Original Paper

A Study on Escort Interpreting Strategies at Buddhist Sites from the Perspective of Interpretive Theory: A Case Analysis of Baoguang Temple

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Abstract

With the growing popularity of cultural tourism, escort interpreting at religious attractions has become an important medium for intercultural communication. Buddhist sites, in particular, present significant challenges to interpreters due to culturally loaded terms, religious concepts, and historical narratives. Drawing upon recorded data from a six-hour escort interpreting task at Baoguang Temple, a prominent Buddhist heritage site in Chengdu, China, this study examines how interpreting strategies are employed to ensure accurate and effective communication for foreign visitors. Guided by Interpretive Theory, the study analyzes recorded interpreting data and focuses on methods such as omission, explanation, and liberal translation in response to difficulties arising from Buddhist terminology, ancient Chinese couplets, and local historical stories. From the perspectives of comprehension, de-verbalization, and re-expression, selected interpreting cases are examined to illustrate how meaning-oriented strategies contribute to communicative effectiveness in dynamic on-site settings. The findings suggest that prioritizing meaning over linguistic form enables interpreters to better mediate complex cultural and religious content. This study aims to provide practical insights for escort interpreting at Buddhist attractions and contribute to research on interpreting strategies in cultural tourism contexts.

Keywords

Interpretive Theory, Escort interpreting, Buddhist attractions, Interpreting methods

1. Introduction

In the context of global cultural exchange, cultural tourism has increasingly become an important channel for intercultural communication, in which escort interpreting plays a crucial mediating role. Historically, Buddhism has functioned as a foundational pillar of Chinese civilization, profoundly

shaping Chinese people's philosophy of living. This influence permeates every facet of social life, ranging from attitudes toward life and death to moral compass guiding everyday conduct. Consequently, Buddhist temples are not merely static monuments of antiquity; they are living repositories of China's spiritual and intellectual heritage. Therefore, apart from natural scenery, attractions with characteristic cultural connotations like museum and temples are welcomed by overseas tourists to China because these sites offer a profound window into Chinese culture.

Within the broader framework of cultural diplomacy and the "telling Chinese stories" Initiative, the interpretation of religious heritage serves as a vital channel for demonstrating China's soft power. In this specialized context, the interpreter's task transcends the mere dissemination of general tourist information. Instead, it involves the sophisticated mediation of "culturally embedded meanings"—a process that Gaile (2009) requires the decoding of abstract concepts including religious terms, historical narratives, and symbolic expressions into a digestible format for a global audience.

The interpretation of Buddhist sites presents a distinct set of multifaceted challenges including linguistic equivalence, theological concepts and the dynamic nature of on-site interpreting settings. Cognitive asymmetry between Chinese guides and foreign tourists also plays a role in increasing the difficulty of on-site interpreting in religious attractions. While the former's discourse is frequently embedded in a high-context cultural framework rich in Zen allusions and historical intertextuality, the latter often approach the site with a Western religious paradigm or a fragmented understanding of Buddhism popularized in the West. This discrepancy transcends mere lexical gaps, evolving into a conceptual barrier where the interpreter must function as a 'cognitive bridge' to reconstruct the 'sense' of the source message.

Previous research on escort and tourism interpreting has primarily focused on interpreters' roles, professional competence, and communicative functions in guided tours. Studies have examined the mediator role of interpreters in tourist settings and emphasized the importance of flexibility and cultural awareness in escort interpreting.

Furthermore, the Interpretive Theory, pioneered by the Paris School (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989), provides a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing the cognitive maneuvers of the interpreter. While Interpretive Theory of Translation has been extensively applied to conference interpreting, its utility in the highly unpredictable and interactive environment of escort interpreting remains underexplored. By emphasizing "de-verbalization"—the process of stripping away the linguistic shell to grasp the non-verbal sense—Interpretive Theory of Translation offers a unique lens through which it can be understood that how interpreters maintain the equilibrium between linguistic accuracy and communicative efficacy in the presence of complex Buddhist metaphors. However, existing studies have largely addressed escort interpreting at a general level, with relatively limited empirical attention to on-site interpreting practices in culturally and religiously specific contexts. In particular, there is a lack of case-based analyses grounded in recorded interpreting data that examine how interpreters strategically handle culturally loaded content, such as Buddhist terminology, religious concepts, and

historical narratives, in real-time escort interpreting settings. This gap indicates the need for empirically informed studies that illustrate the application of meaning-oriented strategies in complex cultural tourism environments.

