English Translation of Tourism Text from a Perspective of Cognitive Construal

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With the booming growth of global tourism, more and more tourist attractions and cultural heritage attract international tourists through different forms. As an important bridge for cultural communication, the translation of tourism texts not only needs to convey information accurately, but also needs to take into account cultural differences and cognitive characteristics. Cognitive construal theory, as an emerging theoretical framework for translation, provides an understanding and explanation of different dimensions in translation practice by focusing on human cognitive processes. This paper investigates the English translation of several tourism texts based on the cognitive construal theory and examines the cognitive mechanisms reflected in the translated texts. The study shows that the four dimensions of the cognitive construal all have an important impact on the English translation of tourism texts; people from different countries or ethnic backgrounds have different cognitive construals, so translators should flexibly adjust their cognitive construals in order to achieve a specific translation purpose. This study helps people to understand translation activities from the perspective of cognitive construal and provides a reference for the practice of translating tourism texts.

Keywords: cognitive construal, tourism text, translation study, cognitive construal transformation

Introduction

The textual materials of tourist attractions—such as brochures, website content, and guide signage—serve not only as tools for conveying basic information but also as vital vehicles for cultural exchange. The translation of tourism texts has been extensively studied by numerous scholars from various perspectives. Chen Wu and Wei Wei (2024) examined the English translation of tourism texts from the perspective of Newmark's communicative translation. Dong Xiaohua (2024) analyzed tourism text translation into English from a teleological perspective, arguing that translation success no longer hinges solely on similarity between the target and source texts, but rather on whether it fulfills specific communicative purposes; Wu Xinlei (2024) examined differences between English and Chinese tourism discourse from three dimensions—form and meaning, directness and indirectness, and subject-object relations—and proposed corresponding Chinese-to-English translation strategies. However, most existing studies focus on the characteristics of tourism texts and their translation principles and strategies,

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with few investigations exploring the underlying cognitive mechanisms of tourism text translation from a cognitive perspective. Cognitive interpretation constitutes a significant research domain within cognitive linguistics. In recent years, the cognitive theory has emerged as a significant direction within translation studies. This study will analyze the English translation of Chinese tourist attraction texts based on cognitive translation theory, dissecting the differing cognitive thought patterns between Chinese and Western cultures and the translator's cognitive translation process, thereby providing a reference for tourism text translation practice.

Cognitive Construal

The term "interpretation" in English is defined in the Longman Contemporary English Dictionary (1987) as: "to place a particular meaning on (a statement, action, etc.); understand or explain in a particular way." Interpretation involves either assigning a specific or unique meaning to a linguistic expression or action, or understanding or explaining it in a particular or distinctive manner.

Langacker introduced the concept of interpretation in 1987 and subsequently refined its dimensions through multiple iterations. The publication of *An Introduction to Cognitive Grammar* in 2008 marked the theory's maturation, with Langacker defining four primary dimensions: elaboration, focus, salience, and perspective (Langacker, 2008). Domestic research on the theory primarily relies on this dimensional classification. These four dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for studying translators' cognitive processes and the origins of linguistic structures, while also offering an explanatory pathway for linguistic expression differences.

Analyzing tourism text translation through the four dimensions of translation semiosis: Focus refers to the area of attention, linguistically manifested in the "figure/ground" cognitive structure. In cognitive linguistics, 'figure' typically denotes a prominent part, while "ground" signifies the surrounding context. Salience refers to the cognitive ability to identify focal points. The salience object is defined by the salience anchor and the salience boundary: the salience anchor is the most prominent object, while the salience boundary denotes secondary prominence. For Chinese tourism texts, the asymmetry in linguistic structure between the original and translated versions constitutes a salience issue. Translators must consciously shift their interpretive perspective to maximize fidelity to the original meaning. Consequently, translators require flexible adaptation of interpretive mechanisms during the translation process.

