The Research on the Standardization of Bilingual Signs in Public Service Areas from the Perspective of Skopostheorie

-- A Case Study of English Translation of Scenic Areas and Spots in Zhangjiajie

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Abstract

In recent years, with the continuous expansion of foreign exchanges and the rapid development of tourism industry in Zhangjiajie, more and more foreigners come to "Zhangjiajie" for variety of purposes, including tourism, cultural exchanges, film shooting as well as economic and trade negotiations. Standardized use of bilingual signs in public service is extremely important to enhance urban cultural connotation and build a good image. Through a series of efforts in field investigation, questionnaire, literature research and seminars, the essay summarizes the existing problems and shortcomings in the English translation of public signs in scenic spots in Zhangjiajie as follows: incorrect spelling, grammatical errors, confusion in translation and inappropriate semantics. Referring to the Guidelines for the Use of English in Public Service Areas (GB/T 30240.2-2015) and standards in other provinces and municipalities, the author puts forward some targeted improvement measures according to Skopostheorie principles and translation strategies. It would be better to provide some reference for improving the translation of public signs in local scenic spots and promote the sound and sustainable development of local tourism.

Keywords
Skopostheorie, public signs, English translation, Zhangjiajie.

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the background of economic globalization and The Belt and Road Initiative, China's tourism industry, especially the inbound tourism has developed rapidly. Zhangjiajie has unique natural scenery, long-standing cultural customs and brilliant red memory traveling which can attract more and more foreign tourists. The rapid rise of tourism brings both opportunities and challenges to the local people. It is undeniable that tourism has greatly promoted the growth of local economy, but the growing overseas tourists have also posed new challenges to the city’s tourism reception and service ability, the most important of these is language. Wang Yinquan pointed out that the translation of public signs has been included in the field of external communication translation and cultural translation, and the latter is the most important step in the dissemination of foreign culture [1]. In recent years, government departments, university scholars and scenic spot management committees have paid extensive attention to the use of language in the public places. English translation of public signs has become one of the most important contents in the construction of our city. It bears the construction of city image and cultural environment. Meanwhile it has become a "business card" of Zhangjiajie city and reflects
cultural connotation and spirit of the city. Bei Zhu once said that the use of public signs in Chinese and English version can directly reflect the openness of a city. Whether the translation is standardized or not can test the internationalization of the city, and the level of translation directly shows the overall quality of the city [2].

2. RESEARCH STATUS OF PUBLIC SIGNS AT HOME AND ABROAD

As for the definition of public signs, different experts and scholars have different opinions, they can express their own opinions and define them from different perspectives and dimensions. Lv Fa believes that public signs are words and images related to people’s life, production, ecology and livelihood, which has the function of warning, directing, prompting and displaying [3]. Yang Quanhong holds that public signs are a special style commonly used in public places, either in few words, or in an easy-to-understand graphics, or both, to express a certain demand for the readers or to attract some attention [4]. "Public signs" refer to the basic public signs covering clothing, food, accommodation, travel, entertainment and purchase, etc. and public languages with guiding functions and public information marked by common symbols without written or non-written codes, which are the general name of signs, slogans and others[5]. According to Liu Lifen, public signs are a special style commonly in public places with very few words, or an easy-to-understand graphics, or both, to show the function of warning, directing, prompting and displaying to the public [6].

To sum up, public signs are a special style of writing, including people’s daily affairs such as food, clothing, housing, entertainment, purchase, etc. which integrates information description, instructions, prompts and warnings.

The study of public signs in the West started early in 1959, Vinay & Darbelnet [7] talked about the concept of public signs in the preface of his book Comparative Stylistic of France and English, while the study of public signs in China began in the early 1990s. Beizhu and Shan Aimin first talked about "public signs" in their article On the Linguistic Characteristics of English Public Signs and Chinese-English Translation published in 2002. In order to welcome the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the First National Symposium on Translation of Public Signs was held in Beijing in September 2005. Many translators and experts assembled to express their opinions, pointing out that there are still serious quality problems in the translation of public signs, such as translation errors and missing-translation. Experts unanimously emphasized that all walks of life, especially translators, must attached great importance to the translation of public signs. In July 2007, Jiang Lu read out the paper Research on Public Sign Translation and Corpus Construction at the Second National Symposium on Public Sign Translation held by Tongji University in Shanghai, which initiated the first discussion on the construction of public sign translation corpus in China.

