



On the English Translation of Publicity Texts of Shaanxi History Museum from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory

Xianrong Qiao, Xinrun Wang

College of Arts and Sciences, Shaanxi University of Science and Technology, Xi'an, China

Email: wangxinrun@foxmail.com

How to cite this paper: Qiao, X.R. and Wang, X.R. (2021) On the English Translation of Publicity Texts of Shaanxi History Museum from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory. *Open Access Library Journal*, 8: e8173.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1108173>

Received: November 9, 2021

Accepted: November 26, 2021

Published: November 29, 2021

Copyright © 2021 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Museum publicity texts are one of the significant means to effectively convey cultural messages, therefore, it's necessary to secure a successful translation. From the perspective of Appraisal Theory, this paper, with British Museum as a reference, uses UAM Corpus software for the comparative analysis of appraisal resources of publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum, hoping to shed light on future translation of museum publicity texts.

Subject Areas

Culture, Linguistics

Keywords

Appraisal Theory, Shaanxi History Museum, Museum Publicity Texts, Corpus, Appraisal Resources

1. Introduction

With the huge influence brought by the 14th National Games, an ever-growing number of foreign and domestic tourists gravitate to Shaanxi for a trip. As a national-level museum in China, the Shaanxi History Museum is a landmark of cultural tourism in Shaanxi, and its profound cultural heritage offers an important window for tourists all over the world to understand the culture of Shaanxi and even China. Given that the publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum are mostly bilingual, a desirable English translation version will not only enhance its global influence, but also appeal to visitors, thus promoting the communication between the two cultures.

Only 20 years have passed since appraisal framework was first developed by Martin [1], which marks the establishment of the Appraisal Theory. From a wide view of literature over the past 20 years, it can be seen that the Appraisal Theory has attracted wide attention all over the world, and has gradually penetrated into translation studies. Some scholars have conducted qualitative research from a macroscopic perspective. Liu, S. Z. discussed the identification and rendering of the three major appraisal meanings in the translation process [2]. Si, X. Z. explored the values of Appraisal Theory to translation studies and practices, and held that a qualified translator should faithfully reproduce the appraisal meaning of the source text [3]. In addition, a few studies have also been carried out to investigate translation strategies and techniques of appraisal resources by combining specific translation cases. Li, J. Y. made a comparison of appraisal resources in Chinese and English versions of the report of the 19th National Congress of Communist Party of China, and proposed the translation strategy of adopting both semantic and communicative translation [4]. Chen, X. R. focused on translation methods of implicit and explicit attitude resources taking annual report speeches of listed companies as an example [5].

However, few researches have been conducted on the translation of appraisal resources from the perspective of corpus comparison, and even fewer are concerned with the publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum. Based on the current research status, this paper, drawing on insights from Appraisal Theory, created a corpus containing the bilingual publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum to explore the distribution of appraisal resources, and finally made suggestions for the English translation of Shaanxi History Museum.

2. Overview of Appraisal Theory

In systemic functional linguistics, the meaning levels of language can be classified into ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning. A desirable translation requires equivalence between the source and target texts in the above-mentioned three levels. Appraisal Theory mainly focuses on the interpersonal meaning of language, which deals with not only how attitude is expressed, but also how attitude is intensified or downgraded and how different voices or opinions are positioned in a text [6].

According to Martin's appraisal framework, appraisal system can be divided into attitude, engagement, and graduation system. Each of these systems has its own subsystems. Attitude system is used for expressing sentiments and attitudes, which is subdivided into affect, judgment and appreciation. Affect consists of positive affect and negative affect. Judgement deals with the description and evaluation of human behavior and personality, which can be classified into personal judgement and moral judgement. Appreciation is mainly used to evaluate the aesthetic value of products and processes, and comprises of reaction, composition and valuation. Engagement is concerned with the source of attitudes and has two subsystems: monogloss and heterogloss. Monogloss means that the writer

him/herself is the subject of evaluation, while heterogloss indicates that the opinions are borrowed from others. Graduation deals with the amplification of attitude and degree of engagement, and consists of two aspects: force and focus. Force can be expressed through intensification and quantity, and focus consists of sharpen and soften. The classification of appraisal resources is presented in **Figure 1**.

