

How is Polysemy Similar And Different Across English, Spanish, And Chinese?

How We Do Things With Words
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English

Chemistry is defined as the science that deals with the composition and properties of substances and various elementary forms of matter. Is also defined as the interaction of one personality with another. Knowing the difference between the word usage here is important because it could save an individual from embarrassing and uncomfortable social interactions where the talk of relationships is inappropriate.

Spanish

Trufa

(*dulce or mentira*)

Trufa in many different cultures has a similar definition *dulce* which means candy. When used in a sentence, it is often referenced with a positive connotation. On the other hand, *mentira* gives out a negative connotation which only some understand, depending on their upbringing with the word.

Chinese

喜欢一个人(Xǐ Huān Yī Gè Rén)

Definition 1: loves a person

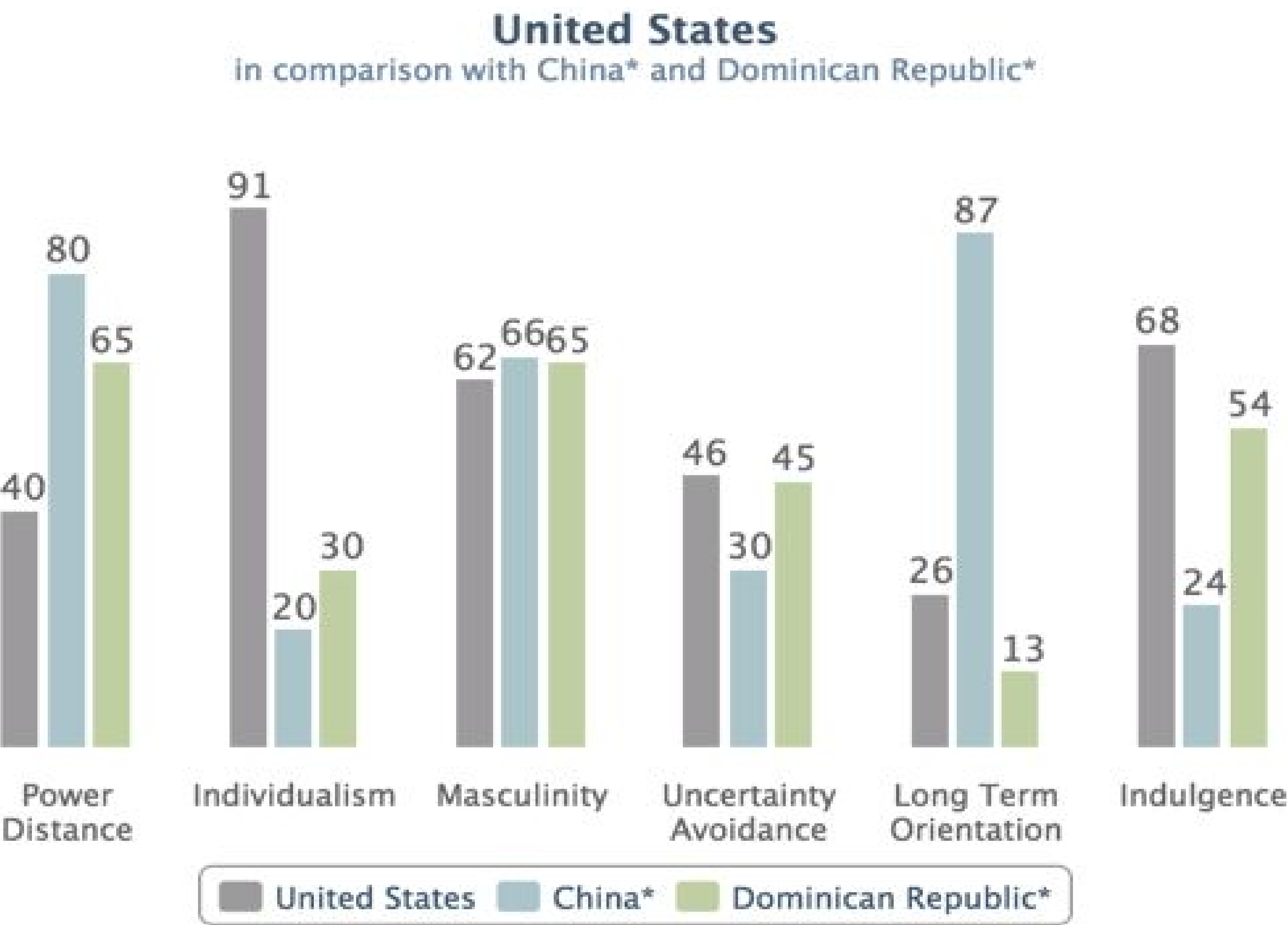
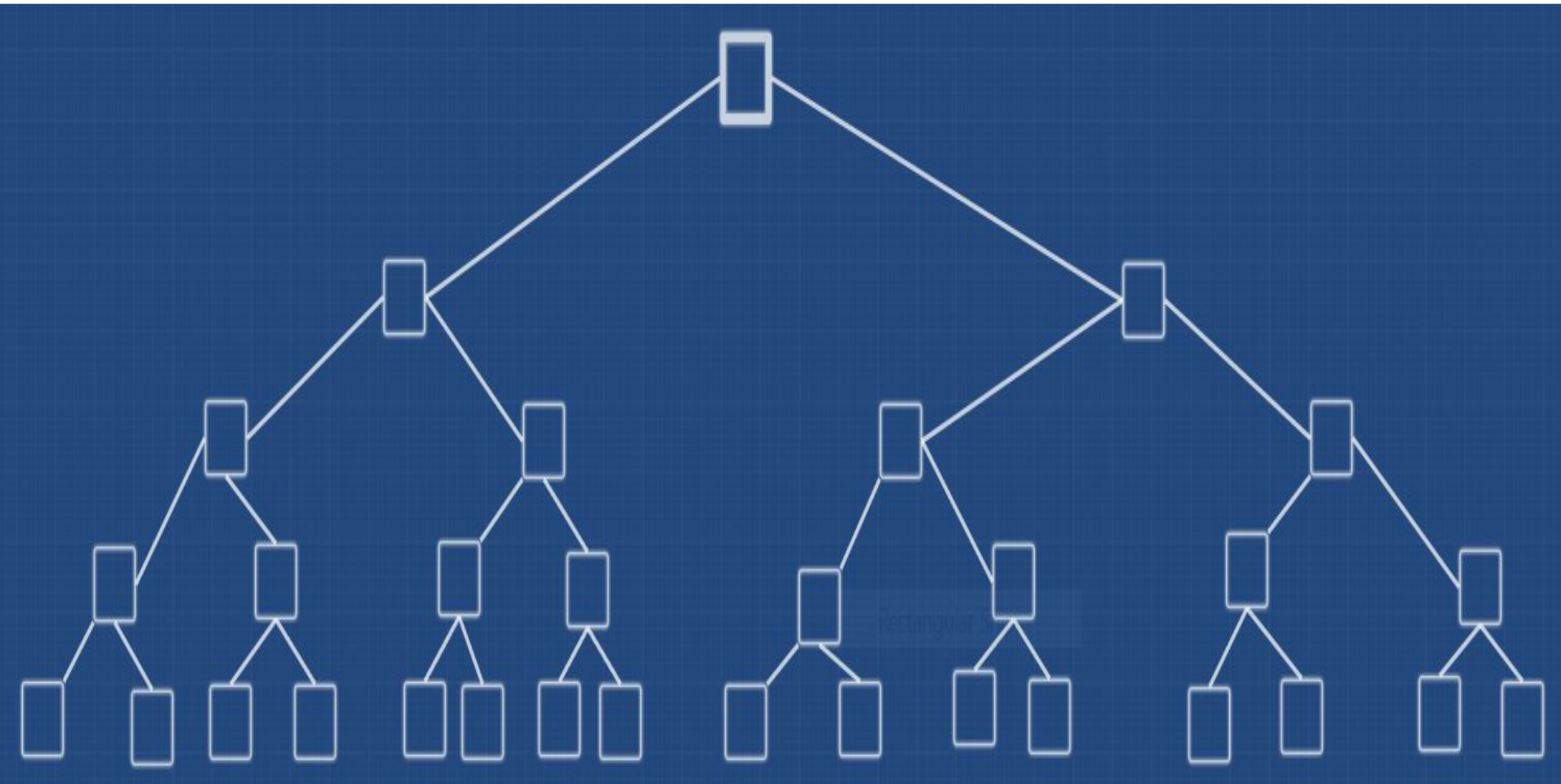
Eg. 我喜欢一个人，他是学校的四分卫。

