

On the English Translation of Chinese Character “kai” from the Perspective of Contextual Meaning

Qingyun Wang^{1, a}, Yuanyuan Chen^{2, b}

¹School of Foreign Languages Studies, University of Science and Technology, Liaoning, Anshan, 114051, China;

²School of Foreign Languages Studies, University of Science and Technology, Liaoning, Anshan, 114051, China.

^a1203115264@qq.com, ^b13050044258@163.com

Abstract

Chinese language is characterized by concise and comprehensive meaning. A simple Chinese character often has dozens of meanings, so there may be different translations of the same Chinese word in different contexts. In view of the high word frequency of the Chinese character “kai” in daily life and the difficulty of translation in various contexts, this paper attempts to study and argue the English translation of the Chinese character “kai” different contexts and try to translate some specific examples.

Keywords

Contextual meaning, the Chinese character “kai”, English translation.

1. Introduction

Translation stresses “faithfulness”, “expressiveness” and “elegance”, and “faithfulness” means to make the translation accurate, not deviating from the content, not missing and faithful to the original. In order to achieve the standard of “faithfulness”, we must put the translation into the context of the original text.

Context: In linguistics, it is defined as “that which occurs before and/or after a word, a phrase or even a longer utterance or a text. The context often helps in understanding The particular meaning of word, phrase, etc.” Therefore, any one of the same words may have very numerous meanings in different contexts, so pay attention to this when translating.

In daily translation, we find that Chinese character “kai” is a relatively difficult word. The Chinese character “kai” itself has many meanings, and its meaning is more different in different contexts. In this paper, the author attempts to analyze the English translation of the Chinese character “kai” in some specific contexts through examples.

This paper is divided into six parts: the first part is to study the definition of translation; The second part is to learn the standard of the translation; The third part is to research the definition of the context; The fourth part is to specific relationship between context and word meaning; The fifth part is trying to analyze the meaning of the Chinese character “kai”. The last part analyzes the translation of the related phrases of Chinese character “kai” in the specific context through specific examples.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. The Definition of Translation

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the translation is turn from one language into another[1].

Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language defines the translation is to turn into one's own or another language[2].

Nida said: " Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style[3]. (Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, 1982: 12)

Taking all the arguments together, we try to give a definition to translation: translation is to convey the meaning expressed in one language to another language, so as to achieve the purpose of communicating thoughts and feelings, spreading cultural knowledge, promoting social civilization, and especially promoting the prosperity of the culture of the target language.

2.2. The Standard of Translation

In 1789, the British translator and scholar George Campbell first put forward the three principles of translation, namely the three things translators must do. The first thing ... is to give a just representation of the sense of the original ... The second thing is, to convey into his version, the author's spirit and manner ... The third and last thing is, to take care, the vision have at least, so far the quality of an original performance, as to appear natural and easy ... [4] (Venuti, 1995: 75)

In 1790, Alexander F. Tytler, another famous English translator, also put forward a translation three principles, which were exactly the same as those of George Campbell: 1. That the Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work. 2. That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original. 3. That the Translation should have all the ease of original composition[5]. (Lefevere, 1992b: 128)

2.3. The Definition of Context

Context is of great importance for the understanding of word meaning, especially for the understanding of the meanings of polysemy words. The important role in the study of context in semantics increasing brought to the attention of the people. In language communication, context is always changing, which leads to changes in the dynamic semantics. Without the context, the words' meaning will be pale, indefinite and puzzling. What's more, the communication will be failed. Therefore, we should know denotative meanings of a word as much as possible and generally there will be no risk of misunderstanding of the meaning when it occurs in a particularly context[6].

2.4. The Relationship Between Context and Word Meaning

2.4.1. Context Has An Influence on the Meaning of Words

Many words have positive and negative meanings. Usually, a word is often with a positive or negative sense, sometimes there is a neutral word with a negative or positive sense. Therefore, in the process of English translation, we should fully consider the meaning of the word in this context. Sometimes, the author will use irony to express his feelings. At this time, the translator needs to connect the context and choose appropriate words, namely, praise or derogatory words, to present the artistic conception closest to the original text.

There are some examples:

How clever of you to blame others for breaking the glass!

