

Mistakes and Countermeasures in English Translation of Public Signs

-- With Error Correction Activity for Chengdu Universiade as Example

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Abstract

As the name card and an important symbol to highlight the cultural level and management specification of a city, the English translation of public signs affects the external image of the city and the daily life of foreigners. Therefore, rectifying and standardizing the English translation of public signs is of great help to the development and image improvement of the city. With the "GOOD-BY, GOOFY SIGNS!" urban public English signs error correction activity as an example, this paper summarizes several problems in the English translation of public signs and puts forward corresponding measures, in order to attract relevant departments' attention, take countermeasures to improve the image of Chengdu before the Universiade, so that the Universiade can be held better, and the foreign athletes can have a good impression.

Keywords

Chengdu Universiade; Public signs; Error correction activity; English translation.

1. Introduction

On October 28, 2021, the World Event City Development Conference and Chengdu Sports Industry Conference with the theme of "New stage, new opportunity and new momentum" were held in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. In order to stimulate new ideas, explore new paths and gather new strength for the development of national sports industry and the preparation of major sports events, the government focuses on the construction of world-famous event city in Chengdu, explores the development path with both regional characteristics and international influence, promotes the implementation of the strategic concept of "hosting competitions, building cities, promoting industry and benefiting the people"[1]. With the undertaking of large-scale international games and the increase of international exchanges in Chengdu, the construction and development of urban infrastructure is particularly important in highlighting the city image, among which, the unification and standardization of urban public signs is the direct display of the improvement of the city image in urban construction.

For that, Chengdu Foreign Affairs Office carried out the "GOOD-BY, GOOFY SIGNS!" urban public English signs error correction activity to improve the present non-standard situation in the English translation of Chengdu public signs. People found the wrong English translation, took photos and uploaded the photos, positions and modification suggestions on the WeChat applet "All the people come to correct errors", so that the expert group would review and give modified translations. At present, with the communication between Chengdu Foreign Affairs Office and relevant departments, some error signs with the expert group's suggested translation have been rectified. This paper sorts out and summarizes the English translation errors of public signs in this error correction activity, combined with the modified translations given by the

expert group, intends to draw more attention from more people, especially the people in charge of relevant departments, and hopes that the English signs that have not been rectified can be modified as soon as possible with the efforts of relevant departments.

2. Classification of English Translation Problems of Public Signs in Chengdu

According to the data submitted in the error correction activity, there are several problems in English translation of public signs on roads, streets, subway stations, parks and other public places, including misspelling, letter case error, abbreviation and full form, error spaces between words, missing and redundant letters, improper use of words, pretermission, improper word order, digital mistranslation, repetition and so on.

2.1. Misspelling

As we all know, a word is composed of fixed letters, so as long as the Chinese meaning is clear, the corresponding correct spelling of the word is sure. However, there are many spelling mistakes in the English translation of urban public signs, which are caused by carelessness in the process of work and the personnel who are unfamiliar with English spelling, but it is easy to cause confusion for foreigners, which affects their experience and makes them question the culture level of publicity in Chengdu.

Example 1:

Original public sign: Poetic Jing Jiang

Analysis: The original public sign is “Jinjiang” in Chinese, while the spelling of Pinyin is wrong, and there is no attention to the front and back nasal sounds and the spaces between words. The proposed translation is: Jinjiang.

Example 2:

Original public sign: NO BICYCIES

Analysis: The word “bicycle” is misspelled, not “bicycie”. The proposed translation is: NO BICYCLES.

2.2. Letter Case Error

Letter case is a common and important form of expression in English. Usually, there are two forms of letter case: the case of the first letter and the case of all letters. Because of the difference between the case of the first letter, the meaning of many words is also different. For example, the word “China” refers to the country named “中国” when the first letter C is capitalized but the meaning “porcelain” when the first letter C is small. In addition, many proper nouns and place nouns need to be capitalized on specific occasions. Therefore, we must not ignore the differences and effects caused by case errors.

Example 1:

Original public sign: To Hospital of Chengdu University of TCM, please depart from exit C

Analysis: Here “exit C” indicates a location, which is often used at the entrance and exit of public places and can be used alone, so the initial letter “E” should be capitalized. The proposed translation is: Exit C.

