

Coherence and its Role in Determining Word Meaning

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Abstract

English is a language dominated by polysemy, and it will lead to mistranslation if the meanings of polysemy are not grasped correctly in Chinese translation. The determination of the meaning of polysemous words depends on context. However, the context is also uncertain and should be constructed according to textual sentences, and the correct understanding of sentence meaning is based on the understanding of words in sentences. Two uncertain factors depend on each other, which means that translation is a process of repeated matching and trial and error. In this process of trial and error, it is remarkable to rely on discourse coherence to eliminate ambiguity.

Keywords

Coherence; Context; Meaning; Translation.

1. Introduction

English is a language dominated by polysemy, and it will lead to mistranslation if the meanings of polysemy are not grasped correctly in Chinese translation. The polysemous words discussed in this paper refer to lexical semantics, which is similar to dictionary definitions. Feng Guohua (2002) and others discussed how to determine the meaning of polysemous words according to linguistic context, situational context and cultural context through specific translation examples. It is almost common sense to determine the meaning of words according to context. However, sometimes the understanding of polysemy is not as simple as the above example, and mistranslation caused by misunderstanding of polysemy is not uncommon. Why is it difficult to grasp the meaning of polysemy?

2. Word meaning and context

Brown & Yule defined context as "the environment in which language is used", which can be divided into linguistic context and non-linguistic context (Halliday,1985), as well as linguistic context, situational context and cultural context. According to this context view, context is established/given, which is a constant factor pre-stored in the brains of both sides of communication. The most obvious problem mentioned in the introduction of determining word meaning according to context is that it does not take into account the role of word meaning in context. "If language leaves context, its meaning cannot be obtained (indicative), and the context in which language is used is defined by the meaning of language, which makes the meaning of language uncertain." Juliane House also emphasized the reflexivity between context and speech content, and content also influenced context, and proposed that translation is context reconstruction. Ren Shaozeng discussed the derivation from context clues to determine the meaning of words, and thought that the process of understanding "is derived from discourse to context, and then from context back to discourse, so as to achieve the understanding of discourse." Deriving context from context clues is essentially a process of constructing context. Compared with traditional context view, Ren's analysis is more scientific and convincing in determining the meaning of polysemous words according to linguistic context, situational context and cultural context. Context has both an established side and a constructive side. "The relationship between the established information and the constructive information of context can be compared with the relationship between building materials and buildings. The same batch of building materials will build different buildings in the hands of different architects. Similarly, different communicators will construct different cognitive contexts with the same established

information of context." (Wu Yaxin, 2012) In view of the constructiveness and subjectivity of context, it is vague to discriminate polysemous words according to context.

However, social cognitive pragmatics holds that vocabulary itself carries context. SCA's view of competing context holds that vocabulary itself contains/carries/can create context, which divides context into pre-context and situation, including individual context and collective context. The understanding of discourse, that is, the construction of meaning, is the result of the interaction between the listener's own personal context and the speaker's personal context under the restriction of the actual situation context. According to Giora's parallel context mechanism, context (external context, including context and situation) and vocabulary interact in a parallel way in the process of discourse understanding. The meaning association triggered by vocabulary in the listener is related to the prominence of the vocabulary, and its prominent meaning always appears in the listener's brain at the earliest. People rely on their most accessible prominent knowledge to understand discourse in their own context. Prominent meaning originates from the pre-context with individual differences contained in vocabulary (or discourse), and the activation of prominent meaning naturally activates the corresponding pre-context. Therefore, there is a matching process between the pre-activated context and the situation. If the pre-context is appropriate to the situation, there will be a smooth communication process. If there is no match, the context before activation will be adjusted, that is, the relevant discourse will be understood in a non-prominent sense. It is not difficult to see that SCA also recognizes the function of context screening to determine the meaning of words, but emphasizes that words themselves carry context. According to SCA, determining the meaning of polysemous words according to context means determining pre-context according to situation. However, not all situations will enter the hearer's cognition and become relevant contextual factors, which contextual factors will be considered by the hearer as relevant contexts that can influence discourse understanding, and there is uncertainty about the matching principle between the activated pre-context and the situation, so it becomes difficult to distinguish the pre-context according to the situation.

3. Coherence and word meaning

Coherence is regarded as "the psychological interpretation of a text to create a consistent schema, mental picture of world" (Goatly 2012: 318), cohesion has been conceptualized as comprising four types of grammatical cohesive ties (conjunctives, reference, substitution and ellipsis) and two categories of lexical cohesion (reiteration and collocation); in addition, some authors take into consideration the cohesive role of parallelism, theme-rheme articulation and given-new information organization, which are referred to as structural cohesion.

