

Cultural Factors in Tourism Interpretation of Leshan Giant Buddha

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Received: November 23, 2016 Accepted: December 17, 2016 Online Published: December 19, 2016

doi: 10.5539/elt.v10n1p56

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n1p56>

Abstract

Different cultural aspects are always involved in tourism interpretation, and the process of tourism interpretation is also cross-cultural communication. If the cultural factors can be interpreted for the foreign visitors in a better way, it's beneficial to convey the cultural connotation of the scenic spot and it can be the communication more effective. There are many scenic spots in China, to show the beautiful scenery and traditional Chinese culture to the world. Leshan Giant Buddha is one of national 5A tourist attractions in Leshan, Sichuan Province, China, and there are a lot of tourists coming here every year, especially foreign tourists. Therefore, its tourism interpretation shall be better and better. The tourism interpretation of Leshan Giant Buddha concerns many cultural factors. Based on Skopostheorie, this paper discusses how to deal with the cultural factors in guide interpretation of Leshan Grand Buddha from the following three aspects: names of scenic spots, four-character phrases and classical Chinese poetry.

Keywords: Leshan Giant Buddha, tourism interpretation, skopostheorie, cultural factors, methods

1. Introduction

The rapid globalization and the convenient transportation make the whole world into a small "village". More and more foreign tourists come to China, to enjoy its majestic scenes, and understand the culture and customs of China. The tourism in China becomes an important channel for the Chinese people to share their friendship and show their culture. Therefore, the rapid development of tourism makes higher requirements of tourism interpretation.

Tourism interpretation not only gets involved with two languages, but also introduces the local culture of China to the foreign tourists. Meanwhile, the tourism interpretation should take the cultures of both sides into consideration, to make the listeners get a better understanding of the translated version from the perspective of culture. It is unavoidable that there are a lot of cultural factors in tourism interpretation, so how to adopt the strategies to translate these factors is a question for the tourist interpreters. This thesis will take Leshan Giant Buddha as an example to have a discussion on how to deal with cultural factors in tourism interpretation.

2. Research Background

The famous Leshan Giant Buddha is located in Leshan, Sichuan Province, China, at the confluence of Dadu River, Qingyi River and Minjing River. It is the largest carved of stone Maitreya, with the overall height of 71 meters. Besides Leshan Giant Buddha, there are some other scenic spots in this region, such as Wuyou Temple, Lingyun Temple Mahao Cliff Grave and so on. Every year, their beautiful and majestic natural sceneries and religious culture with a long history attract a substantial number of tourists to come here, among whom there are many foreign tourists. This requires us to improve the tourism interpretation and introduce the Chinese culture in Leshan Giant Buddha to them.

On July 4, 2011, China National Tourism Administration announced that Leshan Giant Buddha was approved to be one of the national 5A tourist attractions. In September 2014, the 1st Sichuan International Travel Expo was held in Leshan; on November 18, 2015, People's Government of Sichuan Province formally approved Leshan as the pilot city of provincial comprehensive tourism reform; on December 20, 2015, China National Tourism Administration approved Leshan as one of the first advanced area of national tourism reform and innovation. All these not only show more and more internationalized charm of Leshan, but also make higher requirements of the tourism interpretation. Therefore, now it is inevitable to improve the tourism interpretation, spread the local culture of Leshan and promote the position of Leshan in the international tourism industry.

The present research on Leshan Giant Buddha mainly focuses on its history, culture and tourist value, and most these and research programs have been made from these perspectives, such as Evaluation of Domestic Tourist Value of Tourist Resources of Leshan Giant Buddha, written by Guo Hianying and published on Regional Research and Development on December 15, 2007; Economic Benefit Assessment of Leshan Giant Buddha, written by Li Xiaoliang and published on Journal of Sichuan Agricultural University on June 1, 2012, and so on. However, there is few research on translation of Leshan Giant Buddha, such as Research on Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs—Analyzing the Translation Errors of Public Signs in Leshan Giant Buddha, written by Li Wenting and published on Journal of Leshan Normal University on April 15, 2009, whose author just did her research on Leshan Giant Buddha from the perspective of public signs. Therefore, it's necessary to do some research on Leshan Giant Buddha from the perspective of tourism interpretation, and it can help spread the local culture if the research is carried out from the perspective of cross-culture communication.

