

A Study on the Language Service Environment Construction in the Internationalization Process of Zhengzhou

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Abstract: *The construction of the international language service environment is an inherent requirement for urban internationalization. When constructing an international metropolis in Zhengzhou, attention must be paid not only to economic development but also to the construction of an international language environment. This article proposes strategies and suggestions for building a multilingual coexistence language ecosystem and a diversified language training content system based on demand, focusing on foreign language training for foreign affairs windows and foreign-related industries. These strategies also involve standardizing translation standards for public notices and improving the city's multilingual consultation service system.*

Keywords: *Zhengzhou, internationalization, language service environment*

1. Introduction

Language environment refers to the conditions of language use and linguistic life in a region or community, representing the basic appearance of language use in society. "International language environment" refers to the breadth, depth, and frequency of communication using languages other than one's native language in a city. Urban international language environment refers to the breadth, depth, and frequency of information exchange using various languages in a city. It includes both "human factors" and "physical factors." "Human factors" mainly refer to the degree of proficiency and application of foreign languages among different groups of people in the city, while "physical factors" mainly refer to the scope and standardization of foreign language application in urban public facilities and services (Peng, 2019)^[1]. The construction of an international language environment is an important aspect and component of a city's soft environmental development, as well as a significant embodiment of its overall competitiveness.

In today's world, the degree of diversification and internationalization of a city's language environment is positively correlated. Language serves as a carrier of culture, a symbol of ethnic identity, and a city's business card. The level of international language proficiency in a city reflects its civilization and openness, showcasing the city's image and taste, and reflecting the overall cultural literacy of its citizens. In terms of international language environment construction, Beijing took the lead and issued the "Capital International Language Environment Construction Work Plan (2011-2015)" after the Olympic Games. Shanghai also seized the opportunity of the World Expo to convene the "World Expo Language Environment Construction" international forum. As early as 2007, the Shenzhen Foreign Affairs Office and the Translators Association launched the "Shenzhen Public Bilingual Sign English Translation Standards and Implementation Guidelines." These policies have provided guarantees for strengthening the construction of the city's international language environment (Liu, 2013; Zhao, 2020)^{[2][3]}. As the "Belt and Road" initiative advances, Zhengzhou, as a central city, is entering a new stage of building a world city. The construction of an international language environment becomes particularly important as a fundamental task for building a world city (Wang, 2017)^[4].

2. Prominent Issues in the Construction of International Service Language Environment in Zhengzhou

As one of the important engines driving China's economic growth, Zhengzhou possesses a developed manufacturing industry and modern service industry. Many multinational companies have established production bases and research centers in Zhengzhou, which have promoted the rapid development of the local economy. The Zhengzhou Airport Economy Comprehensive Experimental Zone has become an international logistics center, enhancing Zhengzhou's international influence and competitiveness. However, there are still prominent issues in the current construction of the international language environment in Zhengzhou (Wang, 2018; Lu, 2012)^{[5][6]}.

2.1 Lack of Standardization in the Translation of English Signage in Public Places

Signage is widely used in urban life and can be seen almost everywhere. It is an important part of social language. It reflects the era, society, or cityscape intuitively and vividly, indicating the level of pragmatics in that era, society, or city. Currently, there are translation errors in some English signage in public places in Zhengzhou, mainly in two categories: language problems and pragmatic problems. Language mistakes include capitalization, spelling, punctuation, grammar errors, and inappropriate wording. Pragmatic mistakes include Chinglish, cultural misunderstandings, inappropriate contexts, and crude translations (Yan, 2016; Wu, 2022)^{[7][8]}.

2.2 Insufficient Diversity in English Signage in Public Places

As of May 25, 2023, there were 3,020 resident foreigners and 107,973 temporarily entered foreigners scattered throughout various continents in Zhengzhou. However, the language used in the English signage in public places in Zhengzhou is very limited, primarily consisting of English with few appearances of other languages. In light of this situation, it is necessary to enhance the diversity of signage in Zhengzhou to improve the language service environment and cater to a wider international community.

2.3 Low Level of Internationalization in the Language Proficiency of Employees in Foreign-Related Industries

With Zhengzhou entering the era of service economy, it has accelerated the development of modern service industries such as financial services, information services, technology services, and business services. Cross-border e-commerce transactions rank among the top in the country, which reflects the relatively high level of internationalization in Zhengzhou's foreign-related service industry. On the other hand, it also raises higher requirements for the foreign language proficiency of employees in foreign-related industries in Zhengzhou. However, currently, the overall foreign language proficiency of employees in foreign-related service industries such as hotels, stations, public transportation, and scenic spots in Zhengzhou is low and does not meet the demands of an international working environment.

