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## Bridging the Gap: Exploring Translation Equivalence and Enhancing Public Sign Translations in Xuzhou's Tourism Spots



**Abstract:** - In the tourism industry, effective communication is essential, and accurate translation of public signs plays a significant role in providing information to domestic and foreign visitors. However, in translation studies, few scholars divide tourism public signs into equivalent types. This paper aims to solve this gap by analyzing the translation of tourism public signs in Xuzhou, China. To explore this, an empirical research approach was adopted, including the collection of photographs of public sign translations and their subsequent analysis. This study makes an in-depth analysis of the translation of public signs in Xuzhou, including their content and language. The researcher examined the strategies used by translators to ensure the accuracy and cultural appropriateness of their translations and assessed their effectiveness in conveying the intended meaning to visitors. The results show that the application ratio of Functional Equivalence is the highest. These special translations are usually carried out by translators with varying degrees of English proficiency, who rely on available language resources to achieve their communicative goals. In addition, the advantages and limitations of functional equivalence are discussed. It is suggested based on this situation that translation of public signs in tourism should be completed by translators with rich knowledge of both Chinese and English.

**Keywords:** Translation; Equivalence Theory; Public Signs in Tourism.

### Introduction

As a key bridge of cross-cultural communication, translation undertakes important communication tasks. Among the many translation theories, equivalence theory is particularly prominent and is regarded as one of the core theories in this field. According to Baker and Saldanha (2009), equivalence mainly refers to the transmission ability to maintain the meaning of the original text in the translation process. However, scholars hold different views and evaluations about the value of this theory. While some argue that equivalence is crucial, others argue that it limits creativity and progress in translation. Brislin (1970) states that assessing equivalence between two languages is also a complex process that requires specific criteria. This study contributes to the ongoing debate by providing empirical evidence from the tourism field, particularly focusing on the translation of public signs in Xuzhou and highlights the practical implications of applying equivalence theory in real-world contexts.

Public signs are all kinds of written languages in public places. It is an essential part of the urban culture and language environment, which can increase the efficiency and affinity of regional cultural communication and

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strengthen the harmonious blend between different cultures. The International Committee on Graphic Signage defines public signs as signs that could be anything from a basic technique to label or locate information to a highly sophisticated means of conveying data (Dong, 1996). According to Chinese academics, public signs inform the public and serve as a form of warning in various situations (Lu, 2005). According to the language and utilisation, public signs can be divided into Directive, Informatory, Cautionary, Restrictive, Mandatory Public Signs, and Public Slogans (Wang & Liu, 2020). This categorization not only reflects the functional diversity of public signs but also underscores the complexity involved in their translation, which must account for cultural, linguistic, and contextual nuances. In this context, the translation of public signs becomes a creative endeavour, blending linguistic precision with cultural storytelling. Usually, public signs are strictly normative and standard (Wang, 2014). The Chinese-English translation of public signs adopts the public signs used on the same occasions. They further have the same functions in both Chinese and English cultures. However, the general translation method or strategy may not be applied to translating public signs in tourism (Yu, 2019). Its language style is more like art and literature instead of being short or imperative. Due to the particularity of public signs in tourism, the contents could hardly be the same. Public signs in different scenic spots tell different stories. To advertise these scenic spots, translators seem to spend more time considering the proper way of translation.

The tourism industry in China has experienced rapid growth, making it one of the top tourist destinations across the globe. According to Sulaiman and Wilson (2019), the tourism industry needs to provide translations of public signs that are accurate as well as culturally appropriate. This further helps in facilitating interlingual and intercultural dialogue between natives of the area and visitors from other countries, promoting tourist sites, and improving the image of the country. In the past two decades, the number of international visitors has increased significantly from 7.43 million in 1997 to 29.17 million in 2017 (China Statistical Yearbook, 1998, 2018). Although tourists come from various countries and speak different languages, English has become a vital communication tool in the Chinese tourism industry due to its status as a lingua franca in the modern world (Canagarajah, 2007; Pennycook, 2017). The Chinese government has implemented policies to standardise the use of English in tourist attractions to enhance communication between hosts and international tourists, intending to improve overall travel experience. For example, the Regulations on the Administration of Foreign Language Signs in Public Places of Beijing have been deliberated and adopted at the 59th Executive Meeting of the Municipal People's Government on February 12, 2020, and shall come into force as of July 1, 2020.

