

The Role of Formalized Structured Translation Specifications in Translation Quality Assurance of Public Signs in China

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Abstract

A survey was conducted of public signs in a famous river town in China. A variety of translation problems were observed including (1) the wrong use of fonts, (2) inconsistency of terminology, (3) typesetting, and (4) lack of consumer awareness. The solution to such problems, it is argued in this paper, involves cooperation on the part of translators, translation agencies, and universities training translators. Furthermore, it is argued that an effective vehicle for promoting such cooperation is the use of formalized structured translation specifications (FSTS). Translation project FSTS should be developed in conjunction with a translation project and kept with the project materials for use in future additional work. The paper explains how FSTS is developed and how they can be used to improve the results of translation projects, including the translation of public signs and many other types of projects.

Keywords: translation quality assurance, translation problems, Formalized Structured Translation Specifications (FSTS), project management

1. Introduction

Translation quality assurance (TQA) is a haunting issue in translation that can be analyzed from multiple perspectives. This paper seeks to analyze TQA from the poor translation of public signs spanning a period of two decades in a river town (hereinafter referred to as “XX”) in China. In addition to those that could be attributed to poor translation, there are also some that could have been avoided if proper quality assurance measures had been taken. Moreover, a close look at these problems reveals that the translator alone should not be held accountable. It is thus necessary to study translation quality assurance in a larger context by incorporating the Formalized Structured Translation Specifications (FSTS) that involve multiple stakeholders ranging from translators, commissioners, educators to even the government.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, with China’s steady rise as a world power, an increasing number of visitors and businesspeople come to China to seek business opportunities or merely satisfy their curiosity of this mysterious dragon. Two mega-events, namely 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and 2010 Shanghai World Expo, that took place in succession alongside with numerous other world-level business, cultural and sports events have thrust China into the limelight. To make expatriates feel at home, the Chinese government has to provide more English language services, especially public signs in English. Therefore the recent decade in China witnessed a boom in the study of translating public signs, a field that is virtually neglected by western scholars.

The study on the translation of public signs in China in this decade can be boiled down to four approaches:

1) The normative approach, best represented by *Guidelines for the Use of English in Public Service Areas* (GB/T 30240.1-2013) issued by the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of China and scheduled to take effect starting from December 1, 2017. The rules for using bilingual public signs are explicitly described in both standards, together with over 3,500 lists of bilingual public signs in such fields as transportation, hospital, tourism, finance and telecommunication. *A Companion to the Guidelines for the Use of English in Public Service Areas*, a companion to the abovementioned national standard, was compiled by the Department of Language Information Management of the Ministry of Education of China and published in 2016.

2) The error analysis approach. This approach is most widely practiced by university professors (Wang, 2004, 2007; Bian, 2005; Liu, 2008; Ko, 2009) as well as journalists and English amateurs who posted typical mistakes (usually with photos) on the Internet. A college student organization “Woodpeckers” in Shanghai International Studies University has been working on detecting errors in public signs in Shanghai, and their contribution has been reported by various local newspapers. The state government also takes active measures to eliminate errors in public signs (Language Affairs Commission affiliated with the state Ministry of Education is responsible for language policy and standardization). Shanghai Language Affairs Commission even published a book *Analysis of Errors and Standardization of English Translations of Public Signs* (2010). As a result, with people from all walks of life becoming concerned with the translation quality of public signs, mistakes in public signs have been gradually eliminated. However, such error analyses are usually based on individual cases and are hardly organized systematically. Huang & Du (2009, pp. 31-35) summarized the errors into ten categories, and their classification is based on a popular approach that is explained below.

3) The functionalist approach. The functionalist school represented by Vermeer (1989) and Nord (2001) provides a convincing theoretical basis for pragmatic translation, especially translation of public signs (Lu, 2006; Liu, 2007; Wang & Wang, 2008). Translation of public signs should not be a mere linguistic transfer but a transfer of proper textual functions based on a given translation brief. Thus some public signs should be adapted to suit the needs of target audience while some should not be translated at all.

