

# On C-E Translation of Public Signs from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

## -- Taking the Public Signs in Max City as Examples

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### Abstract

**With the frequent exchanges between China and foreign countries, the standardization of translation of public signs is conducive to the effective transmission of information and the exchange of different cultures. Guided by Skopos theory, all collected samples in Max City of Chinese and English public signs were classified, contrasted, analyzed, and it is found that some errors in C-E translation of public signs are caused by inconformity with the characteristics of public signs and violating the rules of Skopos theory. Then the strategies of C-E translation of public signs are put forward based on Skopos theory.**

### Keywords

**Skopos Theory; Public Sign; Translation Strategy.**

## 1. Introduction

Since China joined the world trade organization, international communication has become more frequent, and bilingual public signs in Chinese and English can be seen everywhere in major cities of China, especially in scenic spots and commercial areas. Max City officially opened in June 2016, which is located in the core hinterland of Meixi Lake international new town, Yuelu District, Changsha. Under the background of people's pursuit of a better life, building a good business English language environment is a key step to improve the service of Max City.

One of the effective ways to make foreigners in China feel at home is to communicate properly with them. English translation of public signs plays a crucial part in international communication. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the errors in the translation of public signs and to eliminate them with corresponding strategies. On the contrary, the poor translation of public signs will lead to the results of hindering the economic development and misleading the visitors. For example, incorrect application of Pinyin cannot make visitors understand the meaning of public signs, and improper tone of the translation will make visitors feel offended. In this case, C-E translation of public signs is an important research field.

Ma Lin (2012) proposes that public signs are the "business card" of a city. The English translation of public signs not only provides rich information for foreign visitors, but also represents the image of Hunan Province. Therefore, to achieve the goal of becoming an international business area, it is necessary to create a good language environment. The unreasonable use of public signs in business districts should be corrected and standardized.

Furthermore, some practical translation strategies and the standards of public signs should be put forward from the perspective of Skopos theory. In this process, translators should make proper choices according to their own knowledge and experience as well as the skopos of the original text. In addition, translation practice should be based on translating problems of public signs by analyzing a large number of cases in the business area.

So Skopos theory is applied to the research on C-E translation of the public signs in Max City. This thesis attempts to conduct a systematic study of the C-E translation of public signs in Max City through five chapters.

Chapter one is a brief introduction of this thesis. Chapter two introduces the contents of public signs and Skopos theory. Chapter three describes the basic situation of the samples. Chapter four analyzes the common types of translation errors. Chapter five presents the strategies for the translation of public signs according to skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule. And chapter six makes the conclusion.

## 2. Skopos Theory and C-E Translation of Public Signs

As for human translation activities, many outstanding translators have explored the problems in translation of public signs. And a lot of researches on the translation of public signs have already shown that Vermeer's Skopos theory has strong guidance to the C-E translation of public signs.

### 2.1. Theoretical Basis: Skopos Theory

Skopos theory is first proposed by Vermeer in 1978, which describes the basic rules and norms of Skopos theory and points out that the translation is a cross-cultural activity. Vermeer's general Skopos theory and Riess's specific translation theory are combined to establish a comprehensive and complex translation theory in the book *General Theory of Translation* (Vermeer, Riess, 1984).

In Vermeer's view, translating has an intended purpose. Translation is closely related to language and culture. "As a cross-cultural translation, the translator should be familiar with both the source-culture and the target-culture" (Vermeer, 1983). In order to achieve the successful translation of target language, the translators should consider the expectation and the cultural background of the target language receivers. Consequently, in the translating process, the translators should not only be conform to the surface structure of the original texts, but also adopt different translation strategies for different target audiences. In other words, absolute loyalty is not necessary in some cases.

According to Vermeer, Skopos theory regards any translation as a purposeful activity, and includes three basic rules: skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule.

