Grammatical Metaphor in NHCE and Its Teaching Strategies

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Abstract. Reading English passages, as essential input source, plays a critical role in students’ English learning. New Horizon College English (NHCE) texts serve the main resources to improve reading ability for college students. As common feature of adult discourse, metaphorical expression exists widely in these texts. Grammatical Metaphor (GM) proposed by Halliday refers to incongruent expressions from its original form. The wide existence of GM in adults’ written English is one reason to cause difficulties in reading comprehension. Therefore, it is plausible to make a systematic and detailed research concerning the complexity caused by GM during NHCE Book 4 English reading process, and some recognizing strategies of GM and teachers strategies to consciously cultivate college students’ awareness of GM will be proposed.

Introduction

Currently, many colleges have adopted NHCE as their main teaching materials to Non-English majors for its advanced teaching concept, complete series of textbook, richness in content where exists wide Grammatical Metaphor(GM). Understanding GM better will provide a new guiding principle for teachers to give instructions in teaching NHCE.

Xiong Xueliang and Liu Donghong concluded that individual ability will develop from congruent form to metaphorical form in second language acquisition process. GM enriches expressions and sentence structures, and mainly exists in written languages and adults’ language applications[1]. However, the pervasive GM is one of the main elements to cause difficulty in English text comprehension[2].

As far as GM research is concerned, there rarely appears study on GM in NHCE texts which is the main reading material for college students. This study attempts to focus on the subject.

Grammatical Metaphor and English Reading

Halliday, founder of the Systematic Functional Grammar, regards GM as lexical-grammatical resources to expand meaning potential. GM is an alternative, grammatical resource of language which was first proposed from language variation perspective in Anti-language by Halliday[3]. later Halliday suggested we should study it from the perspective that how meaning is expressed rather than how the word is used[4].

In colleges of China, improving students' reading ability has always been a major goal for teachers. Metaphorical expression is the common feature of adult discourse, which indicates the complexity of expression and abstractness of cognition in GM. At the elementary stage of foreign language learning, written and spoken materials play equally important roles in providing language input for learners. However, reading English passages is becoming a crucial way for learners to acquire language input with the improvement of their foreign language level. The complexity of GM itself increases the difficulty of discourse understanding and reduces the intelligibility of language material so that it constrains the development of learners' language proficiency[5].

As for the relationship between GM and the difficulty of a discourse, Halliday proposes that metaphor is at least inherently complex, and that the least metaphorical wording will always be the one that is maximally simple[4]. Fan Wenfang suggests that GM is another inseparable factor to
influence the difficulty of a discourse that the more GMs a discourse contains, the more challenging the discourse is to be comprehended when other things being equal[6]. Ravelli points out that the large existence of GM in discourse increases the difficulty of discourse itself and at the same time reduces the reading speed of learners, thus reduces the intelligibility of the discourse and decreases the language input for learners[7,8]. Dong Hongle and Yang Xiaoying also discuss the relationship between ideational GMs and reading comprehension, finding out nominalization causes obstacles in text understanding.

Since passages containing GMs are inherently more complicated, it is significant to guide students to recognize GMs in a discourse, because recognizing GM in English reading not only helps to overcome obstacles in reading comprehension for students but also helps them to understand the discourse thoroughly.

**Grammatical Metaphor and Its Classifications**

As a key notion in systemic functional linguistics, realization refers to “the inter-stratal relationship between the semantics and the lexico-grammar, in other words, the lexicogrammar realizes the semantics, and the semantics is realized by the lexico-grammar”[9]. Halliday distinguishes two kinds of realizing relationships between meaning and grammar. For a given semantic word group there will be some realization in the lexicogrammar - some wording - which can be considered congruent; there may also be several others that are in some aspect "transferred", or metaphorical which expands the semantic potential of the system, adding further semantic features. Thus there may be congruent and metaphorical forms to realize the same meaning. Congruent realization refers to that there exists a natural relationship between the meaning and grammatical categories, for example, participants or things are realized by nouns and processes by verbs. This way of representing the real world is regarded as natural to human's perception and understanding of the world, so this natural or typical relationship between meaning and form is called congruent form. On the other hand, metaphorical realization refers to that the relationship between meaning and grammatical categories is unnatural or atypical, such as process and quality are realized by nouns[10].

According to Halliday, there are two kinds of GM: one is Ideational GM including nominalization and transitivity process metaphor; the other is Interpersonal GM.

**Ideational GM**

The first type of Ideational GM is transitivity process metaphor, which happens at the semantic level. According to ideational meta-function in Systematic Functional Grammar, Transitivity system is the semiotic expression of the real world[4]. Halliday holds that the world can be expressed through six processes: material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavior process, and existential process. Each process can express another process in metaphorical form as illustrated below:

1. (1a) They climbed the summit on the fifth day. (material process) →
2. (1b) The fifth day saw their ascent on the summit. (mental process)
3. (2a) they danced in Hungarian style. (behavioral process) →
4. (2b) They did a Hungarian dance. (material process)

Owing to the process transformation, the participants and environmental elements also change. For example, “on the fifth day” refers to place element realized by adverbial part in 1a clause, while “the fifth day” becomes sensor of mental process realized by noun groups in 1b; the process realized by verb “climbed” transforms into phenomenon realized by noun “ascent”; “the mountain” with semantic meaning of the range transforms into “on the mountain” as environmental element. In this group, clause (a) is the congruent form; clause (b) is the metaphorical form.

