

The Translator's GUIDE to CHINGLISH

中式英语之鉴

by *Joan Pinkham*
with the collaboration of
Jiang Guihua

琼·平卡姆 [美] 编著
姜桂华 协助



外语教学与研究出版社
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序

英语学了多年,虽说高不成低不就,纯正的英语总还是一直在听、在读。可是,“纯正”的中式英语(Chinglish),却是第一次有机会如此集中地赏析。琼·平卡姆女士的这部作品搜取了大量中式英语的实例,分别部居,详剖细解,将中国人写英语易犯的文体修辞毛病揭出了大半。

中式英语,因其半英半汉、不英不汉,被作者戏称为“具有汉语特色的英语”。这样的英语每天都在我们中间出现,见于街头的广告词,见于我们的英语报刊,见于政府报告的英译文本。而我们早已看惯,并不觉得怪异,如今由作者一一指出,才知道这种中式英语的可笑。比如“农业获得丰收”,表达为“there have been good harvests”蛮好,在后面添上“in agriculture”便成蛇足,因为“harvest”本来就指农业。再如“生活水平不断提高”,有人译为“living standards for the people continued to rise”,其中的“for the people”也属多余。“红”就是“red”,“很少”就是“few”,既简单又清楚,何必赘言“red in color”,“few in number”? (均见正文3-4页)诸如此类的现象,作者在本书的第一部分**多余的词**里作了分析,所述分为“多余的名词和动词”、“多余的修饰语”、“同义堆叠”、“重复指称”等类。

第二部分题为**句子结构**,从“名词肿胀症”、“代词与先行词”、“短语和子句的位置”、“垂悬成分”、“平行结构”、“逻辑连词”六个方面,分析了中式英语的构句特点。这里仅就第一个方面举一个例子。

所谓“名词肿胀症”,指的是句子里名词过多,且要位都被抽象名词占尽。例如下面一句(172页):

A. The prolongation of the existence of this temple is due to the solidity of its construction.

书中没有提供汉语原文,想来是“这座寺庙的能够持久,是因为其建筑的牢固”之类。经作者改译,成为:

B. This temple has endured because it was solidly built.

再转译入汉语,可作“这座寺庙建造得十分牢固,因此能历久不败”。句A的四个抽象名词在句B中由两个动词和一个副词取代,名词当家一变而为动词主宰,句子顿时有了生气。作者主张多用动词,少用名词,多用意义具体的词,少用抽象含混的词。其实,一般的英语修辞书或写作教科书上也都是这么教的,只是写作者为使文体显得“威严”、“科学”,不知不觉便用起了抽象名词。英美人写英语,中国人写汉语,又何尝不是如此。所以作者补充说,这样的弊病并不能算中式英语的特色。

关于本书的用途,平卡姆女士在书前的“致读者”中已经说明。它可以作教材,供高年级学生练习汉英翻译;又可以作读本,供翻译工作者自行修习。为此,每一小节的后面都附有20个正误句例和20个待改的病句。在作者看来,“翻译不是一门科学,而是一种手艺。”研究翻译理论、构建翻译学的人,听了会作何想?或许我们应该这样来理解她的话:翻译要想被尊为一门“学”,先得成为一种“艺”,就像“烹饪学”那样,写一本烹调书,终不及做一手好菜更能证明“学”的价值。

除了提高汉英翻译的技艺,本书还有一个更广的用途,那就是帮助各行各业的中国人写好英语。两个用途其实有点相通,因为许多中国人写英语,大概是心里先有了汉语的句子,再把它译过去。我自己写英语总不能自如,怕也是落了个毛病,但读了这本书,虽然谈不上彻底摆脱汉语思维,竟也有一种豁然明亮的感觉,因此愿把它推荐给那些想在英语写作上进一步,却苦于找不到帮手的朋友。

姚小平

2000年2月

于外研社研究发展中心

To the Reader

This book can be used either in the classroom or for independent study. It is addressed primarily to Chinese translators and to advanced students of English who are practicing translation. I hope, however, that it will prove equally useful to other Chinese who are called upon to write English and who wish to improve their mastery of it — people working in journalism, foreign affairs, business, tourism, advertising, and many other fields.

Naturally, readers who open this book will have reached varying levels of skill in their second language. But to one degree or another, the work of all but the most highly trained and experienced among them will inevitably contain elements of Chinglish. Chinglish, of course, is that misshapen, hybrid language that is neither English nor Chinese but that might be described as “English with Chinese characteristics.”

In writing this Guide, I have assumed that my Chinese readers have a basic knowledge of English grammar and that if they want a review of the subject, they can find it in other books. My purpose is rather to show translators — and, by extension, others who are writing directly in English — how to recognize elements of Chinglish in a first draft and how to revise it so as to eliminate those elements. In other words, this book is intended to help them turn their work into real English such as might have been written by an educated native speaker of the language.

At institutions like Xinhua News Agency, *China Daily*, Foreign Languages Press, and the Central Translation Bureau, this task is

commonly entrusted to senior translators or editors or to foreign “polishers” (who may be more or less competent to perform it). But in principle, much of the work could be done by the original translators — or writers — themselves. That is why throughout these pages I have sometimes referred to the “translator,” sometimes to the “polisher” or “reviser.” The terms are not mutually exclusive: every translator rereading a first draft can and should be his or her own polisher.

