

Translation of Polysemous Words in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*: A Case Study

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Abstract

This paper investigates the various responses of professional and novice translators toward translating polysemous verbs. To this end, 20 students studying English Language and Translation Studies took a pretest as well as a posttest on translation. The data analysis showed that professional and novice translators react differently toward translating polysemous verbs. The results also illustrated that novice translators are mostly trapped in the first meaning impression mainly selecting primary sense rather than secondary senses for their translation equivalents.

Key words: Cognitive linguistic, Ambiguity, Polysemy, Homonymy, Primary and secondary senses

1. Introduction

The present paper addresses the issue of polysemous verbs based on cognitive semantics and linguistics for exploring the lexicographic representation of polysemous verbs with looking up through monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. The sampled polysemous verbs including *MAKE* and *DO* with many senses are selected and their respective dictionary entries compared and evaluated. The negotiation on translation centered on the degree of freedom and discretion that the translators have in representing the meaning of the source text, and choosing primary sense or secondary sense in translation.

The main reason for choosing the verbs of *MAKE* and *DO* in this research is based on this fact that both of these verbs are etymologically designated as polysemous items. In other words, they have conventional metaphorical senses, and can express a basic action which can be extended to many other uses. Also, it is noteworthy that the choice of the verbs *MAKE* and *DO* in this survey is partly due to the fact that both of these verbs are highly frequent and widely employed, in a way that, their uses cover a wide range of meanings and have several equivalent uses in Persian too. (Touplikioti, 2007, p.402)

2. Review of Literature

According to Martine Vanhove (2008), cognitive linguistic theories focus on the cognitive processes involved in language processing and understanding. Rather than focusing only on abstract and formal structures in language, “cognitive linguists incorporate other areas of cognition into the study of language.” (p. 147).

Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2007) states that the analysis of polysemy in cognitive linguistic is done as a form of categorization. And four features of the flexibility of meaning, the prototype theoretical model of semantic structure, the radial set model, and the schematic network model are crucial for the cognitive linguistic approach and its relation to polysemy, (cited by Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007, p.140).

In the classical theory, the category is defined by a fixed set of properties. In prototype model, on the contrary, a category is defined with reference to a prototype, an entity which exhibits all the typical features and the majority of features of all members and forms a unified gestalt in the network, (Touplikioti, p. 42). In the same position, Zelinsky-Wibbelt (2000) maintains that among the various senses of words, some entities are more central or more peripheral depending on their links to the prototype. Peripheral senses are usually thought to be vague “as there is a continuous transition between similar concepts in the neighborhood region”, (Touplikioti, p. 42). Brugman and Lakoff (1988) explain the radial set model as follows:

“polysemic words consist of a number of radially related categories even though each of the polysemic senses can itself display a complex prototype structure. The central radial category member provides a cognitive model that motivates the noncentral senses. The extended senses clustered around the central category are related by a variety of possible links such as image schema transformations, metaphor, metonymy, or by partial vis-a`-vis holistic profiling of distinct segments of the whole sense (cited by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2007, p.148)”.

Tuggy (1993) in his paper entitled ‘Ambiguity, polysemy and vagueness’, clarifies the relationship between vagueness and polysemy in a schematic network. In this network, one word may be accepted as polysemy (different meanings) at one level and as vagueness (a less specified meaning potential) at another, more schematic level. In this way, Tuggy represents that this shift between levels is a contextual effect. We may use an expression rather more vaguely in one situation; and may use it at a more specific, polysemous level in another situation. Polysemy refers to a case where a word or phrase has multiple, related meanings. That is, a word or phrase is considered polysemous in case it has more than one related sense.

Ambiguity means that each word or an expression, or a sentence may have two or more different descriptive senses and can be considered as ambiguous one before realization of stress, stop, intonation or other phonological means and without any more presuppositions or contexts than what the word or the sentence itself creates, (Qing-Liang, 2007, p.1). According to Baker (1998), “there are two kinds of ambiguity: lexical and structural. Lexical ambiguity is typically caused by polysemy and homonymy. Structural or grammatical ambiguity arises where different constituent structures (underlying structures) may be assigned to one construction (surface structure), (p. 166).

