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Partial equivalences in bilingual dictionaries: Classification, causes and compensations

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Abstract

A headword's meaning develops along two paths in bilingual dictionaries: intralinguistic meaning and interlinguistic meaning, the former defined by the headword's linguistic system while the latter shown by its translation(s). The semantic differences between the headwords and their translations in signification, and in syntagmatic and associative relations, indicate that partial equivalences in bilingual dictionaries are in fact solid and authentic, and are thus prevalent. Based on a new classification of meaning developed from Saussure's value hypothesis, we have identified 18 possible types of partial equivalences. Bilingual dictionaries may choose to compensate for the partial equivalences through translation methods and dictionary devices according to users' needs, types of the dictionary and evidence provided by the corpus.

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Keywords: Bilingual dictionaries; Partial equivalences; Compensation

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1. Introduction

Equivalence is the relationship between words or phrases from two or more languages which share the same MEANING (Hartmann and James, 1998: 51). In bilingual lexicography, the theory of equivalence has been dominating the theoretical field for a significant period and this notion is likely to remain central to the concerns of bilingual dictionary makers (Adamska-Sałaciak, 2010: 387). However, the current views of equivalences or equivalents as partial and relative have come to challenge the traditional views of equivalence as full and exact. Though bilingual lexicographers generally agree that the basic purpose of bilingual lexicography is to seek equivalence, they admit that there is difficulty in looking for equivalent words in the target language system (Zgusta, 1971: 294), as equivalence is 'partial' or 'relative' rather than 'full' or 'exact' for most contexts (Hartmann and James, 1998: 51) and perfect interlingual equivalence is an exception rather than the rule (Adamska-Sałaciak, 2013b: 223). Snell-Hornby (1983: 247) directly pointed out that ''partial coverage and non-equivalence are a reality of interlingual comparison''. Furthermore, studies of the classification of translation equivalence and anisomorphism in the field of bilingual lexicography (Wiegand, 2002; Wu, 2005; Wei, 2005b; Zhao, 2006: iv; Hartmann, 2007: 25; Yong and Peng, 2007; Zhang and Yong, 2007: 153–163; Svensén, 2009: 255–261; Adamska-Sałaciak, 2010, 2014; Héja, 2016) highlight similarities as well as differences between headwords in the source language (SL) and their translation equivalents in the target language (TL). Though interlinguistic differences are generally regarded as an unavoidable problem in bilingual dictionary compilation (Svensén, 2009: 253), the

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description of interlinguistic differences has become a significant concern for bilingual lexicographers (Chen, 1992: 4; Wang, 1995: 150; Wei, 2005a: 64).

To describe interlinguistic differences, bilingual lexicographers usually draw on lexicographical theories such as Mel'čuk's meaning-text theory (1973, 1997), Zhang's definition models based on cognitive semantics (2002, 2006, 2010, 2017), the function theory (Bergenholtz and Tarp, 1994, 1995; Tarp, 2008; Bergenholtz and Gouws, 2010) and the communicative theory (Yong and Peng, 2007), which have exerted great influence on the overall design of bilingual dictionaries. In addition, translation theories are often applied to bilingual lexicography since translation is a major task in bilingual dictionary compilation and 'equivalence is a central concept in translation theory' (Baker and Saldanha, 2010: 96). Hence, researchers have been attempting to formulate translational patterns for bilingual lexicography, such as Wu's (2005) five common patterns of equating interlinguistic symbols in bilingual dictionary translation and Wei's reflections on bilingual lexicography (2005b).

In current studies on bilingual lexicography, partial equivalence has been extensively explored from the lexicographical perspective. Zhang and Yong (2007: 156) make a classification of partial equivalences based on English–French dictionary translations. As for English–Chinese or Chinese–English dictionary translation, Yong and Peng (2007: 130–131) identifies 5 types of partial equivalents for headwords: approximate equivalents, analytical equivalents, synthetic equivalents, subordinate equivalents and superordinate equivalents. However, most partial equivalence studies to date mainly focus on the classification of partial equivalences based on lexicographical evidence. Our approach will adopt a new methodology by using meaning aspects as a basis for the classification of translation equivalence.

Based on a synthetic classification of meaning, we attempt to provide a systematic classification of partial equivalences for headwords. More importantly, we intend to examine the deeper causes for partial equivalences in bilingual dictionaries, evaluate the choices in interlinguistic meaning construction and discuss how compilers may deal with interlinguistic meaning differences in the translation of bilingual dictionaries. It is worth noting that our focus is on sense-to-sense interlingual equivalence while semantic divergence falls beyond the scope of the study.

2. A classification of partial equivalences in bilingual lexicography

2.1. A synthetic classification of a word's meaning

Saussure proposed that 'language itself can be nothing other than a system of pure values' (Saussure, translated by Roy Harris, 2001: 110). This concept of value was later explained as 'products of a system, which is the set of syntagmatic and associative relations that hold between the concrete entities of a language' (Holdcroft, 1991: 108). These statements highlighted the importance of linguistic relations including syntagmatic relations and associative relations. (This term is often replaced by paradigmatic relations.) These definitions of value are consistent with modern thoughts on the definition and classification of meaning. The seven types of meaning proposed by Leech (1983) show a careful consideration of syntagmatic relations by the inclusion of collocative meaning and associative relations by the inclusion of connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning and thematic meaning. In the application of Leech's meaning classification to the compilation of bilingual lexicography, Yong and Peng (2007: 47) further grouped the seven types of meaning into two categories: conceptual meaning and non-conceptual meanings. Based on the previous studies of meaning classification, we intend to present a synthetic classification of meaning, shown in Fig. 1.

A word's meaning is essentially composed of two types: meaning 1 and meaning 2. Meaning 1 usually carries the concept of a word, which may be called conceptual meaning. Meaning 2 is non-conceptual meaning (Yong and Peng, 2007: 47) and can be further divided into two kinds according to Saussure's relational types: meaning 2a and meaning 2b. Meaning 2a shows the syntagmatic relations of words, especially collocations, including grammatical collocations, semantic collocations and culture-specific collocations. Meaning 2b indicates the associative relations, including connotative associations, social associations, affective associations and reflected associations. We may add more types of associations to the list, such as cultural associations.

2.2. Intralinguistic and interlinguistic meaning for headwords in bilingual dictionaries

In a bilingual dictionary context, the headwords are usually defined by elements both within and across language systems. In such a context, the meaning of a headword is divided into two types: *intralinguistic meaning* and *interlinguistic meaning*. The intralinguistic meaning for the headword is closely related to its typical usage within the language system and the interlinguistic meaning is related to interlinguistic differences. A proper construction of both kinds of meaning can help users to orient the headword's position within its language system and realize the contrastive differences across language systems. Hence, to make a truly functional bilingual dictionary for learners, we need to take into account both

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