

The Application of Iconicity in Translation

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Abstract

Iconicity refers to the reflection of human experience on linguistic structures. Iconicity exists widely at all levels of languages. Iconicity is generally diverse, which can be mainly divided into two categories: diagrammatic iconicity and metaphorical iconicity. This paper discusses various types of iconicity and the methods of translation between English and Chinese. It is helpful to achieve the ideal translation that the translated texts and the original texts are similar in both form and spirit from the perspective of iconicity in the process of translation. When translating diagrammatic iconicity, it is necessary to convey the sound, form and meaning of the original text without violating the expression norms of the target language. When translating metaphorical iconicity, it is necessary to use different methods such as literal translation, free translation, set of translation and literal translation with annotation according to the sharing degree between the source domain and the target domain in metaphors.

Keywords

Translation; Diagrammatic iconicity; Metaphorical iconicity; Spiritual and formal resemblance.

1. Introduction

Iconicity is one of the important topics in contemporary cognitive linguistics. This paper intends to apply iconicity to translation studies. In linguistics, there is a natural connection between form and content, that is, the relationship between them can be demonstrated and justified. There is an inevitable connection between the concept and structure formed on the basis of people's perception and cognition of the objective world and people's experience. According to Zhao Yanfang, "this connection refers not only to the relationship between onomatopoeia and pictograph, sound and meaning, but also to the relationship between language and thinking, that is, linguistic structures reflects human experience." [1] Functional linguists Haiman and Cicon expanded the principle of "similarity in form and meaning" from vocabulary to sentence, holding that the structure and meaning are similar. Starting from the relationship between cognition and linguistics, Lakoff and Langacker explore the iconicity between linguistic structure and conceptual structure, revealing the general rule between cognition and linguistic structure. This paper intends to explore different types of linguistic iconicity and the methods of translation between English and Chinese, thus in order to achieve the ideal translation that the translated texts and the original texts are similar in both form and spirit, rather than being similar only at the linguistic level.

2. The Ideal Translation-both Spiritual and Formal Resemblance

As far as translation is concerned, the pursuit of ideal translation should be the unity of the two, that is, the translation effect of "similarity in form and spirit". In fact, the proposition of "emphasis on the resemblance of the spirit" means that when the spirit and the form can't be achieved at the same time, one has to give up the form and protect the spirit. This formulation

is intended to emphasize the spirit, but it doesn't mean that form can be disregarded. It can be seen that the translation proposition and practice of "emphasis on the resemblance of the spirit" is not the best translation method.

It will be a more ideal realm and pursuit of translation to convey both the spirit and form of the original text. From the perspective of translation aesthetics, "similarity in both form and spirit" also has its theoretical basis. According to Liu Miqing, "translation is a process of aesthetic reproduction, that is, a process in which the aesthetic subject (translator) reproduces the aesthetic object (original text) through the target language. The aesthetic elements that constitute the characteristics of the original text include the following two parts: one is the aesthetic representative element of the original text, that is, the form of the original context; the other is the non-representative element of the original text, that is, the charm, style and artistic conception of the original text." [2] It can be seen that the aesthetic composition of the original text covers two aspects: the beauty of form and temperament. Therefore, in order to completely convey the aesthetic value of the original text, the translator must reproduce the beauty of these two aspects at the same time.

3. Iconicity and Translation

3.1. The Meaning and Different Types of Iconicity

Iconicity refers to the signifier and signified of the language, that is, there is an inevitable connection between the form and content of the language, and the relationship between them can be demonstrated and justified. In this sense, the form or structure of language reflects the conceptual structure of human beings, and the conceptual structure of human beings reflects the objective world and its structure. "Cognitive linguistics divides iconicity into two categories: diagrammatic iconicity and metaphorical iconicity." [1]

"diagrammatic iconicity refers to the consistency between a language expression (length, order and the relationship between its components) and the conceptual content and experience it expresses. As for diagrammatic iconicity, Haiman proposed compositional iconicity and relational iconicity." [1] Relational iconicity is further divided into order iconicity, distance iconicity, quantity iconicity and marked iconicity. For the convenience of discussion, diagrammatic iconicity is generally classified into phonetic iconicity, order iconicity, quantity iconicity, distance iconicity, marked iconicity and symmetric iconicity."

"Metaphorical iconicity refers to the process of projecting one concept to another, and the mapping of one cognitive domain to another, including the use of metaphor and the system of metaphorical concepts." [1]

3.2. Phonetic Iconicity and Translation

Phonetic iconicity refers to the natural mapping between speech and the meaning it expresses, mainly including onomatopoeia, phonetic symbol, rhythmic iconicity, or a combination of several situations. The application of phonetic iconicity makes phonetic forms express meaning in rhetoric, which can set off emotion and enhance the vividness of language expression. For examples:

It was a splendid population-for all the slow ,sleepy, sluggish-brained sloth stayed at home.

