ISSN 1712-8358[Print] ISSN 1923-6700[Online] www.cscanada.net www.cscanada.org

A Public Signs Translation Assessment to Binzhou City of China From the Perspective of Dynamic Equivalence

CHENG Hu[a],[b],*

[a]School of Foreign Languages, Binzhou University, Binzhou, China. [b]Ph.D. Department of English Education, Chonbuk National University, Jeonju City, Republic of Korea.

Supported by(1)Scientific and Technological Development Project of Binzhou City (Policy guidance)(2015ZC0118);(2)Key Project of Social Science Planning in Binzhou (16-SKZC-7);(3)Education Reform Project of Binzhou University; (BYJYZD201501);(4)Key Art and Science Project of Shandong Culture Department (ZX2015091).

Received 21 June 2018, accepted 30 August 2018 Published online 26 September 2018

Abstract

Public signs are mainly used to convey certain information, attract the attention of tourists, and provide convenience for tourists. English translations of public signs in Binzhou City (mainly in Weji Ancient Village) reflect the cultural connotation and the level of internationalization of Binzhou city. However, the investigation report shows that there are quite a few problems in English translations of public signs in Binzhou, such as the lack of translation, redundant translation, improperly expressed and ambiguous words, and the lack of aesthetic feeling, which will mislead foreign visitors. English translations of the public signs in Binzhou should adopt correct translation principles, strategies and methods to improve the quality of English translations of public signs to help Binzhou city establish a fine city image and achieve the purpose of enhancing the competitiveness of Binzhou city. This paper takes Eugene Nida's "dynamic equivalence" translation theory as the principle and collects public signs in Binzhou city as the research object, aiming to find out the existing problems of English translations of public signs in tourist attractions in Binzhou city. The paper is based on the principles of "formal equivalence", "meaning equivalence" and "style equivalence" in Eugene Nida's dynamic equivalence theory and proposes corresponding solutions so as to

improve the quality of English translations of public signs and provide references for tourist attractions, which will improve internationalization of Binzhou city and make reference to the international image of China.

Key words: Public signs; Translation dynamic equivalence theory

Cheng, H. (2018). A Public Signs Translation Assessment to Binzhou City of China from the Perspective of Dynamic Equivalence. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 14(3), 6-13. Available from: http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/10569 DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/10569

INTRODUCTION

Along with China's growing economic strength and advancing globalization, China's contacts with the world have become frequent in various fields. There are increasing foreign visitors coming to China, and English has become an indispensable tool to communicate with others in daily life. English translations of public signs can be seen everywhere in Binzhou city, especially in tourist attractions. The correct English translation of public signs is an "image ambassador" that shows social progress, urban construction and national cultures to foreign visitors. A public sign is a symbol of the social civilization, it also reflects the cultural connotation and moral cultivation of a social group (Dai & Lu, 2015, p. 39). For foreign tourists coming to China, the public sign in tourist attractions is the most convenient guidepost and information carrier. However, there are quite a few mistakes in English translations of public signs in tourist attractions in Binzhou city especially in Weji Ancient Village. These incorrect and non-standard translations of public signs have seriously damaged China's external image and brought many troubles and inconvenience to foreign tourists. Public signs in tourist attractions in Binzhou such as in Weji Ancient Village need more

^{*}Corresponding author.

accurate and appropriate English translations. Correct English translations of public signs in tourist attractions can convey the local styles and cultural values of tourist attractions, and definitely convey the cultural connotation inherited from tourist attractions to foreign visitors, it can also inherit the excellent Chinese traditional culture and its essence, which enable Binzhou city to actively adapt to the modernization of tourist attractions. The trend of globalization and informatization creates an open platform for the protection and motivation of the traditional villages and the display spaces of tourist attractions (Fang, 2010, p. 45). Therefore, it is particularly important to make a deep analysis and research on the current situation of English translations of public signs in tourist attractions, and find out the problems so as to put forward countermeasures to improve the quality of translation of public signs in tourist attractions.

