

Causes Analysis and Translation Methods of Financial English Lexical Metaphors

Beibei Chen, Ke Chen

School of Foreign Languages, Xi'an Shiyou University, Xi'an 710000, China

Abstract: Metaphors and financial activities are prevalent in all aspects of human life. Financial English, as an integration of finance and linguistics, has a large number of metaphorical expressions in its discourse system. This paper selected the second edition of Reuters Financial Glossary published by China Financial Publishing House as the research object, collated all the financial English metaphors included in it, and, according to the characteristics of the source domain, divided them into six categories: animal-related, plant-related, object-related, action-related, color-related and weather-related, etc. After that, the paper searched and analyzed the English materials of authoritative journals such as Financial Times and The Economist since 2024, and explored the formation causes and the translation methods of financial English metaphors under the guidance of the metaphor theory. It is hoped that this study will help further deepen the research of financial English metaphors and provide a reference for the translation of financial English texts.

Keywords: Financial English; Translation Methods; Metaphor

1. Introduction

Metaphor is classified as rhetoric in traditional linguistics, and gradually involves the cognitive domain with the development of cognitive linguistics. Related researches can be divided into three main stages. The first stage is the propose of metaphor, these studies laid the foundation of metaphor as a cognitive tool, emphasizing its ability to understand abstract concepts through concrete things. The second stage is the ontological study of metaphor, and this kind of articles deepened the understanding of metaphor and classified and discussed the phenomenon of metaphor. The third stage is the applied research of metaphor, these researches explored the identification, mapping relationship and translation transformation of metaphor under a specific domain.

In the field of finance, metaphors materialize abstract financial and economic things and phenomena through figurative and vivid language construction, promoting effective communication and understanding of information. However, for financial practitioners whose native language is not English, accurately interpreting these metaphors has become a great challenge in grasping information. This paper discusses the reasons for the formation of financial English metaphors and their translation methods in the light of metaphor theory, with a view to further deepening the study of financial English metaphors, providing reference for practitioners in related fields, and providing reference for the translation of financial English texts.

2. Classification of Financial English Metaphors

Financial English, as an integration of finance and linguistics, is a kind of English with strong knowledge, practicality and professionalism. This paper selected the Reuters Financial Glossary as the research object, collated all the lexical metaphors included in it, and divided them into the following six categories.

Animal-related: Human tend to use known and familiar things to understand unknown and abstract concepts. Therefore, financial English draws on a large number of metaphors related to animals. Some examples are as follows: bearish(看跌, 看空), bullish(看涨, 看多), bulldog bond(猛犬债券), butterfly spread(蝶状价差), cash cow(高收益的产品业务), dead cat bounce(死猫式反弹, 跌深反弹), etc.

Plant-related: In addition to animal-related lexical metaphors, financial English often draws on the phenomena of plant growth, prosperity, and decline to reflect fluctuations and developments of financial markets. Some examples are as follows: branch company(分公司), daisy chain(非法交易链), economic growth(经济增长), economic resurgence(经济复苏), green shoots(复苏绿芽), seed money (启动资金, 本金), etc.

Object-related: What's more, Financial English metaphors are also mostly related to common items in human daily life. While giving

new meanings to old words also reflects the economy of language. Some examples are as follows: book(账簿, 名册), cap(利率上限期权), floor(利率下限期权), notes(中期债券), option(期权), position(头寸), etc.

Action-related: Financial market is a dynamically changing environment with money circulation and capital operation showing significant dynamism. Therefore, there is a tendency to use action vocabulary as a metaphor to describe various phenomena in financial market. Some examples are as follows: ask(卖方报价), bid(买方出价), call(看涨期权), offer(要约, 发盘), put(看跌期权), squeeze(逼仓, 供给短缺), etc.

Color-related: Color is often associated with specific emotions and symbolism in human culture. There is also a portion of lexical metaphors related to colors in financial English. Some examples are as follows: beige book(美国经济展望调查报告), black market economy(黑市经济), blue chip stock(蓝筹股, 绩优股), greenmail(购股勒索), pink sheets(粉单市场), white knight(白衣骑士, 白武士), etc.

