

# Mistranslation and Methodological Analysis of English Signs in Public Places

Yuanyuan Chen

Guangxi Agricultural Vocational University, Nanning 530000, Guangxi, China.

**Abstract :** Due to the influence of industry norms, translation level and reference standards, mistranslation of English signs in public places is quite common. The main factors leading to pragmatic problems of English signs are verbatim and rigid translation of signs, chinglish and differences in expression modes. In order to standardize the use of English signs and improve the image of urban civilization, it is necessary to follow the principle of pragmatic equivalence, use international standardized terms, translate proper nouns, and strengthen the supervision of government functional departments.

**Keywords :** English Signs; English Translation; Public Places; Translation Principles

With the development of economy and the frequent exchange between China and foreign countries, the use of English has gradually expanded, and the use of English signs in public places has become the demand of economic and social development. However, there are often many irregularities in the application of English signs, which have a significant impact on the image of cities, scenic spots and countries. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the standardized use of English signs in public places.

## 1. Reasons for mistranslation of English signs in public places

### 1.1 Translate word for word

Transmitting information is the essence of language communication, which can influence each other's thinking and realize mutual interaction. In communication, in order to maintain good communication relations, we should pay attention to the art of communication language, maintain mutual respect and use elegant and polite language. English expressions pay more attention to the object consciousness, which is characterized by euphemism, indirectness and humor, and also take into account the politeness principle of language expression, while Chinese expressions are more clear and direct. In the translation of English signs in public places, the simple translation of English and Chinese words is very common, which is also an important factor leading to the mistranslation of public signs. Although this kind of English logo translation seems to express the Chinese meaning, it has many problems from the perspective of English grammar. For example, in some of the bus "Senior Citizens First" Chinese signs is translated into the corresponding English: old people first, most Chinese because have aged respected tradition, "old" in the logo at the same time also represents a shift of "respect", in the face of the logo will often feel personalized service, the heart of warm meaning. However, for the foreign elderly with different cultural backgrounds, it is inevitable that there will be resistance. At this time, because westerners are more young and energetic, they especially resist the word "old", in their context, "old" more or less contains the meaning of belittling. However, the correct translation would be Senior Citizens First.

### 1.2 Chinglish translation

Due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, Chinglish is more common in our daily life, which is mainly caused by insufficient consideration of the differences between Chinese and Western cultures in the translation process. Chinese and English represent the different cultural backgrounds and characteristics of the Middle East and the West respectively. Therefore, this factor should also be taken into account in English-Chinese translation. For example, China is the hometown of tea and tea culture has a long history in China. If we translate it into English from the Chinese perspective, black tea will be translated as red tea, but

---

Copyright © 2021 Yuanyuan Chen

doi: 10.18686/ah.v5i11.4238

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

the correct definition in English is black tea. For example, some scenic spots use signs to remind visitors to meet in narrow areas: “Watch out, Knock Head” is the Chinese equivalent of “Knock Head”, but in English the term “Knock Head” is a fixed slang meaning “idiot”, so in this case the translation of “Watch out, idiot” is bound to cause a joke.

### **1.3 Differences in expression**

Different cultural backgrounds have different characteristics in language expression, which is also an important reason for mistranslation of English signs. Through the investigation of signs in public places, it is found that imperative sentences are a very common way of expression, but there are changes in meaning and tone in English translation. For example, in order to protect the grass in a park, it is necessary to set up a reminder of “Keep off the grass”, which is usually translated as “Please keep off the grass”, but in English culture, relatively euphemistic expressions are chosen: “Please give me a chance to grow” is also more acceptable. Therefore, in the expression of public signs, full attention should be paid to the different ways of thinking and expression to avoid embarrassment and misunderstanding caused by Chinglish.

