

A Study on the C-E Translation of Chinese Public Notices from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory

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Abstract: Nowadays, public notices translation is one of the main research fields in translation studies. This paper applies Adaptation Theory to analyze the characteristics of Chinese public notices in Chinese-to-English translation. At the same time, according to the linguistic characteristics of Chinese public notices, such as variability, negotiation and conformity, this paper discusses the current status and purpose of the research on the translation of Chinese public notices. The paper also uses Adaptation Theory to analyze the textual and linguistic characteristics of lexical, syntactic, and stylistic aspects and adopts appropriate translation strategies following the principle of selection and conformity, so as to achieve the purpose of conformity.

Keywords: adaptation theory; public notice; translation.

1. Introduction

With the economic globalization on a tear, communication and cooperation between countries around the world are getting closer and closer. English has become one of the common languages at home and abroad, which is gradually integrated into people's study, work and life. The English translation of public notices has been popularized in most countries. Public notice is a kind of application style used in public places and it is also one of the components of social public language. Public notice is not only a vital part of a country's civilization development, but also an overall embodiment of the improvement of all the people's quality of life. At the same time, it is also used as a special window for the construction of a region or a country's social and spiritual civilization. The application of civilized language and proper translation of public notice has become a major task to promote social civilization, build a strong civilized country and construct a beautiful country.

2. The current state of research on the translation of public notices

As a vital part of the public language of the society, public notices are used in some public places to convey some intentions such as hints, reminders, warnings and requests to people. It is an important pivot to understand spiritual civilization of the society, as well as reflecting the overall cultural quality, moral cultivation and spiritual outlook of the group living in this society. To get the style of an era, a society, a country or a city, one often gets the initial impression from the level of the language usage of this era, society, country or city (He Ziran, 1997). Social languages serve as an aspect of language application, which is responsible for some specific communicative tasks with clear public orientation. Therefore, publicity is the primary and basic feature of social language and public language is a new common popular word at that time. After that, scholars began to study the translation of public language.

In recent decades, the research on translation of public notices has been developed earlier in other countries and has become more standardized so far. However, the study of public notices translation in China started relatively late and did not receive enough attention from the national government, academic experts, scholars and people. Since the 21st century, people's attention to public notices translation has gradually increased. Besides, the research on public notices translation has been greatly enriched and improved in terms of practical operation and theoretical research in various regions and gratifying achievements have been made. However, the research of public notices

translation needs to be improved. There are still a lot of problems as follows. Firstly, there are major problems such as spelling mistakes, syntactic errors, overly mechanized translations, multiple translations and omission, etc. Secondly, there are also cultural problems such as cultural differences and contextual problems, etc. With various translation standards in different countries, the development of public notice translation in China needs urgent attention and improvement. Any improper translation will lead to the decline of our overall national quality and international influence. Therefore, only by carefully studying the functions and linguistic and cultural connotations of public notice language can we really give full play to its function of information service and promotion in the process of developing and upgrading culture and civilization, deepening reform and opening up, and promoting globalization in our country.

Table 1. Numbers of papers on translation of public notices, 2011-2022

Years	Totals	Journal Papers	Domestic meetings	International conferences	Academic journals	Papers	Master thesis	PhD thesis
2011	268	223	4	1	1	1	38	0
2012	308	251	8	3	0	1	45	0
2013	300	260	4	2	1	0	33	0
2014	341	299	3	3	3	8	25	0
2015	289	263	2	2	4	1	17	0
2016	282	252	5	0	3	0	22	0
2017	225	194	4	1	7	3	16	0
2018	223	197	4	1	6	0	15	0
2019	256	235	2	1	1	0	17	0
2020	106	100	1	0	4	0	1	0
2021	94	87	2	0	5	0	0	0
2022	38	33	0	1	3	0	1	0
Totals	2730	2394	39	15	38	14	230	0

As can be seen from the above table, with the passage of time, the number of papers on public notice translation shows a decreasing trend. The table illustrates indirectly that people's attention to the public notice language gradually decreases, in which the use of Adaptation Theory to study the translation of public notices is even more rare. Therefore, in-depth study of public notice translation is imperative and it is urgent for the academic community to provide reference value.

