The Effect of Context on Meaning Representation of Measurement Adjectives in Translation of Texts from Different Languages to English Language

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Abstract: The easiest place to study contextualization is surely in the relation between words and their contexts of use. Knowing a word involves knowing its meaning and therefore, knowing a word involves knowing its contexts of use. People communicate via sentence, seldom via isolated words. Our interest here lies in the shift of emphasis from referential or dictionary meaning to contextual meaning of adjectives. For this purpose we choose measurement adjectives such as big, large, small and little and we refer to their contextual meaning rather than referential meaning in translation from different languages namely Persian and Azerbaijani into English language or vice versa. Since big and large, small and little are synonyms; it is not surprising that they can be used to describe many of the same nouns. However, they are not perfect synonyms and there are some differences in the distribution of these adjectives which make some problems for translators especially from those languages which these kinds of differences are not so obvious.

Key words: Referential meaning · Contextual meaning · Large · Big · Small · Little

INTRODUCTION

Translation, as an activity, is a task which has been performed for centuries. This is an activity whose main concern is to facilitate the communication process. The professional of translation reaches this goal by translating the information received in a foreign language into the language of the person who required his services and vice versa. When this complex process is carried out in a factual communicative situation, then, it is possible to say that translation has reached its ultimate goal. Translation studies (TS) relies so heavily on a concept of meaning, that one may claim that there is no TS without any reference to meanings. However, different approaches in TS refer to different types of meaning: some researchers are looking for lexical patterns in source texts and their translations [1], while other scholars concentrate on how the text utterances function within their immediate contexts [2-4]. Or while some studies are investigations of the impact of the text as a whole on its audience or even society [5], others refer to philosophy of language as a means to look at meaning in translation [6-7]. If we assume that the goal of both learning a L2 and translating into another language is to transmit appropriate meaning linguistically, semantically and pragmatically, then learning a L2 should be linked to translation exercises.

Some researchers explicitly talk about meaning as a cognitive concept and say, for instance, that translators and interpreters construct or assemble meaning [8-9]. Others regard it as a textual characteristic. In the latter view, texts themselves hold meanings, so translations can be compared in terms of meanings with each other, with source texts or with a comparable corpus. Taking into account the lexicological aspect, a translator should be knowledgeable of the formation of words in the languages he works from and into and the semantic relations held among these words, above all in specialized contexts. Sometimes, translators, as linguistic mediators, may face the situation of solving lexical problems, that is, translators are not able to find an appropriate linguistic resource in the target language which properly transmits the message. As Zohrevandi [10] points out “translation now deals with communicative needs and purposes for stretches of written or oral discourse which is calls communicative competence”.

On the other hand, another term for clarifying the meaning in translation is contextualization. Contextualization is not exclusively linguistic, of course,
as Sun [11] refers to it and says that using context to determine linguistic meaning is simply a special case of a general cognitive ability. Contextualization has been defined as the use of context to determine meaning and to resolve potential ambiguities. When contextualization is linked so closely to meaning, of course, it inherits all the uncertainties associated with the concept of meaning. But it also inherits the broad scope of meaningfulness. Wherever experience is meaningful, context must be considered and language provides one of the best avenues to approach a study of the remarkable human capacity to use context. A contextual approach to lexical semantics might assume that the meanings of a word form are fully reflected in appropriate aspects of the relations it contracts with actual and potential contexts [12].

In linguistics, context carries tremendous importance in disambiguation of meanings as well as in understanding the actual meaning of words. Therefore, understanding the context becomes an important task in the area of applied linguistics, computational linguistics, lexical semantics, cognitive linguistics, as well as in other areas of linguistics as context triggers variation of meaning and supplies valuable information to understand why and how a particular word varies in meaning when used in a piece of text. Keeping this question in mind, I have made an attempt here to understand the nature, type and role of context in the act of meaning disambiguation of words used in a language. On the other hand reviewing the English language teaching in Iranian and Azarbayjaniyan institutions and universities, one would recognize that Iranian and Azeri students are confronted with two problems: distinguishing between referential and contextual meaning of special words and finding an appropriate equivalents for those words in target language. In order to examine the mentioned questions or hypotheses a series of steps were taken.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

From pre-intermediate students, who were attending translating classes in the field of English language teaching at Islamic Azad University in Karaj and Kaspi institution in Azerbaijan, a sample of 150 students on the basis of their GEP were selected. The rationale behind selecting subjects suitable for this study was to select homogeneous subjects regarding their language proficiency. On the basis of the subjects’ scores on a standard GEP test (i.e. a 1961 version of Michigan test), 150 students were selected. Then these students randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group. It is better to mention that because we had two different native language speakers, in each groups we again had two groups namely Persian and Azeri speakers in experimental group and Persian and Azeri speakers in control group.

