A Study on the Use of Communicative Translation Method in English-Vietnamese Public Sign Translation

PHUONG THI LAN NGUYEN
Thuongmai University, Viet Nam
phuongntl@tmu.edu.vn

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of the Communicative Translation Method (CTM) in translating public signs from English to Vietnamese. To fulfil this objective, two research methods are employed, including discourse analysis, which helps to analyse linguistic components used in the two texts and translation comparative, which helps to compare the linguistic and semantic similarities and differences between the source text and the target text to identify the use of CTM. A research sample consisting of 42 pairs of signs classified into five groups based on their functions is used for the analysis. The research findings indicate that CTM is the most popular method in the English-Vietnamese translation of public signs. Three specific techniques of CTM are used for the translation, including the omission of words from the translated text, the addition of words to the target signs and the adjustment of forms of expression in the target text. The research findings go in line with the proposals and descriptions of Newmark about CTM and the findings of previous studies, thereby further consolidating the theories related to translation methods in general and CTM in particular. Some implications on using CTM for informative texts in general and public signs, in particular, are provided to practitioners.

Keywords: public signs; public sign translation; translation methods; communicative translation method (CTM); CTM techniques

INTRODUCTION

Public signs are an integral part of communication materials and can be seen everywhere. They are short written messages posted in public areas to give information and instructions to remind and warn people to do or not to do something (He, 2019). To this end, public signs must be written in a way that people can understand what the signs aim to communicate with them without spending so much time reading. Every single word to be used in a particular public sign should, therefore, be well chosen to facilitate its communication purposes (Z. Yang, 2019).

In the current setting of international integration, people who travel abroad for business and leisure have become increasingly common, which means that public signs are read not only by the locals but also by foreigners. The translation is therefore needed to enable public comprehension. As public signs are a special form of communication, how to translate them from one language to another also requires special considerations of the linguistic features, such as lexical uses, sentence structure or syntax, or communication effects, such as the readability and naturalness of the translated signs (C. Chen & Jing, 2019; Jing-jing, 2011; Qiannan, 2012). A wrong and inappropriate translation may result in the target text becoming confused and incomprehensible to readers, or even worse, becoming ridiculous in the eye of the audience (Z. Chen, 2024). A study on how public signs are translated can help to figure out what method works best for their translation; based on this, some implications can be proposed to translators.

This research aims to examine the use of the Communicative Translation Method (CTM) in the translation of public signs from English to Vietnamese, discuss the grounds for its use and present some implications for the English-Vietnamese translation of public signs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

STUDIES ON PUBLIC SIGNS

Public signs, as a topic of research, have drawn the attention of quite a few scholars, forming an adequate theoretical ground for the concept. Previous studies have investigated different aspects of public signs, including their linguistic features, the use of language in the signs and the classification of public signs.

The linguistic features of public signs have been described by various researchers (Amenador & Wang, 2022; He, 2019; Y. Yang, 2009; Yongqing, 2009). Y. Yang (2009) states that as a tool of communication delivered in the constraint of space and time to read, public signs must be short so that passers-by do not need to spend so much time identifying the meanings of the signs, and they must avoid using uncommonly-used words in order to facilitate constant comprehension. Yongqing (2009) summarises the main linguistic features of public signs, using five adjectives beginning with the letter C, including Concise, Conventional, Consistent, Conspicuous and Convenient. Conciseness means the slogan should be understood in just the way it is designed to communicate to the public; Conventional refers to the fact that the language used in the signs should be standard so that even people of basic educational background can understand them; Consistent means the signs should be understood the same by different people; Conspicuous requires the language to be clear and Convenient means the sign creators should choose the words that are simplest possible to print in the signs. Among the 5 Cs, Conciseness is deemed the most important. He (2019) and Amenador and Wang (2022) emphasise that public signs must be concise so that the message can be expressed in the simplest form; they must be straightforward to convey information directly to the public. Therefore, rhetoric or esoteric terminologies should be avoided; they must be standardised to avoid ambiguity, and they should not use unfamiliar words to prevent any possible misunderstanding or potential difficulties for the public.

With regards to the language components used in public signs, Y. Yang (2009), Qiannan (2012), Amenador and Wang (2022) comment that to keep them compact, public signs are not always written in full sentences but only use noun phrases, verb phrases and gerund (such as *Safety First*, *Food & Beverage* or *No Smoking*), the signs often use simple present tense and imperative mood (for example, *Don't drive when tired*, *Protect against heat*), and abbreviated form is commonly used in public signs (like *F&B*, *ATM*). Y. Yang (2009) adds that public signs often print words in capital forms (like *EXIT*, *ENTRANCE*) or print the initial letters of the keywords in capital forms (as in *Give Way to Buses*, *No Photographing*), and there is often a combination of words and graphic symbols to increase the communication effects of the signs.

