

## The Application of Peter Newmark's Theory in Translating the Public Signs in the Scenic Spots

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### Abstract

This paper mainly focuses on the research of Peter Newmark's theory, namely the communicative approach and the semantic approach in translating the public signs in the scenic spots. Public signs were collected around the West Lake. Then I classify the public signs to which approach could apply. Under the principle of either approach, through the careful study of the public signs, I re-translate these public signs. The classification would increase the feasibility of the translation. In the process of translation, some problems are founded, such as spelling mistakes. The two theories have their advantages, so we can combine them when we put them into practice.

**Key words:** Communicative approach; Semantic approach; Public signs; Classification

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Research Background

As we all know, the world is getting smaller and smaller in term of transportation. The foreigners are eager to see the mysterious country China, which has a five-thousand-year history and is full of scenic spots. Hang Zhou is famous for its beautiful scenery, especially West

Lake, which features a variety of stories. Since 1990s, American theorist Laurence Venuti initially applied the "domestication" and "foreignization" to translate the public signs (Xie, 2008). However, the foreign scholars didn't do much to the public signs. Recently, with the development of the travel industry and the growing reputation of China, Foreigners are eager to see what's about China. China as a nation with a long history has many amazing things for the foreigner. The public sign is the guide for the foreigner. Chinese scholars and students are engaged in translating the public signs. There are many web sites like (<http://www.bjenglish.net.cn>) etc. This is the first public web site for the ordinary people to participate in. But the public sign translation has different languages and situations. Styles vary. It is hard for us to have the same standard for the translation. By the way, the public sign translation has its sheer flexibility.

#### Significance and Aims of the Present Study

Reading public signs is an important way for foreigners to know the history of the scenic spots and stories. The foreigners want to know more about the history of the scenic spots. As a result, the Public Signs play an important role in helping the foreigners<sup>1</sup> from English-speaking country as a guide. Inspired by Peter Newmark's Communicative approach and semantic approach, I applied this theory into studying the public signs around West Lake. Under the guideline of this theories, the English counterpart could be simpler, clearer and more effective for foreigners to understand. I hope my research would give foreigners from English-speaking country some help.

#### Structure of the Study

The public signs would be more understandable for the foreigners from English-speaking country. The chapter one is an introduction and the chapter two is the literature

<sup>1</sup> The foreigner refers to those come from English-speaking country.

review of public sign translation. The chapter three: I classified the courses and chose the corresponding approach according to the nature of the course and the function of the course, the next step is to re-classify the discourses more carefully and then discuss them. The following step is to point out the problems and limitations in the Chapter four.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 The Previous Study

#### 1.1.1 Professor ChenGang's Translation

My study field is the public sign of the scenic spot in the range of West Lake and some other scenic spots. Professor ChenGang is an expert in translating Hangzhou, especially in translating West Lake. He not only translates its fascinating stories and poems, but also its people. Sometimes the public signs are the titles of his articles, it also will give me lots of inspirations. To be honest, the public sign translation is not the main product. In his book *NEW GREATER HANGZHOU A NEW GUIDE*, he translates the Traditional "Top Ten" as follows:

Spring Dawn at Su Causeway (苏堤春晓)

Breeze-ruffled loutus at Quyuan Garden (曲院风荷)

These all the titles of his articles are all the public signs of the scenic spots which engraved in the stone. I don't know what approach he uses to translate the these titles, in his *旅游翻译和涉外导游*, he use many methods to adjust the translation and the author himself also likes Peter Newmark's theory very much. I will find some valuable things in the book. There are three postgraduates have their opinions on the public signs.