The author searched all relevant articles of CNKI with the theme "public signs", totaling 3617 articles, of which 2681 were in Chinese and 446 were in foreign languages (Figure 1 will show more details). From the quantitative analysis of published articles, there were fewer scholars to make deep research before 2006, and then there was a research boom and reached an unprecedented research peak (319 articles) in 2014, but the research trend has slowed down in the past five years. Among them, thanks to the successful hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the number of foreign literature increased from 7 in 2007 to 47 in 2008. In terms of the perspective of research field, it covers a wide range of areas, focusing on the classification of public signs (related to scenic spots), text types, linguistic features and translation principles and strategies. The authors use Skopos theory, communicative theory, eco-translatology theory and linguistic & economics theory to study the errors in English translation of public signs in terms of language, semantics, pragmatics and culture, analyze the reasons behind them, explore
the principles, strategies and methods of public signs translation, and then put forward suggestions for the standardization public signs in translation.

In addition, the content of the study also involves public signs, teaching, urban image construction, cultural soft power enhancement and other aspects (Figure 2 will show more details). Endless research results include papers, monographs, Chinese-English public signs dictionary, websites, promulgation, the national and provincial local standards in the field of public services and the construction of public signs translation corpus, etc. There is 1 project of National Natural Science Foundation, 1 China Postdoctoral Science Foundation and 15 National Social Science Foundation. Meanwhile, 21 projects are supported by Hunan Provincial Education Commission, making it on the top of the list (Figure 3 will show more details). College scholars also enjoy the study of sign translation. A number of excellent research results emerge in endlessly. Among them, Professor Wang Yinquan of Nanjing Agricultural University and Wan Yongkun of Yuxi Normal College are the representatives with great achievements in this field. However, there are only a few papers on the English translation of public signs in Zhangjiajie scenic spots. The author found that only a dozen articles have studied under the topic words "public signs" and "Zhangjiajie" by searching the CNKI, including two Japanese and Korean papers respectively.

![Published articles](image)
Fig 2. Research contents

- Public signs
- Chinese-English translation of public signs
- Translation strategies
- Public signs in scenic areas
- Chinese of public signs
- Foreign tourists
- Functional translation theory
- Scenic areas
- Readers of translation texts
- English translation of public signs
- Chinese-English translation
- Translation of public signs
- Eco-translatology
- Public signs in scenic spots
- Translation errors
- Translation methods
- Public signs of tourism
- Public areas

Fig 3. Fund projects

- Scientific Research Fund of Ningxia University
- Youth Science and Technology Fund of Sichuan Province
- National Fund for Educational Science Planning
- Soft Science Research Program Fund of Hebei Province
- Soft Science Research Program Fund of Shaanxi Province
- Qinglan Project Fund of Jiangsu Province
- Social Development Fund of Jiangsu Science and...
- Research Foundation of Colleges and Universities of...
- Scientific Research Fund of Inner Mongolia Education...
- Scientific Research Fund of Hunan Education Department
- National Social Science Fund
- Soft Science Research Program Fund of Henan Province
- Scientific Research Fund of Hunan Education Commission
3. SKOPOSTHEORIE AND ITS TRANSATION PRINCIPLES

In the 1970s, functionalist translation theory emerged in Germany, which regards translation as an intentional communicative activity and its core is the purpose/function of translation. Functional translation theory mainly includes Katharina Reiss's Text typology, Hans Vermeer's Skopostheorie, J.H.Manttari's Theory of Translational Action and C.Nord's Function plus loyalty.

Rice borrowed Karl Burhler's linguistic functionalism to link the three functions of language with the corresponding text types, and divided them into three text types: informative text, expressive text and operational text [8]. In the book About Translation, Newmark further explained three types of texts: "The function of expressive texts is to express the author's personality; informative texts is to state objective facts; and the appealing texts is to infect readers [9]." Most of the tourism texts are informative and appealing texts, which are mainly used to provide necessary information guidance, instructions and warnings to tourists, or to call on tourists to protect flowers, plants, trees and heritage resources.

