

Equivalence in Bilingual Dictionaries: Types, Problems and Criticism

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Abstract

This article has set out some of the major issues related to the composition of bilingual dictionaries, namely their functional aspect which helps determining the nature of the intended book, either reception-oriented or production oriented, depending on the type of audience to whom this work is to be presented. After that, the notion of equivalence started taking its position as being the central point of this paper. This latter was gradually reflected. That is to say that the analysis began with word class equivalence, and then it developed to deal with those consisting of two or more words (collocations), to arrive after that to those with longer lexical combinations through relying on different ideas and points of view by theorists descending from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds with different ideas and points of view. Most of them went even further to discuss its subtypes, as called by Heming Yong and Jing Peng, or its degrees as proposed by Monia Bayar 2007. This has led to another level of discussion, i.e. the criticism of some ideas that seemed illogical, especially that carried on zero equivalence, categorical correspondence and others. As I proceed, the discussion has moved to another level. That is of enquiring multiple methods and techniques used to provide naturally sound equivalents with respect to the disparities between languages.

Keywords: BD (Bilingual Dictionary), Lexicology, TE (Translation Equivalence), EE (Explanatory Equivalence) SM ((Specialized Equivalence), SD (Semantic Discrimination), MD (Meaning Discrimination).

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INTRODUCTION

It may seem to the layman (non-lexicographers) that the process of finding appropriate equivalents is an easy work to undertake, while it is, in fact, a sufficiently challenging, time-consuming and fiendishly complicated task that requires specific techniques and methods in order to render lexical units belonging to one language adaptable to another. Despite the fact that much ink has flown on discussing the notion of equivalence in translation in general and in its relation to bilingual dictionaries in particular, it is still posing a serious problem to bilingual word-lists' compilers who strive to advance on suggesting new theories and putting forward good solutions, if not comprehensive ones. In this article, the focus will be on the concept of equivalence in Arabic-English dictionaries and vice-versa. In other words, the research will be investigating the nature of such complex phenomenon by addressing its types as introduced by different theorists interested in this field of knowledge, different problems faced by lexicographers, along with

the strategies adopted to deal with the notion under study and a critical study of equivalence presentation in different Bilingual Dictionaries.

Since lexicography, bilingual dictionaries and equivalence are the core of the research paper, there is no harm hinting upon them by giving some definitions as a small introduction to our main subject matter, which revolves around the notion of equivalence in bilingual lexicography, types, analysis and criticism.

As it is stated by Crystal (2008: 278), "*lexicology* (*n*) is a term used in semantics for the overall study of a language's vocabulary (including its history). It is distinguished from *lexicography*, which is the art and science of dictionary-making, carried out by *lexicographers*. Lexicography could accordingly be seen as a branch of 'applied lexicology'. The term *lexicologist* is less widely used: someone interested in vocabulary would normally be considered a species of semanticist. The psychological study of word meaning

(e.g. the linguistic expression of spatial relations) is sometimes known as *psycholexicology*".

According to Bowker, "lexicography is the discipline concerned with the principles and methods of writing dictionaries"; cited by Sternkenburg (2003: 154) as an editor.

In their jointly edited book entitled "The handbook of Applied Linguistics", Davis and Elder (2004: 55) cited that Kirkness claims the following: "In a narrow sense lexicography may be described as the art and craft of writing a dictionary. Certainly, a lexicographer is essentially someone who writes or contributes to a dictionary or dictionaries, be it as an individual or a member of a team, as a freelancer or an in-house employee, as a full-time professional or part time alongside other activities such as university lecturing. *Lexicographer* is also used more generally to refer to writers of other reference works, including encyclopedias".

A bilingual dictionary is considered to have multiple functions. One of these functions is, as far as we are concerned, translation; this type of dictionaries deals with the source language (SL) vocabulary by providing its translation in the target language (TL) via what is termed as equivalence. To prove this, the following quotation is given: "a bilingual dictionary viewed as a whole ought to be a unified translation tool", Berkov (1990: 99).

Another definition of the nature of BDs is provided by Hartmann (1989:9) in which he says: "The bilingual dictionary is often called the translation dictionary par excellence because it offers the user inter-lingual lexical equivalents".

