Bilingual German-English Lexicographical Resources

Summary

Bilingual dictionaries are the key resource for every translator. But they should always be used in close conjunction with monolingual resources in the source and target language.

- The authoritative English-German/German-English general bilingual dictionary is the four-volume Langenscheidts Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch der englischen und deutschen Sprache (Der Große Muret-Sanders). It is also available online.
- An excellent single-volume general bilingual dictionary is the Langenscheidt Collins Großwörterbuch Englisch.
- Popular online German-English general dictionaries are LEO (http://dict.leo.org/) and Dict.cc (http://www.dict.cc/). Caution is advised with some entries, but the forums are useful and should be used.
- A very good resource for German-English is Linguee at http://www.linguee.de/ – an engine that searches bilingual texts on the Web in English and German for words and expressions.
- The Langenscheidt Routledge e-Fachwörterbuch Wirtschaft, Handel und Finanzen Englisch, is just one example of the many good specialised bilingual dictionaries available.
- Equally useful are the parallel texts found on multilingual sites, e.g. the Swiss governmenr site at https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start.html. These sites often have their own glossaries and terminology databases.

A number of the electronic resources mentioned are available under “elektronische Nachschlagewerke” on the ZHAW library’s search page: https://www.zhaw.ch/de/hochschulbibliothek/suchen-finden
Introduction

This unit looks at German-English bilingual lexicographical resources in printed and electronic form. It begins with some words on how they should be used and then proceeds to consider representative examples. There is also a bibliography of some useful works.

Medium

The difference between printed and digital resources is one of medium rather than content. An electronic or Web-based dictionary is essentially the same as its equivalent printed edition (if one exists); but the way that digital data is stored, and the opportunity for multimedia presentation of that data, means that the material can be viewed and retrieved in ways that printed books do not allow. This increased flexibility is of great benefit to the user. On the other hand, many digital resources are relatively intransparent – it is often hard to find out how extensive an Internet dictionary is, who has edited it, what other resources it gets its content from, how up-to-date that content is and so on.

Despite the widespread availability digital media and the Internet, printed works can still be a useful source for language professionals in their some of the work they do. This may seem surprising, above all given the comparatively long time-to-market of printed resources. Yet language does not change so fast as to make dictionaries wholly unusable after a few months. Furthermore, a number of highly specialised printed resources may never be published in digital form because sales or subscriptions could not justify development costs. So it would be premature to regard printed resources as wholly obsolete.

Bilingual Resource Use

The principal aim of bilingual (and multilingual) resources is to establish interlingual equivalence (i.e. equivalence between languages) at the lexical level – that is, to translate words and expressions in one language with words or expressions of more or less the same meaning in another. They are not primarily concerned with defining or explaining terms nor with presenting collocational examples.

This can be their weakness. It is a measure of a good bilingual dictionary that examples of usage are given and, where direct equivalence between source and target languages or cultures does not exist, explanations and/or definitions are offered.

Increasingly, modern editions of the best bilingual resources in German and English have begun to include pragmatic indicators and contexts of usage, collocational examples, definitions – especially where no direct equivalent to the source-language term exists in the target language – and even some encyclopedic background information on a term, phenomenon or institution. Content such as this is a measure of the quality of these resources: the more such supplementary information, usage examples, is provided, the more useful and reliable the resource is.

All that has been said about English monolingual dictionaries and other resources applies equally to bilingual and multilingual ones. Considerable work has gone into compiling these tools; it would be a pity not to use all the information they contain. So once more, an important step is to know your reference works, especially those you regularly use: familiarise yourselves first with the way entries are assembled, with what the abbreviations mean, with any additional information and so on. In addition to matching words and phrases across languages, many general bilingual dictionaries have extensive and very practical appendices covering grammar, language use, forms of address, letter writing, weights and measures, etc. in both languages.

Be that as it may, it should be clear that the language professional must also turn to monolingual resources to find out more whenever the dictionary:

• presents a variety of possible equivalents for the source-language word or expression,
none or only some of which are adequately contextualised;

• fails to give sufficient information on usage (i.e. field of use, formality, etc.);
• supplies no or only limited cotextual or contextual examples;
• supplements a target-language equivalent with an explanation, suggesting that the equivalent offered is no more than vague and general;
• gives a paraphrase, explanation and/or definition of the source-language term instead of a direct target-language equivalent, suggesting that no such equivalent exists.

General and specialised bilingual dictionaries are the key resource for every translator. It is with the help of these aids that the translator is able to accomplish an accurate transfer of meaning from a source language and text into a target language and text. Yet these dictionaries are only one item in a chain of research tools, and should never be relied on alone. They should therefore be used in close conjunction with monolingual resources in the source and target language: firstly, to ensure that the source-text message has been correctly understood; and secondly, to make certain that the message has been transferred in a way that makes it both comprehensible and acceptable to the intended target audience. A language specialist should always be prepared to check back in monolingual reference works where bilingual or multilingual resources cause doubt or uncertainty.

