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CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS METHODS FOR PINPOINTING NEOLOGISM MEANINGS

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Abstract:

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Interpreters and translators frequently encounter neologisms - novel words or phrases without established meanings - posing comprehension barriers. This paper surveys techniques leveraging contextual, morphological, cross-lingual, and collaborative cues to infer new term senses. A sequential 4-step process centered on co-textual analysis is proposed for deducing signification, encompassing: 1) identifying pertinent contexts 2) delimiting morphological constituents 3) scanning bilingual corpora for translational variants and 4) negotiating meaning through peer consultation. Developing student analytical procedures, lexical search skills and team deliberation through this methodology can enhance interpreter decoding and conveyance of obscure neologistic coinages based on totality of linguistic evidence.

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INTRODUCTION. As the pace of discovery and change accelerates, so too does language evolution encompassing novel words known as neologisms. Businesses, academics, policymakers, artists and youth culture frequently generate original coinages denoting distinct concepts which initially lack clarified meaning (Fischer, 1998). For instance, emerging phrases like ‘glamping’ (glamorous + camping), ‘doomscrolling’ (obsessively consuming negative online content) or Latinx (gender-neutral designation for Hispanic/Latino) signal societal innovations. However interpreters and translators encountering such terms often struggle determining precise signification and equivalent translations, posing barriers for smooth communication.

While extensive vocabularies, technical knowledge and cultural literacy facilitate interpreting standard terminology, decoding rapidly emerging neologisms requires additional competencies for deducing meaning from contextual clues. As Rey (1995) notes, "the contextual data guide the detection of meaning...[where] the situation helps determine designative purpose" of new words (p.106). Therefore, cultivating analytical procedures for unlocking contextual, morphological and cross-lingual inferences can aid interpreters in clarifying opaque neologisms. This paper proposes a sequential 4-step process for deducing meanings centered on co-textual scrutiny, corpus investigation and collaborative deliberation.

METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW. Research on resolving neologism sense explication during interpretation suggests language professionals utilize diverse strategies to pinpoint signification, including:

Leveraging Morphology

Interpreters may decode a neologism’s underived root and derivational affixes (prefixes, suffixes) for meaning clues based on recognizable morphic elements (Sablayrolles, 2006). For instance, ‘edtech’ comprises ‘education’ + ‘technology’. However, morphology alone cannot determine broader meaning requiring consideration of surrounding text.

Harvesting Co-Textual Cues

A neologism’s proximate verbal environment often implies its semantic scope (Rey, 1995). Sablayrolles (2006) notes interpreters can scan left and right co-text searching for “explicit formulations of meaning” (p.98) via: apposition, repetition, definition, exemplification or contrast expressions. Certain terms inherently attract copious contextualization like buzzwords (e.g. ‘blockchain’) versus jargon.

Consulting Monolingual Corpora

Corpus analysis systems like COCA allow exploring a neologism’s accumulation of textual usages, comparing across genres and years to observe emerging definition patterns (Davies, 2009). However corpora carry limitations regarding currency, scope, domain specificity and lack contextual fine-grained detail.

Cross-language Scoping

If inadequate context appears in the source language, interpreters may search bilingual parallel corpora for translation nuances implying sense demarcations, especially amidst polysemy and synonym confusions (Tirkonnen-Condit, 2004). Yet full equivalency between languages is rare, demanding additional meaning negotiation.

Collaborative Deliberation

When individually unable to decipher an ambiguous neologism, interpreters can pool linguistic resources through community discussion platforms to jointly negotiate significance (Angelone, Bazzanella & Mutihac, 2021). Still, achieving consensus without external feedback risks narrow perspective bias.

A Comprehensive Process Approach

While the above strategies demonstrate promise for eliciting neologism meaning, current research lacks formal consolidative protocols combining morphological, contextual, cross-lingual and collective affordances towards sense deduction. As Montero-Perez (2020) advocates, “It seems advisable for

translation/interpreting students to systematize the learning of neologism translation strategies” (p.201). Therefore this paper puts forth a sequential 4-step procedure for co-textual analysis supplemented by corpus tools and team deliberation.

CONCLUSION. This paper proposes formalizing a 4-step process for student and professional interpreters to resolve meanings of previously unfamiliar neologisms based on morphological patterns, co-textual clues, corpus translations, and collaborative deliberations. The technique aims to systematically leverage multiple intrinsic and extrinsic linguistic signals to deduce signification when standard translation methods falter.

