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Application of Translation Variation in Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs

变译在公示语 汉英翻译中的应用



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Preface

Translation of public signs plays an important role in Sino-foreign cultural exchange and economic cooperation. But at present the quality of Chinese-English translation (hereafter abbreviated to C-E translation) of public signs in China is still far from satisfaction. Linguistic errors, pragmatic failure and cultural mistranslation are common problems in current C-E translation of public signs.

Text types are closely related to language functions. Language functions can decide text types. According to text typology, public signs are classified into informative and vocative texts which perform such functions as directing, reminding, warning, informing, persuading and propagating. Peter Newmark put forward communicative translation strategy to translate informative and vocative texts. The communicative translation lays emphasis on the readability of the target text and the reception of the target readers, the fluency, idiomaticness, brevity and comprehensibility of the target language. It stresses that the target text should be able to produce functionally the same effect on the target readers as the original on the readers. Translation variation theory, put forward by professor Huang Zhonglian, is a suitable and feasible theory to guide the C-E translation of public signs, which aims at representing

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contents and messages of the original by using appropriate adaptations such as addition, deletion, edition, narration, condensation, combination and rewriting to meet the specific needs of the specific readers under specific circumstances.

Based on the translation variation theory, this book analyses the feasibility and necessity of applying translation variation in C-E translation of public signs and explores the application of some translation variation methods in translating public signs so that the functions and skopos of C-E translation of public signs can be realized.

This book is composed of six parts. Chapter 1 briefs the background, purpose and significance, methodology of this study as well as the structure of the book. Chapter 2 is a text analysis of public signs, which presents definition, classification, characteristics, functions, and text types of public signs. It also makes a comparison of translation strategies for translation of public signs and those for translation of other text types. Chapter 3 mainly analyses the mistranslation in C-E translation of public signs and its cause. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are the key parts of this book. Chapter 4 first gives a brief overview and comment on translation variation and translation variation theory and then discusses the feasibility and necessity of applying translation variation in C-E translation of public signs. Chapter 5 explores the methods of applying translation variation to translate public signs, such as amplification,

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omission, adaptation, imitation and creation, so that the information and intention of the original can be conveyed exactly to the target readers. The final part comes to the conclusion in which findings, limitations and suggestions for further research are presented.

It is hoped that this book will provide some useful guidance for the readers to better understand the functions and text types of public signs and learn how to apply translation variation in their own translation practice and thus make a valuable contribution to the standardization of C-E translation of public signs.

Due to festinate time, limited knowledge and experience of the author, some mistakes and errors in this book are unavoidable. Feedbacks, comments and suggestions from all readers of this book are warmly welcome so that corrections can be made.

The Author

March 6, 2017



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Chapter 1 Introduction



1.1 Research Background

Research on translation of public signs has a comparatively long history in Western countries. Early in 1959, Vinay & Darbelne began their study on public signs. While in China, it is generally accepted that research on translation started in 1989 and then developed rapidly. After entry to the 21st century, with the deepening of China's opening-up to the outside world, more and more foreigners pour into China for travel, study, business etc. Chinese-English translation (hereafter abbreviated to C-E translation) of public signs has also become a hot topic which attracts the attention of many experts, scholars as well as the general public in China.

1.1.1 Public Campaigns on C-E Translation of Public Signs

Research on C-E translation of public signs has been stimulated by big events such as 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, 2010 Shanghai World

Expo, Shenzhen Universiade 2011 and 2016 G20 Hangzhou Summit etc. With a view to bringing convenience to foreigners to the largest extent and building a more friendly and inclusive national image, public campaigns about translation of public signs have been launched nationwide.

The campaign was initiated by Beijing International Studies University (BISU), which established the first C-E Public Signs Research Center in 2002. In the same year, the center started a program named *Research on C-E Translation of Public Signs*. During the summer vacations in 2004 and 2005, the members from the program travelled to 17 cities in 11 foreign countries, inclusive of Germany, France, Britain, and Holland and so on, to collect more than 3000 realistic and authentic pictures and 10 hours video recordings of public signs, which laid a good foundation for the successful launch of the first website for C-E translation of public signs www.e-signs.info. This website has become a very important platform for research in this field. The public signs translation collected from western countries and papers in this area made the website become the most authoritative and influential one in China. From then on, many websites have been set up for the study of translation of public signs. For instance, www.chinadaily.com.cn set up in 2005 was a platform open to the public for study and give their opinions on how to translate public signs. In addition, a campaign named Here We Go was

conducted by <http://language.cninadaily.com.cn/herewego/to> encourage the general public to find out the awkward and incorrect translations of public signs in their daily life and take photos of them, and then the website invited some professional scholars and experts to make comments and rectify the C-E mistranslation of public signs. A similar campaign was launched by www.beijingenglish.com.cn, which was exclusively organized for Beijing citizens to find the translation errors of public signs in Beijing streets. In this campaign, thousands of translation errors have been found and corrected by translation specialists and experts.