Classification of public signs is perhaps where scholars have gained the greatest consensus. Based on the communication functions, researchers have categorised public signs into different types. Kang and Zhang (2008) divide public signs into four categories, namely suggestive, indicative, restrictive and imperative. Y. Yang (2009) groups public signs into six kinds: directing, prompting, restricting, compelling, advertising and public interest publicising. Jing-jing (2011) classifies them into informing, prompting, restricting and compelling. Z. Yang (2019) uses the four labels suggestive, indicative, restrictive, and warning to name the four kinds of public signs.

He (2019) specifies them as guidance, encouragement, restriction and constraint signs. Shi (2020) divides public signs into four types: indicative, prompting, restrictive and mandatory. As such, it can be seen that, except for the two kinds of advertising and public interest publicising, scholars have chosen different terms for the four kinds, and they have shown great consensus on the classification of public signs based on their communication purposes. However, it should be noted that there is not a clear boundary between different kinds of public signs; an overlap sometimes happens, and a particular sign can be more or less of one kind or another (Y. Yang, 2009).

STUDIES ON PUBLIC SIGN TRANSLATION

There have been various studies on public sign translation, many of which have surprisingly focused on English-Chinese translation. Previous studies have covered some relevant contents.

Firstly, earlier research has identified common mistakes made in the translation of public signs. Jing-jing (2011) finds out that there are two main kinds of errors in public sign translation, including errors in linguistic aspects with spelling, grammar and lexical misuses, and errors in cultural aspects with Chinglish, harsh mood and misusing expressions with different cultural connotations. Z. Yang (2019) presents a long list of common mistakes found in public sign translation, including spelling mistakes, improper diction, blind equivalence, redundancy, pragmatic failure, cross-cultural misunderstanding and non-unified translation. He (2019) goes into more detail by showing that there are illustrations of three violations in the translated text, including violations to the purpose of the act, violations to the intra-textual coherence and violations to the inter-textual coherence in the translation. Wang and Zhou (2023) point out that the most serious problem in public sign translation is the mismatches, which may result in misunderstanding. They specify that many public signs are translated directly from the original language, thereby not conveying the intended meaning of the original texts, causing confusion to readers. Most recently, based on their observation of public sign translation in a Chinese city, Z. Chen (2024) identified many mistakes, including the incorrect use of words, grammatical errors, spelling errors, incorrect use of singular and plural nouns, etc. and pointed out the main reason for these mistakes, which lies in a stiff translation. They comment that literal translation is often used with translators excessively relying on machine translation, resulting in some translations being laughed at by readers for their silly mistakes. From the above review, it can be seen that the most common problem in translating public signs is the translated signs may not convey the same message as the original ones or may not sound appropriate to the target public.

Previous studies on public sign translation have also looked into different strategies and principles used to transfer public signs between two languages. Qiannan (2012) proposes that to fulfil their communication effects, the translated signs should (1) be simple and concrete, (2) use appropriate tones that fit the functions of different kinds of public signs such as prohibition, warning, command or suggestion and (3) realise normalisation, i.e., being consistent with the expression of general public signs. Cai (2019) observes that translators of public signs should follow three principles: (1) receptor-oriented, which means that the translator should take readers' responses and comprehension as the top priority while translating; (2) equivalence-expected effect, which involves the translator in creating similar effects for the translated signs on target readers as the original signs have on the source readers and (3) information accuracy, which is to ensure that the messages and information of the original text are kept unchanged in the target text. Wang and Zhou (2023) specify give principles as follows: (1) keeping the translation simple by making it concise and clear and avoiding adding unnecessary content, (2) keeping the translation accurate so

that it is not ambiguous or misleading, (3) maintaining standardisation by following norms and standards, (4) taking into account cultural differences by adjusting the translation according to the actual situation to make it conform to local culture and customs and (5) making the translation short and easy to remember to convey the messages to target readers effectively.

