

Original Paper

The Study of Metaphor Translation in News English from the Perspective of Relevance Translation Theory

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Abstract

With rapid globalization, people need to read news reports every day to keep pace with the changing world. News, especially English news, has become one of the most effective and fastest means to disseminate information in different languages and cultural backgrounds. The metaphor, as an essential rhetorical method, is always used in news English. The correct understanding of metaphors in the news plays a crucial role in obtaining news information accurately. Therefore, it is necessary to achieve the optimal metaphor translation in news English, so as to promote communication and mutual understanding between different cultures. This paper adopts the relevance translation theory as the theoretical basis. Firstly, the research on the translation of metaphor and news English is reviewed. Secondly, the overview and applicability of the relevance translation theory are elaborated. Finally, under the guidance of this theory, this paper analyzes the three translation methods adopted by translators in translating metaphors, based on the specific examples of news English.

Keywords

news English, metaphor, relevance translation theory, translation methods

1. Introduction

News English provides an opportunity for people around the world to learn about each other's cultures and traditions. The metaphor in news English is a means of expressing, which will make expressions more vivid and impressive, arouse the imagination, and attract readers' attention. However, it is not easy to translate it, as the metaphor is formed by socio-cultural beliefs and culture-specific attitudes, and is also influenced by thought, experience, and social practice. The differences in the use of metaphors reflect different cultures. Accordingly, all these factors should not be ignored in metaphor translations.

Translators should not only accurately understand the metaphorical meaning of the source text, but also make a vivid translation, so as to ensure successful cognitive interaction. The optimal translation of metaphor requires the translator to analyze the specific context, which can fully display the original intention and meet the target audience's language habits. Relevance theory mainly emphasizes the effect of context and the mode of reasoning, and translation is a process of reasoning and cognizing language, which have something in common. Furthermore, people's understanding of metaphors is closely related to their cognitive environment and cultural background. Therefore, relevance translation theory can be used in the metaphor translation in news English. Translators should first consciously speculate the author's intentions and exactly understand the meaning of metaphors, and then flexibly use some translation methods under the guidance of relevancy translation theory, so as to accurately translate the metaphor in news English.

2. Studies on Metaphor Translation

Metaphor and translation are two separate disciplines, and new research results are produced every year. However, it was not until the 1970s that scholars paid much attention to the translation of metaphor.

Abroad, Menachem Dagut "took the lead in emphasizing the importance of metaphor in translation studies, and also pointed out that translators paid little attention to it" (Dagut, 1976, pp. 21-33).

Newmark put forward seven methods of translating metaphor in *A Textbook of Translation*: "(1) Reproduce the same metaphor image in the target language; (2) Replace the metaphor image in the source language with the appropriate image in the target language; (3) Replace metaphor with simile and keep the image; (4) Combine the simile and sense; (5) Transform metaphor into sense; (6) Omit the metaphor; (7) Combine the metaphor and sense." (Newmark, 2001, pp. 104-113) He mainly discussed the metaphor translation from the perspective of the rhetorical view of metaphor, which is a source language-oriented translation method. In the 1980s, the cognitive linguistics of Lakoff and Johnson had a profound impact on the development of metaphor, and also brought methodological implications to the metaphor translation. Teilanyo proposed "four translation methods: conversion, omission, modification and retention in the context of specific texts" (Teilanyo, 2007, pp. 309-326).

In China, most of the studies on metaphor translation are conducted from the perspective of pragmatics. Many Chinese scholars have found the influence of cultural differences on metaphor translation, and began to study metaphor translation from the perspective of cultural differences. In 2008, Duan Xinmiao pointed out that the key to metaphor translation is how to deal with the image as the carrier in the source text (Duan, 2008, pp. 86-87). With the development of cognitive linguistics, more and more Chinese scholars have turned the perspective of metaphor to cognitive linguistics. In 2005, Zhang Meifang published *Cognitive Processes in Metaphor Translation through Schema Analysis*, in which she proposed that when translating metaphors, translators should first understand the concept code in the source text and then encode according to the culture and context of the target language, so as to generate a version that is similar to the source text in the target language culture. (Zhang, 2005, pp.

