Chapter 17

Addressing Translation Issues as Intercultural Communication Barriers in Tourism: Language, Culture, and Communication at Play

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines Chinese-English translation issues that cause intercultural communication misunderstanding in the tourism language. As international tourists are travelling around China, Chinese-English translation services are useful. It plays an important role in facilitating the tourism business operations and meeting the tourist language needs. However, failure to understand cultural differences can result in intercultural communication failure in tourism discourse. The researcher critically analysed the English-Chinese translation issues using tourist information texts collected from a variety of written sources and examining them at cross-lingua-cultural communication level. Translation of tourist information texts from a source language to a target language is more than a linguistic transfer and involves linguistic restructure and cultural imaging re-creation that make sense in a target language and culture. Implications for addressing translation issues as intercultural communication barriers are discussed. Future research direction is also indicated in the conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

People are travelling across language and cultural borders more frequently than ever before to see the old civilisation and rising economies for tourism purpose. China is one of those tourist destinations which attracted international tourists from many countries each year. From Jan to June in 2016, seventeen major source countries such as Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Russia, Philippines, Mongolia, Malaysia, Singapore,
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India, Thailand, Canada, Australia, German, Indonesia, UK, and France, covering five continents (China National Tourism Administration, 2016).

It is important for the Chinese tourism industries to provide reliable and satisfactory English translation services to meet the English translation needs of such a large number of international sojourners travelling in China. This would mean a good business opportunity for such service providers as hotels, restaurants, and shops when their tourist promotion texts (e.g. shop signs, billboards, food menu, and service advice, etc.) in English communicate to international tourists. Furthermore, quality translation service could also help promote Chinese tourism and make it sustainable as satisfied tourists would pass on the complimentary message to their friends and relatives, making their personal satisfactory experiences a testimonial. However, some of tourist information texts (TIT) for promotion purpose may fail to communicate the messages intended due to translators’ misinterpretation of cultural differences between a source language and a target language (Sulaiman, 2014). The examination and understanding of translation issues as intercultural communication barriers in the language of tourism are meaningful and educational (O’Regan, Wilkinson, & Robinson, 2011; Phipps, 2011) as these efforts are conducive to more public heed to cross-linguistic and intercultural differences in the applications of translation studies and to more emphasis on training translators’ socio-cultural-pragmatic competence for pedagogical purpose. Apparently, more research efforts are needed to investigate intercultural written communication incompetence as seen in tourist promotion texts lost in translation.

This chapter aims to study the translation issues as intercultural communication barriers in tourist information texts used in China and address these issues for sustainable tourism development. The researcher first reviewed literature relevant to interlanguage and intercultural communication model, features of tourist information texts, and recipient-oriented translation approach, then proposed two research questions, described methodology, identified interlanguage and intercultural communication competence issues in tourism translation with reference to data collected, and addressed these issues. Finally, the researcher discussed the significance of this project in the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section the researcher first reviewed published outcomes about interlanguage and intercultural differences, then tourist information texts (TIT) for publicity purpose, and a reader-oriented translation approach (Williams, 2013). The purpose is to provide a theoretical underpinning for section 5 where the discussion focuses on translation issues as intercultural communication barriers in the tourism language in China.

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*excluding visitors from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan