Research of Equivalence from the Perspective of Bilingual Lexicography

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Abstract: This paper delves into the multifaceted implications of the concept of equivalence in philosophy, which serve as a robust cornerstone for the formulation of dictionary definitions. Within this framework, the author envisions bilingual dictionary-making as an intricate blend of translation and lexicography, endeavoring to offer tentative yet insightful responses to four pivotal questions surrounding equivalence in bilingual lexicography. Central to this discussion is the fourfold classification of equivalence types, whose untapped potential holds immense value in fulfilling users' cognitive needs during the dictionary-consulting process.

1. Introduction

According to the largest general-purpose dictionary of English, OED online, the word "equivalence" first appeared before 1542 in the sentence "When he weyth the fawlt and recompense He..fyndyth playne A twene them to no whitt equivalence."① by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542). It may derive etymologically from French équivalence, which may stem from Medieval Latin aequivalentia, originating in turn from Late Latin aequivalentem.② Aequivalentem is the present participle of "aequivalere", which means "to be equal in value". In terms of historical relatedness, this Latin root consists of "aequus" (equal) and "valere" (to be strong, to be worth), thereupon carrying the sense of things being of equal worth or value.

2. Equivalence in philosophy

Equivalence is defined as " the fact or state of being equal in value, amount, meaning, importance, etc." ③ Since its inception, the concept has witnessed widespread applications and had implications across many disciplines, especially in philosophical and mathematical contexts, each enriching its conceptual scope in distinct ways. It denotes a relationship where two or more entities are considered to be interchangeable, identical, or indistinguishable in some relevant aspects. In addition, it also has the implication that equivalence is a fundamental assessment of sameness or equality in value, function, or outcome, facilitating comparison, substitution, or interchangeability across diverse domains.

This article will first expound the concept of equivalence in the context of philosophy, which is of cardinal significance for the explication of equivalence in translatology and lexicography. In philosophy, equivalence often relates to concepts of truth, meaning, or value and can be explored in terms of logical propositions, moral principles, or existential states. Since philosophy, as a generic term, has a wide range of coverage of disciplines including ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, and logic, equivalence is closely tied to the notions of equal value or significance in ethical, metaphysical, or epistemological terms. By saying so, it is evident that the notion of equivalence is intricate and multi-faceted in the philosophical contexts. Here are some ways in which the idea of equivalence is explored in philosophy.

2.1 Ethical equivalence

Philosophers might discuss the equivalence of different actions in terms of their moral outcomes. This involves the principle that different actions can be morally judged as equivalent if they result in similar consequences or are motivated by similar values. For instance, in utilitarian ethics, different actions that yield the same amount of happiness or utility might be considered equivalent, irrespective of their different natures or contexts.

2.2 Metaphysical equivalence

In metaphysics, equivalence might be discussed in terms of ontological commitment—whether different ontological descriptions of the world can be seen as equivalent if they describe the same reality. It is too rigorous and ideal a criterion to achieve because too many senses lack the corresponding referents. Therefore, we have no reason to conclusively determine that there exist in the world phenomena or entities that are completely equivalent in terms of their ontological essence. Even the seeming equivalent matches differ in such aspects as connotations, register, pragmatics, etc. Ontological equivalence is but an ideal state that we have been seeking since the immemorial times. The failure of ontological equivalence can be explicated as follows: Human environment is of multifaceted nature, human being are not only residents of physical world, but also the linguistic, cultural, and psychological worlds. Therefore, even the physically recognizable entity is highly likely to receive vastly differing descriptions from different cognitive agents who may live in disparate non-physical worlds, let alone those abstract concepts. So, we may say that ontological commitment provides a shaky foundation on which to build the equivalence, and the realization of equivalence resides more on the epistemological level, which we will elaborate on in the next section.