1. OVERVIEW OF TRANSLATION OF PUBLIC SIGNS

1.1 Definition of Public Signs

According to Newmark Peter (1981), public signs refer to lettered boards or other public displays placed on or before a building, room, shop or office to convey certain information, capture individuals' attention, and provide convenience for the public. Jin Huikang (2017) claimed that public signs refer to a special type of writing which usually appears in public places to prompt people and arouse their attention (p. 57). It is the most common practical language in daily life, and a special style that is presented to the public in order to achieve certain communicative purposes. To be specific, Pi Demin (2010) held that as an important window for foreign tourists to get familiar with China, the public sign is a requisite part of social language and an unique characteristic to show cultural connotation, it conveys guidance, reminding and warnings to individuals (p. 132). In some sense, the public sign is an important mark of social civilization and advancement of human society and it also reflects the cultural connotation, moral cultivation and spiritual outlook of a social group.

1.2 Functions of Public Signs

The propose of setting public signs is to satisfy the behavioral and psychological needs for tourists and the general public. In practical applications, the public signs have two main functions: guiding, reminding function and compelling, warning function.

Guiding and reminding public signs are mostly used in serving the public who can know the location where they are and intention act based on the reference information provided by the directive public signs. This type of public signs does not convey direct mandatory information. The public can choose whether to do or not according to the actual surroundings, and purposefully obtain the information content provided by the guiding and public signs. For example, KEEP RIGHT; PLEASE QUEUE OTHER SIDE; THESE SEATS ARE APPRECIATED BY THE OLD AND INFIRM.

Compelling and warning public signs play the role of instructional functions. The purpose of conveying information is to direct the public's conducts (Shu, 2010, p. 57). This kind of public signs has a clear and obligatory emotional factor. Sentence structures mostly use imperative sentences, and the public are not allowed to do some actions instead of making responses according to the required instructions in the context of the style of language. For instance, KEEP OFF THE GRASS; NO SMOKING; PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB.

1.3 Importance of Translation of Public Signs in Tourist Attractions

Due to the transformation of society, the public sign has become a part of our lives and it has become a window for us to show our cultures to other countries. Standard and correct English translations of the public signs can convey accurate information and achieve the effective dissemination of cultures so as to reflect the taste of a city and a country. For foreigners coming to China, the role of English public signs is obvious for the reason that it is the most convenient signpost and information carrier.

With the enhancement of China's international status, the exchanges between China and other countries in economy, culture and other aspects are increasing, and the amount of foreign tourists and scholars visiting to China has been increasing every year. Therefore, the double-language public sign in Chinese and English is playing an increasingly significant role for directing foreign visitors. The public signs in tourist attractions are mainly used to convey certain information and provide convenience for foreign tourists (Su, 2015, p. 147). Chinese cities need more accurate and appropriate English public signs.

The correct English translations of public signs in tourist attractions can show the correct values and styles of Chinese villages' traditional architectures to foreign tourists, correctly convey the cultural image carried by tourist attractions, and enable them to actively adapt to the trend of modernization, internationalization, and informatization. Additionally, Wu Yongzhi (2012) mentioned that correct translations of public signs in tourist attractions can reduce cultural misunderstandings between Chinese and foreign cultures, and the improvement of English translations of public signs in tourist attractions can provide a reference for future translation of public signs in tourist attractions, which can strengthen the exchanges and cooperation between China and foreign countries, and improve the international image of China (p. 95).

1.4 Related Studies on Translation of Public signs

The public sign has become a part of our lives and it has become a window for us to show our cultural values to foreign visitors. Standard and correct translation of public signs can convey accurate information, reflect the tastes and characteristics of a city and country. As Yang Hongying (2011) pointed out, for foreigners visiting to China for the first time, the public signs in the tourist attractions bring them an lot of convenience, but erroneous translations of public signs not only confuse foreigners, but also bring misunderstandings and even damage China's image (p. 65).

The current situation of English translations of public signs in tourist attractions in various parts of China is not optimistic. Many translation agencies just want to meet the needs of internationalization, and feel that they only need bilingual public signs, therefore, they just directly translate online or use a dictionary to translate literally regardless of the social connotation and cultures in public signs. Eugene A. Nida (2001) held that original text should first be translated in that different languages represent different connotations, translators must change the the way of language expression to improve the quality of translation.

As the public sign in tourist attractions is the important information carrier in the society, the quality of translation cannot be overlooked. Translation of public signs in tourist attractions should be guided by Eugene Nida's "dynamic equivalence" translation theory. During the process of translating public signs in tourist attractions, the translators should pay attention to principles of accuracy, conciseness, appropriate diction and aesthetics so as to achieve the application of dynamic equivalence theory.

