

Original Paper

On the C-E Translation of the Chengdu Public Signs from the Perspective of Communication Theory

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Abstract

With the rapid development of economy and technology, China's overall national strength, international status and influence have increased considerably. China has entered into the cultural output era, and it is important to tell China's stories well, spread China's voice and present a real and comprehensive China to the world. In the past several decades, China's practical cooperation with other countries continues to develop, as well as the larger international games and conferences, attracting a quantity of people from overseas travelling in and out of China. Most public places have offered public signs in bilingual language, which effectively serve people at home and abroad. The public signs have become the most direct and common medium for people around the world to get to know China. Meanwhile, the quality of public signs' translation directly reflects the social landscape and human civilization of a country and a city. This essay will focus on the Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games to be held from July to August 2023, and jointly study the 5W mode of communication with the Chinese-English Dictionary of Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games Public Signs, discuss and analyze the quality and communication effect of Chinese-English public signs in the five aspects of communication subject, content, media, audience and effect, hoping can provide some new insights to the public signs' translation.

Keywords

Chinese-English Dictionary of Chengdu 2021 World University Games Public Signs, 5W model of communication, public signs, communication effect

1. Introduction

As economy and technology boom rapidly, China's comprehensive national strength and international status keep growing. At the same time, the global communities pay more and more attention on China. During the process of international cooperation and exchange, translation serves as a material basis that sustains a smooth communication and provide a channel for the world to learn Chinese history and culture.

As the strategic highland of China's western development, Chengdu has made remarkable achievements in economic prosperity and industrial revitalization and has owned a good reputation in China and around the world featuring with distinctive local history and culture, appealing more and more foreigners and tourists every year. In order to provide good services in line with international standards, Chengdu's public places all provide public signs in bilingual language, such as railways, tourist attractions, parks and hospitals. The translation of the public signs not only reflects the city's international image, but also relates to the international service level in larger conferences and events.

The Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games is the first world comprehensive games that Chengdu has successfully bid to host since it put forward the goal of building the world-famous city of sport events. There will be athletes, coaches, referees and officials from relevant international sports organizations from over 170 countries and regions joining the games, which is a great opportunity to let the world to know Chengdu and learn Chinese culture. During this period, public signs will play an important role to provide people services in daily life. In order to standardize the names of the competition events and the public signs of running venues and public facilities, the relevant departments have compiled the *Chinese-English Dictionary of Chengdu 2021 World University Games Public Signs*, which contains over 4,000 words and phrases, including the competition events, the main operating areas, the arrival and departure transportation, medical services, the culture and history of Chengdu, the famous food and tourist spots, the public transport and municipal departments, and other basic information about the games and Chengdu.

2. Literature Review

The translation of public signs is an important field of translation research. Although the research on public sign translation in China is relatively late, it is a hot topic in application translation research in China. The earlier research on the translation of public signs was in the 1990s. He Ziran (1998) studied the English translation of public signs and pragmatic issues from the perspective of pragmatics. Ni Chuanbin and Liu Zhi (1998) proposed that the English translation of public signs should follow the five principles of "brevity, clarity, appropriate tone, standardization and appropriate humor".

In the 21st century, with the development of cooperation and exchanges between China and other countries, as well as the organizations various large-scale Olympic events and international conferences, there are more and more people come to China and public signs play a more important role in communication (Wang, 2015). More and more domestic experts and scholars focus on the study of public signs translation. According to the dates of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), there are almost 2477 journal papers about the translation of public signs from 2002 to 2023, which mainly talk about the problems and solutions of public signs translation, translation principles of public signs, and the standardization of translation. Meanwhile, there are diverse guiding theories of public signs translation, including skopos theory, functional equivalence theory, ecological translation theory, etc. Communication theory, reception aesthetics, pragmatics are also involved in the research of public signs

translation. Domestic scholars combined translation with communication studies, proposed many practical and feasible translation strategies and principles, exploring the guiding role of communication studies in the translation of public signs. Guo Xiaochun (2013) demonstrated the interactive relationship between the media, society, and audience during the communication process, and proposed attachment strategy, adaptation strategy, and emotion driven strategy three ways to solve the cross-cultural communication problem. Guo Cong (2017) discussed the influence of the ecological environment and target recipients on the English translation of public signs from the perspective of Communication. Zhao Xixi (2019) combined the 5W mode of Communication theory and emphasized the importance of feedback from the translation object and the status of audience in the translation process.