#### 1.1.2 The Cross-Cultural Perspective Merits and Demerits

Qu Qianqian from Shaanxi Normal University studies the public signs from the cross-cultural translation perspective. In her thesis *A Study on English Translation of Public Signs From a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, the main idea is that the process of translation is not simply the language but more important is the culture. He cites the example as follows: A dog is "man's best friend in the eyes of the Westerners while the evil thing in the eyes of the Chinese." (Qu, 2007, p.30) When we do translation, the culture shares the priority. The author implied Vermeer's theory to translate the public signs. Its way is to approach the foreign culture. It will gear to the foreigner's taste and make them understand more easily and naturally. But it has its own limitation: First: There can not be all the cultural equivalences in the two languages and sometimes the culture is non-translator. Second: The approach of the foreigner's will lose the essence of Chinese culture. This will reduce the level of communication and appreciation. The foreigners want to see the different aspects of the target culture.

#### 1.1.3 The Functionalist Perspective Merits and Demerits

Wang Nan from Tianjing Normal University studies the public signs from the functionalist perspective. In his thesis *C-E Translation of Public Signs from the Perspective of Functionalist Approaches*, she translates the public signs based on the study of their functions. For example: Wet Paint (油漆未干) Caution: Wet Floor (小心地滑), Sold out (已售完), No Vacancies (无空位) (Wang, 2008, p. 8&11). Above all these, you can see the first example Wet Paint, the author translates 油漆未干, I think we can add something as 请别坐. All those show the function that you should do something or you should not do something. Another example is Ticket Only (凭票入场), this shows the regulatory function. This gives me lots of inspirations. The public signs can be classified by the functions. But it also has demerits: First: This method will be effective in the range of the functional sentences only conveys that you should or you should not do in the expense of losing lots of meaning. Second: This method is effective of particular public signs, especially for the functional public signs.

#### 1.1.4 The Relevance Perspective Merits and Demerits

Li Jiahui from Dongbei Normal University studies the public sign in the Relevance and adaptation perspective, she attempts to use this method for reducing the Errors and related information. In her thesis *Errors Analysis on the Translation of Public Signs from Perspective of Relevance and Adaptation Theories*, she states the Relevance theory as the translator should reduce the information that the environment which has implied. Let's see his example: The situation in the railway station, the 小件寄存 (Left Baggage) (Li, 2008, p.6;25) which reduces the information that the environment has implied. Because in that environment, there are referential signs inmate something that you need not say something. The only thing you want to do is to translate the uncovered meaning. This theory depends on the guide of the translator and the familiarity of the environment of the readers. This theory's shining point is that the translation will be simpler without any unnecessary information. But it also has some disadvantages: First: The implied meaning is hard for the translators to control in the virtues of the diversity of the readers. Second: The implied meaning that involving many factors from readers to translators.

### 1.2 The Reasons for Why I Choose Peter Newmark's Theory

Peter Newmark's theory includes two parts: one is communicative approach and the other is the semantic approach. Communicative approach focuses on effect and function of the translation, while semantic approach focuses on the style and rhetoric of the translation. The reasons as follows: The first one: Compared with the previous ones, each of them focus on the certain

point. When we use Peter Newmark's theory, we can also consider these factors. The second one: The Peter Newmark's theory is easy to use because it has every step to achieve the goal, which like to solve a math problem.

## 2. THE THEORIES AND APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH AND SEMANTIC APPROACH

### 2.1 The Definition of Public Signs

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, a sign is "a piece of paper, metal etc. in a public place with words or drawings on it that gives people information, warn them not to do something etc. e.g., a round sign, a no-smoking sign." According to Modern Chinese Dictionary, the public signs are those which use written words to express something. According to [www.e-signs.info](http://www.e-signs.info)<sup>2</sup>, the website is a formal website of public signs. The definition of the public signs has wider meaning than the above all. The words in the public places are all the research objects of this area, including sign, plaque, notice, bulletin, poster, advertisement for public interests, information, guide, direction, instruction and introduction etc, the short is only one sentence and even a word (exit, entrance). Compared with the public signs all above, my research is into the realms of the definition from [www.e-signs.info](http://www.e-signs.info).

