

Original Paper

A Study on Chinese-English Translation of Henan Tourism Texts from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics Theory

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Abstract

With the vigorous development of tourism industry in China, studies on tourism translation have received much attention. Henan is the province with abundant tourism resources in the Central Plains and attracts many tourists every year. As a direct means of international promotion of tourism resources, tourism texts translation is of the great importance. Based on the data of Henan tourism texts, this study analyzes the existing problems in translation of Henan tourism texts with the intention to improve translation quality from the perspective of reception aesthetics theory. It is found that spelling errors and translation errors can be found in the translated texts and that there is a lack of attention to the reader-oriented principle in the translated texts. Various translation techniques should be adopted by the translator to meet the reader's expectations. This study can provide valuable insights to Chinese-English translation practice of tourism texts and is of importance to the study of tourism texts.

Keywords

Reception aesthetics theory, Chinese-English translation, tourism texts

1. Introduction

The tourism industry is thriving and developing in China, and with the implementation of a series of policies to boost consumption, the tourism economy is rising rapidly. Henan Province is one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization and is famous for its abundant culture relics and tourism interests, five of which are listed as the world cultural heritage sites, including the Longmen Grottoes, Yin Xu, Historic Monuments of “The Centre of Heaven and Earth”, etc. In recent years, Henan has made great efforts on the publicity of Central Plains culture and many tourism cities have benefited a lot from the supportive policies. Attractions like the Millennium City Park and Yuntai Mountain, have drawn an increasing number of international tourists. The majestic landscapes and profound cultural heritages of

Henan attract more and more international visitors.

However, the English translation of Henan tourism texts has become increasingly prominent, and there are many problems in the translated texts, which has become one of the factors affecting the flow of international tourists and the Henan's tourism image to the world (Yan, 2010). It is of great necessity to promote the translation quality of Henan tourism texts both online and offline, so as to provide international tourists with more useful information and help them better understand about the Central Plains culture. Reception aesthetics theory emphasizes the importance of the reader's active role in the reception, interpretation, and appreciation of literary works (Jauss, 1982). It not only changes the traditional view of literary translation, but also provides a new perspective and research method for the study of applied translation. Tourism texts are a combination of literature and advertising. Therefore, reception aesthetics theory is of great significance to the translation of tourism texts (Hong, 2006). Previous studies on tourism texts mainly focused on the texts themselves without shifting the perspective to the target readers, and there are few studies on tourism texts translation from the perspective of reception aesthetics. Based on the data of Henan tourism texts, this study aims to analyze the problems in the translation of Henan tourism texts, and improve the translation quality from the perspective of reception aesthetics theory, so as to attract more international tourists.

2. Tourism Texts Translation

Tourism texts refer to written materials designed to inform and facilitate the tourist experience, encompassing a wide range of content such as travel guides, brochures, and signage (Chen, 2008). Texts could be categorized into three types based on their functions: the expressive texts, the informative texts, and the vocative texts. Tourism texts are possessed of both informative and vocative functions (Newmark, 2001). Tourism texts contain a vast amount of informative content, such as the geographical location, historical background, and cultural characteristics of tourist attractions. This information is objective and truthful, aiming to impart specific knowledge about tourist destinations to readers or tourists. This part of the content aligns with the characteristics of informative texts. And the purpose of tourism texts is to attract tourists as well as stimulate their interest to travel. This characteristic of evoking actions or reactions from readers corresponds with the definition of vocative texts.