3. Theoretical Basis

Katharina Reiss introduced the functional theory into the translation criticism through her book, *Translation Criticism, the Potentials & Limitations* in 1971. Then Skopostheorie, which was pointed out by Hans J. Vermeer, is the core of the functional translation theory. Christiane Nord highlights three aspects of functionalist approaches: translation brief, the role of ST analysis, and the functional hierarchy of translation problems (Christiane, 1997). The functionalists believe that every translation enjoys its certain purposes, and the translation process and results should follow these purposes. There are three main rules in the skopos theory: the skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule, among which the skopos rule is the most important one (Jeremy, 2004). Besides, Reiss and Vermeer mentioned the basic rules of the functional theory in 1984: 1. A target text is determined by its skopos. 2. A target text is an offer of information in a target culture and target language concerning an offer of information in a source culture and source language. 3. A target text does not initiate an offer of information in a clearly reversible way. 4. A target text must be internally coherent. 5. A target text must be coherent with the source text. 6. The five rules above stand in hierarchical order, which the skopos rule predominating (quoted in Jeremy, 2004). These rules explain the standards which should be followed. When the translator or interpreter chooses the strategies or methods, they must take the skopos of translation or interpretation into consideration.

For tourism interpretation in China, its main purpose is to introduce the Chinese culture to the foreign tourists. Therefore, during the process of tourism interpretation, the interpreter should spare no effort to choose the proper translation strategies and methods to deal with the cultural factors. Not only should the cultural factors be taken into consideration, but also the coherence of the target text should be reached.

4. Cultural Factors in Tourism Interpretation of Leshan Giant Buddha

Language is the carrier of culture, while culture is the basis for language. From the perspective of applied pragmatics, language is the reflection of culture as well as the direct and effective tool to grasp one culture (Chen, 1999). No matter written or oral, translation is a kind of cross-culture communication on its own, especially the tourism interpretation.

China is a country with the history and tradition of five thousand years, and the foreign tourists want to understand China, its cities and all its scenic spots through tourism interpretation. Tourism interpretation means the translation practice and professional translation of terms for tourist activities, tourist major and industry. In sum, tourism interpretation is a kind of communication activity between languages, societies, times, cultures and psychologies. Compared with other types of translation, it is much more direct, outstanding, typical and comprehensive in its features of the cross-cultural and cross-psychological communication (Chen, 2004).

The tourism interpretation almost involves every aspect of culture. The classic definition of culture is the one pointed out by Edward Tylor, an English anthropologist, in *Primitive Culture*: Culture is a whole integrated with knowledge, belief, art, law, moral, customs and any other ability and habit acquired by the human as a member of the society (Fang, 2004). Nida Eugene classifies culture into five types, namely ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture and language culture (Nida, 1993). Generally these five types of culture are involved in the tourism interpretation.

The foreign tourists come to China not only to relax themselves, broaden their horizons, enjoy China's famous mountains, rivers and other sceneries, but also to understand the culture and customs different from those of their native countries, which are contained in the famous sceneries (Tang, 2009). Therefore, the tourism interpretation should spread the Chinese people as well as convey the meaning. This thesis will take Leshan Giant Buddha as an example to explain how to deal with the cultural factors in the tourism interpretation from the following three perspectives: names of scenic spots, four-character phrases and ancient poetry. All the examples taken here are

cited from Tour Guide Presentation of Leshan Giant Buddha provided by Leshan Giant Buddha International Scenery Travel Agency Co., Ltd. for the translation volunteers of Pacific Asia Travel Association Annual Summit 2015.

4.1 Names of Scenic Spots

Translating the names of scenic spots has the direct effect on the propaganda of the scenic spots as well as the first impression of the foreign tourists on the scenic spots. Therefore, special attention should be paid to translating the names of scenic spots. However, it is still no clear standard on the names of some scenic spots. For the names of scenic spots are generally authorized by customs, we should make the names of scenic spots unified and standard, and remain and follow the names left from the history and familiar to the people. We should not translate it in another way, or it may cause some misunderstanding (Xia & Fan, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to standardize the names of scenic spots. Take the translation of “乐山大佛” as an example. There are several different descriptions: Leshan Great Buddha, Leshan Grand Buddha and Grand Buddha of Leshan. Even the public signs in the scenic spot or the road signs don't have the same translation, which may cause confusion among visitors from other places. Generally Leshan Giant Buddha should be a better choice, in order to make its translation standardized.

