

The Research on Application of Grammatical Metaphor in English Meta-linguistic Texts

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Abstract: This paper purports to illuminate the application value of grammatical metaphor from an integrated perspective of functional analysis and cognitive analysis with a corpus-based analysis of English metalinguistic texts (EMTS). The notion of grammatical metaphor has long been a hot issue since it is first proposed by Halliday as one of the core concepts of systemic-functional grammar and in turn of functional stylistics. Recent years have witnessed some tentative efforts to investigate the application value of grammatical metaphor. Meanwhile, with the rapid development of cognitive linguistics and cognitive pragmatics, cognitive stylistics arises as a new interdisciplinary perspective on the style of the text. Likewise, systemic functional linguistics has undergone a cognitive turn in recent years.

1. Introduction

Metaphor has long been a fascinating and controversial issue in linguistics. In Western countries, strenuous study of metaphor dates back to the Aristotle-Plato debate. To Aristotle and his followers, metaphor is merely an adornment to language (i.e. a trope); to Plato and his associates, however, it embodies the nature of language (and even of human beings). This controversy, as Ortony (1979) notes, has developed into modern linguistics as the distinction between nonconstructivism and constructivism. Whereas non-constructivists, by following the tradition of rhetoric, view metaphor as a figurative device to refine language, constructivists tend to envisage it as a means to interact between language, reality and thought, which simultaneously embodies the nature of language and the working mechanism of human mind [1].

As a whole, however, traditional approaches to metaphor are generally confined to the lexical level. But as Halliday argues, metaphorical variation is in most cases “lexicogrammatical rather than simply lexical.” Halliday thus proposes the notion grammatical metaphor to designate metaphorical expressions involving lexicogrammatical transferences of one kind or another. As Halliday & Matthiessen argue, lexical and grammatical metaphors are not two different phenomena; instead, they are “both aspects of the same general metaphorical strategy by which we expand our semantic resources for construing experience.

2. Ideational metaphor in EMTs

2.1 Nominalization in EMTs.

As a sub-genre of scientific discourse, EMTs abound in nominalized expressions. In this section, the statistic result of an empirical analysis of nominalization in the EMT corpus will be reported, based on which the distribution pattern and stylistic value of nominalization will be expounded.

In lexicology, nominalization refers to an aspect of the word-formation process of affixation or derivation whereby nouns are derived from verbs or adjectives by adding nominalizing suffixes.

As Halliday observes, nominalization is the single most powerful resource for creating grammatical metaphor. For example:

Adopting the different perspectives suggested above, phonetics can be viewed as a group of phonetic sciences, separated as ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY OF SPEECH, ARTICULATORY PHONETICS (which often tends to deal with the identification and

classification of individual sounds), ACOUSTIC PHONETICS (sometimes restricted to instrumental analysis and measurement of sound waves) and AUDITORY or PERCEPTUAL PHONETICS [2].

In this example, there are 4 nominalized expressions. Now take the nominalized phrase “the identification and classification of individual sounds for example” for example. This nominalized phrase can be rephrased as “the process in which individual sounds are identified and classified”. Here what is encoded congruently as a relative clause is condensed into the suffixes so that the figure (process) is transferred into two elements (things). In this sense, nominalization is a process of thingness. The lexical density is increased by condensing the associated contextual information into a nominal expression.

2.2 Transitivity Metaphor in EMTs.

In order to map out the distribution pattern of transitivity metaphors in EMTs, an empirical study is conducted in this project. The statistic analysis starts with the identification of transitivity metaphors in the corpus. Then all the instances of transitivity metaphors are manually labeled with the symbol [tm]. After that, the instances are categorized and calculated.

As Halliday observes, transitivity is one of the lexicogrammatical realizations of the ideational metafunction of language, which can be split into two sub-metafunctions: experiential and logical. Whereas the experiential metafunction enables people to construe their experience of the world, including the world around themselves and the world in their minds, the logical metafunction enables people to construct the logical relations in the construal of human experience of the world. In this sense, language is then postulated to be related to the field of discourse. It is used to represent what is going on, including happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming. In the case of EMTs, metalanguage enables people to construe human experience of language.

3. Interpersonal metaphor in EMTs

3.1 Mood Metaphor in EMTs.

The interpersonal component represents the speaker’s meaning potential as an intruder. It is the participatory function of language. Language is then viewed as doing something. The interpersonal component enables the speaker to intrude himself into the context of situation. With interpersonal resources, the speaker can not only express the role relationships associated with the situation, such as informer-doubter, questioner-respondent, and so on; he can also express his attitudes and judgments and seek to influence the attitudes and judgements of others. The interpersonal metafunction is realized lexicogrammatically by the systems of mood, modality, persons, etc.; it can also be realized phonologically by the key system, including the rise-fall contour of the tone system and melody.

3.2 Modality Metaphor in EMTs.

As a sub-genre of academic discourse, EMTs are mainly focused on the publicizing and instruction of metalinguistic knowledge. Therefore, the authors do not attach much importance to the interpersonal aspect of the communication. On the other hand, a noticeable difference is also identified between introductory textbooks and academic monographs. Although the gap is not as great as that for the mood metaphors, it is still noteworthy. Introductory textbooks are compiled to publicize metalinguistic knowledge to readers who are not quite familiar with the discipline(s). For this intended readership, the author has to adapt the content as well as the way in which the metalinguistic knowledge is presented. Consequently, EMTs of this category are more reader-friendly than academic monographs [3]. The authors of introductory EMTs attach more importance to the accessibility of their products. Interpersonal meanings (including probabilities and obligations) are more explicitly expressed in metaphors of modality than in their corresponding finite verbal operators. In systemic functional linguistics, modality is concerned with the various intermediate possibilities of finiteness between the positive and negative poles. In English, modality

can be realized either congruently by finite verbal operators, or metaphorically by temporal or modal phrases and clauses. This suggests that the metaphor of modality means the substitution of phrasal or clausal expressions of modalization (including probabilities and usualities) and modulation (including obligations and inclinations) for finite verbal operators.

