

The Role of the Context and its Influence on the

Homogeneous Words in Translation

دور السياق وتأثيره على الكلمات المتجانسة في الترجمة

Kelani Suleman Alkelani

A lecturer at Department of English, University of Az-zawia

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 26-04-2026

Accepted: 15-05-2026

Published: 02-06-2026

Keywords: context, text, translation obstacles, equivalences, homogeneous, and synonyms.

ABSTRACT

This research is a study of the role and influence of the context in choosing the correct and appropriate meaning of homogeneous words, i.e. "words that have the same letters but differ in meaning". As we, as translation specialists, whether a professor of translation or a professional translator, know this difference and the context of speech affects finding meaning, but for the student, the matter is different. Some students do not know that many words in the English language have the same letters but have more than one meaning that different from the others, even though the number and pronunciation of the letters in the word are equal. This study demonstrates the role of the context in choosing the correct and suitable meaning, as well as some examples in different sentences to clarify that the context determines the meaning of the word in the sentence. The students, who selected to participant in this study, were given a number of individual words. Then, they asked to find the meaning of each word. They were presented with the same words but in a sentence within a specific text that included these words.

الملخص:

هذا البحث هو دراسة على دور وتأثير سياق الكلام في اختيار المعنى الصحيح والمناسب للكلمات المتجانسة أي "الكلمات التي لها نفس الحروف ولكنها تختلف في المعنى". كما نعرف نحن كمتخصصين في الترجمة سواء استاذ مادة ترجمة او كمتخرج مهني هذا الاختلاف وان سياق الكلام يؤثر في ايجاد المعنى ولكن بالنسبة للطالب فالأمر مختلف. بعض الطلبة لا يعرف ان الكثير من الكلمات في اللغة الانجليزية لها نفس الحروف ولكن لها أكثر من معنى مختلف عن الاخرى، بالرغم من تساوي حروف الكلمة في العدد والنطق. كما تقدم الدراسة بعض الكلمات

منفصلة وفي جمل كما مثله لتوضيح الاختلافات في السياق وان السياق هو من يحدد معنى الكلمة في الجملة. تم اعطاء الطلبة الذين تم اختيارهم في المشاركة في هذه الدراسة عدد من الكلمات مفردة ليست في جملة وطلب منهم ايجاد معنى هذه الكلمات، ثم قدمت نفس الكلمات ولكن في جملة ضمن نص معين يتضمن هذه الكلمات وطلب منهم ترجمة هذه الجمل لمعرفة دور النص وتأثيره على المعنى في الترجمة.

Introduction

This study attempts to explore the role and influence of context on word meaning in English. As is well known to all English language learners, a single English word can have more than one meaning. Some words have two synonyms, some have three, and some have many synonyms. But how do we determine the correct and appropriate synonym? To do so, we must identify the word's position within the sentence in the text. From the text, we can extract the correct synonym, and this is what we will attempt to explain in this research. There are many examples in this research, which are single words that are not in sentences, and the students were asked to find the meaning. Then these words were placed in sentences within a certain contexts, and the students were asked to find the meaning of these words to illustrate the role of the context of speech and the importance of how the meaning of a word in English changes with the change of the context of speech or text. In addition, this study presents a definition of context and its influence on word meaning in English. It also, defines homophonous and offers tips for students to overcome obstacles and problems they may encounter when translating polysemous words. Furthermore, it outlines strategies to avoid errors during the translation process and defines translation and its importance in today's world.

Statement of the study

This explores the role of the context in influencing word meaning in English when translating homogeneous words. It also seeks solutions to problems that these words may cause in translating, provides advices and some strategies for students to use in order to avoid falling into such problems.

Significance of the study

This research aims to define the context and its role and importance in the meaning of an English word, whether in isolation or within a sentence or text. It also seeks to clarify the difficulties students encounter when they fail to

understand context. Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of context as the foundation for extracting the intended meaning from among the various possible meanings of a word. Therefore, by understanding context, students can choose the most appropriate meaning for a word.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to reveal the role of context in determining the meaning of words in English, and how the meaning of a word differs when it stands alone compared to when appears within a sentence or text. It also explore how context influences this differences in meaning depending on the context of the text. Furthermore, it aims to clarify the importance of context in translation and in identifying the intended meaning and appropriate synonym. Finally, it offers some strategies used in the translation process and provides guidelines that may help students avoid errors when translating similar-sounding words that have different meanings.

Hypothesis

English and Arabic differ in several ways, and English and Arabic cultures differ in many characteristics. These differences between the two languages and cultures have created many problems in translation. One such problems is translating words that are similar in spelling but different in meaning, which called "homogeneous". The lack of students' knowledge of translation methods and techniques was a primary reason for these problems in translating similar words. Students should thoroughly study the text and understand its cultural context.