Tourism translation is a cross-linguistic, cross-social, cross-temporal, cross-cultural and cross-psychological communicative activity (Zou, 2013). In the 21st century, many scholars shift their research interests from definitions, functions and characteristics of tourism texts to the perspectives of text type and cross-cultural communication, exploring the cultural aspects of tourism texts. Tourism texts translation should not only convey tourism information but also transmit cultural information. It is a kind of cross-cultural communication with specific purpose, and the theory of intercultural communication is widely used in tourism texts translation (Zhang, 2000). Tourism texts often carry multiple cultural sectors and language habits of the national language, so it may fail to produce a good

translation only based on the principle of fidelity to the original text (Li & Wang, 2009). In addition, comparative studies based on the stylistic characteristics of tourism texts between Chinese and English were conducted in order to improve the translation quality of tourism texts in China. It is found that the content and form of tourism translation should meet the reading preferences, cultural expectations, and cognition of the target reader. Thereby the translated texts become an integral part of their communicative context. The communicative effect of the translation on target readers should be as close as possible to the effect that the original text has on readers of the source language (Shan, 2022). Prior to the emergence of the reception aesthetics theory, the author-oriented principle and the text-oriented principle had been dominant in tourism texts translation for quite a long time, and accordingly, few translation studies had attached importance to readers (Xiong, 2012). Studies on tourism texts translation are mainly from the perspectives of Skopos, cross-cultural, text typology, etc. (Zou, 2013). In the studies on translation of tourism texts, little has been done from the perspective of reception aesthetics theory. From the aesthetic perspective, the tourism texts translation should cater to the cultural psychology and aesthetic preferences of the target readers and pay attention to aesthetic disparities among different countries (Jia, 2003). In addition, there should be an appropriate aesthetic distance between the translated work and readers, and it is the translators' responsibility to take linguistic, aesthetic and cultural differences of the target readers into full consideration (Hong, 2006). The translation cannot be passively influenced by the readers, on the contrary, it is expected to meet readers' horizon of expectation (Li & Guo, 2010).

3. Reception Aesthetics Theory

3.1 Foundation and Development of Reception Aesthetics Theory

Founded by German scholars, Jauss and Benzing (1970), the reception aesthetics theory emphasizes the importance of the reader's active role in the reception, interpretation, and appreciation of literary works. The concept of the Horizon of reader's expectation was put forward and the central status of the readers was established in the literature theory and the aesthetics research. Iser (1978) developed the aesthetics theory by proposing the concept of calling structure, which believes that the uncertainties and the blanks can arouse readers' curiosity to discover the significance of the translated texts, and that readers can participate in creation and reconstruct their understanding. Reception aesthetics theory developed by the school dominated literary theory in Germany for about a decade. It was virtually unknown in the English-speaking world until around 1980 when it was made more readily accessible by a number of translations of the most seminal works (Holub, 1995). This theory takes the reader's perspective as its starting point and emphasizes the reader's reaction and aesthetic experience of the text, which has a significant impact on translation studies.

3.2 Main Concepts of Reception Aesthetics Theory

Reception aesthetics theory has evoked a revolutionary tide in the translation field. Among its various notions, this study mainly focuses three key concepts: the reader-oriented principle, horizon of

expectations and aesthetic distance, hoping to provide some suggestions to tourism translation.

3.2.1 The Reader-Oriented Principle

The reader-oriented principle is a key point that distinguishes reception aesthetics theory from other translation theories. Jauss (1982) insists that the audience of literature does not merely play a passive or formal role, that the historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees, and that it is necessary to take the reader's reading as an active innovative activity rather than a passive reception. Firstly, according to Jauss, there is a triangle relationship among the author, the text and readers, with the text serving as a link between translators and readers. In other words, readers can fully exert their subjective initiative in the reading process to endow the text with specific meaning and vitality. The meaning of the work comes not only from the work itself, but also from readers' dynamic interpretation, including reader's imagination, creativity and understanding (Jauss, 1982). And only in the process of readers' creative reading can literature works have a realistic existence and vigorous vitality (Jauss, 1989). Therefore, translators should take the target readers' role and status into consideration and focus on the needs of international tourists.

