A Study on Legal Vocabulary Translation Based on the Characteristics of Legal English Vocabulary

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Abstract: *Legal English is similar to other social languages, that is, it is a unique language function formed by people in long-term use according to various linguistic factors such as communication objects, communication purposes, and social and cultural environments, and the language rules and uses are relatively special. In addition, the special nature of the legal profession determines its complex and abstract English syntactic structure and terminology. In this paper, we take the lexical features of legal English as the starting point and analyze the translation strategies of legal vocabulary, hoping to provide reference for relevant researchers.*
Keywords: *Legal English; Lexical features; Translation skills*

Legal English is a discipline that integrates language, law and translation, and the influence of legal culture in different countries and regions as well as legal professional language habits are applied by lawyers, judges and staff of judicial organizations in different countries in the field of judicial practice, which is why the wording of legal English emphasizes strict, formal, standardized and dignified. At present, many legal English translators face great difficulties due to the professionalism and specificity of legal vocabulary. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the characteristics of legal English vocabulary and master the translation skills on this basis in order to improve the quality and level of legal English translation.

1 Characteristics of Legal English Vocabulary

The law reflects the will of the state power group and the class, and has significant authority and policy, because of which, the wording of laws and regulations should be semantically strict, formal and accurate, and effectively maintain the seriousness of the law. Legal English is called “Language of the Law” or “Legal Language” in English-speaking countries, which means the language used in expressing litigation/non-litigation legal affairs or legal science concepts in English. Based on the concept, it is known that legal English is not the only language, but also covers other languages such as Latin and French. Legal English vocabulary is characterized by the following aspects.

1.1 Emphasis on accurate wording

One of the most distinctive features of legal English is the accuracy of words, if legal English is not accurate

enough, it lacks soul and core. The accuracy of legal English vocabulary means that the linguistic meaning of the vocabulary is fully in line with the objective phenomenon/thing it reflects, accurately, precisely and correctly reflecting the general or main characteristics of the phenomenon or thing. At the same time, compared with other types of business English, legal English is more normative, and the demands and intentions of legislators, parties, and the judiciary can be expressed directly through legal English, especially with the rights of the state, the obligations of individuals/legal persons, etc. No matter the legal documents or instruments require accurate wording, if the wording is ambiguous, it will form different understandings and cause disputes. For example, in an estate dispute case in the United States, the testator used a controversial word in his will that caused a dispute: the will reads as follows: The remainders of the testator's property should be divided equally between all of our nephews and nieces on my wife's side and my niece. The use of the word "between" was the cause of the problem. The testator's wife had 22 nieces and nephews, but the testator had only one niece. This will was interpreted in two different ways: (1) all of the testator's nieces and nephews were divided equally between all of the testator's nieces and nephews; (2) 50% of the testator's estate went to the testator's nieces and nephews, and the remaining 50% went to the wife's 22 nieces and nephews; after the court heard the estate dispute, the judge ruled that the second way was to be executed The judge ruled that the will should be executed in the second way. The reason is as follows: the word "between" means between or between two parties. The trial judge held that if the first meaning is understood, i.e., if one of the testator's nieces is divided equally with his wife's 22 nephews/daughters, then the word "between" should be used in the will. The above case demonstrates the precise features of legal English wording.

1.2 The use of archaic words

Legal English is influenced by professional factors and is a relatively formal and highly rigorous language at the academic level, so it is different from ordinary languages. Although archaic words rarely appear in ordinary written documents, legal English is applied in a relatively unique way, and this phenomenon can be traced back to the roots of English development. Legal English has been in use for a long time and has become one of the many languages used by the public. In the course of legal development, archaic words have been preserved and developed in legal English due to the existence of Middle English and Old English. For example, "there", "here" and "where" are common adverbs in English, which are used as prefixes in legal English, and this adverb is used with different words to form This adverb will be used as a prefix with different words to form professional legal terms, making English vocabulary and phrases more concise and avoiding dragging and repetition. For example, prepositions such as herein, hereto, herinafter, herinbefore, etc. are added to here; prepositions such as threrin, therefrom, thereto, etc. are added to there. Add the preposition about whereof, whereby, etc. to where, etc. The above archaic words themselves have the same sanctity, rigor and formality as the law. Only when translators fully understand and grasp the meaning of archaic words in translating legal English can they translate various legal texts clearly and thoroughly and improve the translation level.

1.3 Borrowing foreign words

The foreign words in legal English mainly come from French and Latin, and after the Normans started to rule England in 1066, French became the language used by English high society, and a large number of French

words were incorporated into English, and there is no doubt that a large number of the so-called official language - French - is also used in laws and regulations. For example: estoppel, attentat, fee simple, fait accompli, etc. At the same time, the common law system is based on the common law, which in turn is developed on the basis of the Roman private law. It is well known that Roman private law was written in Latin. Common law inherited a large number of legal traditions of Roman private law, and a large number of Latin words and their variants will inevitably exist in its legal documents. For example: alibi, de facto, in re, inter alia, etc.