2. INTRODUCTION OF DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE THEORY

2.1 Concept of Dynamic Equivalence Theory

In 1969, Eugene A. Nida, the American linguist and translator proposed the dynamic equivalence theory, which requires that the target reader of a translation can make the same response as the original reader. Nida believed that dynamic equivalence, that is, from the semantics to the styles, using the natural and closest equivalence to reproduce the information of the original language. Dynamic equivalence contains three levels: formal equivalence, meaning equivalence and style equivalence. The information conveyed by the translation includes both surface vocabulary information and profound cultural connotation.

One of the basic points of Nida's translation theory is receptor orientation. Translation is mostly about ensuring that the receptors understand the original information accurately. He believes that the service target of translation is the reader or the receptor of the language. To judge the quality of the translation, we must see how readers react to the translation. The translation should meet the language habits and cultural expectations of the reader of the target language and achieve "the most natural and closest equivalence". The equivalence in this theory is not equivalence in linguistic form but functional equivalence at the level of semantic communication (Verschueren Jef, 2010). This kind of equivalence is centered on readers of the target language, which requires the translation to be acceptable and in accordance with the standards of translation and the reading habits of target readers. At the same time, this kind of equivalence is not absolute, but it is the "closest" dynamic equivalence.

Nida's contribution to the dynamic equivalence translation theory is that he is against traditional translation theories and liberates translation from the shackles of literal translation and being obsessed with the special phenomenon of language translation. Dynamic equivalence theory lays emphasis on the function of translation, which guarantees the receptors to understand the original information accurately and correctly. Nida insists that the information itself is of the utmost importance in the communication activities, the form in which information is transmitted is merely in the second place. In Nida's opinion, translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language.

2.2 Main Principles of Dynamic Equivalence Theory

Dynamic equivalence, that is, from semantics to styles, using the closest and natural equivalence to reproduce the information of the original language, including formal equivalence, meaning equivalence and style equivalence. The information conveyed by the translation includes both surface vocabulary information and profound cultural connotation, and there is a brief introduction about three principles of dynamic equivalence.

2.2.1 Formal Equivalence

Formal equivalence is the minimum standard for translation, it emphasizes word-to-word, sentence-to-sentence and concept-to-concept equivalence in translation so that the target text can be completely equivalent to the original text in terms of word formation and the word order. If the lexical meaning, syntactic structure and stylistic style are the same as or similar to the style of translated version, the translation method should adopt literal translation to achieve equivalence between the original text and the target language. This formal equivalence principle can be used when translating some simple phrases or sentences, the translated language and the source language are basically equal in form, and the translation should be accurate and concise (Baker Mona, 2000).

2.2.2 Meaning Equivalence

Meaning equivalence is the fundamental requirement of translation, and it is the fundamental guarantee for accurately conveying information, and it plays a central role in translation. Meaning equivalence means that the meaning of the original language is conveyed through the target language, which not only requires the translator to correctly understand and accurately translate the meaning of the original language but requires that the target language must conform to the cultural background and language habits of the reader (Nord Christiane, 2001). If the original language and target language differ greatly in terms of expressing the same lexical meaning, syntactic structure and stylistic style, the translation method adopted should be free translation so as to realize equivalence between the source language and the target language. Free translation can highlight the content of meaning and style of utterance, misrepresent the meaning of the original text to a lesser extent, which can avoid the misunderstandings.

2.2.3 Style Equivalence

Style equivalence is the highest level of translation equivalence theory and the most difficult one to achieve. The highest level of equivalence is that the target reader should be able to understand and appreciate the target text in the same way as the original reader, which is just the ideal state pursued by translators. Not only should translators have deep comprehension of the source text, but they must also have a strong aesthetic and language skills. Since China and foreign countries have their own historical and cultural backgrounds, there are differences in individuals' ways of thinking and aesthetic habits, therefore, in the process of translating, translators must fully take the western culture into consideration so as to achieve the requirements of style equivalence (Zhang, 2016, p. 30).

3. PROBLEMS ON TRANSLATION OF PUBLIC SIGNS IN WEIJI ANCIENT VILLAG OF BINZHOU CITY

The paper selects Weiji Ancient Village, a famous tourist attraction in Binzhou City, to show the ancient architectural style of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Weiji Ancient VillageIt is located at Tongji Road, Weji Town, Huimin County, Binzhou City, Shandong Province. There are many attractive places in Weji Ancient Village such as the traditional snack streets, ancient architectures with unique characteristics and handicrafts districts.

