The Analysis of the Stylistic Difference Between Chinese and English Tourist Literature and Its Translation*

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Based on the comparison and contrast between the English tourist literature and Chinese one, the essay analyzes and discusses the translating principles including faithfulness, transmitting Chinese culture, and tourist orientation. The author puts forward the translating strategies, such as amplification, transliteration, reduction, and restructuring. Through the discussions, the guiding significance of the theories applied to the translation of tourist literature can be realized.

Keywords: tourist literature, comparison, principles, strategies

Introduction

In order to produce a satisfactory translation of tourist literature, a translator should have a clear idea of similarities and differences between Chinese and English tourist literature. Comparing a lot of materials in both languages from published newspaper, magazines, and tourist books, the author finds that the differences outweigh their similarities. Both belong to the same text-type whose main function is to provide enormous information to readers and meanwhile stimulate their curiosity and interests in making travels. Their language is usually informative, intriguing, realistic, educational, humorous, etc. However, Chinese and English are two completely different languages, which inevitably leads to a lot of discrepancies in style. It is well known that language is an indispensable part of culture. It cannot be denied that the stylistic differences are caused, to some extent, by the different cultural aspects including thought pattern and aesthetic value. In a word, the stylistic differences do reflect cultural differences.

The Stylistic Difference Between Chinese and English Tourist Literature

Chinese Description Is Ambiguous While English One Is Fact-Based

Chinese people are not used to establishing a clear-cut definition of the world. Rather they would like to get a general comprehension of the matter, which results in ambiguity in description. While the Western systematic world and analytical thought pattern, on the opposite, lead to clarity. On describing a scenic spot, Chinese and English tourism writers have different focuses. Influenced by the harmonious philosophical perception of Golden Mean, the Chinese have developed their peculiar aesthetic value, one of which is unique emphasis on the

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ambiguity. While the English-speaking people stress the importance of the objective identity, they observe it in real life. Therefore, an effective description depends on the concrete details to make sure of vividness. The contrasts are also deeply rooted in different thought patterns. In the relationship between the world and the human beings, Chinese philosophers advocate “oneness between man and nature”. They think that nature and man are an integrated whole and that they exist harmoniously. Influenced by this philosophy, Chinese aesthetics hold that human emotion is integrated with sceneries. There is an old saying representing this view “一切景语，皆为情语”.

Chinese Tourist Literature Is More Flowery Than English One

In Chinese scenic description, people tend to use a lot of adjectives or flowery language in order to show their elegance in writings and hopefully leave a deep impression on readers. In contrast, Westerners like to use plain and simple words or concrete details because they believe that facts speak louder than words. It is the aesthetic difference that produces such a result. As a translator, if he or she was not aware of the aesthetic preference of the Chinese people and that of the target readers, it would be impossible for him or her to produce a good translation. Adjectives, of course, are necessary in tourist literature, but too many of them can have the opposite effect—leave people the impression of exaggeration and produce boredom.

Preference for Four-Character Expression in Chinese Tourist Literature

Another aesthetic feature of Chinese, especially in classical Chinese, is the steady rhythms of parallel construction. Though this style is not a tradition unique to Chinese literature, parallelism is never used as frequently as in Chinese. This is partially because of the traditional Chinese “Ying” and “Yang” culture that there is a beauty of symmetry. If there is “Ying”, then there must be “Yang” to balance it. These cultural phenomena are also reflected in the language. Chinese and English speaking people seem to view differently on the use of set phrase and expressions. Good English writing discourages what is called “clichés” or “trite expression”. Chinese writing, on the contrary, takes preference for four-character expression. In Chinese vocabulary, there are a very large number of idioms: the four-character expressions. Four-character expressions derive from Chinese tradition and have a very important place in Chinese writing, which almost become the symbol of elegance and refinement. We can hardly find a piece of writing without a number of them.

