

Cultural Strategy in the C-E Translation of Tourist Materials

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Abstract. This paper analyzes both the cultural strategy in the C-E translation of tourist materials and the differences between Chinese and Western cultures as reflected in such materials. The paper starts with the functions of tourist materials, makes a cultural analysis of tourist materials, and presents three major translation strategies on dealing with different kinds of tourist materials.

Introduction

With the development of society, tourism plays a more important role in national economy. China is a great country with a long history of more than 5,000 years, and its splendid culture attracts foreign visitors from all over the world. They need accurate tourist materials which can give them introduction and information about the tourist resources in China. As a result, the translation of tourist materials plays a significant part in the development of tourist industry. Tourism is a borderline subject. It is almost related with all subjects of natural science and social science. When we handle tourist materials, especially the tourist materials of highly civilized countries, such as China, we may encounter a lot of problems and difficulties. Cultural elements seem to be a key point and a big difficulty in the translation of tourist materials. In view of the important role of culture, this paper focuses on the cultural strategy in the C-E translation of tourist materials.

Functions of Tourist Materials

Information and Instruction

Tourist materials are used to give information and attract tourists. China has a long history, and there are so many scenic spots and historical sites in our motherland. Sometimes even the native people do not have the basic knowledge of these spots, let alone foreigners. With the development of society, more and more foreigners come to China and they are quite interested in the tourist resources in China. As a result, they need accurate tourist materials which give them introduction and instruction. As translators, we need to be careful enough when translating tourist materials and try our best to give the factual and faithful information to visitors.

For example, When we translate the tourist material of West Lake, we may need to translate the name of the scenic spot of “孤山”. According to the literal meaning of the name, we are likely to translate it into “Solitary Hill”. In fact it is not a hill but one of the four islands in West Lake, so the correct translation should be “Solitary Island”.

Encyclopedia

Tourism is a borderline subject, which covers information and knowledge of many other subjects, such as history, geography, politics, mathematics, physics and chemistry. It is almost related with all subjects of natural science and social science. As a result, tourist materials seem to be an “encyclopedia”, full of unknown information and knowledge. China is an ancient country with a long history of more than 5,000 years, and during such a long time each dynasty had its unique culture and left its historical sites. China is also a unitary, multi-national country where 56 nationalities live and develop their respective colorful tourist resources.

长城跨越连绵的山岭峡谷，全长12,700里。

The Great Wall crosses a series of mountains and gullies, stretching 12,7000 li. (Zeng Cheng 2002)

In China, people are accustomed to using “li” as a unit in measurement. We use “li” here and there in our daily life, and everyone knows how long it refers to. However, foreigners do not know what “li” means, and therefore they won’t understand the magnificence and grandeur of the Great Wall. In fact “li” is equal to half of a kilometer. If we can paraphrase the Chinese unit “li”, and add “or 6,300 kilometers” in the above sentence, foreigners will understand it easily.

Cultural Analysis of Tourist Materials

Translation and Culture

Translation is a cross-cultural activity. Traditionally, it was taken for granted that translation was only a cross-language activity and the translator’s task was to translate a text from one language into another.

In fact, translation is not as simple as it seems to be. Although on the surface it deals with languages, it actually deals with cultures due to the special relationship between language and culture. The former Soviet Union semiotician Jurí Lotman demonstrates, “No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language.” (Bassnett 1980)

Lotman’s words suggest that language and culture can’t be separated from each other. On one hand, language serves as a guide to how a culture perceives reality, without which culture will become something we can’t grasp; on the other hand, language, as a part of culture, is influenced and shaped by culture. It is a reflection of culture.

By translation, we mean people give the meaning of something said or written in another language. Since translation deals with language, it is also a reflection of culture. People should study translation in a cultural context. Having known the close relationship between translation and culture, we should pay much attention to the cultural elements in the translation of tourist materials.

Cultural Elements in Tourist Materials

First, history. China is a great country with a long history of more than 5,000 years. Our ancestors left us so many famous historical sites. All these historical sites with their mysterious stories attract visitors from home and abroad. We can easily find the names of dynasties and historical figures in such kinds of tourist materials. Some historical events, stories and legends also appear in them. Even the native people can’t understand all these materials with historical features, let alone foreigners without the necessary cultural background knowledge.