3.2.2 Horizon of Expectations

The concept of horizon of expectations, also called readers' pre-understanding, refers to a combination of readers' experience, tastes and cognition formed before reading, and a literary work would predispose its readers to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies, overt or covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970). These factors could help readers gradually accept the new literary work. To some extent, the horizon of expectations could be summarized as the habitual thinking or the conventional wisdom founded during the previous literary reading experience. Different readers would acquire different reading experience owing to different life experience and knowledge levels.

When it comes to the role of the translator, various scholars have made a variety of explanations. And it is widely accepted that the translator acts as a role of "pioneer, midwife and teammate" in the translation process (Nida, 2004). But from the reception aesthetics perspective, the translator has taken a dual responsibility and the whole translation process can be divided into two reception stages, one is the reception of the source text by the translator and the other is that of translated text by the reader (Ma, 2000). A real work is created for readers and by readers. Since the reader plays an important role in the creation of work, the translator should pay more attention to readers' horizon of expectations. During readers' interaction with a text, they can not only decide what to read, how to read and to what degree the text is to be accepted. Therefore, the concept of horizon of expectations is highly esteemed in the translation study. The translator should take international tourists' horizon of expectations into account to make decisions on what and how to translate in the translation of tourism texts (Liu, 2005).

3.2.3 Aesthetic Distance

The aesthetic distance is considered as the distance between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work (Jauss, 1982). In other words, the aesthetic distance is the gap between the

known and the unknown sections. At the level of the knowledge, the aesthetic distance can establish the information gap to stimulate readers' interests and broaden their horizons. At the level of the art, it can also produce a sense of fuzzy beauty and enrich readers' spirit. For tourism translation, since international tourists have different life experience, aesthetic value and way of thinking from Chinese tourists, it is hard for them to understand the cultural information and the emotion of the tourism texts. Therefore, the shorter aesthetic distance would be better for international tourists.

4. Problems in the Translation of Henan Tourism Texts

Based on the data of Henan tourism texts, this study conducts a textual analysis of the translated texts. These texts cover various topics such as introductions to tourist attractions, public signs, travel guides, and tourism services.

4.1 Lack of English Versions of Tourism Texts Online

In the process of collecting tourism texts online and offline, it is found that most of the tourist attractions across Henan have introductions and public signs in several languages, including Chinese, English, Japanese, etc. For example, the official website of The National Museum of Chinese Writing offers services in four languages, including Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean, providing convenience for international tourists. However, the official websites of some tourist attractions provide information and guidance only in Chinese. For instance, the renowned attraction Kaifeng Palace, located in Kaifeng city known as the "Ancient Capital of Eight Dynasties," provides information only in Chinese on its official website, without considering the needs of international tourists.

4.2 Errors in Translated Texts

4.2.1 Spelling errors

Spelling errors are mainly due to carelessness of the public sign makers. Public signs with spelling errors will leave negative impressions on readers and make adverse effects to Henan' image. For instance, one public sign from the scenic area of Yuntai Mountain in Jiaozuo City:

E.g. (1) 请勿近距离投喂食物、逗猴、谢谢合作!

Translation: Please Do Not Feed or Tease the Macaque Thank you for you rcooperation!

In the above example, "cooperation" was mistakenly written as "rcooperation," which is an erroneous word. This public sign of Example (1) should be translated as "Please Do Not Feed or Tease the Macaque. Thank you for your cooperation!" Obviously, the error in the sign was due to the typist misplacing the space while typing, and the proofreaders did not correct it.

Similar errors can be found in the following introduction at Yuntai Mountain scenic spot:

E.g. (2) 左方钟乳石, 是温盘峪山体上含有的充足水份沿石灰岩垂直渗漏, 使石灰岩溶蚀后, 由含碳酸钙的水溶液吸附于石英岩裂缝处的岩壁上, 长期沉积而成。由于此处终日不见阳光, 再加上钙质优良, 形成了如今的白色晶莹剔透的钟乳石。

Translation: The stalactite on the left is formed by thesedimentation of the calcium carbonate which is dissolved from the limestone by the water and deposit on the surface of the quartzite. After long yearsof

sedimentation, finally create sthis brilliant and glittering masterpiece.

