



# Analysis of English Translation of Public Signs for External Publicity of Coastal Culture-Oriented Travel— —A Case Study of Zhoushan City

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**Abstract.** Public signs are an important part of external publicity, and accurate English translation of public signs is of great significance to the dissemination of national culture. This paper pays attention to the linkage between culture and English translation, focuses on the intrinsic linkage between the coastal cultural tourist attractions and the English translation of public notices for external publicity, and puts forward optimization suggestions on the English translation of local external publicity by combining the cultural connotation.

**Keywords:** coastal cultural tourism; public signs; outreach English translation; analysis and countermeasures.

## 1 Introduction

In the last century, the research of public signs has been carried out abroad, Vinay & Darbelnet (1995) introduced the concept of public signs in the preface of their book *Comparative Stylistics of French and English*<sup>[1]</sup>. The research in China starts from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the first paper about public signs *On the Language Characteristics and C-E Translation of English Publicity Terms* (Bei Zhu & Shan Aimin, 2002) was published in China Knowledge Network (CNN). 2002)<sup>[2]</sup>. From this time on, the number of papers on the translation of public signs has been increasing every year, and since 2007, hundreds of papers on publicity terms have been published every year, which shows that the research on the translation of public signs has become a hot spot in the field of translation nowadays from the beginning when it was little talked about to the present day.

At present, there are not a few studies on the translation of public signs, but there are still many deficiencies. On the one hand, the island scenic spot as the focus of foreign tourism opening has not been paid attention to, the research is relatively blank, compared with the study of traditional public signs translation, this paper pays more attention to the island culture and translation linkage, combined with the reality of the characteristics of the local translation of the feasible suggestions; on the other hand, many

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studies only stay in the theory, the lack of real examples. On the other hand, many studies are only theoretical and lack of real examples. Besides, the research methods are too single, and the conclusions are generally drawn after the experience is summarized. Focusing on language research expression, it contributes to the understanding of the nature of public signs in the academic system, but lacks practical application, does not effectively combine with regional characteristics, and is too vague, while this paper will effectively combine with Zhoushan's regional characteristics, and study the optimization of the local public signs translation suggestions.

## 2 Significance of the study

He Ziran said, "To understand the style of an era, a society, a country or a city, one tends to get the initial impression from the level of the language used in this era, society, country or city."<sup>[3]</sup> This shows the importance of public language outreach to a region, a country and a nation. From the archipelago new area to the river-sea intermodal transportation service center, from the free trade port area to the Boeing delivery center, Zhoushan shoulders such an important national strategic mission, and since it is entrusted with such a mission, the soft power of its foreign language service is in urgent need of upgrading.

This paper focuses on correcting the errors in the English translation of public signs, adapting to the cultural background of the majority of tourists, successfully achieving the purpose of communication, improving the image of Zhoushan in the hearts of foreign tourists, and promoting the dissemination of China's humanistic history and culture; at the same time, this paper can also provide a reference for the governmental tourism departments to provide foreign propaganda work, help the internationalization of the scenic spots and exhibition halls to build and develop, and help Zhoushan's international output of culture to contribute to the story of Zhoushan and even the story of China, which is of great practical significance.

## 3 Review of the literature

Scholarly research on translation of public signs is more and more important in this era, because of the international development. In China, people have realized early on the importance of public signs translation, so there have been many papers on that research. However, these years more attention should be paid to the intercultural communication, never just focus on the correction of the translation.

Most essays only discuss the problem from just one special perspective and give much consideration to individual cases, such as *An Analysis on the Translation of Public Signs in Wuhan*, the author Hao Peng used A-B-C method to solve translation errors. *The Research on the Standardization of Bilingual Signs in Public Service Areas from the Perspective of Skopostheorie—A Case Study of English Translation of Scenic Areas and Spots in Zhangjiajie*, the authors Jingjing Zhao and Ling Zou applied functional translation theory to discuss the public signs and with the perspective of Skopostheorie. *The Strategies in C-E Translation of Public Sign—Based on the Study of Public*

*Sign Translation of Qingdao*, the author Dongmeng Liu used the comparison method to compare English and Chinese. They only used special perspectives or theories to study the translation of public signs, and classified the corpus for error correction. However, they did not propose better solutions based on culture and local characteristics. They should use public signs to "communicate".