2.4 Poor Foreign Language Proficiency and Frequency of Communication for Citizens

There are few English corners in public welfare in Zhengzhou city. Public service units such as Zhengzhou Library have set up language corners and other activities to enhance their social service functions. However, the participation rate in foreign language activities is low, and the language proficiency of participants is limited, making it difficult to expand the activities in terms of breadth and depth. Some communities have also offered foreign language courses in community colleges, but due to various reasons, the results have been minimal. Even universities have not been able to establish sustained and influential foreign language learning activities and venues.

3. Promoting the Construction of Zhengzhou International Language Environment: Strategies and Countermeasures

3.1 Enhancing Residents' Foreign Language Proficiency

Language users are one of the most active and important elements in a language environment.

Therefore, to build a good international language ecology in the construction of Zhengzhou as an international metropolis, it is a fundamental, long-term, and challenging task to improve the foreign language proficiency of different population groups based on their usage needs.

3.1.1 Building a Diversified Language Service Environment

Considering the international status of English and the current situation of foreign language teaching in China, it is reasonable to start with promoting English in the construction of Zhengzhou's international language environment. However, international language environment construction should not only focus on promoting English and establishing an English-Chinese bilingual environment but also take into account the development of other non-common languages. Government departments should take the lead in building an international language ecology and citizen foreign language training content system that prioritizes English, with non-common languages as supplements, creating a multilingual international language ecology where English and Chinese serve as the main languages while non-common languages are supported. Currently, there is a shortage of talent proficient in non-common languages, which has become a bottleneck in language services for the "Belt and Road" initiative. Based on this, educational authorities should conduct research on the language demands of the "Belt and Road" initiative, fully utilize the educational resources of Zhengzhou's universities, especially those specializing in foreign languages, actively plan for the development of foreign language programs and multilingual layouts, and ensure the cultivation and reserve of multilingual talents for the "Belt and Road" initiative. This provides a talent guarantee for the construction of Zhengzhou's international language environment, serving as the foundation for international language environment construction.

3.1.2 Key Improvement of Language Service Levels

Referring to the measures taken in Beijing and Shanghai to provide foreign language training for government officials, service industries involved in foreign affairs, and residents, the government should work on the following four aspects: 1) Conduct thorough research, accurate assessment, plan formulation, and clear requirements to develop industry-specific English teaching materials. Based on comprehensive research and accurate assessment of the foreign language proficiency needs within each industry and different positions, organizations should determine the English learning content, goals, training methods, and assessment criteria for different positions and staff members, and develop training materials accordingly. 2) Integrate general requirements and specific needs. In on-the-job English training, not only should employees be required to master commonly used English for daily life and work, and be able to engage in simple English communication, but also a certain number of government officials with higher English proficiency should be selected based on the characteristics of their positions. Through targeted and intensive training, various training measures should be adopted to ensure that they reach a higher level of international communication and serve as reserves of high-level international communication talent. 3) Highlight key positions based on actual needs. For some key positions involved in foreign affairs, by cultivating and introducing talents, multilingual specialized service windows should be established with English as the main language, striving to achieve barrier-free foreign language services. 4) Actively carry out English skills competitions and learning exchange activities within the industry and between positions to strengthen the learning outcomes, identify and cultivate foreign language service backbones, and establish an industry foreign language talent pool.

3.1.3 Active mobilization of multiple forces

In the training of residents' foreign language skills, government departments should conduct demand surveys, open up various training and learning channels, integrate resources, mobilize multiple forces, and build a comprehensive and multi-channel resident foreign language learning and training system. Efforts should be made to establish a comprehensive and multi-level citizen foreign language learning network. This network includes both school-based foreign language education and social foreign language education, which are important conditions and basic guarantees for improving the foreign language level of residents and optimizing the city's international language environment. Internet should be actively utilized for training and learning, exploring mixed training and learning models that combine online and offline methods to make the training and learning methods more flexible. School-based foreign language education primarily targets students from primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. Efforts should be made to reform teaching methods, build a high-level foreign language teaching faculty, and enrich the content and methods of foreign language instruction. While promoting the improvement of foreign language training standards in training institutions, the government should adhere to the principle of "government promotion, corporate participation, and

public benefit," integrate resources from various parties, and organize more enjoyable foreign language learning activities for citizens. This will create a language environment for citizens to learn and use foreign languages, making the network of activities related to learning and using foreign languages more integrated into their daily lives and grassroots communities.