43-46)

3. News English and Metaphor

3.1 Translation of News English

As news English has some features, such as concise words, vivid words and more rhetorical devices, the translation of it requires special translation methods and principles to guide. However, the barriers between English and Chinese languages and cultures, the difference of ideologies and the lack of effective theoretical guidance have brought difficulties to the translation of news English.

Traditional studies of news translation believe that different translation methods and techniques should be used according to the content and purpose of news English, so as to maximize the transmission of news information. In China, many scholars have studied the translation of news English. In Zhu Yige's *The Linguistic Features and Translation of English News* and Zhang Jian's *English in News Publications*, they analyze the purpose and features of news English and put forward different translation principles and techniques. Zhang Jian believes that translators should strictly abide by the translation criteria and that it is best to reproduce the rhetorical features of the source text in the translation, which can make the news easier to understand and thus enhance its readability. It can be seen that his views are confined to structural and rhetorical perspectives. (Fang, 2014, pp. 4-5)

Cognitive linguistics provides a new perspective for news English translation, especially metaphor translation. As a rhetorical device, the metaphor not only makes the language of news more vivid, but also reflects people's thinking about issues. Cognitive linguists believe that people's understanding of metaphors is closely related to their knowledge, cultural backgrounds and past experiences. Therefore, people from different cultural backgrounds will have different connections when facing the same metaphor.

3.2 Metaphors in News English

The metaphor may be a word, a phrase or a sentence, from the perspective of the number of words constituting metaphor in news English. Here are the examples.

(a) Metaphors Made up of a Single Word

Example 1

Source Text: Meanwhile, the acquisition of land for mining of coal, iron ore and bauxite is sowing great discontent in the "mineral belt" of central and northeast India.

Target Text: 同时，获取土地用于开采煤矿、铁矿和铝土矿的行为在印度中部和东北部的“矿带”也激起了强烈的不满。

(b) Metaphors Made up of a Phrase

Example 2

Source Text: But as the web grows beyond infancy, many of the world's leading telecommunication and Internet companies are aiming to cut the Web's umbilical cord.

Target Text: 不过，随着因特网慢慢度过其“幼儿期”，趋于成熟，许多走在世界前列的电信和因

特网公司正在想法要将其“脐带”切除。

(c) Metaphors Made up of a Sentence

Example 3

Source Text: Dinana Catter points out, “Adam gave Eve a rib—the transplant. People see that it offers a ray of hope. By donating the organs, in some way the person they loved lives on.”

Target Text: 戴安娜卡特指出：“夏娃是由亚当的一根肋骨制造出来的—这是第一次器官移植。人们看到这给别人带来了一束希望之光。通过器官移植，在某种程度上，你所爱之人的生命得以延续”。

4. Relevance Translation Theory

4.1 An Overview

In 1986, the French linguist Sperber and the British linguist Wilson jointly published their pragmatics book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, in which they proposed the relevance theory, an important theory of cognitive pragmatics. (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) The core of this theory is the ostensive-inferential communication model. Relevance theory has a positive impact on pragmatics, linguistics, literature, psychology, philosophy and other fields, such as translation studies. Ernst August Gutt, who is Sperber and Wilson’s student, studied the theory of translation from a cognitive perspective, and then proposed the relevance translation theory in his book *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*. The principle of relevance translation holds that relevance theory is a process of interpretative application. It is similar to using indirect speech in one language, but unlike it, translation takes place between two languages. The translation refers to the target text that has an ideal degree of similarity to the source text. This reachable ideal similarity is the optimal correlation emphasized by relevance theory.

The essence of translation is a process of expression and inference. In this process, the translator seeks the optimal correlation between the cognitive environment of the source and target language reader, so that the target language reader can obtain sufficient contextual effect without too much reasoning effort. The translator should choose the relevant context hypothesis from the potential context, and collect communicative clues from every aspect of the source text, so as to deduce the communicative purpose of the target language reader. At the same time, correct assumptions should be made about the target language reader's cognitive environment. Translation should conform to the intention of both source and target language readers.