Some essays research the cultural transmission by public signs. For example, Oliver Radtke and Xin Yuan in their paper *'Please don't climb trees and pick flowers for the sake of life' making sense of bilingual tourism signs in China* mentioned a concept of Chinglish and gave a definition: not as a deficient oral usage of English in the process of learning the language, but as an interchangeably creative or plain wrong occurrence on bilingual Chinese-English public signage in the People's Republic of China<sup>[4]</sup>. Chinglish is a translation in terms of grammar that is correct, moreover, reflecting a strong Chinese aesthetic taste and diction. Although it is a good way for China to be internationalized and propagate our own culture, without considering the subject of the audience, in extreme cases, it may also lead to ethnocentrism.

While the issue of translation strategies has attracted extensive attention, the translated text itself has also been studied and discussed. The function of the special text is strong, the style distinctive and the communicative purpose clear. Hence, the translation strategies should also be based on its literary style. *How to do things with signs. The formulation of directives on signs in public spaces* is a paper about how to standardize and communicate by formulating public sign language. The author Jan Svennevig proves that it is easier for the receiver to accept instructions if the language makes good use of rhetorical devices. But the meaning of a text is not only in the language itself but also in what the language means more broadly to a reader. And translation is a vital process.

In order to make foreign tourists truly understand public signs, intercultural communication must be considered. English translation of public signs is also a way of intercultural communication. But what will enhance the quality of the translation of public signs and achieve effective cross-cultural communication? *From intercultural to trans-cultural communication* written by Will Baker, he said that it needs to fully consider the complex and flowing communication between language and culture, and participants use multiple spatiotemporal scales simultaneously. He also mentioned trans perspectives in applied linguistics and transculturality theories. According to *INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE*, Istvan Kecskes said in current linguistic theory, language is composed of system of linguistic signs, conceptual base of users and situational context. He pointed that intercultural communication interlocutors must temporarily build up a shared understanding of actual situational context, socio-cultural frames and a mutual way of understanding of the linguistic signs<sup>[5]</sup>. In Intercultural mediation, intercultural communication and translation, the writer Anthony J. Liddicoat thinks that the translator is an important mediator who stands between the reader and writer and rewrites the text for an audience. Translation is no longer seen as a primarily linguistic process, but one that recognises that translation is a culturally contexted activity influenced by factors that lie outside what is normally understood by language<sup>[6]</sup>.

Most studies recognize the importance of English translation of public signs. The quality of translation will affect the city's image and even the international image of a country. Therefore, most studies focus on the mistakes of public signs and propose corrective measures. However, we should also recognize that public signs are also a kind of language expression and a good medium to spread culture. With the development of society and the deepening of internationalization, we should also pay more attention to cross-cultural communication. A public sign is an application text. As a special pragmatic material, it has obvious communicative purposes. Thus, this paper, based on the perspective of Intercultural Communication, attempts a multi-theories study, examines the specific public signs corpus, and tries to propose some feasible and practical strategies with regional cultural characteristics for translators, using real cases of Zhoushan to illustrate.

## **4 Analysis of the problems of the examples of the English translation of the public signs of coastal culture and tourism**

### **4.1 Marine Culture and Art Venue——Zhoushan City Exhibition Hall**

As a landmark exhibition hall of Zhoushan, Zhoushan City Exhibition Hall is an important carrier and window for understanding the development of the city, participating in urban planning, displaying the image of the city and spreading the culture of the city, which comprehensively demonstrates the history, current situation and development direction of Zhoushan as well as the grand blueprint of the planning and construction of the New Area of the Zhoushan Islands in Zhejiang Province. Therefore, the accuracy of the English translation of the public signs in the exhibition hall is crucial for international friends to understand Zhoushan and enhance their understanding of Zhoushan's development history and marine culture. However, there are still many low-level errors in the public signs in the exhibition hall.

#### **1) Incorrect use of words.**

Whether the choice of words in the translation is rigorous and accurate depends on the quality of the translation and the scientificity of the translation, and it can also most intuitively convey the meaning of the original text to the audience. Wrong choice of words will often lead to the audience not being able to understand the cultural connotation of the public announcement, and at the same time, it will affect the audience's precise positioning of the meaning of the words, which will also lose the role and purpose of the information conveyed by the public announcement.

For example, a phrase is translated as "oceanic economy" in the sentence that "Zhejiang pilot zone for oceanic economic development", which, combined with China's cultural background, refers to the development of marine resources and reliance on ocean space. In the Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary (8th edition)<sup>[7]</sup>, the meaning of "oceanic" is "connected with the ocean"; the meaning of "marine" is "connected with ships or trade at sea"; Therefore, the translation of "oceanic economy" here should be more accurately translated as "marine economy".

