

Refining Tour Commentaries Translation at Tang Paradise: An Application of Peter Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory

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Abstract: *This paper investigates the application of communicative translation theory to the translation of tour commentaries at Tang Paradise in China. It identifies the inadequacies in existing translations and applies Newmark's principles to propose more effective alternatives. By analyzing several case studies, this study demonstrates the enhancement of clarity, cultural adaptability, and audience comprehension in translations. It emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive translation in enriching the tourist experience and facilitating cultural exchange. The findings contribute to the understanding of translation practices in tourism, highlighting their role in global cultural communication.*

Keywords: Communicative Translation; Tourism Translation; Tour Commentaries Translation.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global tourism industry is witnessing a gradual resurgence. China, a nation of vast territories and a rich historical tapestry, is increasingly attracting foreign tourists eager to delve into its enchanting and enigmatic heritage. A pivotal factor in facilitating the recovery and growth of China's international tourism lies in the proficient translation of tourism-related materials from Chinese to English. This paper will focus on identifying existing translational inadequacies and proposing amendments that align with Newmark's principles, ensuring that the essence and allure of the Shaanxi Tang Paradise are effectively conveyed to an international audience.

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT THE IMPERATIVE OF TRANSLATING TOURISM-RELATED MATERIALS: A FOCUS ON TOUR COMMENTARIES

Tourism, as a multidisciplinary peripheral science, encompasses an extensive array of subjects, ranging from natural and social sciences to diverse cultural aspects like local customs, entertainment, gastronomy, attire, and accommodation (Zhu, 2004). This breadth necessitates that tourism materials cover a wide spectrum of knowledge and genres.

Within this domain, tour commentaries constitute a vital component. They play a crucial role in enriching the experience of foreign tourists visiting various tourist areas and scenic spots. Regrettably, existing translations of these tour commentaries often falter in considering the tourists' comprehension capabilities and cultural backgrounds. There is a tendency to pursue literal equivalence in language, text, and information content, sometimes leading to neglect of cultural differences and their translational challenges (Zeng, 2005). Such translations can leave tourists perplexed, diminish their leisure experience, and potentially lead to misinterpretations of Chinese culture. This not only impedes the cultural exchange that tourism should ideally foster but also hinders the effective communication of China's rich cultural heritage.

Therefore, it is imperative to address and rectify these existing inadequacies in the translation of tour commentaries. This task gains even more urgency in the context of the anticipated revival of international tourism in China and the broader objective of promoting the sustainable development of the Chinese tourism sector. By refining these translations, we can ensure that they not only convey accurate information but also resonate culturally with international tourists, thereby fulfilling the dual objectives of education and enjoyment in tourism.

3. THE INTRODUCTION OF COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION

Peter Newmark, an eminent translation theorist from England, significantly contributed to the field of functional translation theory. His seminal works, namely *Approaches to Translation* (1982), *A Textbook of Translation* (1988), and *About Translation* (1991), have profoundly influenced translation studies. Drawing upon Karl Bühler's theory regarding the functions of language, Newmark categorized all texts as expressive or informative or vocative, each with a basic translator's loyalty to the SL writer, or the 'truth', the facts of the matter or the readership respectively. (Newmark, 2001: 55). Furthermore, Newmark's theory delineates two primary translation approaches: semantic translation and communicative translation.

In the realm of tour guide presentations, according to Newmark's text typology, these are best classified as vocative texts. The essence of vocative texts lies in their focus on the readership, necessitating authorial anonymity. The most significant part of it is calling upon the readers to act, to think, to feel and react in the way intended by text. (Newmark, 2001, 41).

Newmark postulated that: "Semantic translation is used for 'expressive' texts, communicative for 'informative' and 'vocative' texts. (Newmark, 2001: 47) Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. (Newmark, 2001:39). This entails maintaining the original text's effect, enhancing readability, and sometimes even improving upon the source text's logic for clarity in the target-text. Newmark articulates: "Communicative translation addresses itself solely to the second reader, who does not anticipate difficulties and obscurities, and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his own culture as well as his language where necessary." (Newmark, 2001:39) Therefore, for translating tour guide presentations, communicative translation emerges as the most effective approach. However, as most texts exhibit a dominant function along with subsidiary ones, it is imperative for translators to identify the primary function and choose the corresponding translation method. Newmark observed that: "Few texts are purely expressive, informative or vocative: most include all three functions, with an emphasis on one of the three. (Newmark, 2001: 42).

In this paper, we ascertain that the principal function of a tour guide presentation is vocative, thereby rendering communicative translation as the most apt approach for translation.

