NEED FOR AN ACTIVE DICTIONARY FOR THE ADVANCED LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN PAKISTAN
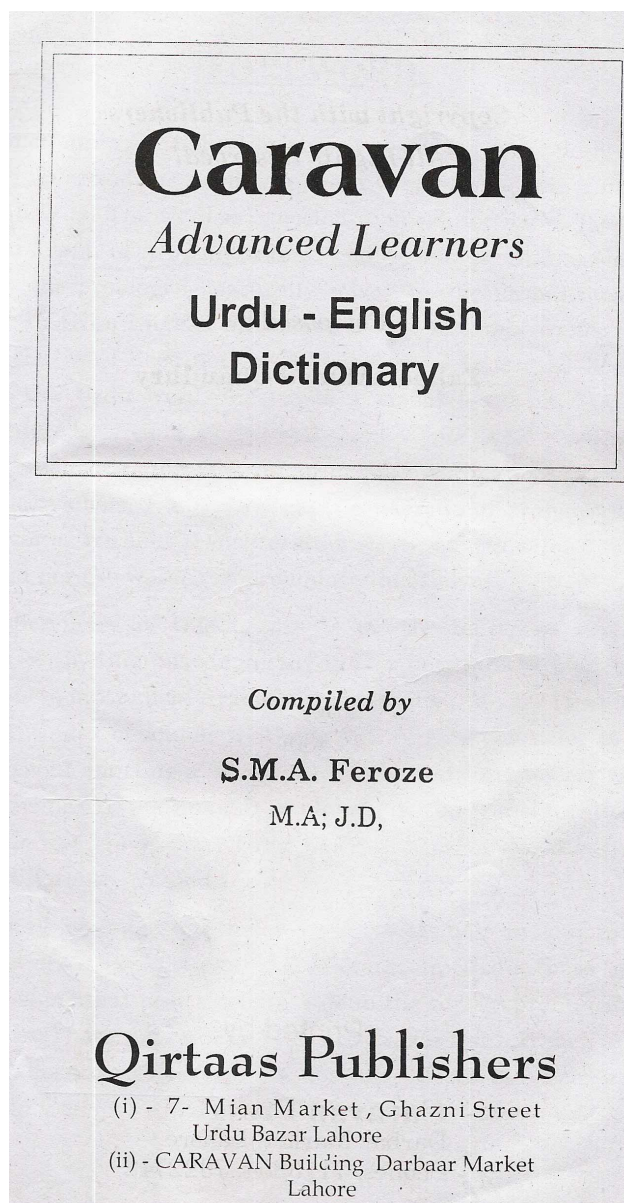
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NEED FOR AN ACTIVE DICTIONARY FOR THE ADVANCED LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN PAKISTAN

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Caravan

Advanced Learners

Urdu - English
Dictionary

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Abstract

The learners have no escape from the dominant language, Urdu in the present case. Consequently, a lot of negative transfer takes place in the production of English. Various

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kinds of reference works have been prepared to cater for the encoding needs of the learners. In case of encountering difficulties, while composing a text or translating into L2, the learner starts from Urdu/L1 word, which s/he hopes to find only in an Urdu-English dictionary. He/she uses this to find equivalents in English, along with information on their context of use and restrictions, if any. The existing Urdu-English dictionaries fail the users on various counts. There is a need for a learner's dictionary prepared along modern principles drawing upon the insights of research and advancement in lexicography, linguistics, psychology, translation studies, lexicology, and information technology.

1. Linguistic Situation in Pakistan

In order to discuss the kind of dictionary advanced Pakistani learners of English need for encoding purposes, we need to look at the issue from the perspective of the target users – a cardinal principle in modern lexicography (Tono 2001).