## 2) Grammatical errors.

Errors in tense and syntax are an important cause of irregularities in the translation of public announcements. Incomplete or redundant phrases, incorrect use of tense and syntax, inconsistency of paragraphs, wrong understanding of the meaning of words, word order and syntax, and rigid application of Chinese grammar often affect the audience's understanding.

For example, a sentence is translated as "which obvious advantaged in river-ocean combined transportation service". The adverb modifies the verb, and advantage (v.) should be modified by the adverb, while "obvious" is an adjective that cannot modify the verb, and should be changed to "which obviously advantaged".

Another sentence is translated as "As for the theme of strengthen river- ocean combined transportation network", In this phrase, "strengthening" should be used "of" after as a gerund, and should be "As for the theme of strengthening river-ocean combined transportation network".

## 3) Spelling errors.

English spelling mistakes are the lowest but most common problems in translation errors. In the public signs of Zhoushan City Exhibition Hall, there are many spelling mistakes, except for the fixed collocation of phrases in which the spelling of words is wrong, and there are even more mistakes in the spelling of words in the longer translation.

For example, "the Golden Waterway" is translated as "the Golen waterway".

## 4) Incorrect use of singular and plural nouns.

The use of singular and plural nouns involves the accuracy of translation, which shows the translator's proficiency in mastering the nouns, and the use of singular and plural of the same noun in different contexts with different interpretations changes, while the wrong use of singular and plural will make the translation inaccurate, which will affect the audience's understanding of the translation.

For example, a sentence is translated as "Perfect the transportation system for bulk commodities and container. "According to the original text, "container" can be a countable noun when it is interpreted as that, so the plural should be used in the sentence.

## 4.2 Cultural and Leisure Attractions——NAN DONG Valley of Arts

As an emerging scenic spot with natural ecological wilderness and rural agricultural interest, NAN DONG Valley of Arts is a famous ecological leisure village with cultural and artistic connotations in the province with folklore, folklore and ecology as its contents. The public notices in the scenic spot are comprehensive and rich with patterns, and part of the public notices are also equipped with both English and Japanese translations, providing convenient services for foreign tourists. The public notices of the scenic spots play a role in spreading the culture and telling the stories of the scenic spots, but there are deficiencies in the language level and practicality.

### **1) One-sided fidelity to the original text.**

The three principles of translation are "faith", "reach" and "elegance". In Yan Fu's mind, "Faith" is not a juxtaposition, "Faith" is the core, "Reach" and "Elegance" are means. Among them, there are two aspects of "faith", the faith to the original work and the faith to the readers of the translated text, and Yan Fu seems to focus more on the latter<sup>[8]</sup>. This also shows that translation must be faithful to the original text, but not constrained by the original text, which means that it cannot be one-sidedly faithful to the original text. If the translation is faithful to the original text, it will lead to absurd results.

For example, in a sentence means "Zhoushan's handicrafts are very distinctive and have their own style", the phrase actually means "very unique style". Chinese language likes to use special expressions to describe the same meaning, but here it is directly translated as "tasteful", which makes foreigners feel puzzled. There is a literary public sign wants to express the idea of not stepping on the lawn and being a civilized person.

The translation of the original public sign is: "Green accompanies you in spring, summer, autumn and winter; Civilization accompanies you happily all your life". From the linguistic dimension, the reader cannot understand its real meaning; the use of the words "accompanies" and "green" is inappropriate, which makes it impossible for the reader to understand the connotation it wants to express. Analyzing from the cultural dimension, the meaning of "spring, summer, autumn and winter" in the original text is a year, and "green" actually means protecting the environment, which are all expressions of imagery, but the English translation does not make people understand and causes confusion.

### **2) The font size of the public notice is too small.**

The public signs are to let the tourists understand the attraction culture through reading the public signs, and the font of the public sign is too small, it will let the tourists can't see the content clearly, and then unable to understand the culture of the scenic spot, but to cause the discomfort of the viewer, and give the scenic spot left a bad impression. This also violates the original intention of the scenic spot to provide quality service for tourists.

