

An Analysis of the English Translation of Public Signs in Scenic Spots: With Ancient Longzhong as an Exemplar

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Abstract: *The translation of tourist attractions is not only an important tool for foreign tourists to understand the scenic spots, but also an important means for foreign tourists to understand the historical background of the scenic spots and promote cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Ancient Longzhong is the only 5A-level scenic spot in Xiangyang. Although the public signs in the scenic spot have been translated into English, Japanese and Korean, they still need to be improved in terms of international development. This paper analyses the current translation of public signs in Ancient Longzhong, then discusses the main problems, and finally puts forward some strategies and methods for reference based on the existing translation standards of scenic spots.*

Keywords: *Translation, Public signs, Scenic spots, Ancient Longzhong*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Known as the "First City of Huaxia", Xiangyang of Hubei Province is located in the plain of the middle reaches of the Han River. It is not only a beautiful city with splendid scenery, but also a famous national historical and cultural city, as well as the main cradle of the Three Kingdoms' culture. As one of the most famous tourist attractions in Xiangyang, Ancient Longzhong has a history of more than 1,800 years. It is the place where Zhuge Liang, an outstanding famous statesman, strategist, diplomat, litterateur, calligrapher and inventor lived in seclusion during the Three Kingdoms period. The famous stories of Liu Bei's "Three Visits to the Thatched Cottage" and "Longzhong Plan" took place here. In 1994, it was approved by the State Council as a national key scenic spot, and in 1996, it was designated as an important heritage site under state protection. On January 7, 2020, Ancient Longzhong was approved by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as a national 5A tourist attraction.

In recent years, in order to carry forward the culture of the Three Kingdoms and commemorate Zhuge Liang, Xiangyang has held the "Zhuge Liang Cultural Tourism Festival" for many years, aiming to present the history and culture of the Three Kingdoms to the global tourists in a modern and colorful form through the cultural festival. Therefore, more and more friends from home and abroad were attracted. Along with the festival, they went to pay their respects to Zhuge Liang and visited Ancient Longzhong, known as the "cradle of the wise".

As an important display place of Xiangyang's international image, the translation of public signs inside Ancient Longzhong scenic spot is particularly important. These signs not only provide convenience for foreign tourists when visiting, but also undertake the responsibility of spreading the culture of the Three Kingdoms. However, after an investigation in Ancient Longzhong, it was found that errors in the English translations of public signs in Longzhong were common, which not only damaged the international image of Xiangyang and affected the promotion of the culture of the Three Kingdoms, but also caused a lot of inconvenience to foreign tourists.

1.2 Research methods

In order to further standardize the public signs in Ancient Longzhong and improve its English translation quality, the author has carried out a comprehensive and in-depth field investigation of the scenic spot, and made a comprehensive statistical analysis on the translation of all public signs in Ancient

Longzhong. The research objects include scenic spot introduction, signs and slogans, explanatory boards, billboards, etc. Through photos and electronic documents, combined with the Internet and the national *Guidelines for the Use of English in public service areas* [1], to find out the mistranslation cases, and systematically analyze the reasons.

1.3 Public signs and national standards

Public signs refer to a "special style commonly seen in public places" [2], therefore, public signs can be seen everywhere in daily life. As a common text form with specific functions, the translation of public signs is particularly important. Wang Yinquan once pointed out that the translation of public signs plays a very important role in the construction of international cities and tourism destinations, and any ambiguity or misunderstanding of public signs will lead to adverse consequences [3]. As a result, whether it is the development of a scenic spot or the construction of a city, the translation of public signs must be done well. Specifically, public signs should have the characteristics of 5Cs: concise, conventional, consistent, conspicuous and convenient [4]. Only a qualified public sign can give full play to its function and value in application.

December 1st, 2017, China's first series of national standards on the normative use of foreign languages in China: *Guidelines for the Use of English in public service areas* was formally implemented. This series is divided into 10 parts. In addition to the General Rules of Part 1, the other 9 parts are English translation norms and standards for transportation, tourism, culture and entertainment, sports, education, health and medicine, post and telecommunications, accommodation and catering, commerce and finance, covering a large range of public services. The national standard not only defines a series of terms, but also puts forward related translation methods and requirements, word selection and spelling methods, grammar and format, and writing requirements. This research also takes this series as the standard to make a comparative analysis of English translation problems in Ancient Longzhong, and puts forward suggestions for revision according to the national standard.