The examples of Chinglish presented here (the “A-version” in each case) are authentic. That is, although some of them have been simplified for instructional purposes, none are invented. Most were found in draft translations that were corrected before the text appeared in print. Some were found in published materials — official documents, *China Daily*, the several English-language magazines, and so on. The source of an example is indicated only when it appeared in a foreign publication, such as the *Far Eastern Economic Review* or a U.S. newspaper.

When an example of Chinglish is taken from a draft translation, the revision offered here (the “B-version”) is, with few exceptions, the one decided upon by the polishers who revised it. If, however, the A-version appeared in print, the revision is one that I think should have been made and that I am suggesting now. In either case, the proposed B-version is not necessarily the only “correct” one. Translation is not a science but a craft, and craftsmen in any field may have different opinions as to the best solution to a given technical problem.

It may seem presumptuous for a person who knows little of the Chinese language to proffer a work of this kind. My qualifications are

that I am a lifelong student of English and a professional translator (from French to English) who has given much thought to problems of translation. In addition, during the 1980s and 1990s I spent eight years working as a polisher in Beijing, first at Foreign Languages Press and later at the Central Translation Bureau (Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin). During those years I had the opportunity to work closely with a wide range of Chinese translators, from beginners fresh out of school to the most capable senior professors. I learned much from them all.

Even with this background, however, I could not have produced this Guide without the help of two invaluable consultants who have kindly read and reread my manuscript. The first is my good friend Jiang Guihua, the retired chief of the English section at the Central Translation Bureau, who has examined every example with the critical eye of a skilled reviser. The second is my husband Larry, who has given me the benefit of his expertise as a writer and as a professor of journalism who has had long experience both teaching and polishing in China. The criticism and advice of these two knowledgeable editors, one native speaker of each language, have been, quite simply, indispensable.

Joan Pinkham
Amherst, Massachusetts
1 April 1999

致 读 者

本书可用于课堂教学,也可用于自学。其主要对象是中国的翻译工作者以及做翻译练习的高年级英语学生。但是,我希望这本书对需要用英语写作的其他中国人(包括新闻工作者、外事工作者、从事商业、旅游业、广告业以及许多其他行业需要使用英语的工作者)同样有帮助,而他们也都希望解够更好地掌握英语。

自然,当读者翻阅这本书时,他们使用第二语言的技能所达到的水平是不同的。但是,除了那些造诣很深的,一般人的翻译中都会不同程度地含有中式英语的成分。当然,所谓中式英语就是那种畸形的、混合的、既非英语又非汉语的语言文字,也可称其为“具有汉语特色的英语”。

在写这本书的过程中,我心目中的中国读者已经掌握了基本的英语语法;如果有人想复习一下他们的语法,可以去求助于有关这方面的书籍。而我的目的则在于帮助翻译工作者以及其他直接用英语写作的人懂得如何在初稿中找出中式英语的成分并将其修改掉。也就是说,这本书是为了帮助他们将自己的写作修改成为地道的英语,就像一个受过教育的以英语为母语的人写的一样。

在一些像新华社、《中国日报》社、外文出版社、中央编译局的单位里,这项工作一般是由高级翻译、审校或外国专家做的(他们或多或少能够胜任这项任务)。但是,原则上,大部分工作可由译者(或作者)自己来完成。为此,在整部书中,我有时用“译者”,有

时用“润色者”或“改稿人”。这些词并不相互排斥：每位译者在审阅其初稿时都可以而且应当是他自己的润色者。

书中所提供的中式英语的例句(每一条初译文:A-version)都是有根据的。虽然其中有的例句为了便于说明而简化了,但都不是编造出来的。绝大部分例句是从初译稿中搜集的,出书之前都作了修正。有些是从出版物中找到的,如:正式文件、《中国日报》、几种英语杂志等等。给出处的例句都是引自外国出版物,如:《远东经济评论》或某份美国报纸。

书中凡是为从初译稿里引用的例句提供的修改译文(B-version),除个别例外,都是由改稿人定的。但是,如果 A-version 是从已出版的书中引用的,那么所提供的修改译文则是我认为当初应该改而未改,现在建议这样改的。无论是哪一种情况,这里所提供的修改译文不一定是惟一“正确”的。翻译不是一门科学,而是一种需要特殊技能的专业。每个行业的技术工人对于解决某个技术问题的最佳办法都会有不同的见解。

对于一个不懂汉语的人来说,向读者提供这样一部作品似乎有些不自量力。而我所具备的条件是:我一生都在学习英语而且是一名职业翻译(法译英),因此,对翻译问题考虑甚多。在 80 年代到 90 年代期间,我在北京做了八年的修改译文工作。先是在外文出版社,后来在中央编译局(马恩列斯著作编译局)。在这些年里,我有机会同许多中国的翻译工作者密切合作,他们中间有刚走出校门的新手,也有水平很高的教授。我从他们那里都学到不少东西。

