

英语笑话与幽默翻译点滴

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摘 要

本文论述了英语笑话与幽默的独特之处, 翻译此类作品时应注意的问题和应掌握的某些技巧, 以及对学生学习英语所起的作用等。

关键词: 笑话; 幽默; 特点; 条件; 语言的结构; 运用

1 概 说

翻译就是将某种语言所表达的思想内容准确无误、通顺流畅地用另一种语言重新表达出来。翻译又可分为文学与科技两大类。科技翻译语法结构简单, 修辞造句较朴素, 但它要求概念清楚、逻辑无误、数据确凿、通顺可读; 文学翻译则除语法结构较复杂, 讲究修辞造句等之外, 更要考虑原作的体裁风格。就这个意义上而言, 它更近于艺术的再创造。

笑话与幽默是一种杂体文学。由于它同样具有“用语言来创造形象、典型和性格, 用语言来反映现实事件、自然景象和思维过程”的特征, 因而它的翻译应归于文学翻译之列, 但它的体现形式又是戏剧性的, 且语言精炼简洁、朴素无华, 三言两语就露真情, 翻译时要做到保持原作那直率而风趣、巧妙而诙谐的风格, 起到使人忍俊不禁的效果。如:

On the last day of a university course, we attended a lecture given by the millionaire founder of a large company. "I hope you'll have some questions for our visitor," the course director said. "What does one ask a millionaire?"

There was a moment of silence. Then a female voice called out, "Are you married?"

会议主持人要求与会者向作报告的百万富翁提问题, 冲破沉寂的却是一个女声问道: “您结婚了吗?” 没有任何修饰之词, 可主题表达得十分清楚, 含意也十分深刻, 令人深思。又如:

Department-store automatic answering machine: "If you are calling to order or send money, press 5". "If you are calling to register a complaint, press 6459834822955392." "Have you a good day."

百货公司的自动答话机告知: “若是订货付款, 请按键 5” 一个数字, 清楚简捷。 “若要投诉, 请按 6459834822955392” 16 个数字, 且序号混乱, 令顾客望而生畏, 只好把满腹怨气

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吞进肚里去。

这则笑话连数字在内总共 30 个字可谓言简意深。

有的笑话、幽默,一看就会令人发笑,如:

As my husband and I were walking with our ten-month-old grandson, a dignified woman stopped us and said, "Isn't he adorable! How old is he?"

Before I could answer, my husband quickly said, "I'll be fifty this month."

此情此景肯定是问奶奶手中抱的婴孩有多大,可老头却抢先答道,他这个月就要满 55 岁了,岂不可笑?但有的幽默、笑话,英美人看了会捧腹大笑,而我们却瞠目以对,觉得没什么可笑的,如下面两例:

Discussing the environment with his friend, one man said, "which of our natural resources do you think will become exhausted first?" "The taxpayer," answered the other.

最先枯竭的自然资源怎么会是纳税者呢?不是牛头不对马嘴吗?这是因为西方社会税收名目繁多,人们对纳税恨之入骨却又无可奈何,用这则笑话来发泄其不满。再如:

This is a strange country we live in. muses Jay leno. "when it comes to electing a president, we get two choices. But when we have to select a Miss America, we get 50!"

把选举美国总统候选人只有 2 名与选美候选人却有 50 名两者相提并论,以此来表示对总统选举的某种情绪。

由此可见,翻译英语的笑语与幽默是很难的,它所反映的内容不仅与各国、各民族的政治、经济、历史文化以及风土人情都密切相关,而且作为笑话与幽默其基调还必须是善意的戏谑,机智而含蓄逗乐,并通过那些乖谬和不通情理的现象让具有深刻内在联系的东西放出精神的火花。因此,在从事翻译时必须处理好以下几个环节,这就是选材、理解、表达、审校和定稿,如何才能处理好这五者的关系呢?

