

Contemporary English 当代英语

英语陷阱

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卢思源 著

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英语陷阱

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前言

什么叫“英语难句”？顾名思义，就是难以理解或翻译的英语句子。譬如，在 *Their apartment is shy of a gas stove*。这个句子里，如果读者只知道 *shy* 作“害羞”或“胆怯”(*bashful, self-conscious or chary of*)解，而不懂得它还有其他的涵义，就无法理解此句。在百思不得其解的时候，他可能会把此句看作难句。实际上，这种语句算不上真正的难句，只要翻开一本内容详尽的辞典，查阅一下“*shy*”的各种用法，就不难发现 *shy of* 还有“缺少”和“不足”之义，相当于 *short of* 或 *deficient in*，是个美国用语，这样就可以把该句译作：“他们的公寓缺少一个煤气灶”。

笔者认为，从某种意义上说，称得上“难句”的却是那些表面看来容易，而实际涵义与其字面意义大相径庭的语句。例如，有人把 *Are you a good sailor?* 译作：“你是个好海员吗？”把 *What a shame!* 译为：“真可耻！”将 *He ate his words at last!* 译作：“他终于食言了！”其实，这些都是错译^①。正确的译法第一句应该是：“你会晕船吗？”；第二句是：“真可惜！”；第三句是：“他终于收回前言，并认错道歉！”如用英语阐述，这三个句子相当于：

① 这三句错译的英语应当是：“*Are you a skilled seaman?*”，“*Shame on you!*”(or “*For shame!*”), “*He broke his word at last!*”(or “*He went back on his words at last!*”)

“Aren't you liable to be seasick?”^①，“What a pity!”和“Finally he took his words back and said in a humble way that he was wrong.”

为什么会错译呢？原因可能有二：第一是“内因”。译者认为，在这几个句子里没有生词，每个词语都很熟悉，这些词句既通俗，又浅显，故毫不思索地就把它随口译出。第二是“外因”。早年上海世界书局出版的《英汉四用辞典》“A Daily Use English-Chinese Dictionary”中，有这么几句英汉对照的例句：“He is a good sailor.”——他是好水手。“What a shame!”——多么可耻啊！“to eat one's words”——食言。其后增订出版的《英汉四用辞典》中，这些错误的译句依然原封不动地保留了下来。又如，上海近年出版的《英汉大辞典》有这么一个例句：She is very dear to me. 其汉译为：“她对我很亲”。显而易见，这也是错译，正确的译文是：“我很喜欢她”（请参阅本书“The little girl is dear to me”一则）。也许，它们正是人们闹翻译错误的源泉（fountainhead）吧！

无论是“内因”也好，“外因”也好，这类句子的错译，其根源是在于译者光从字面上着眼，只看到语言的表面词义，而没有考虑到这些特殊的句型所表达的实际思想内容。为此，我们在理解和翻译这类特殊的句型时，决不能被其表面现象所迷惑，而要透过表面看本质，抓住语言

① 就文体和功能风格看，“Are you a good sailor?”是通俗的口语，具有亲切的口语风格色彩，提问的重点放在“good sailor”上；“Aren't you liable to be seasick?”则用在比较正规的场合，例如医生询问病人，它带有文学口语的风格色彩，提问的重点放在“liable”上。

的精神实质,译文才能达到内容和形式的统一。

笔者从事英语教学已有三十多年的时间,近十几年来,从英语专业的大学生和研究生的作业本以及平日阅读的书刊中,收集了大量这种似易实难的句子。现将这些语句作为典型的句型,对它们进行分析和翻译,并加注解,每个“难句”附以若干类例,以供读者学习和参考。

在撰写本书过程中,蒙香港商务印书馆编辑部提出了一些建议,笔者在此表示衷心的感谢。

卢思源

一九九三年四月

于

香港鲗鱼涌

自我小测验

读者可以利用本书,给自己的英语水平作一个小测验:本书 120 个句子中,如果读者自译有八成正确,那你的英语水平可以算是不错了。如果只有六成正确,那只能说勉强及格。如果对得不足一半,那就需要认真学习一下,特别是要仔细把本书好好看看,以免掉到“陷阱”中去。

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1

He is a bicycle doctor.

他是单车修理工。

此句不能译作：“他是个骑单车的医生”，因句中的 doctor 是委婉语(euphemism)，是对某种职业的美称，故不作“医生”解，而是表示 repair man 的涵义。委婉语起源于远古，维多利亚女王时代中期为其鼎盛时期，在现代英语中，其出现频率依然颇高，因为人们通过委婉语，可以用温顺悦耳的词语去谈论或叙述一些原来令人不快或听来逆耳之事物。为此，他们用 domestic help, day help 或 live-in help 代替 maid 或 servant(佣人)；以 custodian 或 superintendent 替代 doorkeeper, caretaker 或 janitor(看门人或管理人)；用 She has a tile loose 或 She has a cylinder missing 去代替 She is crazy 或 She is not right in the head(神经失常)。

委婉语多如恒河沙数，不胜枚举，在此略举数例，以见一斑：

	原 称	委婉语
无线电修理工	radio electrician	radio doctor
理发师	barber	cosmotologist
妓女	whore	working girl /street girl
家庭妇女	housewife	household executive
收垃圾工人	garbage collector	sanitary engineer
老年	old age	second childhood
老人	old people	senior citizens
假牙	false teeth	dentures
小解	piss	urinate /number one

最后请看几个委婉类例：

Nowadays many *weight-watchers* would like to go to the gym.

如今有不少胖人喜欢到健身房去锻炼。

That luster has taken a fancy to *Middle Eastern dancing*.

那个好色之徒现在开始喜欢看肚皮舞。

Social diseases are on the increase in Hong Kong.

香港的性病在不断增多。

They are *the culturally deprived*.

他们是没有学识的人。

A library of teaching materials for preventing teenage suicides will open for *educators* in Hong Kong this year.

今年香港将为教师开设一家图书馆以提供防止青少年自杀的教学资料。

值得注意的是，委婉语虽然是“古已有之，于今为烈”，但决不能用得过多过滥。使用时要考虑场合和对象，如用得不得体，反而会使你“欲礼而不及”，甚至令人不知所云，一头雾水。