

OMLAD: A novel approach to the issue of foggy pasta and clever walls

Learning a foreign language is, for the most part, a difficult undertaking. Language teachers expect students to be able to find the meaning of unfamiliar words when they are writing short paragraphs or longer essays. However, online dictionaries, as well as paper dictionaries, provide a multitude of possible translations for a given word. On the one hand, having access to this wealth of information at one's finger tip is great - one has all the possible translation at a glance within seconds. On the other hand, having all this information available also necessitates that one is able to distinguish meaning nuances between the given translations - a task which is often difficult, if not impossible, for e.g. beginning language students. Online dictionaries are not easy to use and many students think that 1:1 translations are common since all they have to do is enter a word and they get a result. However, thinking that this is the case, combined with the lack of necessary reference skills, often leads to mistakes in communication or even communication breakdown. Students often struggle with finding the correct words when using traditional or electronic dictionaries and are overwhelmed by the multitude of possibilities they have for one English word (and vice versa). Consider the following examples.

- 1) We had a fun in Turkey.
"Wir hatten Spass in Truthahn."
'We had fun in turkey (the bird).'
- 2) We had a blast in Turkey.
"Wir hatten eine Explosion in der Türkei."
'We had an explosion in the turkey.'

As the above examples illustrate, choosing the correct translation is often difficult when given multiple possible translations. Language students do not necessarily have the skills or knowledge to pick the right translation.

This paper proposes a novel approach to dictionary output. In order to facilitate the learning process of foreign language students and make them aware of cultural connotations embedded in words, as well as to guide them in the selection process when using a dictionary we developed OMLAD (online multi-lingual adaptive dictionary). OMLAD is designed to limit the output depending on a learner's skill level. For example, a beginning German student will have the output limited to e.g. five possible translations while an advanced student of German may see all 15 possible translations. Therefore, students will only see translations which are appropriate for their language skills. It further shows them what words are appropriate for what they are trying to convey and will make them aware of cultural differences since language (in this case the vocabulary of a language) and culture are connected.