To address this gap, drawing upon recorded data from a six-hour escort interpreting task at Baoguang Temple, the primary objective of this research is to investigate the pragmatic mechanisms through which the interpreter facilitates the communicative flow amidst the constraints of a real-time, on-site tour. By focusing on the distinctive linguistic and theological features of this Buddhist site, this study is designed to address the central research question: how are interpreting strategies employed by escort interpreters to convey culturally loaded Buddhist content and to ensure successful cross-cultural meaning transfer in on-site interpreting setting.

To provide an answer to this question, the study explores how interpreters employ specific interpreting methods—namely omission, explanation, and liberal translation—as adaptive responses to cope with difficulties arising from Buddhist terminology, ancient Chinese couplets, and local historical narratives. Unlike traditional textual analysis, this research employs the Interpretive Theory as its analytical perspective, based on recorded interpreting data, to focus on the processes of comprehension, de-verbalization, and re-expression in dynamic interpreting situations.

By illustrating how meaning-oriented interpreting methods are applied in escort interpreting at Buddhist attractions, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence to research on interpreting strategies in cultural tourism contexts and to provide practical insights for interpreters working in religious and culturally complex settings.

The remainder of this study is organized into five sections. Section 2 provides a comprehensive literature review on escort interpreting and the tenets of Interpretive Theory. Section 3 outlines the methodology, describing the data collection process at Baoguang Temple. Section 4 presents a detailed case analysis of the interpreting strategies utilized during the task. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the findings and offers practical implications for future cultural tourism interpreting.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Interpretive Theory in Interpreting Studies

The Interpretive Theory was pioneered by Seleskovitch and Lederer of the Paris School (ESIT). Unlike the prevailing linguistic structuralism of the 1960s, The Theory posits that interpreting is not a process of transcoding linguistic signs, but a cognitive act of grasping and re-expressing the "sense" (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989).

The core of Interpretive Theory lies in the Triangular Model, which introduces a non-verbal stage—de-verbalization—between comprehension and re-expression. As Lederer (2003) emphasizes, de-verbalization is a necessary mental phase where the interpreter strips away the linguistic form of the source language to retain only the cognitive "sense." This is particularly crucial in escort interpreting involving archaic or highly metaphorical discourse, where a literal word-for-word translation would

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inevitably lead to communicative failure. A cornerstone of the Interpretive Theory is the concept of de-verbalization, a cognitive phase that Seleskovitch (1978) identifies as the essential bridge between auditory perception and conceptual expression. This phase is necessitated by the inherent limitations of human short-term memory, particularly in the context of simultaneous or high-pressure escort interpreting. Seleskovitch (1978) argues that the human brain is cognitively incapable of retaining the exact linguistic surface structure—the specific lexicon and syntax—of a long, complex utterance for more than a few seconds. Instead, as the interpreter processes incoming discourse, the formal linguistic shell rapidly evaporates, leaving behind only what she terms a "cognitive residue" or a non-verbal "sense." The "sense" is not a static representation, but a dynamic mental synthesis formed instantaneously at the intersection of linguistic input and the interpreter's existing cognitive baggage, including world knowledge and situational context. In the demanding environment of a Buddhist temple tour, where sentences are often dense with archaic allusions, the interpreter cannot afford to store the verbatim Chinese source text. Rather, they must immediately strip away the linguistic form to grasp the underlying "sense"—the speaker's communicative intent. This process of de-verbalization ensures that the re-expression phase is driven by conceptual clarity rather than a mechanical, word-for-word transcoding, which Seleskovitch (1978) warns would inevitably lead to cognitive overload and a breakdown in natural communication. Consequently, de-verbalization serves as both a cognitive filter and a creative catalyst, enabling the interpreter to reconstruct the message in a target language that resonates with the audience's cultural and linguistic expectations.

