

Translation Strategies of Tourism and Culture Promotion Signs in the Context of Communication Translation

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Abstract

Cultural tourism linguistic landscape is the intuitive expression of cultural tourism signs, which conveys information in the form of signboards, scenic spot introductions, etc. It is an important support for the development of the cultural tourism industry and affects tourists' first impression of the local area. Especially, the accuracy of the translation of public signs as part of the language landscape directly influences the civilized image of a city. Shaoxing, as the "Cultural Capital of East Asia", has profound cultural heritage and rich tourism resources. The development of tourism has made the language landscape of Shaoxing's cultural tourism destinations more diverse. We will take the translation of the language landscape of Shaoxing's cultural tourism as an example from the perspective of communicative translation. Through the analysis of the translation irregularities existing in its linguistic landscape, we will explore the translation strategies of language landscape from the perspective of communicative translation. By exploring the current situation of the language landscape and its translation in this region and proposing corresponding translation strategies, we aim to improve the urban language landscape environment and enhance the internationalization level of the city.

Keywords

Cultural Tourism Linguistic Landscapes, Public Signs, Communicative Translation Theory

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Significance of the Topic

In the process of cultural tourism internationalization, the translation quality of

multilingual signage in language landscapes directly affects tourists' access to information and emotional experience. Existing research indicates that translation errors may lead to tourist confusion and decrease the trustworthiness of the destination (Chen, 2023). The language landscape of cultural tourism affects tourists' first impressions of the locale. High-quality translation of language landscapes is not only a bridge for cultural communication but also a key to enhancing a city's international image. Therefore, thoroughly studying the current state of cultural tourism language landscape translation, analyzing its existing problems, and proposing corresponding solutions is of great practical significance for promoting the high-quality development of the cultural tourism industry.

This study focuses on the current state of translation in cultural tourism linguistic landscapes. It aims to identify problems in current translation practices through systematic investigation and analysis and to propose feasible improvements. Specifically, the research goals include: first, comprehensively categorizing the types and distribution of linguistic landscapes in cultural tourism and summarizing their translation status and characteristics; second, deeply analyzing problems in the translation process, such as the lack of cultural connotation, inappropriate translation strategies, and inaccurate language expression; third, proposing targeted solutions based on actual case studies to provide scientific guidance and reference for the practice of linguistic landscape translation in cultural tourism.

By proposing targeted improvements, the study aims to effectively enhance the quality of linguistic landscape translations, improve tourists' understanding and appreciation of Shaoxing culture, and thereby increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the cultural tourism industry. Moreover, the study's conclusions can offer valuable insights and inspiration for translation work in the linguistic landscapes of historical and cultural cities, provide robust support for the international development of the cultural tourism industry, and promote the overall development of China's cultural tourism sector. The study contributes positively to enhancing the cultural soft power of cities and promoting cultural exchange and integration.

1.2. Current Research Status at Home and Abroad

1.2.1. Definition of Language Landscape

The concept of linguistic landscape was first introduced by Landry and Bourhis (1997). They defined linguistic landscape as follows: linguistic landscape refers to commercial signs in public spaces that carry visually prominent linguistic information within the observed area (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Linguistic landscape is an emerging field in sociolinguistics. The first to conduct research on linguistic landscapes were scholars Rosenbaum, Nadel, Cooper, and Fishman (Rosenbaum et al., 1977). They chose Keren Kayemet Street in Jerusalem as their research site, where they studied the language signs on the street, everyday conversations, and language used in transactions. By carefully analyzing these elements, they aimed

to uncover the cultural and social ideas behind them. At that time, they particularly focused on issues related to the spread of English abroad, hoping to identify patterns and characteristics of English dissemination from the linguistic phenomena on this street.