3.2 Optimizing the External Service Function of Public Facilities

In addition to the "human factor," the construction of an international language environment in a city also includes the "material factor," that is, the external service function of urban public facilities. To optimize and enhance the external service function of public facilities in Zhengzhou City, it is necessary to further promote the popularization and standardization of foreign-language signs in public places(Ge,2011)^[9]. The government should establish corresponding institutions and mechanisms, regulate and supervise the foreign language translation service market for public signage, improve language self-service facilities, promote the construction of multilingual service platforms, and reduce language barriers for foreigners living in Zhengzhou. The construction of an international language environment in Zhengzhou should demonstrate the profound historical and cultural heritage of Zhengzhou through high-level foreign language signs and foreign language identification information, promote the internationalization of Zhengzhou, and enhance the international image of Zhengzhou(Zeng, 1998)^[10].

3.2.1 Standardizing Various Types of Foreign Language Signs

Foreign language signs in urban public facilities, also known as "foreign language public notices," are a common genre found in public places. They can take the form of concise text, simple icons, or graphic illustrations, attracting the public's attention and conveying certain requests, reminders, or warnings to people. They mainly include the foreign names of streets, landmarks, tourist attractions, public facilities, institutions, as well as foreign advertisements, commodities, instructions, travel guides, social propaganda, and notices. The foreign language public notices of a city are the first impression presented to the international community, serving as a window through which the international community understands the city's civilization. They also serve as a medium for interaction and communication between foreign residents and the city, providing great convenience for their lives in the city. Foreign language public notices are the face of a city's international image, and standardizing them is one of the important tasks in the construction of an international language environment in a city. Scholars have conducted investigations and research on the current status of the translation of place names and public signs in Zhengzhou City, and identified several issues in English translation of place names and public notices in Zhengzhou:

1) Disordered translation and writing of place names

In Zhengzhou, there are multiple versions of signage for road names, place names, scenic spots, and public facility names, including Chinese Pinyin and English translation, which has resulted in a confusion of standards. The following is an example from table 1.

Table1 Inconsistent translations of place names

Chinese	Inconsistent English translation
二七广场	(1) ER QI Square (2) Two-seven Square
建设西路	(1) JIANSHE West Rd (2) JIANSHE XILU
城隍庙	(1) CHENG HUANG Temple (2) CHENGHUANGMIAO
二七塔	(1) ER QI TA (2) ER QI Tower

2) Wrong translation of public notice

Through field investigations, we have found that errors and wrong translations in signage are also common in scenic spots such as People's Park, Fantasy wild Adventure Park, and Green Expo Park. As shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Wrong translation of public notice

Chinese	Wrong English translation
小心碰头	Care meet
上客点	Board a taxi point
请注意安全	Please note security
勿丢垃圾	Don't keep a rubbish

From the above examples of translations, these translations mostly belong to "Chinese-style English," which may not have been reviewed or proofread by professionals or foreign experts. A large number of irregular or incorrect translations of public notices not only affect the functionality of public facilities in serving foreign tourists, leaving them confused and hindered in understanding, but also inconvenience their daily lives and damage the international image of Zhengzhou as a historic and cultural city. In view of this, the international language environment construction in Zhengzhou should conduct standardized, error-correction, and popularization work for various English signage through planned and step-by-step efforts in the following three aspects: 1) The government departments should organize relevant experts and institutions to study and establish unified translation standards and multilingual translations for place names, public facilities, tourist attractions, and social institutions in Zhengzhou, and establish multilingual translation parallel corpora for place names or public notices. 2) Led by the government departments, experts in translation fields from universities, volunteer teams composed of professionals, or professional institutions like the Henan Translators Association should refer to the translation standards and carry out standardization and error-correction work for the English translations of place names, street names, tourist attraction names, public facilities, and social institution names throughout the city. 3) An authoritative approval organization for public notice translations should be established and the submission of public notices and English names of various units and institutions for review should be implemented to prevent wrong translations and other phenomena at the source. 4) The use of foreign language signage in various social institutions and places should be promoted to gradually achieve bilingualism or even multilingualism in all signage or public notices in Zhengzhou.