Pakistan is a multi-lingual country where around 70 languages are spoken as mother tongues. Urdu serves as the *lingua franca*. It happens to be the medium of instruction and the language of media. It is the national language of the country. The constitution of the country recognizes it as pre-eminent and restricts the use of English. The constitution proclaims to replace English with Urdu. Interestingly, the constitution itself and the laws are codified in English. English is the language of power and prestige. That is why, perhaps, English enjoys monopoly in the formal education system.

2. Lexical Contrastive Analysis

The students have access to English through Urdu as Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is employed to teach English in Pakistan. Urdu and English widely differ from each other. Their orthographies, vocabularies, phonologies, syntaxes and morphologies are different. The learners face problems at all levels of language – pronunciation, syntax, morphology, vocabulary and pragmatics. Added to these are the difficulties posed by the cleavage of culture and clime. Consequently, frequent negative transfer takes place, i.e., the features of Urdu are carried over to English resulting in students' errors.

It will be pertinent here to cite some examples of points of difficulty.
In Urdu, the feature of count noun vs. non-count noun is non-existent. Hence, the words like 'kaam' (work), 'baal' (hair), 'khabar' (news), and many more have plurals in Urdu. The learners are misled and they carry over the feature into English. Hence, it is not uncommon to find such errors as:

(Urdu) Us kay baal ghungrialy hain.   Eng.Tr. *Her hairs <u>are</u> curly.
(Urdu) Yeh khabrain darust nahin hain.   Eng.Tr. * <u>These</u> news <u>are</u> not correct.
(Urdu) Mujhay ghar per bahot sey kaam hain.   Eng.Tr.   *I have <u>many</u> <u>works</u> (jobs to do) at home.

As stated above, the learners face problems at all levels of language. However vocabulary is the Achilles' heel of the learners even at the advanced level. The reason lies in anisomorphism- lack of equivalence (Zgusta 1971). For example, Urdu words like 'sahib' and 'janaab' may not have proper equivalents in English in many contexts.

In the sentence,

(Urdu) *aap kay waalid sahib kia kartay hain.*   Eng.Tr.:   What is your father?

the word *sahib* remains untranslated. In Urdu it has a special function. It shows deference. Moreover, for the same reason, i.e., to show deference, the words *'aap' ' kay' 'kartay,' 'hain'* are used, but, in English, their equivalents do not convey the same connotations. Matters are made worse due to 'bilingual reflex,' which refers to the belief that one can and should match every word in one's native language with a corresponding term in the language one is learning (Nesi 2000).

3. A Typology of Learner's Communicative Needs

According to Tomaszczyk (1983) the reference needs of the foreign language learners fall into two types: 'receptive,' i.e., (a) to comprehend the spoken language, (b) to read the target language text, (c) to translate the target language text into the source language, and 'productive' i.e., (a) to express verbally in the target language, (b) to produce text in the target language, (c) to translate the source language text into the target language.

Hartmann (1999) et al., note, 'Dictionaries are essential tools for foreign language learning'. However, it is equally true that no single dictionary can cater to all kinds of the above-mentioned needs.

The present writer subscribes to Hartmann (1999) et al.'s observation that 'A full range of monolingual, bilingual and multilingual dictionaries and other reference works should be available for each language and language pair'.

Various kinds of dictionaries have been developed to help learners address the encoding needs. They include: (a) monolingual learner's dictionaries, (b) bilingualised dictionaries having L2 – L2 – L1 format (Laufer 1995), (c) Thesauri and Dictionaries of Synonyms and Antonyms, and (d) bilingual dictionaries in L1- L2 format.

4. EFL Monolingual Dictionaries

Those who favour the use of monolingual dictionaries maintain:

4.1.1. These contain more information such as definition, collocations, and examples of use of the searched headword in the target language.
4.1.2. These aim to ensure easy access to the needed information. Atkins and Varantola (1998) found that monolingual dictionary was more successful in helping users find the relevant information.

4.1.3. These increase the learner's exposure to and use of the target language and thus discourage the use of the source language. In this way they eliminate the interference of L1. The learner begins to think in L2 and s/he no more needs to relate the newly word or sense to L1.

