The Research of Foreign Language Signs in Beijing Road from the Perspective of Spolsky's Language Policy Theory

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Abstract: Foreign language signs are used in providing message towards foreigners, including information, indication, warning, etc. While traveling in foreign countries, those correct signs play a crucial role in showing direction, introducing spots and keeping people away from danger and so on. However, the Beijing Road Cultural Tourism Zone, which receives a large number of foreign visitors, sets up some foreign language signs with wrong English translations. Moreover, as a tourism card of Guangzhou City, in the study of situation of foreign language sigs translation, the Beijing Road Cultural Tourism Zone have not yet been studied as an example. Therefore, this thesis chooses to research on it. Based on the three dimensions of language practices, language ideology, and language planning of Spolsky's language policy theory, this thesis adopts questionnaires and field surveys to investigate and analyze the current situation and its reasons of the English translation of foreign language signs on the Beijing Road Cultural Tourism Zone of Guangzhou City. The survey shows that there are many situations with the translation of foreign language signs on Beijing Road, such as translating in pinyin and non-use of the English translation, as well as inconsistent translation, omission of translation, literal translation, and spelling errors. The above situation is a reflection of the completeness of Cantonese pinyin system and the Guangzhou government's cultural protection, the government's strong language sovereignty ideology and uneven language service ideology of the people involved, and the inadequate language planning in regulations formulation, translation standard publicity and translators' management. Finally, this thesis proposes several strategies to provide certain reference proposals for Guangzhou city to formulate and improve relative language policies.

Keywords: Spolsky, Language Policy, Beijing Road, Foreign Language Signs, Reference Proposals

1. Introduction

Foreign language signs are words and pictures that provide information about people's lives in public places for the purpose of informing, indicating, advising and warning [10] and "constitute a specific genre in terms of language use, communicative functions and cultural feature" [7].

Geng and He [4] have studied the general translation problems of tourism foreign language signs. Tang, Yu [16], Lv [9] and Zhang [19] et al. studied the translation of foreign language signs in Zhangjiajie, Kangbashi District and Xinghu Scenic Area respectively. However, the existing literature has not yet dealt with the translation status of foreign language signs in the Beijing Road Cultural Tourism Zone of Guangzhou (hereinafter referred to as "Beijing Road") and its investigation and analysis.

Beijing Road is a national 4A-level tourism attractions and a national cultural industry demonstration park. As a tourism card of Guangzhou City, it has a deep historical and cultural heritage and great cultural tourism value. At the same time, it is also the cultural tourism attraction that receives the largest number of visitors in Guangzhou, with 200,000 visitors on weekdays and nearly 2.5 times the number of visitors during large-scale festival activities. Therefore, it is reasonable and necessary for Beijing Road to be used as an analysis example for the investigation of the current situation of foreign language signs translation.

This study intends to analyze the current situation of translation of foreign language signs on Beijing Road and the reasons for its occurrence, based on the three dimensions of language practices, language ideology, and language planning under the framework of Spolsky's language policy theory, through questionnaires and field investigations, to make up for the lack of existing research, and try to put

forward several strategies, in order to provide some reference suggestions for the formulation and improvement of relevant language policies in Guangzhou.

2. Theoretical Framework

"Spolsky (2004) redefine the definition of language policy and its connotation and extension from the perspective of social linguistics" [8], and divides language policy into language practices, language beliefs or ideology and language planning or management. Language practices is the habitual choice mode of language varieties in the linguistic repertoire; language beliefs or ideology is the beliefs about language itself and language use; and language planning or management is the specific act of modifying or influencing language practices through kinds of language intervention, planning or management [13]. Sposky's (2004) theory of language policy helps to analyze phenomena or issues such as regulating language, restricting undesirable language, monolingual polities, family language policy, local government language policy, language policy in the United States, and the spread of English.