Analysis of English Translation of Tourism Text from a Perspective of Cognitive Construal

Wen Xu and Xiao Kairong (2019) argue that different modes of cognition generate distinct meanings, and these meanings determine varying linguistic expressions. Even similar or identical meanings may be represented by different syntactic constructions due to differing cognitive frameworks. Hou Xuechang and Lu Weizhong (2019) point out that translators must holistically grasp and appropriately adapt or preserve the semantic connotations, embedded cultural contexts, and cognitive approaches of the original text's expression. The following analysis examines the English translation of texts describing Chinese tourist attractions through four cognitive interpretation dimensions: level of detail, focalization, salience, and perspective.

Specificity

Langacker defines degree of detail as "the level of specificity in describing an object or situation" (Langacker, 1987). Level of detail can manifest across all linguistic levels. Significant differences exist

between source and target languages, making it challenging to achieve equivalent levels of detail in both languages. This is particularly true when translating between languages from different linguistic families, necessitating a conversion of detail levels—either expanding concise expressions or condensing detailed ones (Wen & Xiao, 2019).

Example (1)

(ST): 在广西桂林的象鼻山脚下，有一个水月洞，江水从洞中流过。若乘船徐徐驶入洞中，可以看到"水中有明月，水面现月影，水流月不走，月走水不流。"的美丽景象。

(TT): The Water-Moon Cave, nestled within the Elephant Trunk Hill in Guangxi, is a place where water flows gently through. As you sail into the cave by boat, you can enjoy the silent moon in the running water.

Example (1) concludes with a poetic quotation to evoke a vivid atmosphere. We Chinese excel at using verses to depict scenes. Those familiar with the lines instantly grasp the beauty of such landscapes. However, foreign tourists often struggle to grasp its meaning, finding such expressions exceedingly abstract. In translating this sentence, the translator employs a strategy of simplifying the detailed to convey the essence, skillfully transforming the beautiful, ethereal atmosphere into an objective, concrete image—"silent moon in the running water." This approach aligns with the target audience's cognitive habits, helping them quickly grasp the charm of this scenic spot.

Focusing

Wen Xu and Xiao Kairong (2019) argue that focusing involves two aspects: first, selecting which conceptual content to express linguistically; second, highlighting specific areas when describing this conceptual content. The relationship between these two can be understood as foreground and background. The focus is the area receiving attention, which in language is prominently reflected in the "figure/ground" cognitive structure. Langek argues that figure/ground is an effective fundamental feature of cognitive operations. When observing a scene, certain parts of the visual field attract attention more readily than others; these parts are termed the figure, while the less conspicuous parts constitute the ground. Typically, the agent of action within a scene serves as the focus. However, Langer also notes that areas in stark contrast to their surroundings, or moving objects, are often perceived as the figure. The relationship between figure and ground is not fixed but determined by the observer's choice. Different individuals possess distinct cognitive mechanisms, leading to varying interpretations of figure and ground within the same scene.

Tourism texts are highly purposeful, primarily aiming to attract visitors and showcase the charm of traditional Chinese culture. During translation, adjusting the relationship between graphics and background text is often necessary to help tourists quickly grasp key features and essential information. Consequently, when translating tourism texts into English, translators select different elements to emphasize based on tourists' comprehension needs, resulting in varied expressions.

Example (2)

(ST): 壮族民歌节带着动人的旋律和悠扬的歌声悄然而至，唤醒了沉睡已久的山水。

(TT): The peaceful hills and waters awaken with the melody of music during the arrival of Zhuang Folk Song Festival.

From the original text, the agent is the "Zhuang Folk Song Festival," as it "awakens" the "long-slumbering mountains and waters." This element should remain the focal point. However, in the translation, the agent becomes "the peaceful hills and waters," shifting the focus to the landscape. Simultaneously, 'during' functions as a temporal adverbial phrase modifying "Zhuang Folk Song Festival," relegating it to the background. Foreign tourists are unfamiliar with our ethnic group and even less so with its customs. The "Zhuang Folk Song Festival" is an unfamiliar concept to them, and no further explanation is provided here. Therefore, using "the Zhuang Folk Song Festival" as the subject hinders their understanding. The translation shifts the focus to "the peaceful hills and waters," vividly presenting this otherwise mundane landscape concept to the reader. This evokes the tourist's curiosity, further enticing them to explore and learn about the "Zhuang Folk Song Festival".