Research questions

In this research, we try to answer many questions about the multiplicity of the meaning of a single word in English language, as we find it has more than one meaning, despite the same letters. The following questions are some of the questions we are trying to answer in this research: why does the meaning of the word in English change from one context to another? How do we know the correct meaning of the word and that it is the intended meaning? What is the role of the text and the drivers in bringing out and knowing the intended and correct meaning? What are the problems that these words cause in translation? What are the strategies and methods that the student should use and follow to avoid these obstacles?

Methodology

This study seeks the problems encountering students in translating similar words and the influence and the role of the text in translating these words. It is also seeking to find the appropriate solutions to overcome these problems.

Knowing the problems and finding appropriate solutions to them, some words that consist of the same letters and have the same pronunciation were chosen, but they differ in meaning. These English words were distributed to the students, and they were asked to translate them in a singular case, that is, they are not in a sentence and find the correct meaning and the appropriate synonym for them in the Arabic language.

Discussion of the research topic

The subject of our study and research is to clarify the importance and role of the context and its influence on the meaning of words in the English language. Some word meanings change when the word is linked to other words, and others change their meaning with a change the context. These words are homonyms, homophones, and homographs. These homophones differ from one another. To clarify them for the reader and the student, we will explain the definition of each so that the student can distinguish between them. They are as follows: "Homonyms" are words that sound the same but differ in letters, spelling, and meaning. Here are some words we present as examples, not as an exhaustive list: "accept, except", "addition, edition", 'fair, fare", "whole, hole", etc..

"Homophones" are words that sound the same when pronounced but differ in letters and meaning. Here are some words as examples: "flower, flour", "sea, see", "pain, pane", "write, right", ate, eight", "real, reel", "tail, and tale", etc..

The following type is the subject of our study which is "Homographs" are words that have the same letters but differ in meaning. They are as follows: "blue" is a color, also feeling sad, "box" is a cardboard, also box to fight, "duck" is a bird, also lowering your head. Other homographs words to clarify further. The word "ring". Has more than one meaning. The first meaning is a small ornament placed on the finger of the hand, which a man gives to a woman when he proposed to her or for purposes, whether for a man or a woman. The third meaning is an enclosed area for a sport or show. The word "bear" has many meanings, (animal) a large, strong, heavy wild animal with thick fur and sharp claws, such as a grizzly or polar bear. (Person) a rough, rude, clumsy person. (Finance) a person who sells stocks hoping that prices will drop. The word "can" this word has more than one meaning. As a noun, means a metal container. As a verb, meaning to preserve food. As a modal verb, for ability or permission. Since our research topic explores the role of context and its impact on the meaning of English words in translation. We have briefly defined homophones. We aim to provide the reader or student with simple information and definitions about context and text and their role in influencing word meaning during translation.

Let us learn about words "context" and "text". Context means the surrounding text, background informant, or real world circumstance that help a student or any translator to understand a word, phrase, event, or idea. I think, without context any piece of information can be misunderstood and misinterpreted. The following some definitions of text: a text is understood to be a piece of written or spoken material in its primary form". "A text is a stretch of language that can be understood in context". In brief, the text can be any example of any written or spoken language, from something simple to something complex, such as, a scientific book, a legal or diplomatic document, or others. Having gained a basic understanding of the text and its context, and having learned about homogenous, their types, and the specific homographs we are discussing, let us provide some of these words, words that are similar in letters but different in meaning. The following words have been chosen as example in our study. We will first mention them individually, and then use them in sentences within a specific context in a text.

The word "**bank**". This word has two main meanings as a noun: a financial business that keeps money, the other meaning is, the high land at the side of a river. The following example shows that the word "bank" (بنك) means riverbank (ضفة نهر), illustrating how text and context play a role and influence the meaning of a word. * My family and I went to the village where I was born, which was quite far from the city where I currently live. We travelled to the village by river, via a boat. After about an hour during the journey, we stopped on one **bank** of the river to eat. The children played on the muddy **bank** and watched the boats go by. During the journey, we saw many farms on both **banks** of the river. In the following context, the meaning of the word "**bank**" changes from river (نهر), to **bank** (مصرف), where people deposit their money for fear of loss or theft. * My grandfather was very rich. He owned a lot of property, including real state such as apartment buildings and commercial complexes, and a lot of cash, but he kept all his cash in the "**bank**" for fear of theft. The two previous examples illustrate the role and importance of context and its influence on determining the meaning of a word in translation.