However the critics of monolingual dictionaries point out the following drawbacks of EFL monolingual dictionaries (cf. Raudaskoski 2002):

4.2.1. Robert Lew (2004) as mentioned in Bogaards (2005) found that monolingual dictionary (with English definitions only) scored far less than any other type. In his conclusion, Lew (2004) states that "We must question the validity of the recommendation so popular amongst the educators of the presumed superiority of the monolingual dictionary. There is hardly any empirical evidence available to support that supposed superiority".
4.2.2. Gefen (1994) claims that the English-English learner's dictionaries, although written in simplified language, 'did not prove to be up to the expectation in use and led to student dissatisfaction', and that in the wake of feedback from research in reading comprehension at Haifa and Tel Aviv Universities and classroom experience, it has been shown 'conclusively that the most effective way of determining whether a text has been correctly comprehended is to elicit responses in the mother tongue rather than in the foreign language (English in this case)'.
4.2.3. The metalanguage poses considerable difficulties. The use of codes and abbreviations makes the dictionary look-up process thwarting. It is a well-known fact that the reference skills of the foreign learners are very low.
4.2.4. The basic problem with the MLDs is that they are inherently circular; the L2 definition may warrant further searches and try the learner's patience. Hence the learners shy away from them despite the fact they recognize their usefulness (Scholfield n.d).
4.2.5 Laufer (1995) holds that 'in most cases … the writing activity is such that it makes a monolingual dictionary insufficient. If the learner has an idea in mind but does know the needed L2 word with which to express it s/he is unable to start searching from among the L2 headwords'.

5. Bilingualised Dictionaries

Nakamoto (1995) came up with an interesting solution: the 'bilingualised' dictionary. It retains semantic explanations in the original L2 text with translation equivalents. Laufer (1995) maintains that being a dictionary of monolingual and bilingual information it is both effective for learners and appreciated by them.

A bilingualised dictionary is not without pitfalls.

5.1 . The format of a bilingualised dictionary being L2-L2-L1, the learner may find a bilingualised dictionary irrelevant for encoding purposes because s/he starts from an Urdu word.

5.2 If he L2 equivalent is immediately insertable, there is chance that he may not bother to read L2 definitions (Nakamoto 1995}.

6. Thesauri and Dictionaries of Synonyms and Antonyms

L2 thesauri, dictionaries of collocations, dictionaries of synonyms, and thematic dictionaries, such as Longman Lexicon (1981), Longman Language Activator (1993), Cambridge Word Routes (1994) and Oxford Word finder Dictionary (1997) are monolingual sources meant as *production aids in situations where an L2 lexical item is known for the meaning intended, but some aspect(s) of it are unknown/uncertain*. They are meant to cover L2 words and phrases for which there is no neat L1 equivalent where they can be listed. They allow the learner who can just think of some core word of English in the right semantic area to access sections with the word/phrase s/he needs. For example, needing *apprehension* the learner can readily reach this from alphabetic look-up of the approximation *fear* through a series of menus offering groups of items covering area of meaning related to *fear*.

The major pitfall of the EFL encoding reference works are:

(a) The learner may not possess the desired language level or reference skills to retrieve the desired information because in order to retrieve the suitable choice the learner has to browse-study the whole entry in a thematic dictionary which are organized in a meaning-based way.
(b) Laufer (1995) points out that
    'the limitation of the Activator (1993) , in spite of its many virtues, is that it is a monolingual dictionary, and therefore makes two assumptions about the user which may not be true. The first assumption is that the user is somewhat familiar with the word s/he is searching for, at least with its form. Otherwise it would be impossible to find the right entry for it. … The second assumption is that though the learner may not possess the precise word needed, s/he is nevertheless familiar with other words in the semantic area'.