4. CASE ANALYSIS: APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION THEORY IN TOURISM TRANSLATION

Unlike literary translation, tourism English translation primarily serves as accessible reading material for the general populace of foreign tourists. Its primary goal is to ensure that these tourists comprehend, enjoy, and gain insight into the natural, geographical, cultural, and customary aspects of the destination. This necessitates a focus on both the practical utility and distinctiveness of the translated content.

Newmark claimed that: "I assume that in communicative translation one has the right to correct or to improve the logic; to replace clumsy with elegant, or at least functional, syntactic structures; to remove obscurities; to eliminate repetition and tautology; to exclude the less likely interpretations of an ambiguity; to modify and clarify jargon (i.e. reduce loose generic terms to rather more concrete components), and to normalize bizzareries of idiolect, i.e. wayward uses of language. (Newmark, 2001:42). This approach aims to equate the impact of tour commentaries on both domestic and foreign tourists, eliminating any potential complexities or obscurities to ensure simplicity and clarity, in line with the demands of tourism.

In applying communicative translation theory to the tour commentaries of Shaanxi Tang Paradise, this analysis will employ various translation strategies such as augmented translation, condensed translation, and explanatory translation. These methods are chosen to address specific challenges in the original text and to align the translations with the expectations and needs of foreign tourists. Here are some examples:

(In this part, the following abbreviations will be used throughout the analysis to ensure brevity and clarity:

ST (Source Text): Refers to the original text in its native language, which in this case study is Chinese.

OTT (Original Target Text): Denotes the initial translation of the Source Text into English, prior to any

rectifications or adjustments.

RTT (Rectified Target Text): Represents the revised or modified version of the Original Target Text, amended in accordance with the principles of communicative translation theory.)

Example 1:

ST: 女士们，先生们，欢迎来到大唐芙蓉园，我是本次的讲解员XXX，我将带领您一同参观，希望您能享受这段旅程。如果在参观过程中有任何疑问，欢迎随时向我提出。

OTT: Ladies and gentlemen, Welcome to Grand Tang Dynasty Lotus Garden. I'm your interpreter XXX. I will accompany you during your visit to this park, and I wish you enjoy the visit. If you have any question during your tour, please feel free to ask me.

RTT: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Tang Paradise. I'm XXX, your tour guide, and I'll be accompanying you today. I hope you find your visit both enjoyable and enlightening. If you have any question during your tour, please feel free to ask me.

In the realm of tourism translation, the prologue of tour commentaries plays a pivotal role in engaging tourists right from the outset. This segment, rich in vocative effects, sets the tone for the entire experience, making the accuracy and appeal of its translation paramount.

Firstly, the term "Grand Tang Dynasty Lotus Garden" used in the OTT, though descriptive, may cause confusion among foreign tourists. As per the official standard (DT 6101/T 3101—2021) of Shaanxi Province, "大唐芙蓉园" is officially translated as "Tang Paradise". This standardized translation is widely recognized and seen across various tourist platforms. The discrepancy in the OTT could hinder tourists from connecting the spoken name with the actual location. The rectified translation, "Tang Paradise", aligns with the official and familiar nomenclature, ensuring consistency and recognition among tourists.

Secondly, the OTT's use of "interpreter" inaccurately reflects the role, as this term typically signifies someone who translates spoken language, not someone who guides tours. The revised translation to "tour guide" more accurately represents the role within the tourism context and is immediately recognizable to an English-speaking audience.

Lastly, the phrase "I wish you enjoy the visit" in the OTT comes across as formal and lacks the engaging tone desired in tour commentaries. The alternative, "I hope you find your visit both enjoyable and enlightening," is not only more idiomatic in English but also encapsulates a more inviting and engaging sentiment. This translation better achieves the goal of attracting and engaging tourists, crucial for the vocative aspect of the commentary.

Example 2:

ST: 走进大门，迎面看见的是一方巨大的贴金御玺。御玺是古代皇权至高无上的象征，它的作用类似于帝王的签名。在古代，每一道政令在正式颁布之前都会经过皇帝的亲自审查，而只有在皇帝确认无误，并在政令的最后盖上玺印，这道政令才算真正生效。在这方御玺的底部刻有“大唐芙蓉园”五个大字，御玺下方的地面上还“盖”着这五个字的印文。

OTT: Now, in front of you, there is a giant royal seal painted in golden color. In ancient times, Royal Seal is a symbol of the supreme imperial power. It's just like a signature of emperors, because usually emperor's name will be carved at the bottom, and every draft resolution or proposal comes into force only after the emperor check and set the seal on it. On the bottom side, it inscribed five Chinese characters, "DaTang FuRong Yuan", which is the Chinese name of Tang Paradise. These five characters are also sealed on the ground for us to see clearly.