3. Purpose of the study based on Adaptation Theory

In recent decades, the research on the translation of public notices has gradually decreased, and the translation research based on Adaptation Theory is even less. Therefore, it is necessary to research on the translation of public notices and the use of Adaptation Theory is more conducive to the in-depth study of public notices. In real life, public notices can be seen everywhere, which play the role of reminding and warning to people. Some researches on public notice translation are mostly based on translation theories. The perspectives and levels of the researches are various, such as studying public notice translation from the perspective of translation purpose theory, the functional translation theory, and various factors of pragmatics, etc. All these researches only study public notice translation from a certain micro-factor and cannot form a comprehensive and coherent theoretical framework, which is the most important factor for the study of public notice translation in China. In view of this, it is very important to apply Adaptation Theory to comprehensively and systematically study the research of public notice translation.

4. The Guiding Role of Adaptation Theory on English Translation of Public Notices

Translation, as a relatively unique linguistic communication activity, must be faithful to the content of the original text, but also realize the communicative intent and function intended by the original author, and conform to the linguistic conventions of the target language. This view is consistent with Adaptation Theory that was put forward by Jef Verschueren. What's more, Verschueren (2000) believed that the use of language for communication is, by its very nature, a process of constant linguistic selection for communication, requiring constant conformity to different communicative intentions and usage environments. In short, the process of using language is a dynamic process of conformity in which communicators constantly make linguistic choices at different levels of consciousness in order to achieve their communicative purposes and conform to the linguistic environment. In 1999, publication of *Understanding Pragmatics* marked the maturity of Adaptation Theory. Language has variability, deliberation, and conformity, which are closely related. Variability means that language has a range of alternative possibilities and developments. For the purpose of communication, people create a variety of linguistic expressions to convey the same meaning, so that language users can choose to use them in different communicative situations. Negotiation represents that language choices are not made mechanically or according to rules or formal-functional relationships, but on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies. Conformity means that language users also make negotiable linguistic choices within the variable range of options available to them, faithful to the original author's intentions and realizing communicative purposes. Conformity is a two-way or multidimensional dynamic process. These three features of language are complementary and inseparable. In the process of using language, variability and negotiation are the basis, and conformity is the root and purpose. The first two provide possibilities and ways for language choice respectively, while conformity is the basis for making language choices that meet the needs of communication in an appropriate way and within an appropriate range, so that communication can be carried out smoothly.

Translation is a complex process that needs to realize the purpose of translation and communication intention by taking into account the influence of various factors and levels and making choices continuously according to the purpose of translation. As a kind of translation activity, public notice translation is a kind of application translation, which plays an important role in the international communication and learning and in the application of specific practical life. It also plays the role of a bridge of communication between different cultures. Any kind of translation activity has a clear communicative purpose, communicative object and communicative occasions, and the public notice translation activity more clearly reflects the conformity and choice of many aspects in the translation process, because every choice is made in order to conform to a certain aspect or level of the translation purpose and the overall communicative purpose. All in all, Adaptation Theory not only has strong explanatory power and support for the translation of public notice language, but also has great guiding significance for the whole translation practice. Only when the translation conforms to the requirements of macro and micro levels and aspects, can it successfully accomplish cross-cultural communication and reflect its social application value.

4.1. Conformity at the linguistic level in the translation of public notices

Song Zhiping (2004) believed that in the process of translation, the translator should comply with the socio-political systems, backgrounds, national cultures, religious beliefs, and ways of thinking of different cultures at the macro level, and at the micro level, he should comply with the linguistic codes and styles, the structure of the discourse, and the linguistic components of the language at the micro level. Public notice language is a kind of application language that conveys information, or a medium that uses language to achieve actual communicative purposes and functions. The translation of public notice is different from the translation of other parts of speech, most of which are used in publicity advertisements or other tools, and the language is required to be concise and simple, characterized by three aspects: lexical level, syntactic level and stylistic level.

4.1.1. Lexical level

Wang Yinquan (2000) believed that there are significant differences in word choice across languages and discourse genres. Public notice belongs to the application style. Public notice plays the role of warning and reminder in real life. The vocabulary is short and concise, which is in line with the reading habits of the target language readers.

Example 1

ST: 弯道 注意安全

TT: Warning: Sharp bend

In real life, this example was translated as Zigzag road, be careful of your safety, by using the direct popularization method, which is a bit wordy to read because English favors the use of nominalization. According to the language habits of the target readers, the structure of nominalization was used, which was finally translated as “Warning: Sharp bend.”

Example 2

ST: 危险! 高度易燃物品

TT: Danger! The material is easily inflamed

When the author translated for the first time, he took the direct translation method and translated it as Hazard! Highly flammable items, the translation style is inclined to be direct and clear, which is not close enough to the readers for the language text of the public notice. The nominalized structure is not applicable to the propaganda language, so it is more persuasive to take the syntactic structure, which is in line with the language style of the public notice language.

