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A Survey of Readers' Responses toward Mistakes in Chinese-English Tourism Translation and Its Implications

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Abstract

In this paper, the authors investigated and found that there were many mistakes in the current translated English tourism materials in China. Analysis of foreign tourists' responses toward different types of mistakes discovered in those materials, with the aim of offering tentative suggestions on how to improve the quality of tourism translation was conducted. To achieve this, the authors conducted a survey by interviewing 34 foreign tourists in Chongqing, China about their responses and attitude toward the mistakes in 21 translated English tickets and tourist maps (i.e. whether they think those mistakes are acceptable, misunderstanding or incomprehensible). Such errors include spelling mistakes, missing words, grammar mistakes, Chinglish, inappropriate words, expression mistakes, excessive wordiness, cultural misinterpretation etc. The results indicate that spelling mistakes, missing words, grammar mistakes, Chinglish and cultural misinterpretation are considered to be more serious as most interviewees (above 60%) feel they result in varying degrees of misunderstanding, or even lack of comprehension. As for the other two mistakes (inappropriate words and excessive wordiness), the interviewees hold a higher degrees of acceptance (20% and 50% respectively). Therefore, this paper proposes that translators in the field of tourism translation must persevere in improving their competence in terms of language levels and translation skills, while the government and local authorities should employ professional tourism translators with reasonable and satisfactory remuneration, and professional native English speakers are also needed to help proofread the translated texts. To conclude, this paper may serve as a reference for practitioners and researchers in the field of tourism to avoid translation mistakes and improve the quality of translation.

Keywords: mistakes, readers' response, tentative suggestions, tourism translation in China

Introduction

With the development of economic globalization and intercultural communication, China is attracting increasing number of travelers abroad. According to an official report released by the Chinese Tourism Research Institute in January 2016, in the year of 2015 alone, about 133 million international tourists visited China. Meanwhile, since 1980s when Chinese government first made clear that tourism was an important part of the tertiary (service) industry, a number of preferential government policies have been worked out to support tourism development at both central and local levels. Therefore, in order to facilitate foreign visitors' travelling in China, both authorities and practitioners in the field of tourism industry take tourism translation, especially translation of Chinese tourism materials into English, as their top concern. However, some Chinese researchers (Chen, 2012, p.45; Zhu & Pu, 2015, p.83) have pointed out that there are still many translation mistakes in the translated English tourism materials in China, such as, wrong spellings, grammar mistakes, inappropriate expressions, Chinglish, and incomprehensible expressions etc.

From the theoretical perspective, translation is a complicated cognitive activity, in which translators transfer information from one culture to another with languages as media. Readers' response, in this activity, becomes one crucial factor as has been discussed by scholars and researchers both in China and other countries. Yan Fu, a great Chinese translator, put forward three translation norms: faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance in 1898. By elegance, he meant attracting readers' attention, namely his intended readers -- scholar-officials at his time, and thus it's more likely for his translated works to be accepted by his intended readers (Xu, Liu & Zhang, 2013, p.123) . Nida (1993, p.118) also states a minimal, realistic definition of functional equivalence as "the readers of a translated text should be able to comprehend it to the point that they can conceive of how the original readers of the text must have understood and appreciated it." Akin (2016, p.67-77) in the article "The Paradoxical Relationship Between Schleiermacher's Approach and the functional Translation Theory", analyzes the paradoxical relation of the two translation approaches with regard to the reader , and concludes "the target culture readers are main actors in both approaches which play an important role in the construction of the translation". Moreover, Hanan (2003, p.197-239) in the article "The Bible as Chinese Literature: Medhurst, Wang Tao, and the Delegates' Version" mentions the fierce controversies among the missionaries about methods of translating the Bible into Chinese in the nineteenth century, particularly about absolute fidelity to the Hebrew and Greek texts versus the need to make the translation acceptable to Chinese readers. Likewise, the purpose of tourism translation is to transfer information about different scenic spots to foreign travelers, and readers of the translated tourism materials, specifically foreign travelers aim at obtaining useful information about the scenic spots they are visiting or plan to. That is to say, readers' response is one decisive factor to check whether or not the translated tourism materials succeed in transferring the intended information.

