

The Cultural Orientation of Public Signs Translation from the Perspective of Pragmatics

Juan Luo

Chizhou University, Chizhou, Anhui Province 247000, China

Abstract: As a key medium of information transmission, public signs play a vital role in cross-cultural communication in globalization. Based on pragmatics, this paper explores the cultural orientation in the translation of public signs, in order to provide theoretical guidance for translation practice, and promote the communication and integration between different cultures.

Keywords: Pragmatics; Translation of public signs; Cultural orientation

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Introduction

With the deepening of globalization, public signs have been paid more and more attention. They are not only practical information carriers, but also the mapping of cultural characteristics. The task of translating public signs is to convey the original information while considering the acceptance and aesthetic orientation of the target culture. With the help of pragmatics, a branch of linguistics, focusing on context and communicative functions, we can obtain theoretical approaches to analyze and deal with linguistic and cultural differences. This paper is to explore how to achieve the adaptive transformation of culture through the translation of public signs, so as to improve the application efficiency of translation as well as to enhance the interactivity and effectiveness of cultural exchanges.

1. The concept of pragmatics

Pragmatics is a comprehensive discipline, which deepens its development at the intersection of philosophy, psychology and linguistics. It focuses on the function of language in practice, the expression form of discourse in specific situations, various factors affecting language practice, and the rules that control the dialogue alternation^[1]. The discipline is committed to exploring the practical dimension of language meaning and emphasizing the practical operation process of human language communication. In the actual process of language communication, both sides not only convey the surface symbols and grammatical structure, but also interpret the implicit intention of the speaker through psychological reasoning. Therefore, in-depth understanding of a language not only needs to be proficient in its grammatical structure, vocabulary and pronunciation rules, but also must understand and express emotions, and strive to analyze the deeper meaning of a sentence in a specific context.

2. Cultural orientation of public signs translation from the perspective of pragmatics

2.1 Cultural differences

Language, not only a tool of human communication, but also an important medium carrying the essence of culture, reflects the historical context and cultural deposition of a nation. The rich diversity of global cultures has led to the diversity of languages in their expression style. The differences in culture and ways of thinking make various languages look unique in their structure and expression form^[2]. Especially the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, they have profoundly influenced the way Chinese and

English are used. Translation is not a simple process of language replacement, but requires a profound understanding of the source culture and the target culture. Mistranslation often results from a lack of sufficient knowledge of the customs and expressions of the target culture.

For example, when translating “欢迎您再来” into English, “Please come again” should be used instead of the literal translation of “Welcome to ... again”, which ignores the conventional use of “welcome” in English. Similarly, “小心路滑” should be translated into “Caution: Wet Floor” in English to avoid a direct translation that does not fit the English expression habits. The translation of public signs should carefully consider the cultural differences and the suitability of the occasion. For example “禁止喧哗” and “禁止践踏草坪” should be translated as “Please keep quiet” and “Please keep off the grass”, reflecting the respect for etiquette and civilization.

Therefore, the translation of public signs is not only the transmission of information, but also a link of cultural exchange, which can convey humanistic care and create a harmonious environment. Translation should not be limited to the literal translation of Chinese, but should explore the cultural connotation and common expressions of English to ensure the effective transmission and correct understanding of information in the target language environment. In the translation process, in-depth cultural insight and precise language use are equally important.

2.2 Cultural orientation

2.2.1 Translator

The generation and application of language is deeply rooted in the basic needs of human social events, which constructs the cultural infrastructure. In social interaction, people convey their beliefs, emotions, and thoughts through language. When the two sides of communication have a common cultural background, information exchange is often more smooth; on the contrary, cultural differences may constitute barriers to communication. Language is not only a tool to convey information, but also a way to express the uniqueness of culture, which is reflected in the discourse. When it comes to the use of domestic public signs, the expressions are often closely related to Chinese culture, and these cultural characteristics are not easy to find accurate correspondence in English. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator must have a good command of the deeper intention of the Chinese expression, and carefully select and appropriately transform the cultural elements in Chinese in combination with the characteristics of English culture, thinking mode and expression habits, so as to conform to the habits of English readers and achieve effective communication and equivalence of language functions.