### **3) The public notice is obscured by the background color.**

The background color of the bulletin board is for decoration and to give visitors a refreshing feeling. But should be clear handwriting as the premise. Part of the public announcement in the scenic area there is a public announcement board background color will be covered by the handwriting, so that tourists can't see the content of the public signs. Should not be in order to attract attention, but ignored its substantive value, but made a fool.

### 4.3 The Former Site of the Red Culture - Zhoushan Opium War Heritage Park

Zhoushan Opium War Heritage Park is a commemorative park with the ancient battlefield of the Opium War as its carrier and patriotic education as its theme. This serves as a historical window for understanding the anti Japanese war in Zhoushan and witnesses the heroic actions of the people of Zhoushan in resisting the Japanese pirates. The public signs in this scenic area express the history and culture, and are full of the patriotism of the regional boundaries. The public signs in this area urgently need to be improved. It should be combined with the historical background of the Opium War and the regional characteristics of Zhoushan as an island, and combined with *the Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas*<sup>[9]</sup>, national standard of the People's Republic of China, to evaluate the areas where each public sign deserves improvement, so as to promote the dissemination and development of the island's red culture and promote the internationalization of Zhoushan's red civilization.

#### 1) Disorderly capitalization.

The English translation of public signs in public places should be standardized and unified, rather than arbitrary. Although this does not pose any obstacles to understanding the translation, these details often reflect the attitude of a scenic area or even a country towards trivial matters.

For example, in a directional map within the scenic area, the English translation of the place name of the scenic spot is confusing in capitalization. "Beacon Tower", "look-out Station", "sculpture station", these three annotated words have inconsistent capitalization of the first letter. Within the same layout, there are three issues, and the messy annotations affect the reader's perception. This error seriously affects the image of the scenic area in the minds of foreign tourists. This error seriously affects the image of the scenic area in the minds of foreign tourists.

#### 2) A stiff translation.

The English translation of public signs in public places should be standardized and unified, rather than arbitrary. Although this does not pose any obstacles to understanding the translation, these details often reflect the attitude of a scenic area or even a country towards trivial matters.

Literal translation has always been the most common phenomenon, and some English translations make people laugh uncontrollably, seriously affecting the image of scenic spots and even the international image of the country. The main reason for this phenomenon is the excessive reliance on machine translation by translators or scenic area public signs English translation management departments.

For example, in the ruins park, a building that provides people with rest, shelter from rain, and shade has been literally translated as "Proud Bone Pavilion", exposing issues with Chinese English. Based on the actual situation and cultural background, it is recommended to translate it as "Pavilion of Lofty and Unyielding Character".

The Tombs in this scenic spot is rigidly translated as "Dead Military Officers and Soldiers Tombs Group". In fact, "Dead Military Tombs Group" can be equivalent to "Martyrs Cemetery". However, in Part 3 of *the Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas*, there is a clear and standardized English translation for "Martyrs Cemetery". It is recommended to change it to "Martyrs Cemetery".

### 3) Inconsistent translations.

The signage within the scenic area, which translates the name of the same scenic spot into multiple versions, can easily cause confusion and lead people to mistakenly think it is a different scenic spot.

For example, in the park, there are five translation methods: "Zhoushan Opium War site park", "site park of Opium War of Zhoushan", "Zhoushan Opium War Heritage Park", "Site Park of OPIUM, WAR OF ZHOUSHAN", and "Zhoushan Opium War runs park". There are five different translations for the name of this scenic spot alone, although it is just a word order reversal, it can still cause a certain degree of confusion. In the *Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas*, the standard definition of "Heritage Park" is defined as "Heritage Park". Therefore, it is recommended to translate it uniformly as "Zhoushan Opium War Heritage Park".

## 5 Countermeasures

### 5.1 Focus on the linguistic norms of English expression in public signs

Grammatical problems in the translation of public signs mainly include improper use of lexis, misuse of verb forms, inconsistency of subject and predicate, misspelling of words, improper use of punctuation, etc. All of these will result in the translation failing to accurately convey the message and provide guidance to the tourists, thus violating the principle of relevance and failing to successfully realize the discourse communication of the public announcements. If the improper use of words results in semantic errors, it may cause misunderstanding and resentment among foreign tourists.

Emphasis on correctness and consistency. Translators should both choose words correctly and avoid grammatical errors as much as possible in their translations. The government should take the lead in translating the public signs in public places. It should establish a specialized management body to complete the preparation of the public notice language text, and invite professionals to carry out post-revision and proofreading. The government effectively fulfills its responsibility as a supervisor, and can play a good role in leading the management organization. At the same time, the person in charge of the scenic spot should take measures to unify the planning of the translation of the public signs, clarify the English translation of the same attraction name, and establish a corpus of commonly used words in the local public signs to unify the standard.

