On Chinese-to-English Tourism Translation from Perspective of German Functionalist Translation Theory

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Abstract. This article classifies tourism translation and puts forward the appropriate translation principles and strategies on the basis of their respective purpose and functions under the guidance of German Functionalism.

Introduction

The mysterious Chinese culture, the abundant natural resources, the glamorous natural sceneries, and the various delicious foods attract numerous tourists from all over the world, which has contributed to Chinese economic prosperity and made the tourism culture translation of great importance. Culture plays a central part in tourism attraction, which is not only the priority, but also a sticky issue to tackle in the tourism translation. Despite the prosperity of Chinese tourism, there still exist considerable errors and mistakes in tourism translations, which often mislead foreign tourists, and deprive the tourists of their full enjoyment and appreciation of Chinese culture and gorgeous sceneries. As a result, it is necessary to carry out a comprehensive systematic research on the translation of tourism culture although German functionalism has long been introduced as a theoretical guide to the study of tourism translation, for it is rare to study the tourism translation systematically. Consequently, this article classifies tourism culture translation and puts forward the appropriate translation principles and strategies on the level of words, sentences and texts on the basis of their respective purpose and functions under the guide of German Functionalism.

Introduction to German Functionalist Translation Theory

As one of the most influential translation theories, German functionalism translation theory based itself on the modern linguistics and originated in pragmatics-based text linguistics, action theory, communication theory, and reception theory. It has broken the dominance of Equivalence theory by Eugene Nida, whose theory is inclined to study translation from the perspective of linguistics. In the 1970s, the publishing of Translation Criticism: The Potentials and Limitations by of Katharina Reiss, a German translation theorist, experienced translator and translation trainer, declared the establishment of German functionalist theory. And Katharina Reiss is considered as the first scholar who introduced function to the research of translation. He pointed out that it was impossible or unnecessary to maintain equivalence between the source text and the target text. Instead, she advocated the functional equivalence between the source text and the target one based on his classification of text types and their corresponding translation approaches. Reiss’s work draws on developments in the pragmatic branch of linguistics, and she bases her types on the function of the language in the text.[1] As Reiss’s student, Hans J.Vermeer attached great importance to the purpose of the translation and the target readers’ needs and put forward skopotheorie, the core and basis of German functionalism. In 1984, Translation Action: Theory and Method by Justa Holz-Manttari furthered Hans J.Vermeer’s theory for he put forward the theory of translational action and differentiated translation and translation action, which broadened the branch of translation and emphasized the translator’s status was emphasized. According to him, translation was not just a shift of language code, but an intercultural exchange and the final translations should functions well in

“Skopostheorie was developed in German in the late 1970s which reflects a general shift from predominantly linguistic and rather formal translation theories to a more functionally and socio-culturally oriented concept of translation”[2] In the 1970s, the western translation field broke the confinement of source-text-oriented translation theory and broadened the translation research to the culture. What was the most remarkable were the reaction of receiver and the function of the target text. German translation researchers jumped on the bandwagon. Hans J. Vermeer put forward the skopos theory which laid the foundation for the German functionalist translation theory with the focus on ‘skopos’. Vermeer believed that the following words skopos, intention, aim and function are of the same meaning and he maintained that translation was a kind of human behavior which must be purposeful. [3] When it comes to the translation result, skopos refers to the function of the translated text. When it comes to the translation mode, it means the intention of the mode. All in all, skopos determines the purpose of translation aiming at certain target readers. It is obvious that the importance of the source text is weakened in the German functionalism theory. In other words, skopostheorie focuses above all on the purpose of translation, which determines the translation methods and strategies to be employed in order to produce a functionally adequate result, which is called by Vermeer the translatum [4]

Christiane Nord inherited and developed the theories of Reiss, Vermeer and Manttairi and introduced the ‘function plus loyalty’ principle into the Functionalism in the beginning of 1990s. “Function” refers to the elements which make the target text work in the intended way in the target situation, and “loyalty” refers to the interpersonal relationship among the translator, the TT reader and the ST sender and the initiator.[5] The concept of “Function”, based on Reiss’s text typology’, refers to the four basic text functions: the referential function, the expressive function, the appellative function and the phatic function. Loyalty is an interpersonal category referring to a social relationship between people. Loyalty replaces the faithfulness of the target text to the original one for it involves the social relationships among people, which transcends the confinement of the text and considers the trans-textual elements involved in the translation. The loyalty principle obliges the translator to consider the communicative purpose of the original writer and the needs of the target text reader.