The basic point of skopos rule is that the skopos of translation determines the process of translation, which is the top-ranking rule of translation. "Vermeer believes that every text is produced for a specific purpose and should serve that purpose" (Janet, 1994). Therefore, the skopos rule makes your translation can play a role in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function. The skopos rule can be used to solve some practical problems between free translation and faithful translation, dynamic and formal equivalence, etc. It means that the Skopos of a translational action possibly requires a free or a faithful translation, or any other translation skill which does not belong to these kinds. "Vermeer points out that every translation is directed at an intended audience, since to translate means to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addresses in target circumstances" (Nord, 2001).

The coherence rule is also called intertextual coherence, which means that the receiver can understand the meaning of the target language, and the target language should also adapt to the communication environments and culture of the target language. In other words, "the translation should not only be acceptable, but also be consistent with the state of the receiver" (Wen Ziheng, 2016).

The fidelity rule points out the intertextual coherence between the target texts and the source texts. "Since the target translation is an offer of information, it is expected to bear some kinds

of relationship as intertextual coherence or fidelity” (Nord, 2001). In a word, the fidelity rule means that translators should absorb what they need from the corresponding original text.

The relationship among the three rules is that fidelity rule considered to be subordinate to the coherent rule, and both of them are subordinate to the skopos rule. If the skopos requires incoherence in the translation, the criterion of coherence is no longer valid. All in all, the skopos rules are important in the process of translation.

## **2.2. C-E Translation of Public Signs**

Since 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and 2010 Shanghai World Expo, the study on the translation of public signs has attracted a large number of experts and scholars. It can be seen that the research on public signs translation has become the focus of translation industry from the beginning of getting few people’s attention.

### **2.2.1. Public Signs**

Public signs are of great help to visitors’ activities in the business district, which can be used to guide visitors or convey some important information related to the scenic spot. Barry Gary, the chairman of committee 145 of the international organization for Standardization, indicated that signs are anything from a simplest way-finding or information ‘marker’ to the technically sophisticated communication of a message. “In the process of business and entertainment, signs affect everybody, including travelers, shoppers, visitors, and drivers” (Wang Ying, Lv Hefa, 2007).

One thing is in common in the definitions that scholars have proposed: sign could provide information, indication or caution. Public signs, also has this kind of meaning, they are quite different in other characteristics. In China, Lv Hefa (2005) said, public signs are made of words and pictorial instruction related to humankind, manufacture, life, ecology and occupation in public for the purpose of sign, advice, restriction, oblige tory and soon.

Ni Chuanbin and Liu Zhi(1998) believe that the C-E translation of signs should not only be normative, but also have three other rules: Firstly, the visitors should be clear at a glance. Secondly, the sentences should be concise and the intonation should be appropriate. Thirdly, the translation should be a little humanized, humorous and cultural. From their point of view, there are four kinds of public signs according to the intensity of tone: ban, warning, instruction and indication.

For the features of public signs in China, Hu Wenzhong(1987) pointed out that public signs have the following outstanding features: Firstly, Public signs are always full capital letters without dots or commas. Secondly, Public signs are short sentences with limited amount of words or even one word. Thirdly, there are concise words, which are mostly nouns or noun phrases in public signs. Most often, the language need not be in a complete sentence — a phrase or just a word is enough. In addition, there are a large number of imperative sentences in public signs. Lastly, official languages are occasionally used in public signs.

### **2.2.2. Researches on Public Sign Translation**

With the increasing frequency of publicity and communication with foreign countries, public signs, as the most popular media in cities, play an irreplaceable role in foreign communication. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the English translation of public signs.

Before 2005, the research on the translation of public signs in China was basically in a frozen state. With “the First National Symposium on the Translation of Public Signs” held in Beijing, the study on the translation of public signs started to attract extensive attention in the academic circle.

In recent years, the study of public signs has always been a focus, which has brought fruitful results in this regard, such as publishing a large number of related publications in popular magazines, master theses, doctoral papers and academic books. In addition, there are even

special websites for public signs. Many national seminars on C-E translation of public signs have been held. So far, a lot of researches have been made on the functions, classifications, principles, standards, strategies and existing problems of C-E translation of signs.

“Due to the universality of public signs around the world, experts suggest that the translations of public signs can learn from foreign achievements in this aspect” (Ding Rongrong, 2010). In addition, there are many situations that using Pinyin to replace English in the translation of public signs (Sun Baofeng, 2013). However, it should be noted that this form does not work in transmitting information.