2.3 Epistemological equivalence

In epistemology, the study of knowledge, philosophers may explore the equivalence of different sources of knowledge or different theories that explain the same phenomenon. This theory is of cardinal significance for us to have a reasoned understanding of "real" equivalence in lexicography with an emphasis on its relativity. "What we call the phenomenon of equivalence can only be regarded as epistemological identification of sameness or equivalence, rather than ontological sameness or equivalence"[14](Wei Xiangqing 2005: 63). In addition, it also clarifies that epistemologically, equivalence depends on, to an extent, a host of factors including linguistic signs, culture, and cognition. The reasons are as follows: our knowledge about the essence of entities is merely a provisional result of our cognitive process characterized by infinite approximation, that is, we approach unceasingly what one entity is all about, yet we can never reach it because no one can verify that supposed existence, and human cognition of it is a progressive process. No one dares to

assert the ultimate state of cognition, even regarding the cognition of a specific object. Under this mode of thinking, both the objective material world and the subjective spiritual world described by humans are limited to the scope of human cognitive abilities, confined within a very limited cognitive horizon. That is to say, when we talk about equivalence, it is merely our subjective endorsement of two actually different or not entirely identical things, a cognitive notion of equivalence. In a word, what we refer to as equivalent phenomena can only be considered equivalent or correspondent in an epistemological sense.

2.4 Logical equivalence

Logical equivalence is a specific technical term in philosophy that refers to two statements that always have the same truth value. In logic, equivalence is often used in the form of logical equivalence between propositions. That is, two statements are logically equivalent if they always have the same truth value in every possible circumstance. This concept is central to developing logical arguments and testing logical consistency.

In all these cases, exploring equivalence in philosophy often involves deep analytical work that examines the conditions under which different ideas, actions, or statements can be considered essentially "the same" in some respects. This can lead to better understanding of philosophical arguments, ethical reasoning, and the structure of knowledge itself.

3. Equivalence in translation studies

As Hartmann (2007[1990]:30) treats bilingual lexicography as a blend of translating and dictionary-making, the compilation of a bilingual dictionary can be regarded as a special kind of translation studies. Since a satisfying translation precedes and is central to a successful compilation of a bilingual dictionary, in this sense, the notion of equivalence as a key issue in translatology outweighs that in lexicography and deserves special attention.

3.1 Equivalence in different literature

There is a sea of researches on equivalence in translating circle. Nida (1964:159) makes a distinction between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence, later called formal correspondence, attaches importance to the form and content of the message itself where "the message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the source language (Nida 1964: 159)". On the contrary, dynamic equivalence, later labeled as functional equivalence, places great emphasis on "the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message". (ibid.) Nida's theory helps to develop the path away from word-for-word equivalence and exerting a far-reaching influence in subsequent translation theories. However, both the concept of equivalence and the principle of equivalent effect has received heavy criticisms for a couple of reasons: Lefevere (1993: 7) argues that equivalence was still overly bound with the word level, while van den Broeck[6] (1978: 40) and Larose[12] (1989: 78) considered equivalent effect or response to be impossible because it is but a subjective judgement that can not be measured objectively, which resonate with "implausibility of equivalent response" by Qian Hu(1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1994). Qian claims by eliciting the translations of culture-bound examples between Chinese and English that it is next to impossible to achieve equivalent effect if meaning is bound up in form, as "the closest natural equivalent may stand in a contradictory relation with dynamic equivalents [17](Qian Hu 1993b:465)". In a word, the concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence are trailblazing in introducing a receptor-based (or reader-based) orientation to translation theory

yet the constraints between them has to be further resolved.

Peter Newmark (1981) opposes semantic translation to communicative translation. The former is similar to Nida's formal equivalence whereas the latter resembles Nida's dynamic equivalence in the effect it attempts to produce on the target language readers. Yet Newmark takes a discrepant stance from Nida's receptor-oriented line of thinking in translating. He holds that the success of equivalent effect is "illusory" and that "the conflict of loyalties, the gap between emphasis on source and target language, will always remain as the overriding problem in translation theory and practice"(Newmark 1981: 38). Newmark has faced criticism for his strict prescriptive approach, and the language used in his evaluations retains elements of what he referred to as the "pre-linguistics era" in translation studies. He describes translations as either "smooth"or "awkward", and categorizes translation as an "art" (when semantic) or a "craft"(when communicative).