Example 2:

Original public sign: customer service center

Analysis: “customer service center” refers to a function window, so the initial letters of the three words should be capitalized. The proposed translation is: Customer Service Center.

2.3. Abbreviations and Full Form

In English expression, the position and method of word abbreviation and complete spelling are also very particular. Words, such as week, month, ordinal number, organization and orientation have two forms: abbreviation and full spelling. For example, the abbreviation of Monday is Mon.; ATM, a common bank automatic teller machine in life, is an acronym for Automatic Teller Machine. In an article, if an acronym appears many times, the English abbreviation should be followed by brackets to indicate the full spelling for the first time. For example, HTTP (Hyper Text Transfer Protocol), when it appears in the article for the first time, it need to be in the form of full spelling, with the acronym form followed in brackets, and from the second time it should be in the form of acronym.

Example:

Original public sign: Section 4. Renmin Rd. S.

Analysis: The meaning of the English translation of “section 4 of Renmin South Road” is not wrong, but there are abbreviations in the translation, which are spelled out in full and inconsistent. In order to be simple and clear, the abbreviation can be directly used in the sign. The proposed translation is: Renmin South Road Section 4 (Sect. 4, Renmin Rd. S.)

2.4. Error Space between Words

The use of space is quite different between Chinese and English. English space has the function of breaking meaning. If there is no space between two words, it will cause semantic confusion. Therefore, the space between words in English has a great impact on semantic expression; There is no space between words in Chinese, and punctuation is used to break the meaning between words and sentences in Chinese.

Example:

Original public sign: DONG JIAO CHANG FEATURED NEIGHBORHOOD. JIN JIANG DISTRICT

Analysis: “Jinjiang” in “Jinjiang District” is the name of a river, so there can be no blank space between English translations. The proposed translation is: Jinjiang District.

2.5. Missing and Redundant Letters

Each English word is composed of fixed letters. If there are missing or redundant letters, the incompleteness of the word will change the meaning of the word, or even there is no such word, which will affect the meaning of the sentence and the article.

Example1:

Original public sign: Chengdu University of TCM & Sic uan Provincial People’s Hospital

Analysis: In the translation, the letter “h” is missing in “Sic uan”. The proposed translation is: Chengdu University of TCM & Sichuan Provincial People’s Hospital.

Example2:

Original public sign: FIREL ALARM

Analysis: In the translation, there is a redundant letter “L” in the word “FIREL”. The proposed translation is: FIRE ALARM.

2.6. Improper Use of Words

In English, there may be more than one English word corresponding to the same Chinese meaning. The choice of the appropriate English corresponding to Chinese needs to be determined according to different application environments and other factors.

Example1:

Original public sign: Self-service Ticket Picker

Analysis: “Picker” originally refers to the self-service ticket machine. The proposed translation is: Self-service Ticket Machine.

Example2:

Original public sign: New Expotion Centre

Analysis: As a noun, exhibition means “exposition”. It does not fully express the scope of “exhibition” and the purpose of “Exhibition Center”. The proposed translation is: New Convention & Exhibition Center.

2.7. Pretermission

In Chinese-English translation, there is a situation that the meaning of the original text is not completely translated, which belongs to omission. In the English translation of urban English signs, there are also many omissions in the English translation of signs.

Example 1:

Original public sign: SOUTH STATION

Analysis: It is obvious from the original translation that the English translation of the sign only expresses the meaning of “South Railway Station”, which belongs to omission. The proposed translation is: South Railway Station.

Example 2:

Original public sign: Greenway Planning Exhibition Center

Analysis: The word “Tianfu” does not appear in the English translation of the original sign, which is a prtermission. The proposed translation is: Tianfu Greenway Planning Exhibition Center.

2.8. Improper Word Order

Improper word order mainly refers to the fact that the position order of words or clauses or sentence components in a sentence does not conform to grammatical requirements.

Example 1:

Original public sign: One ticker for one person confirm the ticket number before leaving.

