

Research on the Countermeasures for Translation of Urban Public Signs in Shandong Province Based on Eco-translatology

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Abstract—As an applied translation style, translation of public signs has become a hot topic in translation researches. From the perspective of eco-translatology, this paper makes a research on the translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province. Over an investigation into the status quo of urban public sign translation in Shandong Province, the existing problems are clarified. Taking the "three-dimensional conversion" among language, culture and communication of eco-translatology as the guiding principle, and taking the "post-translation punishment" as the method for correcting the translation, it is available to establish and perfect an evaluation mechanism and sum up the countermeasures for translation of public signs, and finally form a benign interactive cycle of the translation development of public signs, and then formulate an effective public sign eco-translation model, in order to provide reference for the translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province.

Keywords—eco-translatology; Shandong Province; translation of public signs; countermeasures

I. INTRODUCTION

Shandong is a major economic and cultural province with abundant tourism resources. Qilu culture has a long history. "Mount Taishan, The Yellow River and Confucius" attracts a large number of English-speaking overseas tourists coming to Shandong for tourism, investment, employment and residence. The cities in Shandong Province are also striving for being listed as international cities; and the high-quality translation of urban public signs will accelerate the internationalization of Shandong. As a business card for a city, public sign is a window of the city. "Public signs play a vital role in improving the image of a city and enhancing the taste of the city." (Huang Youyi, 2005) As a special application language style, public sign is a language, icon, and diagram displayed to the public in public places. It is a content text that the public needs to know in public places (Shao Min, 2015).

A high-quality translation of public sign can greatly facilitate foreign exchanges, create a good cultural and ecological environment for Shandong's economic development, better serve the overall economic and social development of the province, accelerate the construction of a

strong cultural province, promote the prosperity and development of humanities and social sciences and provide decision-making and intellectual support for the modernization of the province. In addition, an effective translation of public signs will serve the strategy for transformation from major cultural province to strong cultural province as proposed by Shandong Provincial Government, and keep in line with the requirements for cultural construction and development of Shandong Province during the 13th Five-year Plan period and the goal of enhancing cultural soft power of the province.

However, there are a lot of mistakes, errors, missing part and confused part in the English translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province. So, it is imperative to standardize the translation of public signs to improve the translation quality of public signs.

II. THE STATUS QUO OF CHINESE AND FOREIGN RESEARCHES ON THE TRANSLATION OF PUBLIC SIGNS

As early as in 1960s, the West had begun to research the translation of public signs. In 1959, Vinay and Darbelnet made a special discussion on the translation of public signs in the preface of their book *Comparative Stylistics*. Canale and Swain (1980) clearly defined the concept of public signs. Landry (1997) believed that public signs have two functions: information communication and symbolic meaning. Connor (2001) argues that public sign is a style to be viewed by a specific group of people to achieve a particular purpose. Mary Snell Hornby, a famous contemporary translation theorist, (2001) made an empirical research on the translation of public signs in many countries using English and German as the mother tongue. As a result, it is concluded that the translation of public signs uses different grammatical structures, verb inflection and translation strategies and techniques in accordance with varied context. Cenoz J and Gorter D (2006) attached the importance of research on the translation of public signs to the language skills of multilingual translation in the macro context of sociolinguistics. Sr. Anwar A L-thway (2008) argued that public sign translation was influenced by the linguistic territory formed by the integration of specific territories, regions and cities.

As can be seen from foreign researches, the researches on translation of public signs are mainly carried out from the perspective of linguistic research, and emphasize the structure of grammar, the selection of vocabulary and the use of translation techniques and strategies. It is believed that the translation of public signs is a language conversion, regardless of the ecological environment involved in translation of public signs. Therefore, the translation of public signs in foreign countries lacks research from an ecological perspective.

The researches on translation of public signs in China began in the 1990s. Then, such researches showed a booming trend. Currently such research has become one of the hot topics in translation researches. In 2002, Beijing International Studies University established the Public Sign Translation Research Center. In 2003, it created the public sign translation research corpus. In 2005, 2007 and 2014, it respectively hosted the first, second and third national symposiums on public sign translation researches. In recent years, a large number of experts engaged in public sign research have emerged in China. For example, Lv Hefa (2014) made an overview on the development of translation of public signs; Luo Xuanmin (2006) classified the errors in translation of public signs; He Xuegeng (2006) emphasized the cultural factors in the translation of public signs. In addition, Wang Yinquan (2006), Lin Ke'nan (2007), Niu Xinsheng (2008), Zou Yanqun (2011), and Zha Mingjian (2015) all wrote papers about the research on translation of public signs. The research perspectives mainly focus on functional translation theory (Pangbo, 2013), relevance theory (Liu Jing, 2012), translation teleology (Ye Chunling, 2012) and pragmatic equivalent translation theory (Liu Shaozhong, 2015), etc. There are still few researches on the translation of public signs from the perspective of eco-translatology.

III. RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATION OF URBAN PUBLIC SIGNS IN SHANDONG PROVINCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY

A. Definition of Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology was proposed by Hu Gengshen, a professor from Tsinghua University, on the "International Symposium on Globalization of Translation" in Aug., 2006. It is an overview and research on translation from the perspective of ecology. Eco-translatology believes that translation is such a selective adaptation and adaptive selection activity that translator makes constantly to adapt to the ecological environment of translation. Eco-translatology researches translation activities from a broader perspective, and proposes that translation is a "three-dimensional conversion" among language, culture and communication, and "post-translation punishment" is an evaluation mechanism for translation results (Hu Gengshen, 2013).

B. Combing the Researches on the Translation of Urban Public Signs in Shandong Province from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

There are also some papers on the translation of public signs from the perspective of eco-translatology (Cheng Aili, 2014; Li Linlin, 2014; Lu Bin, 2013; Shu Huijuan, 2010). The main topics include the 2012 Henan Soft Science Research Project "Research on the Translation of External Advertising Materials of Henan Tourism in Foreign Language from the Perspective of Eco-translatology" and Hunan Provincial Education Department's subject "Research on Tourism English Translation from the Perspective of Eco-translatology". Through domestic researches, it is known that Chinese scholars have made in-depth researches on the translation of public signs by drawing on various translation theories. However, there are very few and fragmented researches on the translation of public signs by virtue of eco-translatology theory.

So far, there have been few researches on the translation of public signs in Shandong Province; the researches mainly focus on the translation of public signs in partial cities in Shandong Province such as Ji'ning (Zhao Shouhong, 2016; Shao Min, 2015), Yantai (Jia Zhengchuan, 2016; Li Li, 2013), and Ji'nan (Wang Xiaoqiong, 2012); only Liang Jing (2016) made research on the English translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province. It mainly applies functional theory and skopos theory in the analysis. The research perspective is single. It focuses on the function of translation regardless of many comprehensive factors such as the language, culture, and communication involved in conversion of the translated text. At the same time, few scholars may use the theory of eco-translatology to research the translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province. From the perspective of eco-translatology, this paper comprehensively considers the macro-ecological environment, meso-translational ontology theory and micro-translation text operation involved in translation. It also gets "post-translation punishment" incorporated into the translation evaluation mechanism to make in-depth research on translator's attitude and translation theory, timely correct any problems appearing in the translation and form a circulation of benign interaction in translation.

C. The Significance of Research on the Translation of Public Signs from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

First of all, compared with the theories used in the past such as function theory, skopos theory, relevance theory and pragmatic equivalence theory, the research of public sign translation from the perspective of eco-translatology breaks the barriers of translation focusing only on function and purpose or language equivalence, makes a comprehensive consideration of various factors affecting the translation, focus on the construction of the overall ecological environment and model of translation; the new research perspective makes up for the shortcomings of previous researches on translation of public signs. Secondly, this research surveys translation activities in a broader ecological environment, focuses on the center role of translator and the adaptive selection of ecological environment, and pays

attention to the reaction of the translation evaluation mechanism. This is a useful addition to the previous micro-translation strategy concerning the translation method and skills that translation circles adhered to. Thirdly, this research can enrich the translation theory. The research results can provide reference and guidance for the translation of public signs. At the same time, it will bring inspiration and guidance to the reform of English translation teaching and promote the cultivation of high-quality translation talents.

IV. MAIN CONTENT, METHODS AND KEY DIFFICULTIES OF THE RESEARCH

A. Main Content of the Research

From the perspective of eco-translatology, the theoretical results of eco-translatology are used to explore the countermeasures for the translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province.

The specific research content includes the following aspects:

- Survey the status quo of the translation of public signs in cities such as Ji'nan and Qingdao in Shandong Province, analyze the translation of public signs in tourist attractions such as Mount Taishan and Confucius Temples, and clarify the existing problems.
- Investigate the reasons for problems existing in the translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province, and clarify the obstacles that translators have in adapting to the ecological environment of translation.
- Explore the countermeasures for translation of public signs in Shandong Province from the perspective of eco-translatology, research the methods and means for improving the translation evaluation mechanism of public signs, and use the "post-translation punishment" criteria as the translation evaluation standard for public signs, to strive to maintain the translated public signs in line with the needs of readers speaking the target language.