In subsequent studies, a contribution by Landry and Bourhis (1997) successfully drew attention. They defined linguistic landscape as: “The language on public road signs, billboards, street names, place names, shop signs, and public signs on government buildings collectively form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

According to Zhang (2023), in addition to linguistic elements, non-linguistic modalities such as images, sounds, and colors also serve as carriers of linguistic landscapes. He believes that the scope of linguistic landscape research should also cover public signs, labels, slogans, institutional names, and couplets. Therefore, “linguistic landscape” is built upon the foundation of “public signs”. They have an inclusive relationship, where the study of public sign translation can be considered synonymous with the study of linguistic landscape translation.

Sun (2009) pointed out that “linguistic landscape is an important means and channel for government or non-government organizations to communicate with the public, carrying clear intentions and purposes. It should reflect the identity, attitude, intent, and expectations of the information sender, as well as the identity characteristics of the information receiver”. From this perspective, linguistic landscapes are not only vital for conveying messages but also play a role in a city’s development and influence its image in the eyes of the public.

1.2.2. Communicative Translation Theory

The renowned British translator and translation theorist Peter Newmark holds the view that when determining which translation method to use, one must consider three key factors: the type of text, the nature of the readership, and the purpose of the translation. In his work “Approaches to Translation”, Newmark introduces two distinct translation methods: communicative translation and semantic translation.

Semantic translation places a high emphasis on the accuracy of the translated text. It requires the translator to convey the semantic content of the original text precisely and to preserve, as much as possible, the original’s style, linguistic features, and thought process. This type of translation is largely akin to literal translation. The translations produced by the semantic translation method often achieve equivalence in terms of linguistic form with the original text. However, they may conflict with the expression habits of the target language, potentially leading to some degree of difficulty in understanding for the target audience.

In contrast, communicative translation is fundamentally different from semantic translation. Communicative translation prioritizes the expression habits of the target language, placing the target audience at the center. As a result, translations produced using the communicative translation method are often more fluent and natural, making them more easily accepted by readers.

Within Newmark's translation theory framework, the core distinction between Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation lies in their different emphasis on "faithfulness"—the former focuses on the precise conveyance of the original text's semantics, while the latter emphasizes the communicative effect of the translation in the target context. This difference determines that in the translation of cultural tourism language landscapes, the priority of Communicative Translation arises from its deep response to the essential needs of cross-cultural communication.

Additionally, Newmark categorizes text types into "operative texts", "informative texts", and "expressive texts". Based on the characteristics of these different types of texts, he advocates using a reader-response-focused communicative translation strategy for "informative" and "operative" texts. Linguistic landscapes, especially public signs that are an important component, mostly fall into the category of "informative" or "operative" texts. Therefore, when translating linguistic landscapes, the focus should be on the reader, and communicative translation methods should be employed.

From the perspective of effect comparison, Semantic Translation, when dealing with expressions with strong cultural specificity, can easily fall into the "literal translation trap". For example, translating 王羲之故居 as *Wang Xizhi's Former Residence* accurately conveys the literal information but fails to explain to Western readers Wang Xizhi's cultural status as the *Sage of Calligraphy*, leading to a diminished sense of its historical value. On the other hand, Communicative Translation might render it as *Home of Wang Xizhi: China's Renowned Calligraphy Sage*, adding the explanatory modifier *Calligraphy Sage*, which preserves the cultural proper noun while establishing a connection with the target readers' cognitive framework. This "reader-centered" strategy is particularly important in language landscape translation, as tourists typically quickly scan signage in mobile scenarios, and the readability of the translation directly impacts the efficiency of information acquisition.

Similarly, scholar Guo (2011) argues that when translators handle texts like public signs, they should follow the principles of communicative translation theory, consistently considering the perspective of the target readers and prioritizing their reception of the translation.

Moreover, the emphasis Communicative Translation places on linguistic expression habits can effectively prevent misinterpretations caused by cultural context differences. For example, in a scenic area, 小心台阶 was literally translated to *Careful Steps*, resulting in a grammatical error due to Semantic Translation's literal correspondence (the correct translation should be *Watch Your Step*), which inadvertently conveys negative information. Communicative Translation, on the other hand, follows the customary expression of English warning signs, using the target language readers' familiar *Mind the Step* to ensure accurate information that conforms to language norms. This adherence to target language pragmatic rules essentially returns to "translation as a cross-cultural communicative act"—as opposed

to Semantic Translation's "loyalty" to the form of the original text, Communicative Translation, through Dynamic Equivalence, achieves a higher level of functional loyalty by allowing the translation to produce the same communicative effect in the target context as the original text does in the source context.