In this example, the lack of spaces between many words makes the introduction confusing and increases barriers for international tourists to understand the formation of stalactites.

4.2.2 Translation Errors

One of the most common problems in tourism texts translation is poor quality. English translations of tourism texts are often literal word-for-word, leading to grammatical and pragmatic errors, which affects international tourists' understanding of the tourist information. The spelling errors may be attributed to the carelessness of the public sign makers, while the following example shows that a lack of attention to the reader-oriented principle in the translated texts.

E.g. (3) 山崖低矮，人格高贵，请当心！

Translation: Be careful! The ceiling is low.

In scenic area, public signs are often placed where tourists can see them at a glance. There is no need in public signs to specify the location or cause of danger. It is recommended to revise the translation to "Be careful, mind your head", which could provide convenience as well as meet the cognitive and psychological acceptability for international tourists.

E.g. (4) 持本人有效证件的离休人员免票, 1.2 米(含)以下儿童免费。

Translation: Free admission for retired staff with valid documents and for children below 1.2 meter.

This example comes from the Bigan Temple scenic spot in Xinxiang City. Clearly, the policy of free admission for retired staff applies only to Chinese tourists, so translating all the words in the sign will bring unnecessary information to international tourists. The translation overlooked the feelings of the target language readers and failed to consider the dominant position of tourists in tourism activities. In order to cater to the language convention of international tourists, a better translated version of Example (4) is provided: Free Admission for children below 1.2 meter.

5. Application of Reception Aesthetics Theory to Henan Tourism Texts Translation

Reception aesthetics theory provides a new perspective for tourism texts translation. It gives the highest priority to the role of readers and takes readers' horizon of expectations into consideration, which exactly agrees with the purpose of translation in tourism texts. This section will analyze translated texts from the horizon of expectations across three aspects, namely, language structure, cultural background and aesthetic taste.

5.1 Meeting Horizon of Expectations in Terms of Language Structure

Language is an essential part of readers' horizon of expectations. Bearing in mind that differences of language structure between Chinese and English, translators should pay attention to the acceptability of the translated sentences. The acceptability of tourism information involves various issues like politics, religion, etc., which outweighs faithfulness to the source text. The following example is about how to change the language structure and increase the acceptability of the translation.

E.g. (5) 欢迎您再次光临国家卫生城市——洛阳

Translation: Welcome your once more presence country health city—Luoyang.

The sentence is a notice taken from Luoyang Railway Station. This example of word-to-word translation is hard to be understood, failing to express the meaning of hospitality. In order to produce a translation which accords with language structure and the convention of the target language, some phrases in the source sentences should be properly reorganized (Nida, 2004). In order to cater to the language convention of international tourists, the object “洛阳” in the Chinese sentence is better to be translated as a subject. Additionally, “country health city” is an incorrect expression and does not represent the official terminology for “国家卫生城市”. A better translated version of Example (5) is provided: The national sanitary city, Luoyang welcomes you. This version aligns more closely with the expression of public signs in English-speaking countries and reflects the hospitality of Luoyang.

5.2 Meeting Horizon of Expectations in Terms of Cultural Background

Translation is an interpretation of verbal signs and culture. Henan tourism texts cover rich culture connotations, ranging from ancient customs to historic legends, from religions to festivals, from food and clothing to lifestyle. Accurate and appropriate translations can show historical and cultural connotations of scenic spots and arouse tourists' desire to visit. Therefore, translators should consider intercultural differences and cater for target readers' cultural background.

Example (6) and example (7) are chosen from the promotional video titled “Discover Henan--the Home in Your Heart (豫见中国，老家河南)” which was produced by the Henan Provincial Tourism Bureau. This video is structured into four parts: Henan witnessed the flow of the Yellow River, the development of Chinese Characters, the beauty of Chinese Art, and the flourish of Chinese Martial Arts. These parts delve into the origins and essence of Chinese culture, comprehensively showing Henan's cultural influence. From the perspective of reader-oriented principle, the translator should use the technique of amplification to supplement the historical and cultural connotations so that international tourists can understand them.