1.4 Use of terminology

The so-called legal terminology, that is, the phrases and words applied only in the legal field, usually such phrases or words have relatively stable meanings and their use is more specific, and cannot be applied to other areas of legal professional English terms or use other words to replace and arbitrarily derive. For example, tort, defendant, bail, etc. are common in the legal field. Some linguists have pointed out that the meaning of each word varies in different contexts. There are many common English words in legal documents, but the meaning of such words cannot be understood by non-legal professionals, but their meaning is in the legal context, but different from the original meaning. For example: This earthquake caused great damage, He was awarded $10,000, Plaintiff was awarded $50, etc. These are all regular English words, where damage is translated as damage or harm, and award is translated as award or grant, legal professionals who see the English word plaintiff will directly think of it as a legal judgment, so they need to understand award as Therefore, it is necessary to understand award as a court verdict, and damages as compensation given after the verdict, which is a logical and smooth translation of legal English.

1.5 Use of synonyms or near-synonyms in parallel structure

Another feature of legal language is the use of synonyms or parallelism of near-synonyms. [4] The so-called parallel structure of synonyms or near-synonyms refers to the structure formed when two or more words with similar or identical meanings are joined by the parallel conjunction and or. The purpose of this expression is to make the meaning more accurate, to avoid ambiguity and omission as much as possible, and to make the tone of the message stronger. For example: rules and regulations; rights and interests; modification and alternation; conciliation and mediation, etc. In addition, there is a tendency to repeat words in sentences. For example: Administrative acts include administrative legislation, administrative handling, administrative coercion, administrative punishment, administrative jurisdiction as well as acts related to administration. This phenomenon of repetition of words and the use of synonyms or near-synonyms in parallel highlights the deliberate pursuit of correct meaning of words and contexts in legal English, thus enhancing the rigor and accuracy of legal English wording.

2 Translation strategies of legal vocabulary based on the characteristics of legal English vocabulary

2.1 Clarify the translation principles

For the translation of legal English vocabulary, the following principles should be followed: (1) Consistency; compared with Chinese, English vocabulary will apply pronouns, near-synonyms, synonyms and other substitutes for the same word in the expression, mainly because English expressions do not repeat, while Chinese habitually uses the same words to express the same meaning. Legal texts are relatively special by the nature of the industry, so translators need to pay attention to the same word before and after in translation and use of vocabulary to reduce the opportunity for illegal people to take advantage of legal loopholes to do illegal things, and at the same time, consistency in vocabulary can simplify understanding. (2) Simplicity; when translating legal English vocabulary, there is no need to introduce too much emotion and subjective emotion, because legal texts need to convey objective and correct legal meanings in simple language. The law has strong practicality, and every citizen can use the law to defend his or her rights. Therefore, the translator should fully consider its audience and translate legal English vocabulary in a clear and concise manner to maximize the value of the legal text, help the parties understand the meaning of the vocabulary, and lay a solid theoretical foundation for promoting the development of modern rule of law. (3) Accuracy; without doubt, accuracy is the primary requirement for legal English translators to follow, because only on the basis of accuracy can the meaning of the law be expanded, and if the meaning of the legal text deviates due to translation errors of translators, it will bring different degrees of losses to the parties, and will damage the sanctity and majesty of the law.

2.2 Legal English Vocabulary Translation Strategy

2.2.1 Translation of special meanings of ordinary words

Legal English is a special-purpose English, and this language type has refined a variety of specialized terms during its long-term use and development in the legal field. Although some English vocabulary is widely used by the public, however, in translation, legal English cannot be equated with the translation of ordinary English vocabulary, in other words, it is difficult for people who are not in the legal field or have never been exposed to legal expertise to understand the true meaning of some of the words. Therefore, it is far from enough to translate legal vocabulary with only the daily accumulated professional knowledge, and it is necessary to master relevant translation skills. Table 1 shows some English words with special legal meanings. From Table 1, we can know that the general vocabulary covers more professional English words with legal meanings, and the above is only a general introduction of the differences between legal English and general English vocabulary. Translators need to fully understand and accumulate the individual meanings of ordinary words and related translation skills in daily translation, so as to pave the way for accurate identification of ordinary words with special legal meanings.