In China, scholars such as Bao (2011) and Liu (2001) have systematically introduced and validated the scientific nature of Interpretive Theory, proving its efficacy in pedagogical and professional practice. However, while Interpretive Theory has been extensively applied to conference interpreting, its application in spontaneous, high-context cultural escorting requires further empirical investigation.

2.2 Studies on Escort and Tourism Interpreting

Escort interpreting is distinct from conference settings due to its high interactivity and the dynamic nature of the environment. Cohen (1985) provides a foundational framework for understanding this complexity by characterizing the tourist guide or interpreter as a "cultural broker." In Cohen's view, the interpreter must navigate the delicate tension between the "outer" world of the tourist's expectations and the "inner" world of the local site's heritage. Unlike booth-based interpreting, the escort interpreter at a site like Baoguang Temple must manage multifaceted roles that often overlap or conflict. According to Cohen's typology, these roles include the "group leader" who is responsible for logistical flow and physical safety, the "information giver" who is providing factual historical data, and the "cultural mediator" who can facilitate deep understanding of alien belief systems.

In the specific context of religious tourism, these roles frequently create a "role strain." For instance, while the interpreter is intellectually engaged in a complex mediator task—such as de-verbalizing a Zen Buddhist maxim for a foreign client—they must simultaneously fulfill the leader role by monitoring the group's physical path through crowded halls or ensuring the tour stays on schedule. This

multitasking requirement intensifies the interpreter's cognitive load, as the focus must constantly shift between high-level linguistic mediation and low-level logistical management.

Furthermore, Pöchhacker (2004) emphasizes that escort interpreting is defined by its "short-notice preparation" and "high-frequency interaction." In this dynamic setting, meaning is not constructed solely through verbal exchange but heavily rely on non-verbal languages. The physical environment—including the presence of Buddha statues, the smell of incense, the gestures of the guide, and even the ambient noise of worshippers—serves a part in the construction of sense. Unlike conference interpreters, who can controlled environment with a prepared script, the escort interpreter in a Buddhist temple must incorporate these environmental cues into their translation. They must supply the physical landscape to supplement their verbal output, ensuring that the foreign visitor perceives the temple not just as an architectural curiosity, but as a living spiritual space. Consequently, domestic research, as noted by Zhang (2011), has recognized that general service competence is insufficient for the nuanced demands of mediating dense cultural-philosophical content in a living heritage site.

2.3 Interpreting of Culturally Loaded Content and Religious Discourse

Buddhist discourse represents one of the most challenging domains for interpreters due to its culturally loaded content and metaphysical depth. In the context of Chinese Buddhist attractions, this challenge is twofold: the interpreter must deal with both ancient Chinese linguistic structures such as couplets and specialized theological concepts.

In the context of Chinese Buddhist attractions, the difficulty is further intensified by the coexistence of ancient Chinese linguistic structures and specialized Buddhist terminology. Temple inscriptions, plaques, and couplets frequently employ classical Chinese, characterized by syntactic compression, implicit logic, and rich intertextual references. At the same time, Buddhist discourse introduces doctrinal concepts such as karma, enlightenment, and impermanence, which lack direct equivalents in English and are often unfamiliar to foreign audiences. Interpreters working in such settings must therefore negotiate between linguistic form, cultural symbolism, and audience accessibility, making strategic decisions under significant cognitive constraints.