"Coherence is one of the basic features of discourse, and words in discourse are not randomly pieced together. An effective way to eliminate ambiguity and accurately decode polysemous words is to project it onto the coherent relationship network of discourse, and it is easy to make mistakes in isolation without the coherent relationship network." (Wang Dongfeng, 2014) Discrimination of polysemous words according to the network of discourse coherence is to construct various coherent relations between polysemous words and other words in the sentence at the understanding stage, and then to discriminate and determine the meanings of polysemous words. Coherent reading effect is obtained on the basis of real understanding of discourse. Although coherence is constructed, it does not mean that the interpretation and construction of coherence is random, and we should pay attention to avoiding false coherence caused by misreading. Discourse coherence may be seen as a multifaceted discourse property encompassing conceptual connectedness on the ideational plane (propositional or topical coherence), evaluative and dialogical consistency on the interpersonal plane (interactional or evaluative coherence), and textual relatedness on the textual plane of discourse (cohesion). An investigation into discourse coherence is then supposed to take into account aspects of coherence on all three planes of discourse in order to provide an adequate analysis of this complex phenomenon.

4. Constructing coherence and determining word meaning

The above coherent theoretical studies from different levels and angles may have their own advantages and disadvantages, but for our translation practice, what is conducive to guiding translation practice and making a reasonable explanation for translation practice should be used by me. The following article will discuss how to distinguish the meaning of polysemous words by constructing coherence through examples.

One hundred and twenty acres, according to the County Clerk, is the extent of my worldly domain. But the County Clerk is a sleepy fellow, who never looks at his record books before nine o'clock. What they would show at daybreak is the question here at issue.

(a) 一百二十英亩,据沙县书记员所言,是我拥有的世俗疆域。但沙县书记员总是,上午九点之前从不浏览他的记录簿。而拂晓时分领地上展现的一切才是问题所在。

(b) 120英亩,据县政府书记员的记录,就是我在这一世间的领地范围。但那位书记员是个懒家伙,上午9点前从不会查看土地登记簿。而登记簿在拂晓时分能说明些什么,是个值得在此议论的问题。

(c) 一百二十英亩,按县书记员的说法,我现实拥有的领地就这么大。但书记员这家伙很贪睡,从未在九点之前查看过登记簿。那么,拂晓时分登记簿上记着的是多少就有争议。

The title of the article is *Great Possessions*, but the farm area actually owned by the author is only 120 acres, which is not a big farm, let alone a vast one. Why should the author describe the 120-acre territory as vast territory? The author argues like this: the clerk doesn't check the register before 9 o'clock, since he doesn't, how can he know the area recorded in the register before 9 o'clock, that is, at dawn? This issue is also controversial. Of course, the data recorded in the register will not be different at different times, and the author's "sophistry" is obviously a deliberate humor, which comes from the author's deliberate violation of the conversational norms. The second sentence of the original text violates the relational criterion in Grice's conversational criterion, that is, the size of the territory has nothing to do with the clerk's drowsiness, and the third sentence violates the qualitative criterion, that is, the data recorded in the register will not be different at dawn and other times, and there is no dispute. From the author's intentional violation of conversational norms, the author's pragmatic implication can be deduced, that is, the author thinks that his territory is more than 120 acres at dawn, which echoes the title of the article. By recognizing the pragmatic coherence of the original text, we can accurately grasp the meaning of polysemy.

Pragmatic coherence belongs to propositional coherence in conceptual dimension. The above mainly discusses the definition of polysemy from the perspective of pragmatic coherence, which is discussed in the scope of paragraphs and even sentences. The discussion from the perspective of propositional coherence is more helpful for us to grasp coherence from the cross-paragraph discourse scope. The title of the article is *Great Possessions*, which describes one's own subjective world at dawn. These expressions echo back and forth, and the coherence of propositions runs through the whole text. If we realize this coherence, we will not agree to translate the title of the crowning article into "great wealth". From the perspective of speech act theory, we can examine the organic combination of visible coherence, invisible coherence and invisible coherence of a complete speech act. The author's humorous speech style leaves readers with the feeling that the behavior is coherent after the speech, and the theme of the author's love for nature and the integration of nature can be reflected and his thoughts can be transmitted. The translation (c) is better in the aspect of constructing coherence.

5. Conclusions

Wrong understanding of a certain word meaning or wrong choice of a certain context hypothesis will lead to wrong interpretation of the original text. The choice of word meaning and context hypothesis

are interdependent, and context is not certain. It does not exist in advance, which can help us to rely on and eliminate ambiguity. Obviously, the above translation did not construct the correct context hypothesis, which led to the wrong word meaning. The construction of context depends on the understanding of sentences. If there are multiple polysemy words in a sentence, it is easy for the whole sentence to be misunderstood because of the misunderstanding of a polysemy word, which in turn affects the construction of context.

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