RTT: Stepping through the main entrance, you are greeted by a majestic gilded Imperial Seal. his seal symbolizes the absolute authority of ancient Chinese emperors, serving a similar function to an emperor's signature. Each imperial edict required the emperor's personal scrutiny before it was decreed. Engraved at the base of this seal are "Da Tang Fu Rong Yuan", which are the Chinese characters of "Tang Paradise". As if the very earth beneath your feet becomes the page bearing the historical mark of the Tang Dynasty.

In this example, the term "贴金御玺," laden with cultural significance, poses a translation challenge. It is essential not just to translate the words but to encapsulate the cultural resonance as well. The OTT's phrase "royal seal

painted in golden color” inadequately conveys the original term’s meaning. Instead, “gilded” should be employed to accurately describe the historical technique used to create such an imperial seal.

Furthermore, the OTT’s detailed explanation of the seal’s function is excessive for a tourist commentary, where brevity is key. The RTT refines this by succinctly stating its symbolic importance and its role in validating imperial edicts, thus respecting the tourists’ need for clear and concise information.

The description of the imperial seal’s placement is also critical. The OTT’s wording might confuse tourists about the five characters “大唐芙蓉园” being ‘sealed on the ground’. To clarify this visual aspect (as shown in Figure 1) and enhance the tourists’ experience, the RTT enriches the description. It portrays the ground as a canvas, implying that the park itself is marked with the historical imprint of the Tang Dynasty, echoing the awe-inspiring effect of witnessing the seal in its actual setting.

By these adjustments, the translation is refined to offer foreign tourists an experience parallel to that of local visitors, preserving the vocative effect of the ST and ensuring a richer engagement with the site’s heritage.



Figure 1: The Picture of the Gilded Imperial Seal

Example 3:

ST: 穿过茶文化区，我们来到的是科举文化区。科举考试制度是中国古代的一种选官制度，而在科举考试制度发明之前，中国的选官制度主要是世袭和举荐制。这两种制度的缺点在于容易使得出生于权势之家，却没有真才实学的人被举荐为官，同时容易形成裙带关系现象。而与之相反，科举考试制度却使得普通读书人也有通过科举考试而被选拔做官的机会，不仅扩大了皇帝选官的范围，同时也使得选官制度更为客观和公平，所以在当时科举考试是一种相对先进和公正的选官制度。

OTT: Walking through Tea Culture Area, here we are at the Imperial Examination Culture Area. The imperial examination was a civil service system in ancient China designed to select the best potential candidates to serve as government officials. Before earlier, the way to select and appoint officials in China mostly depended on recommendation. The disadvantage of recommendation is that it is easy to make people who have no talent but born in a wealthy or powerful family to be appointed and it may lead to nepotism. The system of imperial exam made it possible for ordinary scholar to be selected as long as they pass the exam. It expands the scope for the emperor to select officials as well as guarantee the fairness of selection, so it is a relatively advanced and objective system to select officials.

RTT: After passing through the Tea Culture Area, we reach the Imperial Examination Culture Area. This system was China’s way of selecting government officials based on merit rather than birthright, contrasting earlier practices where positions were often inherited or granted through recommendation. It allowed scholars of any background to aspire to officialdom, marking a shift toward a more equitable society. Previously, official ranks could be inherited or assigned through connections, a system that often favored the privileged elite. The Imperial Examination, however, democratized this process, allowing the capable yet common scholar to serve the nation.

In this example, the focus is on enhancing the translation of culturally rich content. Given that visitors may have limited patience for lengthy explanations, especially during a tour, it is crucial to distill the essence of the information into a more digestible form. The translation of the “科举考试制度” in OTT is “The imperial examination was a civil service system in ancient China designed to select the best potential candidates to serve as government officials. Before earlier, the way to select and appoint officials in China mostly depended on recommendation.” and “The system of imperial exam made it possible for ordinary scholar to be selected as long as they pass the exam. It expands the scope for the emperor to select officials as well as guarantee the fairness of selection, so it is a relatively advanced and objective system to select officials.”, which risk overwhelming the foreign tourists, prompting the RTT to streamline the content for clarity and brevity.

Furthermore, the translation must skillfully handle culture-specific terms like “权势之家” (families of influence and power) and “世袭和举荐制” (hereditary and recommendation systems), which carry deep historical connotations. The RTT utilizes an explanatory translation approach, aiming to bridge the cultural gap for foreign tourists. This method ensures that the visitors not only learn about the Imperial Examination system as an innovative merit-based approach to governance in ancient China but also understand the contrast with prior practices that perpetuated inequality.

