

Original Paper

On Metaphor Translation in English News Headlines from a Cognitive Linguistics Approach

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Received: March 12, 2023

Accepted: March 30, 2023

Online Published: April 12, 2023

doi:10.22158/elsr.v4n2p21

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v4n2p21>

Abstract

As an essential part of news, English news headlines are especially important. This paper makes an analysis of metaphor translation from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Combining cognitive metaphor theory, the author deals with cognitive features that characterized by the people's life experience and cognitive perception. Then, the translatability of metaphor is discussed in English news headlines in order to demonstrate that metaphorical translation is complicated for the cultural differences. Sometimes a faithful translation may be at the cost of losing metaphorical meaning. Then, effective metaphor translation methods are offered. They are literal translation, free translation and the change of vehicles, all of which involves the interpretation of similarity and/or difference of two languages. By using these methods appropriately, translators will be saved out of awkward translation adversity. With all the work above done, it will be easier for English news translators to translate more appropriately and for people to have a better understanding of the English used in this field. Accurate translation will definitely promote the spread of news and strengthen its timeliness.

Keywords

cognitive linguistics, English news headlines, metaphor, translation

1. Introduction

Cognitive linguistics, based on our experience of the world and the way we perceive and conceptualize it, is an approach to language study (Brooks, 1979). Translation, essentially, is the faithful representation, in one language, of what is written or said in another language. However, as proved by practice, translation cannot be viewed as a merely linguistic undertaking, but should be regarded as an aspect of a larger domain, namely, that of communication. In the case of complex texts, translation involves not only

“linguistic proficiency” but also “encyclopedic knowledge”—it always involves a process full of contradictions. Being an important aspect of “inter-cultural communication”, translation has an important role to play in our epoch.

According to the theories of modern linguistics, language domain can be divided into three parts: field of discourse, mode of discourse and tenor of discourse (Halliday, 1994).

Different translation methods are used in different language contexts. News is an indispensable part of social life which represents contemporary society, provides people with the latest information and enables them to leap over the narrow personal boundary to embrace the broad social life. The new information age witnesses the dramatic explosion of news. Thus, it is undeniable that nowadays newspapers, as an important means to acquire information and convey attitudes and opinions, hold an increasingly important position in people’s daily life. English news headline translation has become an important part in the field of translation.

Being able to translate English appropriately and professionally is essential for conducting further research into this field. Because English news is a kind of special English, its translation methods are certainly different from general scientific and technological articles. This paper examines metaphor translation in English news headlines through a cognitive linguistics perspective thus provides some appropriate methods for its translation.

2. Cognitive Features and Translatability of Metaphor in English New Headlines

English new headlines are composed of phonetics, grammar and vocabulary (Hawkes, 1990). With the extension of its range of application and the increasing normalization of news fields, its characteristics are becoming more and more conspicuous. Metaphors are settling the foundation for English news translation as an independent discipline.

2.1 Metaphor in English News Headlines

As a kind of rhetoric, metaphor is widely used in English news headlines. Metaphor is a kind of figurative language. It uses words to indicate something different from their literal meaning, that is: one thing is described in terms of another so as to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. The comparison in a metaphor is usually implicit, but quite understandable (Richards, 1996). For over 2,000 years, metaphor has been studied within the discipline known as rhetoric (Thornley, 1999). This discipline was first established in ancient Greece, and was focused on practical instruction in how to persuade others of a particular point of view by the use of rhetorical devices. Metaphor was one of these devices, which were called tropes by rhetoricians. Due to its central importance, metaphor came to be known as the master trope. Within this approach, metaphor was characterized by the schematic form: A is B, as in *Achilles is a lion*. As a consequence, metaphor has been identified since the time of Aristotle with implicit comparison. In other words, while metaphor is based on the comparison of two categories, the comparison is not explicitly marked. This contrasts with simile, where the comparison is overtly signalled by the use of such words as “as” or “like”: Achilles is as brave as a lion; Achilles is brave, like a lion.

2.2 Cognitive Features of Metaphor

Cognitive Metaphor Theory has been highly influential both within cognitive linguistics and within the cognitive and social sciences, particularly in neighboring disciplines like cognitive psychology and anthropology. Metaphors map structure from a source domain to a target domain (Fang, 1998).

We know that the basis of metaphor is concept. People often organize many abstract concepts using specific or familiar images by means of metaphor. Many important concepts derive from our knowledge of the surroundings. Metaphor is usually used in two circumstances: Due to the limitations of thought and the lack of existed words or expressions, people have to talk about one thing by employing another; In order to convey meaning more effectively and get better communicative effects, people prefer to talking about one thing by another.

