On C-E Translation of Beijing Subway Stations Names Under Skopos Theory*

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With the increasing international exchanges, the subway station’s English name is playing an increasingly important role in transportation. Based on the problems in the current English translation found in the investigation, this paper attempts to retranslate the problematic station names from the perspective of Skopos Theory. Finally, it is expected to propose suggestions and enlightenment for the standardization of subway stations’ English translation.

Keywords: Beijing subway stations names, translation, Skopos Theory

Introduction

With close international exchanges, there are more and more foreigners in Beijing. Subway is progressively significant for their travel, so the English name of the subway station has also become a business card in Beijing. Beijing subway has 22 lines and 391 stations with a total length of 637 kilometers, which is of great importance in Beijing transportation. It is worth noting that there are still many irregularities in the current English names. For example, the translation of similar names is not uniform, and the inaccurate translation results are difficult in understanding. These irregularities will not only cause confusion for foreigners but also damage Beijing’s international image. Therefore, based on the Skopos Theory, this paper aims to retranslate subway station names with classification, and hopes to provide some reference for the English translation of the subway station.

Features of Beijing Subway Station Translation

The translation of Beijing subway station names is fairly essential. The most noticeable function of the English name of the Beijing subway station is indicating, which is convenient for foreigners to travel. Besides, more and more cities are facing the problem of subway stations’ English translation along with the development of subway transportation systems in China. There are no standards for the English translation of subway station names. Many cities will refer to the translation of the capital city, so the discussion in this paper is more significant. According to the Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Government of Beijing Municipal, the English name of the subway station is still in accordance with English Translation of Public Signs GeneralSpecifications published in November 2006. In recent years, China’s international status has increased, and Beijing subway station names contain rich Chinese history and culture. Therefore, we must pay more attention to the inheritance of Chinese culture when conducting the English translation of the subway

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stations. It gives foreigners an opportunity to learn about China.

Beijing subway is an indispensable part of the Beijing transportation system. Thus, the English translation of subway station names is of necessity to agree with the ground transportation system. What is more, many Beijing subway stations names are historical names, road names, or others. In the process of collecting and searching for the name of the subway station, it is not difficult to find that many names can be classified into one category. For example, Xuanwumen, Chongwenmen, and Deshengmen belong to the same category, and Pingguoyuan, Liyuan, and Pingleyuan belong to one class. This paper attempts to improve the existing translation names on the basis of classification, and specify the translation rule for the same type of subway station name.

A Brief Introduction to the Skopos Theory

The Skopos Theory is the most crucial functional approach in translation. Since the late 1970s, the Skopos Theory was established by Hans Vermeer, it has been applied to different types of translation texts. According to this theory, any form of translational action, including translation itself, may be assumed as an action that is intentional and purposeful. Acting is “intentional” or “purposeful” in two ways: it is intended to be appropriate to the situation and it is intended to achieve an aim in a given situation (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014, p. 87). So, it is necessary to take seriously the acceptability of the audience and the function of the target text. As a result, the Skopos Theory is a guiding principle to determine the strategies used.

There are three basic rules of the Skopos Theory: skopos rule, coherence rule, and fidelity rule. The highest rule of a theory of translational action is the “skopos rule” (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014, p. 90). Translation is not determined by the source target, or its impact on the source text reader, or the function the author assigned, but by the purpose or the prospective function of the translated text. It leads us to give high importance to the intended reader and the function of the target text.

The coherence rule touches upon that the translation must be adequately coherent for the intended users to comprehend it. In terms of comprehension, the target text must give the intended addressees situational circumstances and background knowledge.

The fidelity rule emphasizes the position of the source text, which means that the translation should take the original as an obligation. But the loyal degree and form are decided on the purpose of translation and translator’s understanding of the original. We should know that “from the very beginning, that translational action is not only a linguistic but also a cultural transfer” (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, Chinese culture elements will be presented sufficiently during the translation process of this paper.