选材是首先要注意的问题,除了其它原则外,要把可笑性与可理解性两者结合起来,其次是要紧紧把握住理解和表达这两大核心,前者是翻译的基础,后者是翻译的最终体现。如何才能做到理解正确呢?一般来说应具备以下三个条件:

- (1) 相当的文学修养。语文上有一定造诣,才能译文生动活泼,深入浅出,引人入胜;
- (2) 足够的英语水平。这主要是指语法和词汇,这两者是理解原作的关键。语法分析无误、词义选择得当,一般说来,也就能达到把一种语言的内涵用另一种语言表达出来的目的;
- (3) 知识面广博。文学作品源于生活、高于生活,它反映现实并对未来有影响作用。各行各业都有笑源、笑料,加之当今科技发展迅速,各学科相互交叉渗透,所以翻译笑话与幽默还必须具有科普知识和社会知识。

2 笑话与幽默的独特之处及翻译时必须注意的问题

2.1 语言的结构

笑话与幽默虽然内容丰富,形式多样,但表述简洁,质朴精干,没有多余的词语,有时仅仅是几笔白描就可取得意想不到的效果。笑话与幽默的表现手法灵活多样,都是随机应变,很难概括,常见的有以下几种:

(1) 答非所问。如：

Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, K. Natwar Singh, was invited to speak at a college function. "What would you like me to speak about?" he asked the college principle.

"About five minutes," came the reply.

请印度外长在大学生会集会上作报告，外长问主持人讲什么内容时得到的回答却是“只需讲大约5分钟。”

(2) 出其不意。如：

One mountaineer to another: "It almost cost us our lives climbing to the top of Mount Everest to plant the American flag. But it was worth it. Hand me the flag."

"Me? I thought you brought it."

两名登山队员几乎拼了老命好不容易爬上了世界屋脊，当要插国旗时，才发现彼此都为对方带了，却谁也没带，惊讶地叫道：“我吗？”

(3) 画龙点睛。如：

While taking the 1990 census, I called on a woman who refused to state her age. I told her I was permitted to make an estimate.

"I guess 85 is about right," I said, and pretended to write on the form.

"Don't you dare!" she snapped. "I'm only 68."

人口普查时这位老太太总也不愿说出她的年龄，当普查员要估算出她有85岁时，她才急忙声称她才68岁。活画出了有些妇女爱美怕老的心态。

(4) 嘎然而止。人物描写非常节省，不采取有头有尾的叙述，而是在一语道破所要揭示的思想时就立即在高潮处一刀切断，象开快车急刹车似的。如：

A married couple, both avid golfers, were discussing the future one day night. "Honey," the wife said, "if I were to die and you were to remarry, would you two live in this house?"

"I suppose so-it's paid for."

"How about our car?" continued the woman. "Would the two of you keep that?"

"I suppose so-it's paid for."

"What about my golf clubs? Would you let her use them too?"

"Heck no," the husband blurted out. "She's left-handed."

爱打高尔夫球的一对恩爱夫妻睡前闲聊，妻子问丈夫如她死后，他若再婚，会和后妻共用这所房子和小车吗？丈夫回答当然会，因为都已付了钱，妻子接着问，给不给她用高尔夫球棒呢？丈夫脱口而出，“她是个左撇子”——一语泄漏了天机。

(5) 俏言相戏。如：

One day, Dr. Watson turned in frustration to Sherlock Holmes and said, "I wish you'd stop denigrating my intelligence. Do you know what school I went to?"

"Elementary, my dear Watson," Holmes replied. "Elementary!"

华生医生希望福尔摩斯不要轻视他的才华，诘问他，“你了解我的学历吗？”机智的福尔摩斯不按华生是大学毕业生的事实却答道：“小学。”

2.2 语言的运用

英语笑话、幽默的语言,看来似乎很简单,但翻译时语言的选择必须讲究,要求生动、诙谐有趣,以达到既引人发笑,又发人深思的目的,所以被称之为“智慧的微笑”。如上面(4)则中的 married 一词,如按词面直译为“已婚”夫妇就过于平淡,而译成“恩爱”夫妻就显示出了强烈的讽刺意味。其语言的运用一般有以下五种必须加以注意。

(1) 成(俚)语的运用。如:

Question: Why do cowboys always die with their boots on?

Answer: So they won't stub their toes when they kick the bucket.

此处如把 kick the bucket 直译成踢木桶,则既不可笑,又令人不解,而实际上这是一个俚语,意为“死(die)”。

(2) 运用多义词,造成误解词义而构成笑料。如:

A friend who was involved in a serious motorcycle accident was unable to speak when he first regained consciousness. Wishing to know how long he had been unconscious, he took a piece of paper and a pencil from the bedstand and, after writing “Date?” on it, gave it to his nurse. She handed it back to him after she had written the word “married” on it.

