

Optimizing C-E Translation Quality and Accuracy for Public Signs in Xi'an Gemin Park

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Abstract: Xi'an serves as a capital for 13 dynasties and leaves boundless of cultural and historical relics. With the development of Xi'an city, the translation of public sign raises awareness. This article, taking Xi'an Gemin Park as an example, points out the C-E translation problems existed, (1) inconsistency with published official documents, (2) linguistic problem, (3) readability consideration, (4) inaccurate problem. Then it explores feasible corresponding solutions for translators to enhance the translation quality and accuracy on public signs.

Keywords: C-E Translation, Public Sign, Translation Problems and Solutions, Translator Literacy.

1. Introduction

Xi'an, also known as Chang'an and Haojing in ancient times, is the capital city in Shaanxi Province. Serving as the capital of China for 13 dynasties, Xi'an is endowed with numerous historical sites and relics to the future generation. In addition, with the development of the Communist Party of China, Xi'an is also of great significance. It, therefore, boasts a variety of scenic spots related to the development of the CPC, covering The Memorial Museum of Eight Route Army Xi'an Office, Xi'an Incident Memorial, and Yan'an Revolutionary Memorial Hall and etc., which attracts tourists in China and the rest of the world. Xi'an Gemin Park is located at No.53 Xiwu Road, Xincheng District, Xi'an, covering an area of 10.4 hectares. Dating back to 1927, it was founded owing to be in memory of two generals Yang Hucheng and Li Huchen. It offers a channel to pay tribute to the revolutionary martyrs and pass on the Chinese traditions.

2. An Overview Study of Public Signs

This section explores the definition of public signs, and gives an overview of previous studies that scholars have done.

2.1. Definition of Public Signs

Public signs are mostly referred to as 'signs' in English, and have been defined in different ways (Leong Ko, 2010). Searching "sign" on Collins Online Dictionary, it is defined as "A sign is a piece of wood, metal, or plastic with words or pictures on it. Signs give you information about something, or give you a warning or an instruction." It is defined in Cambridge Online Dictionary as "a notice giving information, directions, a warning, etc." According to these definitions, it can draw a conclusion that a "sign" may be contain a picture and it can give you some directions.

Some scholars also discuss public signs. He (2006) reckons that public signs are designed for a certain group of people, and it is a specialized style to satisfy a certain communicative purpose. Niu (2007) holds that public signs may be a calling card for a city. In addition, a good translation version of public signs maybe intensifies a city's glories. Fan (2010) argues that public sign is a major constituent of international metropolitans and the soft environment of the international

tourist city.

2.2. Research on C-E Translation on Public Sign

The research on C-E translation on public sign may be categorized by the following aspects. Some translation theories are applied to point translation problems. Xue (2022) applies eco-translatorology to public signs in scenic spots. Xue indicates the translation problems, including spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and Chinglish and revision in the dimensions of language, culture, and communication. Fang, Zhu & et al. (2023) proposes translation problems, covering mistranslation, leaking translation, and pragmatic errors under the guidance of Skopos theory. Li & Chen (2024) applies text typology to analyze the problems and proposes translation strategies including when informative function and expressive function are equally significant, informative function should be prioritized. When expressive and appellative function are equally important, appellative function should be prioritized.

In addition, scholars conduct study on public signs in different fields. Zhu & Zhao (2022) points out the problems existing in the writing and translation of Beijing subway public signs, and reckons that the translation of public sign should consider the application scenario and its applicability. Zhai & Xiao (2022) investigates the translation of public sign related to household waste sorting in Guangzhou. It identifies the lexical and syntactic characteristics of the original Chinese signs and evaluates the existing English translations. It highlights common issues, including typographical and printing errors, inconsistencies and incompleteness in translations and Chinglish expressions.

To sum up, previous scholars point out the translation problems and give tentative or feasible translation strategies. In addition, some translation theories are applied to solve certain translation problems.

3. Linguistic Features of Public Signs

According to Zheng (2021), he systemically proposes the linguistic features of public sign. From lexical level, public signs in scenic spots are served for ordinary tourists, so their words should be clear, concise, natural and straightforward.

Moreover, they should avoid using unfamiliar words, slangs or abstruse terms. In addition, the first letter of word usually capitalized. Form syntactic level, public signs usually use the present tense and simple sentence patterns. From discourse level, public signs not only save people's time, but also attracts people's attention. the rhetorical devices such as rhyme, repetition and antithesis would be used.

In Xi'an Gemin park, these rules are also applicable to some extent. From lexical level, the wording could be simple, clear and concise, and the first letter of a word always capitalized, and sometimes the words are all capitalized. From syntactic level, the sentence usually uses simple and present tense, and passive voice is infrequent. From discourse level, the sentence uses rhetorical devices such as repetition to attract people.

