Abstract

With the fast pace of China’s integration into the global economy, English is starting to enter daily life in China. Public bilingual signs in English and Chinese are becoming increasingly common in large cities. However, many of the translations are quite faulty and have received considerable attention in the public media, raising concerns in China about how to improve translation quality.

In this paper, the translation errors in a set of 102 examples of bilingual Chinese-English public signs gleaned from Radtke (2007, 2009) and various internet sources are described in the light of contrastive analysis, error analysis, and translation theory. The errors found in the data are primarily spelling, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic errors. Translation issues include an overreliance on literal, word for word translation, probably motivated by low level English proficiency on the part of the sign translators and the use of problematic computer translation software. Finally, practical suggestions are offered for the improvement of sign translation in China in the future.