B. Research Methods

1) *Survey research method*: Firstly, it needs to take Jinan and Qingdao as examples and investigate the problems existing in urban public sign translation in Shandong Province, and conduct field survey on the translation of public signs in Mount Taishan and Confucius Temple to find out the translator's shortcomings in adapting to the ecological environment of the translation. Secondly, it needs to analyze the status quo of public sign translation in Shandong Province, and clarify the root cause of the problems and the ecological factors having effect on the translation of public signs.

2) *Literature method*: It needs to comprehensively analyze the countermeasures taken in translation of public signs from the perspective of eco-translatology, and explore

the ecological model of urban public sign translation in Shandong Province.

3) *Empirical research method*: It needs to apply the constructed public sign translation ecological model to the translation practice of public signs in Ji'nan, Qingdao, Mount Taishan and Confucius Temple, to test the validity of the model, and constantly refine and perfect the model.

C. Key Points and Difficulties in the Research

Key points: The key points of the research are to clarify the problems existing in the translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province, find out the current situation, and clarify the deep-rooted causes of the problems and the ecological factors exerting effect on the translation of public signs, through questionnaires and actual research.

Difficulties:

- First, the difficulties in the research is to make clear the ecological environment in which the translation of urban public signs are located in Shandong Province, identify the problems, seek for countermeasures, and form an effective ecological model for translation of public signs.
- Second, driven by the mechanism of "post-translation punishment" in eco-translatology, it needs to amend and perfect the constructed translation ecological model to further improve the quality of translation.

V. RESEARCH ON STRATEGIES FOR TRANSLATION OF PUBLIC SIGNS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY

A. Investigation on the Status Quo of Urban Public Signs Translation in Shandong Province

An investigation was made on Ji'nan and Qingdao, as well as the Mount Taishan and Confucius Temple. The final results show that there are many problems, and the problems are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

1) *Low level of language proficiency*: Due to the low level of language proficiency, and improper application of vocabulary and grammar, there are many serious language errors in the translation of public signs, which ultimately leads to the failure of meaning transfer. The main examples are as follows:

In a warning sign on expressway, "开文明车, 行平安路, 回家幸福" is improperly translated as "On the civilization, Line of road safety, the hui xingfu family". This English translation is completely inconsistent with the grammatical logic, and there is Chinese Pinyin mixed among them, which is very non-standard. The translation of public sign stresses language conciseness and clear expression. Accordingly, this public sign can be translated as "Drive politely and safely, go home happily". In a public sign pasted beside a step in a tourist attraction, "小心滑倒" is improperly translated as: "Slip carefully". This translation may have ambiguous meanings: whether it ought to slip or not? Obviously, this warning means "be careful to avoid slipping down"; but here you can

also understand as "one should be careful when slipping down". This expression is not only unclear in meaning but also may make foreigners confused about what to do. Hence, this public sign can be translated as: "Mind your step", or "Watch your step". On the ground of a bank's ATM, the sign "请在一米线外等候" is improperly translated as "Please wait outside a noodle". This translation is ridiculous. Not only it is out of the context as the one-meter line is understood as food "noodle", but also there is very stupid language mistakes. Hence, this sign can be translated as "Please wait one meter outside the line". In a flower bed of a garden, there is such sign as "踏入想一想, 小草也在长" which is improperly translated as "Into The Think, Grass Is Long". This translation is literally translated, regardless of the context. Instead, this sign can be translated as "Think before stepping on, as grass is growing." Another example of sign in flower bed is "要想花儿长得俏, 你我呵护少不了" which is improperly translated as "want to look pretty flowers, I love you not". In this translation, the meaning of the original text is not expressed at all, resulting in complete Chinglish in the translation; there is not only grammatical error, but also illogical statement.

The mentioned non-standard translations caused by translator's low level of language proficiency not only makes the translation fail to achieve the expected effect, but also causes misunderstandings to the target language readers, which may seriously damage the image of the tourist province of Shandong, and greatly weaken tourists' overall impression on the city. Language error is a large mistake and must be avoided in the translation of public signs. In addition, translation of public signs should not only pay attention to the normative and accurate basic requirements, but also pay great attention to the context and occasion of translation, avoiding absurd and ridiculous translation.