Analysis: The English translation of the original sign is very rigid, and there are still omissions in the direct literal translation of the whole sentence, which does not conform to the English word order. The proposed translation is: Everyone shall confirm the availability of one ticket before leaving.

Example 2:

Original public sign: Do Not Head Hand Through Handrail

Analysis: The original translation lacks verbs, and the word order of the whole sentence is wrong, which does not conform to the expression habits of English, making it difficult for foreigners to understand. The proposed translation is: Keep head and hands inside.

Example3:

Original public sign: SECT 1 SOUTH, RING2

Analysis: The original meaning refers to “Section 1, the Second Ring Road South” rather than “SECT 1 SOUTH, RING2”, so “south” should be followed “road”. The proposed translation is: 2nd Ring Road South Section 1 (Sect. 1, 2nd Ring Rd. S.).

2.9. Digital Mistranslation

In fact, the English translation of numbers is very simple, mainly involving the difference between cardinal words and ordinal words. Generally, it can be judged intuitively according to the Chinese meaning. Of course, this refers to not only the wrong use of cardinal words and ordinal words, but also the misuse of English words or Arabic numerals in the English translation of public signs.

Example:

Original public sign: Tianfu 5TH St.

Analysis: The original meaning is the fifth street of Tianfu Street, but the original public sign shows a different meaning. The proposed translation is: 5th Tianfu Street (5th Tianfu St.).

2.10. Repetition

Obviously, repetition means repeating to express the original sign's meaning in translation. The Chinese and English expression contains at least two words or phrases expressing the same Chinese meaning.

Example:

Original public sign: No Over Turning

Analysis: Both "over" and "turning" in the original translation have the same meaning, which belongs to repeated translation, and the expression of "turning" here is inappropriate. The proposed translation is: No Crossing.

2.11. Simple Literal Translation

In translation, it is often easy to correspond Chinese and English one by one and translate them directly, without taking into account the differences between Chinese and English. For example, the familiar "study hard" is directly translated into "good good study". Foreigners may feel very strange when they see such a translation and can't understand it.

Example 1:

Original public sign: No running and staying, Mind your step

Analysis: The original translation is directly based on Chinese literal translation, and the proposed translation is: Please mind your step and do not run or linger here.

Example 2:

Original public sign: Grass according to

Analysis: The original translation is obviously a literal translation of Chinese, but "according to" is a conjunction and there are serious grammatical errors. The proposed translation is: Keep off the Grass.

2.12. Inappropriate Emotion Expressed in the English Translation

In daily life, there are some public signs that need to be translated in special ways, especially public special occasions. Due to the particularity of the groups, different expressions need to be adopted. For example, if "disabled" in Chinese "残疾的" is translated into "the crippled", that is to say "incompetent" here, such a sign will make people feel that they are "incompetent and useless", which is a discrimination against and disrespect of the disabled. If you want to use this word, and consider the feelings and emotional changes after reading, it is more appropriate to express the meaning "people with disabilities" and more reasonable to translate it into "the disabled". The Chinese corresponding to this word can be "disabled", but the address of the disabled group is more euphemistic and polite than the previous expression, and also highlights the respect and protection of the disabled by the state and society.

Example1:

Original public sign: Barrier-free Elevator

Analysis: "Barrier" means an object like a fence that prevents people from moving from one place to another. Here it refers to a vertical ladder for people's convenience. The proposed translation is: Accessible elevator.

Example 2:

Original public sign: Please give your seat to seniors, children, pregnant women, the sick and the disabled.

Analysis: There is a sign in the public transportation in the U.S., "Please give your seat to the elderly, pregnate women and so forth when the bus or subway is crowded.", and also there may also be "handicap accessible" seats reserved for "the disabled", but this words expressed with appropriate emotion. The original meaning of "senior" in the original public sign refers to predecessors, superiors and the elderly, not specifically "the elderly", so "eldly" is more appropriate. The proposed translation is: Please give your seat to eldly, children, pregnant women, the sick and the handicapped.

2.13. Failure to Express the Chinese Meaning

It refers to the translation that does not correspond to Chinese and English at all, in other words, the meaning of the English translation is different from that of the original Chinese, or even very different, which does not correspond at all.