Olufemi [1] analyzes the linguistic situation of public signs in Gaborone, Botswana, based on Sposky's language policy theory, proposing that the city is moving towards multilingualism in English, Setswana and Chinese, and that the state has not accorded any legal position to existing minority languages. Walsh analyzes the demographic and language policy of Irish language in the context of Sposky's language policy theory, suggesting that "the existing conceptual framework of 'language policy' should be expanded to include the idea of an emerging field of 'language governance'" [18]. Shang explores "the code choice and debate between pinyin and English for Chinese street name signs" in line with Sposky's language policy theory, suggesting that "even in highly centralized regimes such as China, language policy cannot be achieved through traditional models of political authority and ideological hegemony" [11]. Sposky's language policy theory and its application help this paper investigate the current situation, analyze the causes and propose the strategies for the foreign language signs on Beijing Road.

3. Research Method and Analysis of Investigation Results

3.1. Research Method

This survey adopts the form of combining questionnaire

and field investigation. First, we conduct a questionnaire, with 10 questions in it, and distributed and returned 234 questionnaires, all of which were valid. Then, we visited the Beijing Road. The area extends to Wende Lu in the east, Huifu East Lu and Wenming Lu in the south, Jiaoyu Lu and Guangda Lu in the west, and Zhongshan 5 Lu and Guangwei Lu in the north. We randomly sampled foreign language signs, and collected and recorded them by mobile phones and cameras to ensure the authenticity of data materials.

3.2. Analysis of Investigation Results

3.2.1. Analysis of Questionnaire Feedback

Participants in this survey included 172 women and 62 men, covering all ages. Their education levels covered high school, undergraduate and master's degrees, etc. And their occupations covered students, teachers, designers, etc. The results of show that the Guangzhou Municipal Government's publicity on the "English Translation Standards for Public Signs in Guangzhou (2018)" (hereinafter referred to as "Guangzhou Signs Standards") is not in place, for the vast majority of people not knowing about it (83.33%), and not having received relevant publicity information (93.59%). In addition, people are not very active in giving feedback on the translation of foreign language signs. Although more than half of the people (52.57%) thought about reporting the wrongly translated foreign language signs, most of them (88.47%) did not take any action.

3.2.2. Analysis of Field Investigation Results

A total of 387 photos of foreign language signboards, including 870 foreign language signs, were collected and recorded. After removing those duplicate and blurred, the translation phenomenon was divided into 5 types and 13 subcategories, as shown in Table 1.

It can be seen from Table 1 that more than half (59.80%) of the foreign language signs is correct, and there are a small number of flexible translation phenomena, namely: reasonable use of Cantonese pinyin (0.24%), reasonable use of Chinese pinyin (2.65%) and non-use of English translation (1.08%). However, there are still some translation problems, not only a large proportion (23.47%) of omission of translation, but also something else, such as: arbitrary use of English translation (2.05%) and literal translation (2.77%). This shows that the service center of Beijing Road attaches more importance to the translation of foreign language signs, but it still needs to further improve the above-mentioned translation problems.

***Table 1.** Current Situation of Translation of Foreign Language Signs on Beijing Road.*

Types	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Translating in *Pinyin*	Reasonable Use of Cantonese *Pinyin*	2	0.24%
	Reasonable Use of Chinese *Pinyin*	22	2.65%
	Nonstandard Cantonese *Pinyin*	1	0.12%
	Arbitrary Use of Chinese *Pinyin*	3	0.36%
No Translation and Arbitrary Use of English Translation	Omission of Translation	195	23.47%
	Non-use of the English Translation	9	1.08%
	Arbitrary Use of English Translation	17	2.05%

Types	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
	Chinglish	2	0.24%
	Literal Translation	23	2.77%
Non-standard Terminology	Language Redundancy	14	1.68%
	Spelling Errors	14	1.68%
	Inconsistent Translations	11	1.32%
Correct	Correct	497	59.80%
Others	Others	21	2.53%

4. The Research of Foreign Language Signs in Beijing Road Based on Spolsky's Language Policy Theory

4.1. Language Choice and Foreign Language Signs Translating in Pinyin

"Language choice is the basic core of language policy and an important part of the field of sociolinguistics" [8]. Language choice is "the strategic use of a given language in a bilingual situation, and the factors influencing this decision may be different" [3].