According to Fermer, Skopos rule is the first principle that all translations follow because the purpose can determine translation strategies and methods choices. Skopos is a Greek word with the meaning of "purpose, function, intention" Translation should not be restricted to the form and content of the original text, but should take into account the expected functions of the translation. The purpose of translation can be divided into three categories: the basic purpose of the translator, the communicative purpose of the translated text, and the purpose to be achieved by specific translation strategies or means, that is, communicative purpose.

4. PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES

Since the end of 2017, the author has been one of the core members for the project “Guidelines for the English Translation of Tourism Related Public Signs in Zhangjiajie”. In June 2018, he was awarded the Social Practice Project for Postgraduate Students of Jishou University - "Practice Group of Foreign Languages College of Jishou University for the Translation Research to Wulingyuan Core Scenic Spot". Through questionnaires, the delegation interviewed about 100 foreign tourists from the United States, Britain, Australia, India and other parts of the world face to face. They were invited to fill in questionnaires on the spot and put forward suggestions for revising unsatisfactory translation of public signs. A large number of bilingual materials of public signs in the core scenic spots of Zhangjiajie City have been collected through on-site photographs. After sorting out and summarizing, it is found that the existing problems in English translation of bilingual signs in the scenic spots of Zhangjiajie City lie in the following categories: incorrect spelling, grammar errors, confusion and improper meanings in English translation of public signs.

4.1. Misspelling

After one year and a half of field research, the author finds that there are still some problems in the English translation of public signs in Zhangjiajie scenic spots, which belong to low-level errors. As a highly purposeful text, low-level spelling errors will make foreign tourists confused instead of conveying the information or calling functions of public signs, which will leave a bad impression on the tourists. Table 1 will show more examples as follows:
Table 1. Examples of misspelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Source text</th>
<th>Original translation</th>
<th>Suggesting translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>龙凤庵</td>
<td>Long-fang Nunnery</td>
<td>Longfengan Nunnery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>袁家界游客中心</td>
<td>Yuanjaijie Tourist Center</td>
<td>Yuanjiajie Tourist Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>应急避难所</td>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problems of spelling errors or wrong order of letters in the above examples are mostly caused by carelessness of translators or front-line workers, so these errors are not difficult to correct. In fact, as long as the translator has some basic bilingual skills, an accurate understanding of the original text, and also some understanding of the target readers and cultural differences of the background, he/she can easily avoid such low-level errors including misuse of uppercase and lowercase letters, misspelling, omission and repetition, etc.

4.2. Grammatical Errors

It is found that grammatical errors in bilingual public signs are common in tourist attractions. Xu Min said that grammatical errors are common to non-native speakers of a second language, while grammatical errors in signs translation mainly include morphological and syntactic errors. Articles, singular and plural, gender classification are morphological errors; syntactic errors refer to phrases (order), sentences (subject-predicate inconsistency), cohesion and collocation errors [10]. Table 2 will show more examples as follows:

Table 2. Examples of grammatical errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Source text</th>
<th>Original translation</th>
<th>Suggesting translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>小心脚下</td>
<td>Mind Your Steps</td>
<td>Mind Your Step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>导游通道</td>
<td>Guide Channel</td>
<td>Tour Guide Only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>请不要随地乱扔垃圾</td>
<td>Do not Littering</td>
<td>No Littering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above examples are all typical grammatical errors. The word “Steps” has an extra letter “s” and foreign tourists can understand the meaning. It seems not hurt the important essentials, but the image and status of an international tourist city will be greatly discounted in the eyes of others. Chen Xiaoshuo pointed out that the translation of public signs also has the value of shaping social image and spreading culture. The influence of signs translation is directly related to the shaping of social image, whether the readers can have a good feeling towards them, and then to the subsequent communication activities [11]. For such public signs, such as the translation of guided passage, “Stuff Only” can be translated into “Tour Guide Only” by referring to the foreign translation of “staff passage”, which is more in line with the readers’ thinking habits. The translation of public signs should be standardized, and the translator must be more careful and improve his own professional translation skills.

