

Research on Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs in Wuxi Qingming Bridge Ancient Grand Canal Scenic Zone from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract: Based on the Skopos Theory, this essay focuses on the actual situation of the English translation of public signs in the Qingming Bridge Ancient Grand Canal Scenic Zone. Four major types of translation errors are found: spelling errors, Chinglish, multiple translations for one word and lack of English translation. Relying on the Skopos Theory, this essay proposes three suggestions: borrowing, annotation and omission for existing errors to achieve the objective of language and cultural communication.

1. Introduction

The Qingming Bridge Ancient Grand Canal Scenic Zone is a national AAAA-level tourist attraction. It is a famous historical and cultural protection area in Wuxi and a characteristic scenic spot of canal towns in south of the Yangtze, and which is known as the “Chinese Living Canal Museum”. The historical relics and cultural landscapes along the coast make this the unique historical and cultural scenic promenade along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal and have attracted a constant stream of domestic and foreign tourists. Therefore, the public signs of this scenic zone are very important. It is not only a symbol of social civilization which reflects the overall cultural quality of the society, but also an important part of the country and the city’s external publicity.

According to Skopos Theory^[1], the translation process should be based on one or several communicative functions expected to be achieved by the translation in the target language culture. Therefore, the purpose of translation of public signs in scenic zone is to achieve functional equivalence between the original text and the translated text, and the audience can also obtain corresponding functions from the translated text. The purpose of public signs translation coincides with the central principle of Skopos Theory. Therefore, this essay will mainly study the current situation and problems of Chinese-English translation of public signs in this scenic zone from the perspective of Skopos Theory and put forward translation suggestions.

2. Sample Collection

According to the field investigation as of December 31, 2020, a total of 151 public signs in

English translation of the Qingming Bridge Ancient Grand Canal Scenic Zone have been collected, and a total of 27 public signs lacking English translation have been collected. According to the characteristics of the public signs of the scenic zone, it can be divided into four categories:

Table 1 Classification of English Translation Samples of Public Signs in Scenic Zone

Scenic Name	Total Number of Public Signs	Introduction of Scenic Spots	Tourist Signs	General Signs	Instructions for Cruise Ships	Lacking English Translation
Wuxi Qingming Bridge Ancient Grand Canal Scenic Zone	151	26	72	40	13	27

Among the four categories, the number of tourist signs accounted for the largest proportion of the total number of public signs, accounting for 47.7%, and which are mostly famous historical and cultural attractions with very strong cultural characteristics of the ancient canal. It has great importance for the development of Wuxi's tourism industry.

3. Analysis of the Translation Error of Public Signs

It mainly violates the three major rules, namely Coherence Rule, Fidelity Rule and Skopos Rule.

3.1 The Violating of “Coherence Rule”

Coherence Rule is also called Intra-textual Coherence Rule, that is, the translation should be both readable and acceptable, and has meaning in the culture and context of the target language. This rule requires translators to combine the relevant culture of the target language in the translation process to meet the expectations and requirements of different readers due to environmental changes in different periods, so as to achieve the purpose of delivering information and communication^[2]. Examples of mistranslations that violate the “Coherence Rule” are as follows:

Translation One: Wuxi Ancient Kiln Relics Museum

Translation Two: Wuxi Brickkiln Group Relics Museum

Translation Three: Wuxi Kiln Ruins Museum

Translation Four: Wuxi Museum of The Vestige Of Ancient Kilins

There are four different translation texts in the same scenic spot, but the meaning of the public sign should be single, otherwise it will cause ambiguity and lead to misunderstanding. National standards stipulate that the same nouns and terms should always be used to express the same concept, and the same concept should always be expressed with the same nouns and terms^[3]. Therefore, the translation of sights in the same scenic spot should be as consistent as possible. This translation does not comply with the “Coherence Rule”.

“Kiln” refers to various brickkiln, and “brickkiln” is more specific and the official norms are “ruins”. Since the main exhibits involved in the museum are brick kilns, we suggest to adopt the term “brickkiln” and translate it into “Wuxi Brickkiln Group Ruins Museum”.