Bilingual and Multilingual Resources: An Overview

The bilingual and multilingual resources most useful to language professionals can be broadly divided up into:

• Language resources:
  o General language resources
  o Specialised language resources

• Knowledge resources:
  o General knowledge resources
  o Specialised knowledge resources

As a rule, linguistic information can be found primarily in general and specialised dictionaries as well as in parallel texts. Extra-linguistic information is contained predominantly in encyclopedias, fact books, almanacs, news sites and databases as well as in subject-specific reference works.

Certain search platforms allow users to simultaneously search a range of linguistic resources; there are also a number of sites where users can consult reference collections comprising both linguistic and encyclopedic resources.

General German-English Resources

The authoritative English-German/German-English general bilingual dictionary is Langenscheidts Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch der englischen und deutschen Sprache; Der Große Muret-Sanders. 4 vols. Berlin, Munich, Vienna and Zurich: Langenscheidt, 1997-2002. It appears in two parts – English-German and German-English – each consisting of two volumes. A more concise version of the dictionary in electronic form – Muret-Sanders e-Großwörterbuch Englisch 4.0 Englisch-Deutsch/Deutsch-Englisch – can be accessed via the ZHAW library page.

There are also a number of single-volume bilingual dictionaries which, although not as comprehensive as the Muret-Sanders, are extremely good. The most recent editions of the Großwörterbucher and university or professional dictionaries by Langenscheidt, PONS, Collins, Duden and Oxford are highly recommended.
Which one you use will be a matter of personal preference; you are advised to work with all of them for a little while before investing in one or the other. As an illustration, consider the following entry from the print version of the *PONS Großwörterbuch*:

```
Abitur <=, setzen => at Abitur (school examination usually taken at the end of the 13th year and approximately equivalent to the British A level/ American SAT exam; das/sein – ablegen (geh))
to sit (one's) Abitur; [das] = haben to have [one's]
Abitur; [das] = machen to do [one's] Abitur
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Obviously, this entry goes far beyond a word-for-word translation, so it is worth consulting the user guide when using such a resource. Indeed, a dictionary which does not include information on grammar, morphology, usage or dialect variation, and which does not provide explanations of culturally-specific terms (like "Abitur") or examples of usage, is not really a dictionary at all: it is a word list, and as such of only limited use.

The *Langenscheidt Collins Großwörterbuch Englisch* may provide even more information, as the following entry from an electronic version of the dictionary shows:

What is especially helpful here is, in addition to the standard translations of the term *Bundesversammlung* in the German, Austrian and Swiss context, the explanation of what the institution is and does.

The range of dictionaries and other lexicographical resources is not restricted to printed and electronic versions of dictionaries. There are a host of Internet dictionaries generally available. There differ not only in terms of medium but also in terms of their origin and development. Printed dictionaries and their electronic equivalents are reviewed, edited publications issued by publishing houses specialised in lexicography. Internet-based resources can be that as well, but they can also be unedited resources relying on contributions from users – which can affect the quality of some of the entries. So whenever Internet resources are consulted, caution is advised.

A popular online dictionary covering English-German and a growing number of other language pairs is *LEO* ([http://dict.leo.org/](http://dict.leo.org/)). Searches can be bi-directional or monodirectional. Be careful with this resource. Although many entries are accurate and idiomatic, some can be of dubious quality. Indeed, the most valuable features of this and other online dictionaries are often overlooked. *LEO* has a large and active forum in which translators discuss particular problems they encounter with words or expressions. Some good translations and tips can be found here. The same applies to the German-English online dictionary *Dict.cc* at [http://www.dict.cc/](http://www.dict.cc/), another popular resource.
Other free online dictionaries covering German-English are TU Chemnitz’s Beolingus at http://dict.tu-chemnitz.de/, the PONS online resource at http://de.pons.com/, the Oxford dictionaries collection at http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/ and, last but by no means least, the fine collection of resources at http://www.wordreference.com/.

One very good resource for German-English is Linguee at http://www.linguee.de/. It is not actually a dictionary but a search engine that searches many millions of bilingual texts on the Web in English and German for words and expressions. In a sense, then, it uses the Web as a giant corpus of parallel texts. Every expression is accompanied by useful additional information and suitable example sentences. This site is highly recommended but, again, must be used with caution and in conjunction with monolingual resources where any doubt exists as to the adequacy of the translations found.

**Specialised German-English Resources**

The Muret-Sanders, Langenscheidt Collins Großwörterbuch and PONS Großwörterbuch are all examples of the numerous general bilingual dictionaries available to language professionals. Yet many assignments demand a degree of specialised terminology that goes beyond the scope of such dictionaries. In this case the translator must turn to specialist bilingual dictionaries and glossaries.

There are as many of these as there are fields of specialisation. The leading dictionaries in the major fields are listed in the bibliography. Here, we shall content ourselves with looking at some examples.

Below is a series of entries from one of the very best English-German/German-English dictionaries, Wilhelm Schäfer's Wirtschaftswörterbuch. The example below is from volume 2, which covers German-English:

```
Verzinsung / (Fin) interest, interest payment
Verzinsungszinsen / (Fin) interest on interest, compound interest
Verzinsungsgeschäft / (Fin) interest business, loan
Verschuldungsgrad / (Fin) debt-equity ratio
Verschuldung / der öffentlichen Hand (FiW) public debt
Verschuldungsgrad / (Fin) propensity to take up credits
```

In these entries we again see the classic elements of a good dictionary. There are abbreviated references to the specific field of use (Fin = Business Finance/Banking; FiW = Public Finance), to British (GB) or American usage (US), and explanations of certain terms (introduce by *ie*). Sometimes there is even a bilingual explanation:

```
Eigenkapitalquote / (Fin) equity ratio
   − Kapital-zu-Ässet-Ratio
   − capital ratio
   (*ie, Verhältnis Eigenkapital zur Bilanzsumme =
   ratio of equity to total assets; hat sich in der Industrie bei 30% stabilisiert)
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The same type of entry, with an equally good additional range of references, is found on the electronic Langenscheidt Routledge Professional-Fachwörterbuch Wirtschaft, Handel und Finanzen Englisch: Englisch-Deutsch/Deutsch-Englisch. The corresponding entries for "Verschuldung", taken from the previous edition (then called the Routledge e-Fachwörterbuch Wirtschaft, Handel und Finanzen), can be seen below:
The entry above is taken from the fine *Langenscheidt e-Fachwörterbuch Technik und angewandte Wissenschaften Englisch-Deutsch* and another standard specialised dictionary in the technological domain is Ernst's *Wörterbuch der industriellen Technik*, available both in print form and electronically. The range and detail of references go far beyond those of a general dictionary, though it lacks example-based colloquial and contextual references. *Der grosse Eichborn* and Dietl's *Wörterbuch für Recht, Wirtschaft und Politik* are similar dictionaries, in these cases specialising in economics, insurance, law and politics.
Parallel Texts

As already mentioned, another frequent source of reference for translators is the parallel text. Parallel texts are two or more texts containing the same messages and serving the same purposes in at least two different languages. Multinational corporate or governmental documentation, product information leaflets, instruction booklets and so on are often produced in (or translated into) a number of languages. This is very valuable for the language professional, who can use parallel versions of these texts as a terminological and collocation resource. Technical translators will find product catalogues particularly useful, especially when illustrations are provided for close comparison.

Wikipedia was introduced in the unit on monolingual English resources. Besides its sheer scale, its greatest advantage for language professionals is its multilingualism – many entries are in various languages, providing readily searchable parallel or near-parallel texts. You can access the English version of Wikipedia can be accessed at http://en.wikipedia.org/ and the various language versions via the links on that page.

A prime example of a fine collection of parallel texts is the EU’s EUR-Lex site (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/index.htm), which provides free access to European Union law and other documents considered to be public. The website is available in 23 official languages of the European Union, and has powerful search facilities enabling search results to appear in a bilingual display so that users can see texts side by side in two languages of their choice, for instance English and German.

Another example is the site of the Swiss government at https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start.html. Much of the documentation on that site is available in English as well as in the Swiss national languages, providing a ready resource of parallel texts in the legal, political and administrative spheres of Swiss public administration.

The purpose here is not to give a full list of all multilingual sites but to sensitise you to their existence and to their usefulness for translation. The following list of other multilingual sites is therefore no more than a small indication of what can be found and used. Many of these sites offer monolingual and multilingual glossaries and terminology databases in the various fields in which the organisations operate. To find these quickly, you can enter terms like “glossary” “terminology”, etc. in the sites’ internal search engines.

Commercial organisations

- Credit Suisse: https://www.credit-suisse.com/ch/de.html; example of a glossary: https://perspectives.credit-suisse.com/ch/privatkunden/anlegen/de/glossar.jsp

National and governmental organisations

- German Bundestag: http://www.bundestag.de/; example of a terminology database: http://tms.bundestag.de/
- Swiss National Bank: http://www.snb.ch/; example of a glossary: https://www.snb.ch/d/welt/glossary/

International Organisations

World Trade Organisation: https://www.wto.org/; example of a terminology database: https://wto.sdlproducts.com/multiterm

General and Specialised Knowledge Resources

Parallel texts such as those mentioned above are also a valuable knowledge resource. This also applies to multilingual encyclopedias like Wikipedia, and to multilingual term banks and glossaries concerned with specific subject areas, many of which contain useful definitions. Yet it must be said that the most used and useful knowledge resources are monolingual – either in the source language (for text reception), or in the target language (for text production, revision and transfer). These resources are covered in the unit on monolingual resources.