Example1:

Original public sign: POCKET PARK

Analysis: "Pocket park" means small park, which cannot to be the name of a park. The original sign means a park located in the place "Dayuan", so the proposed translation is: Dayuan Park.

Example2:

Original public sign: Do not talk with the driver

Analysis: "talk" means using words to communicate; to say things; to speak in order to give information or to express feelings, ideas, etc.. But "chat" means talking in a friendly and informal way to somebody. From the original public sign we can know it appears on the bus, so "chat" is more suitable here. The proposed translation is: No chatting with the driver.

2.14. Misuse of Singular and Plural

The misuse of singular and plural forms in English generally means that the form of the predicate verb is inconsistent with the subject of the sentence. If the subject in the sentence is plural, or the two singular nouns , the predicate verb is usually plural.

Example:

Original public sign: High-heel shoes and hard-groud shoes is forbidden here

Analysis: There are two forbidden objects in the original public sign, and the proposed translation is: High-heel and hard-soled shoes are forbidden here.

3. Countermeasures to Standardize English Translation of Public Signs

As urban public signs are the name cards of the city and play an important role in public and cultural communication, the English translation of public signs should respect the expression habits of English, be concise on the premise of being loyal to the original text, and also take into account the occasion and background of the use of signs. At the same time, it is suggested that the government should establish relevant corpora, establish a unified database of urbanization public signs, and update them in time for the reference of relevant departments or relevant public place management departments, such as parks, hospitals, subway companies, musuems and other management units, set up corresponding departments or groups to supervise and manage the English translation quality of public signs of their subordinate units, and even the translation of public signs in other languages.

3.1. Awareness and Actions to Correct English Translation of Public Signs

With the increase of foreign exchanges and cooperation in Chengdu, more and more foreign-funded enterprises set up branches or joint ventures, and more and more foreigners come to Chengdu to work and live, or even settle down. Therefore, the quality of English translation of public signs has a great impact on their work and life. The government and relevant

departments of enterprises should fully realize the importance of English translation quality of public signs, and also employees should be encouraged to supervise, establish corresponding working mechanisms for investigation and supervision, and timely grasp the English translation of existing public place signs for further improvement.

3.2. Standardization of English Translation for Similar Public Signs

In the English error correction activity of urban public signs, there were problems in many places and signboards of the same type, such as road signs, road traffic signs, signs in the subway stations and other public places. Some used Pinyin, and some used Pinyin plus English. Although sometimes it may not affect the original meaning, there are a variety of English signs, which can easily make people question the culture level of publicity of Chengdu and the governance ability of urban civilization. Therefore, it is necessary to standardize the English translation of similar public signs in order to improve the image of the city.

3.2.1. Road Signs

In this error correction activity, the most problematic type of public signs in English translation is road signs. Road signs here uniformly refer to the public signs erected on both sides of the road to indicate the name of the road. Generally, the road signs in Chinese cities are in Chinese and English. There are also a few areas. Due to the particularity of geographical location and population layout, there are languages and characters of other ethnic minorities, such as the road signs in Xinjiang. There will be Chinese, Uyghur or Chinese, Uyghur and English. Through this error correction activity, experts suggest that the translation of road signs should use pinyin.

Example 1:

Original public sign: BEICAO LU

Analysis: Obviously, the original sign refers to the road "BAICAO" in Chinese "百草路". The proposed translation is: BAICAO LU.

Example 2:

Original public sign: BEISHUN STREET HUAPAIFANG

Analysis: In the English translation of the original road sign, the Chinese order is reversed, and Pinyin is mixed with English, which is very chaotic. "HUAPAIFANG" is a place's name, "BEISHUN STREET" is a street's name and this street is under the jurisdiction of Huapaifang Community. The proposed translation is: HUAPAIFANG BEISHUN JIE.

3.2.2. Road Traffic Signs

The signs here refer to road traffic signs. Through the display of graphic symbols, the traffic regulations can be vivid, specific and concise. At the same time, it can also express the meanings which are difficult to describe in words, so as to manage the traffic and indicate the driving direction. However, road traffic signs of different colors have different meanings. Common ones in daily life are: (1) blue: used for general roads, indicating instructions and compliance; (2) green: used for expressways and urban expressways, indicating place names, routes and directions; (3) brown: indicating instructions for tourism and scenic spots.