“Generally speaking, the C-E translation of public signs should follow the basic principle of taking the audience as the center” (Zhang Xiaodan, 2017), respecting the habits of English language, paying attention to the accuracy and standardization (Yu Yibing, 2012). Therefore, for the convenience and accuracy of C-E translation of public signs, some generally applicable translation methods must be adopted.

### **2.3. The Guidance of Skopos Theory to Public Sign Translation**

The purpose of public signs is to provide convenience for foreign friends in China and further strengthen communication with other countries. If the translating version of public signs can be understood by foreigners, it will spend them less time to find the destination in business district and scenic area. Skopos theory emphasizes the communicative purposes, translation methods and translation behaviors. Due to the different cultural background, expression habits and ways of thinking between Chinese and English, there must be some differences between the original texts and the translation. In this case, it is better for the translator to choose the translation method from the perspective of the foreign visitors according to the translation purpose.

According to Skopos theory, translations should be carried out in the cross-cultural communication. At the same time, the effects of the translation initiators should be valued. For different functions of materials, translators should adopt different translation strategies. The translator can adjust, abridge or even rewrite the original to express the meaning of the original. Through searching on retrieval system of CNKI and other related literature in China, more than 100 articles have been found about public signs translation in scenic spots under the guidance of Skopos theory, such as A Study of the Chinese-English Translation of Scenic Signs in Lijiang from the Perspectives of Skopos Theory (Luo Jiping, 2004) which reflects the strong guidance of Skopos theory. Luo Jiping (2004) points out that Skopos theory insists on the principle of the priority of communicative purpose, and the purpose of translating public signs is to achieve communication purposes. Therefore, Skopos theory has a unique significance in guiding the C-E translation of public signs.

Overall, the purpose of establishing public signs is consistent with the principles of Skopos theory. Therefore, it is entirely feasible to study the translation of public signs in Max City under the guidance of Skopos theory.

## **3. Sample Collection and Research of Public Signs based on Skopos Theory**

The public signs in Max City were chosen as research targets because Max City is China's first business, tourism and culture complex. In March 2016, Max City was awarded “the most characteristic project of China's commercial real estate”, which was crowned by the commercial real estate industry “Oscar”, the China commercial real estate development forum.

### **3.1. Sample Selecting Standard based on Skopos Theory**

Peter Newmark(1982), a famous British practical translation theorist, “divides text functions into expressive function, informational function and vocative function according to different contents and styles.” As a practical style, public signs not only have the function of expression,

information and calling, but also have the function of imperative. The translations of public signs correspond to the meaning of the original texts, which is to achieve the goal of communication, so that the visitors can really understand what the public signs want to express. Therefore, according to Skopos theory, the samples is selected to see if the English public sign conveys the meaning successfully and achieves its goal of making foreigners understand it.

### 3.2. Sample Selecting Scope based on Skopos Theory

In December 2020, the field survey of public signs in Max City and surrounding streets was done. 111 photos of public signs were collected, in which there are 142 C-E public signs. These samples have four major application functions: indicative, suggestive, restrictive and mandatory. 142 public signs mainly include road signs, shop plaques and tourism signs. These samples are authentic, representative and typical. Some English translations follow the basic requirements of public signs and the three rules of Skopos theory, which could convey information correctly. But there are fundamental mistakes in some of them, such as grammatical errors, and there are some nonstandard translations.

In this thesis, 13 errors which mismatch the characteristics of public signs or violate the basic principles of Skopos theory are analyzed. 8 examples of public signs are chosen to be typical examples, which quite match the principles of skopos rule coherence rule and fidelity rule.

### 3.3. Sample Selecting Methods

On-the-spot investigation: Making the field survey of public signs in Max City and surrounding streets.

Induction method: Classify different types of public signs according to whether the translation conforms to the characteristics of public signs and the principle of Skopos Theory.

Comparative law: The quality of the translation is compared with the general standards to evaluate the samples.

### 3.4. Sample Selecting Procedures

There are three steps in this research:

Step one (from June to November 2020): The existing research results of Skopos theory and the C-E translation of public signs from related books and Internet were collected and analyzed.