## **2. Thinking about the path of standardizing English signs in public places**

### **2.1 Use the international standard signs**

As the gathering place of People’s daily economy, study, work, culture and social interaction, public places play an important role in serving people’s normal life. The standardized use of English signs in public places can not only avoid some embarrassing problems, but also be an important manifestation of urban civilization. In order to reduce the mistranslation of English signs, the internationally accepted standardized translation of English signs can be adopted. For example, use “Exit” or “Entrance” in subway stations, scenic areas and other Exit areas, use “No smoking” to indicate No smoking, and use “Caution!” Wet floor to remind the passing crowd to “ski carefully”.

### **2.2 Follow the pragmatic equivalence principle**

The principle of pragmatic equivalence refers to the corresponding translation based on the understanding of the literal meaning and the extended meaning of the language. Instead of sticking to the original externalized form of the language, the most natural and appropriate way is adopted to express the true meaning of the language so as to achieve the same effect. This is also the translation accuracy principle that we pay more attention to. In the translation of English signs, we should pursue the realm of faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance, respect the original intention of the original text, and make it normal and natural. Social pragmatic equivalence refers to the realization of bilingual equivalent translation in cross-cultural and cross-language communication. In the context of Chinese translation of English signs, translators should not only master the differences between Chinese and English expressions of signs, but also be familiar with the socio-cultural norms and features of signs in the Chinese-English speaking environment. In public places, English signs represent the progress and civilization of the society, so we should try to use words that can show the degree of civilization, such as sorry, please, welcome, etc. These words seem simple, but they fully reflect the friendliness and politeness, as well as the good display of pragmatic principles. In addition, the translation of English signs should fully consider the influence of cultural differences, not only grasp the basic principles of the use of Chinese and English, but also have a certain sense of Chinese and Western culture, so as to accurately grasp the original meaning and intention of the signs, and to clearly express the meaning and achieve the aesthetic feeling of cultural information transmission.

## **3. Transliteration of proper nouns**

In most tourist attractions, cities and other areas, the names of buildings are usually translated directly using Chinese pinyin, and are easily accepted by foreigners. For example, Zhongyang Street is directly translated into Zhongyang Street, Wuzi Building is translated into Wuzi Hotel, and Heilongjiang University is translated into Heilongjiang University. This translation method can reflect the characteristics of proper nouns without limiting their meanings due to certain English words. However, in the translation of some famous buildings, scenic spots and historic sites, the translation should be combined with the deep connotation of English, not the transplantation of simple answers. For example, the noun for the Great Wall is “Great Wall”, not “Long Wall”, and the Forbidden City should be translated as “Forbidden City”, not “Purple Forbidden City”. The proper noun of The Summer Palace is “The Summer Palace”, not “Yihe Garden”.

## **4. Strengthen the supervision of English signs**

The use of signs in public places is an important manifestation of a city’s economy, culture and civilization, which is related to the overall image of the city’s development and also a manifestation of the government’s management ability. Therefore, the relevant functional departments of the government should strengthen the supervision and management of the use of English signs and be

good at discovering and correcting mistranslated English signs. In addition, the government should play the role of inspiration, encourage people to participate in the English logo correction activities, reward people who make outstanding contributions to the activities.

## 5. Conclusion

Chinese and western different cultural background and language expression and way of thinking, the effect of the application of English logo mistranslation is relatively rare, to avoid the negative impact of region, city and country image, should give full consideration to the original meaning in language translation, language habits, cultural background, translation standard English logo.

## References

---

1. Qiao B. Analysis of the misunderstanding and translation strategy of English identity in public places. *Ser* 2015; (51): 154.
2. Chen Y. Analysis of the text characteristics and language function of English logic. *Exam Week* 2016; (62): 75-75+ 76.
3. Zhong X, Lin T. Study on the pragmatic problem of English logo in public places. *Overseas English (on)* 2014; (12): 265-266.
4. Zeng Y. Translation of English logo under public places under the purpose of the purpose of the purpose. *Campus English (Teaching and Research Edition)* 2012; (3): 116+ 108.
5. Dong H, Wu Z. Misunderstanding and analysis of English identity in life. *Science and Education Guide* 2019; (1): 54-56.