

A study on tourism English translation teaching in colleges and universities from the perspective of intercultural communication

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of the "China Travel" craze and the deep integration of culture and tourism, inbound tourism has become a frontline for national image building and cultural international dissemination. This study, based on intercultural communication theory, explores innovative paths for tourism English translation teaching in higher education institutions. The article first analyzes the core cultural cognitive differences that lead to thinking obstacles in tourism translation practice. Then, based on the theories of "functional equivalence" and "cultural adaptation" [1], it proposes a translation approach centered on the audience and integrating multimodal means. Finally, by combining current teaching practice cases in higher education institutions, it constructs a teaching strategy system oriented towards "deep integration of industry and education" and "co-growth of intercultural competence", aiming to provide a reference for cultivating compound cultural and tourism translation talents with language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and narrative skills, and effectively serving the macro-strategy of telling China's stories well.

Keywords: intercultural communication, tourism English translation, teaching strategies, China travel, cultural dissemination

1. Introduction

The acceleration of globalization and the popularization of digital technology have transformed cross-cultural communication from a specialized skill into a fundamental quality for modern citizens. Against this backdrop, the tourism industry, as an important carrier of "people-to-people diplomacy", its language services—especially tourism English translation—directly affect the effectiveness of cultural dissemination and the construction of national image [2]. In recent years, with the continuous optimization of China's visa policies and the rising popularity of "China Travel" on international social media, the inbound tourism market has shown great potential. China's natural landscapes, historical sites, intangible cultural heritage, and modern social features all provide rich materials for telling China's stories. However, converting static resources into dynamic narratives that can be effectively understood, accepted, and empathized with by international tourists requires a translation team that is proficient in both languages and well-versed in the laws of cross-cultural communication [3].

As the main base for talent cultivation, higher education institutions are facing an urgent challenge of transforming from the traditional "language conversion" model to the "cultural dissemination" paradigm in tourism English translation teaching. Current teaching often focuses on grammatical accuracy and lexical equivalence, but pays insufficient attention to deep cultural cognitive differences, audience psychology, and multimodal narrative strategies [4], resulting in the phenomenon of "untranslated translation" or "cultural discount" among graduates in their actual work [5]. Therefore, this study aims to systematically analyze the core obstacles in tourism translation practice from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, reconstruct the principles and ideas of translation teaching, and explore feasible strategies for teaching reform in higher education institutions, in order to provide theoretical references and

practical paths for cultivating high-quality professional talents that meet the needs of international communication in the new era.

2. Factors of thinking obstacles in cross-cultural communication

The thinking obstacles in tourism translation are rooted in the different "cultural cognitive schemas" of the translator and the audience. This schema difference creates "fault lines" in communication at multiple levels, including language surface, text rhetoric, and value concepts.

Firstly, at the language and concept level, the "lexical gap" caused by cultural-specific terms is the most direct obstacle. Words such as "Dragon Boat Festival", "Qi Yun Sheng Dong", and "Si He Yuan" that contain unique historical, philosophical, or material culture lack completely corresponding concepts in English. Simple transliteration or literal translation often leads to information loss. A deeper obstacle lies in the narrative differences between high-context and low-context cultures. Chinese tourism texts are deeply influenced by classical literature and are good at using four-character idioms, neat antithesis, and poetic language (such as "Yan Bo Hao Miao", "Feng Luan Die Cui") to create an artistic atmosphere, whose meaning highly depends on a common cultural background and collective imagination. In contrast, English tourism texts tend to be low-context and information-oriented, emphasizing clear presentation of facts and data. If "The scenery here is like a picture, making people forget to leave" is directly translated as "The scenery here is like a picture, making people forget to leave", it may seem abstract and exaggerated to English readers and fail to effectively convey its beauty [6].

