

On Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs in Hospitals from the Perspective of Communicative Translation

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Abstract: With the development of “the Belt and Road” initiative, a large number of bilingual public signs appear in public service places that represent the city images and embody the degree of globalization. From the current situation, the research on public signs in China focuses on tourism, transportation, catering and other aspects, and the research on the medical public signs is not deep and wide enough. The translation quality of public medical signs in hospitals is not good which not only impedes the normal medical treatment of foreign friends, but also reduces the hospital's images. According to the communicative translation theory of Peter Newmark, an outstanding English translation theorist, communicative translation theory is applicable to informative and vocative texts, and public signs belong to informative and vocative texts. Therefore, communicative translation theory is an appropriate theoretical choice for guiding public signs.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of international exchange and “the Belt and Road” initiative, China has strengthened the exchanges and cooperation with other countries. As medical technology of China is developing rapidly, the role of medical public signs is becoming more and more prominent. Therefore, the bilingual signs play a key role in public service places. Any ambiguity, misunderstanding or even misuse of public signs will result in bad influence.

A large number of medical public signs have appeared, which reflects China's medical technology is in line with the international standard. However, there are lots of mistakes in medical public signs' translation. The fundamental function of medical public signs is to provide convenience for the patients. But, lots of Chinese-English (C-E) public signs translation cannot give them the right guidance, or even make them more confused. Failing to realize the public signs' functions will negatively affects the city image.

Fortunately, many scholars are aware of these problems. They have made great efforts to change the situation. In order to improve the translation quality of medical public signs when there are only a few studies on medical public signs, this paper chooses the public signs of hospitals as the subject as a way to call for more public attention. By investigating the medical public signs in hospitals, this paper aims to find out the imperfect translation in medical public signs. More importantly, this paper gives a specific solution to those mistakes. Therefore, the proper and correct translation of medical public signs is able to guide the foreigners and strength the international images of China.

Medical public signs have their special meaning, because correct and proper medical public signs can provide clear guidance for patients in urgent situation. Therefore, the bilingual public signs in hospitals are important to patients who are from other countries.

2. Previous Research on Public Signs in Hospitals

Although the research on the translation of public signs has a long history in China, the definition and related knowledge is still vague until the end of last century. The first national public sign translation conference was held in Beijing in 2005 before the research of public sign translation

became more standardized. Since then, the research on translation of public signs has gradually become a hotspot in translation studies, attracting more and more scholar's attention and seeing a large number of research results (Zhang Haiyang and Wang Xiaojing). National standards issued in 2007 by our country is for the translation of the unified formula language, It is the right time that we standardized the Chinese-English translations of public signs under the guidance of the standard. Some research on special areas, such as medical areas, is beginning to gain increasing concern in recent years.

Many scholars and experts have analyzed the current situation of the translation of public signs and put forward some suggestions on incorrect and inappropriate translation. Meanwhile, they also combine the error analysis with the translation theory. Thanks to the great efforts of experts and scholars, medical public signs in China have made some progress.

3. Communicative Translation Theory

Communicative translation theory is a translation method or approach to translating the texts for the target readers. The translators aim to maintain the text's original meaning and make it work for the readers, rather than translate the texts word by word, so they need to break the limitation of literal meaning of words. Peter Newmark considers the communicative translation is a communicative process and emphasizes that translators must try to transform the source language culture into target language culture. When using communicative translation to translate public signs, the translation should be consistent with the target language culture and expression habits in both content and language. The key to judging the high quality of public signs' translation is whether the translated text can produce the effect that the original text wants to express in the target language culture.

The translator has a higher degree of freedom in interpreting translation to explain the original text, adjust the style, eliminate ambiguity, and even correct the original author's mistakes. Since the translator has to achieve a certain communicative purpose and has a specific target audience, the translation he produces will inevitably break the limitations of the original text.

3.1 Language Function and Text Typology

Peter Newmark put forward the text typology theory on the basis of Karl Bühler's functional theory of language. According to Karl Bühler's functional theory, Peter Newmark proposed three functions of language in his famous translation book *A Textbook of Translation*, namely, expressive function, informative function and vocative function.

3.1.1 Expressive Function

The core of the expressive function is the speaker and author. The core of the language expression function is that the speaker or author uses these words to express their feelings and does not consider the reader's reaction as language is a tool for expression and communication. Peter Newmark believes that expressive text is author-centered. Therefore, this kind of text includes the following types of materials:

Lyrics, short stories, novels, dramas, political speeches by authoritative figures and autobiography, prose, and personal correspondence. When these texts are a kind of catharsis of the author's personal emotions, it is an expression type text.

Translating expressive texts follow the principle of "author first". With the original author as the core, it is necessary to be faithful the original content expressed by the original author, and to be faithful to the original author's language style.

3.1.2 Informative Function

Typical informative texts involve encyclopedic knowledge, often in the forms such as textbooks, technical reports, newspaper or magazine articles, academic papers, memos or meeting minutes. Informative texts are often written in modern languages without the author's personal characteristics because they emphasize "authenticity". Therefore, when translating informational

texts, the principle of “authenticity first” should be followed. In the language application, the translator cannot use the original as the standard, but the reader’s language level as the standard, and strive to be easy to understand, and if necessary, the original text can be corrected. Compared with the expressive text, the translator has more freedom. For example, when the original expression is vague, confusing or inaccurate, the translator has the responsibility to modify it. In view of this, when translating information-based texts into external communication materials, it is possible to avoid the shackles of the original text structure, to disrupt the narrative order of the original text, and to enrich the original information in a free manner. Since many information materials are further sorted through translation, sometimes the translated text of the translator is better than the original text.