4) The parallel text approach. Parallel text refers to “L2 and L1 texts of equal informativity which have been produced in more or less identical communicative situations” (Neubert, 1985, p. 75). Schäffner (1998, p. 85) points out that parallel texts composed of “highly conventionalized text types” serve as an excellent source of reference for translators and translation learners. This is especially true of the translation of public signs, as some texts may serve exactly the same function though they may differ in their wording or literal meaning in different languages. A research team in Beijing International Studies University launched an online bilingual corpus of public signs (www.e-signs.info) and published a book *Chinese-English Translation of Signs* (Wang & Lu, 2007) in which the team went to London and some other European cities to take photos of public signs as a source of building parallel text for the reference of translators.

To summarize, most researchers study the translation of public signs from these four approaches and call for more attention to this issue. However, given their preoccupation with the act of translation proper, they are oblivious of other related parties in the production of bilingual public signs. In reality, the production of public signs in other languages (usually English) in China is not merely dependent on the translation quality but also on some other elements such as editing, typesetting and marketing. A thorough analysis of typical errors in translation will help to illustrate this point.

2. Methodology

2.1 Methodology of Data Collection

This study adopted an empirical approach to case analysis, with on-site data culled with a digital camera during the author’s visit. Given the time constraints, it is impossible to exhaust all public signs at XX town, so the author adopted convenience sampling to take photos of all public signs available to ordinary tourists during a tour of 6 hours. Among 342 photos taken during the process, numerous cross-bred errors were identified. While linguistics errors such as misspellings and syntactic errors were more pronounced, the author decides not to dwell on these aspects, as they were already the steady refrain of most available literature in translation studies. Instead, this paper goes beyond the linguistic dimension towards a taxonomy of extra-linguistic errors and issues that have hitherto eluded the eyes of most researchers. That is exactly where a functionalist approach to translation fits in. Bearing in mind the extra-linguistic factors that contributed to mistranslations of public signs, the author arrived at a taxonomy of errors that is dwelled upon in the subsequent part.

2.2 Process of Translation Management in XX Town

To determine the culprit for each category of errors, it is necessary to offer some background information for the translation process that has been done not only in the case of XX but also in most other places in China.

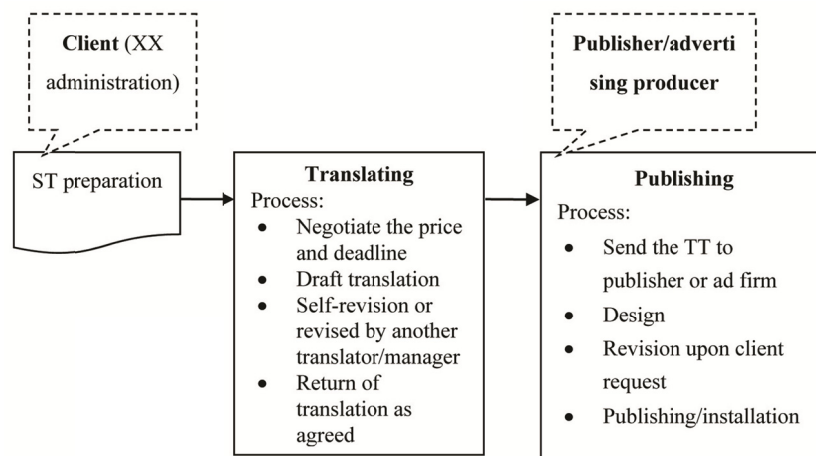


Figure 1. Flowchart of translation process in XX

As is illustrated in the chart, the client simply gives the public signs to be translated (hereinafter referred to as the source text or ST) to the translator agency or the freelance translator without taking any measure of quality assurance during the process. After the target text (TT) is received, it is then sent to a publisher or advertising producer for design and publishing. The client may interact with the designer to discuss the design, but usually not on language issues. When the design is determined, the public signs will be published or produced for use in the public space.