Werner Koller [11](1979:188-191; see also Koller 1989:99-104) differentiates five types of equivalence: denotative equivalence, connotative equivalence, text-normative equivalence, pragmatic equivalence, formal equivalence, whereby forming a hierarchy of equivalence in terms of communicative situation. In this case, the choice of appropriate level is open to debate.

In the context of computer-assisted translation, Pym [13](2007) juxtaposes natural equivalence, where the highlight is on identifying naturally-occurring terms or stretches of language in the SL and TL, with directional equivalence, where the focus is on analyzing and rendering the ST meaning in an equivalent form in the TT.

In summary, equivalence remains a concept of cardinal significance in underpinning the foundation of translation studies although criticisms on this issue never ceases, which can be summarized by 'circularity' of the definitions of equivalence: "equivalence is supposed to define translation, and translation, in turn, defines equivalence"[10](Kenny 2009: 96).

3.2 Functions of equivalence

A brief review of the understandings of equivalence serves multiple purposes in making a successful translation. Firstly, it helps to preserve the meaning of the original text. With equivalence in mind, translators strive to convey the meaning of the source text accurately in the target language, which in turn ensures that the intended message, nuances, particulars and cultural specificity are preserved. Secondly, it is conducive to maintaining faithfulness. Equivalence is beneficial for keeping the faithfulness of the original text while adapting it to the linguistic, cultural context of the target audience, with an eye toward catering their actual needs. By doing so, such balance is pivotal to facilitate an effective communication and readers' engagement. Thirdly, in terms of effective communication, equivalence aims to bridge the gap between original text and the target one, which holds the key to the avoidance of misunderstanding by ensuring the translated text is accurate, acceptable and understandable to the audience. In addition, equivalence also aims to produce among the target readers the similar effect to that of the source readers. Lastly, since translation involve two heterogeneous languages, equivalence is helpful in breaking through the cultural barriers standing in the way of communication. Languages of disparate heterogeneity with differing linguistic structures, idiomatic expressions and cultural references pose a grave challenge to translation. An equivalence-oriented translation strategy will address this issue to the utmost by minimizing ambiguity and confusion across the involved languages.

4. Equivalence in bilingual lexicography

Equivalence is a heated topic that straddles both translatology and bilingual lexicography with the latter at the core of present research. In Dictionary of Lexicography by R.R.K. Hartmann and Gregory James [8] (1998: 51), equivalence is defined as "The relationship between words or

phrases, from two or more languages, which share the same MEANING." Theoretically speaking, equivalence can also be applied to monolingual dictionaries, for example, if the definitions of headwords in a monolingual dictionary appear in the form of one or more synonyms, which can be seen as equivalent(s) in the same language. The same is true with multilingual dictionaries. However, this article will focus on examining equivalence in a scenario of bilingual dictionary making. With this clarification of the equivalence concept in place, this article will discuss the following issues in the subsequent sections:

1) What is equivalence in bilingual lexicography?

2) Where can we find the equivalent relationship? On the level of language as a system or the level of context?

3) What are the criteria against which equivalence can be measured?

4) Is equivalence a unified concept or should differing types of equivalence thereof be discriminated?