Frequent Quotation of Ancient Poems and Personages in Chinese Tourist Literature

Chinese tourist literatures frequently quote ancient poems and personages’ comments, but it is not the case in English one. The reason consists in the different thought patterns. English-speaking natives are of analytical and inductive thought pattern. They do not respect the authority as much as Chinese do. Instead, they pursue the precision in detail and tend to believe what is in the original sense and their own feelings. In other words, they respect facts rather than authority. In contrast, Chinese people are of deductive thought pattern and they are used to thinking on the base of present concepts. The famous person’s comment can greatly influence their feeling. It goes without saying that the frequent quotation of ancient poems and personages can add charm and attraction to the tourist resorts. We cannot deny the fact that in China almost in every tourist commentary there is quotation of ancient poems or personages. One reason is that those scenic spots do have long history and beautiful scenery admired by people from all walks of life. Another reason is that Chinese people tend to believe in authority.
These stylistic differences imply that all languages have their unique expressing ways. The comparison between the source text and the target one sometimes arouses criticism that the translators have severely damaged the original style by applying a plain style to the Chinese standard. Obviously, the Chinese tourist literature can arouse the imagination of Chinese readers, but it cannot produce the same effect on foreign tourists. Therefore, when different stylistic standards clash, the translated versions have been restructured to a very plain wording because that style is a passport to get through the foreign tourist’s cultural filter. Both the form and content should be adjusted in accordance with the given goal of the target text. The comparison of the stylistic similarities and differences in this part serves as a prerequisite for the discussion of the principles and strategies of translating Chinese Tourist Literature.

The Three Principles Governing the Translation of Tourist Literature

According to Buhler (1965), the three main functions of language are the expressive, the informative, and the vocative. These are the main purposes of using language. Newmark (1998) adopted this theory and proposed the three text-types: the expressive text, the informative text, and the vocative text. He also divided texts into three categories: literary, institutional, and scientific. Newmark also pointed out that few texts are purely expressive, informative, or vocative. “Most include all three functions with an emphasis on one of three” (Newmark, 1998, p. 42). Tourist Literature has no exception and moreover puts emphasis on informative and vocative function. Tourists read literature in order to get information about scenic spots or historical sites they are interested in and decide if they really want to make a trip. An effective literature should contain all the basic content the tourists may want to know about the destination country. Besides, tourist literature can produce effect on readers as to call upon them to act, think, or feel the magic beauty of the place recommended by the literature.

How to make readers understand the information conveyed by tourist literature and accept Chinese culture? In my view, translator should abide by three principles: the principle of faithfulness, the principle of transmitting Chinese culture, and the principle of tourist orientation.

The Principle of Faithfulness

Faithfulness is the prerequisite for translation. The famous Chinese translator as well as scholar Yan Fu proposed for the first time the three principles of translation: faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance. Of the three principles, the most important is faithfulness. In Western countries, the “three laws of translation” were formulated by Alexander Fraser Tytler (1791), an English theoretician. In his article *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, he put forward three laws of translation: (1) the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work; (2) the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original; and (3) the translation should have the ease of the original composition. What he focused on is still faithfulness. As far as faithfulness is concerned, there are three levels of faithfulness in terms of content, form, and style. The ideal translation is to reach the three level of faithfulness at the same time. But in most cases, it is difficult and even impossible to do so. And sometimes we have to sacrifice the faithfulness in form or style to ensure the faithfulness of content. But by faithfulness, we do not mean to translate word for word to reach absolute faithfulness. In fact, the mechanical use of faithfulness, on the contrast, will lead to clumsy translation. For example:
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(1) 西湖名菜有南宋风味，载誉已久。
Translation: West Lake dishes, which originated in the Southern Song Dynasty, have been well known for their taste and flavor (GUO, 2001, p. 15).

Here the word “南宋风味” cannot mechanically be translated into “style and taste of the Southern Song Dynasty”, although it sounds more faithful apparently.

Accordingly, faithfulness has its own relativity. In order to get smooth translation, sometimes we have to sacrifice the awkward literal translation. What is more important is that we should concentrate on the purpose of translation and the response of target readers. So taking these factors into consideration, we should at least guarantee the faithfulness of content since the basic task of tourist literature is to convey information on our country to the target readers. We must make sure the translation of information about our country is correct, unbiased, and faithful to the source text.

The Principle of Transmitting Chinese Culture

In the essay The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies, Bassnett argued that it is time for cultural studies and translation studies to collaborate. In her opinion, the study of translation has moved from its formalistic phase to the broader issue of context, history, and convention. She called the change the cultural turn in translation studies. She also argued that there needs to be more investigation of the acculturation process that takes place between cultures and the way in which different cultures construct their image of the writer and texts (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998, p. 138). These words point out the importance of culture studies in translation. Travel can offer opportunities to make cultural exchange. China is famous for its oriental civilization and becomes an attractive destination country in the tourism market. Most readers of the target text are potential tourists who plan to make a trip to China for the purpose of viewing picturesque scenery and comprehending Chinese unique culture. So we should keep it in mind that the translator’s task is to introduce Chinese culture as much as possible to readers in his/her translation. From this viewpoint, we can safely say that translation also facilitates cultural exchange and the translator works as cultural envoy.