2) *Differences in cultural knowledge*: The differences in cultural knowledge are especially reflected in the process of translating cultural promotion and political publicity materials. Due to the differences in cultural backgrounds between China and the West, the deviation of understanding is caused. Specific examples are as follows:

In some publicity materials of Shandong Province, the "Propaganda Department" was translated as the Propaganda Department of Shandong Province. Such translation is not suitable. Because Propaganda has the meaning of propaganda tricks and inspiring and has derogatory sense in Western context, the Propaganda Department should be translated as the Publicity Department, Information Department, Communication Department or Publications Department. In the translation of public signs in many cities of Shandong Province, a great amount of Chinese pinyin is used, which further increases the difficulty for the target language readers to understand. Chinese Pinyin is generally used for the translation of some special nouns such as place names and person names. For words with specific meanings, the indicated meaning should be translated to facilitate readers' understanding. However, in the translation of many public signs, the keywords are translated in Chinese pinyin, instead of translating the meaning, so that readers feel confused. For instance, in some 清真餐馆, "清真餐馆" is

improperly translated as "Qingzhen Restaurant" instead of "Halal Restaurant" or "Muslim Restaurant". On the door of building in some parks, there is a signboard indicated "闲人免进" and the translation below it is "XIAN REN MIAN JIN". Looking at this sign, foreign tourists often look stunned, as they neither know what language it is nor know what it is saying about. "有佛事活动, 请绕行" is improperly translated as "Foshi in progress, please take another route". Such translation is not clear in meaning. The "佛事" should be clearly translated rather than being translated in simple Chinese Pinyin. Hence, this sign can be translated as "Buddhist service in progress, please take another route". Chinese Pinyin is not an effective translation mode. In many cases, even if Chinese Pinyin is used in the translation, it is also needed to add a footnote to explain it. However, due to the succinct requirements for translation of public signs, it is impossible to add supplementary explanation behind it. So, the best translation method should be direct translation, except for some special proper nouns. For example, Qianfoshan Road in Ji'nan, because Qianfoshan is a special proper noun, can be directly translated as "Qianfo Mountain Road" instead of "Thousand Buddha Mountain Road" translated in many places.

3) *Failing to achieve the communication effect*: British translation theorist Peter Newmark proposed semantic translation and communicative translation. Semantic translation refers to the translation maintained in line with the words and sentences structure of the original text and the author of the original text, paying sufficient attention to retaining the cultural, lexical and syntactic forms of the original text. It is a sufficient translation. Meanwhile, communicative translation focuses on the acceptance effect of the translation, and the response of the target readers. It does not stick to the expression of the original form. It is an acceptable translation. Especially in some warning signs, communicative translation is reflected particularly evidently. For example, on many riverside trees, there may be warning signs "小心落水" and the translation below it is "be careful of slipping into the water". This translation could not achieve a strong warning effect. If it was translated as "Warning/Deep Water", the warning effect would be more obvious. Similarly, "小心地滑" can be translated as "Caution/ Wet Floor"; "注意防火" can be translated as "Caution/ Fire ". Those are very obvious models of communicative translation. However in the translation of urban public signs in Shandong Province, there are a large number of cumbersome translations that do not pay attention to communicative effects but overemphasize the semantic meaning. The purpose of translation should be not only intended to convey the meaning of the original text, but more importantly to communicate with the target readers to achieve the purpose of communication. Therefore, communicative translation has become an effective means of communication for translation of public signs.

B. "Three-dimensional Conversion" Translation of Public Signs from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

As an important translation method and concept in eco-translatology, multi-dimensional conversion requires that in the process of translation, it is not only needed to convert the language of the text, but also needed to pay attention to aesthetics, psychological suggestion, communicative intention, cultural connotation and other aspects. Instead of the single-way and single-dimensional translation method, this multi-dimensional conversion aims to translate the text after having an overall consideration of the full text, the whole paragraph, and the whole sentences. The multi-dimensional conversion focuses on the overall and interrelated elements such as the large, medium and small translation ecological environments, with particular attention to the balance between the ecologies of the original language and target language. The multi-dimensional conversion in eco-translatology is mainly embodied in the conversion among language dimension, cultural dimension and communication dimension.

1) *Adaptive selection and conversion of language dimension*: Linguistic expression of a text is the focus of the adaptive selection of language dimension. It emphasizes translator's adaptive selection and conversion of the linguistic form in the translation process. The conversion of language dimensions is carried out at different levels and in different aspects. Chinese and English belong to different language families. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family and English belongs to the Indo-European language family. Chinese prefers to use parallelism or four-character structure, and the rhetorical effect is remarkable, reflecting the image thinking of Chinese people. When it is translated into English, the target text should be concise and clear, and in line with the logical thinking mode of English-speaking people. When we are considering the choice of vocabulary and sentence structures in conversion of language dimension, it is necessary to fully analyze the overall ecological environment of the source language, and adjust its ecological environment to the target language, so as to achieve an ecological balance between the original language and the target language. A large number of linguistic errors have appeared in many translations of public signs. Due to lacking consideration of the context, the language components are translated out of the context, and eventually lead to many stupid language errors.