In the translation practice, when facing the problem of cultural identity and cultural conflict, we need to weigh the cultural orientation against strategy of translation, that is, whether to favor the cultural dominance of the target language or to maintain the cultural dominance of the source language. Foreignization and domestication represent two translation strategies to cope with cultural differences. Domestication is to put translation under the framework of the target language culture, replace the content of the source language with the cultural vocabulary of the target language, and convey the deep implication of the source language vocabulary through free translation. While foreignization focuses on retaining the cultural characteristics of the source language, and realizes translation by means of literal translation or transliteration. In the translation practice of the public signs, the translator needs to make a choice between the cultural orientation of the target language and the cultural orientation of the source language, which will directly affect whether the translating results can promote effective communication and information cues.

2.2.2 “Domestication” and clever translation

When dealing with the translation of public signs, domestication has proved its remarkable efficacy. Its core is to adjust the source language expression to reduce the cultural differences and achieve the functional equivalence^[3]. For example, the translation of “小心地滑” into “CAUTION: WET FLOOR” rather than “Carefully slippery” effectively avoids misunderstanding. Similarly, the translation of “小心碰头” into “WATCH YOUR HEAD” by adopting domestication more accurately expresses the original meaning of warning than the literal translation of “Take care of your head”. In the promotion of the WBC Intercontinental Gold Belt Boxing Event, “丝绸之路，凝聚五洲。拳王争霸，贺岁金城” is cleverly translated as “The Silk Road leads to All Continents, Big Boxing Game in Lanzhou” by domestication, which is not only loyal to the original intention, but also improves the intelligibility. Domestication deepens cross-cultural communication and understanding. In practice, translators should flexibly use domestication strategy according to the specific context, which should not only retain the cultural characteristics of the source language, but also adapt to the habit of the target culture.

2.2.3 Foreignization and mistranslation

In the process of cultural exchange, the importance of accurately grasping the cultural differences between source language and target language is self-evident, especially in the field of translation of public signs. The aim of translation is not to do word for word

conversion, but to ensure that the target readers can accurately grasp the functionality and intention of the information. Ignoring the cultural differences and simply adopting literal translation, which is a kind of foreignization, is likely to cause communicative obstacles and pragmatic inappropriateness.

For example, the simple literal translation of “中百味烤全羊海鲜自助火锅” into “of the subway self-service hotpot” ignores its deep cultural connotation, leaving English readers unable to understand this unique hotpot culture unrelated to the subway. Similarly, the direct translation of “山珍特产” into “Good Food Specialties” conveys the message of high-quality food, but it fails to fully show the cultural connotation of “rare food from the mountain forests”.

In order to achieve more effective cultural communication, translators should adopt domestication, so that the cultural information in the source language can be accurately and appropriately reflected in the target language culture. For example, the translation of “山珍特产” into “Specialties of Delicacies” not only better covers its cultural significance, but also makes the information more accessible and acceptable to the target language readers. Effective translation is not only language transformation, it must also carry and adapt to the exchange of two cultures.

Conclusion

To sum up, the translation of public signs is extremely complex and challenging in terms of cultural adaptability. From the perspective of pragmatics, we can see the profound influence of cultural differences on translation practice, as well as the decisive role of translators in the translation process. Through the appropriate use of the translation strategy, the translators should seek a balance between domestication and foreignization to ensure the accurate transmission of language information and the proper display of cultural characteristics. At the same time, accurate identification and avoiding mistranslation is also the key to maintain the quality of translation. Looking forward to the future, we hope that translators can deeply master the cultural background of the source language and the target language, in order to promote the communication and understanding between different cultures by using flexible translation skills, and jointly build a harmonious and symbiotic multi-cultural world.

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About the author:

Juan Luo (1989.06-), female, Chinese, born in Anqing, Anhui, graduated from Jiangsu University of Science and Technology, Post-graduate Degree, Master's Degree, lecturer in Chizhou University, research direction: translation, linguistics.