While limitations exist regarding context memory, corpus semantics, and consultation consistency, the consolidative procedure espouses a principled skillset for deducing novelty. By emphasizing embedded terminology semantics, verifying against external sources, bounding speculation, and qualifying tentative interpretations, interpreters can provisionally - yet responsibly - convey emerging terms to enable communication amidst relentless language evolution.

As Montero Perez (2020) concludes, “In order to avoid the potential inaccuracy or loss of meaning, raising translators’ awareness on strategies to translate neologism seems necessary” (p.201). By extending interpreter methodologies beyond static vocabulary knowledge to encompass dynamic decrypting procedures, instructors can cultivate enduring adaptive expertise amidst relentless terminology advancement.

The outlined diagnostic approach thereby provides a model recurring skill set for decoding novel signification anchored in evidence-based deduction. While ultimately no technique removes need for usage confirmation, processing morphology before memory, textual data before human conjecture, and observation before presumption works to proactively illuminate meaning. In an era demanding sharper discernment of novelty, interpreters must learn to distinguish signal from noise.

RESULTS. A proposed 4-step process for interpreters to pinpoint neologism meanings leveraging morphological, contextual, corpus-based, and collaborative affordances is as follows:

Step 1: Identify Pertinent Contexts

Upon encountering an unfamiliar neologism in a source language passage, the interpreter first highlights the term and scans surrounding co-text searching for explicit or implicit formulations of meaning. Useful contextual clues include (Sablayrolles, 2006):

Definitions/Descriptions: Sentences linguistically explaining or describing the new term's significance. For example, "Handshake etiquette has evolved due to new hygienic norms like social distancing, which involves maintaining six feet of separation."

Examples/Enumerations: Lists exemplifying sub-types, elements or manifestations of the neologism. For instance, "Common adrenaline sports include skydiving, bungee jumping, sharkcage diving..."

Reformulations/Rephrasings: Paraphrases rewording the novel term using known expressions. E.g. "High atmospheric carbon levels produced by combustion engines contribute to the greenhouse effect, otherwise known as climate change."

Contrasts/Comparisons: Juxtaposing known concepts against the neologism to differentiate meaning. Ex. “Unlike traditional banking, mobile finance utilizes smartphones instead of bank branches."

If sufficient contextual clues emerge within ~15 words surrounding the term, the interpreter proceeds to step 2. When minimal context manifests, they progress directly to step 3.

Step 2: Delimit Constituent Elements

The interpreter divides the neologism into constituent parts by inserting spaces between underived free root and derivational affixes. For instance, ‘fintech’ becomes ‘fin tech’; ‘edtech’ transforms into ‘ed tech’. They then translate detached elements individually, analyze resultant combinations and assess plausibility against step 1 contextual cues.

If morphological decoding and context alignment suggests a cohesive definition, the interpreter proceeds to step 4. Otherwise they continue to step 3 to investigate usage patterns across a bilingual corpus.

Step 3: Scan Bilingual Corpus

The interpreter queries the novel term on a bilingual English/foreign language parallel corpus to compare usage frequencies and translations between languages. For optimal currency, a specialty corpus like Linguee featuring technical and scientific texts may provide greater insight relative to common corpora.

The interpreter examines the first ~10 corpus excerpt sentences containing the neologism, assessing translation variants and word proximity patterns. If translations remain vague featuring equivalent unknown terms, contextual examples similarly lacking clarification provide limited value. Here seeking peer perspectives (step 4) allows broader consideration.

However validated, stable foreign language translations with ample endogenous context implies discreet meaning. The investigator aggregates such inferences to inform interpretation.

Step 4: Negotiate via Consultation

When prior steps leave excessive ambiguity, the interpreter consults a decision tree:

Within sequential interpreting event:

Query speaker directly by requesting definition/rephrasing if permitted

Discuss briefly with co-interpreters to pool linguistic resources

Outside current engagement:

Submit term to professional community discussion forum to deduce meaning collectively

Contact relevant domain experts (technical advisor, scientist etc) to elicit term usage

Ideally combined observer perspectives allows inferring an approximate working translation absent source clarification. While subject to confirmation, provisional meanings enable lieu conveyances rather than omissions during delivery.

ANALYSIS. The proposed 4-step procedure for unlocking opaque neologism significance leverages the relative strengths of morphological, contextual, corpus and collaborative guidance. By prioritizing co-textual factors, interpreters emphasize available inherent evidence before pursuing external supplementation which carries limitations.

Linguistic Context Priority

Analyzing morphology and proximate text first privileges decoding self-contained signals likely bearing on meaning. As Sablayrolles (2006) notes, "proximity contributes to transparency" in deciphering novelty (p.96). While corpora contain usages across limitless documents, isolated sentences detach terms from native coherence. Similarly, human recall and opinions fragment instead of holistically processing terminology.