Shang [11] found that the bilingual signs of street names in Chinese provincial capitals and municipalities are mainly translated in Chinese pinyin. As people in Guangzhou mainly use three languages: Cantonese, Mandarin and English, they would like to make the best choice among English, Cantonese pinyin and Chinese pinyin when translating signs into English. And it was found that there is the phenomenon of some foreign language signs on Beijing Road translating in Cantonese pinyin or Chinese pinyin. This section will analyze this phenomenon combined with language choice.

4.1.1. Language Choice and Foreign Language Signs Translating in Pinyin

(i). Translating in Cantonese Pinyin

Some foreign language signs choose to use Cantonese pinyin when translating. A shop signboard is "禄一禄港式火锅" in Chinese (Figure 1), and its English translation is "LUK YAT LUK HK HOT POT", where "LUK YAT LUK" is Cantonese pinyin, which means "shabu-shabu" in Cantonese. This act often found in Hong Kong hot pot culture.

Some foreign language signs use non-standard Cantonese pinyin when translating. A shop signboard is "伙记茶档" in Chinese (Figure 2), and its English translation is "Koo Kei Cha Dong". However, the "Koo" is not the Cantonese pronunciation of "伙". And "Kei", "Cha" and "Dong" are from different Cantonese Romanization. According to "Jyutping"[1], the correct Cantonese pinyin of "伙记茶档" should be "Fo Gei Caa Dong".

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[1] At present, there is no unified Cantonese Romanization. There are four popular Cantonese Romanization: "Guangzhou Cantonese Romanization", "Jyutping", Since there is a general consensus in the academic community in Guangdong and Hong Kong to choose "Jyutping" for Cantonese phonetic transcription, the correction of Cantonese pinyin in this section refer to "Jyutping".

(ii). Translating in Chinese Pinyin

Some foreign language signs choose to use Chinese pinyin when translating. In the street sign (Figure 3), the English translation of "文明" in "文明路" is the Chinese pinyin "Wenming". It was named for the origin site of Wenming Gate, but has nothing to do with the English word "civilization". If it is translated as "Civilization", it will mislead foreigners.

Some foreign language signs arbitrarily use Chinese pinyin when translating. A foreign language sign (Figure 4) is posted on the door, with Chinese "电房重地，闲人免进" and English translation "DIAN FANG ZHONG DI XIAN REN MIAN JIN". However, "Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas" (hereinafter referred to as "Guidelines") clearly states that information on restrictions and prohibitions should use English instead of Chinese pinyin when translating.

Figure 1. Reasonable Use of Cantonese Pinyin.

Figure 2. Nonstandard Cantonese Pinyin.

Figure 3. Reasonable Use of Chinese Pinyin.

Figure 4. *Arbitrary Use of Chinese Pinyin.*

4.1.2. Language Choice Promotes Translating in Pinyin

"Language choice refers to the phenomenon of choosing a certain language or language variety in a specific occasion and in a specific language practice. It is the decision of the language dual-user to choose which language or which language to concurrently use according to the function of the language, that is, the needs and practical applications of the environment of communication and the object of communication" [17]. Firstly, the complete Cantonese pinyin system supports translating foreign language signs in Cantonese pinyin. The Cantonese commonly used in Guangzhou and Hong Kong can be completely romanized, so we can choose Cantonese pinyin for the translation of foreign language signs. From the perspective of language choice, "Spolsky (2009) believed that public signs should be written in their own language or in a language that can identify themselves" [21]. Some restaurants in Guangzhou choose to use Cantonese pinyin to translate their signboards to highlight their "Hong Kong style".

Moreover, reasonably translating in pinyin is also conducive to the preservation and dissemination of local and Chinese culture. As in the case of"禄一禄"and"文明路", these simple words contain distinctive culinary culture of China and history of Guangzhou. If we choose to use Cantonese pinyin and Chinese pinyin for translation, foreigners may learn the culture behind it in the process of inquiring about its meaning.