Hence, the authors conducted a survey by asking some foreign travelers about their responses toward different types of mistakes in the present translated English tourism materials (mainly the English introductions on tickets and tourist maps of some scenic spots) and in turn analyzed the results and proposed some tentative suggestions on how to improve the quality of tourism translation in China.

A Survey of Foreign Travelers' Responses toward Tourism Translation in China

Research Purpose

The research purpose is to find out the interviewees' responses toward different mistakes in the translated English tourism materials, and their general opinions on tourism translation in China.

Research Subjects

Thirty four foreign students and teachers from universities and colleges in Chongqing, China participated in the survey, among whom, 19 interviewees are from the English-speaking countries such as the U.S.A., Australia, Canada etc, the others come from other countries including Germany, France, Switzerland, Japan, South Korea, Iraq, Mexico, Mali and so on. They are engineers, teachers, students, or office workers and all of them have received Bachelor's degree or beyond.

Questionnaire Design

Questions1-4 are multiple choices. The first one is about the necessity of providing translated English introductions on tickets and tourist maps. The second question asks the interviewees' responses toward 8 categories of mistakes in 21 tickets and tourist maps of some popular scenic spots in Sichuan, Chongqing and Shenzhen, namely, whether they think those mistakes are acceptable, misunderstanding or incomprehensible. The mistakes include spelling mistakes, missing words, grammar mistakes, inappropriate words, expression mistakes, wordy, Chinglish and cultural misinterpretation. The third question and fourth question respectively analyze the interviewees' favorable translating method of place names, and preferred type of English tourism introductions. The last question is an open one, aimed at analyzing interviewees' specific opinions on the present translated English introductions of scenic spots in China.

Data Analysis

Through a thorough analysis of the 21 English tickets and tourist maps, the authors discovered that the translation quality of those materials is far from satisfactory. At leas 104 mistakes were found, with some obvious mistakes such as spelling errors appearing on tickets. See below the detailed information of different types of mistakes.

Table 1 *Different Types of Mistakes and Their Percentages*

Regions / Types of mistakes	Sichuan	Chongqing	Shenzhen	Total	
	Number of mistakes	Number of mistakes	Number of mistakes	Number of mistakes	Percentage %

Spelling mistakes	19	21	7	47	45.2
Missing words	2	5	3	10	9.6
Grammar mistakes	6	10	1	17	16.3
Chinglish	2	1	0	3	2.9
Inappropriate words	7	3	2	12	11.5
Expression mistakes	5	3	0	8	7.7
Wordy	5	0	0	5	4.8
Cultural misinterpretation	2	0	0	2	1.9
Total	48	43	13	104	100

Question 1: The necessity of providing translated English tourism materials.

Thirty interviewees agreed that it's quite necessary, but few non-English-speakers expressed the necessity of proving Japanese, French or German introductions of scenic spots as well.

Question 2: Interviewees' responses toward different mistakes

Table 2 *Foreign Travelers' Responses toward Different Types of Mistakes*

Responses / Types of mistakes	A (acceptable)		B (misunderstanding)		C (incomprehensible)		D (others)	
	Number of travelers	Percentage %	Number of travelers	Percentage %	Number of travelers	Percentage %	Number of travelers	Percentage %
Spelling mistakes	1	2.9	24	70.6	5	14.7	4	11.8
Missing words	5	14.7	21	61.8	4	11.8	4	11.8
Grammar mistakes	5	14.7	21	61.8	7	20.6	1	2.9
Chinglish	6	17.6	15	44.1	9	26.5	4	11.8
Inappropriate words	9	26.5	17	50	5	14.7	3	8.8
Expression mistakes	7	20.6	19	55.9	6	17.6	2	5.9
Wordy	17	50	12	35.3	4	11.8	1	2.9