**Introduction to Chinese Tourism Translation**

Tour guides are the direct practitioners of Tourism translation, who always deal with the questions of the tourists concerning six elements in the tourism industry, namely, the food, lodging, traveling, sightseeing, shopping, and entertaining. As a result, tourism translation involves a wide scope of tourism stuffs, which include scenic spot name translation, scenic spot introduction translation, tour guide commentary translation, and all other texts with regards to tourism. The common tourism translation is the translation of pubic signs, the restaurant English menu, the English leaflets distributed at the travel agency or in the hotel, and the English scenic spot introductions on the internet, which all boost the publicity of China’s culture. When it comes to the content of tourism translation, it involves China’s tea culture, cuisine, silk, martial arts, local operas, Chinese mythology, religions like Taoism, philosophy like Confucianism, architecture, and so on, which are the precious cultural legacy of China worthy of being introduced to foreign tourists.

The German functionalism is closely associated with translation practice for it was put forward to boost the training of the translators. According to the German functionalism, translation participants
are not only translators, but also the translation initiators and the target text receivers. Among the three translation participants, the initiator determines what is translated, the target text receiver the process of the translation and the translator the exact specific translation methods and strategies. The receiver of the tourism translation is the foreign tourists, which is the key elements that impact on the categorization of tourism translation. Accordingly, tourism translation can be divided into three types: the scenic spots translation, the dish translation and the tourism publicity translation.

Scenic spot translation is a significant type of tourism translation for 26% of foreign visitors are attracted by China’s historic sites and allusions while 56% by Chinese exotic life style, local customs and practices, as well as geographical sights according to the sample survey conducted by the China’s Tourism Association[6]. Scenic spot translation can be further divided into the translation of scenic spot names and the translation of scenic spot introduction. Scenic spot names refer to the names of diverse natural or cultural landscapes, which are often associated with the geographic characteristics, the legends, the historical events or stories, the folk customs, etc. of the scenic spots. Scenic spot names are usually brief, meaningful and charming, which are the first things that arouse the attention and interests of the potential tourists, provoke them to make the scenic spots their travelling destinations and eventually remain in their mind for a long time. Chinese scenic spot names have the above-mentioned functions, so the functions should be maintained in their English translations. But in effect, enormous translations fail to conform to the functions. For example, Three-Su Temple reminds Chinese tourists of the three great poets in Song Dynasty of ancient China: namely Su Shi, Su Che and Su Xun. But the English translation fails to achieve this for the foreign tourists lack the historical knowledge of Chinese literature. To render appropriate scenic spot name translations which can fulfill the original functions, most of the scenic spot names are composed of two parts, the proper name that supplies more specific information and are often translated by means of transliteration and literal translation and the general name usually with its English counterpart that usually points out which types of scenery the scenic spots fall into. For example, E-mei Mountain, in which “E-mei” is the proper name translated by means of transliteration and “Mountain” is the general name. The transliteration can render a brief and short scenic spot name translation, which is easy to remember, while literal translation can provide more information concerning the specific scenic spot, which can make the scenic spot more appealing to the tourists. Consequently, the translator should properly combine the two methods to render English translations of scenic spot names which fulfill the functions of the original names.