2) *Adaptive selection and conversion of cultural dimension*: In the opinion of Hu Gengshen (2004:40), the adaptive selection and conversion of cultural dimension means that as a cross-cultural and cross-language communication process, translation must overcome the obstacles caused by cultural differences in order to ensure smooth communication. This requires that translator has to have cultural awareness and focus on the transfer and interpretation of the cultural connotations in the process of bilingual communication. There must be a certain culture behind each language. If the cultural background is different,

it is not easy to convey 100% of the cultural connotation of the original text. In the translation process, translator must make appropriate choices in cultural dimension, so as to obtain a translation with high integration and adaptation. The translation of public signs should also pay special attention to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and thinking, and both reflect cultural differences and eliminate cultural understanding barriers. There are certain differences between Chinese and Western civilizations. Such public signs as having hint and warning functions in China are very normal words and deeds for people in the West for which there is no need to give more hints. For example, "不要随地大小便", "垃圾入桶", "违者罚款", and the similar public signs may not be translated completely. "留学生" can be translated as "international students" instead of "foreign students" so that "留学生" may not have a feeling of being treated unfriendly.

3) *Adaptive selection and conversion of communication dimension*: Translation itself is the inter-communication and communication between two languages. In the view of eco-translatology, the adaptive selection and conversion of communication dimension pays attention to whether it can achieve communicative effect in addition to the effect of the adaptive selection and conversion of information in language dimension and cultural dimension, and mainly focuses on whether the original communication intention can be realized in the translation; The application of domestication and foreignization and the conversion of language style are both for the purpose of achieving good communication effects. Detailed to the translation of public signs, it is especially important to realize the conversion in communicative dimension. As public sign should be simple and clear, the translation should adapt to the environment of the target language and focus on the expression of communicative effect. For example, the translation of warning sign should be able to play a strong warning role. For instance, "小心触电" can be translated as "Danger/High Voltage" instead of "be cautious of the electricity", because the latter translation's warning effect is far less direct than the former translation.

It should be noted that the three-dimensional conversion is not separated, but a close-knit unity. A translation of high integration and adaptation should be the result of multi-dimensional selection. In other words, the more the translation is in line with multi-dimensional selection, the better the translation will be. The translation of public signs needs to make a comprehensive use of multi-dimensional conversion method, to ultimately achieve the best effect of public sign translation.

C. "Post-translation Punishment"

From the perspective of eco-translatology, it is necessary to timely correct any non-standard and non-normative case that has appeared in the translation of public signs, and establish a sound evaluation mechanism to form a benign interactive cycle in the development of public sign translation. An effective ecological model of public sign

translation can be formed under the guidance of the "three-dimensional conversion" of language dimension, cultural dimension and communication dimension in eco-translatology, and be supplemented by ecological "reconstruction".

VI. CONCLUSION

Eco-translatology pays attention to translator's adaptive selection and selective adaptation to the ecological environment of the target language. Therefore, it has a strong pertinence to guiding the translation of public signs, and is in line with the "three-abundance principle for publicity" as proposed by Huang Youyi (2004: 27), the deputy director general of China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration, namely, adhering to the actual development of China, adhering to the demand of foreign readers for Chinese information and adhering to the thinking habits of foreign readers. Eco-translatology has a positive guiding effect on the translation of urban public signs in Shandong. In the process of translation, the integration of "Heaven and Man" and "People-oriented" Eastern ecological wisdom conforms to the ecological development route of "Beautiful Shandong and Ecological Shandong". The ecological model of translation of urban public signs in Shandong constructed from the perspective of eco-translatology has strong practicality and guidance. It mainly includes two aspects of propositions: first, the translation of public signs should follow the principle of "three-dimensional conversion", and a translation of high integration and adaptation should be the result of multi-dimensional selection. Second, there should be a sound evaluation mechanism for the translation of public signs, and the "post-translation punishment" in eco-translatology can be used as an evaluation criterion to promote improving the translation quality.

The translation of public signs should be based on the actual situation of Shandong Province, and commit to solving the problems in the translation of public signs in Shandong Province, serving the requirements of Shandong to go to the world, and providing intellectual support for the world to understand Shandong. At the same time, it should also help lay a solid foundation for Shandong to create a good international image and develop its tourism resources.

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