In the sentence, "clever" is used to describe the practice of shifting responsibility onto others. But if we look at the context, we can see that the word "clever" in the sentence is not the way it seems to be the way the praise passes the buck to the other person. It's critical and ironic.

Cheaters always take care of you in every possible way and cheat on you after gaining your good impression.

In this sentence, "take care of" is used to describe the attitude of a liar towards the victim. If we only look at the phrase "take care of", we will consider it as a positive term. However, if we

combine the whole sentence with the context, we can find that it is used to describe the trickery of a cheater that is hard to find and therefore makes the victim fall for it.

But at the same time some derogatory words rely on the cooperation with other words, in a certain context, will also change from a derogatory word into a positive word.

For example:

Several women disappointed, also a little bit sad, all in their own hearts to scold their cruel man.

In this sentence, "cruel man" originally refers to a man with a cruel heart, a heart of stone, who abandons his wife and son. But in the context of the article, we can feel that the wives of these guerrillas miss their husbands, and how these wives can hate their husbands. Here the "cruel man" can better show the woman miss her husband's coy performance. Therefore, the derogatory connotation cannot be fully followed in translation.

2.4.2. Context Provides the Basis for the Accuracy of Word Meaning and Specific Vocabulary

Selection

Both English and Chinese have the phenomenon of polysemy of one word; however, taking dictionary definition is not necessarily complete equivalence with the meaning of the original. In this case, based on the characteristics of the context, we should select the words corresponding to the subject and object of the action, the place and occasion where the action takes place for the corresponding translation, and choose the words most suitable for the article from a number of alternative words for translation.

"It was a cold winter night. The street was deserted. I stood alone under a tree with an entanglement of bare branches overhead, waiting for the last bus to arrive. A few paces off in the darkness there was a shadowy figure squatting against the wall, but he turned out to be a tramp. The street was lined with fine houses, their illuminated windows beaming quietly towards the dark blue sky. It was icy cold with a gust of strong wind howling around. A couple of withered leaves, still clinging to the branches, rustled mournfully from time to time. The shadowy figure, taking a copper coin from me with thanks, straightened up to attempt a conversation with me.[7]."

We can find that there is a phrase in the clause "clinging to the branches", Zhang Peiji instead of simply translate it into "stay on the branches", or the "left on the branches". The fallen leaves on the branches bear the "fierce" wind of the winter night. If you want to hang on the branches in such a violent wind, the dead leaves must not be easily "left" on the branches, but cling to the branches. So the context "clinging" is more suitable for this section.

2.5. The Semantics of the Chinese Character "kai"

In Chinese, the Chinese character "kai" is rich in meaning, and the combination of single Chinese character "kai" and other words will produce a variety of dynamic meaning. In The Dictionary of Modern Chinese, there are 13 interpretations of the Chinese character "kai"[8].

- (1). Make closed things no longer closed; open something. Such as: "open the door", "open the lock", "open the box" and so on.
- (2). Get through; open up. Such as: "carve out a way", "exploit a mine" and so on.
- (3). To unfold (something that is closed or joined); separation. For example: "the peach trees are blooming", "the two pieces of wood broke apart", etc.
- (4). Thaw. For example: "The river thawed", etc.
- (5). To lift (a blockade, injunction, restriction, etc). For example: "remove the personal restraints on him". etc.
- (6). To start or control (a gun, car, ship, aircraft, machine, etc). Such as: "fire a cannon", "fire a round" and so on.

- (7). Move on; arrive. For example: "Two regiments arrived yesterday and moved on today."
- (8). Set up. Such as: "set up a factory"; "set up a hospital, set up a company" and so on.
- (9). Start; begin; come in to. Such as: "term begins"; "come in to operation"; "start working" and so on.
- (10). The surname.
- (11). A unit of account for the amount of pure gold in gold mining (24 cents); karat. For example: "This gold necklace is 18 karat."
- (12). Short for kelvin. For example: "1 kelvin is 1/273.16 of the thermodynamic temperature at the three-phase point of water."
- (13). Approach verbs which is used after a verb or adjective.
- (a). separate or leave. For example: "push the door open, and so on."
- (b). Accommodation. For example: "the room is too small for too many people" and so on.
- (c). Extend. For example: "the good news spread" and so on.
- (d). Start or go on. For example: "They goes on their works."

