做中译英时除了惯常使用的逗号和句号之外,有时也会用到分号、冒号和破折号。某些情况下是因为原文即中文使用了这些标点符号,翻译时自然也会跟随使用这些标点符号,但某些情况下中文原文并未使用这些标点符号,但在英文译文中有必要使用这些标点符号,以便译文意思表述更为清晰。我们在学校里学习的英语语法课除了逗号和句号之外,很少涉及到其他标点符号的使用方法或使用实例,这也显示了学校课程和翻译实践之间的脱节。

我在做中译英的过程中总结了一些分号、冒号和破折号的使用方法和使用实例,分享给大家。

分号:

英文分号可以看成是在逗号上面加了一个句号,所以与逗号相比,分号所连接的语意之间分隔性更强,但与句号相比,分号所连接的语意之间分隔性更弱。分号一般有两种用法:

1. 如果列举的事物或事项之间已经包含逗号,分号用于帮助分隔这些事物或事项:

例如: I bought apples, grapes, and pears in a grocery store.

假设在这些水果前面用包含逗号的形容词来修饰,例如""

shiny, ripe apples

small, sweet, juicy grapes

firm pears

那么在这种情况下,如果用我们在学校中学习的英语语法,我们可以写成:

I bought shiny, ripe apples, small, sweet, juicy grapes, and firm pears in a grocery store.

也就是这些水果用词之间全部用逗号分隔,按照学校教的语法来看,这个句子是没错的,我在自己研究英语标点符号使用之前也会这样写。但这个句子显然有点难以

理解,需要自己分隔语意、断句,而且没有直观地告诉读者到底买了多少种水果,哪些词语应该归类在一起。在这种情况下其实就可以用分号,改写成:

I bought shiny, ripe apples; small, sweet, juicy grapes; and firm pears in a grocery store.

(注意最后一个分号前面要加上and)

在翻译实践中,经常遇到中文先是说了一个结果,然后列举几项原因,在这种情况下就可以用分号,一方面意思连接紧密,另一方面又有所分隔。

2. 分号还可以连接两句话

分号可以用在两个独立的句子之间,将两个句子在一定程度上分开,就像句号一样,但这两个句子之间有密切的关系。例如:

I went to the grocery store today. I bought a ton of fruit. Apples, grapes, and pears were on sale.

在这个句子中,分号可用于将两个(而不能是)三个句子连接起来。所以以下两句话都是正确的:

I went to the grocery store today; I bought a ton of fruit. Apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.

I went to the grocery store today. I bought a ton of fruit; apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.

而下面这句话就不对:

I went to the grocery store today; I bought a ton of fruit; apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.

但在这个例子中为什么要用分号呢?一个原因是这三个短句子听起来有点不流畅或突兀,连接性不够。之前我不了解英语中分号的用法时,可能会用and把前两个句子连接起来,即

I went to the grocery store today, and I bought a ton of fruit. Apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.

或者会用where把前两个句子连接起来,即

Today I went to the grocery store, where I bought a ton of fruit. Apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.

在这个例子中用分号一个更有说服力的理由是想强调其中两个句子之间的关系。如果把 "I bought a ton of fruit"和"Apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale"更紧密地联系起来,读者可能会意识到,买这么多水果的原因是促销力度大。

之前我不了解英语中分号的用法时,可能会用as把这两个句子之间的关系体现出来,即

"I bought a ton of fruit as Apples, grapes, and pears were all on sale.

但加as体现的是译者对原文的理解和阐释,而很多时候原文并没有表达出明确的因果关系,所以译者能不自己添词是最好的,这样分号就可以派上用场了,既暗含了这种因果关系,又没有明确表达出这种因果关系,更贴近原文。

冒号

冒号可用于解释、强调或连接。

常见用法

1. 列举、引用和解释说明。

列举:

We covered many of the fundamentals in our writing class: grammar, punctuation, style, and voice.

引用:

Shakespeare said it best: "To thine own self be true."

解释说明:

Many graduate students discover that there is a dark side to academia: late nights, high stress, and a crippling addiction to caffeinated beverages.

上述用法比较容易理解。

2. 连接句子。在这种情况下,两句话中后一句话为总结、强调或解释前一句话。这两句话都应该完整,且内容紧密关联。

例如:

Life is like a puzzle: half the fun is in trying to work it out.

3. 固定用法,例如表示时间、比例等等。这类用法容易理解,因此在此不赘述。

注意冒号的前面必须是一个完整的句子。

例如:

The very best peaches are: those that are grown in the great state of Georgia.

My favorite cake is made of: carrots, flour, butter, eggs, and cream cheese icing.

There are many different types of paper, including: college ruled, wide ruled, and plain copy paper.

这几句话都是对冒号的误用,因为冒号前一句话都不完整,只要将冒号去掉就行。

冒号后的第一个单词是否应大写?

一般而言,如果冒号后的单词是从句,即不构成一个完整的句子,那么第一个单词就应该小写,否则既可以大写、也可以小写。

例如:

The commercials had one message: The geeks shall inherit the earth.

The commercials had one message: the geeks shall inherit the earth.

这两句话都是对的,因为冒号前的那句话是一个完整的句子。

在中译英的翻译实践中经常遇到的情况是冒号出现在标题中,例如:

京东数科:定位数字科技,进阶"联结"模式

这种情况应该属于冒号前后都不是独立的句子, 所以冒号后第一个单词应该小写

我查看了许多英文文章的标题,也都贯彻了这一原则,例如:

Fintech and the digital transformation of financial services: implications for market structure and public policy

破折号

破折号有以下作用:

1. 强调。破折号的作用与括号相反。括号提示读者括号内的内容相对括号外的内容 重要性较低,而破折号提示读者要更注意破折号之后或者之间的内容。破折号起到 强调作用,而括号起到弱化作用。破折号的强调作用如下:

单个破折号强调一句话句首或句尾的内容。

例如:

After eighty years of dreaming, the elderly man realized it was time to

finally revisit the land of his youth - Ireland.

"The Office" - a harmless television program or a dangerously subversive guide to delinquency in the workplace?

两个破折号用于强调一句话中间的内容。

例如:

Everything I saw in my new neighborhood - from the graceful elm trees to the stately brick buildings - reminded me of my alma mater.

The fairgrounds - cold and wet in the October rain - were deserted.

两个破折号之间的词语通常是名词,而在后一个例句中,破折号之间是形容词,用来描述前面的名词。

2. 用于补充说明前面的名词的词语通常用逗号分隔,但如果这些词语之间已经用逗号连接,可以换用破折号,以便于理解。

例如:

Even the simplest tasks, washing, dressing, and going to work, were nearly impossible after I broke my leg.

这句话中 "washing, dressing, and going to work" 前后用了逗号, 意思不太清楚, 可以改用破折号:

Even the simplest tasks - washing, dressing, and going to work - were nearly impossible after I broke my leg.

又如:

For the main businesses of its parent company - retail and logistics -, JD Digits provides all-around services including marketing and promotion, technical support and financial services.

上句中 "retail and

logistics"之间虽然并无逗号,但其前后用破折号比用逗号意思表述更为清晰。