Table 1. Lexical features of public sign in Xi'an Gemin Park

Source language (Chinese)	Target language (English)
应急棚宿区	Area For Makeshift Tents
游乐场	Playground
卫生间	TOILET
革命亭	Revolution Hall
忠烈祠	Zhonglie Temple
刘志丹雕像	Statue of Liu Zhidan
南门	South Gate

Table 2. Syntactic features of public sign in Xi'an Gemin Park

Source language (Chinese)	Target language (English)
防止水土流失 改善生态环境	Prevent and control soil erosion And improve the ecological environment
创建文明城市	Public welfare concerns
为了下一代 请远离香烟	For the next generation please stay away from xiangyan

Table 3. Discourse features of public sign in Xi'an Gemin Park

Source language (Chinese)	Target language (English)
只要生命存在，生活就是美好的。让我们关爱留守儿童，关爱每一位需要爱护的孩子，让我们共享一片蓝天！	As long as the extinction of life, life is good. Let us respect the disables, care of persons with disabilities, learning disabilities, let us share a blue sky!

4. Problems and Their Corresponding Solutions of C-E Translation in Xi'an Gemin Park

In this chapter, this article first points out the problems of C-E translation of public signs in Xi'an Gemin Park, and then gives some feasible solutions to improve translation quality. According to LV (2007), he points out that directing, prompting, restricting and compelling are their four most important functions. In Gemin park in Xi'an City, public sign has its own functions, and diverse translation skills applied to enhance the communicative purpose among foreigners.

Problem A: Inconsistency with published official

documents

In the year of 2009, Public information graphical symbols and signs on earthquake administration is published by China Earthquake Administration. The national standard regulates public information, graphics symbols and signs related to earthquake prevention and disaster reduction. It also gives standardized English version to certain public signs. In Xi'an Gemin park, “应急棚宿区” can be found, and its English version is “Area For Makeshift Tents”. Obviously, “应急” is omitted and it does not correspond to the national standard. In addition, the first letter uppercases.

In the year of 2017, Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas- part 3: Tourism is published. It prescribes terminologies and definitions of public signs. It also gives translation methods and requirements. In the Guideline, it stipulates the translation of “祠”, viz, “Memorial Temple”, and the first letter should uppercase. According to the Guideline, “Zhonglie Temple” is revised to “Zhonglie Memorial Temple”.

In the year of 2020, Guidelines for the use of English for Public Sign Part 2: Culture and Tourism is published by Beijing Administration for Industry and Commerce. It rules the English version of public signs, covering eight parts, viz. transport, culture and tourism, commerce and finance, sports, healthcare, post and telecom and catering. In Xi'an Gemin park, English version of public signs is not accordance with it. For example, “革命亭” is translated into “Revolution Hall”.

Solution: China witnesses a rapid development, since the reform and opening up particularly. Translation of public signs raise professionals awareness. When translating, if the official document formulates the specific C-E translation version, the translator must follow it, so as to ensure the translation quality and accuracy to the greatest extent.

From the perspective of translator, before translation, he or she is bound to search quantities of information, including parallel texts, corpus, glossary and etc. National standard, local standard, even the industry standard, to some extent, is of great importance for translators, because before it is published, it is often revised back and forth.

As regard “应急棚宿区” “革命亭” and “忠烈祠”, Public information graphical symbols and signs on earthquake administration stipulates“应急棚宿区” English translation version, viz. “Area for emergency makeshift tents”. In addition, just “Area” is capitalized. Although “革命亭” and “忠烈祠” do not have complete official English translation version, the core noun of it is prescribed. “亭” is stipulated as “Pavilion”, and “祠” as “Memorial Temple”.

To sum up, official documents, national standard, local standard, and industry standard, are good parallel texts for translators to ensure translation quality and accuracy.

Problem B: Linguistic problem

In terms of public signs, linguistic problems may matter. Public sign usually contains information, and different language versions may help people from different countries to reach the same communicative purpose as the Chinese. And when translating public sign, its unique style should be taken into consideration. In Xi'an Gemin park, linguistic problems could be considered as a common one. It includes collocates and capitalization.

In terms of collocates, it may not only demonstrate the translator's language proficiency, but also show respect to the foreigners. In Gemin Park in Xi'an City, “为了下一代 请远离香烟” is translated into “For the next generation please stay

away from xiangyan". In this translation version, three linguistic issues are identified, reducing its effectiveness. The first issue pertains to the improper use of punctuation, which impacts the overall readability. Secondly, the translation of "香烟" as "xiangyan" relies on the pinyin system. While this approach may resonate with Chinese speakers, it is likely to confuse foreign readers unfamiliar with pinyin conventions. Lastly, the lexical choice. "远离" is translated into "stay from," fails to align with idiomatic English usage, which results in an awkward and unclear expression.