It attracts a large number of visitors from home and abroad every year. In order to show the degree of development of Binzhou's tourism culture and better accommodate foreign tourists, Weji Ancient Village adopts English translations of public signs, but there exists many translation problems of public signs in Weji Ancient Village, such as the lack of translation and redundant translation, improperly expressed and ambiguous words and the lack of aesthetic feeling etc. From the perspective of Nida's dynamic equivalence theory, there are three main problems in the translation of public signs in Weji Ancient Village.

3.1 Translation of Non-Equivalence in Form

According to Nida's dynamic equivalence theory, formal equivalence is also called lexical equivalence, which is the most basic principle of dynamic equivalence and the minimal standard for translation. In the course of the process of researching English translations of the public signs in Weji Ancient Village, the author finds that there are many unequal English translations in the form of public signs. They are the lack of translation and redundant translation.

3.1.1 The Lack of Translation

In Weji Ancient Village, there are a lot of public signs without English translations. The lack of translation does not follow the formal equivalence, which affects the spread of cultural images and is not conducive to the exchange of Chinese and foreign cultures. For example, there is no corresponding English translations for "滨州 民间剪纸", "惠民泥塑", "惠民水板画"and "博兴吕剧". The corresponding translations should be as following:

Table 1 Corresponding Translations of Cultures in Binzhou City

滨州民间剪纸	Binzhou Folk Paper-cutting	
惠民泥塑	Huimin Clay Sculpture	_
惠民木板画	Huimin Xylpgraph	
博兴吕剧	Lu Opera in Boxing	

3.1.2 Redundant Translation

One of the most important features of public signs is "simplicity". The redundant translations will weaken the effectiveness of public signs. In Weji Ancient Village, public signs such as "古镇金街","咨询台", "文秘"and the tourists, but their corresponding translations "Gold street gold street, ancient town", "Information desk", "Secretarial secretary" and "Entrance gate" are all redundant expressions. When foreign visitors read these redundant English translations, they are likely to ask questions like "Do the Chinese all adopt such a redundant structure when identifying public signs?" If Chinese and foreign visitors have different understandings of the same public signs that printed in both English and Chinese, this kind of translation will violate Nida's formal equivalence theory.



Figure 1 Gold Street Ancient Town

3.2 Translation of Non-Equivalence in Meaning

In dynamic equivalence theory, Nida held that meaning equivalence is the most important translation principle. In the process of researching the English translations of public signs in Weji Ancient Village, the author finds that there are translation problems of non-equivalence in meaning.

Ambiguity is a common problem in translation. After language conversion with ambiguity, foreigners are easy to understand two versions. For instance, the public sign"导游咨询" is translated into "The tour guide consulting",

which is unclear to provide directive information and services whether for tourists or guiders. Actually, it should be translated into "Guide Service". Similarly, the public sign "游客止步" in Weji Ancient Village is translated into "Tourists stop", and it should be translated into "Staff only". The public sign "非物质文化遗产街区" is translated into "Non material cultural heritage block", which ignores the equivalence in meaning and does not take the habit of translation into account. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to be translated into "The Intangible Cultural Heritage Block".



Figure 2 Guide Service



Figure 3
The Intangible Cultural Heritage Block

3.3 Translation of Non-Equivalence in Style

Style equivalence is the highest level of translation equivalence theory. There are high demands for the translator's capabilities. Not only should translators have deep understandings of the source materials of translation, but translators must have strong aesthetic and language skills.

The different translations between Chinese and English languages not only reflect different cultures, but also reflect different ways of thinking in different countries. The expression of Chinese public signs is straightforward, and a large number of imperative sentences such as "禁止吸烟" and "禁止入内" are used in the translation of public signs.

"Don't...", this kind of sentence structure applies the tone of English translations is imperative and does not conform to the English idiomatic expressions. Because the English language emphasizes the expression of indirect euphemism, and pays more attention to politeness principles, and sometimes it lacks the sense of humor. The purpose of the utterance can be expressed indirectly through another kind of speech act without using overly rigid behavior. One of the most common examples is "禁 止吸烟", it is generally translated into "No smoking" in China, but the standard translation is "Thank you for not smoking". The tourists from foreign countries will be pleased and satisfied if we begin to use standard translations with equivalence in style in public signs.