What's more, for the purpose of promoting the systematic and comprehensive development of the translation of public signs, a series of National Symposiums on Translation of Public Signs have been and will be held in some large cities in China. More details are given as follows:

The First National Symposium on Translation of Public Signs was held on September 25 to 27, 2005 in Beijing International Studies University (BISU). Over 100 experts and scholars from governmental organizations, industrial organizations, professional groups, colleges and universities and translation circle attended the symposium and had discussions on the particular subject "Translation of Public Signs in a Global Context". Their discussions mainly focused on the following topics: ① The Theories and Practices of C-E Translation of Public Signs; ② National Standards and Industrial Standards of C-E Translation of

Public Signs; ③ Construction of a Collaboration Network on Study of C-E Translation of Public Signs etc. Professor Dai Zongxian, a famous scholar in the field of translation of public signs, delivered a speech on the symposium. He pointed out that “the translation of public signs, neglected by Chinese people for quite a long time, is of great significance to the sustainable development of China. The approaching 2008 Beijing Olympic Games will provide China a good opportunity to put across our country’s image. It is essential that we should work together to find out the awkward and incorrect translations of public signs and correct them”. The first Symposium on Translation of Public Signs exerted milestone significance in the study of translation of public signs. It marked that the research on translation of public signs had taken shape and stepped up to a new level.

The Second National Symposium on Translation of Public Signs was held on July 14 to 15, 2007 in Tongji University in Shanghai, which signified that great progress had been made in the field of translation of public signs. The theme of this symposium was “Translation of Public Signs and Construction of Linguistic Environment” with discussions on the following major specific topics: ① Translation of Public Signs and Cross-cultural Communication; ② City and Translation of Public Signs; ③ Exploration on Theories Guiding Translation of Public Signs; ④ Tourism and Translation of Public Signs etc. The participants of the

meeting appeared that the utmost task was to formulate a national standard on translation of public signs to regulate the C-E translation of signs at public places in cities. They also suggested that the translation of public signs should imitate and borrow public signs in foreign countries because of their universality in a global context.

The Third National Symposium on Translation of Public Signs was held on September 13 to 14, 2014 in Beijing International Studies University (BISU). The attendants had heated discussions on the subject “The Construction of International Metropolises and Tourist Destinations with Chinese Characteristics” so as to facilitate the construction of linguistic environment of international metropolises and tourist destinations with Chinese features. This symposium covered a wide range of topics, among which the main topics related to translation of public signs were: ① Globalization and Translation of Public Signs; ② Theoretical Foundation of Translation of Public Signs; ③ Standardization and Terminologization of Translation of Public Signs; ④ Translation of Public Signs and Sustainable Development of Tourism Industry; ⑤ Web Corpus Construction for Translation of Public Signs etc. Professor Luo Xuanmin, President of China Association for Comparative Studies of English and Chinese (CACSEC), made a keynote speech in the symposium. He pointed out that increasing expansion of international exchanges highlighted the importance of translation of public signs under

the background of economic globalization. He further explained that the translation of public signs was concerned with not only language transfer but also the development of cultural tourism industry and the shaping of cultural image. He said, “If translation of public signs is only considered as a kind of language transfer, with its social and cultural impacts neglected, the image of the government will be damaged and even culture shock will appear.” After an interpretation of the translation of public signs against the background of globalization, he stressed that joint efforts should be made by government, educational institutions, foundations, researchers and communities etc. to ensure the translation of public signs under guidance and supervision, achieving the goal of building a sound cultural image.

The Fourth National Symposium on Translation of Public Signs will be held on September 22 to 24, 2017 in Nanjing Agricultural University. This symposium is titled “Language Service, Standards and Foreign Language Policies” with the following major topics: ① Translation of public signs and Chinese Culture’s Going Out; ② Translation of public signs and State Language Capacity; ③ Translation of Public Signs and Foreign Languages Teaching Policies; ④ Translation of Public Signs and Language Service; ⑤ Translation of Public Signs and MTI Teaching; ⑥ Translation of Public Signs and ESP Teaching etc. The symposium will speed up Chinese culture’s Going Out, facilitate the construction of

foreign language service environment in international metropolises, promote the research on translation of public signs to step up to a higher level, propagate the national standard *Guidelines for the Use of English in Public Service Areas* and facilitate the cultivation of MTI postgraduates.

1.1.2 Academic Research on C-E Translation of Public Signs

Apart from the public campaigns conducted on study of translation of public signs, many domestic scholars and experts also have carried out extensive academic research on it. According to incomplete statistics, the number of thesis relating to C-E translation of public signs was over 1600, which were mainly published in newspapers, magazines and academic periodicals etc. Moreover, some research achievements were presented in books and dictionaries. More and more people have conducted research on this field from different perspectives. According to the data collected from books, newspapers, magazines, academic periodicals as well as internet, research on C-E translation of public signs concentrates on the following six aspects:

1. To Clarify the Definition of Public Signs

“公示语” comes together with “标识语” “标语” “标示语” “标志语” “牌示语” “警示语” etc. This phenomenon still exists at present. Various definitions of public signs are given by domestic scholars and researchers. Ding Hengqi (2006) refers to public signs as “a kind of