3.2.2 Key Cultivation of Language Environment Construction in Tourism, Catering, and Other Service Industries

One of the indicators to measure an international metropolis is the number of foreign visitors entering the city. Attracting a large number of foreigners to gather and live in Zhengzhou can greatly accelerate the construction of the international language environment and the process of internationalization in the city. The charm of Zhengzhou as a historical and cultural city and the delicacies of Henan snacks undoubtedly become the "two treasures" of this city, attracting popularity and foreign tourists. Therefore, it is particularly important to promote the internationalization of the language in the tourism and catering industries in Zhengzhou, improve the quality of foreign language services in the tourism and catering industries, and improve the foreign language tourism environment in the city. The cultural and tourism management departments can promote the internationalization of tourism and catering industries in Zhengzhou through various means such as writing foreign language promotional materials for various tourist attractions and tourism products in Zhengzhou, developing an English version of the tourism transportation map, compiling foreign language promotional materials about Zhengzhou's food culture, standardizing the translation of English menus, and strengthening the widespread dissemination of foreign language information in the tourism and catering industries through the internet, magazines, television, and other media. These efforts will advance the internationalization of the tourism and catering industries and accelerate the construction of the international language environment in Zhengzhou.

3.2.3 Constructing a Multilingual Consultation and Service System in Cities

Language services should make good use of information technology to strengthen the construction of multilingual urban consultation, emergency assistance, information release, translation, and other systems, in order to improve the level of external services provided by cities. As a world-class international metropolis, New York established the "Mayor's Office of Language Services" as early as ****, cooperating with 31 departments of the city to ensure that these departments can provide language translation services to New York residents even in situations with language barriers.

Currently, according to relevant news reports, in July 2022, a multilingual call center function of the "Belt and Road" language service and big data platform, jointly developed and constructed by the Foreign Affairs Office of the People's Government of Henan Province, Zhengzhou Aviation Industry Management Institute, and Trans International Translation Company (Beijing), has been launched. This platform is aligned with the implementation outline of the "Belt and Road" strategy and the 2015 planning of the "Belt and Road" construction in Henan Province, integrating translation services for over 20 different languages along the "Belt and Road" region, and connecting with hot lines of foreign-related public services such as government affairs, industry and commerce, tourism, investment promotion, civil affairs, and medical care, providing multilingual translation services. The establishment of this platform provides multilingual translation services for emergency assistance and life information consultation to foreign residents living, working, studying, and traveling in Zhengzhou, facilitating their life in Zhengzhou and marking a significant achievement in the construction of the international language environment in Zhengzhou. Of course, the operation of the platform should continue to progress in terms of the coverage of language services, response speed, and service quality, providing strong language service guarantees for the internationalization construction of Zhengzhou.

In addition, Zhengzhou City can also learn from Beijing's practice and establish a multilingual internet service system to promptly release the latest information such as urban regulations and policies, economic and cultural dynamics, and life service information in multiple languages. At the same time, the government should encourage various social institutions and enterprises to establish English websites and update their content in a timely manner, creating an international cyberspace that facilitates the work and life of foreigners in Zhengzhou.

4. Conclusion

Zhengzhou has excellent geographical location, distinctive tourism industry, long-standing and unique cultural resources, as well as strong scientific and technological strength. These are favorable conditions for Zhengzhou to become an international metropolis. Language serves as a medium for communication. In the context of the construction of the "Air Silk Road," we must attach importance to the construction of an international language environment, create a good language environment as a "weapon" for communication with the world, and accelerate the pace of building Zhengzhou into an international metropolis. The government should conduct research from both the "human factors" and "material factors," and based on practical needs, formulate plans for the construction of the city's international language environment, and carry out the construction of Zhengzhou's international language environment in a planned and step-by-step manner. Government departments should adhere to the concept that "language environment is also an investment environment," and systematically and strategically increase investment in human, material, and financial resources for the construction of Zhengzhou's international language environment. At the same time, we must also recognize that the construction of the city's international language environment is a complex system engineering that requires the participation and coordination of various departments, social groups, and multiple forces. It is necessary to establish a mechanism for multi-department collaboration to ensure the joint efforts in carrying out this work.

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