Cultural mis- interpretation	3	8.8	9	26.5	21	61.8	1	2.9
Total	53	19.5	138	50.7	61	22.4	20	7.4

Generally speaking, 50.7% of the interviewees viewed those mistakes as misunderstanding, 22.4% as incomprehensible, while only 19.5% thought them acceptable, which demonstrates that rather a large quantity of mistakes exist in the translated tourism materials and majority of the readers, i.e. foreign travelers do not accept them, hence it will surely result in communication problem, which in turn shows the urgent need of improving the quality of tourism translation. Besides, 7.4% of the interviewees mentioned that some mistakes should have been avoided as long as the translators were a little bit more careful. The detailed analysis of different mistakes is as follows.

(1) Spelling mistakes and missing words:

As included in Table 1 and Table 2, the two mistakes amount to 54.8% of the total mistakes with 60% of the interviewees considering them misunderstanding, and even 12% incomprehensible, which reveals that these two types of mistakes are quite serious. However this serious problem has nothing to do with translators' incompetence in translating, but with their working attitude. Translators and editors need to be extremely careful, particularly in the process of printing and proofreading. See the following examples:

Example 1: 蜀中胜景窦团山欢迎您。

Original version：Welcome to the Famous *Senic Sport* of Bashu Doutuan Mountain.

Revised version: Welcome to the Famous *Scenic Spot* of Bashu Doutuan Mountain.

Example 2: 乐山大佛位于四川乐山市城东，大渡河、岷江、青衣江三江合流处。

Original version: The world No.1 Great Buddha is situated east of Leshan City, Sichuan Province, at the meeting place of three *rimers*, Mingjiang, Dadu and Qingyi.

Revised version: The world No.1 Great Buddha is situated east of Leshan City, Sichuan Province, at the confluence of three *rivers*, Mingjiang, Dadu and Qingyi.

Example 3: 寺内"大雄宝殿"为明代宣德七年建筑。

Original version: The oldest part of this temple named "Da Xiong Bao Dian" was built 八 the Ming Dynasty.

Revised version: The oldest part of this temple named "Da Xiong Bao Dian" was built *in* the Ming Dynasty.

Example 4: 三峡、小三峡环抱巫山县城，在三峡工程蓄水后，风景必将更加秀丽迷人。

Original version: The scenic sights of the Three Gorges and the Minor Three Gorges around Wushan County will 八 more beautiful after storing water through the Three Gorges Project.
Revised version: The scenic sights of the Three Gorges and the Minor Three Gorges around Wushan County will *become* more beautiful after storing water through the Three Gorges Project.

(2) Grammar mistakes:

This type of mistakes ranks the second among all the types, 16.3% of the total. 61.8% of the interviewees viewed them as misunderstanding, and 20.6% as incomprehensible.

Example 5: 特别是大型动物广场艺术《百兽盛会》，场面浩大，百兽齐欢。

Original version: Especially, the fantastic animal show – the animal parade *which you in* will see the majestic-looking King of Animals.
Revised version: Especially, the fantastic animal show – the animal parade *in which you* will see the majestic-looking King of Animals.

Example 6: 天井峡的地裂长达37公里，为世界之最。

Original version: The earth fissure in the Tianjing Gorge is 37 kilometers in length, *where* is the longest fissure in the world.
Revised version: The earth fissure in the Tianjing Gorge is 37 kilometers in length, *which* is the longest fissure in the world.

Example 7: 最高峰太子城海拔4182米。全区为典型的高山峡谷流水地貌。

Original version: The Town of Prince, the highest peak in the area, is 4182 meters. The Town of Prince, the highest peak in the area, *is face here is* typical of high mountains and deep valleys.
Revised version: The Town of Prince, the highest peak in the area, is at an altitude of 4182meters. *This area's landform is* typical of high mountains and deep valleys.
In examples 5 and 6, the translators make mistakes on attributive clauses. In example 7, the translator even makes several mistakes, including repetition of words and expressions, wrong expressions and confusing meaning, particularly a grammar mistake – two predicates "is" in one single sentence. These examples reveal some translators' doubtful competence in the field of tourism translation.