2. The status quo of the translation of the public signs in Ancient Longzhong

This survey covered almost all public signs in Ancient Longzhong, such as tourist center, parking lots and core scenic spots. The mistranslated public signs were recorded by photos and classified according to the national standard. English translation mistakes are mainly in the following aspects.

2.1 The problem of Spelling mistakes and word-for-word translation

English translation of public signs should conform to the standard of English usage and the stylistic requirements. However, there are still some obvious spelling mistakes in the translation of public signs in Ancient Longzhong (See Figure 1). Besides, public service information should be translated according to the content and intention of the information, and try to use daily expressions of similar information in native speaking countries, avoid word-for-word translation. However, through the investigation, it was found that there were many word-for-word translations of public signs in the scenic spot, and the grammar of the sentence is also wrong (See Figure 2).



Figure 1: Spelling mistake: should be corrected to "Litter"



Figure 2: Word-for-word translation: should be corrected to "Free Garbage Bags"

2.2 The problem of the case of the letters and inappropriate choice of words

According to the Chinese national standard-*Guidelines for the Use of English in public service areas*, in the translation of public signs, it is better to capitalize all phrases, short sentences or the first letter of all words. Capitalize the first word in a long sentence, all content words and function words of 4 or more letters. Whereas, there were many cases of wrong capitalization of translated signs in Ancient Longzhong (See Figure 3). In addition, there are also some public signs that are not properly worded and the translator did not pay attention to the appropriateness of the words (See Figure 4).



Figure 3: Wrong capitalization: should be corrected to “No Wading Safety First”

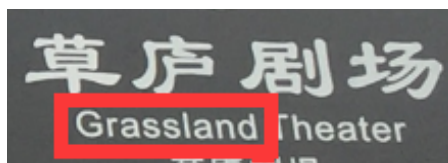


Figure 4: Inappropriate choice of words: should be corrected to “Thatched Cottage Theater”

2.3 The problem of inconsistency of translation and incomplete translation

Within the same scenic spot, the translation should be consistent, otherwise foreign tourists will mistake them for different scenic spots. It is surprising that the translations of the top 10 most famous scenic spots in Ancient Longzhong are all inconsistent, the same scenic spot is translated differently, which can cause foreign tourists to miss the site or mistake it for a different one (See Figure 5). Besides, another problem is the omission of translation. Some of the public signs are incomplete (See Figure 6).



Figure 5: Inconsistency of translation: should be corrected consistently to “Memorial Temple of Marquis Wu or Wuhou Temple



Figure 6: Incomplete translation: should be corrected to “Baby Care Lounge”

3. Strategies and Suggestions for Translation of Public Signs in Ancient Longzhong

According to the above survey of Ancient Longzhong in Xiangyang, Hubei Province, the quality of the English translation of the public signs is poor, and most of which are primary mistakes.

Although, generally speaking, the public signs are comprehensive, the content is rich and clear and part of the English translation is normative, the translation errors and irregularities will still affect the foreign tourists. It will not only damage the image of this important historical and cultural scenic spot, but more importantly, will directly affect the international image of Xiangyang. As a kind of linguistic phenomenon, the English translation of public signs is also a form of translation, which should also meet the basic requirements and norms of translation [5]. In view of the problems, the translation strategies and suggestions are as follows.

3.1 To recheck and amend according to the national standard

The relevant terms and definitions of English translation, principles, methods, requirements and so on are specified in the Chinese national standard, and the suggested translations have been demonstrated in the appendix. At the same time, Ding Hengqi has proposed three strategies of "Borrow, Adapt and Create" in the translation of public signs, so the translation of public signs can choose one of these three methods [6].

If there are the same public signs mentioned in the national standard, it is suggested to "copy" them directly. If there is no public sign that is exactly the same as in the national standard, but similar, it is recommended to "adapt" according to the standard. If there is no English translation to refer to, then the translation should be created in accordance with English habits and ways of thinking. While paying attention to English expression habit, we should fully consider the cultural connotation conveyed in Chinese.