Mainly the following two translation methods have been adopted for translating the names of scenic spots in Leshan Giant Buddha:

4.1.1 Transliteration + Literal Translation

Transliteration means translating the source text based on its pronunciation, and literal translation can deliver the direct meaning of the original text. Just as translating “乐山大佛” into Leshan Giant Buddha, the translator always adopts the method of transliteration + literal translation when he translates the names of scenic spots. For example, “凌云山” and “凌云寺” are respectively translated into “Lingyun Mountain” and “Lingyun Temple”, first transliterating “凌云” and then literally translating “山” and “寺”. Generally, the meanings of these scenic spots can be easily understood by the foreign tourists. There are still some other examples to adopt transliteration with literal translation:

海师堂: Haishi Hall

乌尤寺: Wuyou Temple

麻浩崖墓: Mahao Cliff Grave

灵宝塔: Lingbao Tower

沫若堂: Moruo Study

东坡楼: Dongpo Pavilion

海师洞: Haishi Cave

黄莲古炮台: Huanglian Ancient Emplacement

4.1.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation can be adopted for the easy and direct names of the names of many scenic spots including the natural sceneries and human landscapes, which can keep the cultural information of the original text in the translated text in a better way, and make the translated text more specific and vivid with cultural features (Xia Kangming, Fan Xianming, 2013: 101). One purpose of the tourism interpretation is to introduce the Chinese culture to the foreign tourists. Compared with free translation, literal translation can deliver the meaning and cultural connotation of the original text, which can make the foreign tourists better understand the Chinese culture. For example, “观景台” in front of the bronze statue of Guo Moruo is literally translated into “Sightseeing Platform”. Adopting the literal translation can make the foreign tourists understand its usage. There are some other examples:

唐代药师佛: Apothecary Buddha of Tang Dynasty

海棠园: Crabapple Garden

月榭: Moon Pavilion

碑林: Forest of Steles

乐山大佛建造维修史馆: Museum of the Construction and Maintenance of Leshan Giant Buddha

Basically the translated names of some scenic spots can clearly deliver the Chinese meaning to the foreign

tourists, but there are still some problems of translated names of other scenic spots. The translators must have their responsibility to check, ask and learn from different sides, and mustn't take the words too literally, when they are not sure about the translation (Wu, 2012). Take the translation of “注易洞” as an example. Now it is generally translated as “Zhuyi Cave”, following the method of transliteration plus literal translation. However, it is called “注易洞” because An You, a Jiazhou (an ancient name of Leshan) person in the Ming Dynasty, ever wrote *Yijing (Book of Changes)* in this place. If it is translated into “Zhuyi Cave”, it cannot express the cultural connotation hidden in it. During tourism interpretation, it can be translated into “Zhuyi Cave” at first, and then the following simple explanation can be added: “It was said that An You, an ancient Jiazhou person in the Ming Dynasty, ever wrote *Yijing (Book of Changes)* in this place”, which can make the foreign tourists have a deep understanding of this scenic spot while “Zhuyi”, the transliteration, cannot convey its meaning.

There is another scenic spot, “千峰祖师洞”, which is translated as “Cave of the Monk of Thousand Peaks” sometimes. Before translating the names of scenic spots, the translator should have a clear understanding of why the scenic spot is called so. “千峰祖师” was one prison officer in the end of Yuan Dynasty at the very beginning, and then he shaved his hair and became a monk staying in Lingyun Temple, who made great contribution to temple maintenance and Buddha figures protection. After knowing that “千峰” is the name of one person, the translator can adopt the transliteration, or “Thousand Peaks” will make the foreign tourist confused. Therefore, it can be translated into “Cave of Monk Qianfeng”, and then some other descriptions of this scenic spot can make the foreign tourists under the cultural connotation of this scenic spot.

The names of scenic spots should be translated through different strategies and methods according to the different forms of their Chinese names. No matter how, their translation must be understandable, conveying the meaning hidden in the names without any misunderstanding in the target text.

4.2 Four-Character Phrases

There are a lot of four-character phrases in Chinese, not only in the tourism interpretation, but also in some other situations. predominance of disyllables and quadrisyllables over monosyllables and trisyllables is the main rhythm tendency of the modern Chinese, which inherits and promotes the Pian Ou tradition formed in the ancient time, namely pursuing tidy structure of words, emphasizing harmonious rhyme, seeking magnificent speech and making words and structures in pairs (Lian, 2013). These four-character phrases enrich the forms and meaning of Chinese, which is one feature of Chinese, and also makes translation more difficult. For many times, the translator cannot keep the feature of simplicity of four-character phrases. They just literally translate the original meaning, and it cannot be precisely translated into four English words. There are many methods to translate these four-character phrases, and for the tourism interpretation of Leshan Giant Buddha, it mainly adopts three methods: literal translation, free translation and omission.