Of course, prioritizing Communicative Translation does not negate the value of Semantic Translation—in scenarios where preserving the original text's linguistic aesthetics or cultural symbols is necessary (such as in poetry couplets and names of intangible cultural heritage), the two can complement each other. However, in cultural tourism translation, where information transmission and visitor experience are central, Communicative Translation, with its priority on the "readability for the audience", becomes a better solution for overcoming cultural difference barriers and enhancing international tourism appeal. It not only addresses the issue of whether the translation is "accurate" but also answers the core question of whether the translation is "effective"—this is precisely the essential distinction between cultural tourism language landscape translation and literary or academic translation: before taking culture "outward", the premise is that culture must first be "understood".

1.3. Field Investigation of Public Signs in Cultural Tourism

Among the many cultural tourism cities in China, cities like Beijing and Hangzhou, as well as Shaoxing, face issues in the translation of language landscapes where improper wording and literal translations result in cultural connotations being lost. Some signage translations fail to fully consider the language habits and cultural backgrounds of the target audience. However, Shaoxing, a water town in Jiangnan with a rich historical and cultural heritage, presents unique challenges in translating its cultural tourism language landscapes. Shaoxing boasts an abundance of historical anecdotes, dialects, and traditional folk culture, requiring translation efforts to focus more on accurately converting these culturally distinctive elements while ensuring language correctness and conveying cultural nuances, which is far more challenging than in typical cities. This study focuses on the language landscape translation of Shaoxing's cultural tourism attractions as its research subject. Through methods such as field surveys and filming, it seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the current state of language landscape translation in cultural tourism destinations. The aim is to identify the issues present in the current state of cultural tourism language landscape translation in China, analyze these errors one by one, and offer suggestions for rectification.

2. Current State of Translation of Public Signs in Cultural Tourism

In the practice of translating cultural tourism language landscapes, Communicative Translation Theory demonstrates stronger applicability compared to Semantic Translation by aligning with the cognitive habits and cultural expectations of the target audience. To thoroughly analyze language landscape translation, the

primary task is to classify translation errors hierarchically. This study references the relationship among the translation, translator, and translational context in Eco-Translatology, utilizing a three-dimensional transformation method to closely examine common issues in the translation of Shaoxing's language landscapes from the dimensions of language, culture, and communication. This approach allows us to understand the reasons behind translation errors more systematically and comprehensively, thereby laying the foundation for proposing targeted improvement strategies. The following sections analyze the application logic through specific case studies.

2.1. Inappropriate Word Choices

In the translation of public signs for cultural tourism, inappropriate word choices and grammatical errors are quite prominent. Such errors can often cause significant inconvenience for foreign tourists and may even lead to misunderstandings of the information conveyed by the signs.

Take Shaoxing as an example, where there are issues with word choice in translating signs for shops offering local delicacies. For instance, a restaurant in Shaoxing specializing in 梅干菜扣肉 (*Steamed Pork with Dried Pickled Mustard Greens*) had its English sign translated as *Preserved Vegetable and Pork, Dried Plum Flavor*. The term *Dried Plum* usually refers to prunes, which is not the intended meaning here, indicating a word choice discrepancy. While *Preserved Vegetable* suggests pickled vegetables, it does not accurately convey the unique Shaoxing flavor of 梅干菜. This straightforward, literal translation, merely aiming for semantic correspondence, neither captures the uniqueness and deliciousness of the dish nor allows foreign tourists unfamiliar with Shaoxing's culinary culture to understand its specifics. A more appropriate translation could be *Steamed Pork with Dried Shaoxing Pickled Mustard Greens*, which, using a communicative translation approach, accurately conveys the source information from the perspective of target readers, allowing foreign tourists to clearly understand the main ingredients and features of the dish.