4.1 Understandings of equivalence in bilingual lexicography

Let's start with the panoramic view of the explications of the concept of equivalence in bilingual lexicography, scholars home and abroad have ventured their opinions on this central issue. Zgusta (1971:294) puts it well that "The basic purpose of a bilingual dictionary is to coordinate with the lexical units of one language those lexical units of another language which are equivalent in their lexical meaning." So it may deduced that equivalence in the bilingual dictionary compilation scenario aims for words "equivalent in the their lexical meaning", which can be measured in terms of "designation, connotation, range of application" (ibid:312), the major components of a lexical unit. And on the basis of a detailed discussion of the complexity of meaning components, Zgusta (1971) further maps out three types of equivalence: absolute equivalence, partial equivalence, and zero equivalence. Similarly, Svensén (1993:140) states that "The task of a bilingual dictionary is to provide words and expressions in the source language with counterparts in the target language which are as near as possible, semantically and as regards style level (register)". And he (1993:143-145) distinguishes complete equivalence, partial equivalence and no equivalence. Al-Kasimi[5](1977:58) stated that the primary task of bilingual dictionary compilers is to find suitable corresponding words in the target language for the lexical units in the source language.

Some domestic scholars hold similar views. Li Ming and Zhou Jinghua (2002:64) stated in their book "Compilation of Bilingual Dictionaries" that "The corresponding words in bilingual dictionaries should be equivalent to the definitions in monolingual dictionaries." Additionally, according to them, equivalents can be subdivided into insertible equivalent and non-insertible equivalent.

It is evident that there is a convergence in all the researches on definition in bilingual dictionaries at the linguistic level: it boils down to conceptual equivalent provision. From what we have explicated above, it is clear that the concepts of equivalence and equivalent are oftentimes interwound and cannot be partitioned clearly in that equivalence implies the provision of equivalents. By stating so, this article will use the two terms interchangeably in some cases.

4.2 Interlingual equivalence or textual equivalence

The next concern is at what level of organization should we find the entities where equivalence may reside? This seemingly easy questions defies any prompt answer in both translation studies and lexicography. We are tempting to say equivalence should be equivalence at the systemic level because in both translation studies and lexicography translators are expected to come up with an equivalent in target language that is identical to the source language item under every possible

circumstance. But things would be more complex than expected. There are many cases in which textual equivalence dominates. For example, translating an example serves as a case in point. In translating an example sentence "Service is included in your bill" under the headword "service" in the sense of "the help that people who work in a shop, restaurant, bar etc give you" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 6th edition), the version goes like this:.In this case, the headword "service" in this example sentence has lose somewhat its "independence" and can not be translated literally as "服务". Instead, textual equivalence is pursued here. In fact, the pursuit of textual equivalence has enjoyed a time-honored history: it is said the embryonic form of dictionary, that is, glossary, is a collection of interlineal or marginal glosses made by preachers or genteel scholars in reading classics. It is no exaggeration to say that in the medieval bilingual dictionary making textual equivalence prizes most, as manifested by "As late as 1828, the first English-Polish dictionary was still a strongly text-bound affair"[1](Arleta Adamska-Sałaciak 2010:388).

Currently, bilingual dictionaries feature both type of equivalence, the interlingual equivalence constituting the default, and the intertextual equivalence the supplement. In view of this, lexicographers should be cautious in balancing their act in choosing equivalence type in translating.

4.3 Criteria for equivalence

What criteria should we use to determine if a lexical item can be called equivalent to others? Since translational definition is a particular kind of translation, which justify the necessity of elaborating on the relevant studies. It is commonly acknowledged that traditional translation studies have set two criteria for measuring equivalence, as evidenced by Peter Newmark's statement in section 2.1: one is whether the translation can preserve and convey the original meaning accurately, and the other is whether it can produce the same reading effect among target language readers as among source language readers.

Things might be more complex in the lexicographical circle: opinions differ on this issue. For example, Zgusta makes a distinction between translational and explanatory equivalents (1971:319) as well as semantic and functional equivalents (1987:30); Gouws [7](2002) opposes semantic to communicative equivalents; Hausmann [9](1989:220) juxtaposes prototypical with textual equivalents, etc.