4.1.2. Syntactic level

At the syntactic level, Adaptation Theory emphasizes conformity, which is in line with the linguistic habits of the target readers, but some public notices have linguistic expression errors, such as inconsistency in the singular and plural of nouns, lexical misuse, tense abuse, improper collocation, etc., which misinterpret the original text's author's intention and also lead to difficulties in the readers' comprehension.

Example 3

ST: 中西快餐

TT: China (Chinese) and Foreign Fast Food

It is well known that the language features of public notice are concise, short and limited in space, which leave an instant impression. William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White (1979) illustrated that effective writing is concise. A sentence should not contain superfluous words, which also applies to the translation of public notices. The translated text reflects the charm of language features and conveys the most powerful spirit with concise language.

Example 4

ST: 开启的食品及饮料请勿带入展区

TT: No food or drink to be taken into the exhibition halls.

At the first time, the direct translation method can be used and the Chinese sentence is translated as The opened food package and drink bottle should not be brought into the exhibition halls. There seems to be no problem with the wording and grammar, but it is only when we read the whole sentence in depth that we can know the purpose of the marking phrase. The purpose of the slogan is clear only when we read the whole sentence in depth. If the negative word "do not" is considered in the middle of the sentence and the emphasis is not obvious, which is not in line with the concise and clear character of English public notices and the syntactic habits of the readers of the target language. It is

ignored by the passers-by who are in a hurry to get to and from the exhibition halls. Therefore, we can change it to: No food or drink to be taken into the exhibition halls. It is not difficult to find that some customary expressions not only can provide us with reference in the English translation of public notices, but also can make the translation more compliant with the sentence structure characteristics of the target language.

4.1.3. Stylistic level

Chen Jinyang (2016) believed that as a kind of application style that conveys some specific information to the public, public notice language has its own unique stylistic features. First of all, Chinese public notices are generally colorful and semantically implicit, while English public notices are thematic and focused and the language is objective and concise. In fact, in the translation of public notices, the translator should not only conform to the style and expression of the target language, but also make appropriate adjustments to the translation independently.

Example 5

草色花香手足情，美丽自然拥抱您

Example 6

脚下留意草更绿，手下留情花更娇

The translations tend to be repetitive, such as "Please take care of the grass and flowers. Let's embrace the natural beauty" and "Grass may grow greener if you could watch out your steps, and flowers may bloom better if you could hold your hand", which are direct and rigid translations of the original text, repetitive and redundant. The original text is repetitive and redundant, which is completely contrary to the characteristics of English public notices and it is difficult to effectively perform the function of prompting public notices. Both of the above examples convey the meaning of not stepping on flowers and grass, and the purpose of the language is to protect the flowers and grass. Both public notices can be translated into the English statute expression "Keep Off the Grass", which is concise and accurate, highlights the thematic information of the public notices and is to achieve the purpose of communication.

Example 7

ST: 禁止攀爬

TT: No Climbing

The language of the text is concise and in some places it is translated as "Prohibition Surmounts", which is too formal and solemn. Therefore in order to conform to the principle of selection and conformity of Adaptation Theory, the method of direct translation is adopted, and it is translated into "No Climbing".

Example 8

ST: 注意防滑

TT: Caution: Slippery Floor

This sentence is a warning public notice, some translators translate it as "Advert Skidproof", obviously "advert" and "skidproof" are formal written expressions, which are confused by readers and are not readable. Besides, there is a grammatical error, "注意" is an intransitive verb and it needs to be added with the preposition "to", while "防滑的" is an adjective, which means "skidproof". There is the error of using the wrong word. According to Adaptation Theory, it can be translated as, "Caution: Slippery Floor".

5. Conclusions

Through the study, it is found that as a kind of social language, the text is simple but has certain research value. At the same time, the study of public notice language needs the guidance of theory. Adaptation Theory is very suitable for the translation of public notice language and it has great guiding significance. The Chinese-English translation process of public notice is essentially a dynamic translation process in which the translator conforms to the choice of the translated language. This paper illustrates the Chinese-English translation process of public notice language under the guidance of Adaptation Theory. Besides, the paper also studies the textual characteristics of public notice language in terms of vocabulary, syntax and style and adopts appropriate translation strategies to improve the Chinese-English translation of public notice language. By doing so, it is vital to provide certain reference value for the Chinese-English translation of public notice language, to accurately play the function of the information service in people's daily life and to better enhance the development of the national language and culture.

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