### 2.2 The Corresponding Methods Based on Classification of Discourses

In Peter Newmark's book, he pointed out that there are three main factors that determine the tendency of the translation. Type of the text is one of the main factors. In his book *Approach to Translation*, he classified the types as follows: expressive discourse, informative discourse and vocative discourse. The expressive discourse refers to literature and authoritative text (Newmark, 2006, p.15). The informative discourse refers to scientific and technical reports and text book, the vocative discourse refers to Polemical writing, publicity, notice, laws and regulations, propaganda, popular literature, persuasive and imperative target language, etc. In the above discussion, we can clearly see that expressive discourse falls into category of semantic approach. The reason is that it should translate not only all the information of the text but also the style and rhetoric devices of the text. While the informative discourse and vocative discourse belongs to use the communicative approach. They focus on mainly the consequence of the translation and the action they will perform when they see the translation. In the following, we will discuss each of them respectively and examples are cited. We can attain more clear information in linguistic book. The use of the

term speech act covers "action" such as "requesting", "commanding", "questioning" and "informing" (Yule, 2007, p.9;132). The effect is one of these functions.

### 2.3 Informative Discourse

The informative discourse from the perspective of Peter Newmark can be those related something about information. sign, plaque, notice, bulletin, poster, advertisement for public interests, information, guide, direction, instruction and introduction etc The public signs which have a informative function include signs of introduction, names of scenic spots, signs for direction and signs for demonstration.

#### 2.3.1 Signs of Introduction

Near the gate of the Linyin temple, there is an introduction of the Linyin temple. The introduction of the Linyin Temple is a typical example of public signs which have informative function; Ji Gong is a cultural symbol. The English version: On mentioning Peak flying from afar, one may often hear many beautiful legends, such as the stone bed, hat and fingerprint of the monk Ji Gong, Three-life stone, etc. The foreigners know nothing about Monk Ji Gong. What is he? His bed and hat has anything special or unique. The translation means that the stone has three lives, so the interpretation of this is wrong. My suggestion is that we can translate it as longevity stone. To sum up, the above translation will be difficult for the foreigners to understand.

#### 2.3.2 Names of Scenic Spots

Reading the names of scenic spots falls into the category of informative discourse. The English version: FUJINGYUAN and another version: Fujing Garden. The same Chinese "园" has two different translation methods. Translating "园" (Yuan) into a garden favored by foreigners of English-speaking country while translating "园" (Yuan) into a "yuan" is just for the sake of my own country. Taking communicative approach into consideration, I think another English version: ZHUSUYUAN should translate as Zhusu Garden. The name should be constant from head to the end.

飞来峰造像 (stone carvings at peak flying from afar)

灵隐寺 (Linyin temple)

理公塔 (Li Gong Pagoda)

西泠印社 (Xiling Seal-engraving society)

The translation 飞来峰造像 (stone carvings at peak flying from afar) confuses the foreigners from English-speaking country a lot, and they can not understand what it means. One of them told me that the translation is like a poem, but he does not know the real meaning. The other translations are acceptable. Many names don't have the equivalence of these names in English. So the translator uses transliteration to translate like Linyin, Ligong, Xiling. However, when we apply the communicative approach to

<sup>2</sup> 汉英公示语站.

translate, we should think it before leap. The application of the communicative approach is to invite people to visit this place. The Chinese titles will give Chinese not only the names, but also a sense of beauty. Linyin Temple especially Linyin, the two words in Chinese has a blur and beautiful meaning. It is extremely hard for someone to translate plus LiGong tower especially Ligong, the pronunciation of LiGong for foreigners is just a pronunciation of Li Gong, whereas the Chinese is heard, it will arouse many holy things in the deep heart-justice and fair. I mean the name implied something attractive for Chinese, but it will eliminate all the meaning for the foreigners if you only translate the Pronunciation. So I will suggest that we should translate the most attractive meanings, namely the name-implied things. "Liyin temple" may be translated into A paradise for the pilgrims: "ligong tower" may be translated into loyal place. I have photographed the signs of most famous scenic spots.