Earlier researchers have also proposed tips and advice on how to translate public signs. When it comes to prerequisites for a good translation, researchers all suggest that it is necessary for translators to follow the translation principles and improve their translation skills (C. Chen & Jing, 2019; He, 2019; Qinhua, 2019), take into consideration cultural differences to avoid translation ambiguity (C. Chen & Jing, 2019; He, 2019; Qiannan, 2012; Shi, 2020), analyse the context to identify contextual meanings of the words used in the signs to find the equivalents in the target language (Qiannan, 2012; Shi, 2020), improve cross-culture competence (Z. Yang, 2019), focus on the purpose of the translation to facilitate readers' comprehension (Cai, 2019; Jing-jing, 2011; Qiannan, 2012; Z. Yang, 2019;) and to choose appropriate words for the reproduction (Shi, 2020). Bessie et al. (2024) propose that translation requires not only a translator's ability to restate the meaning of the original text into the target language text but also cultural infrastructure, which includes his awareness of intertextuality so as to interpret it appropriately. To guarantee the equivalence in meanings, House (2015) suggests a technique called transformation-back, which involves the translators asking someone with an ordinary education background to read the translated signs and describe how he understands the signs to match them with their original meaning. This technique proves useful in making sure that the source and the target signs mean the same thing (House, 2015).

STUDIES ON PUBLIC SIGNS TRANSLATION METHODS

Despite a great number of research projects on various aspects of public sign translation, the number of studies on public sign translation methods is surprisingly limited. Only a few have been identified, of which Cai (2019) investigates the use of the Communicative Translation Method (CTM). He compares the typical features of CTM and matches them with the main communicative characteristics of public signs in three aspects, including receptor orientation, equivalence effects, and information accuracy. He concludes that this is a suitable method for the translation of public signs. C. Chen and Jing (2019) analyse the Chinese-English translation of hospital signs from the perspective of Communicative Translation for text typology and remark that public signs are informative texts – the kind of texts that are written without the author's personal linguistic characteristics. As the main aim of informative texts is to deliver the information to recipients when translating these texts, the translator should use the readers' language level as the standard and try to make the translated text easy to understand and, if necessary, the original text can be corrected to fulfil this purpose. Based on this analysis, Chen and Jing conclude that CTM is a suitable translation method for public signs because when this method is used, the translated text can be consistent with the target language culture and expressions in both content and language, and it can produce the same effect that the source text wants to express in the target language culture. Sharing this same view, Z. Chen (2024) comments that the literal translation of the original text is not a good method for the translation of public signs in many cases as it may result in poor readability. Instead, translators should place more importance on the communicative effects of the translated texts and may adjust the linguistic uses to help convey the meaning of the translated signs between the two languages. The study that C. Chen et al. conducted on public travel signs provides clear evidence of the popular use of CTM in the translation of public signs.

RESEARCH GAPS

A review of previous studies reveals that while many studies have been done on public signs and public sign translation, there have been just a few on the methods used to transfer public signs between languages, especially the use of the Communicative Translation Method. It should also be noted that no research has been conducted on translation methods in general and the communicative translation method in particular on English-Vietnamese translation of public signs. A thorough study on English-Vietnamese public sign translation, therefore, is of great significance in providing further evidence for this research theme.

THEORETICAL GROUNDS

PUBLIC SIGNS

Oxford Dictionary (online version) defines a sign as "a piece of paper, wood or metal that has writing or a picture on it that gives information, instructions, a warning". Public signs are signs posted in the public areas. They can be found in various places like along the sides of the streets and national highways, at airports, at bus and train stations, and inside buildings such as business centres, shopping malls, hospitals, offices, etc.

Based on their functions, public signs can be of five kinds. Firstly, directing or indicative signs present the information to guide the public without requiring them to do anything. For example, *Toll Bridge* informs drivers that this bridge charges a certain amount of money if they go through it. Secondly, prompting or suggesting signs, which aim at reminding or warning the public of or against something. Prompting signs call for people's special attention to things noted on the signs; for example, *Shark Sighted* urges readers to beware of sharks as they have been seen in that area. Thirdly, restricting signs are used to inform readers of the constraints or restrictions with no offensive or rude intention; readers are highly recommended not to do something in that particular situation. For example, *Staff Only* gives a polite warning to non-members that they should not enter the area. Fourthly, compelling or compulsory signs. These signs bear a direct, tough, and forceful tone that obliges people to take or not take a particular action. These brief signs are often imperative with negative words; for example, *Police Line - Do Not Cross* is used to mark off a crime scene area, and the police may arrest someone trespassing inside that area. Fifthly, public interest publicising signs are used to raise public awareness of something so that actions will be taken. For example, *Save Water* encourages people to use water consciously in order that it will not be wasted.