The RTT’s effectiveness lies in its ability to convey complex cultural concepts succinctly, thereby maintaining tourist engagement without sacrificing the depth of historical insight. It transforms what could be an exhaustive history lesson into an intriguing cultural narrative, making the tour commentaries both accessible and engaging for international visitors.

Example 4:

ST: 这五道石门象征着科举考试的五个步骤，即投牒俱名、干谒荐举、春试三关、荣登龙门和杏园赐宴。

OTT: On our left hand, these five stone gates here show us the five steps of taking an imperial examination, which are registration, visiting the teachers, having three examinations in spring, honorably winning the exam, and feast in the Apricot Garden.

RTT: On our left hand, these five stone gates here show us the five steps of taking an imperial examination. The first gate represents “Registration with Recommendation Letters”, where candidates submit recommendation letters from local authorities, a prerequisite for examination eligibility. Next, the second gate indicates “Seeking Endorsements”, where candidates present their literary works to scholars and officials for recognition. The gate facing you is the third gate, which symbolizes “Three-Level Spring Examinations”, testing candidates on classic texts, literature and poetry, and contemporary issues. Now we are standing in front of the fourth gate, which represents “Success in the Examination”. The gate signifies the success of candidates, marking their names on the prestigious golden list. Last gate represents “Celebration in the Apricot Garden”, where new scholars are honored with a celebratory banquet.

In this example, the RTT takes into account the complex nature of the Imperial Examination process, a cornerstone of ancient Chinese civil service. The challenge lies in translating culturally specific terms, each representing a significant step in this process. The OTT’s translation, while concise, fails to fully capture the depth and cultural nuances of these terms. Consequently, the RTT expands on each step, transforming them from mere words into vivid, educational narratives. This approach serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it demystifies the examination process for foreign tourists, making the experience more engaging and informative. By explaining terms like “投牒俱名” or “干谒荐举” in a detailed manner, the RTT provides tourists with a window into the historical and cultural significance of these practices. Secondly, this detailed explanation ensures that the translation does more than just convey information; it enriches the tourists’ understanding of Chinese culture. While the RTT results in a longer commentary, this length is justified by the need to clarify complex cultural concepts. The goal is not just to translate but to educate and engage, allowing tourists to appreciate the depth of the Imperial Examination system. The RTT successfully navigates the fine line between maintaining the integrity of the source material and adapting it for a foreign audience, ensuring a meaningful cultural exchange.

Example 5:

ST: 唐代长安城的面积是84.1平方公里，可以分为三个部分，分别是皇城、宫城和外廓城。皇城是中央政府机构所在地，宫城是皇帝居住的地方。

OTT: Tang’s Chang’an city occupied 84.1 square kilometers and was divided into three parts: the Royal City, the

Palace City, and the Outer City. The Royal City is a place for the government agency, and the Palace City is where the emperors lived in.

RTT: The ancient city of Chang'an, during the Tang Dynasty, spanned 84.1 square kilometers and comprised three distinct areas: the Imperial City, the Inner Palace, and the Outer City. The Imperial City housed central government institutions, akin to London's Westminster, where British government buildings are situated. The Inner Palace, similar to Buckingham Palace, was the emperor's residence.

In this example, the translation of “唐代长安城” and “皇城、宫城和外廓城” will emphasise clarity and cultural relatability for the foreign tourists. The ST succinctly describes the city's division and its significant areas, but the OTT does not fully capture the historical and cultural context in a way that is accessible to an audience unfamiliar with ancient Chinese urban layouts. The RTT aims to rectify this by not only providing a more accurate translation but also by drawing parallels with familiar concepts from Western monarchic systems. By comparing the Imperial City to London's Westminster and the Inner Palace to Buckingham Palace, the translation bridges cultural gaps. This approach aids in creating a vivid image in the minds of foreign tourists, allowing them to draw upon their knowledge of European history and architecture for a better understanding of the ancient Chang'an City structure and significance.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper focused on applying communicative translation theory to improve the translation of tour commentaries at Tang Paradise. Through case analysis, it was found that this approach significantly enhances the clarity, cultural adaptability, and audience understanding of the commentaries. The research highlights the importance of culturally sensitive translation in tourism, offering valuable insights for tour guides and the industry. The study also underscores the practical application of communicative translation theory in bridging cultural gaps, enriching the experience of foreign tourists. Despite its contributions, the research acknowledges limitations such as the scope of case studies. Future research could expand upon these findings, exploring wider applications in tourism translation. In conclusion, this research demonstrates the vital role of effective translation in enhancing cultural communication and understanding in the tourism sector.

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