## **Literature Review**

### **Past Study of Translation and Equivalence**

Throughout translation history, there have been various versions of the definitions of translation. Some descriptions are similar, while others are very different. The number of definitions of the translation may be as many as the number of translators (Liu, 2019). Since people explain translation from several perspectives, the process of having a perfectly unified understanding becomes neither feasible nor practicable. It is not conceivable nor practicable to get an entirely consistent experience. Despite this, other individuals have articulated the key aspects of translation from various perspectives such as translation is a mental action in which two symbols, words, or languages are converted through a specific medium (Bell, 2000). The English word "translate" comes from the

Latin "trans+latus", meaning "carried across", which literally means to convert the text content of the original text into the text content of the target language (Liu, 2019). Translation is a complex communicative act that involves the rendering of text or discourse from one language (source language) to another (target language) while preserving its meaning, intent, style, and cultural nuances (House, 2015). Translators play the role of being linguistic and cultural mediators to navigate through the interplay of linguistic structures, social-cultural contexts, and contextual appropriateness to produce an equivalent and contextually relevant target text.

Equivalence theory is a foundational concept in translation studies and its studying provides a solid theoretical framework for translators and researchers in the field of translation studies (Krein-Kühle, 2014). This theory enables the development of translation theories, methods, and approaches while serving as a basis for analysing translation strategies and techniques. It highlights the cultural and linguistic differences between source and target languages along with the challenges of achieving exact equivalence in translation (He & van de Vijver, 2012). In tourism, this understanding becomes significant because accurate and culturally sensitive translations of public signs enhance the travel experience of international visitors. Munday (2001) divides equivalence into five different types (1) Extensional Equivalence is related to the equivalence of irrelevant content; (2) Intentional Equivalence is related to word selection, especially among synonyms; (3) Text-normative Equivalence is related to text type because they behave differently; (4) Pragmatic Equivalence tends to the recipient of the text or information, and finally (5) Formal Equivalence deals with the form and aesthetics of the text. Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997) emphasizes a useful equivalence typology, dividing the concept into seven distinct categories mentioned below:

Table 1: The Genre of Equivalences

Genre
Formal Equivalence
Dynamic Equivalence
Functional Equivalence
Linguistic Equivalence
Ethnographic Equivalence
Stylistic Equivalence
Textual Equivalence

Nida, a renowned figure in the field of translation studies, proposed the concepts of Dynamic Equivalence and Formal Equivalence to describe two different approaches to translation. According to Nida (1964), Dynamic Equivalence focuses on conveying the meaning, spirit, and impact of the source text in the target culture. In contrast, Formal Equivalence emphasises on the maintenance of the form and structure of the source text in the target language. In more recent discussions on translation theory, some scholars have argued that Dynamic Equivalence and Functional Equivalence are essentially same concepts with different names. Liu (2019) supports this view by suggesting that the terms can be used interchangeably. However, this implies that both approaches prioritise the communicative effectiveness and impact of the translated text in the target culture rather than strictly adhering to the form and structure of the source text.

### Translation of Public Signs

The study of the translation of public signs is an emerging topic. In foreign countries, the translation of public

signs has a long history. In 1959, Vinay and Darbelne began researching about public signs. They have stated that when the culture of the target language differs from the source language, it results in changed meaning (Panou, 2013). This suggests that in such cases, literal translation is not suitable anymore to attain Functional Equivalence. In this case, the structure of the translation must be different. Connor thinks that public signs provide a particular group with attention, aiming to complete a specific communication purpose (Connor et al., 2020). Chinese researchers started researching public sign translation around the end of the 1980s (Zeng, 1987, 1989, as cited in Li, 2017). The term "Public Sign" had not yet been invented. For instance, the translation of enterprise name, the first domestic effort, was published by Zhenqi Ding in 1989 (Ding, 1989). In the same year, a *Discussion on Pinyin of Place Names in China* was proposed by Shiyong Zong (Zong, 1989). Finally, in 2002, Beijing International Studies University established the Research Centre for Translation of Public Signs. As the project received funding, the name of the public sign was officially adopted. In September 2005, the First National Symposium on Translation of Public Signs was held by this university, which greatly promoted the research on Chinese-English translation of public signs, as well as the Chinese Translators Journal started to open a column of "Translation of Public Signs" to lead the research while enabling various scholars to continue to explore their views in this field.