Regarding linguistic characteristics, public signs must be short and straightforward so that they do not take long to read and are easy to understand. For this reason, public signs are rarely written in full sentences with sufficient components, including subjects and predicates; instead, only keywords are used to form verb phrases or noun phrases (with the latter one being preferred). Public signs must also use standardised words and avoid uncommon language in order not to cause comprehension difficulties or ambiguity to the public. Rhetoric language is hardly found in public signs as rhetoric requires more consideration and analysis before meaning can be understood, while readers are expected to read the signs and understand them immediately.

TRANSLATION AND COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION METHOD

Translation has been viewed differently according to how it is approached. Generally, there are four approaches to translation. From a linguistic view, translation is "the act of replacing textual material in one language by equivalent textual level material in another language" (Catford, 1965, p. 202). The equivalence approach sees it as a process of finding equivalents for the target text from the original one, especially in syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958). The theorists of the functional approach hold that translation is a purpose-oriented process in which the translator transfers the text to the second language in a way that the effects that the translated text exerts on the target readers are identical to the effects that the original text has on the source readers (Vermeer, 1984). Under the cultural approach, translation is not a mere linguistic transfer but more of a cross-cultural exchange in which the translator needs to take into consideration the culture and context to create a translated text that is understandable to the target readers (Newmark, 2001). Regardless of the differences in the views of researchers on the quality criteria that a translation should meet and the emphasis that the translation should place on, these above-cited definitions point to the fact that translation is rendering a written message from one language to another without changing its communication purposes.

In terms of translation methods, there also exist differences in the views of scholars. Newmark, a prominent name in translation theories, introduced 8 methods of translation in 1988. The eight methods are presented in a V-shaped diagram to illustrate the relationships between the language used in the translated text and that in the original one, as can be seen in the following figure.

SL emphasis	**TL emphasis**
Word-for-word translation	Adaptation
Literal translation	Free translation
Faithful translation	Idiomatic translation
Semantic translation	Communicative translation

FIGURE 1. Translation method V-diagram
Source: Newmark, P. (2001)

On the left side of the diagram lie the four methods where the language in the translated text is closer to the source language, while on the right side are the four ones with the language in the translated text being closer to the target language. In this sense, the *Word-for-word translation* method creates a translated text where the meaning of words, grammar, and forms of expression are directly transferred from the source text without adjustments, which may result in the translated text being grammatically wrong or incomprehensible. One step away from *Word-for-word translation* is the *Literal translation* method, where the translator makes little changes in the translated text in comparison with the source text (like the changes in the word order to make the translated text grammatically correct), making it unnatural and difficult for readers to understand. *Faithful translation* involves the translator making more adjustments to the language used in the translated text and analysing the contextual meaning of the words to produce a more natural target version. *Semantic translation* places more emphasis on the aesthetic value of the source text and attempts to maintain it in the target text, making it a suitable choice for expressive texts.

By contrast, the four methods on the right side stress more on the audience. On the top of the methods on the right side lies *Adaptation* – a translation method that creates a target text with language barely resembling the way it is presented in the source text; in a target text translated by

the *Adaptation* method, only the theme is kept while linguistics-related components may completely change. *Free translation* places focus on the translated content rather than the form of the original texts, creating a translation that looks quite different from the source text. *Idiomatic translation* reproduces the original message via the use of idioms and colloquialisms that are not present in the source texts, thereby distorting the nuances of meaning to some extent. The final one is *Communicative translation,* which emphasises the importance of delivering the communication effects to the target readers both content-wise and context-wise.

Newmark comments that of the eight methods in the diagram, only *Semantic translation* and *Communicative translation* should be considered the "real" methods of translation, as they guarantee the basic criteria of translation, i.e., accuracy and equivalence. *Word-for-word translation* and *Literal translation* should only be seen as pre-translation steps, while *Adaptation* and *Free translation* are more of a reproduction rather than a translation themselves.

Communicative Translation Method (CTM), as its name shows, places importance on the communication effects of the translated text as it "attempts to produce on-target readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original" (Newmark, 2001, p. 58). In CTM, the translator renders the contextual meaning of the source text in a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the target audience. CTM is therefore suitably used for informative texts, where information delivery is of great significance to readers, rather than the language style or the idiolect of the source author.

In essence, CTM is a target-oriented translation approach that prioritises contextuality. Translators using CTM do not aim at forming a linguistic equivalence like in other methods such as literal or faithful translation but seek to reproduce the message of the original text in a way that is acceptable and comprehensible to the target language audience and this can be done via changes in the use of language in the target text.