Weather-related: Weather can transcend geographical, racial, and cultural limitations and trigger similar feelings and understandings among all human beings, so it frequently appears in the metaphors of financial English as a common source domain. Some examples are as follows: market climate(市场环境), dawn raid(黎明突袭, 先手购入), financial storm(金融风暴), sunshine laws(阳光法律), dollar tide(美元潮汐), financial tsunami(金融海啸), etc.

3. Causes analysis of Financial English Metaphors

The reasons for the emergence of metaphors in human language are manifold. As far as financial English are concerned, the causes mainly include linguistic creativity, cognitive similarity and cultural differences.

3.1 Linguistic creativity

With the development of economic globalization, new concepts, products and services are constantly emerging in the financial industry. These new elements need to be accurately described through creating new vocabulary or giving new meanings to old words. And this demand of the language market has further contributed to the generation and development of financial English metaphors. For instance, Adam Smith used “Invisible Hand” to express “the mechanism for the coordination of economic activities through the spontaneous regulation of market prices in the absence of any central organization”.

This creative expression directly led to the generation and development of metaphors in financial English, and reflects the economy of language, that means, taking as few existing words and expressions as possible to convey emerging, rich information.

3.2 Cognitive similarity

Due to the fact that human beings share the same physiological basis, similar social development process and similar natural environment, people of different countries and races have a similarity in thinking and cognition. Therefore, metaphors in different cultures are bound to have commonalities. For example, the term “storm” originally referred to the weather system accompanied by strong winds or precipitation. But in the financial market, it has been mapped to the sharp, short-lived, and hyper-cyclical deterioration of all or most of the financial indicators of one or more countries and regions.

Cognitive similarities allow people to quickly map concepts from one domain to another. Such metaphors not only increase the interest and readability of financial English, but also help people better understand and remember abstract and complex concepts in the field.

3.3 Cultural differences

Different geopolitical patterns, social systems, cultural backgrounds and other factors will lead to people’s own unique social perceptions and experiences. For instance, Scottish farmers named the rent as “mail”, with rent paid in silver coins being “white mail” and paid of livestock or produce being “black mail”. Farmers who paid the latter were often robbed and forced to pay more, so “blackmail” gradually evolved to mean extortion in the majority of countries and regions. However, in American financial market, stock purchase extortion is called “greenmail”. This expression uses “green” instead of “black” because this behavior is related to the dollar bills which is green in color.

Cultural differences in metaphors may be reflected in using the same metaphor to refer to different things or phenomena, or using different metaphors to refer to the same things or phenomena. Both the former and the latter have undoubtedly enriched the lexical metaphors of financial English.

4. Translation methods of Financial English Metaphors

In the specific translation practice, translators should take the cognitive differences of the audience readers in the background of different languages, cultures, societies, politics and disciplines into full consideration. And then, adopting varieties of translation methods to realize the efficient transmission of information between the source text and the target text.

4.1 Literal translation

ST1: Samir Kaji believes that many unicorns will “quietly get acquired for parts”.

TT1: 萨米尔·卡吉认为，许多独角兽公司将“悄无声息地被分割收购”。

ST2: The public's previous aversion to retail investing dates back to the early 1990s, when a stock market bubble burst.

TT2: 民众之前对散户投资的排斥可以追溯到上世纪90年代初股市泡沫破裂的时候。

In the above examples, “unicorns” and “bubbles” have long been understood and accepted by all human beings rather than being specific to the financial investment community. The term “unicorn company” refers to a high-performing stock with unlimited market potential and difficult-to-replicate business model. While “bubble” refers to the phenomenon of false prosperity. When dealing with this kind of metaphors, the translator should adopt literal translation method to maximize the retention of the metaphorical meaning of the source text, which could simplify the translation process and ensure the rigor and accuracy of the target text.

4.2 Free translation

ST3: The VW brand's chief executive Thomas Schäfer had on Monday “admitted” that planned savings had fallen short, pushing the brand into the red.

TT3: 大众品牌首席执行官施文韬周一“承认”未能实现计划中的成本节省，导致品牌陷入赤字。

ST4: It would also distance Starbucks from China's macroeconomics headwinds and political uncertainty.