In this error correction activity, there are also various problems in the English translation of signs, and experts suggest that the translation of road signs should use Pinyin, but the road traffic signs should use English.

Example:

Original public sign: 2NDZHANYUANSTREETWEST

Analysis: The translation of "Street West" is "Second Street West", which is inconsistent with the original Chinese meaning of "West Second Street", and the case does not meet the standard

of English translation of signs. The proposed translation is: 2nd Desai Street (2nd Desai St.); 2nd Zhanyuan West Street (2nd Zhanyuan W. St.).

3.2.3. Signs in the Subway Station

As a means of transportation in the city, the subway carries different people to a corner of the city every day. Subway is also one of the convenient and environment-friendly public transport tools in people's daily life. Take Chengdu subway for example. The daily passenger flow of Chengdu subway is more than 5 million times. As the image and symbol of urban subway, subway logo appears in every corner of the city. The signs in the subway station represent the characteristics of the city and the materialization of the urban spirit and also show the cultural and regional characteristics of the city. Therefore, the standardization and integrity of signs in the subway station have a certain impact on passengers' travel, especially for people who are not familiar with subway lines and target places, so the guidance of signs in the subway station is one of the important ways for them to obtain location information. The most common signs setting in the subway station are attached signs, such as in the train, on the wall, column and ground. The subway has attached signboards on the platform floor, the station hall floor and in the carriage; the main type of the signboards is suspended signboard, and there are suspended signboards on all floors in the subway station, but the height and text form of the suspended signboard are relatively unified and the amount of information is less and the color is relatively single.

Example:

Original public sign: Teaching Hospital of Chengdu University of TCM

Analysis: This sign appears in the station of the hospital of traditional Chinese medicine of Chengdu Metro Line 4. The translation of "Affiliated Hospital of Chengdu University of traditional Chinese medicine" is inconsistent with the translation used in the introduction to the University's official website (English version). The proposed translation is: Affiliated Hospital of Chengdu University of TCM.

3.2.4. Signs in Other Public Places

In addition to the signs of the above three public places, there are also many public signs in parks, hospitals, amusement parks and other public places, such as comprehensive information signs, including sign content, wired network map, location map and passenger instructions. However, it should be noted that warnings appear on many occasions, such as parks, lakes, hospitals, museums, etc. such as "be careful to meet", "water depth, be careful to fall", "no noise", "do not touch" and "tourists stop" are often seen. These slogans are short and clear, aiming to remind people to pay attention to their behavior in specific public places, so it need to use the form of imperative sentences or phrases in translation, which can not only express the meaning in Chinese, but also keep the sentence pattern short, concise and clear.

Example1:

Original public sign: Huanglong River Ancient Town

Analysis: "Huanglongxi" is a place name. Huanglongxi ancient town scenic spot is located in Huanglongxi Town, Shuangliu District, Chengdu, so it is named after the town name. It does not refer to a stream named "Huanglong", so it cannot be translated into river. The proposed translation is: Huanglongxi Ancient Town.

Example2:

Original public sign: Guide to Ladder

Analysis: "Ladder" is very common in daily life, which is made of two long and several thick poles, and the middle crosses are suitable for climbing. The ladder is divided into lifting single ladder and lifting herringbone ladder. But here it means the escalator, and it is the walking elevator used by customers in shopping malls, in other words, it is a kind of transportation to transfer

pedestrians by means of transportation belt. Moreover, the instructions refer to the safety code of conduct and precautions that must be known by everyone before taking this elevator, not a notice of the elevator itself. The proposed translation is: Instructions for Taking Elevator.

3.3. Principles to Standardize English Translation of Public Places

Different public places have different characteristics, so there are some specific norms in the English translation of public signs at home and abroad, such as cinemas, Western restaurants, underground parking lots, public toilets, etc., which should adopt international expressions. Here are three methods as follows: use of international expression and conventional expression, use of approved translation conventions methods, use of specific expression methods.