Second, religion. In ancient times, Chinese people believed in Buddhism and Taoism. The government attached importance to religion and hoped to control the emotion of common people by religion. At that time a lot of temples, pagodas and grottoes were built all over China. Most of the famous mountains in China are embellished with religious temples and pagodas, such as Wutai Mountain for Buddhism and Qingcheng Mountain for Taoism. Foreign visitors who have much knowledge of Christianity may know nothing about Buddhism and Taoism. How to explain for them becomes a problem in the translation of tourist materials. For example, the cave walls and ceilings in the Mogao Grottoes are covered with vivid murals. The main themes are the life of Buddha, various religious stories and tales from Chinese folk mythology. Translators must come up against difficulties and try to find out the most suitable translation strategy when they introduce the murals.

Third, Custom. China is a beautiful land. The ancestors of its various ethnic groups have, since time immemorial, labored and multiplied on the vast, beautiful land. Through thousands of years of continuous disintegration and amalgamation, the numerous ethnic groups in China have gradually developed into the present-day 56 ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its culture, custom and tradition. Some ethnic groups are quite different in their ethnic customs, so translators should explain for visitors carefully and patiently, otherwise there would be misunderstandings and unhappiness. Translators should pay much attention to ethnic customs and make necessary adaptations and explanations to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. Recently more and more foreign visitors come to Yunnan Province, where many minority ethnic groups live and develop. Foreigners are quite interested in these ethnic groups and their colorful festivals, such as Water-Sprinkling Festival, Torch Festival and Fast-breaking Festival. If they do not know the meanings of

these festivals, they won't really understand the happiness and best wishes. As good translators, they can introduce the different ethnic groups and their different cultures in tourist materials.

Fourth, Language. To a certain extent, it is language that hinders the understanding and communication between the Eastern world and Western world. Different countries or nationalities have their own languages, which have developed from generation to generation. Chinese is paratactic and indirect, while English is hypotactic and direct. The Western people always feel puzzled about the mild and indirect Chinese expressions. Because of the difference between the linguistic features of Chinese and English, we need to make proper adaptations when we translate tourist materials.

Cultural Strategy in the Translation of Tourist Materials

Addition

Addition is often used when we need to explain cultural elements in tourist materials. We usually add some words, phrases or sentences to give further explanation of the ST. The names of scenic spots, historical figures, times and dynasties always need to be further explained for foreign visitors.

布达拉宫分为白宫和红宫两部分。白宫是西藏宗教首领达赖活佛处理政务和日常起居之处。红宫分为佛堂、经堂、灵堂，各堂又都有十几或几十处大殿。

Potala Palace is divided into white and red palaces for the color of their walls. The white palace used to be a palace where the living Buddha, Dalai, Tibet's religious leader, handled government affairs and lived. The red palace is further divided into the hall of the Buddha, Scripture Hall and Memorial Hall, each with a dozen or scores of rooms. (Li Xin 1993)

In the TT, the reason why the two palaces are called "white" and "red" is added for further explanation. The addition avoids foreign visitors' misunderstandings about the functions of the two palaces. By mistake, some people translate the white palace (白宫) into "the White House", which will of course cause some misunderstandings among foreign visitors. Maybe they think there is some relationship between this spot and the White House in the USA. Translators will feel puzzled about how to translate "佛堂", "经堂" and "灵堂", if they don't know the functions of the three halls. Generally speaking, religious background knowledge plays a quite important role in the translation of religious tourist materials.

灵隐寺是杭州最著名的寺庙，内有两个主殿—天王殿和大雄宝殿。

Monastery of the Spirits' Retreat is the best-known monastery in Hangzhou. It contains two main halls—the Hall of the Four Major Protectors and the Great Buddha Hall. (Li Xin 1993)

When translating religious tourist materials, this translator does not translate them word for word. Instead he adds more information to give further explanation. He translates "天王殿" into "the Hall of the Four Major Protectors", which is clearer in meaning than simply translated as "the Hall of the Heavenly King". Also, if "大雄宝殿" is translated according to its literal meaning, foreigners may not know its real function. In fact it is the hall where the Great Buddha is enshrined.

For another example, "大水法" is a famous scenic spot in Yuanming Yuan. If we only translate the name into Dashuifa, foreign visitors will also feel puzzled about the name. A better translation should be Dashuifa (the Great Water Wonder). We add the explanation of Dashuifa in the parentheses, and then foreigners can really understand the name of the scenic spot.

Deletion

In Chinese tourist materials, people like to quote ancient poems to describe the beautiful scenery of some scenic spots. They hope that ancient poems will give visitors a deep impression and help them appreciate the value of the spot. However, foreign visitors without background knowledge of Chinese ancient literature certainly won't understand the poems, so we can delete the poems and make tourist materials easy to understand.

