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## **Terminological Challenges in the Norwegian-Tigrinya Dictionary**

### ***1 Introduction***

We live in a world where people migrate from developing countries to Europe to a larger extent than ever before. Often these people come from areas where both language and culture are quite different from the European cultures.

In order to help these people in their new surroundings the compilation of bilingual dictionaries is of great importance. During the 1990's quite a number of bilingual dictionaries were compiled with Swedish as the source language and several languages from developing countries, amongst them Somali and Kurdish. These dictionaries constituted the basis for the compilation of the LEXIN dictionaries which have been compiled at the AKSIS centre with Norwegian as the source language since 1996. These dictionaries are especially designed to help immigrants and refugees with a very poor knowledge of Norwegian.

As would be expected, the translation of terms and lexical items into these languages has presented various challenges. Of course differences in lexical structure and culture can explain many of these challenges, but the status of the target language will also have serious consequences for bilingual dictionary and terminology work.

As is well known, the dissemination of terminology through mass media, bilingual dictionaries, translators, interpreters and, perhaps most importantly, through the school system, is of vital importance if success is to be achieved.

If we look at the status of Kiswahili in countries such as Tanzania and Kenya compared to the status of Tigrinya in Eritrea, we find major differences. Tanzania has succeeded in raising the status of Kiswahili by implementing a consistent language policy, including terminology planning for many years. Kenya has so far not succeeded because they lack an organized structure to undertake language and terminology planning. Still, Kiswahili is a developed language with several bilingual dictionaries involving Kiswahili and other languages.

As Onyango (2005: 231) has pointed out, the education domain is the most important agent for stabilizing and standardizing language usage, including

terminologies. This has not been taken seriously enough in Kenya.

The status of Tigrinya, the official language of Eritrea, is quite different. Tigrinya has been seriously neglected in schools and there are very few school text books and dictionaries available. Domain specific terminology is almost nonexistent. Consequently, Nazareth Kifle, who has translated the dictionary into Tigrinya, encountered serious terminological problems in her translation work.

## ***2 Theoretical Framework***

### *2.1 Source language and target language*

In order to identify the terminological challenges of bilingual terminology work, we can distinguish between 3 major variables/parameters pertaining to source vs. target status, cultural status and degree of premise control. For example, is Norwegian the source language or the target language? Does Norwegian represent the dominant culture or setting of the terminology or does it represent the dominated culture? Does Norwegian represent the point of departure, thus being in the position of the controller of the premises for the translation process, or does it represent the receiver of these premises?

The large scale Norwegian Oil Terminology project is an example. This project aimed at providing good Norwegian technical terms to be used by personnel employed in the Norwegian sector of the off-shore oil industry. Norwegian was the target language. It represented the dominated culture and was the receiver of premises. In the LEXIN projects Norwegian is the source language, representing the dominating culture and the controller of premises. Both these contexts represent their own challenges.

### *2.2 Target language and terminological starting point*

Investigating the relative status of the source language and the target language may in many cases reveal the sort of challenges which one may expect in a bilingual terminology project. Seen from the point of view of the target language, we may distinguish between 4 different types of situation. In the first type of situation, the target language has a developed and established terminology for the LSP (Language for Specific Purpose) domain in question and the domain is parallel for the source language and the target language. In the Norwegian-Vietnamese dictionary for Vietnamese refugees in Norway (Andersen, 1996), specialized terminology groups were formed to cope with the medical terminology in the dictionary. The medical terms used were largely internationally known and thus made the actual translation from Vietnamese into Norwegian relatively easy.

In the second type of situation, the target language has a developed and established terminology for the LSP domain in question, but the domain is not parallel in the source language and the target language. Again the Norwegian-

Vietnamese dictionary provides an example. There were also specialized terminology groups in the domain of law, but the Vietnamese system differed in many respects from the Norwegian one and created many terminological problems for the group.

In the third and the fourth types of situations, the terminological challenges increase considerably, as we will demonstrate. The third type of situation is the one where the target language does not have a developed terminology for the domain in question. The fourth type of situation is the one where the target language to some extent has a developed terminology, but where it is not disseminated among the people and is not understood. Both these types of situations are typical contexts for the Norwegian-Tigrinya dictionary.

### ***3 The Status of Tigrinya in Eritrea***

Tigrinya belongs to the Abyssinian Semitic Language group. In a broader spectrum, it is classified within the South Semitic sub-stratum of the Semitic family which in turn belongs to the Afro-Asiatic group (Lipiniski, 1997). It is spoken by about 6.5 million people in the highlands of Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia. Together with Arabic, Tigrinya serves as the working language of the State of Eritrea. Eritrea has about 4.1 million population which consists of nine nationalities who use nine different languages and among these, Tigrinya is the most widely spoken language, both as a mother tongue and a second language. Tigrinya has also official status in the State of Tigray in Ethiopia.