Step two (in December 2020): The survey method is used to collect and record the English translation texts of public signs in Max City.

Step three (in January 2021): Case analysis is used to select representative cases from all English translation texts.

After these steps, an in-depth study on the English translation of public signs in Max City can be conducted.

### 3.5. Generalization of Selected Samples

According to the characteristics of public signs in Max City, the public signs were divided into four categories: Shop plaque, tourist guide, general sign and other public sign:

**Table 1.** Generalization of Selected Samples

Sample Classification	Shop Plaque	Tourist Guide	General Sign	Other Public Sign	Total
Sample Size	44	74	21	3	142

In the process of collecting samples, the situation that most public signs are translated into English can be found. From the table, it can be found that except shop plaques, indicative public signs like tourist guides and general signs appear more. Unlike in scenic spot, there are basically no characteristics of public signs.

## 4. Error Analysis of C-E Translation of Public Signs based on Skopos Theory

According to the courses of the errors and degree of deviation from the characteristics of public signs and the rule of Skopos theory, the translations of public signs in Max City are divided into two main aspects. One is that errors mismatching the characteristics of public signs, the other one is errors that violated the rules of Skopos theory.

### 4.1. Translation Errors Mismatching the Characteristics of Public Signs

This kind of translation errors are sometimes produced because translators cannot fully understand the connotation and function of public signs of the source language and target language. There are four types of errors that are not in conformity with the characteristics of public signs in Max City:

#### 4.1.1. Grammatical Errors Mismatching the Characteristic of Semantic Clarity

The grammatical errors of public signs in Max City mainly include the misuse of part of speech, the misuse of singular and plural numbers, incomplete sentence structure, error in word selection, etc.

(1)我们致力于为您提供一个安全的购物环境

Original version: Our store strives implementing that you can buy your sporting goods safety.

Suggested version: Our store strives to implement an environment that you can buy your sporting goods safely.

As an important way to convey information, public signs must have clear expression. There are three grammatical mistakes in the original version, which is easy to cause ambiguous sentence meaning. Firstly, 'strive to' usually indicates making efforts to do something, instead of the form 'V-ing'. Secondly, there is no object in the subject sentence. Thirdly, 'safety' is a noun, which can't be used to modify a verb. It should be corrected to the adverb form 'safely'. In order to make this sentence clear and easy to understand, all grammatical mistakes must be corrected.

(2)网购专属取餐通道

Original version: Exclusive take food online channel

Suggested version: Exclusive Food Taking Channel for Online Shopping

In English, the verb prototype is not allowed in a noun phrase. The original version is an incorrect expression, which leads to obscure meaning. And as an indicative sign in an independent board, the initial of the real words should be capitalized.

#### 4.1.2. Case Mistakes Mismatching the Characteristic of Stressing the Main Points

Chinese and English are different in word order, structure and usage. The simplicity of public sign language requires translators to use the language more efficiently. Case error is another prominent problem in C-E translation of public signs in Max City. Although such kind of errors will not mislead visitors like grammatical errors and spelling errors, case mistakes will make the visitors ignore key information.

(3)本店已安装监控及夜间防盗系统

Original version: CCTV & Alarm system In Use

Suggested version: CCTV & Alarm System in Use

In the original version, the initial of the preposition 'in' is capitalized, but the initial of the noun 'system' is not. It is very obvious that the carelessness of the translator leads to this mistake, which fails to stress the main points. What should be highlighted in the expression of English public signs is the meaning of real words. Therefore, the initial of the noun 'system' should be capitalized to stress its meaning.

(4)婴童；幼小童；中大童；运动；鞋；家居；配饰；文具；玩具

Original version: baby; kids; YOUNG; ATHLETES; shoes; home; accessories; TOYS

Suggested version: Babies; Kids; Young; Athletes; Shoes; Home; Accessories; Toys

All of these words are on a board, but there is inconformity in case and singular and plural forms. The errors in the capitalization of public signs cause that equally important information attracts unequal attention. Only when these aspects are unified, the public signs will become standard.