3.2 To improve the professional level of authors and translators of public signs

The professional level of both the author and the translator has a direct impact on the standardization and accuracy of public signs. Therefore, in order to improve the English translation of public signs in Ancient Longzhong, it is necessary to improve the professional level of both authors and translators.

From the author's perspective, their text is the original material of translation, and the subsequent translation is to serve the original text. As for Ancient Longzhong, a historical and cultural scenic spot, the author should take into account that due to the factors of time and cultural differences, too many classical Chinese may not be suitable for tourists to understand the relevant culture and history conveniently, which also increases the difficulties for translators. Meanwhile, lyrical, poetic and graceful texts in Chinese are not suitable for the form of public signs [7]. Therefore, in the creation of public signs, concise and direct expressions should be adopted as far as possible, which will not only serve as instructions or warnings to tourists, but also facilitate the translation.

From the translators' perspective, their work is of great significance, which requires a high professional level and sense of responsibility. Translators undertake the important task of spreading Chinese culture and intercultural communication, their works have a direct impact on the international image of a scenic spot, a city and even China. First of all, translators should constantly improve their professional level, master translation skills and strategies of public signs, and be able to flexibly apply them in translation, to ensure the accuracy and standardization of the text. Secondly, translators should take into full account the differences between cultures in their translation. The translation should give full consideration to the cultural background of foreign tourists and convey the cultural connotation in a way that readers can understand. Finally, faced with such a serious job, translators should have a high sense of responsibility, and cannot blindly rely on the translation machine, or muddle through their work. Translators should not only be responsible for a job, but also for the image of a city or even a country.

3.3 To improve the awareness of administrators and to strengthen supervision

The state has issued the national standards for translation, but this investigation found that the implementation of local scenic spot has fallen behind.

Firstly, administrators need to change their attitudes. They should realize that with the deepening of the internationalization of Xiangyang, more and more domestic and foreign tourists will come to visit

Ancient Longzhong and the English translations are sure to be noticed. The translation problem will not only damage the image of Ancient Longzhong and Xiangyang for foreign tourists, but also leave a bad impression on many Chinese tourists who can speak English.

Secondly, the translation can be entrusted to some professional translation agencies or translators. From the survey, there are many primary translation mistakes and irregularities, which shows that the translators lack of some basic professional knowledge of translation. It is obvious that some signs are translated by machine, so the credentials of the translators are in question.

Thirdly, the supervision and examination of the translations need be strengthened. As shown above, many public signs with obvious translation mistakes were still printed and used. It can be seen that the administrative departments did not hire any relevant professional experts to participate in the audit, or even there was no audit, so a large number of translation mistakes appeared in the public area of the scenic spot. It is suggested that relevant departments should cooperate with experts or professionals to establish an examination and verification organization for the translation of public signs in scenic spots as soon as possible. All public signs and translations must be approved for public use, and any mistakes that have been made should be corrected immediately.

4. Conclusion

With the deepening of China's globalization, the internationalization of Xiangyang has also been further improved. In recent years, a series of large-scale festivals and competitions such as Zhuge Liang Cultural Tourism Festival and Xiangyang Marathon have made Xiangyang known to the world and attracted more and more domestic and foreign tourists. With the increasing number of foreign exchanges, the demand for translation is also increasing. As one of the important places for Xiangyang's external publicity and the soul of a city's culture, Ancient Longzhong is particularly important. The public signs inside the scenic spot directly show the international image of Xiangyang to all domestic and foreign visitors. Unfortunately, after the above investigation and analysis, the result is not satisfactory. The English translation of public signs seems to be a subtle part of the construction of scenic spots, but only a correct and unified translation can play the proper role of public signs, assist in enhancing the soft power of the scenic spots, and contribute to the international image construction of the city where the signs are located.

This research is far from enough. However, it is hoped that this survey can draw the attention of relevant departments to the English translation of public signs, put forward some suggestions for the construction of Ancient Longzhong, and contribute to the construction of Xiangyang's international image.

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