尽管如此,如果没有两位不可多得的人一遍又一遍地帮我审阅我的手稿,这本书是不可能写出来的。首先是我的好朋友姜桂华,她退休前任中央编译局英文处处长,她以一名有水平的改稿者身份严格地检查了每一个例句。其次是我先生拉里,他是一名作家和新闻学教授,曾多年在中国任教并从事修改译文工作,他的专长使我受益非浅。这两位有知识的审校人,一位的母语是英语,一

位的母语是汉语,他们提出的批评和建议很简单,但却是不可或缺的。

琼·平卡姆

马萨诸塞州,阿默斯特

1999年4月1日

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Part One: Unnecessary Words

All authorities on the style of English prose agree that good writing is concise. Careful writers say what they mean in as few words as possible.

A classic statement of this precept appears in the famous little book of William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* [p. 23]* :

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

It follows that any words which perform no useful function in the sentence — that is, which add nothing to the meaning — should be edited out.

Almost every text that has been translated into English from Chinese, (or that has been written directly in English by a native speaker of Chinese) contains unnecessary words. Draft translations are commonly full of them, and even polished final versions are seldom free of them.

Read anything that has been published in English for foreign readers — a magazine article, a news story, an advertisement, a government report — and you are likely to find superfluous words. Read even the shortest of English texts — the label on a food product, a

* For identification of all works quoted in this Guide, see the Selected Bibliography beginning on page 560.

billboard on Chang'an, the company name on the front of a building — and, if you are on the alert to recognize them, chances are that you will find words that could and should have been omitted. Unnecessary words are the hallmark of Chinglish.

The late Sol Adler was the most distinguished practitioner of the English language who ever turned his attention to “polishing” in China. One of his most frequent marginal comments on translations of the works of Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and other leaders was a laconic “Unnec.”

“Unnec.” words can be any part of speech — nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, articles, and so on. In the following chapters we shall consider the most important types, starting with unnecessary nouns and verbs, which often go hand in hand.

I. Unnecessary Nouns and Verbs

Nouns

Most unnecessary nouns in Chinglish appear not alone but in short phrases, combined with articles and prepositions. When you eliminate the nouns, you eliminate the articles and prepositions as well.

Many of these nouns are easy to recognize. They are plainly redundant because their sense is already included or implied in some other element of the sentence. Here are a few examples (“A”) with suggested revisions (“B”) and comments in brackets.

A: to accelerate the pace of economic reform

B: to accelerate economic reform

[“To accelerate” = “to increase the pace of.”]

A: there have been good harvests in agriculture

B: there have been good harvests

[“Harvests” implies agriculture: there are no harvests in industry.]

A: living standards for the people in both urban and rural areas continued to rise

B: living standards in both urban and rural areas continued to rise

[The notion of living standards applies only to people.]

A: these hardships are temporary in nature

B: these hardships are temporary

[Any adjective describes the “nature” or “character” of the

noun it modifies. To say that hardships are “temporary in nature” is like saying that the Chinese flag is “red in color” or that pandas are “few in number.”]

A: the development of our economy in the future will, to a large extent, depend on . . .

B: the development of our economy will depend to a large extent on . . .

[The future tense of the verb (“will depend”) is sufficient to express futurity.]

A: we should adopt a series of measures to ensure that . . .

B: we should adopt measures to ensure that . . .

[Here the plural form of “measures” covers the sense of a “series.”]

Other unnecessary nouns (or gerunds) may be less easy to identify. Nevertheless, a little thought will reveal that they add nothing to the meaning of the sentence. When they are deleted the sense is not diminished, only clarified. Some examples:

A: following the realization of mechanization and electrification of agriculture

B: following the mechanization and electrification of agriculture

A: it is essential to strengthen the building of national defense

B: it is essential to strengthen national defense

A: these constitute important conditions in striving for the fulfillment of the general task in the transitional period

B: these are important conditions for fulfilling the general task in the transition period

A: at that time the situation in northeast China was still one

where the enemy was stronger than the people's forces

B: at that time the enemy was still stronger than the people's forces in northeast China

[“Situation” is a particularly dangerous noun. Not only is it generally unnecessary, but it drags other unnecessary elements after it (in this instance, “one where”).]

A: the key to the solution lies in the curtailment of expenditure

B: the solution is to curtail (*or* : cut back on) expenditure

[“Key” is sometimes useful, but usually it too can be dispensed with. And like “situation,” it often leads to further unnecessary complications (here, “lies in”).]

A: inner-Party democracy is a subject that has been discussed in detail

B: inner-Party democracy has been discussed in detail

Category nouns

There is one type of noun that deserves special mention, because it is the commonest unnecessary word in Chinglish. This is the general noun that serves only to introduce a specific noun (or gerund) to follow: “a serious mistake in the work of planning.”

In such constructions, the first noun announces the category of the second; in this case, it tells readers that “planning” falls into the category of “work.” That is something they already know. Accordingly, the first noun should be deleted: “a serious mistake in planning.”

Other examples:

A: promoting the cause of peaceful reunification

B: promoting peaceful reunification