Recent empirical studies, such as those by Wang (2015), have begun to apply Interpretive Theory to Buddhist interpreting, concluding that "cognitive supplement" is essential for reconstructing the speaker's intended meaning. Furthermore, Wang (2011) and Li (2008) demonstrate that when dealing with poems or religious maxims, the equivalence of "pragmatic sense" must take precedence over formal equivalence. Despite these contributions, there is still a lack of case-based analysis that examines the de-verbalization process during the real-time interpretation of on-site interactions at Buddhist temples like Baoguang Temple. This highlights the need for a study that bridges the gap between principles of Interpretive Theory and the specific cognitive demands of religious cultural heritage. More specifically, empirical case-based analyses that focus on the real-time de-verbalization process during on-site escort interpreting at Buddhist attractions remain limited. Few studies have examined how interpreters operationalize Interpretive Theory principles when confronted with

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immediate, unscripted religious discourse in situ. This gap suggests the need for research that bridges theoretical discussions of meaning construction with the practical cognitive challenges of interpreting within religious cultural heritage sites. By addressing this gap, the present study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how Interpretive Theory functions in real-world escort interpreting at Buddhist attractions.

The interpreting of culturally loaded content has long been recognized as one of the most challenging aspects of interpreting practice, particularly in contexts where language is deeply embedded in religious, historical, and philosophical traditions. Buddhist discourse exemplifies such complexity, as it often combines culture-specific items, metaphysical concepts, and stylistically condensed expressions such as aphorisms, maxims, and poetic couplets. Consequently, their interpretation requires more than lexical substitution; it demands a process of cultural mediation and sense reconstruction. In the context of Chinese Buddhist attractions, the difficulty is further intensified by the coexistence of ancient Chinese linguistic structures and specialized Buddhist terminology. Temple inscriptions, plaques, and couplets frequently employ classical Chinese, characterized by syntactic compression, implicit logic, and rich intertextual references. At the same time, Buddhist discourse introduces doctrinal concepts such as karma, enlightenment, and impermanence, which are often unfamiliar to foreign audiences. Interpreters working in such settings must therefore negotiate between linguistic form, cultural symbolism, and audience accessibility, making strategic decisions under significant cognitive constraints.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case-based research design to examine escort interpreting strategies employed in a culturally and religiously specific tourism context. The primary corpus consists of approximately six hours of high-fidelity audio recordings. To ensure the reliability of the data, the verbal output was transcribed. The study aims to analyze how meaning-oriented strategies are applied in real-time escort interpreting at a Buddhist attraction.

A qualitative approach is considered appropriate, as the research focuses on in-depth analysis of interpreting processes rather than on quantifiable outcomes. By examining selected interpreting excerpts, the study seeks to illustrate how interpreters address culture-specific challenges under the guidance of Interpretive Theory.

3.2 Interpreting Context and Data

The interpreting practice examined in this study was conducted during an on-site guided tour at a Buddhist attraction in Chengdu, China. The interpreting setting involved escort interpreting in a walking tour environment, where interpretation was provided consecutively without the support of a booth or systematic note-taking. The communicative participants included a Chinese tour guide, a Chinese visitor, and a foreign visitor with an interest in Buddhist culture.

The interpreting task covered explanations of the temple's historical background, architectural features, Buddhist concepts, and local narratives. he source discourse provided by the guide is characterized by high lexical density and frequent use of culture-specific items. The transcript reveals that the guide's speech often incorporates historical anecdotes—such as Emperor Xizong's refuge in Sichuan—which require the interpreter to manage complex narrative structures in real-time. In addition to guided commentary, the interpreter was also required to mediate spontaneous interactions between participants, which is characteristic of escort interpreting in tourism settings. Unlike prepared speeches, the guide's input includes colloquialisms and rhythmic sayings. Analyzing these segments allows the study to examine how the interpreter employs de-verbalization to strip away the playful rhyme of the source language and reconstruct the pragmatic 'sense'—the temple's reputation for efficacy—for the foreign visitor.

With the consent of all participants, the entire interpreting process was audio-recorded. The recordings constitute the primary data for analysis. After the task, the recordings were transcribed and reviewed to identify segments that involved culturally loaded expressions, Buddhist terminology, ancient Chinese references, and local historical narratives. These segments form the core analytical data of the present study.