Orioles Singing in the Willows (柳浪闻莺)

Viewing Fish at Flower Pond (花港观鱼)

I have been to the West Lake many times and meet the foreigner in the Viewing fish at Flower Pond. I take this chance to ask him to air his opinion on the translation of the introduction of viewing fish at Flower Pond. He said that it's OK. "But it.....he seems to have some questions when he takes a glance of the pond. What does flower pond mean? Maybe it is winter now. There are not many flowers there or the shape of the pond is flower-like. He added that the translation is understandable." This gives me a lot of inspirations to make the translation as easy to understand as possible. Translation is so complex involving many factors, people varying. And another foreigner said that he likes the poetic sense of the translation, but for him, the available translation is Dear, Lake.

湖上酒店 (Lakeside Dining house)

隱楼 (The In)

The most doubtful question of Lakeside Dining house is to translate *jiudian* as house. According to Advanced learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, "House" (in compound) "steakhouse" can be used. While a restaurant is a place where you can buy and eat a meal, so it is less adventurous to translate it as a restaurant. "隱楼" (Yinlou) were translated as The In. When I read this translation, I am not sure that it has the meaning of a building. According to Advanced learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, "In" (noun) the ins and outs (of sth) all the details, especially the complicated and difficult ones. So the in has not the meaning of a building. The first explanation: "Inn" noun (old-fashioned, BrE) a pub, usually in the country and often one where people can stay the night. The second one: used in the names of many pubs, hotels and restaurant. We can use this word to describe the hotel. "The Inn" is also far from satisfactory. Taking communicative approach into consideration, I

think "隱楼" (yinlou) just want to express that the small hotel has a good environment for the travelers to rest. "隱楼" (Yinlou) itself in Chinese is an advertisement Chinese will automatically think the implied meaning of the hotel, which will attract people to rest in this hotel. So I think "隱楼" (yinlou) may be Quiet Inn or A good place for rest.

### 2.3.3 Signs for Direction

The directing signs always have arrows. The arrow is the very important part of the whole public sign. The first explanation: "出口" is translated into "way out" or "Exit" whereas "way in" or "entrance". I consult A new century Chinese-English dictionary the translation of "出口" [noun] is translated into "way out", "exit" or "outgo". They can all express the same meaning. I interviewed the foreign teachers that they tell me that in translating "chukou" the "way out" is a rare usage. From above analysis, The possible translation is that we can translate unanimously "出口" into "exit" and "进口" into "entrance".

### 2.3.4 Signs for Demonstration

At the gate of the linyin temple, there is a notice there. Reads Admission Price: RMB 35yuan for adult According to the book CHINESE-ENGLISH translation of signs. Charge is more suitable for translating *jiage*. The Chinese version: 1-1.3米儿童17.5元; 1米以下儿童免费; The English counterpart: Half price of RMB 17.5 yuan/person for children between 1-meter to 1.3-meter height; free admission for children below 1-meter height. /person is not necessary in the translation. Let's see foreigners how to express this.

#### ST.JONES'S COLLEGE ADMISSION CHARGES

ADULTS £ 2.20

CHILD (12-16) £ 1.30

The following translation may be considered:

ADULT 35 yuan

CHILD (1-1.3meter) 17.5 yuan

CHILD (below 1meter) free

This version is more easily accepted than the previous one. The Chinese version: 全国70岁以上的老人 (凭身份证和老年卡) 离休干部, 军人, 省内30年教龄教师, 市区残疾人都免费. The English counterpart: Free admission for senior citizens over 70 or cadres retired with honors or service women or teachers from Zhejiang Province with over 30 years of service or disabled people from Hangzhou city in my country. 军人 were translated as servicewomen Why not servicemen? I ask people there that it is available for both men and women. The Chinese version: 市区残疾人; The English counterpart: Disabled people from Hangzhou city in my country. This translation would be offensive due to the prejudice on the nationality and also is too redundant because Hangzhou is a famous city in the world in China. "市区" I consult A NEW CENTURY CHINESE-ENGLISH DICTIONARY 市区 "city proper" or "urban district" "市区残疾人" could be urban district disabled people. We can make further

discussion that disabled is a very offensive word. We can use a more acceptable word physically challenging person. So we can make it further physically challenging person in urban district. Another obvious point is that the author didn't translate "凭身份证和老年卡" The English version is your ID or Your age Card need.

