

The Role of Language and Cultural Commodification in Tourism

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ABSTRACT

The last few decades have witnessed the invaluable impact of economic globalization on facilitating exchanges in transnational culture, whereas international tourism is an inevitable product of transcultural communication worldwide. While professional interpreters and tourist guides may alleviate the language barrier issue, the ever-growing demands for multilingual communication have become an essential factor needed to consider across transcultural settings, mainly tourists. The article investigates the implications of multilingual communication for tourism development and the commodification of culture according to circumstances at variance.

Keywords: Linguistic Commodification, Culture, Tourism, Language Studies

1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, countless researchers explored culture's connotation and symbolic implications from multiple subjects, such as art, lifestyle, religion, value, and social hierarchies. Despite its widespread use, it is hard to give a unified definition of culture in academic circles because culture is applied multidimensional and with varying meanings. Samovar and Porter defined culture as the deposit of knowledge, experiences, and beliefs from different generations [10]. Likewise, culture may be understood as the intellectual achievement, social custom, behaviors, and language of human society [15]. Cultural commodification helps business people commodify their identities and get closer to clients psychologically. In addition, the value of relevant cultural products is estimated by financial value also encouraged individuals to ignore the authenticity and connotation of the culture increasingly. This phenomenon is most apparent in the third industry. After all, tangible and intangible cultures have become commodities, and these cultural productions are the attractions and motivations of tourists to visit the destination [7]. Based on previous research, the article focuses on several typical linguistic phenomena in tourism from a cultural commodification standpoint.

2. LANGUAGE AND TOURISM

Currently, the spread of international languages and linguistic commodification has been integral to tourism's prospect. As an inseparable component of culture, language functions as a symbol of human civilization and communicative tools of a particular group or country. Now internationalization development brings more frequent exchanges in multiple languages across various countries, whereas multilingual interaction is more common in tourism. In the case of tourism, particularly on transnational trade, tourists, guides, and local hosts attach great importance to the role of language in designing promotional materials and marketing management [14]. Language in tourism is constructed as an essential resource for authenticating local identity, marking community boundaries, and commodifying cultural heritage [16]. Therefore, language plays a critical role in passing cultural codes, whereas tourism is a platform for sharing culture at variance.

It is worth noting that disparate languages in global advertising reflect disparate social stereotypes. Advertising is highly influential in many aspects of employment, the public, and daily life worldwide. According to Piller's findings (2017), the use of English in non-English-native speaking countries gives consumers an impression of modernization, elitism, and a free and open market. French slogans are strongly related to refined taste, elegance, and a delicate lifestyle.

Spanish loanwords are light-hearted and easy-going but undignified and capricious depending on the context. However, foreign language in commercials does not work linguistically but emblematically. It is not essential to realize these foreign language slogans' original meaning because their primary function is merely to transmit a sense of ethnocultural stereotype. In light of Piller's study, consumers tend to associate the application of a particular foreign language in advertising products with the stereotype of the country using the language [9]. Hence, Schneider (2010) indicated that attitudes towards different language and linguistic ideologies are anchored in complicated social environments [12].

Compared with language, tourism as a cultural performance builds a theoretical framework to understand tourist-host encounters and provides meaningful insights in training tourism workers' skills [13]. As a socio-economic behavior, tourism has a bearing on both benefits of relevant workers and efficiency of enterprises operation. Tourism has been a vital source of income for some regions and even for entire countries. From a sociolinguistics perspective, tourism refers to "a staged performance where identities, ideologies, and languages are repurposed and refashioned to meet the need of tourism markets and tastes." (p. 410) [15]. Sassi (2018) also believed that the arrival of mass tourism is consequential for research on multilingualism and the advancement of the tertiary industry [11]. Therefore, tourism is an excellent window for multilingual and transcultural communication [4].

3. THE COMMODIFICATION OF CULTURE AND TOURISM

In the last decade, many linguists conducted empirical research about the correlation between tourism and multi-language, including examining the commodification of culture in the context of internationalization [5]; [13]; [14]; [15]; [16]. The Oxford English Dictionary defines commodification as "the act or process of creating something into a product that can be bought and sold." Within this definition, commodification refers to a specific process rendered available for traditional transactions in the market [5]. The commodification of local culture means that the living areas are not within the scope of economic relations stipulated by the market trading standards before it is penetrated by tourism [2].

Indigenous culture carriers in tourism like foods, souvenirs, and cultural symbols can be turned into products and sold to consumers. Sharma (2018) stressed that the workplace discourse in tourism also commodifies these workers' service-oriented personalities to some degree [14]. Similarly, Cole (2007) mentioned that aside from tangible commodities, the happiness and pleasure brought by communication in varying languages is also a kind of intangible cultural commodification [3]. The use

of other languages creates an authentic discourse environment for commercial purposes. Accordingly, the manifestation of cultural commercialization can be material objects and values generated in communication. For instance, the study abroad program is also a cultural commodity that can be sold and purchased, which belongs to the commodification of education [8].

