Issues and Strategies in English Translation of Public Notices in Light of Text Typology Theory: A Case Study of Zhoushan City

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the English translations of public notices in Zhoushan City, which plays a crucial role in facilitating international tourism development. Zhoushan City boasts abundant tourism resources and aims to attract a global audience. However, the current English translations of public notices have various issues that hinder the comprehensive advancement of public services and the overall upgrading of the tourism industry. Drawing on Newmark’s theory of text type translation, this study examines the existing problems in English translations and proposes suitable solutions to enhance the effectiveness and accuracy of the translations. By standardizing the English translations of public notices, Zhoushan City can create a favorable cultural and tourism environment, improve the international quality of urban tourism, and establish itself as a prominent tourism and cultural brand.

1. Introduction

Public notices serve as vital means of communication that inform, instruct, guide, warn, display, and signify information and visuals pertinent to people's daily lives, productivity, well-being, environment, and livelihoods (Dai Xianzong; Lü Hefa) [1]. As an integral component of public services, public notices assume a prominent role in shaping the urban landscape and fulfilling the essential requirements of the tourism industry. With the gradual stabilization of the global pandemic situation in recent years, the domestic tourism industry has experienced a steady resurgence, rekindling the momentum towards internationalizing the sector. Consequently, a substantial demand for accurate English translations of public notices has emerged. Zhoushan City, situated along the picturesque coastline of the East China Sea and renowned as the “City of Thousand Islands,” enjoys a strategic geographic advantage, necessitating a proactive thrust towards internationalizing within its tourism industry. As an integral part of the city’s external outreach efforts, the English translation of public notices assumes a pivotal role in projecting a positive image to the international tourism market and serving as a prominent window for effectively conveying China’s narrative. External promotional translation represents a pivotal aspect of a nation’s level of external communication and the cultivation of its cultural environment, with errors and deficiencies profoundly magnified. Thus, the effectiveness of translation efforts should be primarily reflected in the outcomes of external promotional translation (Huang Youyi) [2]. Regrettably, the prevalence of public notices throughout Zhoushan City’s main island is disproportionately matched by a pervasive pattern of inaccurate English translations, resulting in ineffective external promotion and impeding the optimization of tourism-related public services.

Newmark’s classification of texts into expressive, informative, and vocative categories provides a theoretical foundation for numerous scholars who have investigated English translations of public notices. [3] Niu Xinsheng, in “An Analysis of English Translation of Chinese Public Notices from the Perspective of Vocative Function: A Case Study of Ningbo City,” highlights a significant issue in the English translation of public notices—namely, the oversight of their vocative function. This function encompasses instructive, informative, cautionary, announcing, persuasive, and promotional aspects. [4] Building upon Newmark’s text type theory, this paper places particular emphasis on the vocative and persuasive function inherent in public notice texts. It aims to explore pertinent translation challenges and propose effective strategies to enhance the quality of English translations of public notices in Zhoushan City. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to improving the efficacy of external promotion, fostering a conducive cultural and tourism milieu, and propelling the comprehensive international development of the tourism industry.

2. Analysis of English Translation Issues in Public Notices in Zhoushan City

Texts with a vocative function serve as powerful tools to inspire and call upon specific reader groups. In the context of public notices, these texts often play a crucial role in...
providing guidance, issuing commands, and eliciting a desired response. Newmark's perspective emphasizes the central importance of the “readership” when it comes to texts with a vocative function. This implies that to effectively fulfill their persuasive purpose, such texts must prioritize reader awareness, place the reader at the core, achieve the communicative objectives of the public notice, and have a tangible social impact. For instance, well-translated public notices on urban environmental conservation can showcase a city’s commitment to environmental stewardship and foster a culture of environmental responsibility among its citizens. This, in turn, facilitates effective external environmental promotion while motivating international tourists to engage in sustainable practices and contribute to the global environmental cause.

Moreover, based on Newmark’s theory of text types, it is important to recognize that public notices often encompass elements of both informative and imperative texts. While conveying accurate information remains the fundamental requirement during the translation process, it is equally crucial to optimize the translation to effectively convey the persuasive function inherent in the original public notice. This serves as a critical aspect in enhancing the city's external promotional capabilities.

Regrettably, in Zhoushan City, the current English translations of public notices continue to suffer from a range of issues. The quality of these translations varies widely, thereby impeding the development of foreign-related public services and constraining the international promotion of Zhoushan as a prominent tourist destination. To address the diverse challenges encountered during the English translation process, this paper categorizes them into the following key aspects:

### 2.1. Linguistic Mistranslation

In the cultural square of Dinghai District, Zhoushan City, there is a public notice that reads “Pay attention to not trample the grass under your feet”. The intended meaning of the original text is to urge the public to protect urban greenery. However, the English translation of this notice translates “trample the grass” word-for-word as “practice grass,” where the word “practice” is a simplistic and crude translation of the original meaning of “trample”. This translation not only confuses foreign tourists but also damages the city's external promotional image. Such translations fail to fulfill the basic function of clearly conveying information in the public notice and cannot serve their intended purpose as warnings.