To conclude, the domestic translation researches from the perspective of Communication are still in an early stage. The overall number of studies on the translation of public signs from the perspective of communication studies is not enough, and the content is not comprehensive yet. Therefore, more scholars are demanded to take part in the translation research from the perspective of Communication. Taken the *Chinese-English Dictionary of Chengdu 2021 World University Games Public Signs* as an example, this article will talk about the influence of communication subjects, content, media, audiences and effects on public signs translation, exploring the guidance of the 5W mode of Communication theory on public signs translation, hoping can provide some new perspectives for public signs translation.

3. The 5W mode of Communication Theory

Communication studies human communication behaviour, the communication process and its laws, and how humans use symbols to communicate. According to the communication theory, acts of humans that relate to the transmission and exchange of information are all communication phenomena. Translation is a process that transform one language into another language and convey the main ideas and meanings of the source language to the target audience at the same time. Therefore, the process of information transmission is in line with the laws of communication (Guo, 2013). The original author, original text, translator, translation, and target readers form a common system that interacts the source and target language systems. Changes in the external environment inevitably affect the translation system, resulting in noise. The entire process of translation dissemination is guided by a certain purpose to overcome noise interference, utilize feedback to spread information as accurately as possible and finally achieve the communication purpose.

Harold Lasswell (1948), one of the major founders of communication studies, proposed the famous 5W mode communication theory in *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*. The process of communication into the interactive relationship and activity process of five elements (5W mode), including who, says what, in which channel, to whom and with what effect (referring to five main research contents of communication studies respectively: control analysis, content analysis, media analysis, audience analysis, and effectiveness analysis) (Lasswell, 1948). Given that the translation of

public signs involves issues such as “who” and “to whom” and “with what effect”, the 5W model is highly applicable to the study of public signs translation.

3.1 The Communication Subject

The communication subject plays a leading role in the communication process, referring to “who” of 5W mode of Communication. During translation process, translator is the main communication subject and should be responsible for collecting, organizing, selecting, processing information, ensuring the effect of the communication.

As the “gatekeepers” of the translation, translators need to take the initiative, fully understand the original text and consider the cultural differences, living habits, acceptance and comprehension of audience (Lei, 2016). And then integrate and reconstruct the language style and form of public signs according to the type and functional characteristics of the public signs, adopt appropriate translation strategies to convey the source information contained accurately and overcome the noise of communication to achieve the best communication effect.

Example 1

ST : 蓉宝

TT : Rongbao

ST : 鱼凫文化

TT : Yufu Culture (Yufu King, founder of early ancient Shu Kingdom)

ST : 宽窄巷子

TT : Kuanzhai Alley (wide and narrow alleys)

Rongbao is the mascot of the 31st FISU World University Games, designed from the giant panda Zhima. The first word “蓉” originally refers to hibiscus, but here it refers to Chengdu. According to Chinese history, Emperor Meng Chang of Houshu in the Five Dynasty favored hibiscus flowers and asked people to plant hibiscus all over the city walls. During the blooming season, the scenery was very spectacular. Therefore Chengdu was given the name “蓉城” (city of hibiscus). When dealing with the first phrase, the translator adopted transliteration and translated it as Rongbao, making the translation highly readable and preserving the fidelity of the original information of history. This translation method has been widely applied by translators. For example, the mascot “Hodori” for the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul was translated in transliteration according to Korean pronunciation. The mascot “福娃” of the 2008 Olympic mascot in Beijing was originally translated as “Friendliness”, and then changed into “Fuwa”. The mascot of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo also was adopted transliteration and was translated as “Haibao”. All of them have gained highly recognition and good communication effect (Ye, 2012). When translating the rest phrases, the translators combined transliteration and free translation, keeping the original characteristics of local language and culture and reflecting a strong cultural awareness. To achieve better communication effect, the translators added the annotation, which make it easier for the target-readers to have an accurate imagination in mind and understand the true meaning of “Yufu Culture” and “Kuanzhai Alley”.

3.2 Communication Content

The communication content is the core part of communication and refers to “says what” of 5W mode. The public signs are a kind of special language and face to public, aiming to show what the public should know or observe. So fully understanding the content and conveying the source information accurately are very important.

After text analysis, the words and phrases of *Chinese-English Dictionary of Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games Public Signs* can be divided into 22 categories, such as travel, entertainment, shopping, food, transportation, education, medicine, etc. Different words or phrases have different functions, which are usually divided into indication function, prompt function, restrictive function, and mandatory function. Taking subway stations as an example, the function of the public signs of subway stations is to offer indications for passengers to take the subways. They are closely linked to people’s daily life and play a significant role in traffic indication function during the Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games. This requires that the translated content should be as consistent as possible with the original content to convey information accurately. At the same time, the translations should make sure the natural expression and concise language to consistent with the language characteristics of public signs, finally achieving the communication purpose (Sun, 2021).