(2) 农民们有的在做汤团，图个团圆之意；有的在准备鱼头，也是想图个年年有余的意思。
Translation: Some farmers are making round dumplings. This is a kind of stuffed dumplings made of glutinous rice flour served in soup. It is a traditional food for Chinese in some southern parts of China. The round shape of dumplings signifies family reunion, for the spring festival is the biggest occasion for family reunion in a year. Others are preparing fish for New Year’s Eve Dinner. As the Chinese character “fish” is pronounced “yu”, which is homophonic with another character “yu”, meaning “having surplus or more than necessary”, eating fish at the New Year’s Eve means you will have more than necessary in the coming year (GUO, 2001, p. 19).

Comparatively speaking, the translation is much longer than the source sentence because it is not merely translated literally but also loaded with its cultural implications. It is convinced that the target reader can get a fuller understanding of the source sentence and Chinese culture as well after reading the translation.

In a word, we cannot merely translate the literal meaning of the source text during translation. What is more important is that we should transmit the information hiding under the surface of words—culture. Only by doing these can a translator be called cultural envoy.
The Principle of Tourist-Orientation

By this principle, we mean to take the response of prospective readers into primary consideration. Can they understand or perceive what we say in the tourist publicity materials? Is the translation comprehensible? If tourists cannot grasp the information conveyed by tourist publicity materials, all the translation work is in vain. So we are obliged to make our translation comprehensible. Nord, a well-known German translator, set up an opposition between documentary and instrumental translation based on the theory of functionalism in Germany. A documentary translation means the translator writes his translation from the source writer’s point of view, while an instrumental translation means the translator works from the target reader’s perspective and caters to the demands of the target readers. In this model, tourist publicity materials fall into the instrumental translation with the form of translation as equifunctional translation. It means the function of target-text is the same as that of the source text, where receivers ideally do not notice the fact that they are reading a translation. “Equifunctional translations are found in the area of some pragmatic texts such as tourist information texts, recipe and information on products” (Nord, 2001, p. 50). With this theory as a basis, the translation of tourist literature is tourist-oriented. The translator should always bear the target readers’ response in mind and make sure that they can obtain the maximum of comprehension.

(3) 大雄宝殿脊中央有一麒麟，背驮一座玲珑宝塔。(HUO & WANG, 2002, p. 23)

Translation: In the middle of the ridge of the main building stands a kylin (Chinese unicorn) bearing on its back a delicate Buddhist tower.

The word “kylin” is originated from China and is an unfamiliar name for most foreigners, but they know unicorn. So in the translation, kylin is explained to be a kind of Chinese unicorn. This is a good example of tourist orientation.

In a word, we should take the response of target readers into consideration even if we have to make some adjustments. If we fail to do that, the translation is never a successful one.

The Four Approaches to Translating Tourist Literature

Amplification

By amplification we mean adding more information to the target text in order to make readers of the TT (Translating Tourist) understand and gain cultural knowledge. As we all know, Chinese and English are two completely different languages. Chinese has its own unique grammar and culture. Some sentences, proper names, and idiomatic expressions that are easy for Chinese people to understand can hardly make sense for foreign tourists. These cultural barriers will pose a negative effect on readers’ interest. Therefore, under these circumstances, we have to adopt amplification to smooth the communication. There are two kinds of amplifications: contextual amplification and cultural amplification.

Contextual amplification. Chinese is quite different from English in syntax. In Chinese, non-subject sentences are grammatically correct and also comprehensible for Chinese readers. But it is not the case in English since subject is regarded as indispensable elements of a sentence. Let us see some examples:

(4) 走进芦笛岩洞，宛如走进一个美妙的神话世界。（LU & JIN, 2001, p. 16)

Translation: Entering Reed Flute Cave, one feels as if he were touring a wonderful fairyland.
This is a typical non-subject sentence in Chinese, but if we do not amplify it by adding the subject, the sentence would be grammatically incorrect.