Secondly, the differences in value concepts and thinking patterns are more hidden obstacles. Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism, harmony between man and nature, and historical inheritance. In the introduction of scenic spots, it often highlights their historical origins, anecdotes of famous people, and collective aesthetic value (such as "It has been beloved by scholars and poets since ancient times"). Western culture, on the other hand, focuses more on personal experience, practicality, and critical exploration. For example, when translating historical evaluations or folk legends, Chinese narratives may imply a specific ethical orientation, while Western audiences may expect more diverse perspectives or empirical support. When teachers and students from Anhui University of Science and Technology were assisting rural areas in southern Anhui with cultural and tourism promotion, they found that the general expressions like "deep cultural heritage" frequently used in local promotional materials were vague to foreign tourists and far less attractive than specific historical stories or unique local customs.

These obstacles indicate that tourism English translation is not merely a simple code-switching process but a complex activity of cross-cultural cognitive coordination and meaning reconstruction. College teaching must first guide students to keenly identify and deeply understand these deep cultural differences.

3. Tourism English translation approaches in the context of cross-cultural communication

To overcome the above obstacles, tourism English translation should aim at achieving "cultural functional equivalence" and "convergence of tourist experience", following these approaches.

3.1. Audience-centered principle reconstruction: from "author-centered" to "reader-centered"

The starting point of translation decisions should shift from the "fidelity" of the source text to the "acceptance" of the target language readers. This means that the translator needs to play the role of a "cultural guide", making necessary additions, deletions, modifications, and explanations to the information. For "lexical gaps", transliteration with annotations (e.g., Qipao (a form-fitting traditional Chinese dress for women)), cultural analogies (e.g., comparing "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai" to "China's Romeo and Juliet"), or descriptive translations (e.g., translating "Xiangsheng" as "crosstalk, a traditional Chinese comedic performance featuring dialogue and wordplay") can be used. For high-context poetic language, it is necessary to transform the abstract into the concrete, converting the artistic conception into perceivable specific images or experience descriptions [6]. For example, "Ancient town alleys,

bluestone slabs meandering, telling the story of a thousand years of vicissitudes" can be translated as "Winding through the ancient town are narrow lanes paved with bluestone slabs, their worn surfaces hinting at centuries of history."

3.2. Multi-modal narrative strategy: beyond pure text translation

In the era of digital communication, tourism translation should actively utilize multi-modal resources such as images, videos, and audio for meaning compensation. When Shanghai International Studies University was responsible for the translation of promotional materials for Yu Garden, it not only provided accurate text but also visually illustrated the cultural implications of the garden's landscaping art (such as borrowing scenery and framing scenery) and architectural components (such as dougong and flower windows), and produced bilingual audio guides [7]. This "text + visual/auditory symbols" collaboration can effectively lower the threshold for cultural understanding and create an immersive experience. For scenic area signboards, international standards should be followed, emphasizing the combination of icons and concise language to ensure that safety warnings and directional guidance can be understood instantly.

3.3. Hierarchical processing of cultural information: achieving precise communication

Translators should stratify information based on the function of the text and the interests of tourists. For the names of core landscapes and key historical facts, accuracy must be guaranteed. For rich background stories and cultural symbols, tiered reading options can be provided, such as introducing core information in the main text of the guidebook and providing extended reading through sidebars or QR code links to meet the needs of tourists with different levels of interest. This can maintain the fluency of the text while ensuring the depth and breadth of cultural communication.

4. Teaching strategies for tourism English translation in higher education from the perspective of cross-cultural communication

To systematically respond to the aforementioned theoretical and practical challenges, a paradigm shift from concept to method is needed in the teaching of tourism English translation in higher education. The construction of teaching strategies should follow a coordinated path of "conceptual guidance - method innovation - environmental reshaping", aiming to transform the cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills from an additional goal to the core thread of teaching.

4.1. Reforming teaching concepts: from "language tool" to "cultural mediator" role reshaping

Teaching concepts are the guiding rods of teaching practice. Under the perspective of cross-cultural communication, the primary task is to facilitate a fundamental role recognition transformation for both teachers and students.

