

韩仲谦 ○○○ 著

英语

增强和变形修辞格

A Study 研究

on the English Figures
of Amplification
and Distortion

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英语增强和变形 修辞格研究

A Study on the English Figures of
Amplification and Distortion

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内 容 简 介

英语中除了 metaphor、personification 等十几种最常见的修辞格之外,还存在数以百计的另类特殊修辞格(unusual figures of speech)或修辞方法。本书选取了其中 40 个辞格,按两大类分别对其进行解读,内容包括定义、例解和用法讨论。

读者既可以将本书作为一本英语特殊修辞格词典加以使用,也可以将其作为一本语言学普及读本加以参考。

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Preface

Last year (2012), I managed to have a book published on the discussion and interpretation of some sixteen usual English figures of speech from a pragmatic perspective. In preparing that book, I was amazed to get acquainted with as many English figures of speech as there could have. Though it seems like that we are retreating into obscurity and irrelevance very quickly by studying rhetorical devices that do not even exist in most English language dictionaries, I believe the discipline is helpful. Just as a coach will have cross country runners train by running nine miles a day, six days a week to be ready for a three-mile competition, so I think it is helpful to stretch ourselves to learn hundreds of these terms and their applications so that we will be ready for our own verbal “competitions”. Figures of speech are an indispensable linguistic component, and our verbal communication would be “dull as dishwater” without their emphatic assistance. All of us use figures of speech when we write or speak, but often we are not aware of the figures that we are using.

A person can only be a good writer or a good speaker when he or she is familiar with the figures of speech. A certain level of familiarity with the figures of speech can actually help a person get to the level of an expert, the kind of whiz who is maven in the use of the English language. It does not take much to write a piece of text or deliver a speech. However, it takes quite a lot to be creative while still sticking to the rules. The figures of speech, as far as the English language is concerned, are all about rules. Sticking to them will only help one

become a better writer or an orator.

One point here is very important: we can learn the habit of eloquence by probing into various figures of speech in the English language. Once we learn these terms, we will discover, possibly to our surprise, that we are exercising care that we did not think possible in the selection of words. Sinking our teeth deeply into figures of speech will make us aware of how all speech is metaphorical and how every act of speaking is an opportunity for generative/creative insights into life and language. We will be repaid with rhetoric's greatest gift: elegance of expression.

While laboring on the pragmatic interpretation of the sixteen most usual or common English figures of speech, I was convinced that it might be of some significance to write books giving overall introductions to those figures of speech (unusual ones in particular) in the English language that are new to most Chinese English learners. Bearing that idea in mind, right after the book on the usual figures of speech was passed for press, I set about probing into the unusual figures of speech in the English language. I have found that there are hundreds of English figures of speech, either usual or unusual, that fall into various categories: some involving emphasis, association, clarification, and focus; some involving physical organization, transition, and disposition or arrangement; and some involving decoration and variety. Different scholars have categorized figures of speech in different ways. For example, the changingmind.org categorizes English figures of speech into 19 types. The various figures of speech in English, due to their big numbers, require a series of books to describe and discuss. A single book can hardly fulfill the task. This book selects two types of figures of speech (most randomly), namely, figures of amplification and figures of distortion, and elaborates them in certain detail. The many other unusual figures of speech will be dealt with in coming books of the author. The purpose is to give

them an overall picture and help English learners and users appreciate and use them in their writing and speech as well.

I deeply and strongly believe that our hearts and minds are being deepened as we patiently work through the various rhetorical figures in the English language.

I would like to thank all those who have helped, directly or indirectly, in bring this book into being. I especially wish to thank the school I am working with—Shanghai University of Electric Power—for the conditions and conveniences offered for the preparation and the potential funds provided for the publication of this book. I thank my students whose thirst for knowledge stimulates my determination to finish this work. I also thank some of my colleagues whose comments, whether cordial or vicious, have encouraged me to go my academic way forward and farther as well. Special thanks go to the one who cares much for my endeavor in silence.