(3) Chinglish:

As for this type of mistakes, lots of interviewees, 70.6% of the total, thought them misunderstanding or even incomprehensible.

Example 8: 欢迎您光临蜀南竹海。

Original version: *Welcome you to tour* Bamboo Sea in South Sichuan.
Revised version: *Welcome to* Bamboo Sea in South Sichuan.

Example 9: ……位于重庆渝北区张关乡，横贯319国道沿途风景区。

Original version: … located at Zhangguan county of Yubei district in Chongqing which is crossing the scenic spot of 319 *Guodao*.
Revised version: … located at Zhangguan county of Yubei district in Chongqing, which is crossing the scenic spot of 319 *Guodao (the State Highway)*.

Example 10: 望江台

Original version: the *River-gazing* Platform
Revised version: Wang Jiang Tai (the *River-side* Platform)

In the above examples, the translators render the source texts literally, seriously affected by Chinese expressions, thus producing some Chinglish versions, which totally bewilder the foreign travelers, with example 9 in particular – only providing Chinese pinyin without any English explanation. Although just a few Chinglish mistakes were spotted in the survey, Chinglish, as a matter of fact, is always a problematic issue that Chinese translators endeavor to solve.

(4) Inappropriate words:

Such mistakes occupy about 20% of the total and about 50% of the interviewees considered them misunderstanding, but about 23% could accept such mistakes, quite a high degree of acceptance.

Example 11: 地下游览惊险刺激。

Original version: The underground voyage is full of *danger* and risk.
Revised version: The underground voyage is full of *adventure* and risk.

Example 12: 度假区是一处融风光游览、娱乐、餐饮、宾馆、商贸为一体的高品位休闲胜地。

Original version: The park is a tourist resort *offering services by tourist sights and scenes, entertainments, restaurants, hotels and business and trade*.
Revised version: The park is a tourist resort *with sights and scenes, entertainment facilities, restaurants, hotels, business and trade centers*.

Example 13: 身高1.1米以下的儿童免费。

Original version: Children under 1.1 m *high* are free of charge.
Revised version: Children under 1.1m are free of charge.

Example 14: （该地区）是成都近郊不可多得的休闲、度假、避暑、登山的好去处。

Original version: Hence the area is a nice place for pleasure searchers, holiday-makers, mountain-climbers and those who want to *be away from the summer heat*.
Revised version: Hence the area is a nice place *for tourists to relax, spend holidays, climb mountains and enjoy a cool summer.*

Example 15: ……令人神往， 令人留连。

Original version: You will be enchanted by all these *as to forget about home*.
Revised version: You will be *too enchanted to leave*.

In most cases, the interviewees can predict the basic information with the help of context clues even if inappropriate words are adopted, as demonstrated in Example 13. However, "danger" in example 11 might mislead and terrify foreign tourists.

(5) Wordy:

The interviewees tended to understand this type of mistakes with highest acceptance degree (50%), but the English introductions of scenic spots may become tedious with such mistakes.

Example 16: 果皮、纸屑、酒瓶、罐头盒等废弃物，请扔进垃圾箱。

Original version: *Waste materials and rubbishes such as rinds, scraps of paper, lasses and tin cans must be thrown into garbage cans.*
Revised version: *Don't litter.*

Example 17: 不得伤及动物，违者必究。

Original version: Any actions to bring harm to the animals *such as beating, hitting or hunting are strictly prohibited*.
Revised version: Any actions to bring harm to the animals *are prohibited*.

