

From Kernerman to Password

by Ilan Kernerman

Kernerman Publishing published its first semi-bilingual dictionary in Israel in 1986. The fact that it was a Hebrew version of Oxford Student's Dictionary, and was approved by the education authorities, contributed to its success. Yet the most essential factor in making it enormously popular was the user-friendly nature of its lexicographic approach. It fast became a national bestseller.

It was followed by an Arabic version for Israel, with subsequent editions for the Middle East and worldwide. This was the first in the *Kernerman Semi-Bilingual Dictionaries* series, whose English core is based on Harrap or Chambers learner's dictionaries. Italian, Greek and French editions appeared under licence by other publishers beginning in 1989.

The term *semi-bilingual* was coined by Lionel Kernerman to describe the new lexicographic concept, for want of a better name for this hybrid dictionary. Zanichelli Editore termed their Italian version *mono-bilingual*. Dr Reinhard Hartmann, head of the Dictionary Research Centre at the University of Exeter, refers to it simply as *a bilingualized dictionary*.

The significance of this terminology is of little concern to the general public, for whom the semi-bilingual dictionary is first and foremost an easy-to-use English dictionary with translations in the mother tongue. Thus, the dictionary made its reputation on the basis of its features, rather than its name.

Among the first to realize the innovativeness of this "learning tool" outside of Israel was Roger Turcotte, director of Modulo Éditeur in Montréal. Modulo launched a successful marketing campaign, which made their semi-bilingual edition the best-selling English dictionary in French-speaking Canada. They called it *PASSWORD*.

"Password" means a "secret word or phrase used by somebody to indicate to somebody else...that he is a friend rather than an enemy" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 4/e, OUP 1989). As it contains the word "friend", this definition is appropriate here for underlying the user-friendliness of *Password* dictionaries.

When the Spanish, Portuguese and Czech editions appeared in 1991, their publishers decided to use *Password* in the titles. Other publishers later adopted this title as they already had textbooks with a similar name, while some preferred a title in their own language.

To date there are semi-bilingual versions in nineteen languages, and a dozen more in preparation. While the basic concept remains the same everywhere, the publisher in each country decides upon the most suitable dictionary design and format for the local market, as well as the promotion strategy for that country.

Following its appearance in southern Europe, the semi-bilingual dictionary was well received in most eastern European countries. Its reputation is

spreading out to northern Europe as well, as indicated first by the Finnish edition published last year by WSOY, and then by a Swedish edition due to be published at the end of this year by Studentlitteratur.

This trend is growing, while new attitudes are taking shape. The relatively high ELT standard in western countries led to assume that their existing methods were satisfactory, but the new ideas about language-learning are causing a reassessment of the role of the semi-bilingual dictionary.

Whereas this increasing recognition is salutary, seeking new ways to improve the semi-bilingual dictionary goes on constantly. While we esteem it as the best type of dictionary presently available for learners of English, *Password* may not necessarily be the last word.

Twenty-five years ago Kernerman Publishing began publishing English language textbooks, and soon became one of Israel's leading ELT publishers. During the past decade it has branched out into the field of learner's dictionaries and extensive collaborations with publishers throughout the world.

The growth of this global aspect of our publishing activities led to setting up a new company, whose role is the coordination of international contacts. The recently-established Password Publishers is committed to pursuing the tradition begun by Kernerman Publishing.

