

# Investigation and Research on the Present Situation of Public Signs Translation in Xi'an Universities from the Perspective of Ecological Translation Theory

Liu Yunhang

Xi'an Peihua University, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710125

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**Abstract:** The paper is based on questionnaires and field research to further study the present situation of public signs translation in Xi'an universities from the perspective of Ecological Translation Theory, and then the existing problems and causes of campus public signs translation are summarized and analyzed for the universities to take effective measures in order to guide the language environment, improve the translation quality of public signs, and regulate public announcements of language translation in Xi'an universities.

## 1. Introduction

Public signs are an important part of the language environment and human environment of international cities and international tourist destinations. Because public signs are of great significance in the lives of the audience and tourists, any ambiguity, misunderstanding and abuse of public signs will lead to adverse consequences. Wrong translation will affect the image and communication of a city and a region, and it will also bring a lot of inconvenience to foreign tourists. The public signs of college campuses, as the public signs of public venues, are not only an important part of campus cultural construction, but also an urban language. The part of the environment is a platform to showcase the spiritual civilization of schools and cities. With the increasing frequency of international exchanges, international exchanges between colleges and universities have also increased. The establishment of bilingual public signs on college campuses has provided great convenience for foreign students or foreign friends who do not understand Chinese in life, study, and work. With the strengthening of the universality and importance of English, bilingual public signs on campus create a good "learning English everywhere" environment for school students, which can also reflect the culture of a school. Therefore, in today's globalized world, the importance of the translation of public signs on campus is unquestionable.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Ecological Translation Theory is a new translation theory proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen in 2004. It is an ecological view of translation developed from the theory of Selection that advocates translation should adapt to the rule of "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest". The new translation theory interprets translation activities and translation phenomena from a completely new perspective. From this perspective, it defines translation as "a translator-centered cycle of translator adaptation and translator selection."

Huang Youyi believes that translators need to be more familiar with the principle of "three approaches": "close to the reality of China's development", "close to the needs of foreign audiences for Chinese information" and "close to the thinking habits of foreign audiences". As far as the translation theories of study on public signs translation are concerned, the theories cited are widely diverse. The research on the application of Ecological Translation Theory for public sign translation has become a hot topic in recent years. 34 articles which cite the theory can be easily searched from 2015 to June 2019. This phenomenon shows that although public signs translation has become more mature and standardized, with the development of the times, new theories for public signs translation need urgently to guide and innovate the studies.

With the continuous deepening of reform and opening up and the popularization of public signs

in China, domestic researches on public signs translation are also fruitful. The research results mainly focus on the characteristics and functions of public signs, current status of public sign translation in cities and scenic spots and errors and causes of public sign translation. However, researches on public signs translation in campuses are rare, and most of them emphasis on the analysis of error types, lacking relevant theoretical guidance.

### **3. Current Situation of Public Signs Translation in Xi'an Universities**

#### **3.1 Research methods and purposes**

The survey was conducted by using questionnaires and field surveys.

Questionnaire method. A comprehensive questionnaire survey was started in many universities in Xi'an. 20 questions in the questionnaire are mainly related to the attention, translation errors of public signs on campus. The first 15 questions are multiple-choice questions. The other 5 questions are open-ended questions, allowing the respondent to put forward relevant opinions and suggestions. The survey results are very impressive. Among the 300 questionnaires issued in this survey, there were 273 valid questionnaires, with an effective rate of 91%. The collation and analysis of Xi'an college students' cognition of public signs on campus are organized and analyzed in order to understand the students' attitudes towards public signs on campus.

In the field trips, more than a dozen colleges and universities were identified as the subjects of the survey. The campus public signs in Xi'an universities were photoed and collected, and a total of more than 400 were collected. The collected photos are classified. The public signs with English translations are integrated with the public signs without English translation, and some public signs with English translation are found to be incorrect or inappropriately translated so that the current status and the reasons for the problems of campus public signs translation can be summarized to propose reasonable solutions and suggestions.

