

A Study on the Problems and Methods of Chinese to English Translation of Public Signs from the Perspective of Skopos Theory: A Case Study of Scenic Spots in Shandong

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Abstract: Public signs are special linguistic symbols with the functions of directing, prompting, and warning the public. However, as far as the current situation of Shandong's scenic spots is concerned, there are many errors in the translation of their public signs. This thesis takes some scenic spots in Shandong as the research object, analyzes the problems in the translation of public signs in Shandong scenic spots from some perspectives on the skopos theory, and then proposes useful translation methods, aiming to promote the translation quality of public signs.

Keywords: Skopos Theory; Translation Methods; Public Signs

Introduction

In an era of economic integration and cultural diversity, the government is increasingly concerned with improving the quality of translation of public signs, but it is going so slowly. Mistranslations, omissions, ignorance of cultural differences and other irregularities in the translation of public signs in cities are commonplace at present. There are few references on the study of the English translation of public signs using skopos theory as guidance and taking the public signs of scenic spots in Shandong as the object of study. The current situation of translation of public signs in Shandong's scenic spots needs more attention. Therefore, the English translation of public signs of scenic spots in Shandong is an object worth studying.

Based on skopos theory, this thesis takes the public signs' translation of Shandong scenic spots as a research object. Take photos of Tsingtao Beer Museum, Saflam, Happiness Arch, Little Rock Island Park, and Eight Immortals cross the sea scenic area as samples to analyze. The samples collected in this research are authentic, typical, and representative. The purpose of this study is to use skopos theory to figure out the real reasons for wrong translations of public signs in Shandong scenic spots, and then give the appropriate methods to translate.

1. Theoretical basis and literature review

This part provides an overview of Skopos theory and previous studies on scenic spots' public sign translation. The Skopos theory is a specific principle that the translator should follow when they do the translation, to make it more clear.

1.1 Overview of skopos theory

In the late 1970s, German functionalists put forward the skopos theory firstly. Skopos theory has been formed and developed through three stages.

At first, Katharina Reiss conducted a study and proposed a Functional Category of Translation Criticism. She deeply feels that in practice, it is difficult to achieve complete equivalence with the original text, because the goals of some translations are different from those of the original texts. Reiss introduces Text Typology in Translation Criticism and proposes a functional approach.

Secondly, Katharina Reiss' student Hans Vermeer inherited some of her ideas and proposed skopos theory. According to behavioral theory, skopos theory assumes that human behavior is purposeful behavior that occurs in a particular situation. The translation is a human activity, like other human activities, it has a purpose, which should be determined before the translation. While translating, the translators can select the right translations according to the specific requirements, the purpose of translating, and special situations.

Thirdly, Justa Holz Manttari presented the Theory of Translation Action. This theory views translation as a purpose-driven, human interaction oriented towards the outcome of the translation.

1.1.1 Three principles of skopos theory

Skopos principle is taking the highest status among the three principle: the basic skopos of the translator, the communicative skopos of the translated text and the skopos to be achieved by the particular translation strategy or device. Only when the translator has a clear understanding of the purpose and function of the translation, he can choose the appropriate translation method to create the ideal translation.

The coherence principle is subordinate to the skopos theory. The translation must comply with intertextual coherence. It needs translators to know about the readers' Socio-cultural background knowledge and mental state, and then choose the best way to translate, in case of making read obstacles.

Both of fidelity principle and coherence principle comply with skopos principle. The fidelity principle means the relations between translations and original texts. However, "fidelity" here is different from normal "loyalty". Fidelity principal emphasis on the skopos of translations and how the translators understand the original texts, they determined the fidelity degree and forms.

1.1.2 The significance of skopos theory in translating public signs

According to the three principles of Skopos theory, translations are required to possess intercultural awareness and be accepted by readers. It asks translators to master more knowledge, they should not only understand what the original texts mean but also have the ability to adjust the translation methods timely, even to rewrite the original texts. During the process of translating public signs in scenic spots, skopos theory plays an important role.

The aim of translating public signs is to provide convenience to foreign tourists and to promote cultural exchange between China and abroad. It has the same requirement as skopos theory, the primary goal is to be fully understood by the readers. Due to the different cultural backgrounds, express habits, and consideration methods, there is bound to be a gap between the original text and the translation. Therefore, the translator must choose the most appropriate translation method from the perspective of the target readers, that is, the end justifies the means.