3. Comparative Analysis of Appraisal Resources in Museum Publicity Texts

The recognition of appraisal resources is an important step of translation. In light of the fact that museum publicity texts contain a large number of appraisal resources, it is necessary to have a panoramic picture of appraisal resources used in publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum in order to ensure the translation quality.

3.1. Corpus Source and Research Method

In this paper, the publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum are organized and created as a Chinese-English corpus, of which the source texts (Chinese corpus) contain a total of 5,749 characters and the corresponding target texts (English corpus) consists of 3,838 words. In the meanwhile, for comparison, the publicity texts of the British Museum (Reference corpus), one of the largest and most famous museums in the world, are selected as a reference, which involves a total of 3892 words.

The UAM Corpus Tool, a multifunctional corpus software, is adopted for annotation of the above-mentioned three corpora. The design of the annotation framework is mainly based on the appraisal framework developed by Martin (see **Figure 1**). The annotation includes the following five major steps: project creation, corpus import, annotation framework design, corpus annotation, and

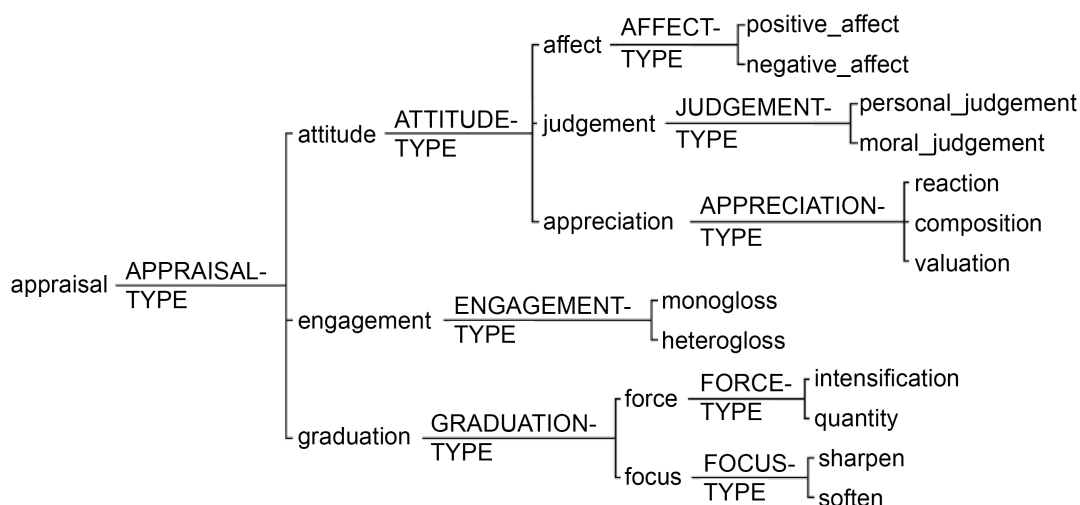


Figure 1. Classification of appraisal resources.

statistics of the annotation results. After finishing annotation, the obtained statistical results are analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

3.2. Comparative Analysis of Appraisal Resources in Chinese Corpus and Reference Corpus

According to the statistical results of UAM Corpus Tool, the distribution of appraisal resources in Chinese corpus and Reference corpus is shown in **Table 1**.

As is shown in **Table 1**, there are 236 appraisal resources in Reference corpus with the length of 3892 words. By calculation, the average distribution density of appraisal resources is 6.06 per 100 words. In contrast, there are 303 appraisal resources in Chinese corpus with the length totaling 5749 characters, and the average distribution density of appraisal resources is calculated as 5.27 per 100 words. It can be concluded that, compared with the publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum, the appraisal resources are used more frequently in publicity texts of British Museum.

According to the usage analysis of appraisal resources in the two corpora, it can be found that attitude, engagement and graduation resources account for 54.13%, 8.91% and 36.96%, respectively in Chinese corpus, while 47.03%, 3.81% and 49.15%, respectively in Reference corpus. Although the total number of appraisal resources in the two corpora varies, their distribution is relatively similar, with attitude and graduation resources accounting for the most, and engagement resources the least. This is due to the fact that museum publicity texts contain a large number of characters/words expressing positive evaluation and appreciation, such as “enormous”, “exceptional”, and “独具魅力 (unique characteristics)”. These attitude resources are used in large quantities to emphasize the historical significance of a historic event or an exhibit, while graduation resources are often used in combination with attitude resources to reinforce attitude.