3.3 Data Preparation and Analytical Focus

Prior to the interpreting task, relevant background information about Buddhist culture and Chinese Buddhist attractions was reviewed. The preparation phase involved a comparative corpus-based review. Parallel texts from globally recognized Buddhist sites, such as the Mogao Caves and Shaolin Temple, were utilized to construct a specialized glossary of 150 terms. These materials provided reference points for commonly used expressions in English introductions of Buddhist sites and informed the interpreter's preparation of key terminology. Therefore, this pre-task preparation enables the interpreter to reduce the cognitive load during the real-time de-verbalization of complex theological metaphors encountered during the Baoguang Temple tour.

Based on the collected materials, a glossary of Buddhist-related terms and site-specific expressions was compiled. Although not all prepared terms appeared in the interpreting task, the glossary reflects the domain-specific linguistic challenges characteristic of Buddhist escort interpreting and informs the selection of analytical cases.

In the data analysis stage, particular attention is paid to interpreting segments where direct lexical equivalence was insufficient and meaning-based strategies were required. These include instances involving Buddhist concepts, ancient Chinese couplets, proper names of religious sites, and culturally embedded narratives.

3.4 Analytical Framework: Interpretive Theory

The analysis in this study is guided by Interpretive Theory, as developed by Seleskovitch and Lederer. Interpretive Theory emphasizes that interpreting is a process of conveying sense rather than

reproducing linguistic form, highlighting the cognitive stages of comprehension, de-verbalization, and re-expression.

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to escort interpreting in cultural tourism contexts, where interpreters must rapidly process spoken input and convey culturally embedded meanings in a manner accessible to target-language audiences. In analyzing the interpreting data, this study adopts the triangular model of interpreting to examine how the interpreter comprehends source discourse, abstracts meaning beyond linguistic form, and re-expresses that meaning in the target language. The analytical procedure follows a micro-descriptive approach. Each selected excerpt is subjected to a three-fold examination: first, the identification of the linguistic barrier in the source text; second, an introspective reconstruction of the de-verbalization phase; and third, an evaluation of the re-expression strategy based on its communicative effect on the foreign visitor.

Based on this framework, interpreting methods such as omission, explanation, and liberal translation are analyzed as manifestations of meaning-oriented decision-making in real-time interpreting situations.

4. Analysis of Interpreting Strategies

In the specialized context of cultural tourism, escort interpreting serves as a pivotal bridge for cross-cultural knowledge transfer. During the on-site guided tour of Baoguang Temple, the interpreter's primary objective was to transform the guide's sophisticated Chinese discourse into an informative and culturally resonant English narrative. This section provides a detailed analysis of the interpreting process through the lens of Interpretive Theory, specifically utilizing the Triangular Model—comprehension, de-verbalization, and re-expression—as the analytical framework. By prioritizing "sense" over linguistic form, the interpreter navigated the multifaceted challenges posed by Buddhist terminology, historical hagiographies, and the dynamic on-site environment.

4.1 Meaning-oriented Comprehension

Comprehension in Interpretive Theory is not merely a linguistic decoding process but a synthesis of linguistic input and "cognitive complements," which include the interpreter's encyclopedic knowledge and the immediate situational context (Lederer, 2003). As Zhang (2011) posits, successful comprehension occurs when the interpreter effectively eliminates ambiguity by anchoring semantics in the context of the speech. At Baoguang Temple, the density of ancient Chinese lexicon and complex narratives necessitated active cognitive intervention.

4.1.1 Strategic Inference and Reasonable Guessing

In spontaneous escort interpreting, encountering unknown or archaic terminology is inevitable. According to Sasao and Webb (2018), inferring meaning from context is a high-order cognitive strategy. Under Interpretive Theory, this is seen as the interpreter utilizing "world knowledge" to fill linguistic gaps and extract the underlying sense.

Example 1:

Source (G): 佛门是我们广种福田的地方...《四十二章经》讲：我们布施百个无依无靠的乞讨者，不如布施一个小沙弥。因为他已发心修善，广种福田，续佛慧命者。

Target (I): Buddhism preaches that people who keep doing good deeds can be blessed. Karma tells us that you reap what you sow. According to the classic, helping out a monk is far better than countless unanchored beggars, because he is the one with a kind heart, spreading the spirit and wisdom of the Buddha.