(出来的) 这帮人个个出类拔萃——因为凡是呆板、呆滞、呆头呆脑的呆子都呆在家里。

This is a famous sentence of Mark Twain. The author of the original text uses five alliterations in succession to echo the previous splendid, and the semantic color is just opposite, resulting in strong humorous effects. The translation also uses five words with the initial word "Dai", skillfully interprets five alliterations in the original text, and successfully preserves the tone and style of the original author. However, the pity is that the metaphorical image of the original text has been lost.

Fainter, dimmer, stiller each moment,

Now night

一刻比一刻缥缈、晦暗、安宁，

于是夜来临。

The translation not only conveys the meaning of the original text, but also adopts a similar form, thus it can deliver equivalent communicative and rhetorical effects to the target language readers. In the original text, the poet deliberately contrasts the lengths of the two lines. The first line is stretched so long mainly to imply the gradual process of the night coming, while the second line with only two syllables is to reflect the feeling that night often seems to come suddenly without knowing it. In addition, the juxtaposition of the three comparative adjectives fainter, dimer and stiller in the first line creates the effect of sound beauty.

3.3. Order Iconicity and Translation

“Order iconicity refers to the order that word order reflects the cognitive state or cognitive process of cognitive subject.”[3] For examples:

一脚跨进教室，就看见一位碧眼女郎飞步迎来，献上一张心形卡片，上面赫然写着：“我喜欢你！”

The moment I was striding into the classroom, I saw a blue-eyed girl flying the step to welcome and present a heart-shaped card, impressively above saying: “I like you!”

This sentence describes the successive relationship in order iconicity, and the author describes his own experience through the sequence of events. From striding into the classroom to see a blue-eyed girl flying the step to welcome and finally present the heart-shaped card, it vividly depicts the psychological state of the girl and the translation restores the scene of the original text by literal translation.

她从西安乘坐高铁经过汉中到成都。

She came to chengdu form Xi'an through Hanzhong by high-speed rail.

This example demonstrates the sequential iconicity of language. While retaining the logical order of events in the original text, the translation has made some slight adjustments in language to make it more consistent with the English expression habits and highlight the principle of sequential iconicity. The translator adopts the same logical order in translation, which can make the translation produce the same visual effect in the interpretation process of the target language readers, and convey the corresponding meaning beauty through the reproduction of the formal beauty of the original text.

3.4. Quantity Iconicity and Translation

Quantity iconicity refers to the number of language units is directly proportional to the number and complexity of the contents. In verbal communication, the syntactic components and syntactic structures that express large and important information or information that the speaker wants to express indirectly are correspondingly increased. As for quantity iconicity, Chinese and English have common features, so the translation between the two languages can adopt corresponding quantitative forms. For examples:

枯藤老树昏鸦，小桥流水人家，古道西风瘦马。夕阳西下，断肠人在天涯。

Over old trees wreathed with rotten vines fly evening crows; Under a small bridge near a cottage a stream flows; On ancient road in the west wind a lean horse goes. Westwards declines the sun; Far, far from home is the heartbroken one.

This example illustrates the quantitative iconicity of language. The original text combines nine images, such as “rotten vines”, “old trees”, and “evening crows” into a picture of autumn suburbs and sunset, and directly transforms these images into corresponding categories in combination

with English expression habits in the process of translation, which not only retains the quantitative iconicity of the original text, but also perfectly reproduces the emotion expressed by the original author.

It was a day as fresh as grass growing up and clouds going over and butterflies coming down can make it. It was a day compounded from silences of bees and flower and ocean and land, which were not silences at all, but motions stirs, flutters, risings, each in its own time and matchless rhythm.

绿草葱葱，白云飘飘，彩蝶飞飞，那是多么清新一天；蜜蜂无声，鲜花不言，海涛微澜，大地稀音，那又是多么静穆一天。然而，却又并非完全静穆——万物各按其时序和节奏，有的摆动，有的摇曳，有的飘扬，有的起舞。

English emphasizes rationality and abstract thinking. The original text uses “and” to connect many images. In the translation, according to the thinking characteristics and aesthetic psychology of Chinese concrete thinking and the construction of focusing on overall effects, the parts connected by “and” are translated into four-character phrases of subject-predicate structure to achieve the effect of intermittent pauses. The original text pays attention to the logical relations, using “as” to guide the adverbial clause of reason; using “which” to guide an adverbial showing the transition relation. However, the translator conceals the logical relation of the former and preserves the logical relation of the latter, creating a peaceful, vibrant and colorful world.

3.5. Marked Iconicity and Translation

Marked iconicity refers to the use of unconventional expressions to carry important information in order to highlight the information, so as to attract readers' attention and make readers feel the author's subjective intention. Marked iconicity in essence also follows the rules of human cognition, and is a subjective reflection of cognitive structure and process. For example:

“Con-trary!” said a voice, as sweet as a silver bell- “that for the third time, you dunce! I’m not going to tell you again-recollect, or I pull your hair!”