2.3 Translatability of Metaphor

Cognitive linguistics stress that experience and cognition can play an important role for the generation of language. It regards language as a product of objective fact, social culture, physiological basis and cognitive ability. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, metaphor generation has its own physiological basis and operation mechanisms, namely the structure mapping from one conceptual domain to another. Based on this theory, it is not difficult to find that all language phenomena are reasonable and can be analyzed and translated from psychological and cognitive perspectives (Hou, 1988).

Mankind has common physiological features and same psychological basis, and accordingly there are lots of similarities among the experiences got by different races in their interaction with the same objective world. This leads to the same expressions of metaphor which are equal in the cognitive perspective. However, because human experience also generate from interactions among people, social culture was another important influential factor for language. In all, expressions of metaphor in different races have equal characteristics and are translatable. Since they are influenced by different social factors, there are still room for improving their translation.

3. Methods of Metaphor Translation in English News Headlines

As is known to all, the ultimate goal of translation is intercultural exchange. It is necessary for translator to make every reader to understand while translating. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to generalize some principles suitable for its translation. In the practice of translation, we may find that now and then some words in their usual senses are very difficult to deal with because of the disparity between the English and the Chinese language. In this case, we have to resort to some special means of translation. Literal translation, free translation and amplification are three useful approaches in dealing with such awkward situations.

3.1 Literal Translation

The essence of translation is the corresponding conversion of meaning between two languages. The meaning here include concept meaning, context meaning, style meaning, image meaning, form meaning and culture meaning (Liu, 1999).

Literal translation and free translation are two basic skills of translation. Literal translation refers to translate a sentence originally, keep the original message form, including construction of sentence, meaning of the original words, metaphor of the original and so on. Translation would be fluent and easy to comprehend by target language readers. Literal translation is applied when the figurative meaning or pragmatic element of the source language is accessible to the target language. For example, we should employ literal translation for the following news headlines:

(1) “Middle East: A Cradle of Terror”. The Chinese translation of this news headline is: “*zhong dong: kong bu zhu yi de yao lan*” (中东: 恐怖主义的摇篮). “*yao lan*”, in Chinese, means the same as “cradle”, the birthplace of something important. So literal translation here is sufficient to express the meaning of source language and keeps the metaphor at the same time.

(2) “Russian Reform: Old Wine in New Bottle”. It is translated into Chinese like this: “*e luo si de gai ge: xin ping zhuang chen jiu*” (俄罗斯的改革: 新瓶装陈酒). “*xin ping*”, in Chinese, means the same as “New Bottle”, and “*chen jiu*” means “Old Wine”. In Chinese culture, the metaphorical meaning of “*xin ping zhuang chen jiu*” is to describe something that has been rebranded or repackaged as something new, but is essentially the same as before. The same metaphor is used in both source language and target language. Thus, literal translation makes the translated edition much better understood, and embodies the basic principles of “faithfulness and taste”.

(3) “Life is a journey”. The Chinese translation is “*ren sheng jiu xiang yi duan lv cheng*” (人生就像一段旅程). “*ren sheng*” in Chinese means “life” and “*lv cheng*” means “journey”. In China, the life is also compared to a journey. So literal translation here is adequate for target readers to understand.

In fact, we can conclude from those three examples that literal translation will help make our translation much easier to accomplish the following three purposes:

- (1) being faithful to the original in ideological content;
- (2) reflecting the scene and flavor of the foreign country concerned;
- (3) absorbing the new ways of expression.

3.2 Free Translation

The more successful the metaphor is, the more novelty and cognitive function the similarity contains. “The human beings’ way of thinking in a large degree is metaphorical, that is to say, people always use a familiar cognitive domain to make analogies so that they can understand a new domain better. Lakoff and Johnson pointed out the essence of metaphor is to understand or experience one thing by another. Metaphor ultimately is a kind of cognitive phenomenon, of which the theoretical method is to mapping one psychological and thinking space concept into another one.

Free translation focuses on the implication of metaphors instead of the correspondence in form. If we cannot achieve the functional equivalence by literal translations, liberal translation is within consideration. Free translation needs not pay attention to the form of the original, including construction of the original sentences, meaning of the original works, metaphor of the original and so on. But free translation does not mean to delete or add content to the original and translators must consider the original carefully, know its stress, translate it naturally, and express the meaning of the original.