1.2 Previous studies

In the journal *An Analysis of the English Translation of Public Signs in Scenic Spots*, the article "With Ancient Longzhong as an Exemplar" illustrates this issue. The author mentions public signs and national standards, spelling errors and verbatim translations, instances of improper letters and words, and inconsistent and incomplete translations. Due to the poor translation level of public signs, he suggested that the professional group of the writers and translators of public characters should be improved, and the awareness of the management personnel to strengthen supervision should be enhanced.

Shaohui Zheng, A student in the School of Foreign Languages at the Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology, wrote in his journal *A Study of the Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs in Scenic Spots in Guangzhou from the Perspective of Skopos Theory*-May 2021 (May 2021) also published a similar view. In his paper, he suggested "The application of Skopos theory in the English translation of public signs of tourist attractions." Among them, he demonstrates the use of "simplification under the rule of purpose, borrowing under the rule of fidelity, and adapting under the rule of coherence." He has done a lot of research on the problems existing in the translation of tourist attractions.

2. Problems in C-E translation of commentary boards in scenic spots and reasons

Public signs have three categories: direct public signs, prompt public signs, and warn public signs. According to a series of research studies, it is found that there are still a large number of problems with the public signs of some scenic spots in Shandong, which are summarized and organized as follows:

2.1 Lexical errors

Lexical errors mainly include spelling errors and errors in choosing words. Such problems violate the law of fidelity principle, which requires that the translation must be coherent and the content faithful to the original.

2.1.1 Sentence structure and grammar

Grammatical rules bound each sentence, and all sentences need to follow the rules of grammar. Errors occur in the sentence when grammar rules are violated in the targeted language during the translation. Error in the penalty can be due to the lack of agreement between subject and verb, incorrect declension of nouns, pronouns, or adjectives, and incorrect verb infections. In a sentence, a lack of comprehension and misuse of words are the major factors creating errors during the translation of words. It directly affects the quality of the sentence and the information that each sentence represents. Errors in the sentence structure can make it unconventional and controversial for the original text to give its real meaning. Similarly, the misplaced modifier or an inappropriate verb tense can be another huge problem that misguides tourists with wrong information.

Case



Source Text: Eight Immortals cross the sea scenic area (八仙渡景区)

Errors: An article is a short word like a or the that goes before a noun to make it clear what the noun refers to. We should use an article with a singular countable noun like person, house, apple, or book. Articles are sometimes needed before plural nouns, proper nouns, or uncountable nouns. So “in the front of” should be changed into “in front of”. Most nouns have a singular and plural form. Words like one, many, or these can affect whether you use the singular or plural form. Therefore the sentence “foods for supernatural beings” should be corrected into “food for supernatural beings.”

2.1.2 Spelling mistakes and word-for-word translation

Translation of language should be standard and shouldn't misspell the words. Misspelling words can provide the wrong views to readers, creating confusion among the readers about the text. The readers cannot understand the real meaning of sentences and lead by misguiding with inaccurate information.

Translation of Public Signs should convey the standard English and appropriate word standards. However, some obvious spelling mistakes can still be seen during the Investigations of scenic spots in Shandong (Figure 1).

When the words in the public signs are connected, the sentence makes no sense and misguides the visitors with confusion. However, during the investigation, such errors were found where words were bound together, making the public sign confusing and not understandable (figure 2).



Figure 1: Spelling mistake should be corrected to “Step” Figure 2: corrected form should be “Children can not take the elevator

without care.”

2.1.3 Lack of visibility and blurriness of translation

This kind of problem can be seen in the signboards that are too long and need replacement. And also, it is most common in the words that are crafted in woods which is long-lasting, represents historically significant places and is durable. The Blurriness of woods written text can also result from acid Rain that damages the original text form. And the similar problem was seen in the prominent scenic spot in Shandong (Figure 3). The text was unclear and blurred, so it wasn't possible to know what was actually carved in the woods.



Figure 3

2.2. Reasons

Problems in translation can be due to various reasons, which can be due to cultural differences and the Expression of words differently in each culture. Sometimes it can be also due to the lack of proper inspection of sites and also can be due to the lack of an appropriate way of transition methods and the use of a professional level of the Translator. Each of the aspects has been discussed thoroughly below.