## 2.4 Vocative Discourse

The vocative discourse from the perspective of Peter Newmark can be notice and introduction etc. These are very common around the West Lake.

### 2.4.1 Warning Signs

These signs were collected around the West Lake and they are understandable to some extent.

游客止步 (Staff only)

步行区 (walking Street)

I want to discuss them in a broad sense. "小心地滑" (Caution Wet floor) some people interpret "Don't fall down." (Wang & Lv, 2007, p.5;43), this translation has no grammar mistakes. But it violates the traditional use of native English. The native people will think it strangely. There are many methods to translate the same meaning as follows: Caution: Mind your step, caution: Beware of Step, Caution: slippery surface, Caution: take care of your step. "Caution: Mind your step" is a little more redundant. And "caution: Beware of Step" is redundant, too. "Caution: slippery surface" is ok, but "Caution: take care of your step" is a mistake. The foreigner regards this as a mistake. Take care of is only can use for the people, not for the object and thing.

Now I want to point out that "步行区" (Walking street) has some problems. I consult the Advanced Learners' English-Chinese Dictionary<sup>3</sup>: Walk, noun, a path or route for walking usually for pleasure; an organized event when people walk for pleasure. Walking 1.noun [especially BrE] the activity of going for walks in the countryside for exercise or pleasure 2.adj (only before noun) (informal) used to describe a human or living example of the thing mentioned When we compare all the three meanings, we should use the Walk as a noun to modify the street. So my suggested version is Walk Street. Then to consider Walk Street, we will automatically think that the streets are full of the shops on the both sides. But I will offer you a word "pedestrian": noun a person walking in the street and not travelling in a vehicle. The pedestrian is an Adj [only before noun] used by or for the use of pedestrians; connected with pedestrians. From the above analysis, pedestrian is the right word to describe it as "Pedestrian Street". Considering this again, I also find something awkward. The meaning in Chinese "区" (QU) is far from the true meaning of the Street. So it is not comfortable to use the word "street" to translate "区" (QU) in Chinese. When we consult the Advanced learner's English-Chinese

Dictionary, the two words "street" (noun) a public road in a city or town that has houses and buildings on one side or both sides. "区" (QU) in Chinese is "区域" (QUYUN). So I think the "area" is the closest word for "区" (QU). The last version of "步行区" (BUXINGQU) is Pedestrian area. Finally, I want to say something of Staff only. The first one is an imperative order. Taking communicative approach into consideration, we focus on the "force" that makes visitors perform an act. So we can translate it please don't proceed or way back and thank for your cooperation.

### 2.4.2 Inviting Name of the Restaurant

楼外楼 (lou wai lou restaurant)

花中城天外天 (hua zhong cheng tian wai tian)

The two are all restaurant names. "楼外楼"(louwailou) is so famous restaurant that it appears in many poems. And the "楼外楼" (Louwailou) itself is outstanding. So transliteration can not fully express this. It is not inviting. Under the principle of the communicative approach, we should focus on the effectiveness of the translation. And we also can add something. "楼外楼" (Louwailou) Top-rank restaurant (leave the footprint of many famous people), to the extreme, we can use Hilton to describe it as Hilton hotel is a household name in the western world.

"花中城天外天" (hua zhong cheng tian wai tian), which means nothing to the foreigners. When we see the following introduction, we know this restaurant with a long history and with varieties of dishes. Under the principle of the communicative approach, we should focus on the effectiveness of the translation. And we also can add something. Superb restaurant (famous for local cuisines and long history) this will attract more people.