历代中国人民以其勤劳和智慧在这里留下了许多杰出的创造：金碧辉煌、气象万千的故宫；湖光山色、曲槛回廊的颐和园；建筑精巧、独具艺术风格的天坛；烟波浩瀚、黛色风光的北海公园。

The hard labor and wisdom of Chinese people for generations have left Beijing numerous wonders. Among these are the majestic Palace Museum, the scenic Summer Palace, the ingenious Temple of Heaven and the splendid Beihai Park. (Zeng Cheng 2002)

The writer uses a lot of phrases and idioms to modify the scenic spots in the Chinese tourist material. It is hard and unnecessary to translate all these modifiers, so the translator just uses several simple adjectives to express the meaning briefly and accurately. Although the translator does not translate all those four character expressions, he has successfully conveyed the main idea of the source text (ST) and the effect of the ST and the target text (TT) is the same.

满树金花、芳香四溢的金桂；雪白如雪的银桂；红里透黄、花多味浓的金砂桂；花色似银、季季有花的四季桂；竞相开放、争妍媲美。进入桂林公园，阵阵桂香扑鼻而来。

The park of Sweet Osmanthus is noted for its profusion of osmanthus trees. Flowers from these trees in different colors are in full bloom which pervades the whole garden with the fragrance of their blossoms. (Zhang Ning 2000)

In the ST, there are so many idioms to modify the flowers of osmanthus trees. It is rather difficult to find the proper English equivalents of these idioms. Moreover it is even harder to translate all the names of different kinds of flowers mentioned in the ST. As a result, the translator deletes all the descriptive language of the flowers. Instead he uses a very simple sentence to summarize the complicated information. .

Adaptation

There are always some cultural terms in Chinese tourist materials. If we translate them literally, foreign visitors must feel perplexed. How to adapt these terms becomes a challenging task to translators.

在四川西部，有一美妙的去处。它背倚岷山主峰雪宝峰，树木苍翠，花香袭人，鸟声婉转，流水潺潺。这就是松潘县的黄龙。

One of Sichuan's finest scenic spots is Huanglong (Yellow Dragon), which lies in Songpan County just beneath Xuebao, the main peak of Minshan Mountain. Its lush green forests, filled with fragrant flowers, bubbling streams, and songbirds, are rich in historical interest as well as natural beauty. (Lu Min 2004)

The structure of the TT is completely different from the ST, although they express the same meaning. In the ST, the four idioms are coordinate clauses, while the translator uses the other three idioms to modify the first one in the TT. Adaptation makes the paragraph logical and clear, and foreign visitors may also find it smooth and coherent.

沿湖四周，花木繁茂；群山之中，泉蹊竞流；亭台楼阁，交相辉映；湖光山色，千古风情，另多少人流连忘返。“上有天堂，下有苏杭”的赞誉真是恰如其分。

The causeways, bridges, pavilions, springs, trees and flowers in and around the West Lake make it a paradise on earth, where one can't tear himself away. (Zeng Cheng 2002)

We can find that the structures of the ST and the TT are quite different. Several short sentences are changed into a long sentence. The translator does not translate the short sentences one by one. Instead he puts all the descriptions together to make a complete picture. Such adaptation is brief and clear, and it is based on English grammar.

To sum up, when we learn to translate tourist materials ourselves, we should first of all analyze the ST carefully, and then choose the appropriate strategy. Sometimes we need to use the three strategies at the same time. More importantly, translation should base on the actual situation and make tourist materials easy to understand.

Conclusion

Translation has a close relationship with culture. Cultural elements usually play an important role in translation. In view of the length of this paper, we just choose one point to analyze—cultural elements in the translation of tourist materials. Different translation strategies can be used in different kinds of materials, so we should first of all know the features of tourist materials. Tourist materials

have high practicability, which can be reflected in their function. They are used to give information and attract tourists. Tourist materials can be called “encyclopedia” because tourism is a borderline subject. Since tourist materials include knowledge of social science, cultural elements must play an important role in the translation of tourist materials. There are really a lot of difficulties in the translation of tourist materials, and some translators made mistakes because they did not know how to deal with the cultural elements. These mistakes may bring misunderstandings and prevent the development of Chinese tourism. Translators should base the TT on the actual situations and choose the proper strategies. What we should do is to introduce the splendid Chinese culture to foreign visitors, and thus help them appreciate the colorful Chinese tourist resources.

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