#### 4.1.3. Improper Tone Mismatching the Characteristic of Politeness

Politeness is a very important principle in the translation of public signs, which presents a friendly attitude to other people or the surrounding objects. Compared with Chinese public signs, the tone of English public signs is generally euphemistic. Public signs with the words 'forbidden' and 'not allowed' can be found everywhere in China, but they are unacceptable for foreigners. However this rule is always neglected in many English public signs in China.

(5)请遵守相关区域的适用规则

Original version: We ask that you respect the Test Zones and the conditions of use of them.

Suggested version: Please observe the applicable rules in the relevant areas.

The tone of the original version seems improper, which not reflects the politeness of public signs. Therefore, translators can use 'thank you ...' or 'please ...' to express a friendly attitude.

#### 4.1.4. Diverse Translations Mismatching the Characteristic of Standardization

The meaning of public signs are specific and unique, so when the same public sign appears in different occasions, its translation and form should be unified, otherwise it will bring a lot of confusion and inconvenience to visitors.

(6)梅西百货

Translated versions: MEIXI DEPARTMENT STORES / Mcity

As a signature mall of Max City, the translations of '梅西百货' are not unified, which reflects the lack of standardization of translation, this is what the translation of public signs needs to avoid. This kind of errors will make visitors confused.

(7)慢茶轻食；国际美食

Translated version: Food & Beverage

This English translation is matched with two Chinese phrases in different meanings. Although the two Chinese phrases all indicate food zone, but there is a vast distance between the meanings of them. '慢茶轻食' means beverages or afternoon tea, but '国际美食' means international cuisine. This kind of error will make foreigners feel confused, which mismatches the characteristics of the standardization of the requirements of public signs.

## 4.2. Translation Errors Violating the Rules of Skopos Theory

Skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule are the three main rules of Skopos theory. Some English translations fail to meet the requirements of Skopos theory. There are four aspects of this kind of errors of public signs in Max City.

### 4.2.1. Incorrect Application of Pinyin Violating Skopos Rule

Many Chinese people mistakenly think that foreigners can read Chinese Pinyin, so they directly translate public signs to the form of Pinyin. But in fact, many foreigners don't understand Pinyin, and even if they can read Pinyin, it doesn't mean that they can understand the meaning of Chinese characters, because there are many homophones in Chinese. This kind of translation is a serious violation of the principle of skopos rule--The purpose of setting up public signs is to convey information to the public.

(8)转转乐智能餐厅

Original version: ZHUANZHUANLE ZHINENG CANTING

Suggested version: Smart Revolving Restaurant

Foreigners may be able to read the original version out, but they can't know the characteristic of this restaurant from 'ZHUANZHUANLE'. The feature and attraction of this restaurant is that it is a smart restaurant. It serves by rotating machine instead of traditional waiter. The original version can't express the meaning of its Chinese sign and is unable to attract visitors. Therefore, translating public signs into Pinyin violate the skopos rule.

(9)老砂锅猪肚鸡椰子鸡

Original version: LaoShaGuo ZhuDuji / YeZiji

Suggested version: Pork Tripe Stew Chicken & Coconut Chicken Casseroles

It is incomprehensible for foreigners to read Pinyin instead of English translation when the public sign introduces the name of Chinese food. Therefore, the original version does not make foreigners understand what this Chinese food is, which is inconsistent with what the skopos rule requires. However, this phenomenon of replacing English translation with Pinyin is very common in C-E translation of public signs in Max City.

(10)蜡像馆

Translated version: WEI MU KAI LA STAR CTTY

The Chinese full name of this wax museum is '帷幕开啦蜡像馆'. But in the translated version, there is no word can express the meaning of wax museum, which is supposed to be the most important information of this public sign. It fails to achieve the principle of starting from the purpose of translation that advocated by the skopos rule.

#### 4.2.2. Word-for-word Translation Violating Fidelity Rule

"Word-for-word translation seems to be equivalent in language form, but there are many errors, which lead to pragmatic failures such as syntactic and grammatical errors. Faithfulness to the original text does not mean faithfulness to the form of it" (Chen Yingying, Li Zhenzhen, 2017), which is an important point in the fidelity rule.