E.g. (6) 在这里，百家争鸣，三教合流，中国人的思想和信仰交汇激荡。

Translation: Henan witnessed the contention of schools of thoughts and ideas: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

In this example, “百家争鸣,三教合流” cannot be literally translated as “the hundreds of families argue and the convergence of three religions”. The international tourists may not know what the three religions refer to, so relevant cultural background information needs to be supplemented in English.

E.g. (7) 中国人把追求美好生活的情感，倾注在生产生活的每一个环节：一团泥，倾注岁月年华，一句话，辅以唱念做打，一张纸，妙手裁剪勾勒，一碗面，精心配搭，中国人用巧思和智慧生活，艺术在这里闪耀着人性的光辉。

Translation: The Chinese people dedicate their affections for life to every aspect of living: a ball of clay to keep the old days, a single word with operatic utterance, the exquisite paper-cutting and a bowl of elaborately-stewed noodles. The Chinese are people with wisdom and ingenuity, whose arts shine with the brilliance of humanity.

The Chinese language is characteristic of subtle and implicit expressions, with simple words containing rich cultural information. Before translation, the translator should understand the original text firstly and conduct intra-linguistic translation. Here, “一句话” (a sentence) refers to the utterance of Henan opera, “一张纸” (a piece of paper) refers to the folk paper-cutting art of Henan, and “一碗面”(a bowl of noodles) refers to Henan’s elaborately-stewed noodles. These cultural images cannot be omitted in translation, otherwise, the international tourists may find it difficult to grasp its meaning and their horizon of expectations fail to meet.

As one of the birthplaces of the Chinese nation, Henan has a sea of historical allusions which frequently appear in tourism texts.

E.g. (8) 武侯祠位于南阳市西南的卧龙岗上，相传诸葛亮曾躬耕于此，刘备 “三顾茅庐” 的故事也发生于此。

Translation: The Memorial Temple of Wuhou was built on Wolong hillock southwest of Nanyang City. It was said that Zhuge liang had ever farmed here. The story of “Three Visits to the Thatched Cottage” also resided here.

Example (8) is from the English introduction of Wolong Mountain Scenic Area in Nanyang City. The story of Liu Bei’s “三顾茅庐” attracts many visitors to Wolong Mountain Scenic Area. The use of allusions in tourism texts can enhance language expressiveness. It is well-known that international tourists often have a curiosity-driven mindset or a great interest in Chinese culture. Thus, these historical allusions add unique value to the attractions, broadening visitors’ perspectives and knowledge while providing enjoyment in their travels. Therefore, the translation of these culturally loaded words is particularly important. Historical allusions are rich in connotation, and translators should study their sources and meanings before selecting translation strategies to achieve better results. Therefore, amplification is adopted to supplement the information contained in culture-loaded words. A better translated version of Example (8) is provided: The Memorial Temple of Wuhou was built on Wolong hillock southwest of Nanyang City. It was said that Zhuge liang had ever farmed here, and it was also the setting for the famous story of “Three Visits to the Thatched Cottage” -- Liu Bei visited three times to invite Zhuge Liang to be his military adviser.