In Zhoushan’s Opium War Site Park, next to a bamboo grove, a warning sign is posted with the following message: “Surveillance area, no digging bamboo shoots, violators will be fined”. The translation renders “no digging bamboo shoots” as “Ban dig bamboo shoots.” While “ban” does convey the meaning of “prohibition”, the combination with “dig” results in a grammatically incorrect translation. In another environmental public notice in the cultural square, there is a phrase that says “Show mercy to flowers, don't pick them”. The translation translates “pick flowers” as “break flowers.” “pick” does not mean “to break” in this context, so using “break” is inappropriate. A more accurate translation would be “Do not pick flowers.”

At the entrance of Sanmao Bookstore in Dinghai District, Zhoushan City, there is a directive public notice that says “Please push the door when reading”. The translation is “Read, please push the door.” It is evident that the translation is a literal word-for-word rendering, disregarding the logical connection between the two sentences separated by a comma in English. Additionally, the original text aims to indicate that there are books available for reading inside, and “push the door” actually conveys the meaning of “enter.” To better achieve the directive purpose, a more appropriate translation would be “Come in and read.”

The occurrence of linguistic mistranslation reflects the basic errors in the translation process of public notice texts, which undermine the fundamental information function of the translated text. Furthermore, the directive and warning functions of the original texts are compromised due to the partial loss of information during the translation process, leading to a reduction or complete loss of effectiveness.

### 2.2. Cultural Mistranslation

In the tourist service office of Liuyong Cultural Square in Dinghai District, the Chinese name is “Learn Leifeng Volunteer Service Station”, and its English translation is surprisingly rendered as “Learn Leifeng volunteer service station.” Most foreign tourists are unfamiliar with the glorious deeds of Comrade Leifeng, resulting in a cultural gap in understanding. Therefore, the translation cannot leverage the significant and far-reaching influence of “Leifeng” in China to deepen the concept of “volunteer service.” It would be more appropriate to simply translate it as “Volunteer Service” to ensure the indicative function of the signage.

Next to the Liuyong Memorial Hall, there is a civilized tourism volunteer service point, and the sign displays the working hours of the service point. However, the English translation directly translates “working hours” as “work and rest time.” While “working hours” is a commonly used term in Chinese, it specifically refers to “working hours” in this context. Therefore, the translator should not rigidly translate and should consider the differences in language usage between Chinese and English. It should be translated as “work time” to avoid misunderstandings.

### 2.3. Pursuing form while neglecting the purpose and persuasive function of public notices.

In the cultural square of Zhoushan City, there is an environmental public notice that says “Trees have green color. The earth has pulse”. The translation is “Trees have green color. The earth has pulse.” Formally, the translation follows the parallel structure of the original text. However, in terms of practical function, it diminishes the persuasive function of the public notice. The original text metaphorically associates green trees with the pulse of the earth, emphasizing that green trees are the vitality of the earth and urging people to protect greenery. The translated
version isolates the two logically connected sentences. On one hand, it does not faithfully represent the original text, and on the other hand, it loses the persuasive power of the original text in terms of environmental protection. To faithfully represent the original text and organize the language more smoothly, a more accurate translation would be “Green trees show the pulse of the earth.” However, considering the persuasive power of the public notice, it is necessary to directly convey the concept of “protecting trees.” It can be translated more directly as “Protect green trees.”

Similarly, in the cultural square, there is a public notice that says “Green mountains and green water, birds contend and sing. Protecting the environment is imperative”. The translation is “Green mountains and green water birds contend sing. Environmental protection is imperative.” The translation mistakenly translates “birds contend and sing” as “birds contend sing” and the sentence structure for “green mountains and green water” is not clear, resulting in a grammatical error. However, more importantly, even if we disregard the translation errors, the translated text still fails to fulfill its function as an environmental advocacy message due to the lack of understanding of the functional nature of persuasive texts. The ultimate purpose of using imagery like “green mountains and green water” in this public notice is to call for people to engage in environmental practices. Therefore, a direct translation would be “Environmental protection is imperative.”

3. Public Notice Translation Suggestions and Strategies

3.1. The Fundamental Objective of Public Notice Translation

The primary purpose of public notice translation is to effectively communicate and engage with the public. Public notices, unlike general texts, serve as instruments of warning, notification, and advocacy. Consequently, in the process of English translation, it is imperative to prioritize the essence of the original text rather than becoming excessively preoccupied with the form of the translation. A rigid adherence to literal fidelity should be avoided. In his exploration of the principles of translating public notices from Chinese to English, Liu Fagong, building upon the distinctive functional characteristics and linguistic style of public notices, proposes three fundamental principles: consistency, conciseness, and comprehensibility[5]. Drawing on Newmark’s text classification theory, these principles underscore the importance of maintaining a unified approach to translations, employing concise and easily understandable language. The aim is to ensure that the translated text faithfully serves the fundamental purpose of the public notice. It is crucial to recognize that translating public notices into English is a vital aspect of cross-cultural communication and plays a significant role in promoting a city’s image to an international audience. Therefore, it is essential to avoid the pitfalls of self-isolation and self-indulgence, embracing a more open and outward-looking approach.