Behavioral guidance signs in public spaces, such as 推 (*Push*), 拉 (*Pull*), are high-frequency touchpoints in cross-cultural communication. While Semantic Translation is accurate, it lacks emotional interaction. In contrast, Communicative Translation uses personification to give inanimate objects a sense of dialogue. For example, changing 推 (*Push*) to *Push me* and 拉 (*Pull*) to *Pull me* uses the personification of *me* to transform static signage into interactive language with appeal, enhancing emotional resonance with the target readers while retaining functional direction. Similarly, the traditional translation of 请带好随身行李 (*Please take your personal belongings*) in the subway uses an imperative sentence structure. Although grammatically correct, it tends to sound commanding. Singapore's subway translation, *When you leave, please don't forget to bring me*, personifies luggage as an entity *me* that needs to be *taken along*, creating an emotional connection through a first-person perspective, making the reminder warmer and

easier to remember. If safety signs rely solely on literal translation, such as translating 严禁靠门 as *Do not lean on the door*, they adhere to grammatical norms but carry a commanding tone that can evoke a sense of alienation. Communicative Translation employs a personification strategy to reconstruct language, giving the *door* a life-like quality: *I'm fragile. Don't lean on me*. This expression builds a dialogue scenario between the object and readers through the first-person narrative *I'm*, converting rigid rules into tangible “individual appeals”, which both preserve the warning function and enhance acceptance through emotional expression. Newmark emphasizes that the core of Communicative Translation is “reader-centered”. Such translations align with the emotional expression habits of the target language, avoiding semantic stiffness caused by cultural context differences, making warning information more comprehensible and followable. For example, the Semantic Translation of 修鞋铺 as *Shoe repair store* accurately conveys function but is straightforward and lacks cultural connotation. Under Communicative Translation strategies, *Shoe clinic* uses metaphor to liken *shoe repair* to the professional care concept of a *clinic*: in English culture, *clinic* not only refers to a healthcare facility but also carries connotations of *professional treatment*, forming a cognitive mapping with the *repair* function of shoe repair. This creative translation does not sacrifice clarity; instead, by using the existing conceptual framework (the professional attribute of *clinic*) in the target language, it aligns the translation more with readers’ cognitive schemas, adhering to Newmark’s principle of “reader-friendly comprehension”—the translation should avoid barriers caused by cultural differences and achieve efficient information transmission through the natural expression of the target language. The alignment of the Communicative Translation strategy advocated in this article with Newmark’s theory lies in both being ultimately directed towards the “understanding and acceptance of the target readers”. Although cases like *Shoe clinic* incorporate creative elements, the essence is not the sacrifice of clarity but the construction of a more natural semantic association through the cultural metaphor of the target language (such as the professional association of *clinic*) and cognitive habits (the personified dialogue expression). In comparison with “word-for-word correspondence” in Semantic Translation, Communicative Translation emphasizes “functional equivalence” within the target context—the translation should not only accurately convey referential meaning but also activate readers’ cultural schema for effective decoding of information. In the above cases, creative translation achieves a balance between “accurate meaning” and “natural expression” through moderate innovation in language form (rather than baseless creative outbursts), ultimately serving the core goal of cross-cultural communication—to allow foreign tourists to experience the intimacy and professionalism of the cultural tourism language landscape without comprehension obstacles, thereby enhancing the destination’s international appeal.

2.2. Functional Conveyance and Audience Reception Discrepancies

In the linguistic landscapes of cultural tourism, the translation of public signs

sometimes features language that is too harsh or overly imperative, without fully considering the psychological reception of the target audience, resulting in an overall tone that lacks harmony. For example, in some scenic areas, signs with translations like 禁止进入 (*No Admittance*) are common. This expression is direct and forceful, which may give foreign tourists a sense of being strictly restricted and constantly monitored, potentially leading to feelings of resistance. Similarly, the translation of 严禁触摸 (*Don't Touch*) uses a blunt, command-like expression that does not take the visitors' feelings into account, and could lead to unnecessary misunderstandings in the context of cultural exchange.