Spring. This word has more than one meaning. The first meaning is one of the names of the four seasons of the year, names **spring** (فصل الربيع). This season comes after winter and before summer. It is considered the most beautiful season of the year because the temperature is moderate and flowers bloom. The second meaning of the word spring is **coiled metal** (الزنبرك) It is a long piece of metal, made of wrought iron, in the shape of a spiral or a series of rings. Let us take the following example for illustrating: because a customer cancelled an order, the manager instructed the workers to safely store the sharp **metal coils** in the warehouse. The third meaning of the word **spring**

is as a verb (يقفز). Example: * the horse I had bet on had won the race. When the well-wishers gathered around to congratulate me, one of them, set a firework, startling the horse, which then **jumped** over the fence and we were unable to catch it.

Break this word is one of the most perplexing English words for translation students when translate it into Arabic, due to its multiple meanings, making it difficult for students to find the appropriate synonym. Its meaning changes depending on the context and the specific text; it can be used as both a noun and a verb. Most dictionaries define it as follows: the word **break** is a flexible term used as both a verb and a noun. It generally means to split in pieces, stop an activity, or fail to obey a rule. When the word "**break**" is in isolation, i.e. not part of a sentence, it has more than forty (40) synonyms in Arabic, according to Al-Mawrid Dictionary. However, these synonyms change according to the text and the context. According to Al-Mawrid Dictionary, here are some of its Arabic synonyms: as a verb (يكسر) to break jail, (ينتهك) to break the law, (يروض) to break a horse, (يحطم رقم قياسي) to break a record, (يخرط الارض) the is breaking. (ينهار) broke under questioning, (يتفرع) our cases broke up into four types. (يخرط الارض) to break ground. (يفطر) to break one's fast. (يخترق) to break through. The following are some of its Arabic synonyms: (استراحة), (انقطاع الصلة), (فاصل قصير), (وقفة), (ثغرة), (كسر). The following are examples when the word **break** is as a verb. When the word **break** means to smash or damage something into pieces. * If you are not careful, Ahmed, you will **break** the vase. * When play football, be careful or you will **break** your leg. When it means to stop working. * My car broke down yesterday. When it means to take a short pause or rest. * Let us **break** for lunch after half an hour. I am so tired. When it means go against a law or a rule. * Young drivers who speed **break** the law. When it means to bear a record. * My son has prepared well for this tournament; he hopes to break the record. The following are examples when the **break** is as a noun. When it means as a rest or pause period from work. * We will take a short **break** at 9.30 for breakfast. When it means a split, crack, or space in something. * I found a small **break** in the wooden fence. When it means a lucky opportunity. * Ali got that job at such a big company; it was a great opportunity for him.

Head is another word of 'homographs' that spelled the same but has different meanings. According to several dictionaries, including Al-Mawrid Dictionary. It has more than twenty-five (25) Arabic synonyms, making it one of the words that causes many problems for students when translate a text. The word **head** has multiple meanings depending on context. *It can mean the top part of the body, a leader or person in charge, the front or top of an

object, or the core word in grammatical phrase*. 1) The upper part of the human or animal body that contains the eyes, mouth, ears, nose, and brain. *The following examples are sentences containing the word **head** for clarification. * My wife wore a white hat and put it on her **head** when we visited the farm. * He nodded his **head** in agreement with her terms for accepting him as a guard. 2) Leader or a person in charge. * Ahmed was the **head** of our national team in the last competition.* He was appointed as the new director of AL Anwar Petroleum Exploration Company. 3) The front part of a line or the upper area of something. * Each student must write his or her name at the **head** of the page. * The commander of the military band walked at the **head** of the procession. 4) Grammar. The headword. The head is the main word in a phrase that determines its grammatical category and core meaning. In the noun phrase "nice big eyes", the **head** noun is "eyes". In the phrase "quickly deliver the present", the **head** verb is deliver. The following are some other examples illustrate the uses of "**head**" in idioms. 1) Ali during the chaotic presentation, he manages to keep his **head** and answer every question with confidence. 2) Off the top of my **head**, I can think of four books that match your description. 3) She kept burying her **head** in the sand about her debts until was too late to fix them. 4) Ali was juggling two jobs, night classes, and family responsibilities, but he managed to keep his **head** above water, handling everything with quiet determination. From the preceding examples, we can clearly see how text and context influence the meaning of a word, and how meaning changes with changes in text and context.

