

Translation Studies on Public Signs from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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Abstract: With the growing influence of China internationally, the English translation of public signs, as a widely seen communication tool in daily life, has become increasingly important. This paper aims to analyze the application of Eco-translatology in the translation of public signs between English and Chinese, as well as explore how to better utilize the theories of Eco-translatology to enhance the effectiveness of public signs, providing insights for future translations of public signs.

Keywords: Eco-translatology; Public signs; Three-dimensional transformation.

1. Introduction

Public signs refer to written language that is visible to the public in public spaces. They are the most common and practical language used in people's daily lives, serving as a special genre of communication aimed at achieving specific communicative purposes. Public signs are widely applied in various aspects of our lives and can be found almost everywhere, such as road signs, billboards, shop signs, promotional messages in public places, and travel introductions, among others. Public signs are an important component of international cities, international tourist destinations, and the cultural environment. With the increasing international influence of China, many major international conferences and events are held here, making the translation of public signs particularly important. Due to the significance of public signs in the lives of the public and tourists, any ambiguity, misunderstanding, or misuse in their translation can lead to negative consequences. Incorrect translations can affect the image and international communication of a city or region and cause inconvenience to foreign visitors. On the other hand, accurate translations can create a favorable international language environment and establish a positive international image for China.

2. Eco-translatology and Public Signs

Eco-translatology is a relatively new translation theory in recent years, and its core concept of "translation ecological environment" and its advocated translation method of "three-dimensional transformation" have great enlightening significance for the translation of public signs. The term "translation ecological environment" goes beyond the conventional concept of "context" and refers more explicitly to the world formed by the source text, target text, and the original language, communication, culture, society, as well as the interaction between authors, readers, and clients. The "three-dimensional transformation" refers to the adaptive selection and transformation between the language dimension, the cultural dimension, and the communicative dimension. In addition to the translation of linguistic information and cultural connotations, the focus of selection and transformation is placed on the communicative level, ensuring that the communicative intent in the source text is reflected in the target text. This aligns well with the crucial

communicative intent of public signs. Therefore, the "three-dimensional transformation" method and the translation of public signs have a clear connection.

Based on the application of Eco-translatology in the translation of public signs between English and Chinese, this paper explores how to utilize the theories of Eco-translatology to better enhance the effectiveness of public signs, providing valuable references for future translations of public signs. In recent years, extensive research has been conducted in academia on the translation of public signs and Eco-translatology. The following analysis and summary will focus on the current research status of domestic and international studies based on public signs and Eco-translatology:

2.1. Current research status of public signs:

In China, research on public signs mainly includes the following two aspects:

2.1.1. Characteristics and functions of public signs

Public signs share some application characteristics with signs, symbols, and indicators, but public signs have a broader scope of application. Any basic textual information related to the needs and behaviors of the public, tourists, overseas guests, foreigners living in China, and those engaged in travel and business abroad falls within the scope of public signs (H.F. Lu, 2005). Therefore, public signs have extensive usage. English public signs are characterized by concise vocabulary, precise wording, and the use of concrete words, keywords, and core vocabulary as long as they accurately reflect the specific functions and meanings of public signs. Articles, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, etc., can be omitted. Nouns, verb phrases or phrases, and abbreviations are commonly used to ensure that readers can understand the purpose and direction of the public signs at a glance. Therefore, public signs are also characterized by conciseness. Public signs are applied in various aspects of daily life, directly influencing various aspects of our lives. Public signs serve the social, behavioral, and psychological needs of tourists and the general public. Therefore, they have prominent indicative, suggestive, restrictive, and mandatory functions in practical applications (H.F. Lu, 2005).

2.1.2. Translation strategies and methods of public signs

The famous British translator Newmark (1981) divided the functions of language into three types: expressive function, information function, and vocative function. He Xueyun believed that public signs belong to the type of calling

function text, and should focus on a reader centered communicative translation strategy. The key is to convey information so that readers can think, feel, and act, and use language to convey information. The function of producing effects, emphasizing translation effects, and placing readers first. English public signs have strict standardization, standardization, and inheritance. Therefore, when translating public signs into Chinese and English, it is necessary to perform a one-to-one C-E substitution of public signs used in the same context and with the same function in both Chinese and English cultures. The translation of Chinese English public signs should also pay attention to the differences in specific vocabulary used in English speaking countries such as the United States, Australia, etc., and use internationally recognized and commonly used equivalent vocabulary for Chinese English substitution to avoid inconvenience caused by the use of unfamiliar vocabulary (H.F. Lu, 2005). J.P. Chen (2005) summarized the current C-E translation of logo terms in society into two major defects: copying the original text, literal translation based on characters, and non concise translation. He proposed the principle of "accurate, standardized, and concise" logo term translation.