As regard to punctuation mark, it maybe considered that the source text has nothing marks. It maybe a way to retain the original style. But for foreigners, it, possibly, does not make sense and is not idiomatic. The punctuation has its rules. According to Grammarly, comma is defined as "a comma indicates a small break.", and its usages are separating items in a list of three or more, setting apart non-restrictive relative clauses, setting apart interrupters and parenthetical elements, following a participial phrase that introduces a sentence and etc. In this sentence, "For the next generation please stay away from xiangyan", the function of "For the next generation" is an introductory statement grammatically. The translation, therefore need a comma. In addition, "远离" is translated into "stay away from". According to Cambridge Online Dictionary, "stay away from" means "to maintain a distance from someone or something, especially for safety reasons; to forbear from interacting with someone, engaging in something, or using something.". In Chinese context, "远离" implies that it is usually harmful for individual. From his perspective, "stay away from" cannot convey the meaning "远离" in Chinese.

Another linguistic problem is letter uppercase. In Xi'an Gemin Park, there are three gates and the public signs direct. "西门" is translated into "west gate". Comparing to other two gates, "东门" is translated into "East Gate", and "南门" is translated into "South Gate". Instead of capitalization, another problem is found, viz, the consistency.

Solution: A good translation is not just about converting words from one language to another but also transferring meanings. Understanding the cultural contexts of both the source and target languages may help avoid misinterpretations and inappropriate translation. For linguistic problems, translators maybe seek aids from online dictionaries, Corpus, Thesaurus and etc. In addition, translators need to grasp the Chinese meaning first, and then use more idiomatic ways to express. In addition, after translating, it is beneficial to have another translator or an editor review the work, especially punctuation mark, capitalization, collocates and so on. This process maybe a way to enhance translation quality.

Problem C: Readability mistake

Readability mistake maybe the biggest in translation. Chinese and English belong to different language family, and people express themselves in different ways, due to different thinking patterns.

The following examples are pragmatic misunderstanding in Xi'an Gemin Park. "创建文明城市" is translated into "Public welfare concerns", "只要生命存在, 生活就是美好的。让我们关爱留守儿童, 关爱每一位需要爱护的孩子, 让我们共享一片蓝天!" is translated into "As long as the extinction of life, life is good. Let us respect the disables, care of persons with disabilities, learning disabilities, let us share

a blue sky!"

For the first one, "welfare" means "help given, especially by the state or an organization, to people who need it, especially because they do not have enough money; physical and mental health and happiness, especially of a person" according to Cambridge Online Dictionary. It cannot convey the meaning of "文明". In Chinese context, "national civilized city" refers to a city where the overall quality citizens and the level of urban civilization are relatively high in the comprehensive construction of a moderately prosperous society. The titled of National Civilized City is the highest honorary title reflecting the overall civilization level of cities in Chinese mainland. Searching "创建文明城市" on China Daily, the parallel text is given. For the second, the English translation is loose, and may not demonstrate the inner logic of it.

Solution: Enhancing readability in Chinese to English translations involves specific considerations due to the distinct differences between the two languages. For translators, readability should be considered. Adapting sentence structure, focusing on idiomatic expressions, clarifying ambiguities may the way to improve readability. Chinese sentences often follow a subject-object-verb order. Which can result in awkward constructions in English if translated directly. Adapting sentence structures to fit English norms, usually subject-verb-object without losing the original meaning is possibly crucial for readability.

Problem D: inaccurate problem

The function of public sign is to give people some information more concisely and simply. In Xi'an Gemin Park, some public sign is not concise. For example, "刘志丹雕像" is translated into "Statue of Liu Zhidan". "王太吉·王太诚纪念碑" is translated into "Monument to Wang Taiji and Wang Taicheng". For Chinses, we know who is Liu Zhidan, Wang Taiji and Wang Taicheng. But for foreigners, they do not know our culture exactly, they may raise the question who are they, what have they done and why build a statue or monument for them. As a public sign, informative and directive public sign in particular at a scenic spot, the information should be given complete and specific.

Solution: When translator happens to this scenario, concrete translation maybe a feasible way to cope with. For the mentioned translation, translator adds "Martyrs" before the name could be good approach. By this way, "Statue of Martyr Liu Zhidan" and "Monument to Martyrs Wang Taiji and Wang Taicheng" could convey who are they and what are their contributions, and why build statue or monument for them. That is to say, translator may take reader's response into account by raising different questions.

5. Conclusion

Public sign has its own unique style, which could be a challenge for translators. This article used Xi'an Gemin park as a case study to highlight existing problems in C-E translation, including inconsistencies with official published documents, linguistic errors, readability issues and inaccuracies. It them proposes feasible solutions covering adapting sentence structure, seeking dictionaries for aid and etc. to help translators improve both the quality and accuracy of pubic sign translation.

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