In a seminal study, Lu (2005) has successfully addressed the ambiguity surrounding the definition of public signs in China, providing a comprehensive and clear explanation. Through in-depth analysis, Lu (2005) has not only clarified the meaning of the concept of public signs, but also provided strong support and direction for the future development of the field. This research study has further believed in comprehensively covering the information and events, which in turn, led to understanding the characteristics of modern audience along with the recognition of continuous evolution of public signs. In this manner, this research study has put forward valuable insights into the field of intercultural communication and translation. This has further helped this study in laying a solid foundation for further research studies.

### **Categorisation of Public Signs and Their Functional Significance**

Dai and Lu (2005) have conducted a seminal study to deepen the knowledge of public signs along with their dynamic and multifaceted functions. This research study has helped in categorising public signs into two categories such as static and functional categories. Each of these categories serve a unique purpose by providing an efficient framework to analyse the specific functions. Apart from this, this research study has further helped in the identification of a wide range of functions of public signs based on their recommendations, functional significance, encompassing indications, commands and maintenance guidelines (Dai & Lu, 2005). This further enabled the study to highlight the several ways within which public signs can interact with their target audience, resulting in improved dynamic and context-dependent nature. The consistently growing importance of public signs enabled several research scholars worldwide to pay attention to this field. In this similar context, another research study by Ni and Liu (1998) has highlighted some essential guidelines to strengthen the public signs through standardisation, clarity, and simplicity. The approach followed by this research study helped in providing valuable insights regarding the efficiency of public signage (Ni & Liu, 1998). However, a deeper theoretical foundation was required in the context of enriching their contributions and making recommendations rigorous instead of the fact that the principles provided practical direction.

Apart from this, another research study by Wang and Chen (2004) has able to take a commendable step to investigate translation errors and emphasise on the significance of adhering to conventions during translation. The rigid focus of this study on the convention as a guiding principle has been insightful. There are chances that this analysis can be strengthened by connecting their research findings with already existing theories of translation. This will help in placing the research study in a wider theoretical context. In addition, another research study by Li (2009) has shed light on a translation model based on the examination of public signs characteristics. This helped the research study in bringing practicality to the centre stage as they provided a practical toolkit to solve challenges faced during translation processes. However, it is observed that lack of profound theoretical foundation limits the generalisability of proposed models while hindering their adaptability in different contexts. There is no doubt regarding the undeniable contributions of these research scholars in the context of translation studies as they provided guiding principles along with strategies, but it is also important to give recognition to the criticisms. Mo and Jin (2008) have correctly pointed out that these views are mainly based on the summary of personal experience and the expression of subjective emotions and lack a solid theoretical foundation. It is observed that the integration of theoretical support has the ability of improving the efficiency as well as applicability of these methods. Liu (2020) in recent years has conducted an in-depth discussion regarding the Russian translation situation in the Hainan Island. This research study has focused on the solutions of some specific problems faced during translation in Hainan Island. However, the impact of the analysis may be more significant, if a more direct and systematic approach to the identified problem is proposed, rather than being limited to problem identification.

These studies have made important contributions to the field of translation of public signs, but a common theme is that research deeply integrated into translation theory will be able to elevate these efforts from a practical level to a theory-based solution strategy. This not only helps in enhancing the credibility of the recommendations, but also helps in contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of effective translation practices. Several scholars have made important contributions to the study of public signs by adopting various theoretical frameworks. For example, Wang (2018) has conducted an in-depth study of sign translation in Xinjiang and applied Skopos theory to guide his translation method, providing valuable insights for translation under specific communicative goals. Another research study by Luo (2019) has designed comprehensive guidelines in a set of three to provide guidance to the translation process of public signs in alignment with the established standards. This further helped in the demonstration of the practicability of the norms.

Zhang (2020) has explored the intersection between Xi'an tourism culture and the interpretation of public signs of tourist destinations under the influence of new media. By deeply studying the modern media environment, Zhang's research has provided a new perspective for the interpretation of public signs (Zhang, 2020). On the contrary, Li (2017) has comprehensively analysed the types of errors in Chinese-English translation of tourist attractions and their potential causes, and this detailed analysis revealed the root causes of translation differences and the necessity of improvement. Although the existing research results are quite insightful, studies applying equivalence theory to the translation of tourism-related announcements are still limited. These studies contribute to the understanding of bulletin translation to a large extent, but do not delve into the theory of reciprocity. This theory, which focuses on the preservation of cross-linguistic meaning while considering cultural differences, has a great potential to improve the quality of bulletin translation. In the similar context, it is observed that the wide acceptance of

equivalence theory has enabled researchers and practitioners around the world to ensure that the process of translation transcends cultural and linguistic barriers. Thus, the application of equivalence theory is not only logical, but important for ensuring effective translation of culturally relevant situations and tourism-related announcements.