4. STRATEGIES ON TRANSLATION OF PUBLIC SIGNS IN WEJI ANCIENT VILLAGE

Equivalence is based on commonness between different languages, dynamic equivalence emphasizes equivalence between the original text and the response of the readers, in other words, the dynamic relationship should be basically the same as the relationship between the original recipient and the information (Pi Demin, 2010, p. 134). The dynamic equivalence translation requires the translation to be completely smooth and natural and tries to connect the recipients with the behavioral patterns existing in the cultural environment. It does not require the recipient to first understand the cultural background of the original language before they can get the information. The dynamic equivalence theory attaches great importance to the agreement between the target language and the source language and plays a strong guiding role in translation practice.

4.1 Formal Equivalence Principle

Eugene Nida's dynamic equivalence theory points out that translation must pay attention to equivalence in form, while formal equivalence must meet the requirements of accuracy and conciseness (Hatim, 2001). In a 1981 article,

Newmark also pointed out that semantic translation and communicative translation have achieved two major goals of translation: accuracy and conciseness. Therefore, the translation method should be literal translation so as to make the target text more accurate and more concise. Translators should use keywords and core vocabularies rather than redundant words in the English translations of public signs, and articles and pronouns can all be omitted, such as the public sign "魏集古村落", it can be directly translated into "Weji Ancient Village", the accurate and concise translations are more powerful and appealing.

The characteristics of the public signs in tourist attractions have not contained the obscure language and complicated long sentences, on the contrary, translation should be concise and ensure the completeness of context. The public sign "欢迎再来" in the exit of Weji Ancient Village is translated into "Welcome you again". In fact, it only needs to be translated into "Welcome". In Weji Ancient Villages, original translation of the public sign "创一流服务迎四海嘉宾" is translated into "First class service from all over the world with the firstclass service". Although the word-to-word translation guarantees the full meaning of the public signs, its translation is redundant and does not embody the core meaning. In contrast, the translation "First class service to all guests" guarantees both the integrity of the meaning and the simplicity of the form, which not only improves the effectiveness of translation but also helps tourists save time to get information.

4.2 Meaning Equivalence Principle

Nida advocates that translation should put meaning in the first place, and some changes in the formal structure are not only reasonable, but may be ideal. This is similar to the point of view "similarity in spirit rather than in form" in the traditional translation criterion of China. The translation of introduction about culture and history of Binzhou city has problems with long sentences, loose structure and improper use of words. Therefore, literal translation in most cases is not in line with the standards and logical in Chinese, which will seriously affect the quality of translation and mislead foreign tourists. For these improper words and sentences, translation can be guided by dynamic equivalence theory.

The English translation of public signs in Weji Ancient Village must be combined with specific conditions, and the traditional translation criterion cannot be used in translating public signs. Translation must be combined with the actual context. In Weji Ancient Villages, tourists often find that the public sign "小心落水" has been translated into "Fall into water carefully." This kind of translation is not only incorrect, but also completely detached from the actual context and seriously undermines China's international image. Actually, it only needs to be translated into "Be careful of water". Similarly, public signs such as "残疾人电梯" should be accurately

translated into "Elevator for the disabled", rather than "Disabled person elevator".

Similarly, the introduction of cultures in Binzhou city should adopt free translation and add some details to make foreign visitors understand Binzhou city well.

ST: 滨州是黄河文化和齐文化的发祥地之一,早在新石器时代就有人类繁衍生息,五代始置滨州,以濒临渤海而得名。生活在这片沃土上的人民群众,在长期的劳动实践中,用他们的勤劳和智慧创造了丰富多彩的民俗文化。明清以来的大规模移民使外来文化与土著文化碰撞与交融,孕育出独具特色、异彩纷呈的非物质文化遗产。

TT: Binzhou, founded in the Five Dynasties, is famous for being close to Bohai, and it is one of the birthplaces of the Yellow River culture and Qi culture, people resided here from the Neolithic. The people who live in this fertile land create colorful folk cultures with diligence and wisdom in the long term of practice. Massive immigration from the Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty blended the foreign culture with the indigenous cultures, which cultivates distinctive and colorful intangible cultural heritage.