3.3 Passivization in EMTs.

As Givón postulates, passivization has three functional domains: (a) topic assignment -- making the non-agent (object) the primary topic of the clause, (b) impersonalization -- suppressing the identity of the active's agent/initiation in the passive clause, and (c) transitivity/detransitivization -- construing the event as the resulting state of an action. Seen from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, these three functional domains correspond respectively to the textual, interpersonal and ideational metafunctions of language. In this section, focus will be laid on the interpersonal aspect of passivization, particularly the stylistic value of passivization in EMTs.

3.4 Person Shift in EMTs.

A linguistic phenomenon related to the impersonalizing functional domain of passivization is person shift. The term person shift refers to the alteration between the personal subject and the impersonal subject in the major and/or minor clause. Compare the following two realizations of the same metalinguistic phenomenon:

a) Unfortunately, what may appear to be a reasonable division of labour between phoneticians and phonologists is frequently discussed in the context of assumptions about the 'real' nature of speech.

b) Unfortunately, we (people, linguists, etc.) frequently discuss what may appear to be a reasonable division of labour between phoneticians and phonologists in the context of assumptions about the 'real' nature of speech.

In the active version (139b), the subject is identical to the personal actor of the process of discussing. In the passive version (139a), the personal actor (i.e. we, people, linguists, etc.) is backgrounded, and the Abstract impersonal goal (i.e. what may appear to be a reasonable division of labour between phoneticians and phonologists) is foregrounded as the subject. The shift between the personal subject and the impersonal subject makes the passive construction more detached and objective.

3.5 The Ideational-interpersonal Tension and Its Implications.

In systemic functional linguistics, grammatical metaphor is defined as a relocation in the mappings between semantics (i.e. meaning) and lexicogrammar (i.e. wording). In ideational grammar, human experience of the world is encoded in one way or another distinct from the congruent realization so that some metaphorical meaning arises. As Halliday & Matthiessen observe, there are three types of phenomenon: sequence, figure and element. Their congruent lexicogrammatical realizations are respectively clause complex, clause and element of clause structure: group/phrase. In ideational metaphor, however, they are metaphorically realized respectively by clause, element of clause structure: group/phrase, and element of the clause structure: thing. Consequently, as Halliday & Matthiessen point out, ideational metaphors demonstrate downgraded rank-shifts. As Halliday & Matthiessen put it, "the general tendency for ideational metaphor is to 'downgrade' the domain of grammatical realization of a semantic sequence, figure or element—from clause nexus to clause, from clause to group/phrase, and even from group or phrase to word [4].

4. Textual metaphor in EMTs

In systemic functional linguistics, the textual component is defined to represent the speaker's text-forming potential. This component expresses the relation of the language which enables the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions to be actualized into a coherent text. This is the

component which provides the texture. It expresses the relation of the language to its context, including the linguistic context (i.e. what has been said or written before) and the context of situation.

A comparison between these three metafunctions shows that the first two metafunctions are concerned with the relationship between the text and the world and are thus “extrinsic,” the textual metafunction is concerned with the relationship within the text and so is “intrinsic” in nature.

Several metatials indicate that marked themes are not quite frequently used in EMTs. Among the 2,497 sentences in the EMT corpus, only 380 instances of marked themes are used, with an average rate of 15.22%. This reflects the general tendency of straightforward presentation of scientific and technical discourse. As has been discussed above, a marked theme refers to an element shifted to the initial position of the clause to which it normally does not belong. As the incongruent starting point of the message conveyed by the clause, the marked theme is of greater prominence than the unmarked (i.e. congruent) theme. Here is an example [5]:

a) But if we are aiming for precision and clarity, English, like other natural languages, cannot be used for metalinguistic purposes without modification.

b) But English, like other natural languages, cannot be used for metalinguistic purposes without modification if we are aiming for precision and clarity.

A is what is termed in traditional rhetoric as the periodical sentence, in which the subordinate if-clause is shifted to the initial position and functions as part of the theme of the sentence. This marked positioning makes the if-clause more prominent in the sentence than in the more congruent version of the sentence b, which is traditionally called the loose sentence. A comparison between introductory textbooks and academic monographs indicates that marked themes are more frequently distributed in the former sub-genre than in the latter one (18.80% vs. 12.63%). This reflects introductory textbooks’ greater accommodation towards the intended readership than that of academic monographs. In the case of introductory textbooks, the intended readers are usually people who are not quite familiar with the metalinguistic knowledge publicized in the textbooks, whereas in the case of academic monographs, the typical (intended) readers have mastered adequate expertise in the discipline.

5. Conclusions

In the previous chapters, the application cases of grammatical metaphor is investigated from an integrated perspective of functional stylistics and cognitive stylistics, supported by an empirical analysis of the distribution pattern of various types of grammatical metaphors in the EMT corpus.

References

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