3.1.3 Vocative Function

Vocative text focuses on the readers or greeted people, which intend to call on readers to act, think, feel, or react according to the author’s intentions. It should be noted that the call to the audience is not an individual, but a readership. Vocative text includes propaganda, instruction, popular books (texts that are fun and educational). Translators should consider the linguistic and culture background of the source language and the pragmatic effect of the target language.

4. Problem Analysis

Public medical signs provide information to patients and other people by showing its informative function. In other cases, it helps to regulate people’s behavior, and exhibits its vocative function. It has no personal feelings attached, therefore it doesn’t have expressive function. A lot of translators did not grasp the informative and vocative characteristics when they translate the medical public signs, so the translation of public signs in hospital make the foreigners feel confused. However, there are a lot of such problems in the translation of public signs in hospitals that Linguistic problems and culture problems. And the Linguistic problems can be divided into three kinds of mistakes such as spelling error, misusing part of speech, mix use of medical terms.

The communicative theory emphasizes informative function, but the spelling errors hinder the foreigners’ understanding for the medical public signs. Because this kind of problems can make it difficult for the foreigners to understand the meaning, which violates the informative function of the communicative translation theory. The problem of spelling is often overlooked, but these small errors can reduce the images of a city or even a country. If the translator becomes more careful, this kind of small errors will be easily avoid.

The medical public signs should focus on the information translation and the content should be accurate. Misusing part of speech belongs to grammar mistake, which also violates the informative function of the communicative translation theory. The reason for this kind of problems is the carelessness, or irresponsibility of the translators. The public signs represent the development of a nation, so the translators should improve their responsibility to avoid some low-level mistakes. And the translation ability is another factor. The translators should improve their English and read books of translation theory.

The huge difference between Chinese and English makes readers accept of language differently. Because translators are influenced by their native language and local culture, they will unconsciously bring Chinese expression habits and ways of thinking into English translations during the translation process, leading to the emergency of public signs with strong Chinese thinking characteristics. The Chinglish violate the vocative function and the result of communicative translation.

These problems mentioned above should be given sufficient attention, the translators should be more careful to avoid such low-level mistakes as the omission of a word and grammar errors. Meanwhile, the translators must know the medical public signs is informative and vocative texts which is target readers-centered. As the translators ignore this principle and do not clear the communicative translation theory, the translation of medical public signs made the target readers confused. Another reason which caused these problems is that the leaders of hospitals and relevant

institutions do not pay enough attention to medical public signs. Therefore, the translators should have the awareness of the medical terms, English skills and translation theory of public signs. And the relevant institutions and the leaders of hospitals should attach importance to medical public signs and solve these problems immediately because these problems are important element in the future development of hospitals.

5. Suggestions

The communicative translation theory aims for the target readers. It is not allowed to have any incorrect public signs in medical institutions, which hinder the comprehension of public signs. In order to eliminate the mistakes in public signs, here are some suggestions.

Translators need to improve their skills. The translators need to consider the semantics, cultural difference and grammar in the translation process. They need to not only grasp the language skills, but also learn some medical knowledge. They can take professional training in translation and learn translation theory.

It is necessary to establish parallel corpus. With the development of the internet, machine-aided translation is normal. Developing parallel corpus in medical field can not only improve the quality of medical public signs, but also improve the translation efficiency. Bilingual parallel corpus can provide practical guidance for the development of medical public signs. Therefore, it is essential for medical institution to establish bilingual public signs in medical field.

It is important to establish evaluation and supervision institution. The imperfection of evaluation and supervision institution is another factor to affect the quality of public signs. The globalization of China has been accelerating in the past decades, but the attention of establishing evaluation and supervision institution has not been improved. Therefore, it is right time that we need to establish evaluation and supervision institutions. With the help of evaluation and supervision institutions, they can provide a channel such as websites and emails for people to feedback the errors they found in the public signs.

It is necessary for us to understand the differences between the Chinese and Western culture. Due to the influence of Chinese habits and cultural differences, Chinglish is one of the common problems. Therefore, the English translation of public signs in hospital must involve the characteristics of culture. The translators are able to give full consideration to the thinking and reading habits of the target readers, which can avoid pragmatic errors and unnecessary troubles for foreign patients.

6. Conclusion

With the development of globalization, the public signs play a crucial role in our society. We often find out improper and incorrect public signs in hospitals, which need to be corrected in time. Although experts and scholars try hard to study the translation methods of medical public signs, some translators have no capacity to solve these problems because they don't understand the translation theory, such as communicative translation theory, and let alone use the principle. Communicative translation requires target readers as the center, and the public signs belong to informative and vocative text. The wrong and improper translation will hinder the comprehension of public signs. In order to avoid these problems, the translators' skills, parallel corpus and evaluation and supervision institution are important and effective methods to resolve the problems.

As experts, translators and relevant medical institutions make great efforts, the medical public signs as a part of public signs have staged achievements and laid a solid foundation for further research. However, the breadth and depth of medical public signs research is not enough. Therefore, the relevant theories need to be consolidated.

Due to the limitations of time and the author's ability and the knowledge backgrounds, the mistakes are inevitable. Therefore, the paper just gives some inspiration and reference to the translation of medical public signs.

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