3. Taxonomy of Extra-Linguistic Errors of Public Signs in XX Town

Here the taxonomy of errors is provided here to illustrate this point:

3.1 *Wrong Use of Fonts*

In the public signs printed in English, there is a clear tendency to use some fonts that seem unusual and even weird to the eyes of western visitors. However, a further analysis reveals that these fonts of English result from their combination with some special fonts for Chinese characters such as songti, heiti or kaiti. In a word processor such as MS-Word, it is not uncommon for any Chinese user to produce the following effects of fonts if they assign a uniform font for the Chinese characters in a combination of Chinese characters and English words:

宋体Songti
黑体Heiti
楷体Kaiti

Figure 2. An illustration of some unusual fonts associated with popular fonts of Chinese characters

Here three English fonts that correspond to three of the most familiar Chinese fonts have been used to demonstrate the strange effect of mixture. It is obvious to any native English speaker that the most commonly used fonts of English are, inter alias, Helvetica, Times New Roman, Arial, Tahoma, and Verdana. Therefore the mismatch between the most familiar Chinese fonts with the most familiar English fonts may create not only perplexity but also possibly poor legibility on the part of readers.

The poor use of fonts is not really an issue with translation, but it deserves attention from translation researchers because it hinders the communicative effectiveness of public signs.

3.2 Inconsistency of Terminology

Terminology has remained a big problem in the translation of public signs. In XX, the information center has been translated into three different versions, namely, “tourist center”, “visitor center”, “guest center” on the signs at different places. Though none of these versions is semantically wrong, the mixture of different terms may be FUNCTIONALLY misleading—tourists might be baffled because they are led to assume that these terms refer to different places. This also happens to maps that were seen at different places in XX—there is at least one place that has been translated into different names by adhering to different translation principles. Imagine a tourist follows the map to the “Pleasure-boat Wharf” only to find that he comes to a place called “Water-touring Dock”!

Some terminological inconsistency can be resolved contextually and rendered less harmful. For example, in the visitor center of XX, there is a section where wheelchairs and prams are available for lease. On the desk there is a plate which reads “Facilities for disable” while on the wall the regulations describe them as “Special Services” instead. In spite of this, tourists still feel quite inconvenient having to solve the puzzles wherever they go.

This problem is partly due to the lack of terminological training in translator education. In China, the undergraduate and graduate programs of translation and interpreting were established just ten years ago. Most translators are simply graduates of English major which offers “pedagogical translation” rather than “translation pedagogy” to students. The English major is offered in at least 1,000 universities and colleges in China, and translation is usually a compulsory course for this major. Given the huge number of translation learners, the output of qualified translators is ruefully low. In the traditional translation classroom, translation is regarded as an advanced language skill for developing language professionals but usually not as a professional orientation. Teachers help learners understand the basic skills of sentence translation and attach great importance to beauty and enlightenment in literary translation while the translation of proper nouns, especially terms, is hardly taught. As a result, these self-made translators attach great importance to linguistic equivalence while neglecting the terminological equivalence.

Another reason for this problem lies in translation management. As is shown clearly in the translation materials, the translation tasks of the whole town had been done by at least five individual translators over a span of nearly 20 years. Each translation reflects an individual style and word choice. Moreover, they were printed in different fonts on different media in different colors, making it easy to spot the transitions over the age. A bigger problem that is accompanied is the inconsistency of terms among different translators. As these translators never bother to read existing translations done by their predecessors (nor are they given such materials for reference by the client), each just establish his/her own set of terminology, which contributes to further chaos in terminology.

3.3 Typesetting Errors in Translation

Typesetting is also a serious problem with the production of English public signs in XX and to a larger extent, everywhere in China. Just as the ATA brochure *Translation: Getting It Right* points out, “typographical conventions vary from one language to the next. Many printers and office staff are unaware of this—or do not take it seriously—and may automatically “adjust” foreign-language texts to bring them into line with their own standards.” (ATA, 2007) The Chinese language is so different from English in spelling that even a professional editor of Chinese cannot handle the editing of English well. In many places in China you can see signs in which all the English words are spelled together without any space in between! Moreover, the misuse of Chinese punctuation marks in English is nothing new to tourists and expatriates. These problems have been discussed and criticized by many people already, and here we will look into some less obvious yet potentially serious hindrances in typesetting.

