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**IN MAKING ENGLISH-MANIPURI DICTIONARY –
THE SEMANTIC PROBLEMS**

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In Making English-Manipuri Dictionary: The Semantic Problems

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Abstract: Giving semantic information is the most complicated task in lexicography. However, it is indispensable for any dictionary. The monolingual dictionary deals with definition whereas bilingual dictionary with translation. Hence bilingual lexicography has more complex semantic systems. The degree of complexity also depends upon the languages, which are involved in the dictionary. The job in hand aggravates if the source and the target languages are from different language families. Such problem is observed to be prominent in making English-Manipuri Dictionary. The paper is an attempt to give the semantic problems confronted in making English to Manipuri Dictionary for Manipuri speakers.

In bilingual lexicography, semantic problem is the biggest one. Truly speaking, the meaning discrimination of headword is based on— definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and translations which are the essential information for the identification of headwords. In this regard, it is worth to remember that monolingual lexicographers do not face the problem of translation. Therefore, translation work is an extra activity for the bilingual lexicographers. It would also be wrong to assume that translation from source to target language is the only main task for a bilingual lexicographer. Bilingual lexicographer also has the same problem as that of monolingual dictionary maker.

The problems can be reduced to some extent if the languages are very closely related (linguistically and culturally). On the contrary, the problems cannot be solved so easily if the languages are very different in many respects like English and Manipuri. There are some words, which can easily be translated from one language to another; however thousands of words cannot be translated accurately. In such circumstances, bilingual lexicographers adopt the system of using— definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and

Note: Manipuri equivalents are using IPA [SILDoulos IPA93] for this purpose.

explanation of headwords as practiced by monolingual lexicographers. A considerable number of single lexical units of the source language cannot exactly be corresponded to the target language, and therefore explanations of the headword in paraphrases become an essential property of bilingual dictionary in meaning discrimination.

Many a time it is also found that only definitions or explanations of the head words of the source language are provided since the dictionary is intended for target language speakers who aspire to learn source language.

The following examples are taken from an English-Manipuri Dictionary. In example (A) some of the English words, which can be translated into Manipuri, are provided. And example (B) shows the words, which cannot easily be translated.

- A. **ant** /kək.ceŋ/; a small social insect celebrated for industry.
 bird /u.cek/; feathered vertebrate.
 cat /həu.doŋ/; small animal domesticated carnivorous quadruped.
- B. **gyroscope** /cə.krə sa.nə koï.bə.gi ni.jəm.tak.pə jən.trə/; instrument
 Illustrating dynamics of rotating bodies.
 honeymoon /lu.hoŋ.bə.gi ə.han.bə t^ha/; the first month after marriage-
 /lu.hoŋ.bə nəu.ri.bə mə.təi mə.nau koï.bə/; spend honeymoon (in
 a place).
 juniper /mə.təm pum.bə.də i.səŋ səŋ.bə pəm.bi/; an evergreen shrub.

As languages have their own systems of organizing forms and meanings, lexical units in different languages are organized differently. In such circumstances isomorphism is no more, “there are no exact correspondences between words in different languages” (Nida, 1958:281). Although there are such problems, one of the notable headaches to bilingual lexicographers is matching of cultural words in different languages. “These lexical units do not have counterparts, i.e., lexical units with an identical designatum in the target language” (Zgusta, 1971:324). It is being understood by bilingual lexicographers that dealing with two languages mean bicultural work. Regarding this matter we can mention

... “A culture (defined here as a more-or-less unified linguistic area) is not aware that its facts are different, peculiar, or even characteristic, unless so informed by an outsider or unless confronted suddenly by another culture” (Swanson, 1970:70).

The cultural words can broadly be studied under the following heads: i) Ecology and Environment, ii) Material culture, and iii) Social culture.

i) *Ecology and Environment*: The ecosystem and its environmental elements are more or less location specific. As a result, natural phenomena, the flora and fauna, topographical features are varied from place to place. Many English words, which are related to this topic, do not develop in the minds of the Manipuri speakers. It is because of the influence of the ecology and environment. However, it is not an avoidable task for the bilingual lexicographer to give the correspondence. And therefore the English-Manipuri dictionary makers explained in different ways, for instance:

estuary /sə mudrəgi pam.bom/; arm of the sea.

hurricane /əkənbə noŋ nuŋ.sit/; violent storm.

trout /ŋa mək^həl əmə/; fresh water fish of delicate flavour.