Analysis: The term Guangzhong Futian (广种福田) and Sutra of Forty-two Chapters (四十二章经) represent specific Buddhist culture-specific items. Lacking the exact English nomenclature for the sutra in real-time, the interpreter employed the generic term "classic" to maintain the flow. For Guangzhong Futian, the interpreter bypassed the agricultural metaphor (sowing fields of merit) and utilized a meaning-oriented strategy by rendering it as "doing good deeds to be blessed." While the literal form was sacrificed, the theological "sense"—the accumulation of merit through virtuous action—was successfully conveyed. This illustrates how Interpretive Theory prioritizes the communicative intent over lexical equivalence.

4.1.2 Logical Reconstruction of Narrative Dense Information

Escort interpreting at historical sites often involves long, narrative-heavy discourse. Spoken Chinese, characterized by parataxis and loose sentence structures, requires the interpreter to reorganize information into a logical hierarchy suitable for English-speaking listeners (Chen & Wu, 2007).

Example 2 (Narrative of Emperor Xizong): The guide provided a lengthy account of Emperor Xizong discovering Buddha relics at the "Great Stone Temple."

Source (G): 中和元年，避难入蜀的唐僖宗将行宫建在了"大石寺"的遗址后边... 忽然发现前方宝光四射... 竟发现十三颗晶莹剔透、光彩绚丽的佛舍利...

Target (I): In the Tang dynasty, the emperor Xizong... lived near the site of the Great Stone Temple. One night... Suddenly, he saw the mysterious light... then they found thirteen brilliant Buddha relics.

Analysis: Faced with a dense chronological narrative, the interpreter constructed a clear logic map during the comprehension phase. By identifying the causal links—refuge, discovery, excavation, and verification—the interpreter de-verbalized the intricate Chinese descriptions and reconstructed the "sense" in a cohesive English narrative. This confirms Interpretive Theory's premise that comprehension is an active process of constructing a mental representation rather than a passive reception of words.

4.2 De-verbalization and Strategy Selection

De-verbalization refers to the cognitive process whereby interpreters detach meaning from linguistic form and retain sense for re-expression (Lederer, 2003). In escort interpreting contexts, where note-taking is often limited, de-verbalization plays a particularly crucial role.

4.2.1 Functional Explanation and Amplification

When correspondence is impossible due to cultural asymmetry, the interpreter must move beyond transcoding and adopt an explanatory approach (Choi, 2003).

Example 3:

Source (G): 藏经楼楼下为说法堂... 这里还藏有叶贝经...

Target (I): Downstairs is the hall where the abbot explains dharma to monks and the public. Famous palm leaf manuscript is also collected in Sutra Repository.

Analysis: The term Shuofatang (说法堂) could be literally translated as "Preaching Hall." However, to ensure the visitor understood the hall's specific function within the monastic hierarchy, the interpreter explained it as a place where "the abbot explains dharma." This strategy of functional amplification allows the visitor to visualize the religious activity associated with the site, bridging the conceptual gap between source and target cultures.

4.2.2 Selective Omission of Redundant Information

According to Interpretive Theory, if certain linguistic elements do not contribute to the "sense" within a specific context, they may be omitted to facilitate communicative flow (Du & Shen, 2018). This is particularly relevant when the source language uses repetitive rhetorical structures common in Chinese tour guides.

Example 4:

Source (G): 这些罗汉塑像或喜或愁、或怒或嗔，或坐或立，神情不一，姿态各异...

Target (I): Those arhats' statues are with diverse facial expressions and postures and have a high value of artistry.

Analysis: The source text employs four-character idioms to emphasize variety. In English, a verbatim list of these emotions would result in linguistic redundancy. The interpreter utilized selective omission, condensing the emotive list into the terms "diverse facial expressions and postures." By stripping away the rhetorical flourishes, the interpreter focused on the core "sense"—the artistic variety of the statues—thereby adhering to the economy of the target language.