#### **3.2 Findings**

At present, there are public signs in all the universities surveyed, which are distributed in teaching buildings, libraries, and street signs. Public signs can be found everywhere and most of them are bilingual except some new campuses where there are inadequate facilities, so bilingual public signs are few and appear only on streets. According to the questionnaire, 62.4% of the students noticed the public signs on campus, but only 34.3% of the students noticed that the public signs of their university were equipped with English translation. 78% students believe that it is necessary to translate public signs on campus, 14.6% are indifferent to the topic, and the remaining 7.4% of students think it is not necessary. 68% of the students think that the wrong translation of campus public signs will have a negative impact on the school's image. In summary, with the increasing frequency of communication between Chinese and foreign universities, public signs as a business card for the image of universities not only affect the daily learning life of international students and foreign teachers, but also affect the external image of the universities. University students are also concerned about the construction of public facilities and the image of the school. In this survey, it was found that public signs in some universities had errors such as grammar and spelling, and failed to meet the "accurate" standard. Therefore, schools should pay more attention to the translation of campus public signs, improve the standardization of campus public signs, and enhance the school's external image.

### **4. Results analysis**

According to the summary and analysis of the current state of public signs in Xi'an universities, the Chinese-English translation of public signs on campus exists the following types of irregularities:

#### **4.1 Misspelling**

Spelling errors include misspelled letters, missed letters, overwritten letters, and incorrect

alphabetical order. For example: “收发室” is translated as Receive And Dispatch Room, “and” is a conjunction, which should be lowercase here. Recyclable garbage is misprinted as recyclables, and the correct way of writing should be: recyclable; fire extinguishers are misprinted as fire extinouiher, and the correct way of writing should be fire extinouiher.

#### **4.2 Abuse of Pinyin**

“Abuse of Pinyin” means that the translator uses Pinyin directly, or mixed Pinyin with English. For example, the “阶梯教室” is written as "Jie Ti Jiao Shi". Here, "Lecture Hall" is recommended rather than using Pinyin directly.

#### **4.3 Grammatical errors**

“Grammatical errors” are mainly part-of-speech errors, missing components, third-person singular errors, and vocabulary creation. If “Don’t throwing rubbish” is a part of speech error, this sentence is an imperative sentence. "Don't" should be followed by the original verb form “throw”.

#### **4.4 Improper use of words**

The recommended translation for the “实验楼” should be “Laboratory Building” rather than “Experimental Building”. “Experimental” focuses on major scientific research and does not apply to other things.

#### **4.5 Inconsistency**

In the survey, the inconsistency frequently appear. For the same Chinese public signs, there are several different English translations For example, there are several different translations of“洗手间 /卫生间” in a university:

(1) The translator used Pinyin "WEI SHENG JIAN" directly.

(2) It was Translated as "WC". The term "WC" is an abbreviation of “water closet”, which means “the effluent is washed away with water”, which is more indecent.

(3) It was translated as “MALE / FEMALE TOILET”. In the opinion of Professor Wang Yinquan, this translation is inappropriate. Professor Wang Yinquan (2006) once pointed out: “Translations such as ‘Male’ and ‘Female are extremely inappropriate, because ‘Female refers to ‘someone or something that can bear children or lay eggs.’ ”. It is found that “Men’s Room / Men” and “Ladies’ Room / Ladies” are universally accepted, which are accurate, and consistent in both American and British English. Therefore, “Men’s Room / Men” or “Ladies’ Room / Ladies”with a male / female graphic logo are recommend to use more.

### **5. Conclusion**

As a business card for the image of colleges and universities, the accuracy of campus public signs is extremely important. Taking the translation of public signs on campuses in Xi’an city as an example, this paper analyzes the existing problems in English translation of public signs on campuses and proposes amendments. And through the questionnaire, more than half of the students thought that the translation of campus public signs would have an impact on the school’s image. Therefore, universities should pay attention to the translation of public signs on campus. Failure to correct misspellings and mistranslations of public signs will not only lead to mocks from students, but also damage the school’s image. Translation is not a simple and mechanical translation, but requires translators to adapt to the ecological environment, and to choose among the three dimensions of language, culture and communication to improve the translation quality of public signs on the campus.

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