Abroad, Ni Made Ariani & Ketut Artawa analyzed five English public signs discovered in the Ubud region of Bali, Indonesia. Their research aims to identify grammatical errors in the information conveyed by these five public signs during the translation process, and to understand the translation procedures used during the translation process. The first finding of this study was the discovery of grammatical errors on the first, second, and fifth public signs. Meanwhile, the second discovery involves four translation processes, namely modulation, conversion, literal translation, and Galk. Another interesting finding that can be found in their research is that the application of these translation programs plays a crucial role in determining the quality of translation products and promoting the occurrence of grammar errors.

2.2. Theoretical Research on Ecological Translation Studies

The systematic proposer of the concept of ecological translation studies was Hu Gengshen, who focused on elaborating on the nine research focuses and theoretical perspectives of ecological translation studies, including: (1) Ecological paradigm (2) Association sequence chain (3) Ecological rationality (4) Translate accordingly (5) Translate the ecological environment (6) Translator center (7) Selective adaptation (8) Three-dimensional transformation (9) Post disciplinary action.

The concept of "translation ecological environment" was first proposed in the article "Preliminary exploration of translation adaptation selection theory". Starting to introduce the concept of "translation ecological environment" without continuing to use "context" or "cultural context". With the deepening of research, the "translation ecosystem" more clearly refers to the world composed of the original text, source language, and target language, namely language, communication, culture, society, as well as the overall interconnected interaction of authors, readers, and clients. The elements of the "translation ecological environment" include the source language, original text, and target language system, which is the overall environment for the survival of translators and translations. It is not only a collection of multiple factors that restrict translators' optimal adaptation and selection, but also a prerequisite and basis for translators'

multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection. The translation ecological environment is a collection of multiple factors that affect translators' optimal adaptation and optimization choices. In recent years, the definition of "translation ecological environment" has become broader, referring to a collection of texts, cultural contexts, and "translation communities", as well as a combination of spiritual and material elements. (G.S. Hu, 2011).

The basic theory of ecological translation studies shortens translation methods to "three-dimensional" transformations, that is, under the principle of "multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection", relatively focusing on the adaptive selection transformation of language, culture, and communication dimensions. The so-called "adaptive selection and transformation of language dimension" refers to the translator's adaptive selection and transformation of language forms during the translation process; The so-called "adaptive selection and transformation of cultural dimension" refers to the translator paying attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations during the translation process; The so-called "adaptive selection transformation of communication dimension" refers to the translator's attention to the adaptive selection transformation of bilingual communication intention during the translation process (G.S. Hu, 2011).

3. The Enlightenment of Ecological Translation Studies on the Translation of Public Signs

3.1. The Enlightenment of Translation Ecological Environment on the Translation of Public Signs

The "translation ecological environment" refers to the world composed of the original text, source language, and target language, which includes language, communication, culture, society, as well as the overall interconnected interaction among authors, readers, and clients. This concept clarifies the overall environment that needs to be considered during translation, so it is particularly crucial for translators to make wise adaptive choices based on the ecological environment of the target language. The translation of public signs is different from the translation of other languages and scripts. Public signs have strong social attributes and are an important component of social language, playing a huge role in external publicity and communication, as well as economic and cultural construction. The translation of public signs requires readers such as foreign tourists, visitors, and residents to clarify their meaning and instructions, without any ambiguity or misunderstanding. Therefore, readers' feelings should be given priority, and attention should be paid to cultural and communicative differences between English and Chinese, in order to accurately grasp the meaning of the source language. For example, the theme slogan of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo was first "Better City, Better Life." in English, followed by a Chinese translation of "City, Make Life Better". At first glance, such Chinese does not correspond to the original text, at least in terms of word equivalence. Some people may ask, why not simply translate it as "better city, better life"? This is because the ecological environment for translation between Chinese and English is very different. Aristotle said more than two thousand years ago, "People come to cities to live, and people live in cities to

live better." To this day, the relationship between the two is still a common concern for countries around the world. It can be seen that the original English text originated from such an ecological environment, which aims to express the relationship between cities and life, or more accurately, the impact of cities on life. In fact, the original text should be understood as "Better city can make life better." After interpreting this way, we will not be confused by seemingly unequal Chinese translations, but will applaud the translation of "City, Make Life Better" because such Chinese reflects the most authentic and accurate original language environment. It can be seen that when translating public signs, it is necessary to consider the translation ecological environment of the source language, accurately grasp its true meaning, in order to achieve excellent translation purposes.