4.3 Reformulation for Idiomatic Re-expression

Reformulation involves expressing understood meaning in a natural and idiomatic manner in the target language (Lederer, 2007). In the present case, liberal translation and sentence restructuring were the primary reformulation strategies employed.

4.3.1 Liberal Translation and Cultural Transposition

Liberal translation was used to convey culturally symbolic expressions whose literal translations would be indigestible to foreign visitors. This strategy ensured communicative effectiveness and avoided cultural misunderstanding and allows the interpreter to prioritize the pragmatic effect.

Example 5 (Calligraphy Analysis):

Source (G): ...它的点却是在下方。为什么呢？这就好比... "避"字一样，是作者邓锡侯即兴创作的。

Target (I): ...You can see the dot is at the bottom... It is not a mistake. The truth is that it was improvised... A similar written style can be found in the character "bi," which means avoid.

Analysis: The visitor, unable to read Chinese, would find the visual nuance of a dot's placement meaningless without cultural context. The interpreter moved beyond the linguistic form of the guide's explanation to emphasize the intentionality of the calligrapher. By framing it as "not a mistake" but "improvised," the interpreter transposed the aesthetic "sense" of Chinese calligraphy into a concept familiar to a Western audience (the value of improvisation), ensuring the information was intelligible and engaging.

4.3.2 Sentence Restructuring for Interest and Coherence

Sentence restructuring was particularly effective in interpreting narrative explanations and local legends. By reordering information to foreground key points—such as likening a leaning pagoda to the Tower of Pisa—the interpreter aligned the discourse with target-language narrative conventions. This restructuring enhanced listener engagement and facilitated comprehension.

Example 6 (The Leaning Pagoda):

Source (G): ... 所以人们也将它称为东方斜塔。

Target (I): Interestingly, the dagoba has gained a reputation as the Eastern Leaning Tower of Pisa because it is slightly leaning to the west.

Analysis: The interpreter restructured the guide's inductive narrative into a deductive one. By immediately introducing the evocative title "Eastern Leaning Tower of Pisa," the interpreter secured the visitor's attention. This syntactic restructuring demonstrates that the re-expression phase under Interpretive Theory is not a passive mirror of the source text's structure, but a proactive reconstruction designed to achieve optimal communicative impact.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined escort interpreting at a Buddhist tourist attraction through the lens of Interpretive Theory, drawing on empirical data from on-site interpreting practice. By analyzing representative cases involving culturally loaded expressions, Buddhist terminology, ancient couplets, and local narratives, the study demonstrates how meaning-oriented strategies such as omission, explanation, and liberal translation can facilitate effective intercultural communication in dynamic interpreting settings.

The findings suggest that Interpretive Theory provides a robust explanatory framework for understanding interpreting processes in tourism contexts, particularly where interpreters face high cognitive demands, limited preparation time, and strong cultural asymmetries between source and target audiences. A clear understanding of the source message, supported by sufficient cognitive complements, enables interpreters to move beyond linguistic form and focus on sense construction and re-expression. The analysis further confirms the central role of de-verbalization in managing culturally dense content during on-site interpreting.

In addition, this study contributes to escort interpreting research by highlighting the distinctive features of interpreting at Buddhist attractions, where religious discourse, historical narratives, and aesthetic language converge. Unlike conference interpreting, such settings require interpreters to function not only as linguistic mediators but also as cultural interpreters who actively negotiate meaning for foreign audiences. This finding enriches existing discussions on tourism interpreting by foregrounding religious and cultural specificity.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. The data set is limited in scale, and the analysis is based on a single interpreting context. Future studies could incorporate larger corpora, comparative case studies across different religious sites, or multimodal data to further validate the applicability of Interpretive Theory in similar contexts. Moreover, empirical research combining on-site observations with audience reception data would provide a more comprehensive understanding of interpreting effectiveness at cultural and religious attractions.

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