One of the most common problems with typesetting lies in the attempt to align the size of English words with that of Chinese characters. Chinese as one of the few ideographic languages is characterized by the economy of characters in typesetting by contrast with English, since each character usually stands for one individual unit of meaning, when one Chinese character takes up only two bytes (in display, each roughly takes up the space of two English letters) in the computer system with no space in between whereas the average English word takes up at least 4 letters, it is no wonder that the Chinese text seems considerable shorter in translation. Any experienced English-Chinese translator knows that though the Chinese translation of any English text, if set at the same size of fonts, takes up 2/3 or even half the printing space of the English text.

Given this disparity in length and printing space, the picture icons of some software applications have to be resized to accommodate the translation. Similarly, the translation of tourism information also requires a moderate adjustment in font and typesetting. However, it is woefully noticed that the contrary is true—many signs simply reduce the size of English fonts to give equal space to English and Chinese. In other words, when a public sign is displayed in both Chinese and English, the English translation is usually considerably smaller in actual size than

the Chinese text, which results in poor legibility. An illustration of this effect goes like this:



Figure 3. A demonstration of disparity in the printing space of Chinese and English

In the figure above, I used a very familiar public sign to illustrate the difference. The four Chinese characters *dang xin hua dao* stands for “Caution! Slippery floor.” When they are both set in the same size of the font, the English sign is considerably longer than the Chinese one. In many places in XX, the fonts of English signs were always reduced for alignment with the Chinese version. As a result, words in Line 4 above are hardly legible to the English reader.

W
A
T
E
R

Figure 4. An illustration of vertical typesetting

Another common problem with typesetting is that in some places when English words have to be printed vertically, producers just copy the layout of Chinese characters by listing each letter horizontally. However, English signs are usually written by changing the direction of words so that they extend from up to down and are thus easier to read. This can be demonstrated by a reproduction in Figure 4. Though this mistake may be harmless, it’s still quite inconvenient for tourists.

3.4 Cultural Errors

By accentuating linguistic equivalence, they turn a blind eye to cultural differences. What translators have been doing is to perform a semantic translation of every sentence that is given to them without making any necessary changes or adaptations. As a result, some sentences are almost unintelligible to foreign tourists because they are loaded with cultural connotations that are unique to Chinese. For example, there is a line in the description of the information center that says “Special crowd service (*te shu ren qun fu wu*).” This literal translation from Chinese may bewilder many tourists, though the term “special crowd” is actually a Chinese euphemism for the physically challenged people.

Errors like this reflect a lack of audience awareness—the translator is completely oblivious of the actual needs of the target audience. This is where functionalism should intervene. Jia (2004, p. 378), Zhang (2006, p. 29) and Lu (2006, p. 79) all point out that the translation of tourist documents should seek the equivalence of textual functions rather than linguistic equivalence. Translators have the license to adapt the text where necessary to suit the actual needs of tourists.

However, a problem thus arises: will the client give translators the license of functional adaptation? Before the author explained to the people of XX administration, they did not realize this necessity. Therefore most translations have been done by adhering to linguistic equivalence. This is true of most other cases in China—clients never realize the need for function-oriented adaptation. What they always do is give the ST to the translator and demands the TT by the deadline, quite oblivious of what happens during the translation process. For fear of being accused of “betrayal” to the ST, most translators just adhere to the literal meaning of words and sentences, thereby creating some “correct” yet useless or even misleading information to tourists.

Though these problems may seem easy to handle, they actually require the efforts of all parties involved. An interesting incident happened during the author’s survey of public signs, when I came across a problematic English sign but was halted before I took any action. I was told that XX administration has no disposal over the sign, because it belongs to the police station. Therefore eliminating these errors is not simply an issue with translation itself. We need an integrated solution to this issue by aligning efforts of all people.

4. FSTS in Translation Quality Assurance

All parties involved in translation should realize that translation is by no means a purely linguistic transformation based on semantic analysis. Rather, many parameters are inevitably involved that shape translators’ decision-making process. Pym (2003, p. 489) reiterates a minimalist definition of translation competence that he proposed in 1991:

- The ability to generate a series of more than one viable target text (TT1, TT2... TTn) for a pertinent source text (ST);
- The ability to select only one viable TT from this series, quickly and with justified confidence.

From this definition, we can see that translation competence follows that the choice of one viable TT should be contingent upon all variables in the translation project. When the variables are formulated in detail, they are best represented by the specifications (ASTM, 2006; Melby, 2012). Thus these specifications should be incorporated throughout the process of translation and observed by all parties involved.