3.2 The Violating of “Fidelity Rule”

Fidelity Rule is also called Inter-textual Coherence Rule, which requires Inter-textual Coherence between the target language text and the source language text. But the degree and form of fidelity depend on the purpose of the target language text and the understanding of the translator. This rule requires the translator to be morally responsible for the audience, responsible for the translation behavior, and respect the original author and not violate his intentions^[4].

Translation One: Miao Guang Guta

Translation Two: Miaoguang ancient tower

The “Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas” stipulate that the “tower” shall be translated into different ways under different circumstances. “Miaoguang” refers to a bodhisattva named “Miaoguang”, and “Miao” is widely used in Buddhist scriptures, expressing profound meanings. In the Avatamsaka Sutra, it is full of wisdom and light, which shines on the world^[5]. It can be seen that the “tower” in the original text is pagoda, and should be translated into “Miaoguang Ancient Pagado”.

3.3 The Violating of “Skopos Rule”

According to Skopos Rule, translation activities should function in the way expected by the audience. Vermeer^[6] pointed out that there are three purposes in translation, namely the basic purpose of the translator, the communicative purpose of the translation, and the purpose to be achieved by using a special translation method.

“Coherence Rule” and “Fidelity Rule” under the guidance of Skopos Theory must be subordinate to the “Skopos Rule”, and the former two belong to the latter. Functional translation errors are the most important translation errors, which can directly or indirectly damage the intended function of the translation.

Example: China Silk Museum

The “industry” in the original text is not translated, which is a problem of lack of information. “Fidelity Rule” emphasizes that there should be a corresponding relationship between the original text and the translated text, and requires the translator to convey the complete information of the original text. However, the translation information is missing and not faithful to the source language, which violates “Fidelity Rule”. More importantly, this translation does not achieve the communicative purpose of the translation and does not convey the characteristics of the “silk industry” displayed by the museum. We suggest to translate into “China Silk Industry Museum”.

4. Suggestions for Public Signs Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

4.1 Borrowing

Although there are differences in stylistic features and styles between Chinese and English languages, there are functional equivalents in the two languages. This translation method also conforms to “Fidelity Rule”, that is, the translation is completely faithful to the original in terms of information transmission and functional equivalence. If we can find expressions with the same meaning and function, we can directly borrow, such as “Slip carefully”, but actually “CAUTION! Slippery”.

4.2 Annotation

Public signs in Chinese scenic spots generally involve historical and cultural knowledge. First, the translation should start from the perspective of the audience. Secondly, the translator should pay attention to the purpose of translation. Most of this type of public signs are interpretive and educational. Unlike instructional and restricted public signs that only provide information, they should also have the function of spreading Chinese culture. A place in Wuxi Brickkiln Group Ruins Museum mentioned the history of brickkiln and there is a public sign mentioned the character “Taibo”. In this translation, the identity of “Taibo” is added. This is a good example of annotation, which better exerts the cultural communication function of language.

4.3 Omission

The Chinese and English languages belong to different language systems, and their structures are different. The differences between the two determine that some deletions and adjustments need to be applied to the original text in the process of Chinese-English translation of public signs in scenic spots, and strive to make the translation smooth and concise, in order to reduce the reading burden of target readers. Public signs belong to the restricted public signs. The main purpose is to inform tourists not to step on the lawn. It is not to promote Chinese culture. Therefore, it is not necessary to translate the charm and characteristics of Chinese which is more suitable for omission strategy, translated as “Please Keep off the Grass”. It can be seen that, in certain contexts, when translating certain public signs into English, only translating their pragmatic meanings can achieve the pragmatic effects and functions of the source language.

5. Conclusion

Skopos Theory has a good guiding role in the selection of Chinese-English translation strategies for public signs in tourist attractions. In the translation process, the translator must master relevant translation skills, which are highly compatible with the expected function of the target text and the acceptance of foreign tourists, and improve the readability and acceptability of the translation, so as to select the appropriate one through the three rules of Skopos Theory to achieve accurate and concise results, and finally achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication.

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