(11)手推车自取处

Original version: Trolley takes place

Suggested version: Trolleys Area

Firstly, there are grammatical errors in this phrase. The verb can't be used in this noun phrase, and its subject is a person, not a thing. The relationship between 'trolley' and 'take' is passive relationship, so it's a mistake to use the third person singular here. It obviously does not conform to the fidelity rule in vocabulary choice and sentence structure. In addition, this translation is obviously a word-for-word translation, which is unidiomatic.

#### 4.2.3. Chinglish Violating Coherence Rule

Professor Li Wenzhong (1993) defines "Chinglish as distorted English that is out of standard-English or English culture in communication, which is caused by the arbitrary application of Chinese rules". In some situations, Chinglish can convey information, and foreigners might understand it. But there is a serious mistake violating the coherence rule. The coherence rule requires that translation not only achieve coherence within the text, but also achieve the coherence needed in the communicative context. "In order to achieve the coherence and appropriateness of translation, the conversion of part of speech and active passive and other ways always be used" (Sun Shasha, 2013).

(12)对于部分商品, 我们提供试用以便帮助您更好地了解 and 选择

Original version: We offer the opportunity for some of our products, to test before purchase.

Suggested version: In order to make you know our products better, we will provide you a tryout of some of them.



The translator mechanically translates this sentence, resulting in the translation violates the coherence rule and is hard to understand. In this situation, coherence can be achieved by replacing words and changing sentence structure. 'Test' is usually used in scientific and medical experiments, 'tryout' is more appropriate.

Alternate translation refers to the interlaced use of English and Pinyin in translation, and the existence of Pinyin will lead to incomplete or incorrect information transmission

(13)大众点评必吃榜

Original version: DIANPING MUST-TRY RESTAURANT

Suggested version: Restaurant Recommended by the Public

The coherence rule requires translators to consider the linguistic characteristics and cultural background of the target country. The original version includes Pinyin and English, which violates the coherence rule to make the translation disordered. So that neither Chinese nor foreigners can understand it well.

In a word, there are various reasons for errors. Only when the translators have good quality of professional knowledge and master the necessary skills of public sign translation, can these errors be avoided. "In translation practice, translators should carefully choose the most appropriate words. In addition, enriching academic knowledge and practical experience is often of critical importance in the translation of public signs" (Li Liquan, 2016).

## 5. C-E Translation Strategies of Public Signs under the Guidance of Skopos Theory

Skopos theory puts forward the principle of "purpose determines method", that is, the translation methods adopted by the translators must be determined by the intended purposes and functions of the translation. Translation strategies of Skopos theory for C-E translation of public signs should be applied to deal with all kinds of errors and problems. According to its three rules, there are some guidelines that could enlighten translators in C-E translation of public signs in Max City.

### 5.1. Translation Strategies under Skopos Rule

"Vermeer's interpretation of the purpose rule is as follows: the way of translation, interpretation, speaking, writing enables the text or translation to work when it is used, and enables people who want to use it to work exactly as they want" (Nord, 2001). The skopos rule is at the top of the three rules. If any other rules are broken, the skopos rule is absolutely violated. Therefore, it is the most important task for translation to follow the skopos rule.

#### 5.1.1. Free Translation, to Convey Core Information

Free translation is supposed to make the target text accepted by foreign visitors, which is in accordance with the translation principle advocated by Skopos rule. The sentence pattern and figure of speech are often changed with free translation. If there are too many cultural differences between the source texts and the target texts, free translation will be adopted to conquer the cultural barrier. Free translation is also applied for the convenience of intercultural communication. In order to achieve this goal, the figure of speech or the sentence structure of the source text could be changed. Free translation strategy is applied to convey the information of the source text and at the same time achieve the intended functions in the target text.

(14)童玩童趣 Family & Children

In this translation, translators use free translation to convey core information of the original text, which embodies the principle of skopos rule. In a strict sense, '童玩童趣' is not a standard Chinese phrase, but a compound word created by businesses. This kind of Chinese phrases can hardly be translated into English exactly, so it is very important to extract the central meaning.