5.3 Meeting Horizon of Expectations in Terms of Aesthetic Taste

Reception aesthetics theory emphasizes the democratic nature of aesthetic interpretation, acknowledging the interpretive capabilities and rights of readers. This theory broadens the understanding of human aesthetic experience from a new perspective of the reader. It is widely acknowledged that the language style of Chinese and English tourism texts differs a lot. Featured by flowery expressions, parallel structures and four-character phrases, Chinese tourism texts aim to present the beauty in rhythm and rhyme. Application of idioms, quotations and rhetorical devices can help to strengthen artistic appeal of the language. Conversely, English-speaking people prefer concise and plain language, so direct messages and precise structures are the main characters of English tourism texts. In terms of content, English tourism texts pay more attention to accuracy and practicality

of information, so introductions to geographical conditions, transportation as well as service facility are often involved. The various aesthetic ways lead to the differences between Chinese and English tourism texts. In tourism texts translation, it is recommended that the translator shorten the aesthetic distance to take care of the aesthetic taste of international tourists.

E.g. (9) 景区内八大游览区：山门四峰罗列显壮美，桃花湾碧水连天无穷尽，山神庙神奇古朴叹观止，羊洲地天河瀑布惊天地，一线天断臂如削攀险路，红石河红绿相间织梦幻……160 多处景点以水为线串成秀美的精品画廊。景区空气清新，沁人心脾，山泉甘甜，环境清幽。景区内剑锋千仞，清泉潺流，林木葱茏，猕猴嬉戏，群鹿呦呦，是南太行山水精粹所聚之地。

Translation: Here are several must-see spots: the four magnificent Front Cliffs, the amazing mountain temples, the Bay of Peach Blossoms with green water, and the waterfall as the Milky Way. Besides the towering cliffs, streaming-down springs, there are many more to enjoy in Baligou: the amusing macaques, bleating deer and the refreshing air. Just as the verse to it goes: “Baligou Scenic Area represents the Watery World of north China and the soul of Tai-hang Mountain”.

This is an introduction of Baligou Scenic Area in Xinxiang City. In order to conform to Chinese aesthetic psychology and language habits, the original text uses a large number of descriptive and emotional expressions. Four-letter words such as “沁人心脾”, “剑锋千仞”, “群鹿呦呦”, provide tourists with scenery descriptions and make the text more poetic and attractive. However, if this whole text is translated without adjustment, international tourists find it difficult to enjoy it. And they will be bored with too much descriptive language, and the sense of aesthetic experience will also be weakened. In order to stimulate their interest in sightseeing, the translator deletes some unnecessary information and makes the translation more concise. For example, “空气清新，沁人心脾，山泉甘甜，环境清幽”, these words are used to describe the fresh air and beautiful environment of the scenic spot. In view of the description of the whole paragraph is enough to prove the beauty of the scenic spot, so it is only necessary to provide international tourists with the message of “refreshing air”. And the translator uses omission to shorten the aesthetic distance in order to meet horizon of expectations in terms of aesthetic taste.

6. Conclusion

Tourism is not a mere appreciation of beautiful attractions but a highly comprehensive activity of cultural exploration. High-quality tourism texts not only provide tourists with a positive reading experience but also enhance their overall travel experience. Based on the data of Henan tourism texts, this study analyzes problems in translation of Henan tourism texts. It is found that the official websites of some influential tourist attractions provide information and guidance only in Chinese, that spelling errors and translation errors can be found in the translated texts and that there is a lack of attention to the reader-oriented principle in the translated texts.

This study provides valuable insights to Chinese-English translation practice of tourism texts. The quality of Henan tourism texts translation needs to be improved, more attention should be paid to

readers' perspectives in the tourism texts translation, and various translation techniques should be adopted by the translator to meet the reader's expectations across three aspects, namely, language structure, cultural background and aesthetic taste.

To meet readers' horizon of expectations in terms of language structure, translators should draw inspiration from English tourism texts and adopt similar expressions. In terms of cultural background, translators could apply the technique of amplification to provide supplementary explanations for content with cultural connotations. Regarding aesthetic tastes, translators should address aesthetic gaps by using techniques such as omission to shorten the aesthetic distance. Concise language should be chosen to highlight key points thereby achieving the effect of bridging the aesthetic distance between Chinese and English tourism texts. When international tourists' horizon of expectations is satisfied, they can speak highly of the translation and then have a good travel experience.

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