The following part will examine the three types of appraisal resources respectively in more detail in order to compare the specific differences in the use of appraisal resources in Chinese corpus and Reference corpus.

3.2.1. Comparison of Attitude Resources

As the central system of Appraisal Theory, attitude has to do with “our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behavior and evaluation of things”

Table 1. Distribution of appraisal resources in Chinese corpus and reference corpus.

Feature	Chinese Corpus		Reference Corpus	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	303		236	
APPRAISAL-TYPE	N = 303		N = 236	
- attitude	164	54.13%	111	47.03%
- engagement	27	8.91%	9	3.81%
- graduation	112	36.96%	116	49.15%

[7]. It is particularly important to analyze the use of attitude resources in view of their high usage frequency in museum publicity texts. According to the statistics, the distribution of attitude resources in Chinese corpus and Reference corpus are shown in **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**, respectively.

As can be seen from **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**, compared to affect and judgment resources, appreciation resources account for the largest proportion in both Chinese corpus and Reference corpus, reaching 87.20% and 88.29%, respectively. Affect resources, on the other hand, account for the least proportion, the reason for which is that fewer words with subjective emotions and feelings are used in museum publicity texts in pursuit of objective expression.

The use of appreciation resources, which account for the largest proportion in both corpora, will be further analyzed below (see **Table 2**).

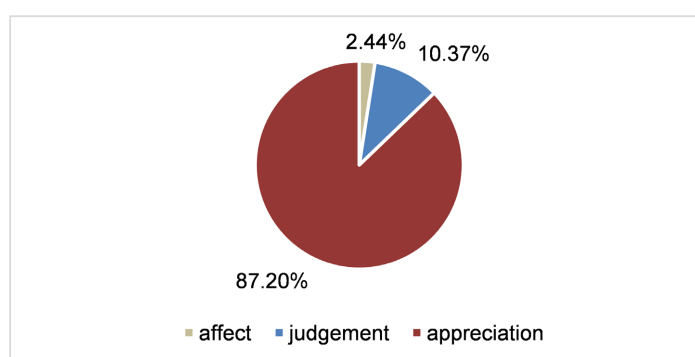


Figure 2. Distribution of attitude resources of Chinese corpus.

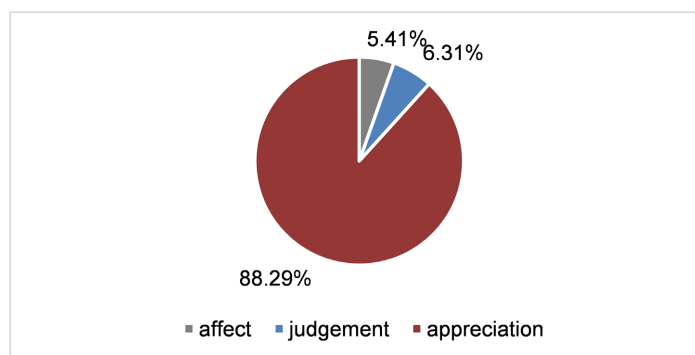


Figure 3. Distribution of attitude resources in reference corpus.

Table 2. Distribution of appreciation resources in Chinese corpus and reference corpus.

Feature	Chinese Corpus		Reference Corpus	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	303		236	
APPRECIATION-TYPE	N = 303		N = 236	
- reaction	19	6.27%	10	4.24%
- composition	12	3.96%	33	13.98%
- valuation	112	36.96%	55	23.31%

According to **Table 2**, there is a huge difference in the use of composition resources in Chinese corpus and Reference corpus, accounting for 3.96% and 13.98%, respectively. The comparison indicates that the publicity texts of British Museum pay more attention to the complexity and uniformity of the composition of historical systems, cultures or artifacts.

3.2.2. Comparison of Engagement Resources

Engagement is used to define the source of attitude, and deal with how different opinions are positioned in texts. It can reflect the neutrality and objectivity of opinions to some extent. In the following, the use of monogloss and heterogloss resources within the engagement system will be counted separately, as shown in **Table 3** below.