Let's single out Zgusta's elucidation of equivalence for a detailed discussion. According to Zgusta, a bilingual dictionary is expected to provide "such a lexical unit of the target language which has the same lexical meaning as the respective lexical unit of the source language"[15](1971:312). From this statement, we can see clearly that meaning has been prioritized in judging the existence of equivalence. Additionally, he claims that "real lexical units of the target language which, when inserted into the context, produce a smooth translation" [16](Zgusta 1984:147), against which translational/insertable and explanatory/descriptive equivalence are distinguished. So it can be deduced that the insertability is considered as a yardstick, too. In fact, every type of equivalence possess the insertability and explanatory power to differing degrees. Apart from meaning and insertability, Zgusta hold that the equation is supposed to retain a high degree of symmetry, which he himself finds unrealistic. In other words, asymmetry of relation poses a challenge for his equative views. Lastly, Zgusta (1984) points out that the aesthetic value, stylistic value and other values also affect the realization of equivalence. In a word, the realization of equivalence involves an abundance of factors in bilingual lexicography with meaning at its core.

In summary, as absolute equivalence requires the target language equivalent to be identical with the lexical item in the source language on all the relevant dimensions of meaning, which is too high a standard to achieve. In this sense, absolute equivalence is but an exception. Thus the common sense of equivalence implies merely maximum closeness. Apart from the traditional orientation

towards meaning, the degree of closeness, to a large extent, resides on the additional values a translational definition may provide, thereby charting the course for lexicographers to strive.

4.4 Fourfold classification of equivalence type

In the absence of the ontological equivalence whose reasons have been discussed in section 1.2, the equivalence can only be pursued from the perspective of epistemology. The so-called epistemological identification of sameness or equivalence, rather than ontological sameness or equivalence, sheds light on the importance of distinguishing between the meaning of words and the corresponding referents, which in turns provides a research perspective for classifying types of equivalence: equivalence or equality exists only at the cognitive level and is of relativity. In the field of bilingual dictionary compilation, this relativity is manifested in the quotation that "Approximation in many, probably most, of the equivalences is inevitable." (Atkins 1996: 7)[2]. One of the tasks for compilers is to reveal the differences entailed within the relativity, as evidenced by "a good monodirectional dictionary is not just a quest for sameness (equivalence) between the lexical units of the two languages, but also an attempt to identify areas of convergence and divergence between the respective lexicons." [3](Arleta Adamska-Sałaciak 2015: 2-3). In short, only by understanding the relativity of equivalence can we truly reveal the fine-grained difference on the basis of semantic commonalities, avoiding misunderstandings that approximate equivalence may cause. This holds dual value in translation studies and lexicography.

The Polish lexicographer Arleta Adamska-Sałaciak [4](2010, 2011, 2015, and 2016), by building upon Zgusta's classifications of equivalence types as well as incorporating findings from other scholars, proposed a fourfold classification of equivalence types: cognitive equivalence, translational equivalence, explanatory equivalence, and functional equivalence. This article will delve into the nuances of these four types of equivalence and highlight their respective advantages and disadvantages in the context of dictionary compilation.

Cognitive equivalence: human share the similar cognitive systems and ways of thinking, with cultural commonalities across different language communities being prevalent and dominant, thereupon providing a foundation for achieving interlingual cognitive equivalence. Traditional translation studies have set two criteria for measuring equivalence: one is whether the translation can preserve and convey the original meaning accurately, and the other is whether it can produce the same reading effect among target language readers as among source language readers. Cognitive equivalence, as the ideal state of equivalence, should meet both these requirements. Specifically in bilingual dictionaries, cognitive equivalence aims to match the source language entry with the target language equivalent in terms of denotational meaning, connotative meaning, and range of application. This includes, but is not limited to, consistency in conceptual meaning, register, style, and usage rules, etc. From translation's perspective, cognitive equivalence is of high insertable and explanatory value; from the perspective of vocabulary acquisition, to have a knowledge of cognitive equivalent requires the least efforts. Cognitive equivalents usually display a high degree of symmetry in both L1---L2 and L2---L1 dictionaries, and are often the preferred choice for dictionary compilers.