3.2. Embracing Standardized Translations

Since December 1, 2017, the “English Transliteration Specification for Public Services” (referred to as the “National Standard”) issued by the China National Standardization Management Committee has been officially implemented. This comprehensive standard covers various sectors such as transportation, tourism, and sports and provides standardized translations for commonly used public notice terms. For instance, the term “scenic spot” is uniformly translated as “scenic spot.” However, despite the existence of these standardized translations, inconsistencies and variations in English translations of public notices persist, leading to a fragmented and non-standardized landscape. This not only hampers the development of a consistent approach to translating public notices into English but also undermines the establishment of a robust institutional framework. To address this issue, it is crucial for relevant authorities to adhere to the guidelines outlined in the “National Standard” when producing translations of public notices. For texts that align completely with the “National Standard,” the suggested translations should be adopted directly. For public notices that possess regional characteristics, a flexible approach that incorporates elements of the “National Standard” should be employed, allowing for context-specific adaptations. By doing so, the authoritative framework provided by the “National Standard” can help mitigate translation errors and enhance the overall quality of the translated texts.

3.3. Establishing a Local Corpus and Unifying Translations

The importance of establishing a local corpus for public notice translations cannot be overstated. This corpus would serve as a valuable resource and facilitate the standardization of translations, particularly in terms of naming conventions. Currently, inconsistencies in translations can be observed, even for identical names. For instance, the translation of “Zhoushan Opium War Heritage Park” at the entrance might differ from the translation of the same name in the introduction of the Cultural Square, where it is referred to as “Zhoushan Opium War Heritage Park.” This lack of consistency not only results in a waste of resources but also hinders the further international development of Zhoushan’s tourism industry. Establishing a local corpus for public notice translations would provide a unified reference point and streamline the translation process. By reducing redundancy in the reviewing and compiling stages, the overall translation quality can be significantly improved, aligning with the objective of accurate and comprehensive translations.

3.4. Reader-Centric Approach

To achieve effective translation, it is important to consider the target readership. Understanding their cultural
background, language proficiency, and informational needs helps in producing translations that resonate with the intended audience. This section discusses the importance of adopting a reader-centric approach and tailoring translations accordingly, which is the “readership” that Newmark emphasized.

3.5. Quality Control Measures

Implementing quality control measures is essential to ensure the accuracy and consistency of translated public notices. It is of high value to obtain feedback from readers and stakeholders to continuously improve translation practices. Specifically, Zhoushan can establish dedicated translation teams or partnerships to ensure a skilled and professional workforce for translation. Training and continuing education opportunities can be provided to enhance the expertise and translation quality of personnel. Besides, communication channels with readers and relevant stakeholders should be established to encourage feedback and input on translation quality. This feedback helps the government understand public expectations and needs regarding translation quality and enables timely adjustments and improvements.

3.6. Professional Translators and Translation Technology

Engaging professional translators with expertise in the subject matter and language pair is crucial for achieving high-quality translations. In Zhoushan, there are some purely machine-generated translation texts for public notice, most of which include mistakes of various kinds. However, in the era of technology, the government of Zhoushan can explore the role of professional translators and the appropriate use of translation technology, such as CAT (Computer-Assisted Translation) tools, to improve efficiency and accuracy.

4. Conclusions

The primary objective of translating public notices into English is to effectively convey the influential function embedded within the original text to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, achieving this persuasive function necessitates the production of accurate and error-free translations, coupled with the optimization of translations that consider the readers’ perspectives. Within a systematic framework for translating public notices, the presentation of standardized and regulated translations plays a vital role in transforming individual and specific public notices in fields such as environmental protection, tourism, and transportation into a collective force. This collective force, in turn, contributes to shaping the city’s external promotional image and brand through the translated public notices, thereby serving as the ultimate aim of this translation endeavor.

The presence of erroneous translations, machine-generated translations, and translations that prioritize form over substance in the English translations of public notices within Zhoushan City demands attention from the relevant authorities. It is imperative to foster a collaborative effort that prompts translators to prioritize the persuasive function of the public notice texts and continually update, integrate, optimize, and rectify any mistranslations based on the readers’ perspectives. Building upon this foundation, the establishment of a standardized institutional framework and a unified translation name corpus should be pursued in a concerted manner, fostering mutually beneficial outcomes. Such endeavors will propel the English translation of public notices in Zhoushan City into a new era and usher it onto a transformative trajectory.

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