4.2.1 Literal Translation

Some four-character phrases have simple and clear meaning, so adopting literal translation will not cause any misunderstanding of foreign tourists. The foreign tourists can understand the original meaning clearly. For example:

1) 在四川省西南部，有一个美丽而神秘的地方，那里三江汇合、九峰叠翠。

In the southwest of Sichuan Province, there is a beautiful and mysterious place, where three rivers converge and nine peaks soar.

2) 右边绝壁之下，大江东去舟如漂叶...

Looking down to the right cliff, boats are floating like leaves on the running Minjiang River

In these two sentences, literal translation is adopted for “三江汇合”, “九峰叠翠”, “大江东去” and “舟如漂叶”, and “three rivers converge and nine peaks soar”, “boats are floating like leaves on the running Minjiang River” can be directly accepted by the foreign tourists and they can clearly understand the meaning of these expressions. Besides, these two four-character phrases are not translated into too many words, which keeps the original feature of simplicity. For this kind of expressions, literal translation is always adopted.

It's the simplest to adopt literal translation for four-character phrases. However, the original meaning cannot be expressed clearly under literal translation, or the expressions are weird in the target language sometimes. For example, “...有钟灵毓秀的人文景观和神秘的佛教文化” is translated into “...mysterious Buddhism, and the culture and scenes that make you conjure up the fine spirits of the universe”. “钟灵毓秀” is literally translated into “make you conjure up the fine spirits of the universe”, which may have no grammatical problems in English, but the foreign tourists will be confused by such translation. The author holds that it's better to omit this

expression and directly translate it into “wonderful landscape and mysterious Buddhist culture”.

4.2.2 Free Translation

If the foreign tourists cannot understand the original meaning of the four-character phrases or they will be confused under literal translation, free translation is a better choice to clearly express the original meaning.

1) 江风陈陈, 湿气袭人, 令人神清气爽。

The fresh air with river breeze makes you feel fresh and powerful.

2) 乌尤山景色幽美, 无论是三江春涨, 还是烟雨秋波, 皆清秀俊美, 四时滴翠, 极富诗情画意。

The scenery of Wuyou Mountain is beautiful and elegant, plentiful in idyllic sentiment regardless of flood season or misty rainy days.

There are many four-character phrases in these two sentences, and free translation is adopted instead of literal translation. In the first sentence, “江风陈陈” and “湿气袭人” are translated together into “the fresh air with river breeze”, while “江风” is translated into “river breeze”, “湿气” is changed into “the fresh air” and “陈陈” and “袭人” are omitted. Three four-character phrases of the original text are combined into one complete sentence in English, making the target language accepters clearly understand the original meaning. There are six four-character phrases in the second sentence, and they are translated into one sentence. “三江春涨” and “烟雨秋波” are translated into “flood season or misty rainy days”.

Besides, there are always reduplication words in Chinese, and there are some four-character phrases of reduplication in the Chinese tour guide presentation. Generally free translation is adopted for this kind of four-character phrases.

3) 又叠叠青峦、漠漠沙洲、淼淼烟霭、点点舟帆似一副画卷映入眼帘。

Taking an overlook, you can see green mountains, sandbanks, light fog, tiny sails far away in the river like scenery paintings.

In this sentence, four four-character phrases of reduplication are used continuously: “叠叠青峦、漠漠沙洲、淼淼烟霭、点点舟帆”. In the translation, only “青峦、沙洲、烟霭、舟帆” are remained and translated into “mountains, sandbanks, fog, tiny sails”, while their modifiers “叠叠、漠漠、淼淼、点点” are translated into “green, light, tiny”. The author thinks it’s better to add a modifier for “漠漠沙洲”: “wide sandbanks”, which will make the structure more tidy.

4.2.3 Omission

Omission is adopted in the tourist translation of Leshan Giant Buddha, such as:

凌云禅院寺门高踞, 飞檐凌空, 红墙碧瓦, 巍峨壮观。

The mountain gate of Lingyun Temple is highly standing in the front with red wall and jade-green tiles.

In this sentence, “寺门高踞” and “红墙碧瓦” are literally translated into “is highly standing” and “red wall and jade-green tiles”, while “飞檐凌空” and “巍峨壮观” are omitted. However, the main idea of this sentence has been expressed, so the omitting these two four-character phrases will not cause any misunderstanding.

Sometimes, there are several four-character phrases continuously used in one sentence, and different translation methods are adopted for different phrases. For example:

在载酒亭小憩, 近瞰三江, 烟波浩渺, 远眺峨眉, 青山隐隐。

Having a rest in the pavilion for a while, you may take an overlook at the three rivers nearby and the looming Mount Emei in the horizon.