In order to conduct this study, three sets of tests were needed: a proficiency test (i.e. Michigan test), translating pre-test and translating post-test. The translating pre-test, which was validated against a standardized test (i.e. IELTS), conducted before the treatment of experiment to see whether there is any difference between control and experimental groups. The last test was a translating post-test which was after six sessions instructing the differences between referential and contextual meaning of measurement adjectives such as big, large, small and little and the effect of context for finding appropriate equivalents in translation. First, for experimental groups the teachers activated students’ background knowledge about the referential and contextual meaning of the mentioned adjectives, then, by clarifying the special collocations that these adjectives take and choosing appropriate equivalents in translating from their native languages (Persian and Turkish) to English language they helped students to have appropriate translating. The criterion for these sentences, which were chosen, was their readability grades. Then, to estimate the reliability of the tests, the KR-21 formula was applied. It is better to mention that for the control groups, there was no instruction. They did translating without being aware of the effect of the differences between referential and contextual meaning of the mentioned adjectives.

Regarding the distribution of raw scores in each group, it was for the researcher to determine the descriptive statistics for the translating pre and post tests (Table 1)

Then, in order to examine the mentioned hypothesis, i.e. the effect of teaching differences between referential and contextual meaning of measurement adjectives and the effect of context on meaning representation of measurement adjectives again a one way ANOVA was run (Table 2). The F observed value for the effect of the grouping variable, is 434.55. This amount of F at 1 and 146 degrees of freedom is greater than the critical value of F, i.e. 3.92. This indicates that the experimental groups performed better than the control groups on the post-tests.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study examined the effect of context on meaning representation of measurement adjectives as well as the effect of being aware of differences between referential and contextual meaning of the mentioned adjectives in finding appropriate equivalents in translation. As mentioned in the previous parts, I want to concentrate in this article on the problems non-native speakers may have with English vocabulary use-in particular with the appropriate combinations of words. This is an aspect of language called collocation. An example of collocation that many learners of English may be familiar with is adjectives that are used to describe nouns. In order to clarify this research questions we chose measurement adjectives for explaining differences between referential and contextual meaning as well as finding appropriate equivalents in target language i.e. English. Since big and large or small and little are synonyms, it is not surprising that they can be used to describe many of the same nouns.

However, they are not perfect synonyms and there are some differences in the distribution of these four adjectives which make some problems for the translators. On the other hand when the translation is taking place across two different languages that do not have culture in common, it is often difficult to obtain even the lexical equivalent of a given items in translation. In order to elaborate these differences in detail, we will try to give the translation of sentences given to the students in experimental and control groups. As mentioned above, the main question here is that since there are not any differences between the mentioned adjectives in some other languages, how translators can make a distinction between them in English or vice versa. For answering these kinds of questions, comparing the list of the words which occurred only with big and large and those which occurred only with small and little in English revealed some differences and put an end to some confusing in choosing appropriate collocations.

In support of this statement at first we are going to speak about big and large then we will consider small and little in details.

Large but not big is used with the nouns amount, number and quantity, so it would be surprising to find these nouns on the list of nouns which occur significantly often with big and the words that occurred significantly often with big but not large, shows that big does not occur significantly often with any Quantity Nouns. Other categories which occur significantly often with big but not with large are Actions words, Popular Things, Important, Serious Things and Head of Idioms. With all of these nouns, big is describing something other than physical size. For example, with the nouns listed under Actions, big describes the intensity of the action, that is, the amount of energy involved and / or the strength of the effect. A big lift is one that lifts something very high and a big push is one that involves a lot of energy and which moves something a long way. The meaning of big with the Action nouns is quite similar to the meaning with some of the Amount nouns, such as change and drop. For example:

- (in persian) Agar motavajhe shurue tagirate kuchek va jozi bahsid baraye tagire bozorgi ke ehtemalan dar raah ast behdar amade mishavid.