2.2.1 Cultural translation errors

Cultural translation errors result from differences in Expression and social and cultural differences due to the difference in language as a set of lexemes and meaning exist between and amongst nations. There are famous sayings of legends and myths more expressive in the local language. Local tourists can understand the connotation at a glance. Still, when it is directly translated to a foreign language through some software, translation cannot provide meaningful and satisfactory results. Translating directly with the means of standard software mainly doesn't solve the problems related to cultural translations errors. That's why it is necessary to grasp the reader's initiative in transition so that the Translator and the reader can merge in view. Therefore, it is reduced to the use of concise and clear language to supplement the cultural connotation contained in the publicity text through annotations.

2.2.2 Negligence from the concerned authority

Mistakes can happen anywhere and anytime, even when authorities are concerned. Still, another primary reason for such problems in a scenic spot for such a long time can be the negligence of the issues from concerned authorities. It is more critical for the timely checkup of boards and signs in the scenic spots.

During the investigation of boards and signs in Shandong's scenic spots, facts showed that errors in the panels and symbols in various tourist destinations were more than two decades of years old. So, this is only possible when concerned authorities aren't aware of the problem and aren't serious about the importance of those boards and signs representing the long-life history of the country and place to visitors in there. And aren't aware of the negative impact of those wrong translations and characters.

3.Countermeasures

Countermeasures are the solutions to problems that are incredibly beneficial to problem-solving. The more we learn, the more we explore better the ideas we can get, which can accomplish us in problem-solving and ease the time consumption and detection of errors. Even in translation, various errors were found during the investigation of scenic spots in Shandong. And this paper suggests some of the possible measures to encounter the mistakes seen in the scenic spots so that it could be helpful in future translation work done in Shandong and other places in case.

3.1 Enhance cross-cultural awareness

Cross-cultural awareness plays a significant role in cultivating sensitivity to cultural differences and flexibility in dealing with cultural differences. Differences in culture between China and foreign countries have greatly influenced cross-culture communication showing the different art forms. Suppose the Translator lacks a cross-cultural solid communication ability. In that case, they may not be able to express strong desires during the translation, which can lead to misunderstanding and misreading of text between two languages and also between the two different cultures.

3.2 Enhance the professional level of authors and translators of public signs

Due to the lack of Professional level of translation methods in the past, there could be numerous errors in certain parts of the famous scenic spots representing the history of China. And there were various reasons which led to the mistakes. But now, China has come far forward and become one of the wealthiest countries globally due to its high scientific research, high level of skilled human resources, and a higher level of technological development. And these crucial facts cannot be ignored. So now China is solving the problems that occurred in the past. So, while translating the more crucial sentences and saying, the management or governing body should focus more on hiring top-level Translators. The translation isn't just changing sentences from Chinese to English; it represents the values of the place and history. It represents the sovereignty of a country's history among foreign tourists.

3.3 Timely correction of non-standard and non-normative translation

Many translations have been done in the past without using the scientific translation method. It was done utilizing people or some low-level translating machines. And those translations done a century before are still in existence. Due to this reason, there is a high possibility that ancient translations had a problem with the standard of words used. And even during the modern era, many scenic spots follow the same old method of translation. And also, some are using the low level of translating software. So, this translation needed to be updated. As per the investigation done on different scenic spots of Shandong, it was a bit normal to see these problems, which needed to be solved as soon as possible. The massive form of errors still can be seen that existed in the scenic spots for decades.

4. Conclusion

Translation of public signs plays an important role in Shandong tourism. This thesis introduced the three principles of the skopos theory and analyzed the significance of skopos theory in translating public signs. According to the research from the scenic spots like Tsingtao Beer Museum, Saflam, Happiness Arch, Little Rock Island Park, and Eight Immortals cross the sea scenic area in Shandong, it is found that there are still a lot of problems with the translation of public signs in scenic spots. This thesis figured out the reasons caused the wrong translations from lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic aspects. At last, this thesis gives the methods to do the translation under the guidance of skopos theory.

The skopos principle asks translators to choose the translation method according to the target readers' needs. There are still a lot of wrong translations in Shandong scenic spots' public signs. They can be divided into three categories like lexical errors including spelling, vocabulary choosing, grammatical errors including noun singular and plural errors, and pragmatic errors such as Chinglish and inappropriate tone, etc. These problems show that the good translation must be matched with the foreign tourists' cultural background and their psychological states.

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