4.3. Translation Confusion

Feng Zhiwei has put forward that one of the principles of nomenclature is "monosemy". "One term shall express only one concept, and the same concept can only be expressed in one term [12]." Through field research, the author found that the names of some scenic spots are inconsistent, even the same Chinese name corresponds to multiple English translations, which not only fails to play the role of guide and guidance, but misleads foreign tourists, and even mistakes them for different scenic spots. Table 3 will show more examples as follows:
Table 3. Examples of translation confusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Source text</th>
<th>Original translation</th>
<th>Suggesting translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>天门山景区</td>
<td>Tianmen Mountain Scenic Area</td>
<td>Tianmen Mountain Scenic Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tianmenshan Scenic Spot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tianmenshan Mountain Scenic Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>金鞭溪</td>
<td>Golden Whip Stream</td>
<td>Jinbianxi Stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Golden Whip Brook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jinbianxi Stream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above examples are all from phenomena that one scenic spot is titled with several English versions, and the translation problems of similar scenic spots are particularly serious. Based on the experience of developing local standards, the author prefers to translate “天门山景区” and “金鞭溪” into “Tianmen Mountain Scenic Area” and “Jinbianxi Stream” by using the method of “proper name + generic name”. This approach not only conforms to the Skopostheorie-guided translation principles, but also has a good communicative effect, especially for new arrivals to ask for directions. Even Chinese who do not know English can understand Chinese phonetic alphabet when they hear it.

4.4. Improper Meaning

The author has made many in-depth investigations into scenic spots and found that the English translation of public signs such as the calling for protection of flowers, plants and trees in scenic spots can be either too verbose and rigid in tone, or inadequate in expression. He Xueyun once pointed out that the most direct purpose of public signs is to convey the information to the readers accurately and leave the readers a deep memory, and then let the readers take action. So when doing the signs translation, translators should strive to interpret the calling function of the source language text [13]. Table 4 will show more examples as follows:

Table 4. Examples of improper meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Source text</th>
<th>Original translation</th>
<th>Suggesting translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>小草微微笑, 请您走便道。</td>
<td>Little grass is smiling slightly. Please watch your step.</td>
<td>Please keep off the grass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>保护绿草,留住绿意。</td>
<td>Preserve green grass and retain the green color.</td>
<td>Keep the grass green and fresh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>进入景区,防火第一。</td>
<td>To enter the area, a fire first.</td>
<td>No Fire!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>党员加油站</td>
<td>Party Station</td>
<td>Information Desk/Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>党员团员义务咨询台</td>
<td>Members of the communist party members are obliged to consult</td>
<td>Free Consultation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above translation examples are rigid, straightforward with lengthy sentences and verbose language, which can give foreign tourists a feeling of ignorance or unfriendliness. Sun Xiaochun said that sign translation should follow three principles: civilization, elegance and politeness [14]. Referring to the translation of such public signs, we should be able to convey both the meaning and the spirit. Especially for example 5, there is no need to translate the
phrase "Party members", because foreign tourists have no relevant cultural background of it. The author advocates the principle of "borrowing" which means if there are similar ready-made expressions in English expressions, it is advisable to apply them directly. On the one hand, it can ensure the readability and conciseness of the translation, on the other hand, it can also be consistent with the thinking mode and reading habits of foreign tourists.

5. CONCLUSION

The study of public signs translation has developed from nothing to prairie fire. People in the industry have made a deep and win-win study of public signs, from domestic to foreign, from mainland to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, from individual research to team research, from expert seminars to national seminars. The research perspectives and dimensions are different, including the definition of public signs, linguistic features and thematic classification. The research fields and contents are also very rich, including translation theory, principle, strategies and methods, and analysis of translation errors. At the same time, research results are diversified, including papers, monographs, Chinese-English dictionaries, promulgation and implementation of national and local standards for sign translation, and the construction of corpus.

However, the translation of public signs in scenic spots is a huge project, and there is still a long way to go to standardize the translation of public signs. It is far from enough to investigate and collect materials by one's own efforts. It also requires many efforts, such as strict proofreading by translators, strong support from government departments, and conscientious and responsible front-line workers. The author thoroughly analyzed the current research situation of public signs over the years, and discussed several key problems existing in Zhangjiajie scenic spots. According to specific cases, the author made a slight analysis and put forward some suggestions for revision. The author hopes that it can improve the current situation of local public signs in Zhangjiajie, and provide some thoughts and references for the study of public signs translation.

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Research on standardization of bilingual signs in public service areas from the perspective of Skopostheorie: A case study of English translation of geographical names of scenic areas and spots in Zhangjiajie

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