ii) *Material Culture*: It is also true that the words pertaining to materials are different from culture to culture. Material words, articles of food, dress, household goods, etc. are also culture specific. Such words of material culture are given in English-Manipuri Dictionary in the following way, for instance:

bacon /əjaibə ok.sa/; salted and smoked meat from the back or sides of hog.

bluchers /k^hoŋup k^huk.u jəubi/; old-fashioned low boots or high shoes.

fork /cabə mətamdə siŋinnəbə kəta/; prolonged instrument used in eating.

iii) *Social Culture*: A society has developed through a distinct culture and the culture always associates itself with certain norms. Therefore, no society can be separated from their socio-cultural activities like, life-style, customs, social system and rites. These socio-cultural activities are manifested in the language. Words related with such socio-

cultural activities of a society, brought up in a distinct environment, cannot be rendered into another language satisfactorily, for instance (from English-Manipuri Dictionary):

alimony /ain.gi teŋ.baŋ.nə k^hainərəbə nupidə məpuroibənə pibə cak.t^hak.məl/;
allowance due to wife from husband's estate, on legal separation or divorce.

capitation /mikok.tə ləubə k^həjəna nətrəgə senk^hai/; tax or fee of so much a head.

caravan /ləikəŋ.lagi mərub^humigi ləŋ.p^həi cət.pə kaŋ.bu pərəŋ/ company of
travelers, as merchants, pilgrims, etc., traveling together for safety
especially through desert.

A comparative study of some English specific words:

The following examples show the meaning discrimination or explanation adopted in three different English-Manipuri Dictionaries- i) The Anglo-Manipuri Dictionary (AMD), ii) Friends' English to Manipuri Dictionary (FEMD), and iii) Students' Anglo-Manipuri Dictionary (SAMD). In these dictionaries the English words- apple, baize, beaver, bishop, daffodil, elite, yacht, etc. are shown along with their explanations in both languages. The simple statements illustrate how the lexicographer/dictionary compilers present the words differently in their dictionaries.

apple

AMD - a kind of fruit, /həitup.kum.bə uhəi jat əmə, sem/

FEMD - /(sem) apəl kəubə uhəi nətrəgə pam.bi/; round firm fleshy fruit of a rosaceous
tree it grows on;

SAMD - a kind of juicy fruit, / həitup.kum.bə uhəi jat əmə, sem / apple of one's eye,
/mit.ki məni/

baize

AMD - a kind of coarse woolen cloth, /samətugi əpəubə p^hi əmə/

FEMD - /əpəubə samətu p^hi/; coarse woolen stuff with long nap used to cover table

SAMD - thick woolen table cloth, /tebil kup.nəbə ət^habə samətugi p^hi/

beaver

AMD - an amphibious quadruped, /isiŋ.dəsu kəŋ.p^hal.dəsu leibə sa jat əmə/

FEMD - /bibər sa/; amphibious animal that has soft fur, broad tail and chisel like teeth, webbed hind feet and flat tail.

SAMD - a small animal; with fine fur living both on land and water,

/isiŋ.dəsu kəŋ.p^hal.dəsu leibə, mətu əkup.pə pan.bə əpik.pə sa əmə/

Besides the above, there are also many more contradictions pertaining to social system and culture. “Aside from the specialization of vocabulary in different semantic fields according to the cultural and environmental needs of speakers, which is only to be expected, languages differ in their formation of parts of their vocabulary dealing with particular subjects” (Robins, 1989:380). For instance, “the lexical units belonging to the semantic fields of kinship, colors, time weight and measures, etc. are other notable items for which equivalents are not easily available” (Singh, 1991:203). Comparatively, the English kinship terms are not so exhaustive like those of Manipuri. Therefore, the English words like brother, cousin, sister, uncle, etc can be corresponded to Manipuri in the following way.

brother	1. /ijam.bə/	“elder brother for male speaker”
	2. /ibuŋ/	“elder brother for female speaker”
	3. /inau/	“younger brother for male speaker”
	4. /iupwa/	“younger brother for female speaker”
cousin	1. /ibai/	“elder male cousin for male speaker”
	2. /itəi/	“elder male cousin for female speaker”
	3. /itəimə/	“elder female cousin for male speaker”
	4. /inəmə/	“elder female cousin for female speaker”
	5. /isen/	“younger male cousin for male speaker”

sister	1. /ice/	“elder sister”
	2. /icən/	“younger sister male speaker”
	3. /inau/	“younger sister for female speaker”
uncle	1. /iton/	“younger paternal uncle”
	2. /ipən/	“elder paternal uncle”
	3. /mamə/	“maternal uncle ”