As Mollanazar (2002) argues, a word may have different senses which can be divided into a primary sense and secondary senses. In this classification, the primary sense of a word is used most commonly in a language, usually learned before other senses, recalled by native speakers when heard in isolation, out of context, and it occurs as the first meaning for an entry in a dictionary (p. 7). Polysemous words constitute the majority of words in a language and frequent errors in translation are mostly due to taking a primary sense for a secondary sense.

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses:

For the purpose of the study, the researchers proposed the following research questions:

Q1: Do professional and novice translators react differently toward translating polysemous verbs?

Q2: Do novice translators mostly choose primary sense for translating polysemous verbs?

In order to investigate the above mentioned research questions, the following alternative hypotheses were developed:

H1: For translating polysemous verbs, novice translators react differently compared to professional translators.

H2: For translating polysemous verbs, novice translators are mostly trapped in the first Meaning impression and mainly select primary sense rather secondary sense.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

This study was conducted among 20 undergraduate Iranian students of English Language Translation Studies at Tabaran Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Iran. They included 13 female and & male participants. A well-known Iranian translator, Saleh Hossini, was considered as the professional translator and role model in this study.

4.2 Instrumentation

In order to explore research questions, a couple of instruments were employed:

- 1) *Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse" (1960)*. It was selected as the source text for translation. The participants were supposed to translate some selected texts from the mentioned source.
- 2) *Saleh Hosseini's Persian Translation (2004)*. It served as a reference. The participants' translations were compared to Saleh Hosseini's.
- 3) *Study pretest*. It included 14 pairs of sentences containing *MAKE* and *DO*, selected from Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse". The purpose of this instrument was to collect data on the participants' translation ability of polysemous words.
- 4) *Translation Strategies Questionnaire*. The purpose of the 20-item inventory was to measure the participants' choice of strategy in translating polysemous words.

4.2 Procedure

The translation analysis of polysemous verbs was implemented in four stages containing two experiments. At first stage, different meanings of our sample polysemous verbs of *MAKE* and *Do* extracted from a monolingual dictionary of "Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary", as well as a bilingual dictionary "Farhang Moaser English Persian Millennium Dictionary" classified. Then, a pre-test will be conducted on BA students of English Language Translation Studies for recording their general knowledge about different meanings of two polysemous verbs of *MAKE* and *DO*. Third, a translation test is given to the same participants of the pre-test (twenty BA students of English Language Translation Studies as novice translators) which this test is composed of twenty- five English sentences containing the polysemous verbs of *MAKE* and *DO*. Before the task, the participants shall be given a briefing on the topic, source of the texts, the purpose of the test, and their tasks. It should be noted that the items in question marked (bolded) and the participants asked to read the sentences and then translate only the marked items into Persian and not the whole sentences. And the results of administered translation test shown in a table & evaluated (second experiment). Finally, the results of first & second experiments are compared. This stage is based on a comparative analysis which conducted based on comparing the extracted translations of sampled students & professional translator. In this way, the reactions of both groups, professional & novice translators, for translating polysemous verbs in selecting primary and/ or secondary meanings are revealed.

5. Results and Discussions

In order to test two raised research questions, two experiments conducted in this study; the aim of first experiment (Study pretest) is to keep a record of their general knowledge and discrimination regarding different meanings of *MAKE* and *DO*. For meaningful practice, students should check the correctness of fourteen pairs of sentences containing *MAKE* and *DO*. No statistically significant difference was found among the experimental group of student at the pre-test regarding their general knowledge about different uses of *MAKE* and *DO*.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Obtained Scores on the Pretest

Pre-test	N	Mean	Mode	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Midpoint	Std. Deviation
Students	20	11.6	12	11.5	9	14	11.5	1.5

And in regard of second experiment (Translation Strategies Questionnaire), as it may be inferred from the below table, the researcher claims that novice translators tend to translate polysemous verbs based on primary sense, in a way that, all the majority of the polysemous examples of verbs *MAKE* and *DO* translated in their primary senses by novice translators except two cases which they were translated in their secondary senses as the same as translations of Saleh Hosseini.

