A Study of the Translation of Chinese Tourist Attraction Names from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

China is a popular tourist destination with a rich cultural heritage and numerous historical sites. With economic globalization, the tourism industry is rapidly growing and more and more foreigners are coming to China for tourism. The translation of Chinese tourist attraction names is of great importance in the field of tourism. Translating the names of these attractions accurately and effectively is crucial for attracting international tourists and promoting cross-cultural communication. It requires more accurate English explanations and translations of our country's tourist attractions. This study explores the translation of Chinese tourist attraction names from the perspective of Skopos Theory. The current situation of translating tourist attraction names in China is examined, followed by an explanation of the concept, features, and functions of Translation Purposive Theory. The application of Skopos Theory in translation is also discussed, highlighting previous studies in this area. The analysis focuses on existing issues in the translation of Chinese tourist attraction names under the Translation Purposive Theory. Finally, translation strategies for Chinese tourist attraction names from the perspective of Translation Purposive Theory are proposed.

Keywords

Chinese tourist attraction names, Skopos Theory, Translation Purposive Theory, translation strategies

1. The Current Situation of Translating Tourist Attractions' Names in China

Tourism has become an increasingly popular activity around the world, with people from different countries and cultures eager to explore new destinations. However, one common challenge that tourists face is the translation of tourist attractions' names. This issue is also prevalent in China, where the translation of place names has become a topic of debate and discussion.

In recent years, China has witnessed a significant increase in the number of foreign tourists visiting the country. As a result, there has been a growing demand for accurate and meaningful translations of tourist attractions' names. However, the translation process is often complex and can be influenced by various factors, including cultural differences, linguistic challenges, and marketing considerations.

Firstly, one of the main difficulties in translating tourist attractions' names lies in the cultural differences between China and other countries. Chinese place names often have deep historical and cultural significance, which can be challenging to convey in other languages. For example, the famous tourist attraction “Chángchéng”, which translates to "Great Wall,"
carries a rich historical and symbolic meaning in Chinese culture. However, when translated into other languages, the true essence of the name may be lost or diluted.

Secondly, linguistic challenges also play a significant role in the translation of tourist attractions’ names. Chinese characters are unique and have different meanings and pronunciations compared to English or other languages. Translating these characters into another language while preserving the original meaning can be a complex task. Sometimes, literal translations may result in awkward or confusing names that do not accurately represent the attraction.

In addition, marketing considerations further complicate the translation process. In an effort to attract more tourists, some tourist attractions choose to adopt names that are more appealing or easier to remember for foreign visitors. This can lead to significant changes in the translated names, sometimes straying far from the original meaning. While this approach may help promote tourism, it can also create confusion and misrepresentation.

To address these challenges, efforts have been made to improve the translation of tourist attractions' names in China. The government has implemented guidelines and regulations to ensure accurate translations and to preserve the cultural and historical significance of the names. Additionally, collaborations between translation professionals, linguists, and cultural experts have been established to find appropriate translations that capture the essence of the attractions.

Internationally, the translation of tourist attractions' names also faces similar challenges. Different countries have their own unique ways of translating place names, often resulting in variations and discrepancies. However, with the increasing globalization and intercultural exchange, there is a growing recognition of the importance of accurate and culturally sensitive translations.

In conclusion, the translation of tourist attractions' names is a complex and multifaceted issue both in China and abroad. Cultural differences, linguistic challenges, and marketing considerations all contribute to the difficulties in finding accurate and meaningful translations. However, with the efforts of various stakeholders, there is hope for improved translations that accurately represent the cultural and historical significance of these attractions.

2. The Concept, Features, and Functions of Translation Purposive Theory

Translation Purposive Theory, also known as Skopos Theory, is a significant approach in translation studies that focuses on the purpose or function of a translation. Translation purposive theory refers to a theoretical framework that focuses on the purpose and intention behind translation. It aims to understand and analyze the goals and objectives of translation, as well as the strategies and techniques employed to achieve those goals. This theory plays a crucial role in guiding translators in their decision-making process and ensuring the effectiveness and accuracy of translations. Yu (2020) explored the application of Skopos Theory in translating tourist information signs. The study emphasized the need to adapt the translation to suit the cultural and linguistic preferences of the target audience, ensuring clear and concise communication.