Table 1 General vocabulary with specific meaning in legal English

Word	Specialized legal terminology	Common Etymology
avoid	撤销	避免
leave	休庭	离开
present	本文件	礼物
party	合约方	党派
serve	送达	服务

2.2.2 Translation of legal English superfluous words

Usually legal English uses 2-3 words with the same meaning to express the same concept, and such expressions are called “superfluous”, which means tautology, i.e. triplets and couplets are often used to express the concept at the legal level with only one word. One of the most distinctive features of legal English vocabulary collocation is the high use of superfluous words. The translation of superfluous words is basically a less difficult direct translation, translating only a word in the same meaningful phrase. The common superfluous words in legal English are shown in Table 2, and the above superfluous words are customarily used for orphans, so the translator only needs to translate the common ordinary words in the translation to directly express the meaning of the original sentence. For example, the lease contract covers the following clause “well and sufficiently repair, uphold and maintain the premises”, and the above statement covers three verbs: maintain, uphold and repair, so the translator only needs to translate the meaning of the word repair to express the meaning of repairing the premises.

Table 2 Use of superfluous words in legal English

English	Chinese
buy or purchase	够买
null and void	无效的
Part and parcel	重要部分
free and clear	没有义务
Terms and conditions	条件

2.2.3 Translation of ambiguous words

Based on the conventional analysis, the word “vague” is difficult to be associated with “law”, as most people subconsciously believe that law is a very strict and sacred existence, and cannot be specious or ambiguous. When it comes to the applicability of the law, the “vagueness” of the law can be found in a certain degree of objective and accurate legislation and just and fair and reasonable law enforcement. The vagueness of the law is the property of the law itself of being incomplete, where incompleteness is the absence of norms/non-norms or the need to supplement the current state of affairs in the enacted and implemented law. The use of partially meaningful vague words to express partially required vague legal facts or legal concepts, etc., is often found in legal English. The legal English ambiguous words are shown in Table 3. For example, the Distributor shall pay the Company for all Products purchased hereunder not later than thirty days from the date of invoice. The Distributor shall pay the Company for the goods within 30d from the date of receipt of the goods in accordance with the signed purchase contract; where no later than and adding a specific time range can express the indefinite date of performance, the above is a typical legal English vague expression, that is, the parties may perform the corresponding tasks within the specified time, but not beyond the specified period. take Take appropriate action is also a common vague expression in legal English. Although appropriate action can be expressed precisely, there is no certainty of future events, so vague expressions are applied. Translators need to follow the principle of maintaining the meaning of ambiguous words to translate ambiguous words and master the related translation skills, that is, to be faithful to the original text in translation while preserving its ambiguity to the maximum extent, because legal translators do not have the right to clearly and explicitly explain the meaning of ambiguous words, and the only one who can make authoritative and clear explanation

is the judge.

Table 3 Ambiguous words in legal English

English	Chinese
within	以内
no less than	不少于
due care	合理的注意
appropriate	适当的

2.2.4 Translation of archaic/compound words\

The frequent use of archaic words is also a characteristic of legal English. The archaic words are Old English and Middle English. The most common archaic words are the adverbs here, there, and where, which are compounded with prepositions (com-pound). Since the use of compound words is a feature of Old English vocabulary, most of the archaic words in legal English are compound words and mainly compound prepositions. As shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Archaic words

Old and Medieval English Vocabulary	Modern English Meanings
thereafter	later
herein	In this thing
whereof	of what
whereby	by which

For example, the following case: Whereas Party A agrees to deliver (sell) the goods to Party B within Ten (10) days in accordance with the prices specified herein. here often refers to “this legal document”, so in English contracts often refers to “contract”. In this example, here-in means “in this contract”. When translating such compound prepositions made up of “here/there/where” plus “by/in/after/of/to/with”, you can use the “prepositional preposition The translation strategy of “preposition preceding” is to preface the preposition and then add this/that/which referred to by “here/there/where”, and then explain its meaning according to its context. For example, A contract shall be an agreement whereby the parties establish, change or terminate their civil relationship.] In this sentence, whereby is equivalent to by which, and which refers to the preceding word an agreement.

2.2.5 Translation of foreign words

The reason why Latin and French are used in legal English is that they are closely related to the legal texts of Roman law and common law, of which Latin is the basic carrier of Roman law, and the English people were ruled by the French on different levels of politics and culture for a long time during the Norman Conquest. For example, Latin prima facie means preliminary and superficial, ab initio means from the beginning or from the beginning; status quo means the status quo, de facto means the actual existence of the fact, the above foreign words have their own meanings, translators need to fully respect the history in the translation of legal English vocabulary.

3 Conclusion

In conclusion, legal English vocabulary, because of its professional nature, puts forward high requirements and standards for translators, who are required to fully understand the industry and the characteristics of English terms in this field when translating legal English vocabulary, so as to reduce the rate of translation errors and improve the quality and level of English vocabulary translation.

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