### **Research Objective and Research Questions**

Translation of public signs in Chinese tourist attractions has gained scholarly attention. Currently, English translations of public signs in many Chinese tourist destinations are subpar, failing to facilitate clear cross-cultural communication (Li, 2016) and lacking accessibility and linguistic understanding. A research study by Chen (2016) has outlined that the limited grasp of the translator regarding a specific culture like Chinese culture may lead to problems like inconsistencies and grammatical and translation errors, resulting in high confusion. Lin (2015) has observed that irrespective of several guidelines regarding the use of English language in public places, their enforcement is lacking owing to the absence of clear translation guidelines. Another research scholar like Amenador and Wang (2022) opined that some research scholars rely on their personal experiences rather than the systematic research studies conducted by scholars. This context has paved way for the background of the present research, which aims to conduct a critical analysis of the public signage translation practices in relation to the tourism spots in Xuzhou. The research also aims to focus on equivalence theory to understand its potential limitations and reasons to gain detailed insights along with recommendations to enhance the translation in the current context. The successful fulfilment of these research aims further help in enhancing the cross-cultural communication in the context of translation and tourism studies.

To fulfil the proposed research aims, the research questions are mentioned below:

1. Which type of Equivalence is applied the most for translating public signs in tourism in Xuzhou?
2. Why is this type of equivalence applying the most?
3. What is the limitation of this type of equivalence?

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

This research study has followed an empirical research design within exploratory strategy. The adoption of empirical research design enabled researcher to collect data for the study through direct observation. Within empirical research design, the researcher has captured several photographs of the public signs along with their English translations. This has behaved as a form of empirical data collection. However, the researcher has only collected data from a representative tourist destination in Xuzhou. This suggests that Xuzhou has been the data collection site for the present research study. The researcher has methodically captured photographs of public signs from each site with their English translations. Furthermore, the researcher has conducted the data analysis by undertaking a comprehensive examination of the collected data while categorising them based on translation theories. This has further helped the researcher to assess the efficiency of each type of equivalence in relation to the accuracy of the cultural adaptability and information transfer. With the help of this research design, the researcher has been able to contribute to the existing body of literature by contributing insights from practical case

studies related to translation studies. This has also enabled the researcher to enhance the cultural adaptability and quality of the public sign translations. This study is expected to highlight the nuanced challenges and opportunities in the field of translation, especially in the context of tourism, enhancing the understanding of cross-cultural communication through public signage.

### Settings and Samples

As the birthplace of Han culture, Xuzhou takes the inheritance and development of the Chinese language as its responsibility and strives to build a world-class Han culture inheritance and tourism destination. Typical scenic spots include natural landscapes, cultural relics of the Han Dynasty, ancient towns, ancient tombs, museums, temples, amusement places, etc. Among these attractions, which represent new fashion trends, attracting people to post on social media, popular spots on the internet are targeted. There are also many kinds of sightseeing places. This paper focuses on sightseeing places with cultural elements. According to the Xuzhou Tourism Bureau statistics, nearly 100 tourist attractions exist. Considering many tourist attractions and the low likelihood of small attractions having bilingual public signs, the researcher planned to narrow the search to the top tourist attractions (those that attract the most visitors each year). These tourist attractions were selected by the Xuzhou Cultural Tourism website: <http://www.xzta.com/>.

The core research design centred on a carefully selected set of public signs. To compile this set, the researcher systematically captured images of these signage installations at tourist attractions. The photographs were meticulously taken, aiming to comprehensively cover the main tourist pathways, as directed by the layout of the attractions themselves. However, it was worth noting that specific sites remained pending due to ongoing renovation activities, the residual impacts of the recent pandemic outbreak, and a lack of available translations. As a result, these incomplete sites could not be incorporated into the present analysis. Subsequently, a thorough refinement process was undertaken. Samples that were too brief in length, devoid of any discernible cultural elements (such as those found in amusement parks) and lacked any form of translation were deliberately excluded from the dataset. This stringent filtering procedure resulted in a final collection of 77 images, which were then subjected to a detailed and comprehensive content analysis.

