

A Study on the Guidelines for Chinese-English Translation of Traffic Signs

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Abstract: *Aiming at developing a nation-wide standard software out of a programming language named Python, The paper focuses on guidelines for Chinese-English translation of traffic signs based on relevant regulations of several major cities in China and three principles of translation by Newmark: consistency, conciseness and comprehensibility. The guidelines consist of General Regulations, Usage and Writing, Words of Directions, Ordinal Numerals, Articles and Prepositions, Abbreviations, Road Information and Basic Facility Information.*

Keywords: *English translation, traffic signs, guidelines, proper noun, common noun.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Traffic signs in this paper refer to signs erected at the side of or above roads to give instructions or provide information to road users by police agencies administrating traffic. As far as we know, there are problems of misspelling or inaccuracy in translating Chinese traffic signs into English in almost every city in China with exception of several large ones like Beijing and Shanghai, what's worse, each of these large cities adopts its own translation rules, making it confusing for foreigners to interpret and the rest of the cities to follow. We propose that the public security ministry implement unified translation criteria to standardize the English traffic signs within the nation with software enabling traffic police in different areas and cities to input traffic signs in Chinese and output standard translations in English. This paper is to expound on the criteria of translating Chinese traffic signs into English from this perspective and based on the following two patterns and principles:

There are several journal papers discussing typical problems in translating traffic signs into English in major cities or provinces. [1] [2] Beijing, the capital of China, always sets patterns for other cities to follow almost in every aspect while Shanghai, the largest commercial city of China, also leads the direction in internationalization and modernization. *English Translation of Public Signs* implemented in 2007 by Beijing Municipal Administration of Quality and Technology Supervision as a measure to standerzize all the English translations of the city for the 2008 Olympic Game and *Guidelines for English Translation of Place Names in Shanghai* issued by Shanghai Place Name Administration Office in the same year are essential and instructional,[3] [4] but the most detailed and delicate one in this field is *English Translation of Public Signs in Shenzhen* issued by Shenzhen Municipal Foreign Affairs Office also in 2007. [5]

According to Newmark in his *A Textbook of Translation*, traffic signs can be classified in the category of *vocative text*, in contrast with *expressive text* and *informative text*. Under this theory, three principles should be followed in translating traffic signs, including consistency, conciseness and comprehensibility. [6]

2. GUIDELINES FOR CHINESE-ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF TRAFFIC SIGNS

A proper noun is a noun that in its primary application refers to a unique entity, such as *London*, *Jupiter*, *Sarah*, or *Microsoft*, as distinguished from a common noun, which usually refers to a class of entities (*city*, *planet*, *person*, *corporation*), or non-unique instances of a specific class (a *city*, another *planet*, these *persons*, our *corporation*). [7]

2.1. General Regulations

2.1.1. Translation of proper nouns

A. Transliterate proper nouns into Chinese phonetics in principle and capitalize the first letter of the noun, e.g.,

春柳	Chunliu
香炉礁	Xianglujiao

B. For monosyllabic proper nouns, transliterate its common noun as a proper noun first, and then free translate the common noun again, e.g.,

南山	Nanshan Mountain, <i>or</i> Nanshan Mt (<i>abbr</i>)
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C. Transliterate the proper noun into Chinese phonetic If it's a name of a road, e.g.,

虎滩路	Hutan Road, <i>or</i> Hutan Rd (<i>abbr</i>)
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Transliterate a traffic sign (or a scenic sign) indicating a specific site (not a road) into English, e.g.,

老虎滩景区	Tiger Beach Scenic Area
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D. For a street or interchange named after a place, transliterate the place into Chinese phonetics, transliterate the street or interchange into English, e.g.,