There are four four-character phrases in this sentence. 本句中接连四个四字词组, “近瞰三江” is literally translated into “...take an overlook at the three rivers nearby”, “烟波浩渺” is omitted in the translation, and “远眺峨眉” and “青山隐隐” are translated together into “...the looming Mount Emei in the horizon”.

It’s difficult to find out the equivalence of Chinese four-character phrases in English, so the interpreter should consider the background of the listeners and the interpreting situation to adopt literal translation, free translation or omission.

4.3 Ancient Poetry

There is a lot of poetry in tourism interpretation. The translation of poetry is very difficult for written translation, and it makes the tourism interpretation even more difficult. For poetry, it’s better to do research and try to figure out the reasonable translation version, so the interpreter will not be helpless during the interpretation process.

The Chinese poetry enjoys the features of high generalization, level and oblique tones, rhythm, rhyme and so on, but it is really hard to keep such features in the translated version. Therefore, the poetry in tourism interpretation is mainly translated to convey its meaning and artistic conception.

1) 寺出飞鸟外，青峰戴朱楼。

Birds can not reach the Temple, and red pavilion stands on the green peak.

These two lines of poetry are taken from Poetry Written in Lingyun Temple, Jiazhou(《登嘉州凌云寺作》), and they describe the majesty of Lingyun Temple through the description of “飞鸟” and “青峰”. Literal translation is adopted to translate these two sentences. Although the features of level and oblique tones and rhyme are given up, the two references of “birds” and “the green peak” are kept to make the foreign tourist feel the majesty of Lingyun Temple.

2) 何处飞来缥缈峰，独立江心江四曲。环水有山不见山，一丛云树插天绿。

Wherefrom came a misty peak? Lonely in the river centre, you cannot see the mountain, instead a cluster of trees shining the sky green.

The translation version of this poetry gives up the features of the original text, but it can convey the artistic conception of the original text to the foreign tourists. For poetry translating, maybe it is not the best choice, but for interpretation, it is really a good choice for the interpreter to clearly convey the original meaning within the limited time.

3) 聊为东坡载酒游，万龛迎我到峰头。江摇九顶风雷过，云抹三峨日夜浮。

Su Dongpo boats here with vintage wine.

Today niches and Buddha figures welcome me along by.

Rivers are running with wind and thunder.

Clouds are blowing over mountains day and night.

There are several numbers used in these lines: “万”，“九” and “三”，but the plural forms are used in its translation version instead of numbers. In the Chinese culture, “万”，“九” and “三” are the frequently-used numbers, especially “九”，such as “九霄云外” and “九重天”. These numbers cannot be literally translated into “ten thousand”，“nine” and “three”，which may cause misunderstanding.

Although these translated versions do not keep the features of the original poetry, they still convey the original meaning. Sometimes, the poetry cannot be translated into English, such as the couplet hung on the columns of Moruo Hall, the first line: “峨眉钟灵，大渡铸魂，中华唯怀，黎庶系心，笔落摇山河，真是文豪本色”；the second line: “女神惊世，屈原壮魄，雷电为颂，洪波度曲，诗成泣鬼神，果然名士风流”. Therefore, it is omitted, and maybe sometimes the guide can explain the meaning for the foreign tourists.

The names of scenic spots, four-character phrases and the ancient Chinese poetry include rich cultural connotation, and all the above-mentioned examples are only used to show how to deal with these cultural factors under most circumstances. In tourism interpretation, the guide should not just memorize the translated version, and he/she should take into the tourists’ cultural background into consideration, make flexible modification based on the real situation and context, and spread the Chinese culture to the foreign tourists.

5. Conclusion

There are many cultural factors involved in the tourism interpretation of Leshan Giant Buddha, and this thesis just explains how to translate the cultural factors from three perspectives: names of scenic spots, four-character phrases and ancient poetry. The tourist interpreter should not just memorize the same guide words, and they should flexibly introduce the scenic spot based on the context, and pay attention to the communication effect. Meanwhile, the interpreter should shoulder the duty of spreading our culture, making the foreign tourists understand the Chinese culture at the same time of enjoying the beautiful and majestic sceneries of China.

Acknowledgements

This research is finance by the following program: Youth Program, Scientific Research Cultivating Program, Leshan Normal University. Program No.: C1406.

(乐山师范学院“科研培育计划项目”青年项目：跨文化交际下乐山大佛景区导游口译研究,项目编号：C1406).

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