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• (in Azari) Kiçik dayiştilik baş vermişитель başladığını andı siz onu hiss edeceksiniz, odur ki, siz gülşüş büyük dayiştilmiş daha da yaşayan hazır olmalısınız.
• (in English) You could notice when the little change began so that you would be better prepared for the big change that might be coming.

In fact, most of the Amount nouns which occur with big could probably be considered Actions rather than (or in addition to) Amounts. I have distinguished the two types here mainly because the Amounts are somewhat more abstract in meaning than the Actions and because some of the Amounts (e.g. cut, drop, increase) also occur significantly often with large, but large does not occur significantly often in the corpus with any Actions. Although there are some contexts in which large may be able to modify some of the Action nouns (e.g., a large boost in the polls), it sounds quite strange with most of them (e.g. a large jump, a large splash).

The nouns listed under Important, Serious Things name things which are not necessarily important or serious in themselves, but which are interpreted as such when modified by big; in other words, it is big that contributes the meaning of important or serious to phrases such as big news and big factor. Project, one of the nouns seems to belong to this category—a big project is a project that is important. Project, of course occurred significantly often with large as well as big.

Unlike project, most of the nouns categorized as Important, Serious Things cannot easily be quantified in terms of dollars or other units of measurement, which may explain why phrases such as a large news and a large test do not occur. The same kind of explanation can account for the fact that large does not sound especially awkward with a few Action nouns such as large boost and large impact; in some contexts, at least, these nouns describe things that can be easily quantified.

Another category which occurs with big is Heads of Idioms. While large did not occur significantly often in any idiomatic adjective+noun phrases, big forms idioms with several nouns, for example, big band (a band that plays a particular kind of music, not a band with a lot of members) and the big bang (the explosion that is supposed to have created the universe). Some nouns have both literal interpretations (usually as Physical Objects) and idiomatic interpretations with big. For example, big picture can be used to refer to a drawing, painting or photograph which is large in size and it also has two idiomatic interpretations; it can mean something like 'an overall view or understanding of a situation' and it can be used to refer to a successful movie. Obviously, large cannot take the place of big in any of the idiomatic phrases. With many of these nouns large sounds extremely awkward, e.g., 3 large bucks, 3 large name, 3 large talk; In the cases where large sounds fine, the noun is always interpreted literally (e.g., large fish, large band and large business). In some of the idiomatic phrases, the meaning of big is quite similar to its meaning with the Important, Serious Things. For example:

• (in Persian). Sare bozorg darde ziyadi ham darad, "harke bamash hish barfash hish"
• (in Azari). Büyük başın büyük də ağırsı olar.
• (in English) A big head has a big ache.

However, as it is mentioned, there are many nouns from these categories which occur only with big or only with large. Perhaps the most striking pattern is that large occurs significantly often with many more Physical Objects than big does. This is somewhat surprising given the dictionary descriptions of big and large; since the basic meaning of both big and large seems to involve physical size, it might be expected that all of the Physical Objects nouns on the large list could also occur with big. Certainly, big does not sound as awkward with these nouns as it does with the Quantity Nouns. That is, although bag, bowl and buildings do not occur on the big list, the phrases big bag, big bowl and big building do not sound very strange and they sound more natural than big quantity or big degree. The question here, then, is why large is preferred with nouns of this type. In many cases, it may be because large is used (along with small and medium) to describe a standard size of food and household items. Many of the nouns which occur with large but not big fall into this category (e.g., bowl, eggs, onions, skillet and tomatoes), while none of the Physical Objects nouns which occur with big do. However, this does not explain why large is preferred with nouns such as flowers, garden and rock. Register differences may play a role here; if, as dictionaries suggest, large is more formal than big, then perhaps large is chosen over big because this written corpus is relatively formal.

Another difference between big and large with the Physical Objects nouns is that many of the nouns that occur with big but not large seem to be describing something other than purely physical size. Many of these nouns describe people (boy(s), guard, guy(s) and kid) or parts of people’s body (mouth and toe). While big can describe purely physical size with these nouns, all of them except guard also have idiomatic interpretations, e.g., big
kid meaning 'older kid', big toe referring to 'a particular toe' and big mouth, in sentences such as He’s got a big mouth, used to talk about someone who says something he should not say. With grin and smile, big seems to be describing intensity rather than, or in addition to, physical size, so these two nouns seem similar to the nouns in the Actions category. If all of these nouns are weeded out, there are only a few nouns with which big have a purely physical interpretation, i.e., bar, boats, gap, guard and tent. For example:

- (in Persian) Dar zamanhaye nazostin anha adat dastand berovand be donbale in goha dar gayegi ke benodrat bozorgtar az yek zorg bood.
- (in Azari) یویلر اندار کاندیون بیز بیک گایگدا گیدردیئر
- (in English) In earlier times, they used to go after these giant in a boat hardly bigger than a canoe.