As for the direct cause of wordy, possibly it's because that translators are strictly confined to the source text and adopt word-for-word translation method. Example 16 is a typical literal translation, and the interviewees pointed out that such rendering was unnecessarily wordy. Just as Fan (1994, p.7-10) addresses, translation includes two important principles – one is to successfully convey information and another to take readers' acceptance into consideration, which also applies to tourism translation. Since foreign travelers read English tourism introductions for the purpose of obtaining useful information about scenic spots, translators need to convey the main information of source texts with clear and concise English texts. For instance, in Chinese introductions, considerable idioms, such as "重峦叠嶂", "广袤无垠", "分外妖娆", are adopted to describe and emphasize the beauty of sceneries, and according to the two translation principles, translators just need to convey their main ideas, or even omit them, instead of translating them literally.

(6) Cultural misinterpretation:

Example 18: 阴阳界

Original version: *The boundary between dark and bright*
Revised version: *The boundary between the living and the dead*

Example 20: 遵守游览秩序，坚持五讲四美。

Original version: Observe the tourist order and insist on the *"Five Particulars" and "Four Beauties"*.

Revised version: Observe the tourist order and insist on the *"Five Stresses" – stresses on decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morals, and "Four Beauties"—beauties of the mind, the language, the behavior, and the environment.*

Almost 61.8% of the interviewees could not accept or understand this type of mistakes. As such expressions concern with special Chinese cultural implications, it is almost impossible for foreign readers to understand the literal translated versions. Therefore, a direct translation with explanation might be understandable and acceptable, as both cultural features and implications are conveyed.

To summarize, among the above mistakes, spelling mistakes, missing words, grammar mistakes, Chinglish and cultural misinterpretation are quite serious as most interviewees (above 60%) consider them misunderstanding, or even incomprehensible. While 23% of the interviewees can accept the mistakes of inappropriate words as they can guess the actual meanings in the context, and 50% tend to understand the wordy mistakes.

Question 3: Translation of scenic spots' names

As regards translating methods of place names, 76.5% of the interviewees preferred transliteration plus explanation, rather than free translation or transliteration.

Question 4: General opinions about the translated English introductions of Chinese scenic spots.

Over 90% of the interviewees thought the English introductions on tickets and tourist maps should be clear and concise, instead of being lengthy and tedious as the present ones. Some suggested that the tourism authorities offer clear and concise English introductions on tickets and maps, at the same time, provide handbooks with detailed introductions of the scenic spots as alternatives. In general, the interviewees praised the progress of the translation quality of present tourism materials, but also pointed out that further improvement was still needed as some English introductions were confusing to them and in some scenic spots English introductions were even not available.

Tentative Suggestions on How to Improve the Quality of Tourism Translation in China

Based on the above survey and suggestions of the interviewees, the authors proposed some tentative suggestions on how to improve the quality of tourism translation in China.

Firstly, since a great number of foreigners travel in China each year, the government and local tourism authorities need to continue their efforts to offer translated tourism materials with excellent qualities by employing qualified translators. Particularly, in those scenic spots without English introductions, such endeavor is of vital importance.

Secondly, translators in the field of tourism translation must persist in improving their competence in terms of language levels and translation skills through relevant training, and communicating with practitioners, researchers, and experts in the field of translation both at home and abroad.

Thirdly, in order to avoid such mistakes as Chinglish and cultural misinterpretation, translators or experts from English-speaking countries should be employed to help translate and proofread tourism materials.

Fourthly, it seems that some local tourism authorities just offer temporary translators unsatisfactory remuneration, which might be the reason why such mistakes as spelling mistakes and missing words appear in the translated English materials. In another word, professional tourism translators, rather than temporary translators should be employed with reasonable and satisfactory remuneration, thus in turn, encouraging them to work responsibly and producing excellent translated tourism materials.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although the number of interviewees in the survey is limited, the results reveal that the present tourism translation in China still needs much improvement as many mistakes were discovered. Spelling mistakes and missing words are mostly because translators and editors lack sense of responsibility. Grammar mistakes and inappropriate words are caused by translators' incompetence in English language. Chinglish, wordy and cultural misinterpretation result from translators' lack of proper translation theories. All those mistakes may result in misunderstanding among foreign travelers to some extent, and of course hinder the development of tourism industry in China and cultural exchange with foreign countries. Therefore, effective measures need to be taken both by the government, local authorities, and tourism practitioners to improve tourism translation. Meanwhile, the detailed analysis of the results also indicates that translators in the field of tourism translation should adopt flexible translation methods to convey clear and concise original information according to target readers' responses.