ST:发源于博兴的吕剧、草柳编、惠民的胡集书会、泥塑、木版年画及滨州民间剪纸、邹平芯子、沾化渔鼓戏、阳信秧歌具有深厚的乡土气息,独具艺术风格。这些珍贵的非物质文化遗产是滨州悠久历史文化的重要载体,凝聚着历代滨州人民的聪明和智慧,体现出追求美好生活的倔强精神和绵绵温情,是劳动人民创造力的重要见证。

TT: Lu Opera and Wickerwork were both stemmed from Boxing county, Hiji Book Club, Clay Sculpture, New Year Wood Picture in Huimin county and Folk Paper-cutting, Acrobatics named Xinzi in Zouping county, Yugu Opera in Zhanhua County, Yangko in Yangxin county all have deep feelings of native lands and artistic styles. Those precious intangible cultural heritages are the important carrier of long history and culture of Binzhou city, which represents the wisdom and intelligence of Binzhou citizens and shows indomitable spirits and tender feelings of pursuing delight life, and it witnesses the creativity of working people.

ST:滨州民间剪纸是当地人民劳动之余,为反映生活,抒发胸意所创造的艺术表现形式。与当地生产生活,民俗活动息息相关,起源至晚可追溯到500年前"唐赛儿剪制刀马人物"的记载。

TT: Binzhou folk paper-cutting is a form of artistic expression created by local people during spare time to reflect real life and express their emotions. It is closely related to the local production of knife and horse figures created by Tang Saier 500 years ago.

In this way, the translation is closer to the English idiomatic expression without too much consideration of the linguistic equivalence in form between the target text and the original text. The English readers will have the same reactions as the original readers, it is also the main idea of realization of the dynamic equivalence proposed by Nida, which places the center on the reader's response to the target text, and emphasize the role of the target text on the target reader. Therefore, translators must dare to break the formal bondage between different languages and pursue meaning equivalence and a common reading experience between the original reader and the target reader.

4.3 Style Equivalence Principle

Style equivalence is the highest level of translation equivalence theory, in a certain sense, style equivalence can be understood that there are obvious differences in the culture, history and customs of various ethnic groups. Therefore, the language habits of target text should be followed when translating public signs. In other words, translators should adopt the most popular and closest expressions to make the target reader understand the history, culture and religion well. In the process of translation, the translator should keep the rhythmic beauty of the original text on the basis of reproducing the meaning of the original text to the greatest extent, and make the translation with more senses of humor and more cultural connotation.

Nida pointed that it is even more important to become familiar with two cultures than to master two languages for a truly successful translation. On the basis of following the above principles, translation of public signs in tourist attractions can take into account aesthetic principle. Public sign can not only serve as a kind of guidance and warning, but also give people warm and comfortable feelings, such as, the public sign in Weji Ancient Village "Take nothing but rubbish, leave nothing but memory" (除 了垃圾什么都不要带走,除了记忆什么都不要留下). One of the public signs is "来魏集,爱魏集,保护环 境靠大家", and there is an English translation " Come to Weji, love Weji, protect Weji depending on everyone." in Weji Ancient Village. Foreign tourists will feel confused with this word-to-word translation and cannot effectively receive the information conveyed by the public sign. In fact, the translation of the public sign just wants tourists to protect the environment of Weji Ancient Villages, and the information of loving Weji is actually the same as environmental protection of Weji, so translation can be appropriately deleted. In order to reproduce the rhythmic beauty of the original text as much as possible, the public sign can be translated into "Love Weji, and you will have a lovely Weji." The words "love" and "lovely" in the sentence belong to the same root, which formed a corresponding relation, leaving target readers with a sense of humour and a deep impression. After considering the style equivalence principle with characteristics of aesthetics, the effective transmission of information can be achieved, which will achieve an excellent communication with foreign visitors and help us to convey China's cultural image better.

CONCLUSION

A public sign in tourist attractions stands for the level of local tourism culture, and it's translation is also very important to convey certain information, attract the attention of tourists, and provide convenience for foreign tourists. The correct English translations of public signs

in Binzhou city can not only help enhance its international prestige, but also convey the cultural connotation of tourist attractions. Nevertheless, as Chinese and English belong to different language families, there are many problems in the English translations of public signs in Binzhou city, such as the lack of translation, redundant translation, incorrect, improperly expressed words, and the lack of aesthetic feelings, which will mislead foreign visitors.

Translation of public signs in tourist attractions should be guided by Eugene A, Nida's "dynamic equivalence" translation theory, which includes formal equivalence, meaning equivalence and style equivalence. The translation should meet the language habits and cultural expectations of the target language reader and achieve "the most natural and closest equivalence". The paper introduces dynamic equivalence theory into the translation of public signs in tourist attractions. For different characteristics of the Chinese public signs, translation should adopt different strategies and methods so as to create an excellent international language environment, promote the development of local tourism, provide a reference for future tourists and improve the image of Binzhou city.

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