One of the key features of translation purposive theory is its emphasis on the intentionality of translation. Unlike other translation theories that focus on linguistic and cultural aspects, purposive theory places a significant emphasis on the purpose and intention behind the translation process (Tan, 2021). It recognizes that translations are not mere linguistic transfers, but rather intentional acts aimed at achieving specific objectives. Another characteristic of translation purposive theory is its recognition of the diverse purposes of translation. Translations can serve various functions, such as facilitating communication, conveying information, promoting cultural exchange, or even influencing public opinion. The theory acknowledges that different translation purposes require different strategies and techniques to achieve the desired outcomes.

The functions of translation purposive theory are manifold. Firstly, it provides a framework for translators to analyze and understand the purpose of a translation project. By identifying the intended audience, desired impact, and specific goals of the translation, translators can make informed decisions about the linguistic and cultural choices they need to make. Secondly, translation purposive theory helps translators select appropriate translation strategies and techniques. Depending on the intended purpose of the translation, different approaches may be employed, such as literal translation, cultural adaptation, or creative transcreation. The theory guides translators in making these choices, ensuring that the translation effectively serves its intended purpose. Furthermore, translation purposive theory promotes the evaluation and assessment of translations. By considering the purpose and intended impact of a translation, it becomes possible to evaluate its success or failure in achieving those goals. This evaluation process helps improve the quality of translations and provides valuable feedback for future translation projects.

In conclusion, translation purposive theory is a valuable framework that focuses on the purpose and intention behind translation. Its emphasis on intentionality, recognition of diverse translation purposes, and provision of guidance for translators make it an essential tool in ensuring effective and accurate translations. By considering the concept, features, and functions of translation purposive theory, translators can enhance their understanding and practice of translation,
leading to more successful and impactful translations. In the field of tourism English translation, Skopos Theory has been applied to ensure effective communication with the target audience and to adapt translations to suit their needs and preferences.

3. Analysis of Existing Issues in the Translation of Chinese Tourist Attractions' Names under Translation Purposive Theory

The translation of Chinese tourist attractions' names poses several challenges, and these issues can be analyzed under the framework of translation purposive theory. Let's explore some examples to illustrate these challenges:

(1) Literal translation without considering cultural significance: One common issue is the literal translation of Chinese tourist attractions' names, which may not capture their cultural significance. For instance, the famous attraction "Yíhéyuán" is often translated as "Summer Palace" in English. While this translation conveys the basic meaning, it fails to capture the historical and aesthetic connotations associated with the original name.

(2) Difficulty in conveying historical context: Many Chinese tourist attractions have deep historical roots, making it challenging to convey their historical context in translation. For example, the name “Gǔgōng” refers to the Forbidden City, but the literal translation does not adequately convey the historical significance and imperial grandeur of the palace complex.

(3) Marketing considerations leading to significant changes: Marketing considerations can sometimes lead to significant changes in the translation of tourist attractions' names. For instance, the well-known landmark "Tiāntán" is commonly translated as "Temple of Heaven." While this translation captures the religious aspect, it deviates from the original meaning of "Altar of Heaven" and emphasizes the temple's tourist appeal.

(4) Variations and discrepancies in international translations: Translations of Chinese tourist attractions' names can vary across different countries and languages, resulting in discrepancies. For instance, the famous landmark “Chángchéng” is translated as "Great Wall" in English, "Grande Muraille" in French, and "Große Mauer" in German. These variations reflect linguistic and cultural differences, but they can also create confusion and inconsistency.

In conclusion, the translation of Chinese tourist attractions' names under translation purposive theory faces challenges such as literal translations, difficulties in conveying historical context, cultural adaptation, marketing considerations, and variations in international translations. Addressing these issues requires a careful balance between preserving cultural significance and ensuring effective communication with foreign visitors.

4. Translation Strategies for Chinese Tourist Attractions' Names from the Perspective of Translation Purposive Theory

The translation of Chinese tourist attractions' names requires careful consideration of the intended purpose and desired impact of the translation. Adopting a translation purposive theory perspective can help guide the selection of appropriate translation strategies.

