

Grammatical Metaphor and Translation

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Abstract: There is a prevalent phenomenon in language that similar meaning can be expressed by different language forms. It is dealt with in the terms of “grammatical metaphor” by the famous linguist M.A.K. Halliday, including ideational metaphors and interpersonal metaphors. Ideational metaphors are realized by the transference of function of the six processes in the transitivity system. Interpersonal metaphors include metaphors of modality and metaphors of mood. Five standards was first proposed by Halliday and later the Attic and Doric forms are used to replace the metaphorical and congruent form. The mastery of grammatical metaphor is helpful in English learning, especially in translation and discourse analysis.

Key words: Grammatical metaphor; Congruent form; Translation

Introduction

The term “Grammatical metaphor” was raised by Halliday in the 1980s, though the phenomenon always exists in language. This way of expression is one prominent characteristic of adult discourse. Grammatical metaphor arises from the remapping of semantic and lexicogrammatical systems of a language. The variants of the same meaning are actually synonymous rather than totally the same. In Functional Grammar, metaphor is treated as “variation in the expression of meanings,” rather than “variation in the meaning of a given expression” (Halliday, 342). It occurs at the lexicogrammatical level, expressing similar meaning by different forms so that it has same signified but different signifier.

1 Ideational Metaphors

The central concept of ideational metaphors is the transitivity system of language, which is classified into six processes: material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational and existential. According to Halliday (1994: 343), the variation in ideational metaphors occurs in the place of choices in the transitivity system. Variation in any of the selection will result in ideational metaphors. One typical example from Halliday (1994: 346) is that “The fifth day saw them at the summit.” The congruent form of the sentence might be: “They arrived at the summit on the fifth day.” The actor is “they” and the circumstance is “the fifth day” while the participants are phenomenon and sener. In this way, the original material process is transferred into

the mental process in the incongruent form.

1.1 Nominalization

Nominalization is a process of forming nouns from other parts of speech. Lexical variation often occurs in the grammar-metaphorical form of expression. Nominalization is the single most powerful resource for creating metaphor (Halliday, 352). It is a kind of “thingization” (胡壮麟, 2005: 312) in language expression, i.e., process is taken as thing or quality as thing. For example,

- (a) The committee decides the matter.
- (b) The committee makes a decision about the matter.

The function of the verb “decides” in sentence (a) is realized by its noun form “decision” in sentence (b). Grammatical metaphors do not only expand the way people view the world by turning dynamic state to static manner, but also provides a more objective way of describing the experiences. When quality is treated as thing, one attribute of the object is realized by noun in the incongruent form, rather than adjective in the congruent form.

1.2 Verbalization

Another phenomenon in ideational metaphors is verbalization. It refers to that non-process is taken as process, i.e., verb is used to express the meaning which can not be expressed by verb in the congruent form. The function of conjunction in the congruent form is replaced by verb in the incongruent form. For example,

- (c) Because she was careless, a serious mistake was made.
- (d) Her carelessness led to a serious mistake.

The causal relation by the conjunction “because” in sentence (c) is realized by the verb phrase “led to” in the second one. According to Zhu Yongsheng (2006), verb can also functions as temporal, subordinating and conditional conjunctions in the incongruent form.

2 Interpersonal Metaphors

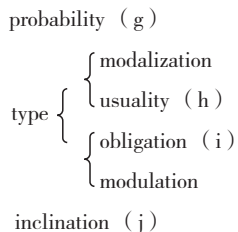
2.1 Metaphors of modality

Modality refers to the intermediate ground of meaning that lies between yes and no or between the positive and negative polarity. In the congruent form, modality is realized by “a modal element within the clause” (Halliday, 354), such as probably, possibly and certainly. In the metaphorical form of expression, the modal element is replaced by “a separate, projecting clause in a hypotactic clause complexes” (Halliday, 354). For example,

- (e) He probably knows the right answer.
- (f) I think he knows the right answer.

The function of “probably” is realized by the clause “I think” in its metaphorical variant.

According to Halliday, the classification of modality can be shown by the following figure:



The types of modality can be distinguished by orientation, dividing modality into subjective and objective modality, and explicit and implicit variants. Take four sentences for instance, (g) “I think he knows the right answer.” belongs to subjective explicit modality, (h) “It’s usual for him to go to school on foot.” objective explicit modality, (i) “I want Mary to come here.” subjective implicit modality and (j) “Beth is keen to help.” objective implicit modality.

Then modality is judged by the value of high, medium and low, which can be applied to both the modal element in the congruent form and the clause in the incongruent form. For example, certain, probable and possible are ranked from high to medium to low in expressing possibility.

The last factor of metaphors modality is polarity, which includes positive and negative polarity. What is worth mentioning is the transference of value in negative sentences. For instance,

(k) I know she doesn’t know the answer.

(l) I imagine she doesn’t know the answer.

(m) I don’t know she knows the answer.

(n) I can’t imagine she knows the answer.

The value of (k) is higher than that of (l). However, if the negative point is transferred to the first clause of the sentence, their value is been changed, i.e., the value of (m) is lower than that of (n).

2.2 Metaphors of mood

Another type of interpersonal metaphors is metaphors of mood. It is used to express the function of speech with four basic functions of statement. Metaphors of mood occurs when the function of one mood is realized by another. For example, the congruent form of command is “Do…”! The metaphorical transference occurs by the use of statement mood in (o) “You should close the door.” and question mood in (p) “Would you mind closing the door?” to express the meaning conveyed by command mood congruently.

3 Translation

The theory of grammatical metaphor is connected with translation especially the translation of scientific discourse. Understanding

grammatical metaphor in the source language is helpful to improve the quality of target language. Since grammatical metaphors occur frequently in scientific texts and news reports, it can serve as one of the sign of the stylistic feature of this kind of texts.

Nominalization is a common phenomenon in English, which requires special attention in translation. Besides, in Chinese verbs are usually used to express the same meaning. For instance, China’s successful launch of Shenzhou IX spacecraft caused tremendous repercussion throughout the world. The translation of this sentence could be that “中国成功发射‘神舟九号’航天飞船，在全世界引起了巨大的反响。” The noun “launch” is translated by the verb “发射” in Chinese.

In Chinese-English translation, the adoption of grammatical metaphors may be a better choice than translation without metaphorical transference. Another example given by Liu Lixin and Zheng Shuming (2005: 106) is “乡里消息传到城里，城里的绅士立刻大哗。” The first version is that “When the news about the countryside reached the cities, the gentry there immediately burst into uproar.” The second is that “When the news about the countryside reached the cities, it caused immediate uproar among the gentry.” The two versions are grammatically right. In the first one, however, the subjects of the two clauses are different. Thus the second is better, more coherent.

Conclusion

This paper explores grammatical metaphor from its classification, standards of congruent forms, and application in language learning. The understanding of grammatical metaphor are helpful in English teaching and learning, especially in translation and discourse analysis.

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