The scenic spot introduction translation is the most typical tourism translation for the scenic spot introduction is the core of the tourism text. When it comes to the scenic spot introductions, it is worth pointing out that the English ones and Chinese ones have different traits and styles. Namely, the English ones tend to try to describe the scenic spots in the accurate, clear and explicit language while the Chinese ones in the ambiguous, implicit language with emphasis on the social status of the scenic spots instead of the scenery itself in the scenic spots. For example, Rocky Mountain National Park is a living showcase of grandeur with countless breathtaking vistas ranging from 8,000 to 14,259 feet. You’ll find delicate alpine flowers, clear lakes, rushing mountain waters, bighorn sheep, ptarmigan, coyote, and elk. [7] The exact fingers are used and specific sceneries are listed in the English scenic spot. Another literal translation of a Chinese scenic spot is that “Mt. Mengding has steep and towering peaks”, which fail to supply the specific information of how steep the peak is to the tourists. Scenic spot introductions are a kind of practical text with the informative function of offering information concerning the scenic spots and the vocative functions of attracting the tourists. But the former function is the prerequisite for the tourists have to learn about the scenic spots to make their choices whereas the latter of the two functions is the dominant one for the purpose of drafting the scenic spot introductions is to attract tourists. According to the German functionalism, the evaluation of translation is decided by to which extent it realizes its translation purpose instead of equivalence. Given their different styles, it is necessary for the translator to apply proper translation methods to fulfill the two functions of the scenic spot introductions. When Chinese scenic spot introductions are full of culturally-loaded information and vague descriptions, which are strange but attractive to
foreign tourists, addition should be adopted to supply the vacant cultural information of the foreign tourists and specific description of the scenic spots so as to improve the acceptability of the translation. For example, the literal translation of “Mt. Mengding has steep and towering peaks”, is changed into “Mt. Mengding has steep and towering peaks of 1456 meters.” With the addition, the translation can better achieve its informative function. When Chinese scenic spot introductions are composed of cultural information which is uninteresting to the foreign tourists, such as the quotations and poems of famous people, the deletion can be adopted for “These poems, sayings, and allusions are used to ornament and enliven the discourse or text in Chinese writing, but to western readers, they are distractions which make the text lack argumentative coherence”.[8] For example, “Su Shi, the famous poet in Song Dynasty of ancient China, praised the diverse views of Mount. Lu by the poem “It is like a range when you look at the mountain from the front. But it is like a peak when you look at it sideways. The mountain shows its different features in different heights and distances.” in the Chinese scenic spot introductions is deleted in the translation. When the structures of the Chinese scenic spot introductions are clumsy to the foreign tourists, it is necessary to adopt restructure, which “is a translation method when the translator modifies the order of the units in a source text in order to conform to the syntactic or idiomatic constraints of the target text. [9] Specifically speaking, the translator can alter the structure of the original text, omit the content which may lead to misunderstanding and substitute the plain adjectives, nouns, adverbs, etc for the original Chinese four-character expressions. All in all, the alteration of the original text in the forms and the language styles is advocated by the German functionalists as long as the translations can fulfill their intended functions better.

The dish translation is important for Chinese cuisine is world-famous, which forms the indispensible part of China’s culture. According to German functionalism, the food culture translation should assume the informative function of introducing Chinese food and the vocative function of arousing the appetites of foreign visitors for Chinese food. In other words, the skopos of the Chinese food culture translation is to make the foreign visitors learn the information on the dishes, promote Chinese food culture in the world and attract more visitors. Under the guidance of the translation skopos of Chinese food culture, transliteration, literal translation, free translation and the combinations of various translation methods can be adopted only if the intended function can be more smoothly achieved. For example, the transliteration of “Tofu, Jiaozi, Guotie, Zongzi” which solves the untranslatability, promotes Chinese food culture and realizes the appellative function of the target text, the literal translation of “Stewed Beef, Twice-cooked Pork” which is directly translated with the cooking methods and the ingredients of the dishes, therefore introducing clearly the dishes to the foreigners just by the name, and the free translation of “Shrimps with Eggs” which is “Good Flowers and Round Moon” if directly translated.

Tourism publicity translation is crucial to attract foreign visitors, which includes the translation of entrance tickets, picture albums, tourist maps, tourist advertising brochures, postcards, and other various forms available to potential tourists. The skopos of the TP translation is to achieve its function of promotion. According to Reiss’s text typology theory, the tourism publicity is a combination of vocative text, expressive text and informative text, so the evaluation of the tourist publicity materials should be judged by the extent to which it achieves the intended skopos. The feedbacks of the tourists towards the TP translations and the final option of the scenic spots as their travelling destination serve to be vital factors in assessing the TP translations. In order to achieve the function of promotion, analogy is often adopted besides the above-mentioned methods of transliteration, literal translation and free translation. For example, “Zhouzhuang” is translated analogically as “Zhouzhuang, the oriental Venice”.

**Summary**

To boost China’s tourism and publicize Chinese culture in the world, the translation of Chinese tourism texts into English should be carefully studied. In response to the demand, the article is written
to explore the translation of the Chinese tourism texts under the guidance of German functional translation theory. In the article, the tourism translations are divided into three types: the scenic spots translation, the dish translation and the tourism publicity translation, which are probed into in terms of their respective features, functions and translation methods such as addition, deletion, analogy, restructuring, literal translation, transliteration, and free translation that can be flexibly employed as long as the translation can achieve the intended and expected functions of the translations. On account of the limited time, data and research experience of the author, it is hard for the article to supply a satisfactory answer to the translation of tourism texts, so more efforts focusing on the field is of great necessity to further the understanding of the issue.

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References


[7] Information on http://www.awwt.co.uk/vacations/selfDriveTours/theAmericanRockies/rockyMountainSplendour.php