In addition, the phenomenon of arbitrary use of pinyin and non-standard pinyin reveals that relevant personnel do not pay attention to the communication objects. The SPEAKING communication model[2] proposed by Hymes [5] pointed out that main components of speech activities include participants (P), like listeners, and Ends (E), the purpose of communication and the expected result. Similarly, language choice guides us in the selection of language according to the needs of the person with whom we are communicating. However, relevant personnel neglect communication objects, foreigners, when arbitrarily use Chinese pinyin and use non-standard pinyin to translate.

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[2] In the SPEAKING communication model (Hymes 1972), S represents setting and scene, P represents participants, E represents ends, A represents act sequence, K represents key, I represents instrumentalities, N represents norms, G represents genre [12].

4.2. Language Ideology and Foreign Language Signs

Spolsky believes that language ideology is "the beliefs of the language community about language itself and its use, and has an important impact on language practices and language planning that tries to change or influence language practices" [20]. The most important thing of language ideology "are the values assigned to the varieties and feature" [14]. Not only members of different speech communities, but also members of the same speech community will have different language ideologies, which makes language ideology complex and diverse. Zhang [20] put forward "four language ideologies. Among them, "the language sovereignty ideology is aware and vigilant about the 'abuse' of English". And the language service ideology believes that setting up accurate foreign language signs is to make foreigners more convenient in work, life and travel.

Our field research has revealed that there are three types of translations of foreign language signs on Beijing Road: omission of translation, non-use of the English translation, and arbitrary use of English translation. This subsection analyzes these in combination with the language sovereignty ideology and the language service ideology.

4.2.1. No Translation and Arbitrary Use of English Translation of Foreign Language Signs

(i). Omission of Translation

Some of the foreign language signs lack English translations (Figure 5). A warning sign "请勿戏水" is placed on the platform of the Canton Clepsydra, but there is no English translation on the sign.

(ii). Non-Use of the English Translation

Some signage does not have an English translation. The Guangdong Vocational Training Bureau (Figure 6), do not have English translations on its name signs. That is because China clearly stipulates in the "Guidelines" that the English translation of the titles of party and government agencies cannot be used for name signboards.

(iii). Arbitrary Use of English Translation

Some foreign language signs arbitrarily use English to Translate. On a road sign, the English translation of "教育路" is "Jiaoyu Road" (Figure 7), where the word "路" is translated as "Road". However, according to the Geographical names-Signs, and the "Guangzhou Signs Standards", "路" should be translated as "Lu".

Figure 5. *Omission of Translation.*

Figure 6. *Non-use of the English Translation.*

Figure 7. *Arbitrary Use of English Translation.*

4.2.2. The Influence of Language Ideology on English Translation

Language sovereignty ideology affects the use of English. When the influence of English gradually increased in China, in order to prevent the status of English from surpassing the status of Chinese, the language sovereignty ideology urges China to stipulate in "Guidelines" that the translation can only be carried out on the premise of using the Chinese language first, and English translation cannot be used for the name signboard of the agency. This confirms that the setting of the sign text should be based on the Chinese language. However, those foreign language signs that Guangzhou City and China clearly specify that should be translated in pinyin are still arbitrarily translated into English. It indicates that the language sovereignty ideology of some relevant personnel needs to be strengthened.

The lack of language service ideology will also affect the English translation of foreign language signs. For the translators, those who lack a sense of language service ideology will not devote themselves to using translations that conform to English usage habits and cultural norms to

meet readers' expectations. So, the signs translated by them cannot be used to serve the foreigners. As in the previous example in 4.2.1.1, the translator did not provide accurate guidance to satisfy foreigners' desire to stay away from dangerous areas in time. For the general public, those who lack language service ideology will not pay attention to foreign language signs in tourism attractions. According to the results of the questionnaire, as long as the foreign language signs do not affect Guangzhou residents' daily life, they will not be worried about the inconvenience for foreigners caused by the lack of accurate foreign language signs. Therefore, people's language service ideology still needs to be strengthened.

4.3. Language Planning and Foreign Language Signs

"Language planning is the collective name for the various tasks and activities carried out by the government or social groups on language in a planned and organized manner in order to solve problems arising in language communication" [2]. Language planning can be divided into language status planning and language corpus planning. Among them, language corpus planning refers to setting standards of the language's form or structure [6], that is, as Haugen said, "the development of standards for written or oral forms, grammar and vocabulary of languages" [15].