All in all, the three rules constitute the Skopos Theory, but the coherence rule and the fidelity rule must give priority to the skopos rule in translating when there is a conflict among them.

The Application of the Skopos Theory in Beijing Subway Station Translation

In the last part, it has already been mentioned that the Skopos Theory is used as a guiding principle that decides the translation method and strategies. It is a flexible issue to determine that the translation should follow transliteration, free translation, or take care of both. Guidelines for the use of English in public service area (GB/T 30240-2017), implemented since December 1, 2017, is the basic standard for the English translation and writing in the field of public service. According to the 4.2.4 of the second part, the translation of subway station names should still conform to the fundamental principle that specific terms are written in Chinese Pinyin.
and generic terms are translated in English. In this paper, the translation considers the latest national regulations and the three principles of the Skopos Theory.

A familiar scene in the subway is that station names spelled by Pinyin are represented by capitalized letters without stops. Even we Chinese cannot understand them immediately. In GB/T 30240-2017, it is worth to notice that “同仁医院” is translated as “Tongren Hospital”. This is considered as our basic standard. What is more, the translation “西黄村” has changed from “XIHUANGCUN” to “Xihuang Cun” although the local standards in Beijing have not been revised. In fact, it is deliberately to distinguish specific name and generic name. The translation of “海淀五路居” is “HAIDIAN WULUJU”, which also has space between specific term and generic term. Actually, there is no corresponding item in English Translation of Public Signs General Specifications for such translation. And it does support the suggestion below.

On the one hand, only the first letter of a word needs to be capitalized. On the other hand, between specific term and generic term, there should be a space. This is consistent with the purpose of understandability and conciseness. Take “苹果园” as an example, “Pingguo” is a meaningful unit in Chinese words, and “Yuan” is a generic term and there are other names like it in Beijing. Thus, it should be expressed by “Pingguo Yuan” to make the intended reader have a better comprehension of it. Therefore, based on the classification, this paper proposes suggestions for the English translation of the subway station name.

The Translation of “xx园”

| Stations          | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 苹果园            | PINGGUOYUAN         | Pingguo Yuan          |
| 枣园              | ZAOYUAN             | Zao Yuan              |
| 东夏园            | DONGXIAYUAN         | Dongxia Yuan          |
| 杜丹园            | MUDANYUAN           | Mudan Yuan            |
| 果园              | GUOYUAN             | Guo Yuan              |
| 蓬家园            | PANJIAYUAN          | Panjia Yuan           |
| 园                 | LIYUAN              | Li Yuan               |
| 平乐园            | PINGLEYUAN          | Pingle Yuan           |
| 小园              | XIAOYUAN            | Xiao Yuan             |
| 丰台科技园         | FENGTAI Science Park | Fengtai Science Park  |
| 亦庄文化园         | YIZHUANG Culture Park | Yizhuang Culture Park |
| 八角游乐园         | BAJIAO Amusement Park | Bajiao Amusement Park |
| 奥林匹克森林公园   | Olympic Green       | Olympic Forest Park   |
| 画明园            | YUANMINGYUAN Park   | Yuanmingyuan Park     |

The stations’ names above are reserved from historical usage, and there are no real places called by these names today. They belong to specific terms that are impossible by corresponding English words. Therefore, these names are presented by Chinese Pinyin, which also stimulates the interest of foreigners to know Chinese culture to a certain extent. What is more, these station names of Pinyin form are difficult for foreigners who do not learn Chinese, so between the generic term “园” and the specific term there should be a space, and hence people will understand this kind of names has a certain relationship and they are different from each other. This kind of translation not only satisfies the indication function well, but also is faithful to the original text showing the Chinese culture.
There are functional parks which are called “xx园”. It is easy to find the corresponding English expressions so that these names can better play their indicating roles. For example, “植物园” is translated into Botanical Garden, “动物园” is interpreted into “Beijing Zoo”, and “亦庄文化园” is translated into “Yizhuang Culture Park”. Moreover, “Olympic Green” and “South Gate of Forest Park” have caused ambiguity. They refer to one park, but two expressions. Consequently, “奥林匹克森林公园” station should be called “Olympic Forest Park” which is also consistent with the name of its official website. According to GB/T 30240-2017, the English translation has been customary, and it can follow the customary translation. So “圆明园” is still translated into “Yuanmingyuan Park”.