Tourism development accelerates the commodification of culture's process. Along with the continuous increase in human cost, tourism gradually replaces industry as a new primary industry for many countries like Spain. The rise of the tertiary industry is consistent with the deindustrialization of developed countries due to the cultural commodification tendency [11]. Consequently, local governments formulate more policies and international agreements that favor the flow of goods and information to boost tourist growth. Conversely, language in tourism can serve as cultural capital to create conditions for their convertibility to commercial profits [5]. The linguistic landscape in tourist destinations has become saleable commodities for clients to appreciate. Goethals (2016) explained that the application of foreign languages is instrumental in evoking linguistic authenticity and exoticism when traveling abroad [4]. Commodifying the language heritages of an ethnic group or a region may increase the marketing benefits of the destination. Heller (2014) and Schneider (2018) argued that under the circumstance of economic globalization, current languages have turned into marketable merchandise instead of a symbol of ethnolinguistic identity [5]; [13].

The existence of cultural commercialization has made a significant contribution to tourism growth. Tourism workers need to commodify language, identity, and cultural activities driven by benefits and take authenticity ideology as the basis of these processes [15]. For instance, Nepalese regard English language abilities as a critical determinant to maintain tourism growth, so local relevant institution prepares four-week English courses twice in one year for tourism practitioners [14]. These language learning courses efficiently reinforce market-oriented operation patterns and commodify Nepal's linguistic and cultural diversity. As Sharma further stressed, service workers learn languages in helping them commodify their identities and get closer with clients psychologically [15]. Currently, the spread of international languages and linguistic commodification has been integral to tourism's prospect.

4. LINGUISTIC COMMODIFICATION

Linguistic commodification is defined as reconfiguring languages as a commercial resource to meet the demands of markets [6]. Currently, linguistic commodification frequently occurs in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. In the Nepal case mentioned earlier, English language skills are packaged as a human

capital commodity to maximize the economic benefits. In interviews, tourism employees have to use English to circulate travel information and position themselves and other visitors' cultural identities [15]. Depending on these materials, the relevant social institutions may make reasonable tourism development projects.

The telephone call center is a rich information source of insight into linguistic commodification and language services regulation [1]. After all, service workers' verbal behaviors are part of company image and the commodities sold to clients. Tariq Rahman (2009) examined the commodification of language in Pakistan's call centers from an English accent standpoint. The study reflected that speaking near-native English accents is critical for Pakistani service workers in conducting business [17]. The call centers even stigmatize English with Pakistan accents because workers are eager to learn native English accents. While language is being commodified internationally in such a background, it has been a potential tool to express locality and regional characteristics [5].

Likewise, Cameron analyzed listeners' demands for speech stylization of telephone operators in call centers [1]. The study confirms that linguistic commodification exerts a main ideological effect on the globalized new economy. To be more specific, linguistic commodification brings the valorization of speech style. Female employees ought to show many good qualities like compassion, solicitude, and sincerity in the tone of service language. As Heller et al. stated, linguistic commodification harmonizes the cultural demands triggered by economic globalization [5]; it involves many linguistic features, including accent, tone of speech, and gendered speech style.

In addition, the commodification of multiple languages improves the English-only international context. Taking Salsa (a global dance and music) as an example, Schneider pointed out why Salsa is famous around the Spanish-speaking world has something to do with the commodification of culture and the global hegemony of capitalism ideology [12]. In the context of English-only ideology, other languages may be seen as non-commercialism. Holborow reported that the local government provides substantial subsidies in protecting Catalan heritage tourism because Catalan lacks the international universality of global languages like English and French [6]. However, multilingualism is helpful to rebuild elite identity and ethnic culture because now Salsa in Cuban style can also convey novel cosmopolitan values like English. Thus, the advancement of other languages can give interlocutors new images of different national cultures.

Apart from economic and cultural factors, the commodification of language is also embedded in ideological conflicts on the political aspect. While identities and commodification of languages usually lead

to tense situations with claims to authenticity, Su and Chun regarded traditional Chinese scripts in Taiwan Executive Yuan's press release as a successful case [16]. The two scholars reflected that the traditional Chinese in Taiwan's official writings show the authenticity of traditional Chinese cultural identification and the property of tool with marketability to PRC readers (The People's Republic of China). In Taiwan's official stance, their press release attempted to stress that Taiwan makes better than the PRC in protecting traditional cultural heritage. A typical case is that in Taiwanese political recognition, the application of traditional Chinese characters seems to present that Taiwan is "more Chinese" than Mainland China. Such official propaganda may pass the superiority of Taiwan's free culture to tourists from Mainland China. In essence, such mentality and behaviors are a political struggle for power of speech to Chinese orthodox culture.

5. CONCLUSION

The article's findings provide information about the interconnection among tourism, language use, and cultural commodification. Language in tourism is often used as a necessary means to achieve transcultural communication with tourists from countries at variance and higher economic profit. Second language speaking with mother tongue accents is widely used for confirming local identification and marking regional boundaries. The occurrence of both situations is consistent with globalized economic development. Conversely, spoken English with near-native accents has tremendous advantages in attracting international trade. In addition to pronunciation, service language in call centers concerns discourse style and professional qualities. In a culture of commodification, individuals ought to avoid inherent racism cognition behind various languages. Whether travel or study abroad, both travel agencies and colleges commodify exotic experiences as a cultural product with interaction value to sell [8].

In my collecting references process, a large volume of research focuses on studying the dominant role of English in linguistic commodification. It seems that fewer researchers explored the commodification of other languages, particularly on languages with fewer native users. Hence, future studies should pay more attention to dying languages and other international languages. Perhaps other languages are not enough frequent-used as English in international business, but the commodification of diverse languages in domestic trade might have potential academic value.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

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