In order to make the English translation of foreign language signs in public places more standardized, China and Guangzhou Government carried out language planning in 2017 and 2018. However, today, Guangzhou's foreign language signs still suffer from various English translation errors. Taking Beijing Road as an example, we found problems in the English translation of foreign language signs such as Chinglish, literal translation, language redundancy, spelling errors, and inconsistent translations. This subsection will be analyzed in conjunction with language planning.

4.3.1. Non-Standard Terminology in Foreign Language Signs

(i). Chinglish

The English translation of some foreign language signs is Chinglish. In the foreign language signage next to the elevator, the corresponding English translation of "火警发生时切勿乘坐电梯" is "In case of fire, do not use the elevator" (Figure 8). However, in English, the logical emphasis, "do not use elevator", should be placed at the beginning of the sentence.

(ii). Literal Translation

Some of the signs in foreign languages are translated literally (Figure 9). On the door of a low voltage room, the English translation of the Chinese word"弱电房"is "Weak Electrical Room", which is obviously derived from a word-for-word translation of the Chinese.

(iii). Language Redundancy

The English translation of some foreign language signs has

the problem of language redundancy (Figure 10). The English translation of "拱北楼遗址" is "The Site of the ruins of Gongbei Tower", as we found on the road signs. "the site of the ruins" obviously has a problem of language redundancy, and "the site of" is semantically repetitive.

(iv). Spelling Errors

There are spelling errors in the English translation of some foreign language signs (Figure 11). The English translation of the word "信息" on a sign is spelt "Infor nation". Apparently, it is the breakage of half of the letter "m" in "Information" result in the error of the English word.

(v). Inconsistent Translations

Some foreign language signs are inconsistent in their translation. In a living hall named "KIVI" (Figure 12), on the zoning map and the floor map, "酒" is translated as "alcohol" and "wine" respectively. According to "Guangzhou Signs Standards", "酒" can be translated as Alcohol or Liquor, so you can choose one of the two. But you must choose the same word to keep the translation consistent.
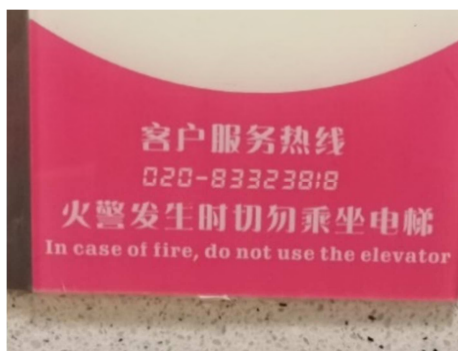

Figure 8. Chinglish.

Figure 9. Literal Translation.

Figure 10. Language Redundancy.

Figure 11. Spelling Errors.

Figure 12. Inconsistent Translations.

4.3.2. Lack of Language Planning Leads to Improper English Translation

The reason why the English translation errors of the above five foreign language signs still exist is that the language planning in Guangzhou is not yet completed. Firstly, Guangzhou City lacks regulations on the management of foreign language signs in public places that are compatible with the "Guangzhou Signs Standards", so the government cannot restrict the behavior of random translation. Referring to the "Beijing Municipal Regulations on the Management of Public Signs in Foreign Language", it stipulates the translation standard we should conform to and the penalties. These allow the government to regulate the translation of foreign language signs in a more effective manner. However, in Guangzhou, rectification can only be suggested, not mandatory.

Secondly, the government's publicity on the "Guangzhou Signs Standards" is inadequate, and most people do not know it. From the questionnaire, the majority of people (83.33%) do not know the "Guangzhou Signs Standards" at all. In addition, the vast majority of people (93.59%) have never received such information. These illustrate that there are gaps in the language planning of the Guangzhou Municipal Government and that the promotion of the Guangzhou Sign Code is completely insufficient.

