Translation Variation of Tourist-Oriented Texts
From Reception Aesthetics

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Reception aesthetics places the readers at the center of the study of literary work and pays attention to the reader’s horizon of expectation, including his cognitive level, aesthetic experience, aesthetic tendency, and acceptance capability. Putting the emphasis on acceptability of the reader, this theory suggests a novel view for translation study. This paper attempts to discuss translation principles, strategies, and methods of tourism materials in the light of reception aesthetics, by adopting such translation variations as amplification, reduction, reorganization, and combination to shorten the tourists’ aesthetic distance and broaden their horizon of expectation.

Keywords: reception aesthetics, horizon of expectation, translation variation

Introduction

Tourist texts are a vital marketing tool, stimulating local economy and bringing jobs. With the increasing number of overseas tourists flooding into famous resorts, tourism industry calls urgently for the high quality translation of tourist texts, which are the principal means of both informing tourists of the scenic spots and persuading them to purchase products, tangible or intangible. Thus, it is of great importance that the spots’ English Tour Websites convey the information fully and acceptably so that foreigners would better understand the spot. This paper, from the perspective of aesthetics of reception, will analyze the rationality and validity of translation variation applied to English translation of tourist texts and try to prove the feasibility of this theory on tourism translation studies as well as provide some suggestions to guide tourism translation practice.

Reception Aesthetics

Reception aesthetics holds that readers should not be a passive part in the triangle relationship among author, text, and reader. On the contrary, it is the reader that helps realize the historical value of the text and fulfill the aesthetic experience. Without reader’s proper participation in the literary creation, no matter how wonderful the text is, it is just a physical existence of no value. Only a reader can relive the true meaning of a literary text. It also states that the historical significance made by the art work exits not only in the creation of artists, but also in the reader’s reception.

There are two key notions in reception aesthetics. One is horizon of expectation and the other is the readers’ role and status.

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Horizon of Expectation

Horizon of expectation is the core notion of reception aesthetics. Jauss (1989) put forward the term “horizon of expectations”, claiming that the reader fills in the blanks of meaning and indeterminacy in an active and decisive way during his reading. In the reading process, the reader comprehends literary works with their own particular “horizon of expectation”. Different “horizon of expectations” result in various perceptions on the same literary work. The process of understanding a work is like a process of integrating the reader’s horizon of expectation with that of the work. When a work is compatible with the horizon of expectations that the reader has held, the integration would be immediately completed, so that the understanding could be achieved. This is called “aesthetic distance” between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work which leads to a “horizon change”. Hence, horizon of expectation is a pre-orientation of the reader’s life experience, a cultural and literary habit already existing in reader’s mind, such as the reader’s world view, cultural knowledge, and aesthetic experience. During the process of reading, it functions as selection, orientation, and finding out familiarity. However, readers cannot just be satisfied with familiar information. They have a tendency to accept the information that is different from, contrary to, or even lacking in their original horizon of expectations, and then reconstruct their horizon of expectations. So while translating, translators should take into account the foreign tourists’ horizon of expectation in terms of culture and aesthetic experience. In order to meet the tourists’ needs to reconstruct their horizon of expectation, the tourists’ particular culture and tradition should be infused to tourists.

Reader’s Role and Status

The concept of reader’s role and status, in any case, can be seen as the most significant concept in aesthetic reception. As reception aesthetics regards the realization of the literary text by the readers as one of the necessary components in literary works, it is necessary to take the reader’s reading as an active innovative activity rather than a passive reception like other literary theory (Jauss, 1989). Reception aesthetics promotes the readers to a new status in reading, as the active producer and creator rather than the passive receptor by removing or filling out indeterminacy, gaps, or schematized aspects in the text. A literary text can only come to life and realize its historical value and become an artistic object when it is read or concretized by the readers. Jauss (1982) generalized the triangle of author, work, and public:

In the triangle of author, work, and public, the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history. The work is unthinkable without the historical life of the active participation of its addressees. (p. 76)

Since the reader plays such an important role on the literary work, translators should take the target reader’s role and status into consideration and put their translation under the enlightenment of reception aesthetics. In this way, the translated version can be preferred by foreign tourists.

The Significance of Reception Aesthetics and Its Following Studies

Reception aesthetics alters the view that the author and text are in the dominant parts of a work and puts the reader on the active place, which has exerted a great influence on other contemporary criticism theories of literature. Reception,
Opened a view toward the possibility of renewing literary history, exhausted and mired in positivism, by giving it the
task of seeking a new understanding of the history of literature as a communication process between all three parties,
 namely, the author, the text and the readers. (Jauss, 1989, p. 287)

**Application of Reception Aesthetics in Translation**

It was not until the year 1987 that the reception aesthetics found its application in translation studies. It has
brought about a profound revolution in translation studies, converted traditional views of translation, and
provided thoroughly new perspectives and methods in theoretical studies of translation.

Summarizing the previous researches, we may find out three enlightenment presented by reception
aesthetics. First, it requires the readers’ active interpretation of a good work. So it would be improper and
impractical to follow certain given criteria. In translation process, it is in vain to seek for the so-called
predetermined meaning which is formerly considered as an integrated part of text itself. It is inevitable and
acceptable for the translators to have certain creation in his interpretation through the process of concretization or
fusion of horizons. Secondly, the status of the translator has changed from the medium of two languages to the
dual roles in translation as a reader of the original text and an author of the translated text. Thirdly, translation
activities are not the monologue of the author or the source text but the “fusion of horizon” formed by the
dialogue and communication.