4.1 What are the Specifications?

The specifications of translation stem from the translation brief. The translation brief, also referred to as translation instructions (Nord, 1991), is a set of instructions prepared by a requester that accompanies a translation assignment, thus enabling the requester to convey information about the source text, the specific communicative purpose and context in which the text is used, the intended uses of the translation and what it aims to accomplish. Nord (2001, p. 60) the translation brief should contain:

- a) the (intended) text function(s),
- b) the target-text addressee(s),
- c) the (prospective) time and place of text reception,
- d) the medium over which the text will be transmitted, and
- e) the motive for the production or reception of the text.

In the ASTM International standard for translation quality assurance (ASTM, 2006), the translation brief is formulated as a set of specifications. Each specification is the value of a translation parameter. Melby (2009) explains that “Translation parameters are factors that are relevant to a translation project. They can be thought of as questions that should be asked before beginning a translation. The answers to these questions form a set of specifications.” Therefore the specifications of translation form the basis of quality assurance between the translator and the client. They provide a possible solution to the problems in the translation of public signs. The following is a list of Formalized Structured Translation Specifications that Melby et al. (2012) formulated:

Table 1. List of 21 Formalized Structured Translation Specifications (FSTS) (Melby et al., 2012)

A. Linguistic [1–13]	
<i>Source content information [1–5]</i>	
[1] textual characteristics	
a) source language	
b) text type	
c) audience	
d) purpose	
[2] specialized language	
a) subject field	
b) terminology [in source]	
[3] volume (e.g. word count)	
[4] complexity (obstacles)	
[5] origin [of the source content]	
<i>Target content requirements [6–13]</i>	
[6] target language information	
a) target language	
b) target terminology	
[7] audience	
[8] purpose	
[9] content correspondence	
[10] register	
[11] file format	
[12] style	
a) style guide	
b) style relevance	
[13] layout	

B. Production tasks [14–15]	
[14] typical production tasks	
a) preparation	
b) initial translation	
c) in-process quality assurance	
[15] additional tasks	

C. Environment [16–18]	
[16] technology	
[17] reference materials	
[18] workplace requirements	

D. Relationships [19–21]	
[19] permissions	
a) copyright	
b) recognition	
c) restrictions	
[20] submissions	
a) qualifications	
b) deliverables	
c) delivery	
d) deadline	
[21] expectations	
a) compensation	
b) communication	

4.2 The Roles of the Client and the Translator under Specifications

Above all, the specifications provide a clear guide to the translation project. By adhering to the specifications, the translator can make necessary changes to the translation according to the parameters of the translation task because his/her role in the translation process is made explicit. The client is also able to make better translation assurance because “the quality of a translation is *the degree to which it follows the agreed-upon specifications*” (FIT, 2009, italicization preserved). Thus the specifications provide a sounder basis for mutual understanding between the translator and the client than the translation brief of functionalism.

In the translation of public signs in tourist resorts, the client and the translator (or the translation agency) should negotiate upon a set of specifications before the translation project begins. The following specifications deserve special attention from both the translator:

- a) Content correspondence: should it be overt translation or covert translation? In the case of public signs, covert translation is certainly more preferably, so searching for parallel texts is a good option during the translation process. Instead of translating “*you qi wei gan*” literally into “The paint is not dry yet,” we should translate it into “Wet paint!”, a readily available sign in English-speaking countries.
- b) Usage register: Public signs are usually characterized by the informative, vocative, persuasive and restrictive functions of text (Lu, 2005, p. 22). Conciseness and precision should be a key principle in writing public signs. It is also common to use imperative sentences.
- c) Terminology check and update: translators should pay special attention to terminology consistency—they should inherit existing terminology from previous translations and be cautious while creating a new one. All terms should be compiled into a glossary for future reference.
- d) Technology: search engines such as Google provide an excellent source of parallel texts for translators. Moreover, the use of translation memory and terminology management systems will help ensure the consistency of translation and avoid repetitious labor.