Summary

The purpose of this unit has been to draw attention to selected bilingual printed and digital resources for the German-English translation version. You have gained

- an overview of the major types of bilingual resource for language professionals
- awareness of how to use these together with monolingual resources
- basic insights into their strengths and weaknesses

This unit has focused on representative examples to indicate their major features and to encourage you to explore them further in the course of your own work.

Bibliography

This bibliography is designed to list some basic German-English / English-German resources which student translators who are commencing their studies on the ZHAW's Bachelor Programme in Applied Languages will find useful. The intention is not to compile an exhaustive bibliography listing all possible resources but to provide an introductory selection of works.

It is largely based on dictionaries acquired for the ZHAW library. Please note that certain titles may have been withdrawn from publication or newer editions released.

General German-English Dictionaries

Up-to-date single-volume dictionary highly recommended by many translators and students. Also available on CD-ROM.

Fine electronic dictionary with 350,000 terms and over 530,000 translations. See next entry for the print edition.

The print edition of the electronic dictionary listed above. 350,000 terms and over 530,000 translations. A very good, user-friendly, up-to-date single-volume dictionary. Also available on CD-ROM (see above).
**Langenscheidts Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch der englischen und deutschen Sprache; Der Große Muret-Sanders.** 4 vols. Berlin, Munich, Vienna and Zurich: Langenscheidt, 1997-2002. The most comprehensive German-English dictionary. Though somewhat expensive, it is an indispensable reference work for translators. It comes in two parts – English-German and German-English – each consisting of two volumes.


**Specialised German-English Dictionaries: Economics, Law and Politics**


Langenscheidt Routledge e-Fachwörterbuch Wirtschaft, Handel und Finanzen Englisch-Deutsch / Deutsch-Englisch. CD-ROM Version 4.0
Up-to-date CD-ROM (October 2002) with 110,000 specialist terms.


**Specialised German-English Dictionaries: Science, Technology and Medicine**


Elsevier is a world-leading publisher of scientific, technical and medical material, and the above entry is merely one of a huge range of specialised dictionaries they publish.


*Langenscheidt e-Fachwörterbuch Elektronik und Elektrotechnik Englisch-Deutsch/Deutsch-Englisch*. CD-ROM Version 4.0
Up-to-date CD-ROM with 150,000 specialist terms. Available via the ZHAW library page.

CD-ROM with 50,000 specialist terms, available on the ZHAW library page.

CD-ROM with 74,000 terms. A version is available via the ZHAW library page.

*Langenscheidt e-Fachwörterbuch Medizin Englisch-Deutsch / Deutsch-Englisch*. CD-ROM Version 4.0
CD-ROM with 220,000 specialist terms. Also available via the ZHAW library page.

*Langenscheidt e-Fachwörterbuch Technik und angewandte Wissenschaften Englisch-Deutsch/Deutsch-Englisch*. CD-ROM Version 4.0
CD-ROM with 500,000 specialist terms. This dictionary is available online via the ZHAW library page.

*Langenscheidt e-Fachwörterbuch Umwelttechnik Englisch-Deutsch/Deutsch-Englisch*. CD-ROM Version 2.0
CD-ROM with 50,000 specialist terms, available via the ZHAW library page.

*Langenscheidt Fachwörterbuch Physik Deutsch-Englisch*. Munich, Vienna and Zurich: Langenscheidt, 2005. Also available online via the ZHAW library page.


*Langenscheidt Online-Fachwörterbuch Biologie, Biotechnologie, Ökologie Englisch-Deutsch/Deutsch-Englisch*. An online dictionary with 200,000 terms covering all areas of biology, biotechnology and ecology. It is available online via the ZHAW library page.


An excellent multi-volume encyclopedia of chemistry in German, with many key terms translated into English. *Römpp* encyclopedias are published together on a CD-ROM.


A useful dictionary presenting and explaining a wide range of computer terminology in English. An index of German terms guides the user to the appropriate English translation.


The standard German reference work, but useful for the translator because many English equivalents are included. Also available on CD-ROM and online on the ZHAW library page.


Collection on one CD-ROM of all *Römpp* encyclopedias covering biotechnology, chemistry, food chemistry, natural materials and the environment. Also available as an online resource.


The print version of the above. A compact version of this dictionary is available online via the ZHAW library page.


CD-ROM version of the above.