4.2 Applicability in Metaphor Translation

Relevance theory also has a profound impact on the translation of metaphors. Theoretically, metaphor is a cognitive tool of a culture, so the original appearance of this tool should be restored when the cognitive tool of one culture is transformed into another culture. From the perspective of the special cognitive context of intercultural communication, metaphor translation is the process of transmitting the cognitive mode expressed in the language of one culture to another culture with the target language.

“The translator should seek for the corresponding metaphor in target language according to the cognitive structure of metaphors. The translation should both produce a metaphorical associative meaning and retain its unique image” (Ye, 2010, p. 122).

Relevance theory mainly emphasizes the effect of context and the mode of reasoning, and translation is a process of reasoning and cognizing language, so the two have something in common. Since people’s understanding of metaphor is closely related to their cognitive environment and cultural background, translators should fully take account of the cognitive and environmental factors in relation to target language readers, so that readers can obtain sufficient contextual effect after reasoning efforts. The same expression in different context shows different meanings. In order to realize the desired effect and the equivalence of language, the translator must properly understand the meaning of the language by reasoning and analyzing the contextual information. In consequence, relevance translation theory is suitable to support the study of metaphor translation in news English.

5. Metaphor Translation Methods

According to relevance translation theory, there are three metaphor translation methods, namely literal translation, paraphrase and substitution.

5.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation, with accurate wording, proper style and equivalent conversion based on the same cognitive structure, is commonly used in metaphor translation of news English. Despite different cultural backgrounds, human beings as a whole have many common factors, which determine that in language and literature, English and Chinese have many similar artistic moods. The same image can evoke the same association in the minds of readers who use different languages. Therefore, in news English, literal translation can be used in translating those image metaphors that can cause the same feelings, so as to retain the original metaphor image, and as much as possible to show the original rhetoric devices, language structure and language style.

Example 1

Source Text: Wallstreet is catching the Asian Flu.

Target Text: 华尔街患上“亚洲流感”。

In 1998, the Asian financial crisis dealt a severe blow to the economy of many Asian countries, and its impact also spread to other countries and regions in the world. In this example, comparing “Asian financial crisis” to “Asian Flu” vividly reflects the profound impact of this financial crisis on American society, making the translation unique, humorous and easy to understand. This metaphor expresses the fact that the United States has caught the “Asian flu” and its economy is starting to collapse. When translating such metaphors, we should directly transfer the images in the source text, and compare abstract things with familiar phenomena so that the news content can be understood at first sight.

5.2 Paraphrase

Paraphrase is an assimilation of metaphors with different cognitive structures. Due to the difference in

thinking mode caused by the differences of languages and cultures, the same metaphorical image may generate different associations in English and Chinese. When the literal translation will make the reader confused, it is advisable to paraphrase it. As the image of the metaphor can neither be retained nor replaced, translators should translate the meaning implied by the metaphor in non-figurative language. Paraphrase refers to accurately expressing the content of the source text without restriction of the form of source text.

Example 2

Source Text: Newhouse praised the Pompidou Center for “the whole idea of knocking art off its pedestal and making it a far more democratic experience,” and called the Lloyd’s tower “the most important embodiment of the high- tech movement.

Target Text: 纽豪斯赞扬了蓬皮杜中心所体现的这一完整理念——“使艺术不再高高在上，使其更加平民化”，并把劳埃德大厦称作“高科技运动最重要的体现”。

The metaphor in this example is a stock metaphor. “Knock art off its pedestal”, an idiom in English, is a fitting and natural metaphor in this sentence. If it is translated literally into “把艺术从基座上打下来”，Chinese readers will be confused. Therefore, the translator paraphrases “knocking art off its pedestal” into “使艺术不再高高在上”，which retains its meaning implied by the metaphor.

Example 3

Source Text: The Chinese market is a bottomless pit.