According to **Table 3**, in terms of engagement resources, heterogloss resources account for a larger proportion in both Chinese corpus and Reference corpus, which indicates that both corpora prefer to borrow other voices, such as classical masterpieces or historical facts, in order to increase the credibility of the text. However, in comparison, the number of monogloss in Chinese corpus (12) is much larger than that in Reference corpus (1). A large number of subjective opinions are incorporated into the publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum to appeal to visitors and highlight the historical significance, such as “这片土地上的文化创造和传承，仍然独具魅力 (creating and inheriting Chinese culture with unique characteristics)”, and “丝路古道上最为亮丽的一道风景 (the most beautiful scenery on the ancient Silk Road)”. The British Museum, on the other hand, focuses more on the objective statement of information, and monogloss resources are less used.

3.2.3. Comparison of Graduation Resources

Graduation is used to “adjust the volume” of items [8], which indicates the scalability of attitude system. Graduation penetrates throughout the attitude system. **Table 4** below presents statistics on the distribution of graduation resources in Chinese corpus and Reference corpus.

According to **Table 4**, there is the biggest difference in the use of soften resources between Chinese corpus and Reference corpus. The number of soften resources used in Chinese corpus and Reference corpus is 1 (0.33%) and 16 (6.78%), respectively. The publicity texts of the British Museum tend to use

Table 3. Distribution of engagement resources in Chinese corpus and reference corpus.

Feature	Chinese Corpus		Reference Corpus	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	303		236	
ENGAGEMENT-TYPE	N = 303		N = 236	
- monogloss	12	3.96%	1	0.42%
- heterogloss	15	4.95%	8	3.39%

Table 4. Distribution of graduation resources in Chinese corpus and reference corpus.

Feature	Chinese Corpus		Reference Corpus	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	303		236	
FORCE-TYPE	N = 303		N = 236	
- intensification	62	20.46%	68	28.81%
- quantity	46	15.18%	24	10.17%
FOCUS-TYPE	N = 303		N = 236	
- sharpen	3	0.99%	8	3.39%
- soften	1	0.33%	16	6.78%

more fuzzy restriction words, such as “probably” and “possibly”, which indicate that the writer has insufficient evidence in his/her descriptions. In English, “possibly” means less than 50% probability, while “probably” means more than 50% probability. The use of soften resources reflects the writer’s rigorousness in expression.

3.3. Comparative Analysis of Appraisal Resources in English Corpus and Reference Corpus

The source texts (the publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum) selected for this paper contain a total of 5749 characters, while the corresponding English translation has only 3838 words, which indicates that English tends to use fewer words to convey the same meaning as Chinese. According to the statistical results, the distribution of appraisal resources in English corpus and Reference corpus is shown in **Table 5**.

As previously mentioned, publicity texts contained in Reference corpus are 3892 words long, among which 236 are appraisal resources. According to the above table, there are 283 appraisal resources in English corpus with the length of 3838 words. From calculation and comparison, the average distribution density of appraisal resources in Reference corpus and English corpus is 6.06 and 7.37 per 100 words, respectively. Compared with Reference corpus, the appraisal resources of English corpus are used more frequently, and even more than those of Chinese corpus. This is due to the fact that some implicit appraisal resources are rendered into explicit appraisal resources during translation.

As illustrated above, attitude, engagement and graduation resources account for 47.03%, 3.81% and 49.15%, respectively in Reference corpus, while 50.53%, 11.31% and 38.16%, respectively in English corpus. In addition, except for graduation, the other two appraisal resources are used more frequently in English corpus than Reference corpus. And the biggest difference lies in the use of engagement resources.

The following part will perform a concrete analysis on the three types of appraisal resources respectively. The distribution of attitude resources in English corpus and Reference corpus is shown in **Table 6**.

Table 5. Distribution of appraisal resources in English corpus and reference corpus.

Feature	English Corpus		Reference Corpus	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	283		236	
APPRAISAL-TYPE	N = 283		N = 236	
- attitude	143	50.53%	111	47.03%
- engagement	32	11.31%	9	3.81%
- graduation	108	38.16%	116	49.15%

Table 6. Distribution of attitude resources in English corpus and reference corpus.