The Translation of “xx门”

Table 2

| Stations   | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 复兴门     | FUXINGMEN           | Fuxing Men            |
| 建国门     | JIANGUOMEN          | Jianguo Men           |
| 西直门     | XIZHIMEN            | Xizhi Men             |
| 安定门     | ANDINGMEN           | Anding Men            |
| 东直门     | DONGZHIMEN          | Dongzhi Men           |
| 朝阳门     | CHAOYANGMEN         | Chaoyang Men          |
| 祁文门     | CHONGWENMEN         | Chongwen Men          |
| 和平门     | HEPINGMEN           | Hepin Men             |
| 前门       | QIANMEN             | Qian Men              |
| 阜成门     | FUCHENGMEN          | Fucheng Men           |
| 北宫门     | BEIGONGMEN          | Beigong Men           |
| 宣武门     | XUANWUMEN           | Xuanwu Men            |
| 西红门     | XIHONGMEN           | Xihong Men            |
| 通运门     | TONGYUNMEN          | Tongyun Men           |
| 安贞门     | ANZHENMEN           | Anzen Men             |
| 健德门     | JIANDEMEN           | Jiande Men            |
| 大红门     | DAHONGMEN           | Dahong Men            |
| 安静门     | GUANGXIMEN          | Guangxi Men           |
| 小红门     | XIAOHONGMEN         | Xiaohong Men          |

“门” is a kind of ancient Chinese architecture that belongs to the city gate. The station names all are derived from historical place names, and they can be translated as specific terms. “门” is considered a generic term, which will achieve the cultural purpose of the translation. However, “石门” is the name of a village in Shunyi District. Here, Shimen is still translated as one word as current translation, but “Shimen” is more suitable than “SHIMEN”.

The Translation of “xx路” and “xx街”

Table 3

| Stations   | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 万寿路     | WANSHOULU           | Wanshou Rd            |
| 南礼士路   | NANLISHILU          | Nanlishi Rd           |
| 大望路     | DANGWANGLU          | Dawang Rd             |
| 玉泉路     | YUQUANLU            | Yuquan Rd             |
Table 3 continued

| Stations         | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 清源路          | QINGYUANLU          | Qingyuan Rd            |
| 张自忠路        | ZHANGZIHONGLU       | Zhangzizhong Rd        |
| 金台路          | JINTAILU            | Jintai Rd              |
| 青年路          | QINGNIANLU          | Qimgian Rd             |
| 物资学院路      | WUZIXUEYUANLU       | Wuzi University Rd     |
| 育知路          | YUZHILI             | Yuzhi Rd               |
| 科怡路          | KEYILU              | Keyi Rd                |
| 经海路          | JINGHAILU           | Jinghai Rd             |
| 长椿街          | CHANGCHUNJIE        | Changchun St           |
| 苏州街          | SUZHOUIE            | Suzhou St              |
| 知春路          | ZHICHUNLU           | Zhichun Rd             |
| 安立路          | ANLILU              | Anli Rd                |
| 稻香湖路        | DAOXIANGHULU        | Daoxianghu Rd          |
| 温阳路          | WENYANGLU           | Wenyang Rd             |
| 万源街          | WANYUANJIE          | Wanyuan St             |

These names are all derived from the name of certain roads in Beijing. The English translation should be consistent with the English names of these roads, or it is easy to cause ambiguity for foreigners. Additionally, consistence is the primary element of a place name. The role of the generic term is to indicate the function and property of the place, so we cannot simply use Pinyin to express it. In one word, based on the coherence rule and the skopos rule, we should improve the current translation.