Suggestions:

Translation from source language to target language is the most important work for bilingual lexicographer. Words may have numerous meanings in different situations. The approach is the identification of word. The identification of word also depends upon its contextual situation. Some linguists are of the opinion that contextual meaning is more important than the dictionary meaning. However to define all contextual meanings is impossible in a dictionary, since it changes place to place and from situation to situation. Many positive senses are used as negative and vice versa. For example, ironic meanings are not provided in monolingual or bilingual dictionary. Regarding meaning discrimination, it can be pointed out that—“In compiling a bilingual dictionary a considerable amount of meaning discrimination or illustration is to be provided wherever the users may face the problems to get the meaning of the words. It is wrong assumption to establish a rule where the meaning should be discriminated because before compiling this type of dictionary he had done the contrastive study of the two languages. The lexicographer knows when and where the meaning discrimination is required. (Singh, 2004).

Normally, in a good dictionary, the compiler gives the polysemous meanings of a headword under the same entry. “A polysemantic word, had several, often quite different, meanings all derived from same basic idea or concept” (Singh, 1995). If the words are homonym, they are entered separately. “Homonym is a word which is identical in written form and in sound with another word of the same language, but is different in origin and meaning” (ibid).

It is not possible to give exact equivalent meaning from one language to another. This is why many bilingual dictionary compilers gave near equivalent meanings in the target language. On the other hand many words have their equivalents in the target language the basic meanings only, but their derived meanings and connotational meanings are absolutely different, for example, 'unicorn' is an imaginary animal like a white horse with a long straight horn growing on its head. At this juncture, any English-Manipuri dictionary compiler will not be able to give its exact or near equivalent in Manipuri. Searching for such equivalent from English to Manipuri is very tedious. Frankly speaking, if the compiler has good command in both languages, then the dictionary will be highly helpful to the users.

We know that many English words have near equivalents in Manipuri. However, it is not a good policy to give only the near equivalents because the dictionary users do not know the semantic gap between the two words. For example, the word 'breakfast' and /cərawanbə/ in Manipuri share similar semantic features. But the later is usually for children only, not for adult. In general, Manipuris enjoy only two meals in a day-- a meal in daytime (usually 9 a.m. to 12 noon) and another at nighttime (6 p.m. to 9 p.m.). The daytime meal of Manipuri can be corresponded to 'brunch' in English. Most English-Manipuri dictionary compilers have provided 'brunch' and 'lunch' identically. Another example is 'hare' and 'rabbit' in English are given as /t^hebə/ in Manipuri. But the above words are defined separately in "Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary of current English" (Hornby, 2000) as: **hare**- an animal like rabbit but with longer ears and legs and able to run very fast and **rabbit**- a small animal with grayish brown fur, long ears and short tail. Rabbit lives in holes in ground It is to be noted that the bilingual lexicographer should define or illustrate the meaning of different words in the target language distinctly.

It is also apparent that different senses of a word in the source language, for instance, 'machine' (noun) have as many as six meanings in "Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English." (Longman, 1998). The word 'machine' itself is no longer used as foreign in Manipuri but only the basic meaning or sense. The other derived meanings are not properly

used in Manipuri. In the same dictionary mentioned above, the word ‘machine’ is treated as different headword according to its grammatical function, as, **machine**² v.- 1. to fasten pieces of clothes together using a sewing machine. 2. to make or shape something using a machine. No doubt, a bilingual lexicographer may give the near equivalent meaning in the target language but one should not try to distort the other meanings of the word. One of the most important devices is to illustrate or discriminate the semantic gap of the word in both languages.

We often find such meanings as ‘a kind of bird’, ‘a species of herbs’, ‘name of a flower or plant’, etc. in English-Manipuri dictionaries which land the user nowhere. For such cases, meanings should be indicated by specialized subjects to which they are used to. “The New Lexicon Webster’s Dictionary of English” (Cayne, 1987), for example, which is famous for scientific definitions of terms, can be referred. It will also be very helpful to the users if the dictionary makers adopted the policy of pictorial illustration. The users may recognize the meaning of headword through pictorial illustrations. All the pictures should be properly described in detail by which the users could get the actual sense or meaning at a glance.

It is worth mentioning that a bilingual lexicographer is doing two jobs—1) translation work (from source to target language) and 2) explanation of head entries (as is done by a monolingual lexicographer).

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