Reconstruction of the teacher's role: from knowledge transmitter to cultural guide. Teachers need to transcend the traditional position of "language coach" and transform into "architects" and "guides" of cross-cultural learning. This means that their core task is not only to explain vocabulary and grammar but also to design learning situations that can stimulate cultural comparison and reflection. For example, when explaining the cultural image of "dragon", they should not stop at the lexical correspondence of "dragon", but guide students to explore its auspicious symbol in Chinese culture and negative connotations in Western culture, and jointly discuss whether to retain cultural heterogeneity (such as translating "龙舟赛" as "Loong Boat Race") or seek explanatory compensation (such as translating "龙舟赛" as "Dragon Boat Race, a traditional ritual to invoke rain and luck") when translating.

Reconstruction of the student's role: from passive recipient to active explorer. Teaching should aim to cultivate students' awareness of being "cultural mediators". Students are no longer containers waiting to be filled with knowledge but active negotiators of meaning and cultural explorers. The teaching goal should be clearly set as: enabling students to analyze the cultural assumptions behind the text like cultural detectives; choose translation strategies for different communication scenarios like strategists; and build passable understanding paths between two cultural cognitions like bridge engineers. This conceptual reform requires a change in the evaluation system, from focusing on language

accuracy to simultaneously assessing cultural sensitivity, the rationality of strategy selection, and communication effectiveness. Elevation of course goals: integrating "course-based ideological and political education" and global competence cultivation. The updated teaching concept needs to resonate with the national strategy of "telling China's story well" and the educational goal of cultivating students' global competence. Teaching should consciously combine translation practice with building cultural confidence and mastering the discourse power of international communication. For example, when translating tourism materials related to contemporary Chinese development achievements such as "targeted poverty alleviation" and "ecological civilization construction", guide students to explore how to go beyond the literal translation of political terms and use specific, perceptible stories and data for "soft" interpretation, making it easy for international tourists to understand and accept, thereby practicing the macro national narrative in micro translation behaviors [8].

4.2. Innovating teaching methods: constructing a diversified teaching matrix of "situation - inquiry - collaboration"

Innovating teaching methods is the key to the implementation of concepts. One should abandon one-way indoctrination and build a diversified method matrix around the principles of "authenticity", "inquiry", and "collaboration".

Deeply contextualized teaching (Scenario-based Learning): Create highly simulated task scenarios and anchor language learning in specific cultural communication. For example, a project such as "Customizing a deep tour guide script for a foreign travel blogger of the Forbidden City" can be designed. Students need to first simulate the blogger's perspective, analyze their knowledge background and interests (such as whether they are more interested in architectural history, court life, or cultural relics and art?), and then in the translation, selectively screen, reorganize, and transform the expression methods of information. With the aid of virtual reality technology, students can even practice their explanations in a digital version of the Forbidden City, receiving comprehensive training on route design, focus guidance, and question-and-answer sessions. This approach integrates discrete language points (such as architectural terms and historical date expressions) into meaningful tasks, making learning directly aimed at solving real-world communication problems.

Case-based Comparative Inquiry: Carefully selected positive and negative translation cases are used to guide students in conducting critical analysis. For instance, comparing two translations of the same introduction to a scenic spot: one is a literal translation that is stiff and hard to understand, while the other is a flexible interpretation that is lively and interesting. Through group discussions, students are guided to summarize specific strategies in excellent translations regarding the handling of culture-loaded words, sentence restructuring, and reader-friendliness, and to identify common thinking patterns that lead to poor translations. Further, "parallel text" analysis can be introduced, where students collect official introductions of similar scenic spots in English-speaking countries (such as Kew Gardens in the UK and the Suzhou Gardens in China), comparing their text styles, information organization logic, and rhetorical devices, thereby deeply understanding the reading expectations and aesthetic habits of the target language readers.

