



Analysis on grammatical metaphor from the view of Meta function

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 15 August 2011;

Received in revised form:

18 October 2011;

Accepted: 28 October 2011;

Keywords

Metaphor,
Grammatical Metaphor,
Meta function.

ABSTRACT

Grammatical metaphor is a kind of variation to semantics in different degrees caused by some deviation of grammatical character. From the view of meta function in systematic-functional linguistics, the author discusses three forms of grammatical metaphor systematically: ideational metaphor, interpersonal metaphor, textual metaphor and their techniques of expression.

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Introduction

Grammatical metaphor is an important component in systematic-functional linguistics. Systematic functional linguists believe that metaphor is a variation of the expression of meaning. The phenomenon of metaphor is not only restricted in the lexical level, but also in the grammatical level. In the theories of systematic-functional linguistics, meta functions include ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. In this paper, the author will analyze grammatical metaphor from the view of meta function.

The Three Meta functions of Language

Grammatical metaphor is studied in the viewpoint of linguistic meta functions in systematic-functional linguistics. The basic idea in systematic-functional linguistics is that language is a kind of instrument to maintain social communication among people and lots of functions exist in the language. From the view of language evolution, Halliday concluded that language functions can be generalized into three meta functions: ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function.

Ideational Function

Ideational function means that people use language to talk about their experiences in real life, and describe situations or things that happen in the surrounding. The transitivity system is its main reflecting form. There are three elements included in the transitivity system: participant, process and circumstance. Process is the core element of the system. One process can be metaphorized to another process. Systematic-functional linguists divided the processes of human activities and natural world into six groups: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process.

Material Process

Material process refers to the process of action or behavior, that is, what someone does or what happens to someone. It is a process of doing. There are always three parts in the process: actor, process and goal (Zhuangling Hu, Yongsheng Zhu, 2005:75).

Mental Process

Mental process is about psychological activities and speech acts, which include speeches, feelings, thoughts, etc. It is a process of sensing, a process to show psychological activities

like perception, affection and cognition. Two participants are generally involved in the process: the subject of mental process, which is sense; the object perceived, which is phenomenon.

Relational Process

Relational process shows the relationship between one thing and another. It is a process of being. To be attributive and to be identifying are its two types. In the former type, the participants are carrier and attribute; in the latter type, the participants are identified and identifier. Employing “be”, linking verbs like “seem”, “become”, “look”, and “remain”, and “have” to indicate the action or condition of participants is an ordinary technique of expression.

Behavioral Process

Behavioral process refers to certain specific physiological process, such as breathe, cough, cry, laugh, listen, etc. So, to certain extent, there is something coincident with material process. Generally speaking, there is only one participant—the person who behaves. Sometimes it refers to “range”, which explains concretely the content of behavioral process.

Verbal Process

Verbal process presents a process of saying or communication. Generally speaking, there are three participants: speaker, receiver and verbiage. In verbal process, information is conveyed and exchanged by talk, which is similar to oral speech in mental process.

Existential Process

Existential process is a process which shows that something exists. The usual verb are “be”, “exist”, etc.. There must be an existent as the participant.

Interpersonal Function

Interpersonal function means that people employ language to communicate with each other, build and maintain interpersonal relationship, influence others' behavior and express their opinions about the world or even change the world. Interpersonal function can show the author's mood, attitude, will and orientation. In concrete discourse, they are presented by mood system and modality system. To express the purpose of the speaker is the function of mood system, while modality system is used to express the judgment of the speaker towards the possibility or the frequency that something happens (Dajun Zhou, 2003:102).

Communicative Roles

In daily communication, people will change their communicative roles at any time. However, there are only two basic roles: giving and demanding. The commodities exchanged could be goods, services or information. The meanings which are expressed could be proposal or information.

Mood

Mood in systematic-functional linguistics is constituted by two parts: subject and residue. Nouns, words with characteristics of nouns, phrases or even clauses can function as subject, while auxiliaries to show tenses can function as residue. Except the subject, all of other elements belong to residue. Mood plays a rather important role between both sides in communication and it makes the communication fluent.

Modality

Except communicative roles and mood, interpersonal function of language can also be realized through modality system. There is a close relation between modality and verbal function. In the proposition showing that the commodity exchanged is information, modality is probability or usualness in different levels between definitely "yes" and "no". Three grammatical forms are used to show modality:

(1) Use definitive auxiliaries:

e.g. She might be a teacher.

He will be back soon.

(2) Use modal adverbs which express the possibility and frequency like "probably, possibly, certainly, perhaps, maybe" and "usually, sometimes, always, never, often, seldom, etc."

(3) Use both two forms:

e.g. That will probably be Jack.

He will usually sit there all day.

In the proposal showing that the commodities exchanged are goods and services, modality presents obligation and willingness at different levels. In commands, obligations at different levels are shown with the help of "allowed to do", "supposed to do", and "required to do"; and in offers, inclinations at different levels are shown with the help of "willing to", "anxious to", and "determined to".

Textual Function

Textual function is a metafunction as important as ideational function and interpersonal function. Textual function is a function which makes the discourse suit for its context and the preceding parts of the passage. Thematic structure and information structure are main approaches to realize textual function. In thematic structure, themes always come before rhemes. Theme refers to the point of departure or the topic of a speech. Rheme refers to the content of the speech. Theme usually presents the known information while rheme usually presents new information. In information structure, known information and new information are also included, but there is no strict rule on which should go first.

The Category of Grammatical Metaphor

Systematic-functional linguists divided grammatical metaphor into three types: ideational metaphor, interpersonal metaphor and textual metaphor according to the classification of metafunctions.

Aiming at the phenomenon that metaphor appears mainly in the lexical level and there is a deviation to semantic rules, Halliday believed that in language expression, the grammar form can be chosen freely to express a same meaning. He called this "grammatical metaphor" and made detailed analysis with the help of metafunctional theories in systematic-functional grammar.

Ideational Metaphor

Halliday divided grammatical metaphor into two groups: ideational metaphor and interpersonal metaphor. One semantic process is presented by another process, other functional elements like participants and circumstances change correspondingly. This is called ideational metaphor. Ideational metaphor can be further divided into three levels: (1) the transition of process, which means in the transitivity system, each process can be meta phorized mutually; (2) the transition of functional components, which means the mutual meta phorization of different elements in the process; (3) the transition of vocabulary and grammar, which means that the transferred functional components are meta phorized from established forms to other forms in the lexical and grammatical levels.

Interpersonal Metaphor

Interpersonal metaphor can be divided into metaphor of modality and metaphor of mood. The former means that in the system of interpersonal function, clauses without modal elements are chosen to express certain modality instead of modal verbs and modal adverbs in the process of forming interpersonal metaphor. The latter means that the speaker employs a kind of mood which has crossing relation with the given verbal function. The consistent principle is violated, which means that declarative function is not always expressed by indicative mood; interrogative function is not always expressed by interrogative mood; injunctive function is not always expressed by imperative mood.

Textual Metaphor

Halliday had discussed ideational metaphor and interpersonal metaphor in detail in his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, but he never mentioned textual metaphor in it. The doubt of whether textual metaphor exists is raised. According to lots of researches by many linguists, there is textual metaphor in language indeed.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can find that the theory of meta function is very useful to explain grammatical metaphor. Metaphor is not only an escape expression of vocabulary, but also an escape means of expression for grammatical forms. Grammatical metaphor provides a new angle of view: vocabularies possess metaphorical function; grammatical forms possess metaphorical characteristic. On how to raise theoretical level for practical application, English learners and translators should adopt a more positive attitude.

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