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On Translation Methods of Figures of Speech in English for Science and Technology

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Abstract

As China's foreign science and technology exchanges are increasing, translations of English for science and technology are becoming more and more popular. Figure of speech, as the ontology of language, plays a pivotal role in translation. However, due to the traditional view that figures of speech is irrelevant to English for science and technology, it has not been given enough attention in this kind of translation. Therefore, the study of figures of speech in English for science and technology is of great theoretical and practical significance. Many scholars have done a lot of research on the translation methods and strategies of English texts for science and technology from the sentence level. The author gives an example analysis from the level of figures of speech as a way to explore the translation strategies of figures of speech in English for science and technology.

Keywords

English for science and technology, figures of speech, translation methods.

1. Introduction

English for science and technology has a precise and disciplined style, a compact structure, and an emphasis on objective facts and less on subjective emotions. However, this does not mean that English for science and technology should "try to avoid the use of various figures of speech that aim to enhance the infectious and propagandistic effect of the language, and avoid the use of exaggeration, metaphor, ridicule, rhetorical questions, double rhymes and other rhetorical devices, so as not to make the reader feel that the lines are flashy and the content is distorted" [1]. One can develop eloquent discourse habits by studying the variety of figures of speech in the English language [2]. An overview of all kinds of English for science and technology discourse shows that the use of various figures of speech is not uncommon, and authors of English for science and technology often use English figures of speech such as simile, metaphors and analogies to improve the rhetorical effect of scientific and technical discourse.

2. Classification of English for Science and Technology

Generally speaking, according to the degree of formality of the style, English for science and technology is roughly divided into three categories: scientific paper, popular science article, and technical prose /document. Scientific papers are written by experts for experts and are the most formal, but often use some rhetorical devices. A popular science article is written by an insider for a layman. The popular science writer has to make the scientific reasoning clear, and has to use literary rhetorical devices to the best of his ability. Relatively speaking, popular science articles are less formal. Technical texts are much broader, and the reader can be both an expert and a layman. For example, product manuals, technical agreements, project applications, feasibility reports, maintenance manuals, etc. are all technical texts.

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3. Translation Methods and Examples of Figures of Speech in English for Science and Technology

3.1. Simile

Simile in English for science and technology are linked to another thing with distinctly the same or similar characteristics by words such as as, like, seem, as if, etc. This kind of figure of speech is usually directly translated.

e.g. Original text: Our planet's crust is made up of about 12 major tectonic plates that fit together like a giant jigsaw puzzle.

Translation：地球的地壳由约12块主要的构造板块组成，就像一个大型拼图一样拼接在一起。

3.2. Metaphor

Metaphor does not use any metaphorical words and it makes a direct association. When translating metaphors, literal translation method can be employed.

e.g. Original text: America worries that the telecoms equipment-maker is a Trojan horse for China's spies and autocrats and poses a grave threat to Western interests. It has been urging its allies to ban it.

Translation：美国担心这家电信设备制造商是中国间谍机构和独裁者的颠覆分子，对西方利益构成严重威胁，一直在敦促其盟国抵制该制造商。

Trojan horse which originates from the Trojan War in the 12th century BC. At that time, when Greece failed to attack Troy, it sent some warriors to hide in a wooden horse, and the army pretended to retreat. When the Trojans saw the Greek retreat, they opened the door and removed the wooden horse into the city. At night, the Greek soldiers came out of the wooden horse and opened the gates of the city, and finally conquered Troy. Nowadays, people often use the metaphor of Trojan horse to refer to “来自外部的颠覆分子; 间谍”. Here, it means that the manufacturer cooperating with Western countries is like a Trojan horse, with Chinese spies hiding inside, which will endanger their interests and security at any time.

3.3. Personification

Since the metaphor of personification in both Chinese and English is person, it is basically translated into Chinese according to the English metaphor itself.

e.g. Original text: Small molecules have long been the basis for drug development. Their small size makes them easily ingestible in the gastrointestinal tract where active substances are immediately absorbed into the bloodstream and can travel anywhere in the body. The small size of these molecules allows them to easily penetrate cell membranes.

Translation：小分子长期以来一直是药物开发的基础。因为体积较小，很容易被胃肠道吸收，在胃肠道中，活性物质立即被吸收到血液中，并可以被转运到身体的各个地方。体积小的特点也让它们可以轻松穿透细胞膜。

3.4. Parallelism

This figure of speech is sometimes used in serious scientific and technical articles in order to make the focus prominent, the rhythm sharp, and the structure proportional, so it is enough to pay attention to the above characteristics when translating.

e.g. Original text: There are several types of volcanoes, primarily classified by shape and size. Major types include stratovolcanoes, which often appear as tall steep mountains, shield volcanoes, which are flatter and dome shaped, calderas, which are large depressions in the ground, and mid-ocean ridges, which are underwater chains of volcanic mountains. No matter their shape or size, all volcanoes emit gas and molten rock.

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Translation：火山有几种类型，主要是按照形状和大小划分。主要的类型包括高而陡峭的复式火山、平坦呈圆顶状的盾状火山、向地下凹陷的破火山口和海底的火山链大洋中脊。无论火山形状大小如何，都会向外释放气体和融化的岩石。

3.5. Question

The use of rhetorical questions in English is roughly the same as that in Chinese, both of which are designed to strengthen the tone, emphasize the meaning to be expressed, provoke thought, stimulate the reader's feelings and deepen the reader's impression. Therefore, we should pay attention to the above characteristics when translating this figure of speech.

e.g. Original text: What is a consumer? What are consume goods? What's the difference between consumer goods and capital goods?

Translation：什么是消费者？什么又是消费品？消费品和资本品有什么区别？

3.6. Alliteration

Alliteration is a peculiar figure of speech in English. In two or more adjacent words, the beginning syllable (or other stressed syllable) has the same letter or sound. The head rhyme is primarily a consonant. It is common to use alliteration in the titles and introductory parts of articles in the English for science and technology. It is often used as a variation in translation. Translators often have to make adjustments when translating this figure of speech.

e.g. Original text: In 1899, the economist Thorstein Veblen coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption" to denote the way that material objects were

paraded as indicators of social position and status.

Translation：1899年，经济学家托尔斯坦·凡勃伦创造了"炫耀性消费"一词，来表明物质商品如何被炫耀成社会地位与阶层的标志。

In this sentence, "conspicuous consumption" rhymes, so the alliteration can be retained in the translation "炫耀性消费".

e.g. Original text: And over time the likelihood of little things going wrong multiplies, and low-probability events occur and interact, to produce unexpected and unacceptable risk.

Translation：随着时间的推移，这些小细节出现错误的可能性就会翻番，各种小概率事件会发生并互相作用，这就会导致"意料之外且不可接受的"风险。

In this sentence, "unexpected and unacceptable" rhymes, but the alliteration cannot be retained. So we have to compromise on the translation, and translate it into "意料之外且不可接受的".

4. Conclusion

Figures of speech are not only frequently found in literature and social science texts, but also in English for science and technology texts. As English for science and technology is boring enough, figures of speech play an indispensable role in order to increase the readability and enjoyment of texts. Therefore, the standardized translation method of figures of speech has profound guiding significance for the translation of English for science and technology. Many figures of speech in literature can be applied to scientific and technological articles, only with different frequency and degree of modification. Therefore, the translation of figures of speech in English for science and technology can not only learn from the translation methods of literary figures of speech, and sometimes even apply them. But the grasp of their degree puts forward higher requirements for translators. For translation, it is of great significance to deal with figures of speech in texts for science and technology as well as in literature.

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