Large, in contrast, occurs with many nouns of this type, which strengthens the impression that in this corpus at least, large is preferred over big for describing purely physical size, especially for non-human things. Both big and large occur with Amounts, but the additional data suggests a slight semantic distinction between big and large when used with nouns of this type. The amount nouns which occur with big but not large—change, difference, discounts and rise, are "dynamic" in meaning in that they describe changes in an amount; in contrast, most of the amount nouns which occur with large describe amounts of money or products which are relatively "stable" (although they can potentially undergo an increase or decrease), e.g., a fee is a set amount of money that is charged for a service and an inventory is a listing of the amount of products that are in stock at a particular time. This difference between big and large is not absolute—as was shown above, big occurred with "stable" amounts such as profits and stakes, while large occurred with "dynamic" amounts such as cut and increase—but there is a tendency for big to be used to describe amounts of change.

It has been shown so far that when the overall uses of big and large are compared, they have many uses in common, but there are also a lot of differences; in particular, there are entire semantic categories of nouns which occur with big but not large and vice versa.

Another basic option in the system Measure-type is [class-property], which does not specify a measurable parameter, like [quantity], but the class of objects that are semantically considered as large or small. This feature covers uses of little thing in the example as well as big names, low achievers, deep feeling, etc. In several cases, the feature controls the choice between near-synonymous lexical items. For instance, a large fish refers to the physical size of a particular fish, while a big fish belong to the class of big fishes. The expression a large city is not idiomatic. It is normally used in expressions referring to the number of people living in it or the area it occupies uses of a big city are different. The big city is used to refer to a large city which seems attractive to someone because they think there are many exciting things to do there and opportunities to earn a lot of money. So in the case of [non-directional] size specifications, the feature [quantity] is preferably realized by large, while the feature [class-property] by big. Pay attention to these examples:

- (in Persian) Dar gharne hejdahom, shahrha bozorgtar va shulgatar shodand.
- (in Azari) On sëkizincë ërdë şêhêrê dêha bóyük vê dêha six êzêli oldu.
- (in English) In the eighteenth century, cities became larger and more crowded.

- (in persian) ...... Sedaye in masale be tanamiye shahrhaye bozorg, homeye shahr va rostaha pakhsh shode bud.
- (in Azari)........ bunun 3ks-sêdasi batching biguy şêhêrê, ucer gucêlê, xirda kendiêlê dê yayulu.
- (in English)...... tidings of this spreaded to all big cities, outskirt places, small villages as well.

By comparing the translations of the given examples in other languages, it can be seen that both big and large are translated to bozorg in Persian and bóyük in Azeri. By lack of these differences in mentioned languages, as it mentioned before being aware of the context that these adjectives can be used can be the best way for overcoming these kinds of problems. On the other hand, in translation, the translator ought to translate the communicative function of the source language text, rather than its signification. Thus for more considering pay attention to the following examples:

- (in Persian) O va shojarash, Piter, mazraeye bozorgi dar jazire dashand.
- (in Azari) O vê ommun 3ri Peterin ada da bóyük bir fermati vardu.
- (in English) She and her husband Peter had a large farm on an island.
For more considering the referential and contextual meaning of other lexical items lets us consider the other two adjectives for example small and little which are considered synonymous in the world of non-linguistic reality, but are not simply used alternatively in free variation on each other.

In support of this statement it is better to mention that unlike little, small occurs significantly often with many different nouns that name Physical Objects, Groups, Organizations, Actors, Quantity Nouns and Amounts. Why doesn’t the adjective little occur with these nouns? This may be due in part to its connotations. Little is used about something or someone that is small to show that you like or dislike them or that you feel sorry for them. However, things such as airport, engines and farms are more likely to be described in objective terms using small. Since little occurs with a wider range of physical objects such as boat, building, clouds, coat, door and many others small also occurs with physical objects, which are purchased in standard sizes, e.g., bowl, potatoes and skille, as well as some nouns which name other non-human objects, such as buildings, flowers and pool. Look at these examples:

- (in Azari) Leonardann ilk ucun masnunda kichik bir miekerrik vardi.
- (in English) Leonardos’ first flying machine had a small engine.
- (in Persian) Mardan ba paro zadan gayege kuchek ra amud bar nahang dar mivordand.
- (in Azari) Adamlar kichik qayiq balinaya tervi shirirdiic.
- (in English) Men would row the little boat right up to the whale
- (in Persian) Az miyane meh mitavanest chand gayege kuchek va sahele yek rud ra bebinad
- (in Azari) Dimana baxmayaraq o kichik qayiqleri vef qayin sabihini govri bildi.
- (in English) Through the fog he could see small boats and shore of a river.
- (in Persian) Pedare Albaniaye o yek mazreye kucheki dasht.
- (in Azari) Onun alban atasının kichik bir fermasti vardı.
- (in English) Her Albanian father had a small farm.

Of the two adjectives examined in this case study, little is the only one that has two grammatical functions—it is used both as an adjective of size (in combinations such as little dog) and as a quantifier for mass nouns (in combinations such as little relevance and little respect).

These functions are quite distinct; all the learners' dictionaries list the quantifier and adjective under separate headings and point out that the opposite of the adjective little is big, while the quantifier contrasts with much and a great deal.

Choosing little as an adjective or quantifier is done meaning on the basis of the status of each noun as either account noun or a mass noun. With count nouns, little generally functions as an adjective (e.g., little dog, little kids, little town) while with mass nouns, it is generally a quantifier (e.g., little damage, little enthusiasm, little headway). Many of the nouns which occurred significantly often with little can be used as either count or mass nouns, for example, benefit, consequence, emotion and faith, but with most of them, only the mass interpretation is possible with little, so these were categorized as examples of the quantifier use of little with others, both interpretations are possible (e.g., difficulty and disagreement). In all, little occurs significantly often with three categories, Physical Objects, Heads of Idioms and Abstract Nouns; it does not occur significantly often in this corpus with any nouns in the categories of Groups, Organizations, Actors, Amounts or Quantity Nouns.

Even within the Physical Objects, the largest category of little nouns, are people-related and some of them seem more likely to be used with an idiomatic interpretation (i.e. little finger used to refer to a specific finger, little lady used to refer to girls or women regardless of their physical size and the little guy used to refer to the average person). Within the other three nouns, boy(s), girl(s) and kid(s), little conveys an impression of young age in addition to small physical size. Unlike small, little is not one of a range of standard sizes, so it doesn’t usually occur with nouns that name food or household items. For more considering, pay attention to these examples:
CONCLUSION

The study reported in this paper shows an approaching for describing lexical semantics from the viewpoint of their uses in contexts. Our interest here lies in the shift of emphasis from referential or dictionary meaning to contextual meaning. The meaning of a given word or set of words is best understood as the contribution that word or phrase can make to the meaning or function of the whole sentence or linguistic utterance where that word or phrase occurs. The meaning of a given word is governed not only by the external object or idea that particular word is supposed to refer to, but also by the use of that particular word or phrase in a particular way, in a particular context and to a particular effect. In order to expand the importance of this fact, referential and contextual meaning of the measurement adjectives has been studied. This study showed that although both big and large, small and little are near synonyms, this does not mean they are identical in meaning and translator can choose each of them without paying attention to their contextual meaning; they are synonyms by virtue of the fact that they are associated with the same semantic dimension, but they are differentiated by the fact that they modify different kinds of nouns and cannot simply be used alternatively in free variation on each other.

Pedagogical Implications for Learners as Well as for Teachers: Learners should realize the importance of lexical collocation and teachers should also put it on the important state in the teaching outline of English. In recent years, the selected teaching materials in colleges all arrange the exercises of lexical collocation and offer some practical collocation exercises, but there is still largely improved space. For example, the glossaries involved in these exercises are less and the exercise form is single and theoretical explanation is shallow, which cannot effectively enhance students’ ability in lexical collocation. Aiming at learning on different levels, teachers could design various lexical collocation exercises. On the other hand, a good lexical collocation dictionary is necessary for learners who want to further enhance their English level. The “Oxford Collocations” published by the Oxford University Press in 2006 [13] has about ten thousand words including nouns, verbs and adjectives and it contains the language situation and collocations of most words for middle and high level learners and includes 50000 example sentences which could exactly and vividly reflect the application of lexical collocation in practical life.
REFERENCES