Project-based Learning with Industry Collaboration: This is the most effective bridge to practice. Universities should proactively establish stable partnerships with cultural and tourism enterprises, scenic spots, museums, and online travel platforms, bringing real translation needs into the classroom. For example, collaborating with local cultural and tourism bureaus to have students participate in the compilation and translation of "One City, One Story" promotional brochures; or working with museums to develop bilingual interactive tour guides for teenagers. During this process, industry mentors can participate in task release, mid-term reviews, and final acceptance, providing feedback from the front line of the market. This "real task, real doing" model not only exercises students' professional abilities but also cultivates their project management, customer communication, and teamwork skills, achieving a leap from "learning to translate" to "working with translation" [8].

4.3. Reconstructing the teaching environment: creating a three-in-one open ecosystem of "textbooks - classrooms - digital spaces"

The teaching environment is the soil that nourishes cross-cultural abilities. It should start from textbooks and extend to physical and virtual classrooms, building an open, interactive, and resource-rich learning ecosystem.

Activation and school-based development of textbooks: Traditional textbooks are important carriers of knowledge but need to be "activated" in use. Teachers should lead students to critically examine the content of textbooks, using them as the starting point rather than the end point of cultural analysis. For example, for a text about the Spring Festival in the textbook, an extended exploration can be initiated: What is the actual acceptance of the English expressions provided in the textbook (such as "Spring Festival Gala") on overseas social media? How do young foreigners perceive the Chinese New Year through which channels? Based on this, students can work in groups to create a digital promotion plan for "Spring Festival cultural experience" targeting overseas Generation Z. At the same time, teachers and students are encouraged to develop school-based supplementary materials or loose-leaf handbooks in combination with local cultural and tourism characteristics, integrating the "big tradition" with the "small local" stories.

Open reconstruction of physical classrooms: Breaking the fixed spatial layout of "teacher's podium - student seating", flexibly setting up "group discussion areas", "simulation presentation areas", "case display areas", etc. according to teaching tasks. The allocation of classroom time should shift from teacher monologue to student activities. For example, using the "World Café" discussion model, rotating to discuss topics such as "How to explain 'feng shui' to foreign tourists of different age groups" and "The differences in politeness strategies of Chinese and English warning signs in scenic spots", allowing ideas to collide in the flow. The role of teachers is to raise core questions, provide resource support, observe the discussion process and offer comments and summaries at critical moments.

Expanding and utilizing digital learning spaces: Make full use of online platforms and digital tools to break the time and space boundaries of the classroom. It is possible to build a course-specific online corpus, including classic travel text translations, students' outstanding project works, and analyses of common mistakes. Use collaborative tools to organize students to carry out cloud-based collaborative translation projects. More importantly, guide students to actively utilize social media (such as YouTube, Instagram, TripAdvisor) as a "field" to observe real cross-cultural communication, analyze the travel videos and comments posted by foreign tourists in China, capture the most vivid cultural misunderstanding points, interests, and effective communication methods, and feed these insights back into their own translation practices.

Thus, the digital space becomes a dynamic field that connects the classroom with the real world and learning with continuous career development. Through the systematic promotion of the above three strategies, college tourism English translation teaching can truly step out of the ivory tower and build an advanced-conceptual, scientifically-methodical, and ecologically-open training system, laying a solid foundation for students to grow into qualified cultural communicators in the era of "China Travel".

5. Conclusion

In an era when "China Travel" and the in-depth integration of culture and tourism are hot topics worldwide, tourism English translation teaching in colleges and universities shoulders the significant mission of cultivating cultural communication envoys. The key to teaching reform lies in organically integrating cross-cultural communication theories, real industry cases, and cutting-edge technologies into the entire process of "teaching, learning, and doing". Only by building a practical ecosystem of industry-education integration and reconstructing a three-in-one curriculum system can we cultivate compound talents who are proficient in language, deeply understand culture, and are adept at using contemporary narratives to spread China, thereby effectively serving the construction of the national image and international cultural exchanges.

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