

On the Cultural Differences in Tourism Translation

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Abstract

With the rapid development of tourism industry in China, it is urgent to translate tourist text from Chinese into English. Translation is not a simple mechanic linguistic transference, but involves complex cross-cultural communication. English and Chinese have different cultures, so translator must pay attention to the cultural differences between the two languages for successful cross-cultural communication. A good tourist text will arouse potential readers' interest in the scenic spots, which will help both the development of Chinese tourist industry, and the output of Chinese culture and the enrichment of the target culture. The paper makes an analysis of cultural differences between east and west from the aspect of thinking mode, historical background, and religion and speech rhetoric. Then, it studies the function of tourism text as well as some translation principles and methods, including rewriting, adding and cutting. In the conclusion, the author emphasizes that translators should not only lay solid linguistic foundation, but also pay attention to the cultural factors in both English and Chinese for the successful cross-cultural communication.

Key words: Tourism material translation; Cultural differences; Translation strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism text plays a very important role in displaying the beautiful local scenery and outstanding cultural

heritages to would-be readers. Accordingly, its translation version can play a same role to potential foreign readers. After reading tourism translation version, readers will get to know the scenic spots and the culture. And, the comparison and contrast of source text and target text can show some light on the cultural differences from the perspective of tourism text. Many scholars and experts in translation field have great enthusiasm in the study of cultural differences of tourism translation.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the existing literature, it is not difficult to find that the treatment of cultural differences and cultural factors is of great importance to tourism translation. After cultural translation theory was introduced into China, it offered a totally new perspective to applied translation research. Meanwhile, it also caused scholars' discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of two opposite strategies foreignization and domestication. These two strategies are often applied in translation practice.

The discussion on foreignization and domestication keeps going on and is still a hot topic in translation field. Up to now, two main opinions came into being. One opinion supports foreignization, holding that foreignization should be considered as the first choice. For instance, Liu (1999, p.269) holds the view that translator should advocate foreignization and he thought that it can best preserve the flavor of the original text. The other opinion is that domestication should be chosen by translators in tourism translation. Cai (2002, p.10) thinks that based on the analysis of translation purpose or translation practice the best translation method is domestication.

Some scholars hold the view that foreignization is better than domestication in the translation of cultural factors of tourism text. They offer three reasons. First, the flavor of the source text can be best kept by foreignization so the source text can be faithfully rendered. Second,

foreignization is helpful for the introductions of the foreign culture to the target culture, so the target readers will get to know more about foreign culture. Third, through the introduction of foreign culture, source culture can get enriched so mutual communication is reached. All in all, these reasons make most scholars support foreignization in tourism translation. However, this does not mean that domestication is totally useless, which should not be taken into consideration by translators. The reason why domestication should not be disregarded is that some similarities do exist among different cultures. As a matter of fact, foreignization and domestication are complementary and have their own value in translation.

2. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TOURISM TRANSLATION

2.1 Different Thinking Patterns

Chinese thinking mode tends to be integral and they like using images, which can be best reflected in the ancient poetry. Far instance, in *the Book of Songs* and poems of Tang Dynasty images are often used to create a imaginary picture. Chinese people emphasize the harmonious unification between the heaven and human, so its thinking pattern is characterized by various images instead of abstract concept. However, Westerners' thinking mode is characterized by the separation of the subject and object, and they put great attention on the object. Their thinking mode tends to be analytic, which is characterized by abstract concept. They are good at logical thinking and tend to describe various things with abstract concepts. In Chinese tourist text, the vivid images can be seen here and there. In the process of tourism translation, translators should pay enough attention to such differences of thinking patterns. Therefore, tourism translators are required to have not only two languages, but also the broader understanding of two different cultures. Here is an example:

Source Text: 这儿的峡谷又是另一番景象：谷中急水奔流，穿峡而过，两岸树木葱茏，鲜花繁茂，碧草萋萋，活脱脱一幅生机盎然的天然风景画。各种奇峰异岭，令人感受各异，遐想万千。

Translation Text: It is another gorge through which a rapid stream flows. Trees, flowers and grass, a picture of natural vitality, thrive on both banks. The weird peaks arouse disparate thoughts.

JIA (2003,p.21) holds the opinion that the four-character expressions “树木葱茏”，“鲜花繁茂” and “碧草萋萋” sounds rhymed. A vivid picture of beautiful scenery is showed before readers and there is no sign of wordiness and redundancy. However, in the eyes of western readers, such expressions are unacceptable because such kind of diction is very flowery and the picture presented is unnatural. After they read such kind of tourism text, they

will not want to take tour to the scenic spot. Therefore, in order to arouse foreign readers' interest in these scenic spot, translator should take care in to these differences. Translator has to delete these wordy and exaggerated expressions and render the concrete objects to readers such as “trees, flowers and grass”. Only this way, the target text is more natural target readers.