### Instrument of Photo content

Tourist sites were documented using photo instruments. Every photo was accompanied by an associated version that denotes issues related to translation. Owing to the constraints and particularity of the data, procuring the necessary information from alternative sources is a challenging task. Thus, the sole alternative was to gather primary data. The researcher began travelling in June of 2023 and visited all the tourist spots that the local government highly recommended. The following attractions and the photos taken after selection are as follows:

Table 2: Types of Tourism and Photo Numbers Taken.

Location	Type	Numbers of Photos Taken
Yunlong Mountain	Mountain	8
Xuzhou Museum	Museum	24
Yaowan Ancient Town	Ancient Town	11
Guishan Tomb of the Han	Old Tomb	14

Dynasty		
Memorial of Huaiai Battle	Battle memorial	2
Tourism area in Jiawang District	Nature view (culture or history contained)	10
Cornel Temple	Temple of Buddhism	8
In total		77

### Data Collection Process

By involving on-site visits and photography to gather data, the researcher identified tourist attractions through official local tourism websites, which suggested they would follow official recommendations. Once the sites were identified, the researcher travelled to each site to take photographs. This first-hand data collection allowed the researcher to capture information about the sites and ensure that the photos accurately reflected the experience of visiting each site. After taken, each photo has been assigned with a unique number for identification and management. Then, a detailed file was built, containing extensive information about each sample, including detailed records of the location, date, and specific time of shooting. The establishment of this archive plays an important role in ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the data, as it helps in documenting the entire process of obtaining each photo in detail and systematically. The researcher then categorised the photos according to their content. This classification process not only helped to organise large amounts of data efficiently, but also identified potential patterns or trends in it, especially when some of the information was not very clear cut. The entire data collection process has been methodically arranged to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the obtained information.

### Data Analysis Process

Regarding data analysis methods, the study focuses on comparative text analysis, which is a solid method for classifying samples according to the principles of equivalence theory. Public signs and their translations have been rigorously reviewed and classified, applying principles such as functional, dynamic, or formal pairs. The goal has been to ensure that each translation case is evaluated within the prescribed framework of translation theory through a comprehensive and methodical analysis. A clear framework has been designed to validate the reasoning behind translation classification to address the potential overlap between functional equivalence, dynamic equivalence and textual equivalence. This paper mainly discussed the relationship between functional equivalence and dynamic equivalence, especially emphasising that together they convey the core idea and spirit of the original text to the target language culture. Through systematic comparative analysis, the researcher has carefully examined the unique characteristics of different translations, allowing informed and clear classification decisions based on their impact in specific contexts.

When difficulties or disputes appeared during the classification process, the researcher looked for professional guidance from translation and linguistics professionals. In-depth discussions with these experts not only enhanced the credibility of the research, but also helped in resolving any contradictions in the classification and ensuring the objectivity and academic integrity of the research. In addition, the researcher has openly acknowledged and addressed the challenges posed by ambiguous texts, providing insights into the decision-making processes and



criteria for text classification that reveal the complexity of this complex task. Through these methods, the research has maintained a high degree of transparency, reliability, and clarity to classify translations into various equivalent types.

**Findings**

**Which type of Equivalence is applied the most for translating public signs in tourism in Xuzhou?**

The data analysis shows that Functional Equivalence dominates most positions in translating public signs of tourism in Xuzhou (Table 3).

Table 3: Numbers of Samples Applied to All Kinds of Equivalence Theories.

Genre	Sample No.
Formal Equivalence	2, 8, 13, 30, 55, 58, 59
Functional Equivalence	1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77
Dynamic Equivalence	None
Linguistic Equivalence	None
Ethnographic Equivalence	4, 6, 28, 35
Stylistic Equivalence	20, 24
Textual Equivalence	None

From the table 3, it is indicated that there are 64 out of 77 samples that belong to the type of Functional (Dynamic) Equivalence. The second largest share belongs to the Formal Equivalence, which has seven samples. The Ethnographic Equivalence takes four, while the Stylistic Equivalence takes two. No sample belongs to the type of Linguistic Equivalence and Textual Equivalence.