TT4: 这一举措还将使星巴克远离中国的宏观经济风险和政治不确定性因素。

Combined with the context, it can be seen that “red” indicates that Volkswagen's capital turnover has fallen into the predicament of expenditure more than income, which could be translated as “赤字” to keep in line with the source text. The “headwind” refers to all the unfavorable factors for Starbucks' smooth operation and development. And it is easier for target readers to grasp this information if translated into “风险”. Therefore, when dealing with such abstract metaphors whose meaning is affected by the context, translators can adopt free translation method to convey the real intention and semantic connotation of the source texts.

4.3 Amplification

ST5: But shares in LVMH, Richemont and Dior were off too, on fears that the softening of China's luxury growth might turn into a crash.

TT5: 但路威酩轩、历峰和迪奥的股价也在下跌，原因是人们担心中国奢侈品增长放缓可能演变成奢侈品股市崩盘。

ST6: That means monetary policy is likely to diverge, with the Fed keeping interest rates high even as the rest of the rich world cuts them to revive growth.

TT 6: 这意味着货币政策可能会出现分歧，因为美联储将利率维持在高位，而与此同时其他富裕国家选择降息以重振经济增长。

In the above examples, if the translator simply translates underline words into “崩溃” and “增长”，it is difficult for readers to understand what are the subjects of these actions. While using the amplification method to translate them into “奢侈品股市崩盘” and “经济增长” further clarifies the subjects, helping readers to grasp the precise information. Therefore, when dealing with metaphors with rich meanings and multiple collocations, translators should effectively add descriptive or restrictive words to supplement the metaphorical meanings of the

source text.

4.4 Variation

ST7: The fact that the wind is at GE's back has undoubtedly helped.

TT7: 毫无疑问, 通用电气是借到了一股东风。

ST8: Second, trust between Mr.Musk and big investors is gossamer-thin.

TT8: 其次, 马斯克与大投资者之间的信任薄如蝉翼。

In Chinese, “wind” contains tailwind and headwind and “gossamer” is often used to describe small things. So the cultural differences between Chinese and English force the translator to change the target domain of the metaphors. Considering the Chinese saying “Everything is ready, all we need is the east wind”, we only need to change “风” to “东风” to express that GE was helped. In addition, Chinese people often use the characters “蝉翼” instead of “蛛丝” to describe the thickness is tiny. Therefore, when the metaphors have significant cultural differences, translators should use the variation method to change the source domain to express the same or similar meanings, making the target texts more easier to be understood and accepted.

4.5 Annotation

ST9: The Bank of England does not believe that “greedflation” has played a significant role in the surge in food prices.

TT9: 英国央行并不认为“贪婪通胀”(企业将价格提高到超出其自身价格压力要求的程度)在食品价格飙升中发挥了重要作用。

ST10: Over fifty countries have introduced regulatory sandboxes to foster financial innovation.

TT10: 五十余个国家推出监管沙箱(英国金融监管局提出的科技创新监管理念)以促进金融创新。

In the above examples, “greedyflation” and “regulatory sandboxes”, as metaphorical expressions of emerging financial concepts whose terminology degree needs to be improved, may cause misunderstanding by the readers if just using the above translation methods. At this time, the annotation method can intuitively show the meaning of “贪婪通胀” and the essence of “监管沙箱”, which skillfully solves this problem. Therefore, the annotation method can help readers better understand the actual meaning and mechanism of the emerging concepts, which could enhance the readability of the target text, and lay the foundation for the cross-cultural communication of the emerging terminology.

5. Conclusion

Metaphors and financial activities are prevalent in all aspects of human life. The current English metaphors in financial field can be roughly divided into six categories: animal-related, plant-related, object-related, action-related, color-related and weather-related, etc. The causes mainly include the language creativity, cognition similarity and cultural differences. In specific translation practice, translators should fully consider the cognitive differences of the target readers in different languages, cultures and social disciplines, and take the questions into account such as whether the metaphors are universally accepted, whether they are affected by the context, whether they are prone to ambiguity, whether there exist cultural differences, and whether they are emerging concepts. And then, adopting the methods of literal translation, free translation, amplification, variation and annotation to realize the accurate, complete and efficient transmission of information, further promoting the exchange and mutual learning of financial information among different languages and cultures.

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About the author:

- 1.Chen Beibei (2000-), female, Han, Master Degree, Xi'an Shiyou University, Baoji City, Shaanxi Province, Translation.
- 2.Chen Ke (1975-), female, Han, Xi'an Shiyou University, Changji City, Xinjiang Province, Professor, Translation