Translators using CTM have to obey three main principles. The first and also most vital principle is *receptor orientation*, which means that the translator should try to fit the translated text to the target culture and make it easy for target readers to understand. In CTM, the translator is given the power to adjust the form of expressions, add or omit words, and change the word order or linguistic components with the aim of ensuring the readability of the translated text. The second principle is *an equivalence-expected effect,* which means that the translated text should produce the same effects on target readers as the source text does on source readers. In some cases, the translator can use and is expected to use his own language to realise this principle if necessary. In that way, CTM is more likely to create equivalence effects than other translation methods that Newmark proposes. The final principle of CTM is *information accuracy*. Although the translator of CTM can change the structures and expressions and add supplementary information to the translated text to make it reader-friendly, it definitely does not mean that he can change the content of the message; by contrast, the translator must always transmit the original information as accurately as possible.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to investigate the use of the Communicative Translation Method in the translation of public signs from English to Vietnamese. Particularly, it aims to answer three questions: how often CTM is used, how it is used and on what grounds it is used. Two research methods were used to realise this research objective: discourse analysis and translation comparative. The former

is employed to analyse the linguistic components used in the original and translated texts, while the latter helps compare the linguistic and semantic similarities and differences between the source text and the target one to identify if CTM is used in particular translated signs. The use of CTM is analysed based on its three main principles discussed earlier in the theoretical grounds, including *receptor orientation, equivalence-expected effect* and *information accuracy.*

A linguistic corpus comprising 42 pairs of public signs is used as a research sample. These public signs are collected randomly from different sources, such as the Internet and indoor and outdoor signs in public areas. The researcher needs to make sure that she can find the two versions of every sign she collects to create a pair: one originally written in English and the other that has been converted into Vietnamese so that she can identify how the signs have been translated between the two languages.

For the convenience of the research findings presentation, the researcher classifies the sampled public signs into five categories, as guided by the theoretical grounds. They include *directing* with 12 signs, coded from DS-E01 to DS-E12 for English version and DS-V01 to DS-V12 for Vietnamese version, *prompting* with six signs, coded from PS-E01 to PS-E06 for English and PS-V01 to PS-V06 for Vietnamese, *restricting* with six signs, coded from RS-E01 to RS-E06 for English language and RS-V01 to RS-V06 for Vietnamese translation, *compelling* with 13 signs, coded from CS-E01 to CS-E13 for signs written in English and CS-V01 to CS-V13 for those translated into Vietnamese, and *interest publicising* with five signs, coded from IS-E01 to IS-E05 and IS-V01 to IS-V05 for English and Vietnamese versions respectively. As mentioned in the previous studies, sometimes there exists an overlap between these five kinds of signs, but as it is not the main focus of this study, the researcher chooses to classify one sign into a particular kind rather than another when it bears more linguistic features of that kind.

The analysis procedure goes as follows: Firstly, the public signs are collected and categorised into five different groups. Secondly, the English and Vietnamese versions of each sign are read to understand their meanings in both languages. Thirdly, the two signs are compared to identify whether CTM is used for the translation; if it is used, whether the receptor orientation, equivalence-expected effects and information accuracy are satisfied and what specific techniques of CTM are used in the translation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This part discusses the main findings of the research. It includes the summary of the use of different translation methods and then the analysis of some pairs of public signs to illustrate how CTM works. The original English sign is presented first, then the Vietnamese version of the sign is provided, together with the literal re-expressions of the meanings of Vietnamese words in the translated text in English (these word-for-word re-expressions are put inside round brackets after the official translation of the sign into Vietnamese) to help readers see how the signs have been translated into Vietnamese.

An analysis of the Vietnamese version of English public signs indicates that CTM is the most popular method for translating public signs. Of the 42 surveyed signs, as many as 32 are translated via the *Communicative translation* method, only three signs are translated by using the *Word-for-word translation* method, which involves no change in any linguistic components, and four are translated by using the *Literal translation*, which is done via a few changes in the word

order between the two languages. The five remaining methods listed by Newmark are not found in the research sample. The use of different methods for public sign translation is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. The use of translation methods in English-Vietnamese public sign translation

No.	Methods	Number of signs	Percentage of signs
1	Word-for-word translation	3	7.14%
2	Literal translation	7	16.67%
3	Faithful translation	0	0.00%
4	Semantic translation	0	0.00%
5	Communicative translation	32	76.19
6	Idiomatic translation	0	0.00%
7	Free translation	0	0.00%
8	Adaptation	0	0.00%
Total		42	100.0%

Source: *collected by the researcher*

Word-for-word translation and *Literal translation* methods are used in 10 public signs. These are very short phrases with just two or three words, which also use very common and simple language (like *No fire* [CS-E10], *No fishing* [CS-E12] or *Maximum height 3.5 metres* [PS-E04]). They do not form sentences with subjects and predicate verbs that may require changes in the word order. So, they are simply transferred directly into Vietnamese without any changes but do not cause any confusion or ambiguity in understanding. In 32 other signs, CTM is applied.