“相——反!”一个银铃般的声音说道。“这是第三遍了，你这个笨蛋！我不想再教你了。用心点，不然我就揪你的头发!”

The author uses a phonetic extension between the first syllable and the second syllable of the word “contrary” at the beginning of the sentence, which violates the spelling norms. In addition, the author uses an exclamation mark to highlight and reflect the speaker's anger and impatience. The translator extends the pronunciation between the word “contrary” in the translation and translates it into “想——反”, achieving the same highlighting effect.

3.6. Distance Iconicity and Translation

Distance iconicity refers to the distance between concepts corresponding to the distance between language components. Distance between two linguistic symbols corresponding to the distance between concepts. For example, when translating restrictive attributive clauses, it is necessary to show that attributive clauses are more closely related to antecedents; When translating non-restrictive attributive clauses, we should show that the relationship between attributive clauses and antecedents is not as close as that of the former. For example:

His father, who was a musician, gave him piano lessons.

他父亲是一个音乐家，他父亲给他上钢琴课。

The original text uses a non-restrictive attributive clause to modify the subject father. In order to show the distance iconicity, the translation also separates the antecedent from the attributive clause, so the translation can't be translated as他的音乐家父亲。

Many members have protested against the proposal

Many a member has protested against the proposal

许多成员反对这项提议。

The verb in example one is “have”, because the noun close to it is “members”. Example two uses the singular verb “has”, because the closest noun is a member. English grammar requires subject-verb agreement, and one of the principles is the proximity principle, which requires that the singular and plural predicate of a sentence should be consistent with the noun nearest to it. This proximity principle conforms to the distance iconicity principle.

3.7. Symmetric Iconicity and Translation

Symmetric iconicity refers to the symmetry in the expression that has the same importance and juxtaposition in concept. “The application of symmetrical iconicity can not only produce the beauty of form of antithesis in vision and the beauty of sound in hearing, but also produce the beauty of meaning in psychological experience.”[3] For example:

于是——洗手的时候，日子从水盆里过去；吃饭的时候，日子从饭碗里过去；默默时，便从凝然的双眼过去。

Thus-time flows away through the sink as I wash my hands, vanishes in the bowl as I eat my meal, and flies away before my day dreaming gaze as I reflect in silence.

The original text uses the symmetrical structure of “.....时,过去” to express the rush of time and advises readers to cherish time. The translation uses three “as” to guide temporal adverbials respectively. For the repeated use of the same word “.....过去” in Chinese, the translator replaces it with several phrases with the same part of speech and similar meanings according to the context, it translates the three “.....过去” in the original text with phrases flows away, vanishes and flies away which conform to English collocation habits and aesthetic patterns. The translation realizes the information and aesthetic function of the original text, and achieves both spiritual and formal resemblance.

3.8. Metaphorical Iconicity and Translation

“Metaphorical iconicity refers to the process of projecting one concept to another, and the mapping of one cognitive domain to another, including the use of metaphor and the system of metaphorical concepts. There are three types of mapping.”[8] The first type is the complete correspondence of metaphors, that is, there is a shared source domain and a shared target domain in English and Chinese metaphors, and the cognitive performance of the source domain is mapped to the target domain to achieve the same cognitive effect of metaphor; The second is the partial correspondence of metaphors, there are two situations: first, the source domain is the same or basically the same but the language expression is different; Second, the source domain is different, but the cognitive effect of metaphors is similar; The third is called the metaphorical gap, that is, the metaphorical cognition mode in the source language is vacant in the target language culture. For example:

你这是在班门弄斧。

Translation one: You’re showing off your proficiency with an axe before Lu Ban (the master carpenter).

Translation two: You’re just teaching your grandmother how to suck eggs.

Translation three: Don’t show off your proficiency before a master.

The translation one uses the method of literal translation with annotation, and perfectly reproduces the original text by explaining the profession of Luban. The translation two adopts the method of set of translation, and uses the proverbs that represent the same meaning in

English to explain the meaning of the original text. The translation three adopts the method of free translation to directly express the meaning of the original text.

4. Conclusion

Applying iconicity theory and its principles to translation studies, and prove that the perspective and entry point of iconicity is helpful to the reproduction and transmission of the original form and its additional meaning. It is an effective way to achieve the ideal translation that the translated texts and the original texts are similar in both form and spirit, which is of great guiding significance to the theoretical research and practice of translation. When translating diagrammatic iconicity, it is necessary to convey the sound, form and meaning of the original text without violating the expression norms of the target language. When translating metaphorical iconicity, it is necessary to use different methods such as literal translation, free translation, set of translation and literal translation with annotation according to the sharing degree between the source domain and the target domain in metaphors.

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