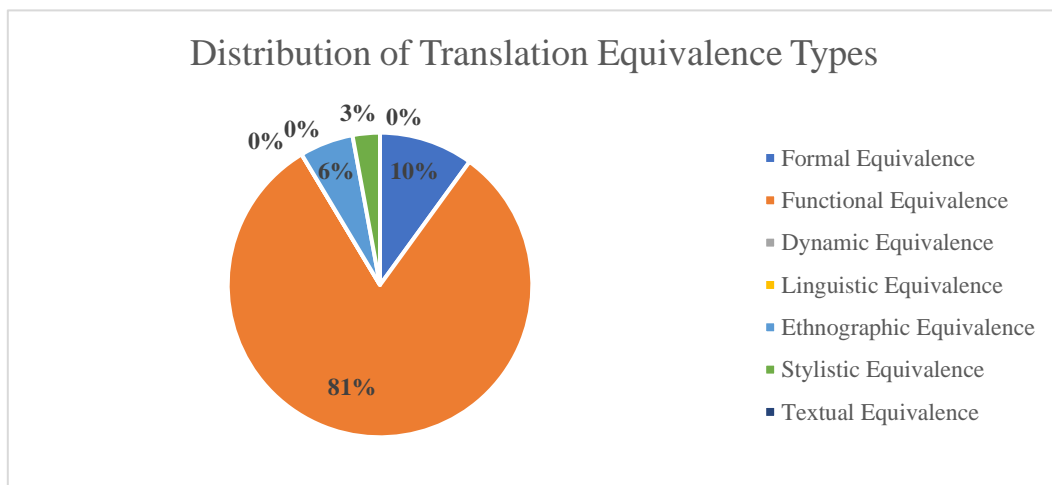


Figure 1

*Distribution of Various Translation Equivalence Types*

The pie chart above illustrates the distribution of various translation equivalence types among the sampled public signs. It clearly shows that Functional Equivalence is the most prevalent type in this study, comprising a significant majority of the samples. The other categories like Formal, Ethnographic, and Stylistic Equivalence represent smaller proportions. Notably, there are no instances of Linguistic, or Textual Equivalence in the samples analysed. This visual representation provides a clear and immediate understanding of the dominance of certain translation strategies over others in the context of public signs in the studied area.

Since Functional Equivalence comprises a large portion of samples, a thorough evaluation of its proportion in each scenic spot is conducted:

Table 4: Numbers of Functional Equivalence applied in all tourism spots.

Type of tourism spot	Numbers of Photos Taken	Numbers of Functional Equivalence applied
Mountain	8	4
Museum	24	19
Ancient Town	11	10
Old Tomb	14	13
Battle memorial	2	0
Nature view (culture or history contained)	10	10
Temple of Buddhism	8	8
In total	77	64

In this study, Table 4 presents a detailed quantification of how Functional Equivalence is applied across various tourist spots in Xuzhou. This approach to translation emphasizes conveying the essence or function of the original message, rather than a literal, word-for-word rendering. These data show the prevalence and distribution of functional equivalence in the translation of public signs in different types of tourist attractions. The table further shows the different applications of functional equivalence in different types of tourist attractions. For example, ancient towns, ancient tombs, natural landscapes with cultural or historical elements, and Buddhist temples all apply. This uniform application in some places suggests that functional equivalence is a strong preference or applicability in these contexts, which may be due to the nature of the message being conveyed or specific audience needs.

Quantitatively, the table shows that of the 77 translations evaluated, 64 were classified as functional equivalents. This accounts for about 83% of the total, highlighting its dominant position in the translation strategies of public signs in the tourist destinations studied. Such a high percentage indicates that this method of translation is very popular in the tourism sector in Xuzhou, possibly because it effectively conveys culturally nuanced information in a way that visitors can easily understand. In addition, the breakdown provides specific insights into each tourist attraction category, revealing patterns and preferences in translation selection. For example, less use of functional equivalence in mountainous areas and war memorial sites may indicate different translation needs or priorities in these environments. The quantitative overview provided in Table 4 sets the stage for a more in-depth analysis.

This has prompted further inquiry into why functional equivalence is preferred in specific contexts, where its effectiveness is reflected, and how it can meet the specific needs of cultural and linguistic transformation in tourism environments. Understanding these aspects can help us to gain insight into the translation strategies of public signs and the cultural factors behind them and provide valuable insights for the field of translation studies.

### **Why is this type of equivalence applying the most?**

The purpose of functional equivalence is to make the translation smooth and natural, not limited by the structure or wording of the original text. This allows greater flexibility in expressing the ideas and concepts of the source text in an appropriate and natural way in the target language, resulting in a more engaging and understandable translation. From the definition of functional equivalence, it does not have a clear rule to regulate the translator's behaviour. When Functional Equivalence is applied, readers can read the target texts in their first language without abandoning the grammar. It also aims to make readers understand the source text more when reading the content. Different from other equivalence with typical and strict rules, Functional Equivalence allows translators to show their styles of translating with typical and strict rules. However, Nida (1964) emphasises that the greater the linguistic and cultural distance between languages and cultures, the more the translator must try to connect this gap by making appropriate changes to preserve the meaning of the source text. For example, he states that translating between English and German requires only minimal formal changes because these languages reflect similar cultural contexts, which he refers to as "Western techniques" (Nida, 1964).