Thanks of course go to my family for their love, support and encouragement during the long gestation period, and for carrying an extra burden of family responsibility on many occasions so that I could work undisturbed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Language serves as a means of communication and cognition; it enables us to cooperate and think for ourselves with other people in the community. There are at least three different basic functions of language. One is informative—language can be used to pass on information. Another is expressive—language can be used to evoke an emotion that is not a direct result of their meaning. Still another is performative—language can be used as a kind of symbol/action in and of themselves. To perform the various functions, language can be used literally or figuratively, depending on the context(s) in which the speech act occurs, or on the speaker's or the writer's personal preference of their language habits.

No matter what functions language performs, the meaning conveyed therewith can be either literal or figurative. Some speakers or writers prefer figurative language to literal language in order to impress hearers or readers more effectively and communicate their intentions more tactically.

Literal and figurative language, in fact, is a distinction within some fields of language analysis. Literal language (i. e. , denotative meaning) refers to words that do not deviate from their defined meaning. This means that words reveal the meaning that they carry. Palmer (1976:30) uses the term “reference” in talking about the denotation of words. Reference deals with the relationship between the linguistic elements, words, sentences, and the non-linguistic world of

experience. Similarly, Crystal (2003: 129) asserts that denotation meaning involves the relationship between a linguistic unit (lexical item) and the non-linguistic entities to which it refers. For example, the denotation meaning of “dog” is its dictionary definition of “canine quadruped”. To sum up, denotation refers to the literal meaning of a word “the dictionary definition”. When a writer or a speaker uses literal language, he or she is simply stating the facts as they are.

Figurative language (i. e. , connotative meaning) refers to words or groups of words that exaggerate or alter the usual meanings of the component words. It may involve analogy to similar concepts or other context, and may exaggerate. These alterations result in a figure of speech. Palmer (1976: 63) suggests that the term connotation refers to emotive or evaluative meaning. It is also used to refer to linguistic or even dialectal differences or even to the small differences that are found near synonyms. According to Crystal (1992: 80), connotation is the personal or emotional associations that are suggested by words, and which thus form part of their meaning, for individual speakers; for example, the word *automation* may connote “efficiency” to one person, and, “rounder” to another.

On the other hand, Parker and Riley (2009: 23) use “non literal locutionary acts” to refer to the connotation. They point out that “non literal locutionary acts” are those for which a literal interpretation is either impossible or absurd within the context of the utterance. For example, the famished husband who walks through the door and says to his wife, *I could eat a horse* (instead of, *I am very hungry*) is performing a non-literal locutionary act. Therefore, figurative language does not always mean what is being said or read, but serves to make it more interesting and helps painting a picture in the hearer/reader’s mind. It uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation.

To be more specific, a literal usage is the “normal” meanings of

the words (Jaszczolt, 2003). It maintains a consistent meaning regardless of the context (Glucksberg, 2001), with “the intended meaning correspond[ing] exactly to the meaning” of the individual words (Harley, 2001). Figurative use of language is the use of words or phrases in a manner where the literal meaning of the words is not true or does not make sense, but “implies a non-literal meaning which does make sense or that could be true” (Montgomery et al, 2007). Within literary analysis, such terms are still used; but within the fields of cognition and linguistics, the basis for identifying such a distinction is no longer used (Barber & Stainton, 2009).

Thus, figurative language is any deliberate departure from the conventional meaning, order, or construction of words. “If something happens literally,” says children’s author Lemony Snicket (2000), “it actually happens; if something happens figuratively, it feels like it is happening. If you are literally jumping for joy, for instance, it means you are leaping in the air because you are very happy. If you are figuratively jumping for joy, it means you are so happy that you could jump for joy, but are saving your energy for other matters.” Figurative language deals with implications rather than realities. In other words, what an individual says or writes may not correlate with what an individual actually means. It can create figures (pictures) in the mind of the reader or listener. These pictures help convey the meaning faster and more vividly than words alone.

Figurative language is everywhere, from classical works like Shakespeare or the Bible, to everyday speech, pop music and television commercials. It makes the reader or listener use their imagination and understand much more than the plain words. In the due course, various figures of speech are invented and used in “figurative language” to add color and interest, and to awaken the imagination. Almost all figures of speech, therefore, fall into the domain of figurative language.

Like wildflower seeds tossed on fertile ground, the figures of