Strike. It is also a word with multiple meanings and more than one synonym in Arabic, which can confuse students and lead to incorrect translation. The meaning of this word changes according to the context and the text. I will present some examples illustrating how its meaning changes with context. Here are some of its definitions. The word **strike** is a versatile that function as both a verb and a noun. It most commonly to hit a target with focus, to stop work in a protest, or to experience a sudden thought or discovery. According to Al Mawrid Dictionary, the word "**strike**" has more than fifty-five Arabic synonyms, some as verbs and others as nouns. Let us learn by following examples some of its Arabic synonyms when it is used as a verb: (ينطلق) for example, "you must **strike** west from here". (يقاتل) "A chill **struck** through his flesh". (يفند الى) "Just after seven o'clock **struck**". (يعلن بضربات الساعة) "To strike for freedom". (يشطب) "**Strike** the match would not **strike**". (يبدأ) "The first object that **struck** him". (يلفت) "They have **struck** an agreement". (يعقد اتفاقاً) "The following words are some of the Arabic synonyms of English word **strike**: (ضربة), (إضراب), (جذب), (رمية صائبة), (رمية صائبة), (جذب), (إضراب), (ضربة).

(عائق), (عقبة), etc. The following sentences are examples that illustrate how the meaning of a word changes and how context plays a role in this change. *Lighting **struck** the tallest tree in the park. * School bus drivers went on **strike** and demanding higher wages and will not end their **strike** until their demands are met. * My grandfather **struck** a match to light a candle when the power went out. * The only option available to us is to **strike**. * If the management would not listen to their demands, they would have to force the issue by **strike**. As we read the previous examples, the role of context in changing the meaning of a word becomes clear. Therefore, students should focus on and study the text and context thoroughly before beginning the translation process.

Set is one of the words that has many Arabic synonyms. It is also among the words that cause many problems in translation. Students must pay attention to the intended meaning when it appears in a sentence, because its multiple meanings depending on the context can confuse the student and lead to an incorrect translation. However, studying the text and understanding, the context is crucial for providing an accurate translation and choosing a suitable synonym for this homograph, which has multiple meanings. According to many dictionaries, such as Oxford Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary, and Al Mawrid Dictionary, it has more than fifteen (15) Arabic synonyms. To avoid misinterpreting its intended meaning, I present some of its definitions and Arabic synonyms in sentences and examples. The following are some of its definitions. In general, as a set is a group of things that go together. As a sentence is a group of words that tells a complete thought. The word **set** can function as either a noun or a verb in a sentence, depending on the context. Examples of **set** as noun: * Ahmed offered his guests a **set** of cold juices. * My brother owns a complete **set** of Oxford dictionaries. * This short **set** pairs ivory glass with dainty gold chrome tips. * The children are allowed to watch one hour of television. After that, their mother turn off the **set**. * No one told us a cameraman was shooting my **set**. * Start with three to four **sets** of each exercise. Examples of **set** as a verb: * I asked my sister to **set** the table. * Ahmed **sets** duty before pleasure. * **Set** your keys on the counter. Amal's behavior does not **set** well with her age. * We need to **set** some extra chairs around the table. * He **set** the ladder against the wall and walked away. * Ali turned off the car and **set** the parking break. The previous examples are an attempt to provide some definitions of the word "**set**", which is a 'homograph', meaning it is similar in letters but different in meaning. Its meaning changes according to the change in context and text. In some sentences, the word **set** is used as a noun and in others as a verb. According to some dictionaries such as, Oxford Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary, and Al-Mawrid Dictionary, it has more than twenty-five (25) Arabic synonyms, some of which are nouns

and others are verbs. Through the homophones mentioned previously in this research, the importance and role of context in determining the meaning of a word become clear to us. These examples illustrate that the meaning of a word is linked to the words in the sentence that make up the context. Therefore, before beginning to translate any text, the student must study the text thoroughly and understand the context, especially if the context is idiom. Because idioms are idiomatic expressions, the literal meaning of the words does not necessarily reflect the intended meaning. However, this research is a simple attempt to demonstrate the importance of context and its influence on words choice in translation.

Sources

- * Baker, M. (1992) *In Other Words*, (1995), *A course Book on Translation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- * Biguenet, J. and Schulte, R. (1984). *The Craft of Translation*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- * Dell, J. Katherine (2006). *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- * Doleerup, C. and Linegaard, A. (1994). *Teaching Translation and Interpreting*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- * Farahzad, F. (1992). *Testing Achievement in Translation Class*. In *Teaching Translation and Interpreting*.
- * Gazala, H. (1995). *Translation as Problems and Solutions*. Beirut: Dar wa Maktababat Al-Hilal.
- * Barton, David, and Carmen Lee. "Language Online: Investigating Digital Texts and Practices". Routledge, 2013.
- * Carte, Roland, and Michael McCarty. "Cambridge Grammar of English". Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- * Ching, Marvin K. L. et al. "Linguistic Perspectives on Literature". Routledge, 2015.