## 2.5 Expressive Discourse

### 2.5.1 Poetic Passage

The expressive discourse from the perspective of Peter Newmark can be literary works and other works. According to my collection, around the West Lake have many stories, the stories were often carved in the stones and the other side is the corresponding interpretation in English. I use semantic approach to translate it. We can see the Chinese clearly in the above, whereas the corresponding English is blur. The corresponding English can not fully express the content of the Chinese. The Chinese version: 大肚能容容天下难容之事, 开口便笑笑世上可笑之人. The English counterpart: Tolerate the worldly unbearable things with the large belly, Laugh at any ridiculous mortal with the open mouth. I ask Foreign teacher the same question, he on earth does not the meaning clearly. Compared with the two languages, The Chinese version that the parallels of the two sentences. It can be called good translation. The Chinese version: 肥头丰颊, 跣足屈膝, 袒腹踞坐, 左手执念珠, 右手执

<sup>3</sup> The sixth edition.

布袋. When Chinese see these sentences will arouse an aesthetic picture of the stature. The English version: It is squatting with full face, barefoot, bended knee, barebelly, whose left hand is holding the prayer beads while the right is pressing pocket. This is the good example of showing the aesthetic value of the semantic approach and has the corresponding effect of the word power. Although English can not have the same syntactic structure of the Chinese sentence, English sentences have its own aesthetic effect that the alliteration of words “barefoot”, “bended knee”, “barebelly”. If we can skillfully use the essence of the two languages, I think we can achieve the goal that we would have the same effect. This is so important for semantic approach (Chen, 2004, p.6; 200).

### 2.5.2 Signs of Description

Near the gate of Leifeng pagoda, there is a general overview of the Leifeng Pagoda. The general overview of the Leifeng Pagoda is a typical introduction of the informative signs. “七级浮屠” is translated into “Seven-story Buddhist pagoda”. The foreigners are eager to learn more about the “七级浮屠”. We can add some explanations such as the background of the pagoda. To the other side, the translation has its brightness, The Chinese version: 雷锋塔享誉海内外, 在数以千计的中国古塔中, 它是为数不多的几座有着丰厚历史文化内涵且游赏魅力也超乎寻常的名塔之一. The English counterpart: Widely known at home and abroad, Leifeng pagoda has been one of the few pagodas with rich historical interests and scenic attractions among thousands of ancient pagodas in China. This piece of sentence is beautifully written.

## 3. THE PROBLEMS AND IMPROVEMENTS

### 3.1 The Language Mistakes

The language mistakes involve a variety of reasons. First, the spelling mistakes: Near the gate of the liyin temple, there is a sign on the wall is called YuHua Pavilion, in which there is a spelling mistake. In the sentence: And the beautiful scenery of two streams work together, the word should be “scenery”. Second: The usage is not precise. Caution: take care of your step. Third: Mistakes: To translate “步行区” (BUXINGQU) as a walking street is a mistake. I ask a foreigner, but he said he had never encountered this usage.

### 3.2 The Lost of the Meaning

In translating, some translators don't do their best jobs from the standpoint of readers. They should always be aware that what are being translated may be new to the readers. JiGong is a household name for Chinese, but for

the foreigners is a different thing. We should add something when we translate them, mainly providing background.

### 3.3 The Limitation

The first limitation the corpus is not enough and complete because economic factor and time. The second limitation is that text may have more than one function. If we translate from the standpoint of more than one function, the effect of translation could be better.

## CONCLUSION

My thesis uses Peter Newmark's theory to translate the public signs around west Lake. The public signs would be more understandable for the foreigners from English-speaking country. The chapter one is an introduction and the chapter two is the literature review of public sign translation. The chapter two: I classified the courses and chose the corresponding approach according to the nature of the course and the function of the course. The Chapter three is the next step is to re-classify the discourses more carefully and then discuss them. The following step is to point out the problems and limitations in the Chapter four. My deepest feeling is that it is hard to make distinction of using the semantic approach or communicative approach because of the purpose or the function of the translation. It leaves much room for the followers to try.

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