西安路	Xi'an Road, <i>or</i> Xi'an Rd (<i>abbr</i>)
香炉礁立交桥	Xianglujiao Interchange

2.1.2. Translation of common nouns

A. Free translate common nouns into English in principle and capitalize the first letter of each word, e.g.,

机场	Airport
自然博物馆	Natural Museum

B. For a Chinese place name with no common noun sense, transliterate it as a proper noun, e.g.,

解放路	Jiefang Rd
胜利路	Shengli Rd

C. To indicate its function, add a translation of the common noun, e.g.,

万达广场	Wanda Plaza
星海公园	Xinghai Park

2.2. Usage and Writing

2.2.1. Writing of a single-word nouns

Capitalize all the letters of a single-word noun indicating instructions; capitalize only the first letter of a single-word noun of a place name, e.g.,

出口	EXIT
金州	Jinzhou

2.2.2. Writing of multiword nouns

Capitalize all the letters of the multiword noun indicating instructions; capitalize only the first letter of each multiword nouns of a place name, e.g.,

下一出口(右)	NEXT (R)
黄河路	Huanghe Rd

2.2.3. Usage and writing of Chinese phonetics

Use Chinese phonetics in accordance with *National Standard of People's Republic of China Basic Rules for Hanyu Pinyin Orthography* to translate the word as one, but not each single character and capitalize the first letter, e.g.,

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大连	Dalian
白云新村	Baiyun Xincun

2.3. Words of Directions

2.3.1. Translate words of directions as follows

东	East / E	前	Front
西	West / W	后	Back
南	South / S	左	Right
北	North / N	右	Left
东南	Southeast / SE	上	Upper
西南	Southwest /SW	下	Lower
东北	Northeast /NE	内	Inner
西北	Northwest /NW	外	Outer
中	Middle	中心	Central

2.3.2. Translate words indicating directions usually into English, e.g.,

大连北站	Dalian North Railway Station
南广场	South Square

Translate words of directions in sequence into English and do not use their abbreviations for several paralleled streets or one street consisting of two sections such as east and west, north and south or inner and outer, e.g.,

旅顺南路	Lushun South Rd
民权北六街	Minquan North 6 th St

Use abbreviations for road signs indicating directions but not a segment of a name, e.g.,

(南) ← 红旗西路 → (北)	(S)←Hongqi West Rd →(N)
中华路 (东)	Zhonghua Rd (E)

2.3.3. Use Chinese phonetics for words of directions if they have been conventionalized as parts of the place names, e.g.,

东北路	Dongbei Rd
西南路	Xi'nan Rd

2.4. Ordinal Numerals

2.4.1. If an ordinal numeral is needed to describe a road name, use English superscript letters, e.g.,

兴工五街	Xinggong 5 th St
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2.4.2. Don't use ordinal numerals for other numbers in a place name, use directly Arabic numerals, e.g.,

三号门	Gate 3
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2.5. Articles and Prepositions

Do not use articles and prepositions in English translation, expect for conventions and accepted usage, e.g.,

白云新村	Baiyun Xincun
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2.6. Abbreviations

Use abbreviations in accordance with international conventions and English established expressions.

Note: Abbreviations can be written with or without full stops (or periods) in translating functional facilities and information signs like Ave, St, Rd or Expwy, but there must be a full stop after the abbreviation of Blvd., e.g.,

街	Street, Wenjing St (<i>abbr</i>)
路	Road, Huangpu Rd (<i>abbr</i>)
快速路	Expressway, Expwy (<i>abbr</i>)
山	Mountain, Mt (<i>abbr</i>)
大道	Boulevard, Blvd. (<i>abbr</i>)

2.7. Road Information

Road information is to indicate or mark using and driving area for people and vehicles, e.g.,

大道	Boulevard (Blvd.)	e.g.,“槐花大道”Huaihua Blvd.
路	Road (Rd)	e.g.,“中山路”Zhongshan Road
街	Street (St)	e.g.,“南沙街”Nansha Street
公路	Highway (Hwy)	e.g.,“滨海公路”Binhai Hwy
高速公路	Freeway	e.g.,“鹤大高速”Heda Freeway
快速路	Expressway (Expwy)	e.g.,“东北快速路”Dongbei Expwy
高架路	Elevated Rd	e.g.,“东联高架路”Donglian Elevated Road
桥或(大)桥	Bridge	e.g.,“黄河桥”Huanghe Bridge
立交桥	Interchange	e.g.,“香炉礁立交桥”Xianglujiao Interchange
人行天桥	Pedestrian overpass	e.g.,“人行天桥”Pedestrian Overpass
(人行) 地下通道	Pedestrian Underpass	e.g.,“中山路人行地下通道”Zhongshan Rd Pedestrian Underpass
隧道	Tunnel	e.g.,“石门山隧道”Shimenshan Tunnel
通道	Passageway	e.g.,“西部通道”West Passageway
线	Line	e.g.,“锦双线”Jinshuang Line
步行街	Pedestrian Street	e.g.,“大商步行街”Dalian Shopping Mall Pedestrian Street
风情一条街	Customs Street	e.g.,“俄罗斯风情一条街”Russian Customs Street, “南山日本风情一条街”Nanshan Japanese Customs Street

2.8. Basic Facility Information

Different translations of “站”

公共电/汽车中途停靠站	Stop or Bus Stop
公共电/汽车终点站或总站	Terminal
公交中心站	Central Bus Station
公交枢纽站	Public Transport Hub
地铁中途停靠站	Station
地铁终点站	Terminal
换乘站或中转站	Transfer Station or Transfer
出租汽车调度站	Taxi Service
出租汽车上下(落)站	Taxi or Taxi Stand.

Different translations of “园”

an area of land next to a house, where there are flowers, grass, and other plants, and often a place for people to sit	Garden	e.g.,“大连植物园”Dalian Botanical Garden
a community, usually a small town or city, that is composed mostly of residents, as opposed to commercial businesses and/or industrial facilities	Residential Quarters	e.g.,“学清园”Xueqing Residential Quarters
an area zoned for industrial development	Industrial Zone	e.g.,“高新园区”Hi-tech Industrial Zone
a smaller area zoned for industrial development	Industrial Estate	e.g.,“软件园”Software Industrial Estate
an area of natural, semi-natural, or planted space set aside for human enjoyment and recreation or for the protection of wildlife or natural habitats.	Park	e.g.,“劳动公园”Labor Park
a facility in which animals are confined within enclosures, displayed to the public, and in which they may also be bred.	Zoo	e.g.,“大连森林动物园”Dalian Forest Zoo

Different translations of “大厦”

a structure with a roof and walls standing more or less permanently in one place for business purpose	Building	e.g., “三合大厦” Sanhe Building
a large dwelling house	Mansion	e.g., “绿波大厦” Lubo Mansion

Different translations of “广场”

an open, typically four-sided, area surrounded by buildings in a village, town, or city:	Square	e.g., “星海广场” Xinghai Square
a public square, marketplace, or similar open space in a built-up area for business purpose	Plaza	e.g., “万达广场” Wanda Plaza

Translation of other basic facilities

机场	Airport	大学	University
医院	Hospital	火车站	Railway Station
体育场	Stadium	宾馆	Hotel
体育馆	Gymnasium	超市	Supermarket
小学	Primary School	市场	Market
中学	Middle School	商场	Shopping Mall
学院	Institute	百货	Department Store

3. APPLICATION PROSPECTS

These Guidelines are expected to be implemented in the city of Dalian, Liaoning Province, P. R. China in the near future by the Traffic Administration Department, Traffic Police Division of Dalian Public Security Bureau. We will apply for research project of the Public Security Ministry so as to further broaden the guidelines with networks which will be developed by Python, a widely used general-purpose, high-level programming language. Its design philosophy emphasizes code readability, and its syntax allows programmers to express concepts in fewer lines of code than would be possible in languages such as C++ or Java. The language provides constructs intended to enable clear programs on both a small and large scale. [8] The networks will automatically translate pattern Chinese traffic signs into English with desired size and color, supported by online service for some special traffic signs or requirements

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