Table 2. Primary and Secondary Translation of the Original Texts' Polysemous Verbs of *MAKE* AND *DO*

NO	Extracted sentences of the original text containing polysemous verbs "MAKE,DO"	Saleh Hosseini		No of Students			
		Primary Sense	Secondary Sense	Primary Sense		Secondary Sense	
				Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Making some little twist of the reddish brown stocking she was knitting		√	16	80%	4	20%
2	He did say disagreeable things		√	14	70%	6	30%
3	Ad make James still more disappointed		√	5	25%	15	75%
4	He had made an unfortunate marriage		√	3	15%	17	85%
5	She made him feel better pleased with himself than he had		√	17	85%	3	15%

	done yet						
6	Made her forget her pity		√	20	100%	0	0
7	He had to make things last twice the time other people did		√	19	95%	1	5%
8	The same the old men did in the quays		√	13	65%	7	35%
9	Made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea		√	18	90%	2	10%
10	Made her look up with an impulse of terror		√	20	100%	0	0
11	Made her turn apprehensively to see if anyone had heard him		√	20	100%	0	0
12	Which made them allies		√	19	95%	1	5%
13	That did make them both vaguely uncomfortable		√	20	100%	0	0
14	That made Mr Bankes almost immediately say something about its being chilly and suggested taking a stroll		√	18	90%	2	10%
15	To see what progress the workmen were making with a hotel which they were building at the back of his		√	15	75%	5	25%

	house						
16	Who do their best work before they are forty		√	17	85%	3	15%
17	He had made a definite contribution to philosophy		√	12	60%	8	40%
18	How then did it work out, all this?		√	20	100%	0	0
19	How did one judge people, think of them?		√	15	75%	5	25%
20	How did one add up this and that and conclude that it was liking one felt or disliking?		√	18	90%	2	10%
21	It did her husband good		√	17	85%	3	15%
22	Whose London life of service was done—they did well enough here		√	19	95%	1	5%
23	Something must be done		√	17	85%	3	15%
24	One could make soup from seaweed		√	17	85%	3	15%
25	Made her drop plumb like a stone		√	18	90%	2	10%

In view of all the above results obtained from two experiments, it can be realized that any differences among experimental group of students at the production test of translation were attributed to the techniques adopted by each group and not to any prior knowledge of the participants. In other words, as it shown by first experiment, there is no significant difference in comprehending different senses of our sampled verbs under different situations. But with respect to the production test of translation, comparing the measurements of the two different kinds of translators reveal significant difference among these two groups which traced back to their experience. Professional translator indeed experienced a change in their underlying knowledge that allowed him to perform quite well and different from novice translators.

With respect to the conceptual and semantic content of the verb *MAKE* and *DO*, the researcher states that the senses of both *MAKE* and *DO* are linked to a prototype by a set of relational semantic principles which incorporate a greater or lesser amount of flexibility.

Taking into account all the above, it is worth mentioning that according to the prototype theory, the researcher interprets the various senses of *MAKE* and *DO* as below: To be more specific, the ‘typical features’ of *MAKE* which constitute the prototype category are including “create, cause, become, gain, estimate, put something forward for consideration, manage to reach a place or position, ensure the success of, behave as if one is about to do something that” which all these features are seen as forming a continuum, with more typical features on one end and the less typical ones on the other. (Touplikioti, 2007, p.43)

In regard of *DO*, the researcher employs the same interpretation; the primary senses of *DO* are including “perform, cause to have, be acceptable, manage, reach a destination, put in order, take place, take, punish” which by the process of metaphorization can be extended to further domains such as playing, cheating, providing food, cooking, being convenient, solving, visiting, making progress, cleaning, take drugs, steal, break in, etc. So it can be inferred that both *MAKE* and *DO* emerge as polysemous verbs consisting of several relatively discrete senses and these different senses cannot be unified on the basis of a common semantic denominator. In the other words, the different meanings are related through “chains of meaning”.