For the translation of such public signs, to create a friendlier and more harmonious atmosphere for communication, we can draw on Peter Newmark's communicative translation approach. This involves using gentler and more polite language, incorporating subtle and tactful expressions, and even employing humor in appropriate contexts to achieve an "effective" and "elegant" translation. For example, using words like "please" can significantly enhance the sense of friendliness for the target audience, making it easier for tourists to accept relevant restrictions and regulations. Below are some revised translation examples. These translations avoid making direct and harsh demands on the reader, instead using expressions common and more readily accepted in English, facilitating understanding for foreign tourists while adhering to the principles of politeness:

Example 1: At the entrance to staff areas, signs like 宾客止步 (*Guest go no further*) and 闲人莫入 (*Strangers are Forbidden!*) use an imperative sentence structure combined with unpleasant content, implying negative traits such as a lack of social courtesy or ignorance of rules on the part of the visitors.

Revised Translation: *Staff Only*. This translation is concise and clear, subtly indicating that the area is restricted to staff members. It avoids the direct imperative tone, aligning better with English expression habits and principles of politeness.

Example 2: In parks, signs like 勿踏草地 (*Don't stamp on the grass*) use the word *stamp*, which overly emphasizes the forceful action of stomping and has a harsh overall tone.

Revised Translation: *Keep off the Grass, please*. Adding *please* softens the tone, and *Keep off* is a commonly used English phrase meaning "to stay away, do not touch", which naturally conveys the message not to tread on the grass, making it more acceptable to visitors.

Through these revised translations, the translation of public signs in China's cultural tourism can better consider the feelings of foreign tourists while conveying information, thereby promoting cultural exchange and understanding.

2.3. Issues with Literal Translation

Problems with literal translation are quite common. For example, 小心地滑 was translated as *Carefully sliding*, which suggests being careful while sliding, rather than warning about slippery ground. It should be revised to *Caution: Slippery*. Similarly, the phrase 向前一小步, 文明一大步 was originally translated as *One*

small step forward, A big step to civilization, which doesn't convey a clear meaning. A better translation would be *One step closer will make it cleaner*, which clearly communicates the intended message. The translation *Seats for the old, the weak, the sick, the crippled, and the pregnant* could be modified to *Courtesy seating*. This change not only avoids the potential for discrimination against vulnerable groups but also highlights the purpose of the seating and promotes a positive message.

3. Translation Strategies for Cultural Tourism Linguistic Landscapes

The translation of linguistic landscapes is characterized by its significant practicality and essentially belongs to an applied discipline with substantial practical relevance. Therefore, deeply exploring the principles that should be followed and the methods to be adopted in the translation process of linguistic landscapes not only holds practical value for the present but also has a long-term and profound impact on social and cultural exchange. Scholar He (2006) suggested that public signs, as an important component of linguistic landscapes, should employ communicative translation strategies based on their unique types. This requires translators to thoroughly understand the linguistic features and functional meanings of public signs, fully recognize the cultural differences between Chinese and English signs, and always prioritize the cultural habits of the target audience.

3.1. Thoroughly Understand the Linguistic Characteristics of Linguistic Landscapes to Achieve Concise and Clear Translations

As a key element of linguistic landscapes, the concise and clear translation of public signs from Chinese to English means that translations must be precise, succinct, and easy to understand, while avoiding obscure vocabulary and complex, lengthy sentence structures. Newmark has clearly stated that “semantic translation and communicative translation achieve the two core objectives of translation: accuracy and conciseness”. Given the inherent characteristics of linguistic landscapes, establishing “conciseness” as an important strategy in Chinese-English translation is essential. For example, in the Lanting Scenic Area of Shaoxing, the public sign that reads 爱护文物, 请勿触摸 (*Protect cultural relics and do not touch*) is somewhat awkward and lengthy. An optimized translation, *Keep hands off cultural relics*, is more concise and forceful, allowing foreign tourists to quickly understand its meaning and aligning with the need for public signs in scenic areas to convey information swiftly.