The second type of Ideational GM happens at the lexical-grammar level. The semantic category
enters lexical grammar by “realization”, of which the most common is “nominalizing”. Thus the
device of rewording process (congruent word form is verb) and property (congruent word form is
adjective) into integral nouns rather than their original quality: verbs represent process, and
adjectives represent property is known as nominalization. Here are some examples:

1. is impaired by alcohol → alcohol impairment
2. some shorter, some longer → of varying length
3. they are able to reach the computer → their access to the computer
4. technology is getting better → advances in technology

Likewise, the participant realized by noun phrase can be metaphorized into process as illustrated by
the following example:

1. We buttered the bread with cheap magarine
2. The man knifed the lady.

In these two examples, nouns butter and knife representing participant are used metaphorically to
refer to the process.

Ideational metaphor is concerned with the transitivity system of language. If a transitivity analysis
does not seem to reflect adequately the state of affairs being referred to, it is very likely that the
meaning is being expressed metaphorically.

**Interpersonal GM**

Interpersonal metaphor refers to using the clause to realize different interpersonal function rather
than its original function or using clauses rather than adverbs to realize interpersonal function, such
as “it is possible…”, “it is highly suggested that…”

According to Halliday, there are two types of fundamental speech roles: giving and demanding,
that is, the speaker is giving something to the listener or demanding something from the listener.
Besides, there is another distinction that relates to the nature of the commodity being exchanged:
either goods-and-service or information. These two variables define the four basic speech functions
of offer, command, statement and question. Congruently, statement is realized by the declarative
mood; question by interrogative mood; command by imperative mood; offer by various moods.

Usually, there exists one to one relationship between speech functional categories (semantic
stratum) and mood categories (lexicogrammatical stratum). However, in the actual use of language,
there is no simple relationship between the grammatical categories and the roles they play in
constructing a discourse. The relationship often becomes more complex for the purpose of
communication needs. In other words, there can be one to two or more relationships between speech
functions and mood types in reality. For instance, command is congruently realized by imperative
mood, but it can also metaphorically be realized by interrogative or declarative mood, see the
following example [7]:

(a) Pass me the salt! (Imperative) (Congruent)
(b) Can you pass me the salt? (Interrogative) (Metaphorical)
(c) I'd like you to pass me the salt. (Declarative) (Metaphorical)

**Recognizing GMs in NHCE Texts**

Since most colleges requires students to finish four books of NHCE to reach CET-4 level, this
study just cites Section A in each unit of Book 4 as research corpus. Based on the above
classification of GM, the following figure shows types and numbers of GM exists in each text.
As illustrated by the figure, there exists pervasive GM in each text, and the types vary according to different styles of writing. Transitivity GM accounts for larger proportion in passages of unit 3 and 9, since they are both concerning political things such as welfare system and Euro-culture, which requires the author tactically express his/her preferences or aversions to represent or shape our reality. Nominalization exists pervasively in unit 4, 5 10 respectively, because this type of GM evolves from the process and can incorporate abundant information in expository writing passages. There are rarely few interpersonal GM in these texts for the reason that the main aim of the writer is to clarify a topic or just present his/her attitude, not intending to have interaction with readers. During the teaching process, teachers fail to explain these GM in congruent and natural way; many students cannot understand the passages thoroughly. For example:

*The conquest of fame is difficult at best, and many may end up emotionally if not financially bankrupt.* (Unit 1)

Here, the “conquest of fame” is a noun metaphorically referring to the process of becoming famous; “end up” is a transitivity metaphor, vividly reflects the author’s attitude to the process of pursuing success.

**Teaching Strategies**

Since metaphorical expression is the feature of adults’ language, and teachers need to cultivate college students’ ability to recognize and apply the GM in English discourse reading and writing, the following strategies are put forward to improve English learners’ ability. For Nominalization have economy and precision function, teachers can require students to write down the congruent form of the actual process it refers to, and in turn, ask them to nominalize some simple sentence into a noun phrase. For transitivity GM have objectivity and vividness function, teachers may ask students to use different transitivity process to express similar meaning, then students may master the ability of de-metaphorizing and produce natural and accurate English language.

**Conclusion**

This study bears significant meaning both in theory and practice. Theoretically, the research scope
of GM has been broadened, and a comparatively thorough understanding about the features and essence of GM has been presented. Practically, it sheds light upon English reading comprehension, which helps college English learners to improve their reading comprehension ability by recognizing metaphorical expressions at the lexi-co-grammatical level and provides a new guiding principle for teachers to give instructions in teaching NHCE text and other English reading materials.

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Reference