(1) Consider cultural significance and avoid literal translation: Avoid relying solely on literal translation and instead consider the cultural significance of the attraction names. Fang and Chen (2018) stated that the presence of missing or conflicting vocabulary due to cultural gaps and clashes can pose significant challenges in the translation process. Travel texts possess strong national cultural characteristics and exhibit features of cross-cultural communication (Zhang, 2023). During the translation process, tourism texts frequently involve cross-cultural, cross-regional, and cross-linguistic communication, necessitating pragmatic or interlingual adaptations (Ding, 2019). For example, for the name "Yíhéyuán", it can be translated as "Summer Palace", but it is also important to provide historical and aesthetic connotations to convey the cultural significance of the original name.

(2) Emphasize historical background and convey historical context: Many Chinese tourist attractions have deep historical backgrounds, so it is important to convey their historical context in the translation. One important aspect of translating tourist attraction names is incorporating cultural and historical connotations. Chinese tourist attractions often have deep cultural and historical significance, and it is crucial to convey these aspects in the translation. This can be achieved by using translation techniques that capture the essence of the original name, such as using descriptive terms or providing additional explanations to convey the cultural and historical context. For example, the literal translation of “shǎo lín sì” is "Shaolin Temple", but this does not fully convey the historical significance and characteristics of Chinese martial art. Therefore, it may be necessary to provide annotations, and additional explanations, or choose alternative translation methods to provide the necessary historical background and context.

(3) Balance marketing considerations and preserve the uniqueness of the original name: While marketing considerations are important, it is also crucial to strike a balance between promoting tourism and preserving the uniqueness of the
original name. Exploring alternative translation methods that preserve the uniqueness of the original name can attract a wider audience. Striking a balance between marketing considerations and preserving the original name's uniqueness ensures that these translations effectively promote tourism while honoring the heritage of these magnificent tourist attractions. This translation strategy ensures that the translation has marketing value while accurately conveying the cultural connotations of the original name.

(4) Consistency in translation approaches is also essential when translating different tourist attractions. By establishing a consistent approach, it helps create a unified and coherent experience for tourists. For example, if a certain translation method is used for one attraction, it may be beneficial to apply a similar approach for other attractions to maintain consistency and avoid confusion. Take the two popular tourist attractions in China: "Xīhú" and "Huángshān". as examples. "Xīhú" is a famous lake located in Hangzhou, known for its scenic beauty and cultural significance. On the other hand, "Huángshān" refers to the Yellow Mountain range, renowned for its stunning landscapes and unique rock formations. To maintain consistency in translation, a translator may choose to adopt a descriptive approach that captures the essence of each attraction. For "Xīhú," a translation like "West Lake" would be appropriate, as it accurately conveys the geographical location and preserves the cultural significance associated with the name. Similarly, for "Huángshān," a translation such as "Yellow Mountain" would effectively capture the natural beauty and distinctiveness of the attraction. By applying a consistent translation approach, tourists can easily recognize and associate the translated names with the actual attractions they are visiting. This consistency not only avoids confusion but also enhances the overall tourist experience, as it provides a sense of familiarity and coherence. Additionally, a consistent translation approach contributes to the branding and marketing of these attractions, creating a strong and unified image for Chinese tourism.

In conclusion, by applying the perspective of translation purpose theory, the challenges of translating Chinese tourist attraction names can be effectively addressed. By considering cultural significance, conveying historical context, balancing marketing considerations, and pursuing consistency, translators can ensure that the translations accurately reflect the essence of the attractions and enhance the cross-cultural understanding of international tourists.

5. Conclusion

In summary, when translating Chinese tourist attraction names from a Skopos Theory perspective, it is important to prioritize the purpose of the translation and adapt it to the target readership. It emphasizes the purpose of the translation and adapting it to the target readership. Incorporating cultural and historical connotations helps convey the essence of the attractions while ensuring consistency in translation approaches across different attractions creating a cohesive and unified experience for tourists. By doing so, the translation can effectively convey the intended message and resonate with the audience.

References