3.2. Accurately Grasp the Cultural Differences between English and Chinese, and Prioritize the Cultural Habits of the Target Audience

Due to the significant cultural differences between the East and the West, language is heavily influenced by cultural traditions and modes of thinking, resulting in

substantial differences in expression and habits. Translation is not merely the simple conversion of language content but a deep intercultural translation. Therefore, translators must pay close attention to these cultural differences and use communicative translation methods to convey the original content in ways that align with the cultural habits of the target audience. Shaoxing, as the birthplace of Yue Opera, has a rich cultural heritage in this art form. For the slogan 越剧——流淌千年的江南雅韵, a direct translation like *Yue Opera-the elegant charm of the Jiangnan region that has flowed for thousands of years* conveys the literal meaning but fails to fully capture the unique charm and rich history of Yue Opera in Chinese culture. Considering the Western cultural expressions for art's unique charm, it can be retranslated as *Yue Opera-an age-old symphony of elegance from the heart of Jiangnan*. This translation enables foreign tourists to better understand the cultural value of Yue Opera and serves as a successful example of how to adeptly handle cultural differences.

3.3. Application of Cultural Tourism Language Landscape Translation Strategies in Non-Historic Cultural Cities

For cities with different cultural backgrounds, especially non-historic cultural cities, it is necessary to flexibly adjust when applying existing solutions to translation issues in cultural tourism language landscapes. Firstly, regarding translation content, non-historic cultural cities can reduce the focus on exploring traditional anecdotes and historical culture and instead concentrate on translating the city's modern features, emerging industries, and tourism projects. Secondly, regarding translation style, a more concise, straightforward approach that aligns with international popular expressions can be adopted to enhance the efficiency of information transmission. Moreover, it is essential to consider local realities, such as city positioning and audience characteristics, to establish translation standards and review mechanisms that meet their needs, ensuring that translation strategies can solve practical problems while enhancing the city's international tourist appeal, thereby truly achieving the goal of using cultural tourism language landscapes to support urban development.

4. Conclusion

As a cultural window for cities to showcase themselves and an important medium of exchange in the process of internationalization, the cultural tourism language landscape has achieved phased results in infrastructure construction and cultural dissemination. However, current translations of cultural tourism language landscapes still face issues such as inappropriate wording, loss of cultural connotations, weak cross-cultural adaptability, and excessive literal translation. These shortcomings severely limit the accurate presentation of the city's image and the enhancement of the international competitiveness of its tourism resources. In this context, the government plays a triple core role in optimizing the cultural tourism language landscape as a "system designer", "resource integrator", and "effect over-

seer”. Specifically, this involves constructing a standardized system to clarify optimization directions and content; relying on a three-tier management mechanism to define responsibilities and ensure orderly progress; leveraging technology and public participation to innovate practical paths; strengthening translator capacity-building to ensure translation quality; and promoting regional collaboration to achieve unified strategy norms. It must be clarified that the optimization of the cultural tourism language landscape cannot be accomplished by a single entity alone but requires government coordination, in-depth research by translators, and broad public participation to form a strong synergy.

In the future, only by basing efforts on local cultural positioning, balancing linguistic norms with cultural uniqueness in translation practice, and organically combining the rigid constraints of policy with the flexible regulation of the market, can we effectively address current translation chaos. This will transform the cultural tourism language landscape into an “urban language business card” with distinct cultural recognizability and international appeal, promoting a leapfrog upgrade of China’s cultural tourism industry from “internationalization of attractions” to “internationalization of experience” and “internationalization of value”. Ultimately, the language landscape will become a “silent ambassador” conveying China’s charm, achieving a dual enhancement of cultural value and economic efficiency in the integrated development process of culture and tourism.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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