After its independence in 1991, Eritrea has adopted a new language policy which encourages the use and development of all its native languages through primary education (Chefena, 2002; Chefena et al., 2000). Primary schooling is conducted in the native tongues. However, the native languages are substituted by English in junior and secondary school. English is also used as the medium of instruction in higher education and as the language of international communication. Eritrea's language policy in theory does not impose any of the native languages as a national or official language. Thereby, without having any legal authority, Tigrinya and Arabic function as the *working or administrative* languages in the country. Legal and official documents are issued in both languages, and they are widely used on the state media. In general, the independence period can be considered as the most favorable period for the development of all Eritrean languages.

The region has a long literary history. Geez, an ancient language which is believed to be the predecessor of the modern Abyssinian Semitic Languages, had played a great role as a literary and liturgical language of the Orthodox Church since its genesis arguably in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. However, Tigrinya appeared as a written language only in the late 18th century. It adopted the Geez writing system. Most of the initiatives were taken by missionaries whose goal was to reach out the wider population through the indigenous languages (Idris, 2003). During the Italian colonization (1882-1941) Italian served as the language of the colony. Eritrea was an autonomous state federated with Ethiopia for very a short period (1952-1961). During this period, Arabic and

Tigrinya served as the official languages of Eritrea. However, after Ethiopia had annexed Eritrea to its regional provinces in 1962, Amharic became the national language of Eritrea.

Within the given historical context of Tigrinya, we can understand better the challenges of developing resources such as dictionaries and term-banks for the language. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give an extensive review of the past and existing initiatives; it will suffice to mention some of the contributions which were also vital in the Norwegian-Tigrinya Lexin project. The *English-Tigrinya* dictionary produced by EPLF (1986) during the armed struggle is among the most popular bilingual dictionaries. The *Swedish-Tigrinya Lexicon* paper dictionary (Svensk-tigrinskt lexikon, 1989) was also referred to extensively. The monolingual dictionary ‘*ዘመናዊ መዝገበ ቃላት ትግርኛ/ Modern Tigrinya dictionary*’ (Tekie, 1999) and the bilingual dictionary in two volumes ‘*Tigrinya-English Dictionary*’ (Kane, 2000) were also important landmarks both in the history of Tigrinya and in the Lexin project. However, contributions to the development of terminological resources are almost nonexistent. To our knowledge, there are only two contributions: ‘*Dizionario di legatoria - መዝገበ ቃላት ብዛዕባ ሞያ ስርገሳውቲ ጥራዝ*’ (Manca, 2004) and *English-Tigrinya Medical Glossary* (Woldetatos and Tzegai, 1999).

#### **4 The Norwegian Lexin Project**

Lexin is compiled with a particular set of users in mind. The purpose of the Lexin series dictionaries is to facilitate the integration of immigrants into the hosting society. The project prioritizes immigrant languages that are of least interest to private sectors since developing resources for these language may be considered unprofitable. The Lexin dictionary contains basic and general vocabulary that immigrants need in their daily life. The vocabulary covers subject areas such as *work, education, health care, immigration policy, welfare and security* and *public administration*, among others. The Norwegian-Tigrinya lexin dictionary contains about 11,000 entries. Each entry is supplied with a definition and examples of usage. Some entries also contain idiomatic and compound occurrences. The Tigrinya-Norwegian Lexin is an Internet based dictionary (cf. <http://www.lexin.no/>). Figure 1 exemplifies an entry in Lexin.

Figure 1: Entry for paraply “umbrella”

**L E X I N**  
 ORDBØKER FOR INNVANDRERE

**Norsk—tigrinja**

Søkeord:  Søk

Søkeresultat

<b>Bokmål</b> oppslagsord	paraply 
	/paraply:/ substantiv
<b>Tigrinja</b>	ጸላላ ሰ.
<b>Bokmål</b> bøyning	[paraplyen paraplyer paraplyene]
<b>Bokmål</b> forklaring	en sammenleggbar skjerm med håndtak til å holde i hånden og som beskytter mot nedbør, sterk sol, osv
<b>Bokmål</b> eksempel	slå opp paraplyen
<b>Tigrinja</b>	ጸላላካ ዘርግ-ካዮ
<b>Bokmål</b>	slå sammen paraplyen
<b>Tigrinja</b>	ጸላላካ ዕጸፎ/ዕጸዎ
<b>Bokmål</b> sammensetning	herreparaply
<b>Tigrinja</b>	ናይ ደቂ-ተባዕትዮ ጸላላ
<b>Bokmål</b>	paraply håndtak -et
<b>Tigrinja</b>	ናይ ጸላላ ካኸሊ/ ኢድ

The dictionary provides 33 picture themes for over 2800 entries. For example, the superscribed flower icon for the word entry ‘paraply’ in figure 1 links the entry to the picture page. This property enhances the pedagogical of Lexin dictionaries values. Since the intended target group is heterogeneous, the dictionary adopts various means to reach out to every one in the group. The main guiding principle has been to select the most *appropriate term that carries over the Norwegian concept into the target language*. Detailed information on the project can be found in Bjørneset (2002, 2005).