According to the analysis, the most basic meaning of the Chinese character "kai" is "open", but the meaning of the Chinese character "kai" also varies with the object of "kai", so the specific meaning of the Chinese character "kai" needs to be studied in the context.

When the Chinese character "kai" is used for an object, it mainly expresses "open something" or "make the machine run and work", such as "open the door", "turn on the light" and so on. When the Chinese character "kai" is used in a store, it mainly expresses "establish" or "manage", such as "set up a hospital", "set up a company" and so on. When the Chinese character "open" is used for plants or rivers, it mainly expresses "blossom" or "thaw", such as "river thaw", "pear blossom" and so on.

In view of the fact that the meaning of the Chinese character "kai" is too numerous to be described in detail, this article will select several more common meanings as examples to analyze the relevant translation of the Chinese character "kai" in a specific context.

2.6. the Translation of the Related Phrases of Chinese Character "kai" in the Specific Context through Specific Examples

2.6.1. "Open"

(1). You say that you love rain,
but you open your umbrella when it rains.
You say that you love the sun,
but you find a shadow spot when the sun shines.
You say that you love the wind,
but you close your windows when wind blows.
This is why I am afraid,
because you say that you love me too ... [9]

(2). Answer the door

(3). Now Open the Box is a beautiful example of the art of Dorothy Kunhardt, the author of the timeless classic Pat the Bunny and the pioneering picture book Junket Is Nice . Here Kunhardt speaks with wonderfully reassuring directness to children's hopes and fears while making magic out of the simplest things[10].

Through the above examples, we can find that the Chinese character "kai" means to expose or open something. For example: "answer the door", "open the umbrella", "open the box" and so

on. Of course, we will also find that the translation of Chinese characters “kai” is also different, there are “answer”, “open” and so on.

2.6.2. “Start”, “Manipulate”

(1). Turn on the lights

I’m looking for her too

I heard she keep her promises and never turn on you

I heard she ain’t gone cheat and she gone never make no move

I heard she be there anytime you need ‘er, she come through

Turn on the lights[11]

(2). Once her politically connected mother, who had arthritic feet and could not drive cars, finagled a driver's license for the 12-year-old Margaret, she drove her mother everywhere.

(3). It's the first model to feature an interface powered by the PS2's Graphics Synthesizer and Emotion Engine chips, too, and comes with a clamshell, joystick-equipped remote control that looks like you could use it to pilot a plane and solve complex equations while you watch[12].

2.6.3. “Establish”, “Set up”

(1). “We plan to set up a technology research laboratory in Japan, not a factory,” Huawei, a Chinese telecommunications equipment manufacturer, clarified on Thursday in response to rumors[13].

(2). When you are planning the opening of your new company, you need to create a company identity that can be sold to prospective clients and investors. One of the things that helps create a strong company image is a good business name.

From the above example, we can see that the Chinese character "open" also has the meaning of establishment. For example: "set up a factory", "create a company" and so on. Therefore, we can know that when the Chinese character "open" in the context is expressed as the meaning of establishment, we can not only look at its original intention, but translate it into "open", but find the best translation in combination with context.

3. Conclusion

When we are translating the Chinese character “kai” into English, we must first consider the basic meaning of the Chinese character “kai” itself. However, the meaning of the Chinese character “kai” may change in different contexts, so we should rely on the clues given in the context to translate the Chinese character “kai”:

1. When translating according to context, the translator needs to understand the background of the time. In the context of different times, the meaning of words is different.

2. The target of the Chinese character “kai” provides the basis for our English translation.

(1). When the object that the Chinese character “kai” acts on is a concrete objective existence, we must consider the specific verb “kai” specifically for what kind of behavior and what kind of thing. This requires translators to fully understand the Chinese cultural background and have a better grasp of the translation of Chinese character “kai”.

(2). When Chinese character “kai” acts to relieve some restricted things and cannot touch or separate them in a real sense, we need to translate the verb “kai” according to the common verb match of the Chinese character “kai” object, and use other words to mean the meaning of "open".

From the above examples, we can see that the Chinese character “kai” also has the meaning of launching or manipulating (guns, guns, cars, boats, planes, machines, etc.). Therefore, when we translate, we can't simply translate the Chinese character “kai” into “open”. We should combine

the context and pay attention to the object of the Chinese character "open" to choose the appropriate English translation.

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