7. Bilingual Learner's Dictionaries

Laufer (1995) points out that the use of a bilingual dictionary is a 'psychological necessity'. She explains further that

> 'When composing a piece of writing, the learner is in the process of formulating the thought in the target language (if s/he is advanced enough to do so) and then s/he suddenly gets stuck for a word. What would most probability come to mind is the L1 word that is needed rather than a synonym or antonym or any semantically related word in L2. This is so since words in our dominant language are more easily accessible rather than words in languages less familiar to us. If the learner wants to find the equivalent L2 word, the easiest way to do so is by consulting a bilingual dictionary.'

In a very comprehensive study conducted to compare learner's monolingual dictionaries with bilingual ones, in terms of preference for one dictionary type rather than the other and in terms of the effectiveness of each dictionary type it was found that majority of learners (75 %) prefer to use bilingual dictionaries (Atkins and Varantola 1998).

The study involved over 1000 learners in seven European countries and four languages. Lew (2004) as cited in Bogaards (2005) holds that " … what little relevant evidence is available points to the bilingual dictionary as the more effective dictionary for reception". Piotrowski (1994) notes that " no matter what their level of competence, foreign learners and users use their bilingual dictionary as long as they use dictionaries at all".

It is necessary to point out that a bilingual dictionary is not an unmixed blessing:
- (a) Laufer holds (1995) that a simple one–word translation, in a bilingual dictionary, can even be misleading when there are semantic incongruencies between the two languages.
- (b) The proponents of monolingual dictionaries maintain that bilingual dictionaries increase learner's dependence on L1 whereas s/he needs being weaned from these as the learning of L2 is the ultimate target.

7.1. A Typology of Bilingual Dictionaries

Al-Kasimi (1983) maintains that the decisive factors in the compilation of the bilingual dictionary include (a) the needs of the target users and (b) the source language of the target users. Taking into account these two factors, according to Al-Kasimi (1983) the following types of interlingual dictionaries emerge:

1) For speakers of SL to comprehend TL texts

2) For speakers of SL to produce TL texts

3) For speakers of TL to comprehend SL texts

4) For speakers of TL to produce SL texts

The following table shows types of bilingual dictionaries: **Table 2Al-Kasimi's (1983) Scheme**:

purpose / Speaker	For comprehension	For production
Speaker of L1	1 Passive use TL -- SL	2 Active use SL -- TL
Speaker of L2	3. Passive use SL -- TL	4.Active use TL -- SL

Al-Kasimi (1983) makes an interesting observation that the distinction between dictionaries for production and dictionaries for comprehension determines their size as well as the choice of respective source and target languages. A dictionary for comprehension contains more entries with more senses.

Al-Kasimi (1983) is of the view that one source of trouble in most existing bilingual dictionaries is that they try to meet the needs of both SL and TL speakers at the same time. As the needs of these two kinds of users are different, it is impossible to pay equal attention to both in one and the same volume. He posits that a dictionary meant for SL speakers should differ from one intended for TL in several ways, for example, the language used in the directions, the selection of its vocabulary, or the orientation of any cultural information that may be conveyed. As bilingual dictionaries deal not only with two different kinds of cultural and linguistic behaviour, but also with two different systems of concept formation, the lexicographer should select the entries of an interlingual dictionary in accordance with the needs of the potential user.

7.2. URDU – ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

7.2.1. Urdu-English Dictionaries written by Colonial Scholars

When India was colonized by the Europeans they needed to comprehend the knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, folklore, mythologies of the natives. Naturally they set out to learn the indigenous languages. They prepared materials like grammar books and dictionaries. The needs of the colonial learners were both decoding and encoding.