The part belongs to specific term adopts the transliteration, so it is spelled according to the rules of Chinese Pinyin. The part belongs to generic term adopts free translation as it is expressed by the corresponding English words. In doing so, the subway station name will be more standardized and avoid ambiguity.

**The Translation of Direction Words**

While translating the subway station name with direction word, the key is where the direction word appears in the name. When the direction word has fixedly become one part of the whole station name, its indication function has been weakened. We will translate it as a part of the specific term if it is in the front of a station name. For instance, Xidan is more proper since two characters have become one fix word along with the long historical use. “南锣鼓巷” is also considered as a specific term and “南” cannot be separated with the rest part. There are 25 station names belonging to this category, which are translated as specific terms in the existing translation, but the spelling form should obey the rule of Pinyin as mentioned in the previous part.

Table 4

| Stations         | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 西单             | XIDAN               | Xidan                  |
| 东单             | DONGDAN             | Dongdan                |
| 东四十条        | DONGSI SHITIAO      | Dongsishtiaot          |
| 西四             | XISI                | Xisi                   |
| 东四             | DONGSI              | Dongsi                 |
| 西苑             | XIYUAN              | Xiyuan                 |
| 北新桥           | BEIXINQIAO          | Beixinqiao             |
| 南锣鼓巷         | NANLUOGUXIANG       | Nanluoguxiang          |
(table 4 continued)

| Stations     | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 东大桥       | DONGDAQIAO          | Dongdaqiao            |
| 南楼梓庄     | NANLOUZIZHUANG      | Nanlouzizhuang       |
| 西小口       | XIXIAOKOU           | Xixiaokou             |
| 北土城       | BEITUCHENG          | Beitungcheng         |
| 西土城       | XITUCHENG           | Xitucheng             |
| 西局         | XIJU                | Xiju                  |
| 西二旗       | XIERQI              | Xierqi                |
| 北苑         | BEIYUAN             | Beiyuan               |
| 北安河       | BEIANHE             | Beianhe               |
| 西北旺       | XIBEIWANG           | Xibeiwang             |
| 北郊洼       | BEISHAOWA           | Beishaowa             |
| 南郊         | NANSHAO             | Nanshao               |
| 西钓鱼台     | XIDIAOYUTAI         | Xidiaoayutai          |
| 东高地       | Donggao Di          | Donggao Di            |
| 东湖渠       | DONGHUQU           | Donghuqu              |
| 北沙滩       | BEISHATAN           | Beishatan             |
| 南法信       | NANFAXIN            | Nanfaxin              |

The second condition is that direction word is in the last part of the station name. This kind of direction has strong indication information. Whether in accordance with national standards (GB/T 30240-2017) or Beijing local standards (DB/T 334-2006), such names should adopt both transliteration and free translation. We translate it into English direction word, such as Liuliqiao East is for “六里桥东”. Beijing subway stations have many such names, like Sihui and Sihui East, Jiaomen East and Jiaomen West. The direction word is put in this way as to make the distinction between the two stations more visible for foreigners.

Table 5

| Stations     | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 天安门西     | TIAN’ANMEN West     | Tian’an Men West      |
| 天安门东     | TIAN’ANMEN West     | Tian’an Men Eest      |
| 安河桥北     | ANHEQIAO North      | Anheqiao North        |
| 角门西       | JIAOMEN West        | Jiaomen West          |
| 高米店北     | GAOMIDIAN North     | Gaomidian North       |
| 高米店南     | GAOMIDIAN South     | Gaomidian South       |
| 立水桥南     | LISHUIQIAO South    | Lishuiqiao South      |
| 大屯路东     | DATUNLU East        | Datun Rd East         |
| 北苑路北     | BEIYUANLU North     | Beiyan Rd North       |
| 天通苑北     | TIANTONGYUAN North  | Tiantongyuan North    |
| 白石桥南     | BAISHIQIAO South    | Baishiqiao South      |
| 车公庄西     | CHEGONZHUAO West    | Chegongzhuang West    |
| 北海北       | BEIHAI North        | Beihai North          |
| 北运河西     | BEIYUNHE West       | Beiyunhe West         |
| 北运河东     | BEIYUNHE East       | Beiyunhe East         |
| 大石河东     | DASHIHE East        | Dashihe East          |
| 阎村东       | YANCUN East         | Yancun East           |
| 西大东路     | SIHUI East          | Sihui East            |
### Table 5 continued

