree on the definition: معقد، متشابك/ ملتف، ملتو،

مشوش.

The agreement, yet, complicates the issue rather than solve it. Once the definitions are not supported by IEs, the learner is free to use them in whatever wrong ways he wishes.

Even when our bilinguals succeed in choosing the right definition, still, they are far from being ideal. The verb (congratulate), for example, is translated as (يهنئ), which is a correct choice, yet, the Arab learner cannot benefit from this definition. The problem particularly arises when he wants to use it in a sentence, and instead of using it with the correct preposition (on), he feels inclined to use it with the preposition (with) as in Arabic. Again, this happens because of shortage in illustrative examples.

Bilinguals also do not offer examples on how some verbs should be joined, for some verbs should be followed by a gerund, while others are followed by an infinitive…etc. In such cases and in many others, the Arab learner has to refer to monolingual dictionaries.

Prepositional expressions, for instance, are very useful, yet, they are useless if not presented within illustrative examples. Arab learners cannot use the expression (regardless of), for example, because they have no idea about the structures following it. However, this problem is easily solved when referring to monolingual dictionaries. Longman Dictionary illustrates this expression by presenting the following examples:

1. The law requires equal treatment for all, regardless of race, religion, or sex.

2. Many people stick with their banks regardless of whether they offer the best deal.

While Cambridge Dictionary presents it in the following

examples:

1. The plan for a new office tower went ahead regardless of local opposition.

2. She knew it was dangerous to visit him except at night, but she set out regardless.

Meanwhile, Oxford Dictionary supports the definition with the following examples:

1. The club welcomes all new members regardless of age.

2. He went ahead and did it regardless of the consequences.

3. The amount will be paid to every one regardless of whether they have children or not.

Only this way can the learner get a clear and full idea of exact meanings and usage. In addition to that, the learner comes into close and frequent contact with the language in action in its utmost natural way.

Results of the questionnaire:

Since statistics speak louder than words, it's pleasing that the results of the questionnaire have confirmed the researcher's hypothesis. The staggering numbers have proved that our bilinguals leave a lot to be desired. The results have also shown how our students are frustrated with them. The following table illustrates this point:

Numb.	Questions	Yes	No
1.	Are illustrative examples in dictionaries important for defining entries properly?	92,872	7,128
2.	When looking up a word in a dictionary, would you prefer to read the definition supported by an illustrative example?	97,136	2,864
3.	Are monolingual dictionaries richer with I.Es* than bilinguals?	98,572	1,428
4.	Generally, do you prefer using monolingual dictionaries than using bilinguals?	91,392	8,608
5.	Do you wish bilinguals would be richer with I.Es in the future?	98,572	1,428
6.	Have you ever misunderstood a definition due to I.E deficiency in a dictionary? Say some examples if the answer is yes.	85,68	14,32

Recommendations

The researcher highly recommends:

1. That future editions of English- Arabic bilingual dictionaries should be enriched with sufficient numbers of illustrative examples for supporting dictionary definitions and disclosing their denotations and connotations.

2. Incorporating word collocations into definitions for their invaluable importance to enrich learners' knowledge of natural and well-accepted ready-made expressions and phrases.

3. Conducting further research on the extent of credibility of our bilinguals by comparing them with monolinguals.

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Appendix 1: questionnaire

Hadramout University of Science and Technology

Faculty of Education

English Language Department

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Questionnaire for fourth-level students of the English Department

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1. Are illustrative examples in dictionaries important for defining entries thoroughly? Yes ( ) No ( )

2. When looking up a word in a dictionary, would you prefer to read the definition supported by an illustrative example?

   Yes ( ) no ( ).

3. Are monolingual dictionaries richer with I.Es* than bilinguals?

   Yes ( ) no ( ).

4. Generally, do you prefer using monolingual dictionaries than using bilinguals? Yes ( ) no ( )

5. Do you wish bilinguals would be richer with I.Es in the future?

   Yes ( ) no ( ).

6. Have you ever misunderstood a definition due to I.E deficiency in a dictionary? Say some examples if the answer is yes.

   Yes ( ) no ( ).

P.s: I.Es=illustrative examples.

شح الأمثلة التوضيحية في المعاجم الثنائية (إنكليزي- عربي)

ملخص:

تسلّط هذه الدراسة الضوء على مشكلة شح الأمثلة التوضيحية *illustrative examples* في المعاجم الثنائية اللغة (إنجليزي- عربي) بالمقارنة مع المعاجم الأحادية اللغة (إنجليزي- انجليزي) وتأثير هذا النقص في كفاءة تلك المعاجم في أيصال معاني المفردات بمعزل عن سياقاتها.

إن سوء فهم تلك المعاني المجردة يؤدي بلا شك إلى الإخفاق في تطبيقاتها، مما يجعل المستخدم أقل ثقة بهذه المعاجم، فيتحول عنها إلى المعاجم الأحادية مما يؤثر سلباً في ارتباطه بلغته الأم.

وقد تعرض الباحث إلى العديد من الأمثلة المستقاة من النوعين السابقين من المعاجم لإيضاح صعوبة عرض المعاني بمعزل عن نصوصها. كما قام الباحث بأستخدام استمارة (استبانة) لاستقراء آراء الطلاب بهذا الخصوص. وبعد تحليل الاستجابات، أوصى الباحث بضرورة إفراز حيز أكبر للأمثلة التوضيحية في المعاجم المستقبلية.