



A Corpus-Based Study on the Usage and Chinese Translation Characteristics of the Verb “Make”

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Abstract

The verb “make” is one of the high-frequency verbs in the English language. Based on the TED English-Chinese parallel speech corpus, this study explores the semantic features of the high-frequency verb “make” and classifies it according to its semantic constructions. The study then analyzes the characteristics of its Chinese translations. The research reveals that the translation of “make” in various usage types is not fixed and is significantly influenced by its collocating words.

Subject Areas

Corpus Linguistics

Keywords

Corpus Linguistics, Translation, Chinese Translation Characteristics, Make

1. Introduction

1.1. About TED

TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, and it is a private non-profit organization in the United States. Since 1984, TED has been hosting the annual TED Conference, inviting experts from the fields of technology, entertainment, and design to give short talks, with a principle that talks should not exceed 18 minutes. Over time, the scope of the talks has expanded beyond the initial three areas to include a wider range of topics such as natural science, architecture, business, international issues, medicine, and more. Since 2007, selected TED Conference talks, along with English transcripts and translations into various languages, have been made freely available to the public through the TED.com

website. This aligns with the core idea of TED conferences, which is to “spread inspiring ideas”.

1.2. TED English Chinese Parallel Corpus of Speech

The “TED English Chinese Parallel Corpus of Speech” consists of texts derived from English transcriptions and corresponding Chinese translations of TED talk videos on the TED.com website. The English transcriptions of TED talks were completed by internal staff of TED, while the translations were done collaboratively through crowdsourcing by volunteers from around the world. The initial collection, organization, and later proofreading of the corpus were completed by Xu Jiajin, and the alignment and proofreading of the English-Chinese texts were done by Qiao Wei.

For specific information about the corpus size, please see **Table 1** below.

2. Research Objects and Methods

“Make” is a high-frequency verb in the target language’s authentic texts. In this study, the TED English-Chinese Parallel Corpus of Speech is used to retrieve the frequency of occurrences of “make/makes/made/making” in the corpus, excluding compound words like “hand-made” that are not within the scope of this research. The distribution characteristics are as follows: “make” and related forms appear a total of 7268 times; “make + a/an + noun phrase” appears 1118 times; “make + preposition” appears 521 times. Building upon the classification of high-frequency usages of “make” by Deng Fei and Li Laichun [1], this study categorizes them into the notional usage, causative usage and delexical usage. Based on this, we employ ParaConc to retrieve texts from the TED English-Chinese parallel corpus, and study the meaning of “make” and the translation characteristics of “make”.

3. The Chinese Translation Characteristics of “Make”

The high-frequency usages of “make” fall into three categories: notional usage, causative usage, and delexical usage.

3.1. Notional Usage

“Make” as a notional verb is its most basic usage, where the meaning of “make” is to produce something (result of creation), and it can be translated as “做”, “制造”, “制作”, etc.

Table 1. Information about the corpus size.

	English text	Chinese text
Number of words	2,479,377	3,708,472
Number of rows	314,873	314,873
Total number of words	6,187,849	

Examples:

1) The most important being that it is the best way to make an inexpensive product.

最重要的一点是，那是制作便宜产品的最好方式。

2) We had to throw out the plywood legs and make new cane ones.

我们必须放弃原来的压合板马腿，改用藤制的。

3) So, we've gotten more and more interested in using these kinds of creative activities in a much broader context, for all kinds of people who don't usually have the opportunity to make music.

所以，我们乐于将此类创意运用到更加广泛的人群中，让那些没有机会进行音乐创作的人也能积极参与。

It can be observed that in the context where “make” are used as notional verbs, the meaning of “make” can be extended from the basic “制造(produce sth.)” to a broader sense of “创造(create sth.)”. Therefore, in translation, translators can choose an appropriate rendering based on the context and collocations.

3.2. Causative Usage

This study follows the categorization of “make” as a causative verb by Altenberg and Granger [2] and classifies it into three types of verb-object-complement structure:

Examples:

1) Adjective complement, such as:

That's why we've spent a lot of time thinking about how to make this data meaningful to the people who use it.

这也是我们花许多时间来研究如何使它更有效的原因。

2) Verb complement, like:

It's enough to make you feel very overwhelmed.

这些都足以让我们感到难以承受。

3) Noun complement, as in:

Do you think you could make us a horse for a show to happen at the National Theatre?

你觉得你能不能给我们作匹马在国家剧院演戏用?

The causative usage of “make” is often translated as “使”, “让”, and when combined with a noun complement, it adds directive property to the original meaning of “produce sth.”. It can be translated as “使 + 动词”, “给 + 动词”, or “把 + 动词”. The choice of translation of “动词(the verb)” should be based on the context.

3.3. Delexical Usage

The term “delexical verb” refers to a verb that has lost its lexical meaning as a standalone word and needs to be complemented by other words to convey its complete meaning. These verbs are also known as “non-lexicalized verbs” [3].

Addressing the non-lexicalization, Sinclair proposed the concept of “shared meaning” [4] as an interpretive mechanism. He held the view that “shared meaning” is an important feature and intrinsic mechanism of text. He posited that the meaning of vocabulary is inseparable from its context, and words combined together in a text have meanings different from when used individually. These words are partially non-lexicalized due to the transmission and influence of adjacent words’ meanings.

For verb phrases with non-lexicalized use of “make”, the focus of translation should lean towards the complementing noun (its partner in the phrase).

Examples:

1) As a result, this production, which had already sold out, every single person in that 800-seat audience, except for 10 people, made a decision to keep the money.

最后，已经卖光的演出票除了 10 个人，800 位购票的观众都决定不把钱收回。

2) Omidyar Network has made a big investment in DonorsChoose.

Omidyar Network 为这个慈善网站投入了大量的钱。

3) That has sparked cholera epidemics in ports along the world and has led to increased concentration on trying to make sure shipping doesn’t move these vectors of cholera around the world.

这引发了霍乱病沿着港口传向整个世界并迫使人们注意到要努力不让船只成为向世界传播霍乱病的传染源。

In the first example, the phrase “made a decision” is translated by extracting the noun part of the phrase and transforming it into a verb, rather than translating it along with the verb as “做决定”. Similarly, in the second example, “made a big investment” is translated directly as “投入大量的钱”, which aligns more with Chinese colloquial habits.

4. Conclusion

After categorizing the high-frequency usages of “make” according to its meaning and comparing its different ways of translation, it can be found that the translation of “make” is not fixed in most of the occasions, except for expressing the meaning of “produce sth.” and “create sth.” that can be directly translated through corresponding Chinese vocabulary (“制造”, “创造”). Their translation method is largely influenced by the meaning of the collocated words. In causative usage, the translation of “使”, “让”, “把” is relatively fixed, but subsequent verbs need to be translated in conjunction with the context. In delexical usage, the meaning of “make” is influenced by the meaning of the words it is paired with, and its translation focus should also be on the words it is paired with, weakening or even omitting the translation of “make” itself.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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