Prominence

When expressing the same object linguistically, language structures exhibit various asymmetries. This structural asymmetry essentially constitutes the issue of prominence. Prominence primarily encompasses two dimensions: lateral prominence and ground. Wang Yin posits that the ground of a word refers to its overall scope within a specific cognitive domain, serving as the fundamental basis for understanding and forming the word's meaning. Corresponding to the ground is salience, which represents the most prominent, emphasized segment within the ground. This segment typically commands greater prominence and attention within the context (Wang, 2011). Thus, much like cognitive processes, translators cannot account for every aspect of the whole during translation. When highlighting or emphasizing one part, suppression of other parts inevitably occurs.

Example (3)

(ST): 在四川西部，隐藏着一个美丽的地方。它依山而建，背靠岷山，四季绿树成荫，花香怡人，鸟鸣悠扬，流水轻缓。这便是松潘县的黄龙。

(TT): Huanglong, located in Songpan County, is one of Sichuan's most beautiful destinations. Backed by the Minshan Mountain, it boasts lush trees in all seasons, fragrant flowers, flowing streams, and singing birds, blending both historical significance and natural charm.

From the original text, we can observe a common indirect and tactful expression in Chinese. Due to the Chinese tendency toward subtlety and indirect thinking, the introduction to "Huanglong in Songpan County" builds up to the destination without directly naming it. The original text first establishes the broad context of western Sichuan, then describes the surrounding landscape: the "Min Mountains" looming behind it, and how beautiful and pleasant the scenery of these "Min Mountains" is. Only then is the mystery revealed—this place is actually "Huanglong in Songpan County." The original expression directly points to Huanglong in Sichuan, while the translation indirectly introduces the subject by first describing the surrounding scenery. This difference reflects divergent cognitive patterns between Chinese and Western cultures. Therefore, the translation's upfront mention of "Huanglong" better aligns with English-speaking readers' cognitive habits and reading expectations, while simultaneously highlighting Huanglong as a prime destination.

Perspective

Perspective refers to the temporal and spatial positions, angles, stances, and attitudes people adopt when observing and understanding things. Translators, as key participants in the translation process, should interpret

the source text based on the reader's or author's perspective. This approach reflects the translator's subjective agency in translation, as they not only convey information but also influence the understanding and presentation of the source text to some extent.

Example (4)

(ST): 进入此山，只见群山起伏，古树参天；山路蜿蜒，云雾与桥相连；深谷幽涧，天光透出一线。

(TT): When entering the mountain, you can see that peaks rise one after another, old trees reach into the sky, paths wind along mountain ridges, and streams run deep and serene.

English is a syntactic language, while Chinese is a semantic language. Chinese tourism texts prioritize evoking mood and atmosphere, often employing subjectless sentences. In the translation, the translator, considering the cognitive perspective and interpretive habits of Western readers, added the subject "you" to the original text. This not only enhances the target audience's sense of familiarity and identification with the translation but also immerses foreign tourists in the scene, eliciting emotional and psychological resonance.

Conclusion

This study examines the English translation of tourism site texts through four dimensions—detail-level, focalization, salience, and perspective—under the lens of cognitive interpretation. Findings reveal that tourism translations exhibit distinct cultural specificity. Consequently, the translation process must prioritize consideration of differing cognitive mechanisms across cultures, particularly ensuring that target-language texts align with foreign tourists' cognitive habits and psychological expectations. Thus, translating tourism texts involves not merely linguistic conversion but a reconstruction of cognition and culture. Therefore, adjustments or transformations to the source text's cognitive interpretation can be made across dimensions such as detail level, focalization, salience, and perspective. This ensures the accurate transmission and effective dissemination of tourism site texts, conveying meaning vividly to attract visitors to experience beautiful natural landscapes and promote the growth of the tourism industry.

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