Language skills are central, while translation skills can be cross-sectional (Hao & Pym, 2021). From the translation of the samples, we could see the translator was not confined to a specific way of translating. Instead, he used a variety of ways to express the meaning, such as using transliteration and giving extra definitions to help readers understand. Transliteration has been widely used among the samples, especially in religious translation. For example: (Sample 4):

Source Text: 又因大士右手抱一婴儿，故名送子观音。

Target Text: *The Statue is also called Child-sending Guanyin because of a baby held in Guanyin's right arm.*

Functional Equivalence allows for greater flexibility and creativity in the translation process, as translators have more leeway to choose appropriate expressions, phrasings, and structures in the target language. This allows for a more creative and expressive approach to translation, which can result in translations that are not only accurate, but also engaging, compelling, and impactful. In this context, a Buddha's name is mentioned. The official title should be Avalokitesvara, which the general people barely know. It has been replaced by the simple word Guanyin which is the character showing up in various books and videos. Considering the actual scenario, the translator employed the transliteration technique directly to reflect the meaning.

Functional Equivalence allows for cultural adaptation, that is particularly important when translating texts that contain cultural references, idioms, or concepts that may not be directly translatable into the target language. By using Functional Equivalence, translators can adapt the text to make it relevant and meaningful to the target audience, considering their cultural background and context. The fact that Functional Equivalence is suitable for the conveyance of cultural content in translation behaves as another significant reason for its widespread usage.

Unlike the general translation of public signs, the translation of public signs in tourism's content is almost full of culture. Chinese culture and English culture are different that a lot of elements are not equal at all. Nida (1964) believes that translators' biggest challenge is transferring cultural references from the source text to the target text, especially since these two cultures are entirely different. Part of the reason for this challenge is that each language exhibits different lexical patterns that relate to specific cultural phenomena and are determined by the cultural focus of the society involved. The terminology "cultural voids", proposed by Dagut (1981), points out the difficulties of translating cultural barriers. Cultural gaps occur when a term or idea from the source culture does not exist in the culture of the recipient nation. As a result, it is impossible to translate such a word or concept without also introducing the foreign reader to the culture of the speakers of the target language. Taking the No. 20 sample as an example:

Source text: 汉代贵族追求长生, 是使用殓葬玉器最为鼎盛的时期, 形成了以玉衣为核心, 包括镶玉漆棺、玉璧、玉枕、九窍塞、玉握等构成的殓葬玉器系统。

Target text: *The funeral-based jade system, composed of jade burial suits and other jade wares like jade-inlaid lacquer coffin, jade Bi, jade pillow, sai (plug) for the 9 apertures in the human body, jade hold, etc, was established and went thriving in the Han Dynasty due to the noble's enthusiasm for immortality.*

Functional Equivalence prioritises the communicative effectiveness of the translation, aiming to convey the intended meaning and impact of the source text to the target audience. The culture of jade in ancient China was as famous as rubies in western countries and other unique terms. In the target text, the translator gave up the original form of the source text and added an explanation in the translation instead of creating new terms. Therefore, the term "Equivalence" may be useful for translation purposes, but it is impossible to attain absolute equivalence due to the unique characteristics of each language and culture (Baker, 2018). Overall, Functional Equivalence is used most frequently because it provides translators with the flexibility to produce translations that are culturally relevant, linguistically natural, communicatively effective, audience-oriented, and creatively expressive, making it well-suited for a wide range of translation contexts and purposes.