3.2. The Enlightenment of Multidimensional Transformation on the Translation of Public Signs

The "three-dimensional transformation" method in ecological translation studies has certain guiding significance for the translation of public signs. Below, the author will analyze examples of English and Chinese public sign translation from the perspectives of language, culture, and communication:

3.2.1. Language dimension

The relationship between pronunciation, word usage, and sentence construction and language is that pronunciation is the external form of language, vocabulary is the building material of language, and grammar is the combination law of language. Together, they form the three elements of language (J.Y. Chen, 2016). In response to the issue of numerous vocabulary and grammar issues in public signs in China, the following will mainly discuss the vocabulary and grammar issues in public sign translation:

The relationship between pronunciation, word usage, and sentence construction and language is that pronunciation is the external form of language, vocabulary is the building material of language, and grammar is the combination law of language. Together, they form the three elements of language (J.Y. Chen, 2016). In response to the issue of numerous vocabulary and grammar issues in public signs in China, the following will mainly discuss the vocabulary and grammar issues in public sign translation:

a) Vocabulary problems also include spelling errors, improper use of words, etc

Example 1 In the introduction of Rehe Spring in Chengde Mountain Resort, there is a translation: "During spring season, you can see the bottom tough the clear spring water." In the text, "tough" should be "through". In addition, there are spelling errors caused by non-standard capitalization and part of speech errors.

Example 2 A dedicated parking space in a public place in Hangzhou is translated as "Appropriate Parking", and "appropriate" means "appropriate, appropriate". If foreigners see such a sign, it can be easily understood as "parking here". The meaning of dedicated parking space is "reserved parking space for certain specific groups". Therefore, due to improper wording in the translation and semantic differences from the original text, it is recommended to change it to "Reserved Parking"/"VIP Parking".

b) Grammar problems mainly include errors in word order, abbreviations, part of speech, singular and plural.

In the English introduction of Example 3 Summer Resort Rehe Spring, there is a clear lack of a predicate verb in the sentence "The small bridge across the river like a colorful rainbow." Therefore, it is recommended to change the preposition "across" to the verb "crosses".

3.2.2. Cultural dimension

Translation is an activity that transcends language and culture. To overcome the obstacles caused by cultural differences and ensure the smooth implementation of information exchange, translators need to pay attention to the differences in the nature and expression of things between the source language culture and the target language culture. In order to avoid misinterpreting the original text from the perspective of the target language culture, translators need to adapt to the entire cultural system to which the source language belongs and pay attention to the transmission effect of cultural connotations during the translation process (J.Y. Chen, 2016).

a) Due to unfamiliarity with the expression of public signs in the same public places in the target language country, the translation of public signs is not authentic

Example 4 The translation of “报警服务台” as “Police Calling Service” is relatively stiff.

In English speaking countries, “Emergency” is commonly used, followed by a phone number or image to remind people to call this number in case of emergency.

b) Confusion among readers due to cultural gaps

Example 5 In the introduction to the attractions of Mulan Paddock in Chengde, there is a sentence: “从康熙到嘉庆年间,皇家到木兰围场狩猎百余次”, which was translated into "From Emperor Kangxi to Emperor Jiaqing, the imperial families hunt in Mulan Paddock over 100 times".

In the absence of a supplementary explanation of the relevant cultural background by the translator, this translation is bound to cause confusion for foreign tourists.

3.2.3. Communicative dimension

Public signs, as a social language with communicative properties, play a strong communicative role in road signs, billboards, store signs, public place slogans, tourism introductions, and other public signs. The social environment in which they are located also has a significant impact on the translation of public signs. Therefore, attention should be paid to the appropriateness of language use in specific contexts.

Example 6 “财运桥” is transliterated as “Fortune Bridge”, but not as “Good Luck in Making Money Bridge”.

Although this translation does not violate the requirements of language and cultural dimensions, due to the attribution of proper nouns to the name of a scenic spot, the latter clearly uses too many words and violates the principle of conciseness in public signs, which is not in line with the communicative environment in which it appears.

4. Conclusion

This article combines examples of public signs translation in various regions and focuses on analyzing the translation ecological environment and "three-dimensional transformation" in ecological translation studies. Through analysis, we can find that there are still many errors and shortcomings in the translation of public signs in China. At the same time, in order to more effectively translate public signs, the three dimensions should be combined with each other to jointly guide the translation of public signs, rather than splitting and analyzing the three dimensions in isolation. The quality of translation of public signs determines the effectiveness of city publicity. This study looks forward to emphasizing the importance of public sign translation in various sectors of society and relevant departments, and vigorously rectify incorrect translations in various regions of China, contributing to China's opening-up and internationalization construction.

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