With regards to the use of CTM, three different techniques are found with their frequency varying, as indicated in the following table.

TABLE 2. Specific techniques of CTM used in English-Vietnamese public sign translation

No.	Specific techniques of CTM	Number of signs	Percentage of signs
1	Words are omitted from the translated text	6	18.75%
2	Words are added to the translated text	10	31.25%
3	Expression modes are adjusted in the translated text	16	50.00%
Total		32	100.0%

Source: collected by the researcher

Here is a discussion of how each technique of CTM is used for the translation of public signs.

OMISSION OF WORDS FROM THE TARGET TEXT

The first technique in CTM is the omission of some words from the target text in comparison with the source one, found in six signs in the research sample, representing 18.75% of the total 32 signs. Here are some examples:

- *Watch your children* [DS-E08]
  Trông chừng trẻ nhỏ (Watch children) [DS-V08]
- *Children's play area. No dogs allowed* [CS-E07]
  Khu vui chơi của trẻ em. Cấm chó (Play area of children. Forbid dogs) [CS-V07]
- *No swimming allowed* [CS-E09]
  Cấm bơi (Forbid swimming) [CS-V09]

- *Please keep this area tidy all the time* [PS-E03]
  Giữ vệ sinh chung (Keep tidy) [PS-V03]

In these above examples, the number of words in the translated text is smaller, far smaller in some cases, than in the original text. Specifically, in DS-V08, the possessive adjective "your" is omitted because the sign does not aim at any particular parents but gives general instructions to all. In Vietnamese styles of expressions, no possessives are used in these general situations. In CS-V07, as there is no possessive case in Vietnamese, the preposition *of* has been added to replace the case, making it into *the Play area of children*; also, the word *allowed* in the original sign has been omitted as the word *Cấm* (forbid) has been used in the place of the negative auxiliary "no". The change from *no* and *allowed* to *Cấm* in CS-V09 is also made on the same basis as in CS-V07, making it not available in the translated sign in Vietnamese. Most noticeably, in PS-V03, the Vietnamese version is much shorter than the English sign: the politeness marker *please* is omitted from the translation because, in Vietnamese language and culture, politeness markers are often used in conversation between individuals while signals and warnings do not necessarily use them; time and place adverbials *this area* and *all the time* are also removed from the Vietnamese sign as they are not crucial to the meaning: *Giữ vệ sinh chung* (Keep tidy) is already explicit and comprehensible. This omission makes the translated version short but still concise and clear enough to readers.

ADDITION OF WORDS TO THE TARGET TEXT

In contrast to the technique of omitting words, many public signs have been translated via the addition of words to the translation. This technique represents a much higher frequency, found in 10 signs, equal to 31.25% of the total 32 signs. Below are some examples:

- *Do not block. Fire exit* [CS-E06]
  Cửa thoát hiểm. Không để vật dụng trước cửa (Gate for exit. Don't let objects in front of the exit) [CS-V06]
- *Baby change* [DS-E05]
  Nơi thay đồ cho em bé (Place to change clothes for babies) [DS-V05]
- *Don't drink and drive* [CS-E11]
  Đã uống rượu bia thì không lái xe (After drinking alcohol and beer, don't drive) [CS-V11]
- *No pedestrian* [CS-E08]
  Khu vực không dành cho người đi bộ (Area not for pedestrians) [CS-V08]

In the above translations, the translators have supplemented explanations via the addition of words to make the signs more comprehensible to Vietnamese readers. In CS-V06, the verb *block* is paraphrased as *letting objects in front of the exit (which prevents free movement in case of fire),* making it clearer to the public. Similarly, *Baby change* in DS-E05 has only two words in English, but in Vietnamese, it is translated with more words added (*Place to change clothes for babies*). If the sign were literally translated, it would be *Thay em bé*, which means c*hange the baby (into another one)* – an absolutely different meaning. With the same technique, in CS-V11, the Vietnamese sign is much longer as the translator has added *alcohol and beer* to the translated sign, making it clear that these are the two kinds of drink that drivers should not use before driving. In Vietnamese, the verb *drink* just means digesting a kind of liquid – it can be alcohol and non-

alcoholic liquid, so without clarification by the addition of *rượu bia* (alcohol and beer), the Vietnamese sign would be misleading. Similarly, if translated literally, CS-E08 would be *Không người đi bộ*, which may mean that there are no pedestrians seen in this area. The addition of words is therefore necessary as this technique not only clarifies the meaning but also avoids causing possible confusion to readers. These examples illustrate that CTM, in general, the technique of word addition, really works, as without it, the translated signs would not make sense.