The client—XX administration in this case—should also play a part in translation quality assurance by paying special attention to the following specifications:

- a) Subject matter: is the translator good at technical translation or general purpose translation? Is he qualified for making the translation of public signs?
- b) Layout details: how should the TT look like? The client may not necessarily request the translator to handle the typesetting, but ATA (2006) advises that the client should “have your typeset copy reviewed by your translator” to ensure that the typesetting conforms to the standards of the target language.
- c) Reference materials: What does the translator need for producing reliable TT? Some typical reference materials are termbases and translation memories. However, this is especially lacking in clients in China. Clients usually don’t provide anything other than the ST itself. Even if they have existing documents, they have no idea how valuable these are to the translator of the current project. Preferably, they should provide translators with additional materials for reference such as the termbase, previous versions of the draft, related documents and their translations if available.
- d) Deliverables and deadlines: What should the translator deliver to the client? Just the translation, or the translation with an updated termbase? Has the translation been reviewed by a professional reviser or the translator himself? Having a 3rd-party reviser review the TT will better ensure the quality of translation, but not many clients realize this.

It is thus desirable that clients should be educated on how to manage translation more efficiently. Just as Samuelsson-Brown (2004, p. 38) points out, “all buyers of translation services will want value for money but this does not necessarily mean that the cheapest is the least expensive in the long term.” The client should not go merely for the best price, but rather for the best translation service. To sum up, the client should understand:

- how to find a good translator;
- what to translate and what not to translate;
- what specifications can ensure the translation quality;
- what related documents to provide to translators;
- how to reuse existing translations in new translation tasks to ensure the consistency of diction and style;
- how to maintain a terminology database to ensure the consistency of terms;
- how to improve editing and typesetting to ensure the quality of end products...

4.3 Other Parties Concerning Translation Specifications

Besides the translator and the client, there are also other parties involved in the translation project. A holistic perspective that takes all these parties into consideration will help ensure translation quality and the sustainable development of the translation industry. Thus we can add to our list the translation agency, the university and also the government.

4.3.1 On the Part of Translation Agencies

The translation agency has been a neglected link in translation, but actually running a translation agency may differ from running a regular corporate administration. A good agency should establish a reliable team of translators and learn to manage freelancers effectively to ensure translation quality. The following tasks should be performed to ensure production and quality controls (Samuelsson-Brown, 2006, p. 35):

- The provision of internal translation production for the company's core languages.
- Quality control of outsourced translation assignments.
- Maintenance of reference material.
- Assisting in the assessment of enquiries from freelance enquiries and compiling a resources database in collaboration with the Administration Department.

All these are related to some of the most basic translation specifications in ASTM standards (ASTM 2006). However, as shown in Figure 1, translation agencies in China usually don't bother with such measures of translation quality assurance as maintenance of reference materials, compiling databases of terminology and even quality check by a professional reviser! Some of them compete with each other by undercharging clients and underpaying freelance translators, thereby reducing costs at the cost of quality assurance (Chu, 2003, p. 28).

4.3.2 On the Part of Universities

As is mentioned above, universities should share the blame for terminological inconsistency, as no course on terminology is included in the teaching syllabi of colleges and universities in China (Liang, 2009, p. 3). Even in the syllabus of the newly established Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) programs approved by the Ministry of Education in China (Ministry of Education, 2007), terminology is nowhere to be found. By contrast, terminology is a core course for translator training in Canada. In the US, terminology exchange standards are widely applied in translation and language industries. The newly released Term Base eXchange (TBX) standard by Prof. Alan K. Melby has been used as the terminology exchange standard of Localization Industry Standard Association (LISA) and recognized as ISO 30042 (LISA, 2008; Melby, 2008). If university professor remain ignorant of these new technology standards, how can students be expected to handle terminology well and work as qualified translators?

Moreover, universities should provide professional translator education by offering market-oriented courses such as computer-aided translation (CAT), translation project management, editing, and desktop publishing, as they constitute a key part of translation expertise in a highly industrialized business of translation.

A reason for this gap between the market and the academe lies in the lack of qualified faculty members especially in such courses as CAT, terminology and applied translation. University professors that have always been academic-oriented can hardly be qualified for teaching these heavily skill-oriented courses. By contrast, experienced translators who are well qualified for handling CAT and terminology management are usually excluded from the faculty—they don't have the PhD diploma that is required in most Chinese universities. The blind adherence to diploma and the assumption that better diploma stands for better qualification have prevented students from learning first-hand experience and expertise from experts in the industry.