When translating scenic area public signs into English, the selection of words should be rigorous and cautious, based on *the Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas*, to meet the requirements of English usage norms and the style of English public signs. The literal translation of the original text should not be arbitrarily



followed, and English should not be used excessively according to actual needs, so as to improve the non-standard phenomenon of English translation and improve the quality and service ability of foreign language services.

## **5.2 Focus on cultural resonance and communication of communicative intent**

As a famous scenic spot or landmark, the cultural industry shouldn't be separated from the silent contribution of cultural workers behind. However, it is still difficult to avoid the lack of cultural resonance in the process of cultural output. Attractions are to a certain extent an important carrier and important window for the general public and tourists to understand the development of the city and spread the culture of the city, so it is especially important to promote the cultural resonance of these attractions and the communication of communicative intent. Some interpreters, due to their lack of cultural literacy, translate the words directly without understanding the cultural meaning of the words, which may easily lead to wrong interpretation of the original text and mislead the citizens and tourists.

Adhere to the characteristics of Zhoushan, output the local expression. In the city information service system, public signs play an important function of transmission and affect the psychological comfort, cultural experience depth and self-realization level of foreign travelers in a foreign country. Translators should accumulate more knowledge of public notices and pay attention to cross-cultural communication, not only considering their indicative nature, but also taking into account the cultural differences in the language, so that the translated text can accurately convey the purpose of the original text, help readers accurately grasp the real meaning, and avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

## **5.3 Rejection of rigid translations in "Chinese English" style**

All along, literal translation is the most common phenomenon, and part of the English translation makes people laugh, which seriously affects the image of scenic spots and even the international image of the country. The main reason for this phenomenon is that the translators or the management department of the English translation of the public notices of the scenic spots relies too much on "machine translation".

Put readers' expectations in the first place and give translations in combination with local characteristics. "When translating the public notices of scenic spots, translators should put the purpose of public notice translation and readers' expectations in the first place under the premise of fully understanding the original text of public notices."<sup>[10]</sup> Relevant organizations and departments should pay attention to the problem of English translation of public notices, which can't be simply handed over to the machine translation to complete, and can not only rely on the "Chinese" translation. Translators should fully understand the benefits of the "cultural dimension" and "communicative dimension" of the translation, and translate under the guidance of functional translation theory, so as to give a flexible and accurate translation.

#### 5.4 Prioritize the effectiveness of public signs

Before writing a Chinese version for public notice, it is important to understand the functional characteristics and language style of public notice language, in order to achieve concise, concise, frank, and powerful language. At the same time, when writing public language versions, reference can be made to *the Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas* to find corresponding public language versions, which have corresponding English translations. This can reduce translation work and improve translation accuracy.

When translating scenic area public signs into English, the selection of words should be rigorous and cautious, based on *the Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas*, to meet the requirements of English usage norms and the style of English public signs. The literal translation of the original text should not be arbitrarily followed, and English should not be used excessively according to actual needs, so as to improve the non-standard phenomenon of English translation and improve the quality and service ability of foreign language services.

While paying attention to the translation itself, attention should also be paid to the production of public signs. In order to achieve standardization and avoid confusion in the translation of public signs and the production of public signs in public places, the government should establish corresponding departments to complete the work of compiling the Chinese version of public signs, post review, and the production of public signs.

## 6 Conclusions

As a carrier of cultural communication, the public signs must ensure its rigor and accuracy, and mature tourist attractions public signs can not only provide convenience for foreign tourists traveling in China, but also promote the exchange of Chinese and foreign cultures, and then show and enhance the international image of China. Boost Zhoushan city to better connect with the international community, enhance its cultural soft power and internationalization level.

Translation of public signs is important for the development of tourism, highlighting China's cultural level and the overall quality of civilization, but also to guide overseas tourists, Zhoushan, the main window of cultural exchanges. Translation should be appropriate, and should be "both in form and spirit". The original purpose of translation is to convert a language that the target group cannot understand into another language that they can understand. Words are the "skin" of the language, but the meaning of the sentence is the "flesh" of the language. In the process of translation, it is important to translate the "skin" of the language, but it is equally important to express the "flesh" of the language correctly and smoothly.

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