Example 2

ST : 驷马桥

TT : Simaqiao

ST : 世纪城

ST : Century City

The bridge’s name “驷马桥” used to be called “升仙桥”. Dating back to Han Dynasty, when Sima Xiangru went to Chang’an to take the imperial examination in the hopes of winning an official rank, he passed by this bridge. He left a manuscript on the bridge corridor reading “大丈夫不乘驷马车, 不复过此桥”. Later, Sima Xiangru successfully achieved his dream and returned to his hometown in a carriage with four horses. Therefore “升仙桥” was renamed as “驷马桥”. The source background information is too long and complicated. Besides the public signs of traffic just provide passengers indications, not to introduce culture and history. Therefore, it is feasible to adopt transliterate directly and translate it as “Simaqiao”. Translation should not only reflect the characteristics of the source language, but also conform to the simple and precise form and characteristics of the public signs. Hence, translators should consider the demands of target audience and make the translated text more intelligible and simple for the target readers, to achieve better communication effects.

Due to the discrepancy and incompatibility in thinking and expression habits between Chinese and English, translators should get rid of the constraints from the original text and express the original information accurately and faithfully in accordance with western cognition and comprehension. We cannot blindly accord to the literal meaning and simply translate word by word. For example, the “世纪城” originally refers to the New International Convention and Exhibition Center in High-tech Zone of

Chengdu, which is currently the largest, most completed and advanced multi-functional conference and exhibition center in western China. While “Century City” means a city of the century, which may misunderstand the passengers. And the translation is inconsistent with the original content and the basic communication requirements of clarity and expressiveness.

Example 3

ST : 武青南路

TT : Wuqing South Road

ST : 昭觉寺南路

TT : Zhaojuesi Road South

ST : 成都东客站

TT : East Chengdu Railway Station

ST : 成都西站

TT : Chengdu West Railway Station

There are some words or phrases that are lack of standardization, such as subway stations that contains location words. The positions of location words (like east, west, north, south, middle) are different when translate the public signs of subway stations. In the *Chinese-English Dictionary of Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games Public Signs*, there are 15 entries in accordance with form “XX+South Road”, and 13 of them were translated as “South Road”, such as “Wuqing South Road”, while the other were translated into “Road South”, such as “Zhaojuesi Road South”. As we can see, the arrangement of location words in such entries are different. Besides, “East Chengdu Railway Station” and “Chengdu West Railway Station” are also translated in different ways. The content of the translation should be as close as possible to universal translation methods in accordance with target language environment and culture. Translators should try their best to avoid ambiguity and confusion and standardize the translation methods.

3.3 Communication Media

Communication media, referring to “in which channel” of 5W mode, is a fundamental component of the communication process and a material method for achieving communication behavior. The common material media includes road signs, billboards, voice broadcasts, electronic media, etc.

The *Chinese-English Dictionary of Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games Public Signs* provides a Chinese-English public sign blueprint for the preparation of the Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games and the construction of urban infrastructure. However, there are still many errors in translation in real life. Therefore, it is necessary to take actions to make adjustments and error correction in public places, and standardize the public signs of the event names, operating venues, and public facilities and so on, to improve the international service level of the Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games.

3.4 Communication Object

The communication audience is a motivating factors of communication activities, referring to “to whom” of 5W mode. It is an active receiver of information and an important source of feedback in the communication process, occupying an important position in the communication activities. When translating, it is necessary to prioritize the interests of the audience, take the fundamental needs of the audience as the starting point and destination of communication activities, consider the characteristics, cultural backgrounds and thinking habits of the audience, make adjustments timely according to audience feedback to improve the effect of the translation.

Taking warning public signs as an example, the warning public signs are widely used in public transportation, public facilities, emergency services and other areas. They are usually used to remind people what to mind and to observe. Many of them are used dynamic expressions such as “No Parking”, “No Motor Vehicles”, “Do Not Enter”, etc. This form makes help to guide the audience to take corresponding activities. Sometimes the language style is more straightforward and tough, so translators should consider the audience’s emotion and feeling, and avoid the translations too forceful, rude and unreasonable.