### 5 Translation Challenges and Terminology Creation Strategies

Translating a dictionary poses challenges that are related to the nature of this genre. Dictionary translators should not be verbose, they should use concise and accurate terms. The terms they create stay in the dictionary as permanent records, thus the work must be of high standard. Sometimes reference dictionaries may not contain the terms that the translators need. Some entries may not exist in the target language and may be specific to the source language. Some challenges may arise from the fact that the two languages are typological distant and culturally different in terms of geographical and climatic conditions, and economic and political structures. Norwegian and Tigrinya are different in all these respects. As a result, we expect to encounter serious terminology problems. This terminological gap can be mediated by

different terminology creation strategies.

Niska (1997) suggests that the strategies adopted must be acceptable in the target language. In some cultures the use of borrowing might be frowned upon. Generally, borrowings of concrete objects such as names for new technological inventions easily make their way into the target language. When the two languages are typologically distant, borrowings of abstract nouns, processes and events may sound bizarre in the target language. Thus one must first exhaust the resources available in the target language before looking for solutions elsewhere. More specifically, the target language may provide procedures for coining new words out of its existing word derivation rules. Tigrinya like all Semitic languages, uses a word formation strategy known as *interdigitation*. Most words are derived out of three or four consonantal roots that are interdigitated with vowels or consonant patterns. The patterns function as unique identifiers of different forms of the root. Daniel (2006) gives an example of how a translator can coin a new term from the existing structure of Tigrinya. Daniel coins the Tigrinya word ተቓባል *täqibali* to mean ‘legitimacy’ since existing dictionaries employ the word ተቓባልነት *täqäbälinäti* which encompasses senses such as ‘acceptance’, ‘approval’, ‘credit’ etc. (Kane, 2000: 976). The pattern [täCiCaCi] has not been used with this particular root. He uses it to distinguish the word ‘legitimacy’ from the other general senses. Both patterns are very productive techniques to derive nouns in the language. For example, words like ተግባር [*tägibari*] action, deed, and ተስካር [*täsikari*] ‘commemoration’ employ the pattern [täCiCaCi] and words like ተግባርነት *tägibarinati* ‘application, use, utilization’, ተጻይነት *täṣayinäti* ‘contrariness, enmity’ and ተቋምነት *täqawaminäti* ‘opposition’ use the pattern [täCä/aCaCinäti]. In the following section we will discuss some of the translation strategies that were adopted to tackle the challenges.

### 5.1 Equivalent terms

We begin our discussion with the most rewarding component of the translators’ task. Generally, languages may share many exact matches and equivalent lexical items and terms. These may be found in any general purpose dictionary. Examples are given in table 1.

Table 1: Equivalent terms

Norwegian	English	Tigrinya
hode	head	ርእሲ-‘ri?isi’
hund	dog	ክልቢ-‘kälibi’
regjering	government	መንግስቲ-‘mäniḡisiti’
skatt	tax	ቀረጽ-‘qäräṣi’
bagatell	trifle	ሃጠው-ቀጠው-‘hatäwiqätiwi’
stortinget	Norwegian parliament	ኖርወይዊ ባይቶ-‘noriwäyawwi bayito’

Languages may have a considerable number of equivalent translations even for

abstract lexical item such as ‘bagatell’ *ሃጠውቀጠው hatäwinqätiwi*. Sometimes, the items might not be exact matches, and a ‘translation equivalent’ items can be used. The Norwegian term ‘stortinget’ can be mentioned as an example. It translates into *ኖርወጃዊ ባይቶ noriwaḡawi bayito* in Tigrinya. The Tigrinya word *ባይቶ bayito* is a culture specific term which denotes ‘a village assembly’. In modern Tigrinya its sense is extended to cover a wider concept, i.e. ‘a national parliament’. Thus, it can be used as a cultural equivalent term for ‘stortinget’ compounded with the adjective ‘norwegian’ to denote its specific sense in the source language.

