

What Confuses Chinese Students in Translating English Polysemy Words? Homonymy, Prototype, Context and Suggestions

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Abstract

Polysemy words have always been an obstacle for translation beginners. However, this is more than a lexical-level issue. The existence of polysemy has its historical reasons, in particular the development of semantics. One result of such development is homonymy, words sharing the same spelling and pronunciation but varying in meaning, even though students are not so sensible with the difference between the two terms. In spite of homonymy, several meanings of a polysemous word are usually interrelated or even developed through the application of metaphorical tools or in certain contexts, therefore, such meanings are not stable and the translation of such meanings in the target language counts on the ability of the translator. We may call the very center meaning of a polysemous word a “prototype” and other meanings its derivatives. Context has made the process of polysemous words even more complex, as sometimes the translator has to create a new understanding and meaning for the word in the target language. This paper will analyze through cases and comparisons and explain how polysemy has influenced the translation process from the three aspects: homonymy, prototype, and context, so as to make some suggestions for improvements.

Keywords: Polysemy, Homonymy, Prototype, Context, Translation.