### **What is the limitation of this type of equivalence?**

Translation is not only a linguistic activity but also a significant cultural practice (Xu, 2009). Xu (2006) argues that cultural relevance should take precedence over linguistic accuracy in translation. From his perspective, it is essential for translators to possess proficient linguistic skills in both the source and target languages. In comparison, language editors often have advisory roles that are subservient to translators (Zlatnar et al., 2021). In Functional Equivalence, authors are often required to create neologisms, which demands their own translation skills. However, translators may struggle to produce a high-quality translation due to lack of specialised knowledge, even if they have the intention to deliver a well-rendered work. For example: (sample 10)

Source Text: 胡人俑深目高鼻、短衣长裤、与中原传统服饰装扮迥异;

Target Text: *ethnic minorities often have sunken eyes, rising noses and wearing short tops and long trousers, different from the central people.*

In the translation, *ethnic minorities* indeed express the correct meaning. However, original text specified these

minorities were from the west. Different words present different approaches in Chinese. The translator failed to point out this detail. In the analysis, however, the pitfalls of Functional Equivalence are also obvious. Although, it gives the translator a lot of space, it hardly guides translators on precisely conducting the translation work. The analysis results show that the translation quality is not very good, even though the translator's translation strategy did belong to Functional Equivalence. On the contrary, a bad translation could hardly manage to bring a good experience to readers who might be reading in their first language that is neither smooth nor natural. For example: (Sample 22)

Source Text: 边箱内陪葬有成套的陶鼎, 盒, 茧形壶, 盘, 匜, 勺, 盃, 罐等冥器。

Target Text: *A set of life utensils placed in the side box.*

Various ancient vessels are mentioned in the text above, many of which are no longer used. It is also a cultural difference between ancient and modern times. In the translation, the translator does not know how to translate these objects. Strictly speaking, this is a translation loss. Given the difficulty of the translation, translators can only make simple generalisations.

One of the challenges of using Functional Equivalence in translation is that it is difficult to measure whether the target readers have the same emotional or cultural response as native readers of the source text. As mentioned by Gentzler (2015), assessing the success of Functional Equivalence in achieving the desired effect on the target audience can be subjective and challenging. Nida (1964), known for its research on functional equivalence, acknowledged that no language can completely replace another, and that exact equivalence may not be achieved in practice (Nida, 1964). Nida (1969) mentioned that while perfect equivalence may exist in theory, it is almost impossible to achieve in real life. In the process of translation, it is difficult to attain accurate translation of culture, meaning, and emotion between two languages. In this context, functional equivalence theory has a crucial role to play in terms of dealing languages that are culturally diverse (Fawcett, 2014). This theory has put forward a systematic basis for the translation process while considering several factors like social influence, audience orientation, and cultural adaptation. This has enabled the consideration of cultural context of both audience' expectations and translation that further helped translators to make wise choices in terms of ensuring superiority in translation.

## **Conclusion**

This study explores the practical application of equivalence theory in the translation of tourism-related official languages. Among different translation methods, functional equivalence is the most frequently used, while formal equivalence, linguistic equivalence and textual equivalence are used in a limited way. Although, functional equivalence is popular in practical applications, there may be shortcomings in the precise translation of public signs related to tourism communication, because it is difficult to grasp the subtle differences and specific requirements of tourism communication.

## **Suggestion**

Future research could focus on identifying and evaluating best practices in tourist attraction signage translation.

Researchers could compare in depth different techniques such as formal equivalence to assess their effectiveness in communicating accurate, culturally appropriate information to international visitors. In addition, it is interesting to explore the potential of augmented reality technology and mobile translation applications to improve the accuracy and accessibility of public sign translation. Studies should also consider the impact of translation quality on tourist satisfaction and navigation convenience, focusing on tourist areas with high tourist flow and relatively unknown scenic spots, to reveal different translation needs and better meet the changing tourism needs.

### Future Research

Exploring the interdisciplinarity of tourism and translation has a wide range of development opportunities. It is of great significance to study the translation of public signs in the tourism industry in depth, with special attention to linguistic and cultural differences in tourist-centred communication. At the same time, the changing demand for translation services in the evolving tourism industry must be addressed. Future research should actively respond to these changes in demand and develop flexible strategies to continuously improve translation quality.

### Significance

This study emphasises the crucial role of proficient translators in the tourism industry, echoing Drugen's (2013) assertion that enhancing the accuracy of tourism texts can positively impact the sector and the economy at large. The primary focus of the research is a comprehensive analysis of Xuzhou's tourism-related public sign translation practices, delving into equivalence selection, underlying methodological rationales, and potential constraints. By establishing a foundation in translation equivalence theory, the aim of this study elevated the quality of public sign translations, enabling effective cross-cultural communication. It offers practical insights aligned with China's goal of showcasing its cultural heritage and facilitating international visitor engagement. Ultimately, the resulting guidelines will serve as a strategic tool for improving the efficacy of public sign communication, providing visitors with a richer cultural experience.

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