Consequently they compiled dictionaries involving English as the source as well as the target language along with the local languages. We find a number of Urdu-English dictionaries written by the colonial scholars. Chief among these are:

1	Duncan Forbes (1837)	A Hindustani-English , English -Hindustani Dictionary
2	John Shakespear (1849)	A Hindustani-English Dictionary
3	S.W.Fallon (1879)	New Hindustani-English Dictionary
4	John T. Platts (1884)	A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English

Given the fact that lexicography was well established in Europe, these dictionaries are of great merit. While paying rich tribute to the oriental lexicographers for their contribution to the promotion of Urdu, Dr. Abdul-Haq (1937) calls them 'the benefactors' of Urdu. The dictionaries have been written on sound principles. The oriental scholars engaged native scholars in the process of compilation in order to make their work really useful.

However, besides being dated, these dictionaries are aimed at the non-native learners, especially the Europeans for most of whom English was the mother tongue, to help them learn Urdu. The target users knew various covert facts about English usage. If we keep Al-Kasimi (1983)'s typology of bilingual dictionaries in mind, an Lx-Ly dictionary

designed with an Ly speaker in mind looking up information about the Lx word s/he encounters but does not understand, will not meet the needs of an Lx speaker.

7.2.1.1 Characteristic features of Urdu-English Dictionaries Compiled by the Colonial Scholars

Being non-native learners of Urdu, the European learners needed to learn numerous things about the use of Urdu lexical items. Hence these dictionaries contain wealth of information on Urdu words, like:

(1) Transliteration of the Urdu lexical item
(2) Etymology of the Urdu lexical item
(3) Parts of speech of the Urdu lexical item
(4) Examples of use of Urdu lexical items
(5) English equivalents
(6) Collocations of the Urdu lexical item
(7) Usage restrictions on the Urdu lexical item, etc.

In order to illustrate the point information on the entry on 'Allah' in Fallon's (1879) *New Hindustani-English Dictionary* is cited below:

> **A.** … allah, … Mah. <u>Ram</u>, Hin. n.m. …God. <u>The Being who exists necessarily , by himself. Comprising all the attributes of perfection. .. the Supreme Being</u>
> allah' o akbar! Intj. 1 God is great – <u>recited at every standing , sitting and kneeling in prayer, and also when slaughtering an animal …</u>

A Hindustani speaker did not need such information as the language of origin, the connotations of the Urdu words, usage restrictions (the underlined portion in the above entry) as s/he already knew it. On the other hand, Englishmen, being non-native learners of Urdu, needed such cultural information. They needed no information on the use of the English equivalent 'God' like the use of initial capital letter and restriction on the use of definite article 'the' with it, etc. The present-day Pakistani learners of English need exactly this kind of information.

Platts (1884) maintained in the preface of his dictionary that 'the dictionary of Forbes' (1837) – to say nothing more unfavourable of it – considerably behind the age. … words and phrases and meanings of words by thousands will be sought in it in vain'.

What Platts said of Forbes' work after 47 years of its publication toward the end of the 19th century holds true for the works of many at the beginning of the 21st century in the age of information technology (IT) and the present social milieu.

7.2.1. Urdu-English Dictionaries written by Local Lexicographers

Local lexicographers have published a few Urdu-English dictionaries:

1) *Ammar Student's Dictionary* compiled by Muhammad Haris and Zeshan
2) *Caravan Advanced Learner's Dictionary (n.d.)* compiled by S.M. Feroze.
3) *Feroze Sons Dictionary* (The name of the compiler not given).
4) *Gem Student's Dictionary (2000)* compiled by Raza-ul-Haq Badakhshani et al. It is based on Sangaji's *Compendium* (1899) of John Shakespear's *Hindoostani - English dictionary* 1849.
5) *Kitabistan's 20th-century Standard Dictionary* compiled by B A Qureshi. It 'owes a lot' to Dr Fallon's epoch-making dictionary, the compiler admits. In the foreword, S M Abdullah, Director, West Pakistan Urdu Academy, Lahore expresses the hope that it 'will be found extremely helpful in spreading the Urdu language in the English speaking countries'.
6) *Rabia Practical Dictionary* compiled by M. Zaman & Naveed Akhtar
7) *Popular Oxford Practical Dictionary* (The name of the compiler not given).