The Chinese like to use four-character expressions because they sound melodious. Such kind of expressions often use exaggerated way to express things, translator should understand the main meaning of such expressions and simply translated such meaning to readers, delete those wordy and flowery parts. As for the above mentioned four character expressions, translator has to translate the concrete objects in these expressions. But there is a question: how to render those decoration parts such as “葱茏”，“繁茂” and “萋萋” to readers? “葱茏”，“繁茂” and “萋萋” indicate that these plants are full of energy and life. Word for word translation can not be used here. In order to reproduce the vocative function, translator can use “thrive” to give a generalized meaning of “葱茏”，“繁茂” and “萋萋”，which are semantically equivalent.

2.2 Different History Backgrounds

The cultural differences should be dealt properly in translation, especially tourism text. Chinese people and English people have their own specific history so the historical culture displayed in the original culture should be paid attention to and proper strategies should be chosen. When translating proper names which include names of people and places, historical events, dynasties, ancient poems, quotations from famous historical figures and so on, translator should choose the strategy of addition. After having an accurate comprehension of source text, translators offer some complementary explanation to help readers understand the historical background. These additions play an important role in disseminating source culture and enriching target culture. Here is an example:

Source Text: 路左有一巨石，石上原有苏东坡手书“云外流春”四个大字。

Translation Text: To its left is a rock formerly engraved with four big Chinese characters. Yun Wai Liu Chun (Beyond clouds flows spring) hand-written by Su Dongpo (1037-1101), the most versatile poet of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).

There are two additions in the the translation version: one is the explanation of Yun Wai Liu Chun and the other is the explanation of Su Dongpo. These additions are very necessary. Zhang (2000, p.56) holds that the explanations of Su Dongpo well express the intension of the source text and let foreign readers know more about Chinese historical culture. Furthermore, it is difficult to translate “云外流春”，which has certain cultural implication. If it is translated by transliteration strategy, target readers are not able to understand the specific meaning of “云外流

春”。If it is translated by free translation strategy, target readers may think Su Dongpo knew English very well. So it is really a tricky problem. In the example, the translator provides some explanation to “云外流春” after giving a transliteration of it.

2.3 Different Religious Cultures

Religion, one of the important parts in human culture, should be paid attention to in the translation process. In Chinese religious culture, Confucius, Taoism and Buddhism are the three most important religions. Religion has close relationship with our daily life. For example, we have such idioms as “借花献佛”, “道高一尺魔高一丈” and so on. However, in the west, Christianity is considered the most important religion, whose doctrine is that God creates everything. *Bible* has been combined with people’s daily lives. In English, one can find such expression as “fig leave” and so on, which has close relationship with *Bible*.

When western tourists visit China, most of them want to know Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. So, it is translator’s responsibility to let them know the teachings of these religions. Translator should faithfully render Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism to foreign readers, which should not be deleted or totally replaced by Christianity. Religious culture is sometimes one of the aspects that tourists want to know. Here is an example:

Source Text: 济公劫富济贫，深受穷苦人民爱戴。

Translation Text: Jigong, Robin-hood in China, robbed the rich and won reputation from the poor for helping them.

If “Jigong” is simply transliterated into Jigong, foreign readers will be puzzled because they will not know who Jigong is. “Jigong”, a monk in Nansong Dynasty, was considered a living Buddha by Chinese. In the above example, translator adds some explanation: Jigong is compared to Robin-hood, a figure in medieval period in West. The addition can help foreign readers quickly understand who Jigong is. Unfortunately, they will not know Jigong is a religious figure so there is some cultural loss. In order to make up for such loss, translator may add such information: both a monk in Nansong Dynasty and Robin-hood in China. Therefore, target readers can fully understand Jigong and the best communicative effect can be achieved.

2.4 Different Speech Rhetoric

As for speech rhetoric, there are great differences between English and Chinese. Chinese tends to use repeated structure, four-character expressions. These differences resulted in different word styles. Chinese tourist text are very flourished in the language. Meanwhile, China has a long history and splendid culture. Trip tour information content mostly focuses on the introduction of these unique ancient Chinese cultures. Compared with Chinese, English looks plain, which focuses on the introduction of scenic spots. Here is an example:

Source Text: 峨眉山月清凉皎洁，光华如洗，熠熠生辉，丝丝扣人。

Translation Text: The moon over Mount E Mei is charmingly shimmering, giving off its coolly pure and silk-slim moonlight.