We can tell from the above that reception theory, on the whole, has provided a new angle for the study of
tourism translation. The study of translation from the perspective of reception aesthetics is of great practical
significance and of great value in academic fields.

**Principles of Translation of Tourist English Texts**

Languages are greatly influenced by culture, history, social background, aesthetic experiences, and other
factors and they create considerable obstacles in translation process. Due to that, ways of expressing and thinking
patterns differ greatly. Those language disparities plus cultural gap, different mode of thinking, and various
aesthetic experiences, constitute translation obstacles. It is rather hard or even beyond possibility to fully translate
one tourist texts into another and still achieve the same communication effects. Therefore, necessary adjustments
should be taken to cater to the foreign tourists’ acceptability, in a bid to arouse their visiting desires.

Two principles must be followed in tourist-oriented texts: the principle of tourist-centered and the principle
of integrating the readers’ horizon of expectation with the text.

**The Principle of Tourist-Centered**

A faithful reproduction of the source text does not necessarily produce the expected effect in target readers
as it does in source readers. So translators should bear in mind the tourist-centered principle and take fully foreign
tourists’ horizon of expectation into consideration when choosing the right strategies.

**The Principle of Integrating the Readers’ Horizon of Expectation With the Text**

As far as reception aesthetics concerns, before the reading process, readers have a previous-formed horizon
of expectation, which will influence the reading in one way or another. As for the tourist texts, it should be
understood and accepted firstly by the tourists before realizing the purposes of attracting them. Only the “fusion
of horizon” or overlapping of horizon of expectation of the readers and that of a literary text can achieve
understanding. Therefore, while translating tourist-oriented texts, the translators should try to bridge the gap
between the horizons of the foreign tourists and that of source text with proper translation strategies to realize the “fusion of horizon”.

**Translation Strategies**

**Shortening Aesthetic Distance**

Translators should bear in mind the differences between languages and cultures to analyze the acceptable and accurate meaning of the sentence and make the shift smoothly to compliance with foreign tourists’ language pattern. The acceptability of tourism information involving various issues like politics, religion, and race. It outweighs faithfulness to the source text. Therefore, it is necessary to shorten aesthetic distance of foreign tourists.

**Broadening Tourists’ Horizon of Expectation**

From reception theory’s point of view, the horizon of expectation is constantly changing with a person’s experience changes. That is to say, readers are not content with familiar information. They would like to receive new information that is different from or even lacking in their previous horizon of expectation, which is a force motivating readers to know more about the peculiar cultures in the process of reading. So their horizon of expectation can be reconstructed. For example, Chinese scenic-spot introduction is often loaded with such distinctive cultural information as noted historic figures, anecdotes and legends, local customs. On one hand these culture-packed information may become barrier for them to understand China well. On the other hand, these may add charm and value to the promoted tourist attractions if handled properly. As for foreign tourists, while traveling abroad, they would like to know some foreign cultures and exotic customs. This is also the motivation of their traveling abroad. Translators, therefore, should try to broaden the horizon of foreign tourists with properly translated tourist texts by keeping their source cultural information and flavor.

**Translation Variations in the Light of Reception Aesthetics**

Huang (2002) put forward the notion of translation variation. Translation variation holds that translators should make some appropriate changes in the content, the form or even the style of the source text, putting emphasis on the translation purpose and the reader’s expectation. It takes the readers’ benefits and acceptance into consideration and greatly improves its readability. This coincides with what reception aesthetics proposes, thus leading a proper direction for tourism translation. Among several translation variations, amplification, reduction, reorganization, and combination are the most practical translation techniques in translation of tourist texts.

**Amplification**

Amplification is to add necessary background information to the culture-loaded terms in the target texts which are unfamiliar to the target readers in an attempt to bridge the cultural gap. Put it in another way, as for tourism translation, amplification is to provide some further historical and cultural explanations to foreign tourists by adding some necessary words, phrases, or sentences so as to broaden their horizon of expectation, meeting their demands of knowing this scenic spot more culturally and historically.
Reduction

Reduction means to delete some unnecessary cultural information in the source text without destroying the meaning and aesthetic feeling of the source text because too much information including poems, folklores and classical sayings containing in tourist texts is definitely forming obstacles to foreign tourists. Reduction of unnecessary cultural information is a better way to shorten aesthetic distance.

Reorganization

Reorganization is the necessary or unavoidable change of expression including word order, forms, and structure in accordance with the usage of the target language so as to make the translated version more real and natural. Reorganization is a necessary technique to shorten the aesthetic distance according to Reception Theory.

Combination

Combination, simply speaking, is to put two or more parts linked by logic or similar content together by omitting some wordy modifiers in Chinese and making a summary of the original meaning in English, which can create a more comfortable translated version of tourist text for English readers and will not reduce or lose information value.

Conclusion

This paper, from the perspective of aesthetics of reception, has analyzed rationality and validity of translation variation applied to English translation of tourism text and tries to prove the feasibility of this theory on tourism translation studies as well as provides some suggestions to guide tourism translation practice.

Reception aesthetics provides a new angle for translation of tourist texts. The author puts forward two principles of tourism translation: One is tourist-centered; the other is integrating the reader’s horizon of expectation with the text. By shortening foreign tourists’ aesthetic distance and broadening their horizon of expectation, the author summarizes four practical translation techniques, namely, amplification, reduction, reorganization, and combination.

References