## (15) 鲜食演义 FRESH IDEAS

Sometimes the translators would like to choose the strategy of free translation so as to conquer the cultural barrier. ‘演义’ is a word with Chinese characteristics, which has different meanings in different situations. In this translation, the word ‘idea’ accurately expresses the meaning.

**5.1.2. Rewriting, to Make Visitors Understand**

As a significant translation tactic and practical operation strategy, rewriting is better to achieve that translators realize the intended purpose and the communicative function of conveying information. Also, “the function of Chinese and English public signs can chiefly be sorted as remindful informative or a combination of the two according to Reiss’s Typology Theory” (Reiss, 1989). For the different functions of the two texts, in the translation practical process, a remindful public sign should be translated into an informative version. It requires the revision of the public sign.

## (16) 您已进入图像采集区域 CCTV IN OPERATION, 茶颜悦色 Modern China Tea Shop

Because Chinese are dissimilar from foreigners, who are more tangible and direct information, in thinking pattern, tradition as well as aesthetic aspect, by the application of the strategy of rewriting, the translation can acquire the intended function. In other words, it pays more attention to the expression of the original meaning of Chinese than the translation of each word. “Thus the English translated version is recognized to be more objective and tangible when the information is showed to the foreign visitors” (Jin Guiyi, 2014).

**5.1.3. Back Translation, to Achieve the Goal of Semantic Clarity**

Skopos theory emphasizes the purpose of the overall translation action. Since translating process is decided by Skopos, the skopos rule is the most important rule and principle to be followed while translating. As mentioned above, the basic skopos of public signs is to provide convenience for the foreign visitors. So the English translations of public signs must satisfy the living habits of foreigners.

“Back Translation refers to the process of translating a sign that has already been translated into a foreign language back to the original language” (Kang Fei, 2017). By adopting back translation, translators can compare the back-translated text with the original text. If the translation remains the same function in terms of sentence pattern and grammar in the target culture and the communicative goal is achieved, the translation will meet the requirements of the skopos rule. By using this method, translators could avoid the errors and improve the translation quality.



**Figure 1.** Public Sign without Back Translation

When reading the English version, it's hard for visitors to understand it. That is to say, it violates the skopos rule because the meaning of the public sign isn't really conveyed. For example, the sentence 'We also offer the opportunity for some of our products' is hard to understand. Providing opportunities for customers translates into providing opportunities for products. If the back translation is adopted, this type of errors could be avoided and the translation will accord with the skopos rule.

## 5.2. Translation Strategies under Coherence Rule

The coherence rule requires that the target text should be understood by the audiences, which should be meaningful both from the perspective of the target language and from the perspective of communication. Communication is successful only when the visitor reads and fully understands it. In C-E translation, many negative factors hinder the receiver's understanding, such as spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, Chinglish and so on. All these problems can be regarded as a violation of the coherence rule.

### 5.2.1. Addition, to Reflect the Necessary Content of Original Text

Chinese visitors are well-known of some public signs which contain the long history of Chinese characters but are presented in short forms. However, the foreign visitors, who do not know Chinese culture and history very well, may be confused or lose interests. Some explanations usually should be added for a clear understanding of the foreign visitors in the translation. Also, through this way, the relationship between the translation and the original text will be closer, which achieve the requirements of coherence rule.

(17)胡桃里 Hutaoli Music Restaurant & Bar, 蜀大侠 SHU DAXIA HOT POT

In examples 17, the addition and supplement of the translation enable foreign visitors to know the business scopes of the corresponding stores from the English signboards.

### 5.2.2. Omission, to Make Visitors Receive Information Easily

The structures of Chinese and English are different. For example, Chinese words are concise and subtle, and dual parallel structures are often used, but most of the English styles are simple, logical, and easy to understand in expression.

(18)吃饭皇帝大 NOTHING BIG BUT EAT

In this example, the word 'emperor' is not translated, but the importance of eating is also emphasized in the translation.

(19)自动售票区 TICKETING AREA

The translation doesn't translate the meaning of every word, but it can be learned from the translation of this public sign that we can buy or get tickets there.