### 5.2 Loan Translation

Loan translation is adopted when there is a terminology gap in Tigrinya to express the concept of the source language. This technique is extensively used with culture specific and internationally standardized terms, as is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Loan Translation

Norwegian	English	Tigrinya
curriculum vitae	Curriculum vitae	‘ሰነድ ሞያን ትምህርትን- sänädi moyan timihiritin’
vårsol	spring sunshine	ጽሓይ አየት- ‘siḡayi ገayäti’ (spring sun)
støvsuger	Vacuum cleaner	መጻዳት ደሮና- ‘mäsayiti därona’ (dust sucker)
sjøstjerne	starfish	ዓሳ ኮኸብ- ‘ጎasa kokobi’ (star fish)
frist	deadline	ገደብ ጊዜ- ‘gädäbi gize (time limit)

Since Norwegian and English are related languages, they share common terms for some of the entries in this table. If we use the same terms in Tigrinya, they stand out as foreign words. Therefore, a loan translation can be preferable in order not to disturb the harmony of the target language. It is important that the terms we create encompass all the senses of the source language. For example, ‘curriculum vitae’ can be translated into *ሰነድ ሞያ sänädi moya* ‘professional record’ or *ሰነድ ትምህርት sänädi timihiriti* ‘educational record’, but both terms provide only part of the whole sense. Therefore, the phrase *ሰነድ ሞያን ትምህርትን sänädi moyan timihiritin* ‘professional and educational record’ is chosen since it conveys a wider sense than the two translations separately.

### 5.3 Borrowing

Tigrinya contains many borrowed terms, especially words related to new technological inventions. It has a large number of borrowings from Italian and English. Some of the borrowings are phonologically and structurally assimilated to Tigrinya. Therefore, borrowings that are widely accepted in Tigrinya are also adopted in expressing Norwegian concepts in Lexin. Table 3 lists some borrowed terms.

Table 3: Loan Translation

Norwegian	English	Tigrinya	Origin
bil	car	ማኪና-‘makina’	Italian
bord	table	ጣውላ-‘ṭawīla’	Italian
glass	glass	ቢኬሪ-‘bikeri’	Italian
industri	industry	ኢንዱስትሪ-‘?indusitiri’	Italian/English
video	video	ቪዲዮ-‘vidiyo’	English
data	computer	ኮምፒተር ‘komipitāri’	English
hodetelefon	headphones	ዕድ-ፎን ‘hedi-foni’	English
fjord	fjord	ፍዮርድ-‘fiyoridi’	Norwegian

Some of the borrowed words exist alongside their Tigrinya synonym. For example, ጣውላ ṭawīla ‘table’ which is an assimilation of the Italian word ‘tavola’. It has ጠረጴዛ ṭārāpāza ‘table’ as its native Tigrinya synonyms, and ቢኬሪ bikeri ‘glass’ which is an assimilation of the Italian word ‘bicchiere’ has ቡሽ bušī ‘glass’ and ብርጭ biričiqo ‘glass’ as its native Tigrinya synonyms. During the period of the armed struggle, as part of the cultural revival campaign, there had been endeavors to minimize the borrowed terms in Tigrinya. During this period many of the borrowings had been substituted by native words. Most of the newly coined terms are recorded in the English-Tigrinya-Arabic Dictionary (1986).

#### 5.4 Term Creation

Currently the number of newly coined Tigrinya terms is growing rapidly, especially in the Eritrean media. This situation is easily noticeable in newspapers and recently published Tigrinya books. In fact, coining new terminology is viewed as a very creative task in the language, and those who are good at it are very much appreciated. For example, the Eritrean public likes to listen to the current president’s official speeches because most people believe that he is very competent in the language and good at inventing new words when he needs them. New terms can be coined from existing words either in the form of simple terms or compounds. They can also be reinstated from archaic or dialectal words. Table 4 exemplifies some of the newly created word for the Norwegian-Tigrinya Lexin dictionary.

Table 4 Term creation

Norwegian	English	Tigrinya
dataskjerm	screen	ሰሌዳ ምርኢት-‘säleda miri?iti’
blålys	blue flashing light	መብራህተ ሓደጋ-‘mäbirahiti ḥadäga’ (hazard light)
dessert	dessert	መዛዘሚ ምኣዲ-‘mäzažmi mä?adi’ (winding up meal)
ski	ski	ምንሽርታት በረድ-‘miniširitati bärädi’
knehase	hollow of the knee	ውሻጠ ብርኪ-‘wişaṭä birirki’ (inner knee)



## 7 Summary

This paper has tried to depict a first hand experience of making an immigrant dictionary. The paper explores the terminological challenges that a translator of an immigrant dictionary encounter by exploring variables such as source vs. target language status, cultural status and degree of premise control. Tigrinya has been assessed as the language which lacks developed and advanced LSP terminology. The two languages are also culturally very distant. Norwegian functions as the language that controls the premises of translation since it represents the domain culture that needs to be transferred into Tigrinya. The article explores some of the translation strategies that were employed in the Norwegian-Tigrinya Lexin project in order to overcome these terminological challenges. We made some recommendations that may be useful to translators of immigrant dictionaries. This article has also explored the ways in which newly established terms are disseminated. Immigrant dictionaries such as the Lexin series are important contributions for immigrant communities and for the enrichment of the target language.

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