Target Text: 中国的市场潜力巨大。

This is a sentence spoken by the CEO of Nike, who visited Shanghai. It is very inappropriate to literally translate the metaphor “a bottomless pit” into “无底洞”，because in Chinese, the expression “无底洞” means a hole that can never be filled up. However, the metaphorical image “a bottomless pit” in the source language implies that it has great potential for development, which vividly conveys the development prospect of the market to readers. If the whole sentence is translated into “中国市场好比是一个无底洞”，the target text will not only fail to express the speaker's hope and confidence in the Chinese market, but also generate a derogatory meaning. Therefore, the translator abandons the original image, paraphrasing “a bottomless pit” into “潜力巨大”。

5.3 Substitution

This translation method of metaphor is based on the assimilation of dissimilar cognitive structures. Different images in English and Chinese may produce the same semantic associations and form some metaphors with the same meaning, showing the conflict of two cognitive methods. If the translator adopts the literal translation, the cultural conflict will not appear, but the reader will be confused about the meaning of the target text. The translator can replace the cognitive mode of the source language culture with that of the target language culture, translating the carrier of metaphor in the source text into an image which is more acceptable in the target language culture, and adding the necessary explanatory words. Such translation can realize communication with appropriate image and fluent expression, reproducing the style and charm of the source text.

Example 4

Source Text: It was the first time that Mr. Clinton, who is facing the most severe political crisis of his career, picked the Pentagon as the backdrop for a major address.

Target Text: 这是克林顿在他的政治生涯中面临的最严峻的危机，他把五角大楼（美国国防部）作为解决这一重大问题的挡箭牌。

In this example, the original meaning of the word “backdrop” means “背景” in Chinese. If the literal translation method is adopted in this sentence, the target text will be slightly stilted and fail to express the accurate meaning of the source text, making the reader confused. In this case, the translator can substitute the image in English with the semantically equivalent image familiar to the target language reader. Therefore, according to the context and the intention of source text, the translator translates “backdrop” into “挡箭牌”, which perfectly conveys the associative meaning of source text and is conducive to readers' understanding.

Example 5

Source Text: The 40-plus summiteers are a mixed bag from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Americas and the Pacific.

Target Text: 法语国家首脑会议是个大杂烩，有来自欧洲、非洲、中东、亚洲、美洲和太平洋地区的四十个国家的首脑参加。

In this example, the word “mixed” visually describes the complexity and loose connections of the summit of Francophone countries. If it is translated literally into “混合体”, the emotion and meaning of the source text can not be expressed accurately. As a result, the translator adopts substitution, translating “a mixed bag” into “大杂烩” which is a similar expression in Chinese. This method transforms the metaphorical image of source text and makes the target text generate the same rhetorical effect as the source text. In fact, on the premise of not violating translation norms and not causing mistranslation, the translator can substitute the image in source language with similar semantic image and expression in target language, realizing the optimal metaphor translation in news English.

6. Conclusion

The metaphor in news English can not only enhance its entertainment effect and aesthetic value, but also help readers understand the content of news better. In the translation, we should take account of both the meaning of metaphor in the source text and the language habits of intended readers, and then maximize the transmission of the cognitive information in the source text by flexibly using a variety of translation methods.

This paper analyzes the translation methods of metaphors in news English from the perspective of relevance translation theory. The first method is to preserve metaphorical imagery, which can be used if the meaning of the same image in target and the source language are the same. The second method is to eliminate metaphorical imagery. Sometimes, owing to cultural differences, target language readers will misunderstand or be confused about the metaphorical images of the source language. In this case, in

order to achieve the function of news English to convey information, the translator should interpret the meaning of metaphors. Although this translation method ignores the function of metaphor to modify language, it can ensure the best relevance. The third method is to replace metaphorical images in the source language. If the same metaphorical image has different meaning in the target and source language culture, the translator can find a metaphorical image with the same meaning in the target language to replace it.

In short, the translation of metaphors in news English is a complex work and not simply a literal conversion of different languages. On account of many differences in English and Chinese language and culture, people have different ways of thinking and expressing themselves. Therefore, translators should first consciously speculate and understand the author's intentions, exactly understand the meaning of metaphors, and then flexibly use literal translation, paraphrase, substitution and other translation methods from the perspective of relevancy translation theory, so as to accurately translate the metaphor in news English.

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