Example 4

ST : 禁止驶入标志

TT : Do Not Enter

ST : 禁止非机动车进入标志

TT : Motor Vehicles Only

ST : 行驶中请勿站立

TT : Stay seated while the vehicle is in motion

ST : 为了行车安全，请勿打扰司机

TT : Do not distract the driver

ST : 车内发生紧急情况时，请按按钮报警

TT : Push button in case of emergency

There are many negative or coercive words in warning public signs, such as “No Left Turn (or No Right Turn)”, “Height Limit”, “Do Not Enter”. Sometimes the original expressions in Chinese are reasonable and understandable, but not suitable for another language due to the cultural differences. Translators need to adopt translation strategies flexibly. The sayings “禁止非机动车进入标志” and “行驶中请勿站立” both adopt negation translation method and are translated into “Motor Vehicles Only” and “Stay seated while the vehicle is in motion” respectively, not only achieving the aim functionally, but also letting the audience feel more comfortable and acceptable. If the translators ignore the cultural differences between the source language and target language, does not consider the rules of the target language and cultural backgrounds, it may not lead to positive translation effect and successful communication. When translating “为了行车安全，请勿打扰司机”，translators selectively deleted the former phrase to make translation more accurate and concise. And the saying “车内发生紧急情况时，请按按钮报警” was

translated into “Push button in case of emergency” in a more clear and direct way. Obviously, this way not only convey its original intention, but also accord with English grammar. Therefore, in order to appeal the audience to take actions and achieve communication purposes, it is very significant to consider and get familiar with the target-language speakers’ emotion and characteristics and make public signs more politely and acceptable.

3.5 Communication Effect

The communication effect refers to “with what effect” of 5W mode, which is the final part in the communication process. Through communication effect, we can acknowledge the impacts and results of communication activities on the target language speaker and society. If the feedback of target language speakers is more positive, the translation effect is more close to the purpose of the communication. Therefore, the effect is one of the most vital factors to reflect the effect of translation.

Example 5

ST : 东坡肉

TT : Dongpo Braised Pork

ST : 乐山棒棒鸡

TT : Leshan Bon-Bon Chicken

ST : 鸭血

TT : duck blood

ST : 肥肠

TT : pig’s large intestine

Due to the differences in food culture, the naming methods in western and China are extremely different. In western menus, generally only the names of dishes are listed with the main and auxiliary ingredients, cooking methods and condiments, which is consistent with the pragmatism pursued by western countries. While China has a wide variety of dishes with extremely rich names, which are usually realistic and creative, reflecting the profound history, culture and folk customs (Ji, 2009). In *Chinese-English Dictionary of Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games Public Signs*, there are many famous local foods in Chengdu listed. When translating “东坡肉” and “乐山棒棒鸡”, the translator retained the original culture and made it more readable and simplicity. But when the transliteration can not directly reflect the true nature of the dish, translators can adopt annotation to describe the method, appearance, taste type, main ingredients, ingredients of the dishes, helping the target audience understand the dishes better. When dealing with “鸭血”, the translation “duck blood” may lead to misunderstanding and “duck blood curd” is more reasonable and understandable. Another example is “肥肠”, the word “intestine” refers to an organ and is usually used in human anatomy. In western counties, chitterlings are more common than intestine when talks about food. Therefore, in order to achieve better effect, translators must consider the cultural differences between the source language and the target language, and respect the cultural habits and the psychological acceptance of the target language readers. And they can make corresponding adjustments according to the audiences’ feedback to improve translation effect.

4. Conclusion

Public signs not only play an integral part of the city's linguistic and cultural environment, but also reflect the city's spiritual and cultural image. It is a crucial channel for foreign tourists and athletes to get to know and understand Chengdu and also a link for communication between different cultures. From the perspective of Communication studies, the subject, content, media, object and effect are all indispensable, making successful communication purpose. The translation process of public signs is also a dynamic process in which the translator, content, communication media, audience and communication effect interact with each other to promote the successful communication and development of public signs translation.

In order to achieve better communication effect and make sure that the communication content of public signs is conveyed accurately, the translators should be conscious in considering and analyzing the difference and characteristics in original language and target language, pay more attention to the emotions and demands of the audience, adopt different translation strategies and make adjustments in accordance with the target audience's feedback. At the same time, it is also very important to make sure the expression in English is reasonable and understandable and the form is concise and easy to read, avoiding ambiguity and confusion.

The 5W mode of Communication provides theoretical guidance for the public signs translation from a new perspective and emphasizes the influence of translator, audience, content, communication effect and communication media on translation. The theoretical and practical application of Communication theory in the translation of public signs is a great progress. The study of public signs translation is beneficial to improve the Chengdu's international image and comprehensive service level of the Chengdu 2021 FISU World University Games, hoping the games will be held successfully.

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