The new trends in metalexicography and developments in educational psychology find no place in the dictionaries published so far in Pakistan. In particular, no effort has been made to find out the learners' actual needs. Mere reprint of the existing dictionaries is offered as the panacea.

What is more upsetting is that there have been no reflections or discussions on the topic of bilingual learner-oriented lexicography at all. The result of this neglect and disregard is obvious: the publishers choose not to pursue new ways of preparing the dictionaries. Most of these dictionaries are largely based on the antiquated works of the Orientalists, who, not withstanding their pioneering painstaking efforts, cannot now be relied upon for accurately reflecting the living languages involved, i.e., Urdu and English. While Urdu grew in its structure and stature, no Urdu-English dictionary has kept with its development to fill the void.

The only dictionary, which claims to be a learner's dictionary is *Caravan Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Surprisingly enough, it is not aimed at local learners. The editor declares in the preface that it is *'not solely addressed to foreign users but also to those overseas Pakistanis who ... have a formal contact with …Urdu'*. He adds, 'every care has been taken to explain the Urdu word to a non-Urdu knowing learner when the two languages are so widely different in their form and habit of writing'. Moreover, it draws heavily on Fallon's work, which besides being dated, was aimed at the non-native learners of Urdu. Consequently, it contains neither morphological, syntactic and pragmatic information on English equivalents nor illustrative examples and collocations (an essential component of the modern learner's dictionaries).

An entry from the **CARAVAN** is given below:

chhutti (H) n.f. Leave; holiday; vacation
chhutti dena (H) v (1) Grant leave (2) let off (3) discharge; dismiss
chutti milna (H) n.m*. (1) Obtain leave (2) be acquitted (3) be discharged;
be dismissed.

* The code gives a wrong message. c̲hutti milna (H) <u>n.m*</u> is not a feminine noun – a symbol not explained anywhere in the dictionary, like some other symbols, for example, 'i.q', and 'q.v'.

An Urdu learner needs to know the difference between the meaning and the use of the equivalents 'Leave; holiday; vacation':

- 'Leave' is the time one is allowed to spend away from one's work. *She applied for two days' leave*. **be on leave** *The clerk is on leave*.
- 'Holiday' is a day fixed by law on which one does not have to go to work or school. **Public holiday** Eid is a public holiday.
- 'Vacation' is one of the periods of time each year when educational institutions are closed. *During summer vacation we shall go to Murree*. (Note it has no plural form).
- 'Discharge' refers to the permission to leave hospital after treatment.
- 'Dismiss' refers to removal from job on account of corruption or inefficiency.

The headword has some more uses as well as equivalents not given the Caravan:

- chhuti (without the intimation to and or permission of the higher authority) furlough
- sey chhuti hona (to close) *Our school closes at 3 o'clock.*
- *khuli chuti dena (to give a free hand to sb). It seem as if the thieves have been given a free hand.*

An L1-L2 dictionary must provide the context of use of the lexical item and the equivalents in the form of collocations and illustrations-both pictorial and sentences or sentence fragments. For example the collocate of 'subuh' (morning) and 'raat'(evening) is one lexical item 'ko' whereas in English the collocations are '*in the*' and '*at*' respectively' – far beyond the range of the conjecture of the learner. Hence the following sentences will be translated as under:

(Urdu) *woh raat <u>ko</u> ai ga*   (*Eng. Tr)* . 'He will come <u>at</u> night'.
(Urdu) *woh subuh <u>ko</u> ai gi*   *(Eng. Tr)*   'She will come <u>in the</u> morning'.

This is where the slot of an active dictionary lies among different types of bilingual dictionaries (cf. Al-Kasimi 1983). No such bilingual dictionary especially for the advanced learners of English in Pakistan is still available.

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