3.3.1. Use of International Expressions and Conventional Expressions

In foreign countries, many public places have standard and unified terms, such as “toilet” in Chinese, which is directly translated into toilet or washroom, rather than various versions of WC in China. In addition, the translation of some tourist attractions, such as the Great Wall, has been widely recognized in English at home and abroad. Therefore, the direct use of internationally agreed and commonly known expressions for such signs will make foreigners feel more friendly and natural, more in line with English expression habits, and will not cause confusion to everyone.

Example:

Original public sign: Cargo Ladder

Analysis: Here, it refers to the elevator mainly used to carry goods, rather than the ladder handled manually. The proposed translation is: Cargo Lift or Cargo Elevator.

3.3.2. Use of Approved Translation Conventions

There are many conventions in Chinese-English translation. For example, the “safety exits” in public places are capitalized “EXIT”; warning and suggestive slogans are generally expressed in imperative sentences or short sentences, which are simple and clear, and the first letter of the content word should be capitalized or all capitalized, which is more warning and suggestive, such as using “Mind Your Head” or “MIND YOUR HEAD” to express the meaning “be careful of your head”; prohibited slogans generally use “No...” or “Do Not...”, and some need to add “exclamation mark” to indicate their danger; if the Chinese meaning contains the meaning of ordinal words, there are two English translation form of ordinal words, one is alphabetic superscript, such as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.; the other is ordinal word, such as the first, the second, the third, the fourth etc. However, in airports, stations and other places, the numbers in the name are not applicable to the expression form of alphabetic superscript or English ordinal words, only the “spot+ cardinal number”, such as expressing “the second terminal” into “Terminal 2”, “the fifth platform” into “Platform 5”.

Example1:

Original public sign: Warning Slippery Surface

Analysis: This sign is very common in public places, but the translation is full of errors. The sign aims to play a warning role, but the original translation has caused ambiguity. The proposed translation is: CAUTION! / Slippery Surface! or Wet Floor! (Sign in two lines)

Example2:

Original public sign: Water depth of Lake/Basin Please Keep away

Analysis: This sign appears in a park in Chengdu. The original translation adopts literal translation, which does not comply with the translation habits of warning slogans, and is not in accord with case and the space between words. The proposed translation is: Deep Water!/Keep Away! (Sign in two lines)

3.3.3. Use of Specific Expressions

With the implementation of environmental protection policies and the enhancement of people's awareness of environmental protection, waste classification is the most direct environmental protection measure in daily life. And the signs on the trash are also very common, so the English translation of these signs has specific expressions.

Example:

Original public sign: OTHER WASTE

Analysis: This sign is on a dustbin in Chengdu, which does not correspond between Chinese and English. "OTHER WASTE" refers to the garbage that is different from that in another bucket, and the category of garbage is not specified. It doesn't express the meaning that Chinese aims to express. The proposed translation is: NON-RECYCLABLE.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the "GOOD-BY, GOOFY SIGNS!" urban public English signs error correction activity is not only to facilitate the athletes from all over the world who come to Chengdu, but also a good opportunity for Chengdu to move towards better internationalization, and to accept more foreigners and provide them with a more convenient and comfortable environment in Chengdu. Through the error correction activity, Chengdu Foreign Affairs Office and other relevant departments have truly realized the current situation of English translation of public signs, and they have also adopted countermeasures to rectify and reform. Of course, due to the complexity of the departments under the jurisdiction of various signs and the different characteristics of the multilevel application process, the rectification and reformation are a long and complex process. Therefore, the author only hopes that through the participation of error correction activity and the presentation of the classification and analysis of the problems in the English translation of Chengdu public signs in this paper, more people can realize that maintaining the city's external image is the responsibility of every citizen, and the activity can appeal more people to contribute to improving the city's external image within their ability. It is also hoped that before the Chengdu Universiade is officially held in June 2022 and foreign athletes gather in Chengdu, the English translation of public signs in Chengdu can be greatly improved, so that Chengdu, a famous "Land of Abundance" in land and overseas, will leave a good impression on more people.

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