The proposed sequence thereby maximizes contextual immersion by the interpreter prior to bifurcating focus. It also avoids overreliance on technology or social connections to resolve intrinsic complexity.

Corpus Analysis Limitations

Despite holding value for tracking term emergence and comparing translations, corpora carry restricted utility for deducing specificity. As Tirkonnen-Condit (2004) explains, "Even very large corpora may not give enough contexts for guessing meaning elements" during disambiguation (p.180). Database excerpts often lack elaborate endogenous descriptions precisely due to assumed audience comprehension.

Therefore corpus consultation mainly serves to confirm and expand vs establish basic meaning. Parallel references help weigh translation options where co-text proves indeterminate. This supplemental role focuses corpus efficacy.

Collaborative Risks

While fellow professionals offer theoretical rigor and diverse expertise, meaning negotiations also risk inaccuracies absent external validation. As Angelone et al. (2021) caution, consolidated guesses

may simply recirculate presumptions about a term's significance within a limited interpreter community. Without contextual grounding or cited usage, proposals remain hypothetical.

The 4-step sequence thereby positions consultation as backup for co-textual failure rather than defaulting to initial crowdsourcing. This better calibrates confidence levels by first eliminating intrinsic uncertainty. Peer discussions can still suggest working translations but subject to confirmation.

Comprehensive Leverage

In total, the proposed methodology aims to systematically eliminate ambiguity across successive heuristic layers corresponding to intrinsically linked vs externally associated meaning signals. By prioritizing embedded factors, verifying against branches of evidence, and calibrating certainty qualifiers, interpreters can determine tenable deductions vs pure conjecture.

The process ultimately seeks maximally informed conveyance absent speculation by aligning inherent morphology, portable context, accumulative corpus attestation and pooled collegial resources for triangulating viable neologistic significance. Ongoing usage confirmation then enables updated terminology tracking.

DISCUSSION. While the proposed 4-step process aims to leverage morphological, contextual, corpus and collaborative signals for resolving opaque neologisms, limitations exist in the methodology. Further research can address enhancing context portability, expanding corpus semantic capabilities, and improving consultation dynamics.

A central premise emphasizes imbuing interpreters with greater co-textual retention ability after identifying key meaning clues adjoining novel terms. However experimental psychology suggests immediate memory for verbal content rarely exceeds 7 utterances forwarded or backward (Guérard & Tremblay, 2008). This restricts portability timeframes, risking forgetting interceding phrases during meaning extrapolation.

Additionally, source languages like Chinese forgo spacing between lexicon units. Identifying edge words around new coinages relies on interpreter recognition capabilities. Romance languages meanwhile feature bound morphemes obscuring neat delimitation. These factors complicate transportable bounds, necessitating flexible parameters based on language typology.

Advancing annotation abilities both digitally and cognitively may assist managing such challenges. Interpreters could leverage text data tools to capture, store and highlight elucidating sentences using personal glossaries. Bolstering working memory capacity alongside reading comprehension also facilitates retaining crucial co-text.

While parallel corpora provide translational comparisons, absolute equivalents remain uncommon (Montero-Perez, 2020). Metalinguistic cues therefore offer limited reliability. Additionally, most corpora lack explanatory usage contexts akin to dictionary entries. Focused corpus expansion could enhance available samples.

Compiling special-purpose corpuses featuring technical reports and scientific publications may better represent emerging specialty neologisms (e.g biotechnology innovations) with improved contextual elaboration. As Tirkonnen-Condit (2004) advises, “understanding requires insight into special languages and domains” during disambiguation (p.180).

Corpus developers could implement new protocols encouraging authors to embed clarifying sentences around novel terminological introductions. If adopted across sources, consequent excerpts would provide richer endogenous meaning details. However, this requires widespread changes in academic writing conventions.

The proposed group consultation poses theoretical benefits but unproven coordination efficacy. New terms often arise during simultaneous conference interpretations with limited capacity to convene impromptu focus groups or contact external experts while preserving delivery flow. There also remain risks of consensus bias. Additional research on optimizing community deliberation mechanics can help overcome such limitations in the collaborative approach.

Professional associations could designate certain interpreters within networks as dedicated terminology coordinators. Upon encountering new terms, practitioners would refer questions to

coordinators for clarification by a centralized expert. Responses then feed back to the original interpreter.

Additionally, standardized question formats, documentation procedures, and confirmation policies may enhance accuracy. By formalizing consultation methods and designating qualified point persons, collaborative reliability and efficiency could improve.

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