车祸中受重伤的病人昏迷几天醒来后问护士‘date’,护士回答‘已婚’。因为 date 除表示日期外,在美国还表示男女之间的约会。护士误会要与她约会了。

(3) 词义的引伸。有的词不能光从字面来理解而必须通过语义的外延(denotation)来推敲、领悟其未被词典所收录的内涵(connotation)意义,下面举例说明。

As I was sitting in a crowded coffee shop, an elderly, well dressed man walked in and crossed the dining area to where a busy waitress was clearing dishes from a table.

“Where's a nice place for a retired executive to sit” the man said rather pompously.

Without looking up, and without stopping what she was doing, the waitress answered, “Florida”

在餐厅里,面对傲慢的退休经理的“坐哪里最好”的提问,服务员答了个“Florida”。如直译这一地名就表达不出服务员心中的潜台词,因此,应抛开字面意义而译成“到旅游胜地去”。佛罗里达是美国南部沿海的一个州,是度假胜地。这样处理就能收到预期的笑的效果。再如:

A couple of old Army buddies who hadn't seen each other in years met on the street. “I've been married since 1980,” one explained. “My wife is ambidextrose.” “You mean AMBIDEXTROUS, don't you?” the other corrected. “No, I do mean ambidextrose--she can polish off a box of candy with either hand.”

两个多年不见的老战友在街上相遇。一个告诉另一个他已结婚了,妻子是个“ambidextrose”。另一个反问道,“你是说她的 ambidextrous (双手灵巧) 是吗? 前者强调说,“不是,我是说她是个“ambidextrose”。该词在现有的词典中是查找不到的,但它是由前缀 ambi (双、两的意思) 和名词 dextrose (玉米、葡萄糖的意思) 两部分复合而成,再结合对全文的理解,于是我便把它译成“双料糖罐”这样既不违反词义,又表达出这位妇女嗜糖如命的程度,并与下文(破折号后面的话)一致了。

(4) 借助同音不同意义的谐音效果, 注意找到两种语言中对应的词语。如:

And then there was the gay who grew a mustache because he was tired of his wife calling him a bare-faced liar.

此人之所以蓄上满脸的络腮胡子是因为听腻了妻子总说他“无髭”(无耻)。

(5) 利用拼写错误。如:

My college roommate had received a cake in the mail, but didn't have a chance to eat any because he was leaving for the weekend. He left me a hastily scrawled note telling me his plans, ending with, "Be gone until Sunday. Take cake."

Happy with his unusual generosity, I enjoyed the treat, finishing most of it by the time he returned. He seemed very disappointed that there was only small piece left for him. When I reminded him of his note, he shook his head and said, "It doesn't say 'take cake'; it says 'take care'!".

乙同学之所以能享用平时并不慷慨的甲同学的整只蛋糕原来是因为甲在匆忙中给乙留的潦草的字条上写了“take cake (请吃蛋糕)”, 而他的本意却是“take care (请照料)”k 和 r 一个字母之差, 造成赔了蛋糕又出丑的笑话, 结果还得自负。

3 阅读和翻译笑话与幽默对于学生的英语学习的作用

我认为阅读和翻译笑话与幽默, 对于推动学生的英语学习起着很大的作用。它可以:

(1) 浓化学习英语的兴趣, 达到寓教于笑, 乐在其中的目的。学任何事物有无兴趣, 兴趣浓淡往往起到决定性的作用。笑话、幽默篇幅短小, 生词不多, 语法现象较少, 易于理解, 读着读着就会情不自禁地笑起来, 起到了松弛神经的作用。中国有句俗语“笑一笑, 十年少”。英美也称誉 laughter-the best medicine (笑是良药)。

(2) 深化并扩大已有的英语词汇、语法等知识。如 club 一般只知作俱乐部讲, 通过“恩爱夫妻”这则笑话, 知道其复数可当高尔夫球棒讲, 很轻松地就记住了。其它如 kick the bucket 等也是如此。所以, 我建议给学生一些笑话、幽默的原文材料, 并让他们作翻译练习, 费时不多, 但对学生的身心发展, 英语水平的提高是大有裨益的。

附记: 文中所列各则笑话与幽默均选自 1992 年以前美国出版的 Reader's Digest (读者文摘)

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