ADJUSTMENT OF EXPRESSIONS IN THE TARGET TEXT

The final technique is the most radical one in CTM – adjusting the form of expressions in the target language to make the translation more reader-friendly. This technique is found in the translation of 16 signs, making up the highest percentage of 50.00%. Here are some examples of translation by adjustments:

- *Keep off the grass* [PS-E01]
  Không dẫm lên cỏ (Don't step on the grass) [PS-V01]
- *Every drop counts* [IS-E01]
  Tiết kiệm nước (Save water) – [IS-V01]
- *Safety first* [DS-E01]
  An toàn là trên hết (Safety is the most important) [DS-V01]
- *Kid-friendly zone. Please don't smoke* [CS-E09]
  Khu vực có trẻ em. Vui lòng không hút thuốc (Zone with children. Please don't smoke) [CS-V09]

A comparison of the original signs in English and the translated signs in Vietnamese via the literal translation put in the pairs of round brackets reveals a kind of re-expression between the two languages. In CTM, the top priority is to deliver the message in the target language rather than caring about linguistic components. This can be seen clearly in PS-V01 when the positive instruction (*Keep off the grass*) is turned into a negative one and the use of more standard words *step on* instead of *keep off* (*Don't step on the grass*), making the sign more understandable to people of all educational levels. Likewise, the interest publicising sign *Every drop counts* has a good aesthetic value in English, but the literal translation into Vietnamese *Mỗi giọt nước đều đếm* would make it totally incomprehensible. Using the communicative method, the translator has made the Vietnamese version sound more straightforward via the use of common words *Tiết kiệm nước* (Save water). The Vietnamese version fails to keep the aesthetic value of the English sign, but it guarantees the delivery of the message in Vietnamese. Similarly, the short expression *Safety first* in DS-E01 is re-expressed as *An toàn là trên hết* (Safety is the most important) – a longer version but very clear and easy to understand to the public in Vietnamese. In the final example of CS-V09, the second half of the sign is translated with no adjustment, but the first one sees a dramatic change in the way the language is re-expressed in Vietnamese. If translated literally, a *kid-friendly zone* would become *Khu vực thân thiện với trẻ em* (area that is very friendly with kids), which is actually not how Vietnamese people describe the concept. For this reason, the translator manages to find a different way to paraphrase it into *Khu vực có trẻ em* (the area where many children are present) so as to warn others to be cautious in order not to disturb or cause trouble to children.

RESEARCH DISCUSSION

An analysis of public signs written in English and those translated into Vietnamese indicates that CTM is the most popular method to be used in the translation of public signs. This is justifiable: public signs are categorised into informative texts, the aim of which is to give information and make the message known to readers. Therefore, the main task of the translator of public signs is to transmit the source message to readers precisely rather than maintain the author's personal style, as required in the translation of expressive and vocative texts. The finding that CTM is the most popular method of translation in public signs goes in line with the proposal of Newmark that "each type of text corresponds to different translation methods. Semantic translation is used for expressive text while Communicative translation for informative and vocative" (Newmark, 2001, p. 41). The finding of the popularity of CTM also aligns with the affirmations of the previous studies, specifically in the research by Cai (2019), C. Chen and Jing (2019) and Z. Chen (2024).

With regards to the specific techniques in CTM, the findings reveal the use of three techniques in English-Vietnamese public sign translation, including the transfer involving the omission of words from the translated text, the addition of words to the target signs and the adjustment of forms of expression in the target text. These findings further strengthen Newmark's description that under the Communicative Translation Theory, the translator has the freedom to do things like adjusting the structure of the original sentences, changing the modes of expression and adding supplementary information to the version as long as these practices help to keep the meaning of the message unchanged in the target language (Newmark, 2001).

From practitioners' perspective, the findings of this study suggest that CTM is an advisory method for the translation of public signs in particular. Using CTM, translators have the right to play with words: rather than sticking to the original linguistic components and forms of expressions, translators are free to make adjustments to optimise the translation goals, i.e. maintaining the accuracy of the message to be reproduced in the target language and facilitating target readers' comprehension by ensuring the naturalness of the message. CTM should also be used for the general translation of informative texts, like instruction manuals, recipes, biographies, reports, etc., as it guarantees the delivery of meanings while facilitating the understanding of target readers.