I love someone. He is the quarterback of the school team.

Definition 2: loves being alone

Eg. 多数时候，我喜欢一个人。

For most of the time, I love being alone.



Abstract

Polysemy is the study of how words can have multiple meanings. This varies greatly across languages and cultures, and any meanings may be lost in translation. We will present three related stories in each source language so that meaning is not lost or misinterpreted. Words used regularly in these languages will be analyzed using the fundamentals insights of cross-cultural pragmatics and the question of polysemy. The languages of study will be Chinese, English, and Spanish.

Definition

Polysemy is defined as the phenomenon of a single word having multiple meanings. However, the broadness of the term can extend greatly. A topic of concern in the study of polysemy is how far can a definition differ for it to still be considered related and how strongly do they have to differ to not be considered a variation of the same meaning.

Polysemy is a pivotal concept within the humanities, such as media studies and linguistics.

←This is what a twine story would ideally look like if you were to zoom out of it. Sometimes, the stories connect in many different ways but this is the basic structure of what it should look like.

Power Distance

To explain the use of chemistry in the Twine story, the linguistic principle of power distance will be used. Power distance relates to how individuals view an institution having power. The United States generally has a much lower power distance when compared to other countries. In a school situation here it is possible that chemistry could be seen as an interaction between individuals. However, this would most likely not be the case globally.

Politeness: Positive/Negative Face

Face-threatening acts (FTAs) refer to acts that may threaten a person's self image. Positive face is the positive consistent self image, while negative face is the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, etc. The two different definitions of the word can be important in conversations between individuals because it can challenge a person's positive face, if the word used has a negative connotation that threatens their face. It is of great importance to know the different definitions of words as it can lead to an upset in the ways the people are communicating. In different cultures, not knowing what you may be referring to can lead to threatening of face which is a sign of impoliteness in many different cultures.

Communication across cultures

The reason that polysemy exists so commonly in Chinese is related to its culture. Chinese culture has really low uncertainty avoidance, which means they tolerate indirect language very well. Actually many Chinese words have multiple ambiguous meanings. In this case, the girl wants to say no to Tuoni, who just professed his love. So, under the circumstance of Chinese culture, instead of saying "No" directly, she chooses to imply that she's unavailable by saying she "喜欢一个人" and it doesn't matter to her whether she actually loves someone else or she just wants to be alone, only that if the girl actually loves Tony, then Tuoni is deceived by his best friend. As the result, this ambiguity leads to the different reaction between Tuoni and Tony.

References

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