To sum up, universities in China are usually unaware of the importance of translation specifications in translator training. They have realized the need of developing professional translators—the MTI program, a profession-oriented two-year master program, has sprouted from almost every top university in China, but their conception about the translation business remains vague. Despite the growing popularity of functionalism in translation studies, professors continue to turn a blind eye to translation briefs or specifications in translation pedagogy. By contrast, Martín de León (2008, p. 2) notes that “nowadays ...almost no one doubts the didactic advantage of the translation brief (which includes information about the function of a text and about the target audience)”. Clearly, a big gap between the theory and practice of translation pedagogy remains. But without any awareness of the translation specifications, how can students even ensure the translation quality of public signs?

4.3.3 On the Part of the Government

The Chinese government has played an active role in supervising translation, publication and translator training. The undergraduate and graduate programs of translation and interpreting in public universities cannot be established without the approval of the Ministry of Education. In 2006, the first three BA programs of translation and interpreting were approved; in 2007, the MTI programs of 15 Chinese universities were approved (Wang & Wang, 2008, p. 74). The entrance examination for MTI (also prepared by the Ministry of Education) is composed of four tests: Politics; Foreign Language Proficiency Test; Basics of Translation (bi-directional translation of

proper nouns and passages); Chinese Writing and Encyclopedic Knowledge (MTI Advisory Board, 2009). As is shown here, no translation specifications are required of candidates.

The neglect of specifications from the government is not only evident in the entrance examination but also in the translator qualification examination. China International Publishing Group (CIPG), a large state-owned company for translation and publishing, is responsible for organizing, implementing and administering China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters (CATTI), the most authoritative translation and interpretation proficiency qualification accreditation test which is implemented in compliance with the national system of professional qualification certificates (CATTI, 2010). According to the syllabus, no specifications were required for test-takers to conform to during this translator qualification test.

By contrast, the translation service standards issued by the Chinese government are characterized by a specification approach to translation service. From 2003 to 2006, the Translation Service Committee of China Translators' Association issued three standards, *Specification for Translation Service. Part I: Translation* (GB/T19363.1-2003), *Target Text Quality Requirements For Translation Services* (GB/T-19682-2005) and *Specification for Translation Service. Part II: Interpretation* (GB/T 19363.2-2006). Zhang et al. (2010) point out that these standards were adapted from DIN-NORM 2345 of Germany. Thus the specifications in the service standards are contrasted against the lack of concern from other governments and institutions. If these specifications are not used in translator training, how can we expect future translators to comply with them?

Moreover, as is mentioned above, some municipal governments such as Beijing and Shanghai also released their own reference standards on the translation of public signs, and other big cities such as Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Nanjing are also planning to release their own versions of the standards for the translation of public signs. These standards are a good complement to translation specifications. Together they will better ensure the translation quality of public signs.

5. Conclusion

The translation of public signs in the case of XX is very typical of the current situation of translation in China. Though the problems may seem trivial compared with grammatical or semantic errors (in some places of China, the sign “*xiao xin hua dao*” (Caution! Slippery floor) is even translated word by word into “Carefully falling down!”), they reflect a serious problem in the translation business and translator training in China that cannot be eliminated in the traditional approach. Translation specifications provide a good solution to these problems and thus deserve better attention than they do today. It is advised that the client and the translator should agree upon a set of translation specifications before they begin the translation project, and the translation quality can be measured by how compliant the TT is to the specifications. This will not only help improve the quality of public signs but also the translation of other fields.

In a forward-looking perspective, we should also help other related parties such as the translation agency, the universities and the government to understand the necessity of specifications. They should constitute an integral part in translator training and certification. The translation service standards were already issued by the Chinese government, but these reference standards were not widely known especially among translators, professors and learners. Therefore we suggest that the current standards should be revised on the basis of newly released EU standard EN 150038 and ASTM F2575-06. Moreover, translation agencies, universities and governments should be aligned in their conception of the specification-based standards so that we can build better translation quality and be better prepared to “present China to the world.”

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