CONCLUSION

This study looks into the use of the Communicative Translation Method in the translation of public signs from English to Vietnamese. An analysis of 42 English-Vietnamese pairs of public signs indicates that CTM is a very popular method for the translation of public signs, being used in 76.19% of the surveyed signs. The communicative translation is done via three main techniques: omitting words from or adding words to the translated sign and restructuring the forms of expressions in the target text.

The popularity of CTM in the translation of public signs suggests that for translation of informative texts in general, public signs in particular, the communicative method is an appropriate choice as it helps to reproduce the translated texts that take into consideration the readability and accuracy of the messages in the target language and culture, thereby fulfilling the communication effects of the discourses.

Despite its achievements, this study reveals some limitations. It analyses the use of CTM for the translation of public signs via a research sample of 42 pairs of signs. Although the findings go in line with previous studies, a more sizeable sample would help to provide a deeper insight into the research topic. This limitation would be the motivation for further research. Future research should also investigate the use of CTM for other informative texts as well as expressive ones to see how different methods of translation work for different types of texts.

REFERENCES

Amenador, K. B., & Wang, Z. (2022). A Systematic Review of the Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs. *SAGE Open*, April-June 2022: 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221094

Bessie, P. A., Artawa, K., Pastika, I., & Udayana, I. (2024). Translation Shifts in English Indonesian: A Cognitive-Affective Map Study. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature® The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies Vol 30*(3), September 2024 http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2024-3003-15

Cai, Y. (2019). A Brief Analysis of Peter Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory. *2019 2nd International Conference on Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Humanities* (ICALLH 2019)

Catford, J. C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: an Essay on Applied Linguistics*. London: Oxford University Press.

Chen, C., & Jing, M. (2019). On Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs in Hospitals from the Perspective of Communicative Translation. *8th International Conference on Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (SSEHR 2019).*

Chen, Z. (2024). An Analysis of English Translation of Public Signs for External Publicity of Coastal Culture-Oriented Travel – A Case Study of Zhoushan City. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Culture, Design and Social Development,* Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 834. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-222-4_7

He, X. (2019). The Study of Chinese-English Public Signs Translation. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 286-291, March 2019. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0903.05

House, J. (2015). Translation Quality Assessment: Linguistic Description versus Social Evaluation. *Erudit.* pp.243-257. doi: 10.7202/003141ar

Jing-jing, W. (2011). A Communicative Translation Approach to Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs. *Social and Cultural Studies*, No.31 (2011), pp.13-26. http://doi.org/10.15017/21899

Kang, N., & Zhang, Y. (2008). On the Translation of Public Sign Expressions. *Asian Social Science.* Vol.4, No.8, August 2008.

Newmark, P. (2001). *A Textbook of Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

Qiannan, M. (2012). Research on the Translation of Public Signs. *English Language Teaching*, Vol.5, No.4, April 2021. doi:10.5539/elt.v5n4p168

Qinhua, M. (2019). Current Situation and Communicative Translation Strategies of Chinese-English Public Signs Translation. *2019 International Conference on Arts, Management, Education and Innovation* (ICAMEI 2019).

Shi, X. (2020). Analysis and Translation Strategies of Public Signs from the Perspective of Pragmatics. *Learning & Education*, Volume 9 Issue 2 (2020). DOI: 10.18282/l-e.v9i2.1390

Vermeer, H. (1984). *A skopos Theory of Translation: Some Arguments For and Against*. Heidelberg: Groos.

Vinay, J. P., & Darbelnet, J. (1958). A Methodology for Translation. In Venuti, L. (Ed.), The Translation Studies Reader, pp.84-93. London: Routledge.

Wang, X., & Zhou, L. (2023). Discussion on the Translation Strategies of Public Signs. *Lecture Notes on Language and Literature, Clausius Scientific Press, Canada.* DOI: 10.23977/langl.2023.060502

Yang, Y. (2009). Classification of Pubic Signs and Their Characteristics. *Asian Social Science,* Vol.5, No.12, December 2009

Yang, Z. (2019). On the Acceptability of English Translation of Public Signs. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 10, pp. 1315-1319, October 2019. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0910.08

Yongqing, H. (2009). Investigation and Research on the Standardization of Chinese and English Translation of Public Signs in Nanyang. *Journal of Hotan Teachers College, 3,* 170-171.