Considering to the above interpretation, all meanings of *MAKE* and *DO* are interrelated schematically, in a way that, Taylor (1995) reveals that meaning A is related to B in virtue of some shared attributes(s), and in turn meaning B can be extended as a source for meaning C, which this chain can be continued to meanings D and E, and so on, (Touplikioti, 2007, p.44).

Make: create → cause → become → gain → estimate → put sth forward for consideration → manage to reach a place or position → ensure the success of → behave as if one is about to do sth

Do: perform → cause to have → be acceptable → manage → reach a destination → put in order → take place → take → punish

In view of all above, translators do not necessarily correlate several polysemous senses by a single schema, but rather by several schemata, hence this proves the internal dynamism of prototypical categories. In this case, the translators determine the relations between polysemous senses pragmatically based on their communicative needs.

Overall, in the light of the above explanation and referring to the obtained results of two experiments, it is obvious that the prototype approach advanced by cognitive linguists proved to be influential on the novice translators.

A more careful examination of the experimental groups’ results suggests that in regard of first experiment which implemented just on novice translators, there is no striking difference among participants for distinguishing different meanings of *MAKE* and *DO* and they react approximately in a similar performance. But with regard to second experiment which conducted by providing a translation test on BA translation students (novice translators) and comparing the translations of professional and novice translators to find out what are their reactions against translating polysemous verbs of *MAKE* and *DO*, it can be argued that as far as cognitive constraints are concerned, novice’ cognitive maturity is logically inferior to professional and their ability of metalinguistic awareness is less developed compared to professional ones. Thus, it was expected that professional whose cognitive mechanisms of processing information are more developed perform better than novice translators. As for

cross-linguistic influences, professional undoubtedly possess richer cultural experiences than novice as well as greater experience of making connections between lexical forms and their meanings in their performance.

6. Conclusion

As it proved by the obtained results of this research, it can be argued that professional and novice translators react differently in translating the polysemous verbs, and it is appeared that, statistical analysis of the data collected provided evidence in support of this view that those priorities proposed by Eugene Nida (1969) have been observed in the translation of professional translator. It means that they put priority of meaning over form; dynamic equivalents over formal correspondence; common use of language over more prestigious words; heard forms over written forms; contextual equivalents over formal correspondence; and they translate just based on conveying the meaning and mostly use words in their secondary senses and they do not restrict themselves to form, but on the contrary, novice translators usually perform in a way that most of the above priorities have not seen in their works. As an example, regarding the last priority in which formal correspondence implies to translate a word by one and only one meaning all the time, this is a trap on the way of novice translators and always waiting to trap them.

In view of the results of the second experiment, as it is shown, the number of students who translated the sample translation test close to the translation of model translator are very low which representing this fact that the processes of both vocabulary comprehension and retention are restricted to the form of language and novice translators limit themselves for translating mostly based on primary sense. Two words which belong to different languages and yet have the same spelling must, at some time, have been the same word. They may be different now because many writers in the two languages have used them differently, in this case novice translators trap on 'illusory correspondence' proposed by Theodore Savory or 'false friends' which claimed by Mildred Larson (1998). Theodore Savory (1968) reveals that the translator "can avoid the mistake of this illusory equivalence only if he has some feelings for the accrued implications of a word, or, as they are usually called, for its associations" (p. 14-15).

Based on the results of this study, both alternative hypotheses were accepted. In other words, the research provided evidence that there was a difference between the performance of professional and novice translators, and novice translators mostly trap in the first meaning impression due to this fact that they have low experience in translation and their general knowledge of translation is based on primary sense selection procedure and mostly choose dictionary equivalents for the various senses of a word, but it seems that professional translators being aware of the difference between primary and secondary meanings of words, usually consider all parameters in choosing the appropriate equivalents, and they usually choose contextual equivalents for the various senses of a word. In simple terms, the researcher claims that novice translators perform in a dictionary-oriented approach, and professional translators perform in a conceptual- oriented approach.

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