## 5.3. Translation Strategies under Fidelity Rule

According to the fidelity rule, the meaning of original text should be understood firstly, and then be translated into the target language. Fidelity rule means the translation is expected to establish relations with the original text.

### 5.3.1. Standardization, to be Entirely Faithful to the Original Text

While translating the signs accepted in English-speaking world, translators had better follow the international standard to keep up with the developments in the rest of the world. It would be the best way to translate public signs, since in the process of formatting the international standard, the translation is constantly being revised, and it meets the rules of Skopos theory. It is efficient to avoid relevant retranslation and unnecessary misunderstanding. Lv Hefa (2004) pointed out "English signs have their own standard and translators could follow those that existing in English-speaking countries when translating the public signs".

(20)员工专用 STAFF ONLY, 小心台阶 MIND THE STEPS

These translations are from English and Chinese Sign Booklet compiled (Yu Fulin, 2003), are frequently used structures in translated public signs. They are universal terms, which are generally accepted as the most standard translation.

### 5.3.2. Borrowing, to Realize the Equivalence to the Original Text

Although there are great differences in stylistic features between Chinese and English, there are functional equivalents in the two languages. Besides the public signs with local ethnic characteristics, most Chinese public signs can find corresponding translations in English. In the process of translating public signs into English, if the expressions with the same meaning and function can't be found, they can be directly borrowed. Some public signs in Max City, which have the same function, could 'borrow' from English.

(21)可回收垃圾 recyclable, 禁止吸烟 NO SMOKING

These translations build a certain connection to the corresponding original text, what is the most important point of fidelity rule. Of course, in order to find public signs with the same meaning and function in English to meet the fidelity rule, the translator must have profound English skills, and consult relevant materials, which must not be copied mechanically.

To sum up, the translation strategy under Skopos theory of public signs is applicable to correct all kinds of problems and errors. Translators should adopt effective translation strategies when dealing with public signs translation. Based on Skopos theory, in the translation of public signs in commercial areas, these useful strategies can give the translator enlightenment.

## 6. Conclusion

C-E bilingual public signs not only provide convenience for international visitors, but also reflect an important indicator of the service level. However, there are various errors in the translation of public signs in Max City. This thesis explores some of them and puts forward some strategies to improve the quality of the translation. In this way, it will bring convenience to foreign visitors.

This thesis introduces the basic contents of public signs and Skopos theory. In addition, the public signs samples in Max City were collected, the translation quality of the public signs samples was evaluated, and the errors in the public signs samples from two aspects, that is to say, mismatching the characteristics of public signs and violating the rules of Skopos theory were listed. According to the characteristics of the errors of public signs in Max City, the strategies of public signs translation under the guidance of Skopos theory were put forward, including free translation, rewriting and back translation under the skopos principle, addition and omission under the coherence principle, and standardization and borrowing under fidelity principle.

After analyzing the current situation of C-E translation of public signs in Max City, the conclusions were found as follows:

Firstly, Skopos theory has a unique significance in guiding C-E translation of public signs. Skopos theory emphasizes the information transmission function of the target text and the response of the foreign visitors, and the purpose of translating public signs is to achieve communication purposes. According to the characteristics of Skopos theory and public signs, Skopos theory can be fully applicable to the C-E translation of public signs in Max City.

Secondly, when translating such kinds of public signs, Skopos theory can play a good role to guide the translation achieve the purpose of conveying information. Translation is not only a transformation between two languages, but also an activity of cultural exchanges. Translators should not only fully consider the linguistic features and translation purposes of public signs, but also consider if the translation correspond to skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule. The translation of public signs in business districts is a kind of cross-cultural communication

activity. Therefore, the translators are required to have not only profound language skills, but also cross-cultural awareness.

Finally, “translating public signs under the guidance of Skopos theory is an important part of foreign publicity translation” (Yang Xi, 2009), which means it is a long-term and complex work. Therefore, this thesis hopes to attract the public’s attention to the English translation of public signs, improve the quality of English translation of Chinese public signs to a certain extent, provide a more comfortable environment for foreigners in China, and display the cultural literacy level of Chinese people. At the same time, this thesis also can provide some references for the translators of public signs.

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