In their jointly written book entitled "*Bilingual Lexicography from a Communicative Perspective*" Heming Yong and Jing Peng introduced the notion of equivalents in bilingual dictionaries as follows: To give a *full equivalence* in a bilingual dictionary, lexicographers have to use L1 and L2 "lexical units" that completely correspond to one another in terms of "content, category, style of usage and register so that they are readily insertible into the context to produce faithful, smooth and elegant translations" Yang and Peng (2007: 129).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As the article's title suggests, bilingual lexicography is considered to be a specialized branch of lexicography that concerns itself with the making of bilingual dictionaries (BDs) with respect to certain specific norms and criteria that helps distinguishing good and reliable BDs from weak ones. A BD (bilingual dictionary) is judged on the basis of the quality and the nature of the equivalence it provides in relation to users' needs. In the same way, the quality of

equivalence in a bilingual dictionary is measured by the extent of its economy, transparency, accessibility and usability, though combining all of these features remains hard to achieve. This problem is highly noticeable in the Arabic medical field for we usually find equivalents of English medical terms that can be assessed against the criteria of term formation.

This can be clearly seen at the level of terms belonging to the Arabic medical field; cancer terminology for instance, in which providing terms that respect the aforementioned criteria is almost non-existent. Consider the following examples:

English medical terms	Their equivalence in Arabic
Glioblastoma	ورم أرومي دبقي
Dysembryoplastics	أورام الدبقيات قليلة التغصن

1.3 Significance of the Study

This article has set out some of the major issues related to the composition of bilingual dictionaries, namely their functional aspect which helps determining the nature of the intended book, either reception-oriented or production oriented, depending on the type of audience to whom this work is to be presented. After that, the notion of equivalence started taking its position as being the central point of this paper. This latter was gradually reflected. That is to say that the analysis began with word class equivalents, and then it developed to deal with those consisting of two or more words (collocations), to arrive after that to those with longer lexical combinations through relaying on different ideas and points of view by theorists descending from different cultural and linguistic background. This sufficiently detailed article is designed to help teachers have a clear idea about the type of dictionary they would recommend to their students, in addition to translators who can rely on while in the assessment of dictionaries as a part of their lexicology program and the use of dictionaries in the realm of translation in general.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

Reflecting main issues related to the composition of bilingual dictionaries, in addition to the assessment of equivalence in different bilingual dictionaries and a critical study of equivalence presentation based on different linguistic criteria.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This study is considered to be qualitative and an analytical one. As a starting point, the research will provide a brief presentation of some keywords related to the notion under study. After that, it will explore, discuss and criticize different types and degrees of equivalence as introduced by different scholars interested in this arena. In this process the research will heavily rely on examples that are either personal or taken from different sources in order to enrich my paper

and make it clearer. Some of them will be taken from different sources, while others will be my own. Still with examples, the majority of them are given in the Chinese language since the paper deals with a book that is written by two theorists from Chinese origin. Thus, there will be an attempt to translate them to see if they can fit in the Arabic context, especially those that are culture-bound. Otherwise, some efforts will be made to find examples that can better suit the language pair the research tackles: Arabic-English and vice-versa so as to make this study adaptable to the set of theories they provide.

Further, the research will justify reasons behind criticizing some ideas that do not seem logical to me by giving proofs to support my attitude. Likewise, I research will suggest some solutions to some aspects of meaning that can prove problems to the dictionary users. In other words, the translator may misuse terms while targeting one audience and not the other. For instance, in Morocco we use (اتفاق) to refer to an agreement, whereas it is used as (مذكرة تفاهم) in other Arab countries, like Egypt, Lebanon and so on.

Next, the research will dwell upon various techniques adopted by translators and lexicographers while trying to give the right equivalents. Again, examples are to be used for clarity purposes. Those strategies will be applied to different levels of linguistic items; single words and sequences of words, namely collocations and idioms as they occupy an important space of bilingual dictionaries.

Later, the research will move to another level of analysis which is related to the way equivalents are presented in different bilingual dictionaries. This can only be done by tackling what is known in the sphere of dictionaries as “*meaning discrimination*” by introducing its nature and showing to what extent it is

considered to be important for the dictionary users to help them benefit to the maximum. Then, the research will add to this discussion the multiple devices whereby equivalents of the same lexical unit are separated from one another in order to reflect their slight differences; hence, empowering users to single out the right word for their context. As usual, the research will rely on the use of examples to make every point clear.

At last, a critical study of equivalence presentation in different bilingual dictionaries will be conducted in an attempt to examine the nature and quality of these equivalence. Are they translation equivalence or explanatory equivalence (paraphrases / glosses)? Are they perfect complete equivalents or partial equivalents? The same will be done with collocations and idioms? Meaning what kind of equivalence are provided for them; are they culturally approximated? Are they explained by means of giving their genuine idea? And so on. This study will also tackle meaning discrimination and how it is differently employed.

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