Free translation is a skill which translators must know the culture of both source language and target language, and must have extensive knowledge. It is a method of sacrificing the form of the source language for the sake of elegance and intelligibility in the target language. And it is adopted only when and where it is really impossible for translators to do literal translation. Here are some examples with news headline:

(1) “Brexit Talks Hit a Brick Wall as EU Stands Firm on Irish Border”. The metaphor of “a brick wall” suggests that the Brexit talks have come to a complete stop due to the EU’s firm stance on the Irish border. However, “a brick wall”, “*Zhuan qiang*” (砖墙) in Chinese, does not contain the same metaphorical meaning as that in English. Therefore, the literal translation is inappropriate. Instead, free translation is applied here by translating “a brick wall” into “*ge qian*” (搁浅) which means a ship runs aground.

(2) “The Trump Presidency Goes Up in Smoke”. The metaphor of “go up in smoke” means that the Trump presidency has ended disastrously. Nevertheless, the literal translation of it “*zai yan wu zhong shang sheng*” (在烟雾中上升) does not make any sense. Therefore, “*yan xiao yun san*” (烟消云散), which means “vanish like smoke and clouds” is a better translation because this Chinese phrase can also be used metaphorically to describe the end of something, such as the end of a relationship or the collapse of a business or political career.

(3) “Carry coal to Newcastle.” The phrase originates from the English city of Newcastle, which was historically a major center of coal mining and export. Therefore, the idea of carrying coal to Newcastle would be redundant, as there was already an abundance of coal there. But the literal translation “*ba mei dai dao niu ka si er*” (把煤碳带到纽卡斯尔) can not be understood by Chinese readers because they are short of the background information about the Newcastle. So the proper translation will be “*duo ci yi ju*” (多此一举). This Chinese phrase does not contain a metaphor but it criticizes actions that are superfluous or pointless.

Thus, it is natural for us to draw the conclusion that free translation should be used flexibly in order to translate English news headlines correctly.

3.3 The Parallel Conversion of the Vehicle

It is well-known that different nations may have various viewpoints towards all kinds of objects existing in our world, due to which there are some conflicts of the vehicles in a metaphor. That is to say, although the vehicles are different, the meanings they stand for are similar. In this case, we cannot translate the source language into target language immediately, but convert the vehicles to the familiar images the target language readers can understand, in the way of paralleling. For example:

- (1) “diamond cut diamond”. The metaphor in this phrase is that of two equally skilled opponents competing against each other. The phrase implies that the competition is intense and evenly matched, like two diamonds cutting into each other. However, the English vehicle “diamond” cannot be translated into Chinese word “*zuan shi*” (钻石) because this word does not have the same metaphorical meaning as that in English. Instead, it is better to be translated into “*qi*” (棋) which means “chess” in English and it is often used in Chinese phrase “*qi feng dui shou*” (棋逢对手) to describe a situation where two highly intelligent or skilled individuals or groups are pitted against each other in a battle of wits or competition.
- (2) “He made the money fly”. The Chinese word for “fly” is “*fei*” (飞), however, When Chinese people describe someone who spends money recklessly and without much thought, they will use the phrase “*hua qian ru liu shui*” (花钱如流水) which means “to spend money like water”. The person is spending money very quickly and easily as if money were flowing like water. In this translation “*shui*” (水), “water”, takes place of some flying object in source language.
- (3) “Yuan Large Step”. In this headline, “yuan” is symbolism of “China”, for it is the name of Chinese currency. While translating, translators need to covert “Yuan” into “*zhong guo*” (中国) which means “China”.

In a word, the metaphorical translation is not a simple word to word translation from source language to the target language, but a process from one mental space to another mental space under the background of different nations, cultures, religions and so on. The metaphorical translation is a complicated cognitive process.

4. Conclusion

Since metaphor plays an essential role in different fields, the translation of metaphorical language is of great significance. Though many translators have done much work on the study of it, some problems are still there that need to be solved in achieving functional equivalence for various readers of languages.

It has become common that there are many metaphor sentences in the news headlines of English, which can be more attractive by readers. This thesis is about metaphor translation in English news headlines. It begins with a general introduction of English news headlines translation. And then the characteristics of metaphor are followed. Finally, methods of metaphor translation in English news headlines are given.

As for the translators, on the one hand, they must be skilled in analyzing the connotative meaning and rhetorical feature of the metaphor, enriching themselves with a deep understanding of the two cultures, on the other hand, he should be expert in using the corresponded strategy as proper as possible in certain occasions, in order to preserve the original taste of the source language.

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