In addition, some of the personnel responsible for the translation of foreign language signs are not professional. The current language planning in Guangzhou does not clearly stipulate that those responsible for foreign language signage translation need to hold relevant qualifications, which leads to uneven translation levels of foreign language sign translators, and even those sign producers who do not have sufficient English skills can become translators. If the government can guarantee the professionalism of the translators, there will be fewer errors in the foreign language signs on Beijing Road.

5. Strategies for Formulating Relevant Language Policies in Guangzhou

At present, the translation of foreign language signs on Beijing Road has been characterized by the phenomena of reasonable translating in Cantonese pinyin, reasonable translating in Chinese pinyin and non-use of English translation, as well as translation problems such as using non-standard Cantonese pinyin, omission of translation and literal translation, which are caused by the lack of relevant language policies. Therefore, we put forward several strategies in order to provide some reference suggestions for the formulation of relevant language policies and the improvement of rules in Guangzhou.

The first is to improve the "Guangzhou Signs Standards". In the case of errors such as omission of translation and literal translation of foreign language signs, a considerable number of them, when attempted to be corrected, could not be accessed in the corresponding English translations in the "Guidelines" and the "Guangzhou Signs Standards", including many basic and commonly used foreign language signs. In this regard, the Guangzhou Municipal Government should enrich the translation examples in the appendix of the "Guangzhou Signs Standards".

The second is to formulate specific management rules for foreign language signs in public places in Guangzhou. The Guangzhou Municipal Government can refer to the regulations on the management of foreign language signs in public places promulgated by other provinces and cities, and invite relevant experts to discuss in detail to formulate the regulations that meet the conditions of Guangzhou. The regulations should clarify who is responsible for the installation of foreign language signs in Guangzhou's tourism attractions. And penalties should also be set and strictly enforced.

The third is to strengthen the publicity of the "Guidelines" and "Guangzhou Signs Standards". Guangzhou Municipal Government should make greater efforts to publicize them, for example, by producing vivid videos, commercials or posters, and placing them on popular video platforms, prime time TV and in areas with high traffic flow, so that people can not only see them, but also remember them.

The fourth is to encourage citizens to give feedback on the translation of foreign language signs. Guangzhou Municipal Government updated the WeChat Mini Program (Figure 13) for citizens to report translation problems of foreign language signs, and added "sign translation search" to assist people in correcting signs. However, as of 5 October 2021, the most read article in it was only 2,291 (reading the article can earn points to redeem gifts), showing that people are not very engaged. In addition, we tried to upload the wrong foreign language sign on this Mini Program, and it has been accepted (Figure 14), which shows that the government is taking this Mini Program seriously. The government should make an effort to raise public awareness of foreign language signs, and attach importance to and actively promote the Mini Program.

Figure 13. WeChat Mini Program.

Figure 14. Feedback Sign Being Accepted.

The fifth is to cultivate high-quality translators. Cultivating high-quality translators is a fundamental measure to improve the quality of foreign language signage translation. Government should formulate relevant policies. Firstly, let children start to develop skills and knowledge of Chinese and English culture from an early age. Secondly, train talents in a targeted manner by urging relevant universities to offer courses or majors on translation of foreign language signs. Thirdly, conduct regular inspections of personnel engaged in foreign language signage translation and issue qualification certificates after passing the examination.

6. Conclusion

Based on the three dimensions of language practices, language ideology and language planning in Spolsky's language policy theory, this paper takes the Beijing Road as the investigation object to analyze the current situation of the translation of foreign language signs in it and the reasons for the phenomenon. The survey found that the translation of foreign language signs on Beijing Road has phenomena such as translating in pinyin, arbitrary use of English translation, omission of translation, language redundancy, and Chinglish. There are many reasons for such translation phenomena. Some are due to language choices to accurately convey the meaning and charm of the original text of the signs, some are caused by the lack of language service ideology of relevant personnel, and others blame on imperfect language planning by the government. In view of the problems and reasons for the translation of foreign language signs, the Guangzhou Municipal Government should formulate relevant language policies to improve the accuracy of foreign language signs and provide foreigners with a convenient working, living and traveling environment, thereby enhancing Guangzhou's international image.

Acknowledgements

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