**Cultural amplification.** Since China has her own unique culture, the cultural elements surely interfere readers’ understanding and there are a lot of culture-default words. The ideal way is adding information.

(5) 这是新建的罗汉堂。中国的石洞和寺庙中有“十六罗汉”、“十八罗汉”、“五百罗汉”等。

Translation: *This is newly built temple to arhats. In stone caves or Buddhist temples there are “16 Arhats”, “18 Arhats”, or “500 Arhats”. The arhat is a Sanskrit term which means a Buddhist who has reached the stage of enlightenment* (CHEN, 2004, p. 381).

“Heart” is a Buddhism term, which is very strange for the Western people who mainly believe in Christianity. For the sake of cultural exchange, we should add the background knowledge.

In Chinese history, there are a lot of dynasties, which even a Chinese people cannot remember clearly, do not mention the foreigners. So when we encounter the translation of a specific dynasty, we should add the beginning and ending year. This is very common in the translation of tourist literature. The following is a good example.

**Transliteration Plus Notes**

It is very common to adopt this approach to translate names of scenic spots. Since this approach combines Chinese Pinyin with explanation, it helps readers to know something about Chinese culture and also improve their cultural comprehension. For example, there are two famous tourist attractions in Hainan, “天涯海角” and “鹿回头”, which are respectively translated into “Tianya-Haigai (the end of the earth and the edge of the sea)” and “Luhuitou (turn-round deer scenic spot)”. This kind of translation stimulates readers’ interest and leaves a deep impression on them. Shanghai has a famous tourist attraction—Yu Yuan Garden, where exists many ancient halls, such as “仰山堂”, “玉华堂”, and “万花楼”, which are translated respectively into “Yangshantang (Hall for Viewing the Mountain)”, “Yuhuatang (the Jade magnificence Hall)”, and “Wanhualou (the ten thousand Chamber)”.  

**Reduction**

On the surface, this approach is opposed to the principle of faithfulness. It is highest duty for a translator to convey all the information to target reader. However, due to different thought patterns and customs, Chinese tourist literature is quite different from English one. For example, Chinese people tend to use more flowery descriptions which are usually superfluous and redundant. Besides this, ancient poems are frequently quoted in Chinese tourist literature in order to heighten authority and impression on readers. Even a Chinese sometimes cannot fully understand the quoted poems’ meaning, do not mention a foreigner. Moreover, it is very difficult to put an ancient poem into perfect translation. A full translation of the source text including ornate descriptions and ancient poems, on the contrary, hinders reader’ understanding and even leads to their loss of interests. Therefore, under such circumstances, the approach of reduction is necessary. Let us see some examples.

(6) 乐山水光山色独特，地理环境优越，素有“绿杨夹岸水平铺”之称，举行龙舟竞赛得天独厚。

*(ZHANG, 2000, p. 56)*

Translation: *Famous for its “tranquil river fringed with rich vegetation”, Leshan in Sichuan Province has the ideal setting for the Dragon Festival.*
In the source text “水光山色独特，地理环境优越” has been repeated in the sentence “绿杨夹岸水平铺”， so the translator omitted the former and retained the latter. The omission of the quoted sentence is very necessary since it does not lose any information, on the contrary, it makes the translation more concise.

Restructuring

By restructuring, we refers to making some adjustments while translating, perhaps adjusting sequence of the source text or adjusting some traditional information, such as ancient name of place and years in order to smooth understanding on the target readers.

(7) 在四川西部，有一处美妙的去处。它背倚岷山主峰雪宝顶，树木苍翠，花香袭人，鸟声婉转，流水潺潺。这就是松潘县的黄龙。（CAO & JIAO, 2004, p. 130)

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

Thought pattern has a great impact on the actual translation. The English thought pattern is straightforward and the topic is usually developed in a deductive way, while the Chinese thought pattern is spiral and the topic is usually developed in an inductive way. Therefore, the above example has been restructured into two new sentences.

Conclusion

To conclude, the translation of tourist literature is never an easy job. When we do the translating work, firstly, we should bear the stylistic difference in mind. Then, based on the principles of faithfulness, transmitting Chinese culture, and tourist orientation, different approaches should be adopted in order to produce a satisfactory English translation. In this way, the guiding significance of the theories applied to the translation of tourist literature can be realized.

References