The Chinese tourism text has many four-character idioms, so we must pay more attentions to this expressions in translation. The English version looks more concise, reflecting the main idea of the source text.

3. FUNCTIONS, PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF TOURISMS TRANSLATION

3.1 Functions of Tourism Text

Chinese and English tourism text can serve identical purposes and have three major functions: vocative function, informative function and descriptive function. Vocative function is the most important function of tourism text. By offering vivid description to foreign readers, tourism text is able to arouse their interest in visiting these scenic spots. If foreign readers do not have the same feeling as source text readers have after reading the tourism translation, the translation text fails to render its vocative function.

The basic function of a tourism text is its informative function. A tourism text has to provide all the necessary information about a scenic spot so the readers can know what the scenic spot is. Besides, the potential tourists must have enough relevant information so they can choose where they should pay a visit. The information that the tourism text should offer include historical information, geographical information, religious information and so on. With the help of adequate information, then the potential readers can have their own idea about such scenic spots. Without informative function, the vocative function can not be achieved.

The third function of tourism text is its descriptive function, which should also be provided to potential readers. What is descriptive function of tourism text? It is a vivid and concrete picture of the scenic spot described. The writer of tourist text should well organize the details of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch so that a positive emotional response can be aroused in potential readers; Meanwhile, the translator of tourism text should also pay attention to the organization of such details to attract readers’ interest.

These functions have different importance: the vocative function is dominant and the other two are auxiliary. Meanwhile, these three functions are not separate; they work as a whole: the vocative function runs through the whole text and the other two are carried between the lines. All in all, the goal of tourism text is to realize the vocative function, informative and descriptive function, and so is the tourism translation.

3.2 Principles of Tourism Translation

Translation plays an important role in bridging two different cultures. The aim of tourism translation is to let potential foreign readers know the scenic spot presented and arouse their interest in these spots. And, it is very important for readers to get to know the culture involved in the translation text. They are expected to gain some cultural information, which includes geography, religion, customs and history and so on. Therefore, generally speaking, tourism translation text should play two roles: the first is to provide relevant information; the second is to offer guiding. The following are two principles of tourism translation:

First, it should be acknowledged that the original tourism text is all about Chinese culture while the target tourism text is one of the ways to output Chinese culture to foreign readers. It is through translation that the two different kinds of culture are connected, so that the translated tourism text can be viewed as a window to foreigners.

Second, tourism translator should respect the original tourist text because translation version should be based on source text. So it is important for translator to handle different cultural information.

3.3 Methods of Tourism Translation

(i) Rewriting

Rewriting aims at improving the readability of target text by reorganizing the content or structure of the source text. When the source tourism text is not well written, and when there are many ancient terms, the explanation of which will be wordy, then it is necessary for translator to use the rewriting strategy.

(ii) Adding

In the process of tourism translation, translators may meet with some cultural factors about Chinese history, religion, customs, and so on. If translator applies literal translation, the target readers might not know such cultural factors because westerners do not live in the Chinese context. Then, in order to make target reader have a better understanding of the tourism translation, the translator should add some relevant background information.

(iii) Cutting

Chinese is a language that is filled with abundant cultural factors. Tourism text is one of the text types that

are usually imbued with cultural factors here and there. Confronted with such cultural gaps in the process of tourism translation, translators can use the methods of rewriting, addition to treat these cultural gaps. However, in order to achieve the aim of cross-cultural communication, translator can also resort to the method of cutting to deal with the cultural factor. Cutting is to omit certain parts of the source text in the process of translation. If translator uses the method to cut some important cultural factors, there is some loss for potential readers because they will not have the chance to get to know these cultural factors. Cutting is different from rewriting: the former simply cuts out the difficult part in the source text, while the latter uses one phrase or sentence to replace the difficult part.

CONCLUSION

With the rapid development of tourism industry in China, it becomes urgent to translate Chinese tourism text into English. Tourism and culture are closely related. Foreign visitors come to China not only to enjoy the beautiful scenery but also to know more about the unique Chinese culture. Thus, tourism translation is in nature a kind of intercultural communication. For successful communication, translators should pay attention to the treatment of cultural factors.

Translation is both a linguistic transference and a cultural communication activity. So is tourism translation. Therefore, a translator should lay solid linguistic foundation and pay attention to the cultural factors in both languages to offer a good translation.

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