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Appendix Questionnaire on Tourism Translation

Aims: *By discovering the problems in the English introduction of Chinese scenic spots on the tickets and tourist maps, try to standardize the translations, promote the development of tourism industry and improve the cultural exchange between China and foreign countries.*
Interviewees: *the foreigners in universities of Chongqing*

Please answer all the questions below:

Gender _____ **Nationality _____**
Education _____ **Occupation _____**

( ) 1. Do you think it is necessary to have English introductions of scenic spots on the tickets and tourist maps?
A. Yes B. No C. It doesn't matter. D. Others_____

2. How do you feel about the following errors on the tickets and tourist maps?
( ) **Error 1**: (spelling mistakes)
Welcome to the Famous Senic Sport of Bashu Douchuan Mountain.
Sichuan Province, at the meeting place of three rimers, Mingjiang, Dadu and qingyi.
A. Acceptable B. Misunderstanding C. Incomprehensible D. Others_____

( ) **Error 2**: (missing words)
The oldest part of this temple was built ∧the Ming Dynasty.
The scenic sights of the Three Gorges and the Minor Three Gorges around Wushan County will ∧more beautiful after storing water through the Three Gorges Project.
A. Acceptable B. Misunderstanding C. Incomprehensible D. Others_____

( ) **Error 3**: (grammar mistakes)

Especially, the fantastic animal show--the animal parade which you in will see the majestic-looking of animals.

The Town of Prince, the highest peak in the area, is face here is typical of high mountains and deep valleys.

The earth fissure in the Tianjing Gorge is 37 kilometers in length, where is the longest fissure in the world.

A. Acceptable B. Misunderstanding C. Incomprehensible D. Others_____

( ) **Error 4**: (Chinglish)

Welcome you to tour Bamboo Sea in South Sichuan.

Located at Zhangguan country of Yubei district in Chongqing which is crossing the scenic spot of 319 Guodao. (Interviewer: "Guodao" is the transliteration of "the State Highway")

A. Acceptable B. Misunderstanding C. Incomprehensible D. Others_____

( ) **Error 5**: (inappropriate words)

The underground voyage full of danger and risk.

The park is a tourist resort offering services by tourist sights and scenes.

Children under 1.1m high are free of charge.

The Buddha's hair is made into 1,000 curls, which, with the wrinkles of its dress are a wonderful drainage.

A. Acceptable B. Misunderstanding C. Incomprehensible D. Others_____

( ) **Error 6**: (expression mistakes)

You will be chanted by all these as to forget about home.

Hence the area is a nice place for pleasure searchers, holiday-makers, mountain-climbers and those who want to be away from the summer heat.

A. Acceptable B. Misunderstanding C. Incomprehensible D. Others_____

( ) **Error 7**: (wordy)

Waste materials and rubbishes such as rinds, scraps of paper, lasses and tin cans must be thrown into garbage cans.

Any actions to bring harm to them such as beating, hitting or hunting are strictly prohibited.

A. Acceptable B. Misunderstanding C. Incomprehensible D. Others_____

( ) **Error 8**: (cultural misinterpretation)

The boundary between dark and bright

Observe the tourist order and insist on the " Five Particulars" and " Four Beauties".

A. Acceptable B. Misunderstanding C. Incomprehensible D. Others_____

( ) 3.Which one do you prefer in the following English names of one scenic spot?

A. Shi Bao Zhai

B. The Stone Treasure Block

C. Shi Bao Zhai (the Stone Treasure Block)

D. Others_____

( ) 4. Which kind of English introductions of scenic spots on the tickets and tourist maps do you prefer?

A. Long and in details
B. Brief and concise
C. Others_____

5. What do you think of the present English introductions of Chinese scenic spots on the tickets and tourist maps ?