| Stations       | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 次渠南         | CIQU South          | Ciqu South            |
| 永丰南         | YONGFENG South      | Yongfeng South        |
| 望京南         | WANGJING South      | Wangjing South        |
| 望京东         | WANGJING East       | Wangjing East         |
| 望京西         | WANGJING West       | Wangjing West         |
| 角门东         | JIAOMEN East        | Jiaomen East          |
| 六里桥东       | LIULIQIAO East      | Liuliqiao East        |
| 良乡大学城西   | LIANGXIANG University Town West | Liangxiang University Town West |
| 良乡大学城北   | LIANGXIANG University Town North | Liangxiang University Town North |

If direction words are in the middle of the station names, we can translate them into English corresponding expressions as Table 6.

### Table 6

| Stations       | Current translation | Suggested translation |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 黄村西大街     | HUANGCUNXIDAJIE     | Huangcun West St      |
| 公益西桥       | GONGYIXIQIAO        | Gongyi West Bridge    |
| 惠新西街北口   | HUIXINXIJIEBEIKOU   | North Exit of Huixin West St |
| 惠新西街南口   | HUIXINXIJENANKOU    | South Exit of Huixin West St |
| 和平西桥       | HepingXIQIAO        | Heping West Bridge    |
| 和平里北街     | HepingLIBEIJIJE     | Heping Li North St    |
| 天坛东门       | TIANTANDONGMEN      | East Gate of Tiantan  |
| 平台东大街     | FENGTaidaONGDAJIE   | Fengtai East St       |
| 平台南线       | FENGTAINANLULU      | Fengtai South Rd      |
| 东风北桥       | DONGFENGBEIQIAO     | Dongfeng North Bridge |
| 北工大西门     | BEIHONGDAXIMEN      | West gate of BJUT     |
| 清华东路西口   | QINGHUADONGLUXIKOU  | West Exit of Qinghua East Rd |
| 农大南路       | NONGDANANLULU       | Nongda South Rd       |
| 荣昌东街       | RONGCHANGDONGJIE    | Rongchang East St     |
| 荣京东街       | RONGJINGDONGJIE     | Rongjing East St      |
| 院济南路       | TONGJINANLULU       | Tongji South Rd       |
| 龙庆观东大街   | HUILONGGUIUAN DONGDAJIE | Huilongguan East St |

In these station names’ translation, the rule is followed that the specific terms are translated by transliteration and the generic terms are interpreted by free translation. Additionally, the same names should be kept one consistent form in different transportation. Only in this way, our basic purpose of translation, indication, can be better achieved. For example, “农大南路” is expressed as “Nongda South Rd” which is located in the road called by this name.

It is better to translate “北工大西门” into “West gate of BJUT”, because there is an English name of this university. However, “物资学院路” is translated into Wuzi University Rd for the reason that the English name of this university is Beijing Wuzi University in its official website.

### Conclusion

All in all, in the process of the translation on Beijing subway station names, translators should pay attention to the conciseness and understandability of the target text, as well as its consistency with the ground
transportation system. Taking Chinese culture elements into consideration, translators should conform to the spelling rules of Chinese Pinyin to keep the form of specific terms. The translator should employ the Skopos Theory suitably and flexibly to transfer Beijing subway station names.

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