Translational equivalence: in terms of domestication and foreignization, translational equivalents often have a domesticating nature, representing source language concepts with set expressions in the target language. Their advantage lies in their ease of acceptance, understanding, memorization, and retrieval by users of the target language. They can also be directly applied in translations, exhibiting high insertability. Theoretically, a headword can be applied in countless contexts, and thus the number of its potential translational equivalents is limitless. A drawback of translational equivalents is that their selection, understanding, and interpretation all require contextual support.

The more translational equivalents there are, the higher the likelihood that they deviate from the original meaning. Translational equivalents without annotations can lead to misinterpretation due to their lack of explanatory power, limiting their usage to fixed expressions.

Explanatory equivalence: from the perspective of domestication and foreignization, explanatory equivalents tend to be ascribed to foreignizing translation, working as both equivalent and the translational definition. Explanatory equivalents, owing to its semantic precision with high degree of true color of the source language, make it easier for readers to grasp the semantic connotations and understand the differences between the source and target languages. In L2-L1 dictionaries, the use of explanatory equivalents is advantageous because L1 users can automatically adjust them to authentic expressions based on the intuition of their mother tongue, showing strong productivity. Once mastered, L1 users can freely understand source language example sentences. However, in L1-L2 dictionaries, this can lead target language users to mistakenly treat explanatory equivalents as translational equivalents during language production, resulting in unidiomatic expressions. Another drawback of explanatory equivalents is that they are not easy to memorize and often cannot be directly applied in translations, requiring users to spend time and effort to come up with translational equivalents from the context. Explanatory equivalents are often used due to lexical or referential gaps.

Functional equivalence: the goal of functional equivalence is to produce a similar reading effect among the target language readers as that experienced by the source language readers. This approach has been validated in literary translation and serves as the primary strategy for lexicographers dealing with prepositions, interjections, etc. Furthermore, modern dictionaries often leverage corpora for compilation, allowing lexicographers to achieve functional equivalence by placing the headwords in contexts or by directly translating phrases or sentences that contain the headword. In both scenarios, there is no need for a direct translation of the headword, indirectly broadening the applicability of functional equivalents. It is foreseeable that functional equivalence will play a more significant role in the translation of examples in bilingual dictionaries from a cultural perspective. A drawback is the difficulty in providing corresponding equivalents. Thus, "Functional equivalence is thus sought, often as a last resort, in situations where it is impossible to provide a lexical equivalent of the headword" [1](Arleta Adamska-Sałaciak 2010:395).

Arleta introduced two classification criteria for these four types of equivalence: "semantic and distributional (functional)" "On the whole, cognitive and explanatory equivalents meet the former criterion, while translational and functional equivalents meet the latter" (Arleta Adamska-Sałaciak 2015: 7)[3]. It can be deduced from this statement that those equivalence types is endowed with contrasting characteristics and there are ample room for lexicographers to identify them in pairs the strengths that one can learn from the other. In other words, compilers are obliged to make great efforts to compensate for the deficiencies of the latter three types of equivalence, making them lean towards cognitive equivalence for satisfying users' cognitive needs.

5. Conclusion

Equivalence is a key concept that appears across various disciplines, each with its specific nuances and particulars. Despite the lack of the universally acknowledged definition of equivalence, and in spite of the fact that the equivalents found in bilingual dictionaries are far from satisfactory, there is nothing wrong with the notion of equivalence in the right which should be treated as a gradable phenomenon. In fact, a repertoire of reasons may account for the imperfections of equivalence. First, a bilingual dictionary involves two anisomorphic languages whose gap is difficult to bridge. Secondly, meaning is capricious in that it is largely interlexical and contextual. Thirdly, what decontextualised words has are meaning potentials. Equivalence is of limited value to

solve the aforementioned problems. All in all, for all the inherent limitations associated with this key concept, equivalence remains indispensable in lexicography, without which the foundation of lexicography might collapse.

6. Notes

① equivalence, n. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary (oed.com)
② equivalence | Etymology of equivalence by etymonline
③ (equivalence noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com)

Acknowledgments

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