Feature	English Corpus		Reference Corpus	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	283		236	
AFFECT-TYPE	N = 283		N = 236	
- positive affect	5	1.77%	5	2.12%
- negative affect	1	0.35%	1	0.42%
JUGDEMENT-TYPE	N = 283		N = 236	
- personal judgement	8	2.83%	5	2.12%
- moral judgement	4	1.41%	2	0.85%
APPRECIATION-TYPE	N = 283		N = 236	
- reaction	17	6.01%	10	4.24%
- composition	5	1.77%	33	13.98%
- valuation	103	36.40%	55	23.31%

As is shown in **Table 6**, in terms of attitude resources, both English corpus and Reference corpus are dominated by appreciation resources, accounting for 44.17% and 41.53%, respectively. Affect resources are used less frequently in both corpora, among which negative affect resources are hardly found. While positive affect resources, such as “proud”, “expecting”, “enjoy”, etc., are used to convey a confident and positive attitude to get closer to tourists.

The distribution of engagement resources of English corpus and Reference corpus is shown in **Table 7**.

According to **Table 7**, in terms of engagement resources, heterogloss resources are mainly used in Reference corpus, while more monogloss than heterogloss resources are used in English corpus.

The distribution of graduation resources in English corpus and Reference corpus is presented in **Table 8**.

According to **Table 8**, apart from quantity resources, the other graduation resources are used more frequently in Reference corpus than English corpus, which reflects the British Museum’s greater emphasis on the intensity of evaluation.

Table 7. The distribution of engagement resources in English corpus and reference corpus.

Feature	English Corpus		Reference Corpus	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	283		236	
ENGAGEMENT-TYPE	N = 283		N = 236	
- monogloss	17	6.01%	1	0.42%
- heterogloss	15	5.30%	8	3.39%

Table 8. The distribution of graduation resources in English corpus and reference corpus.

Feature	English Corpus		Reference Corpus	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	283		236	
FORCE-TYPE	N = 283		N = 236	
- intensification	55	19.43%	68	28.81%
- quantity	46	16.25%	24	10.17%
FOCUS-TYPE	N = 283		N = 236	
- sharpen	7	2.47%	8	3.39%
- soften	0	0.00%	16	6.78%

4. Implications of Appraisal Theory for the Translation of Publicity Texts of Shaanxi History Museum

The museum publicity texts are loaded with a large number of appraisal resources. By a comparative analysis on appraisal resources in the source texts and target texts, it is found that there exists difference in the use of appraisal resources, which provides an important reference for assessing the translation quality of the publicity texts of the Shaanxi History Museum, and also has certain reference significance to further improve its language expression.

4.1. In-Depth Understanding the Socio-Cultural Background of the Target Language

The translation quality depends on the transfer of ideational and interpersonal meanings, and the focus on interpersonal meaning transfer lies in the transformation of appraisal resources. In museum publicity texts, the transformation of appraisal resources is inevitably influenced by the characteristics of the target language and its cultural background, so the translation process requires the translators to compare the foreign culture with their own culture in order to have a deep understanding.

In the English translation of Shaanxi History Museum, there exists some errors that are concerned with cultural difference, which needed to be further improved.

Case 1:

Source text: 有着“旱地之龙”“沙漠之舟”美誉的骆驼，在古代交通工具匮乏的岁月里，成为了丝路古道上最为亮丽的一道风景。

Target text: The camel, with a reputation of “the dragon of dry land”, “the ship of the desert”, was the most beautiful scenery on the ancient Silk Road for the insufficiency of the communication tools in ancient times.

“旱地之龙” in the source text is actually a metaphor. By comparing “camel” to “dragon”, the appreciation attitude can be reflected. However, given that in traditional Chinese culture, “dragon” symbolizes great power, good luck and strength, but in Western culture, dragon is usually associated with evil and violence, which may convey a negative attitude. In light of the above reason, it is recommended to modify “the dragon of dry land” to “dry-land king”. By directly indicating the meaning of “dragon” in the source text, the possible negative effects caused by cultural differences can be avoided.

Since the socio-cultural backgrounds of the two languages are quite different, the difference in organization of textual meaning sometimes is necessary and this alone cannot be used to accuse the translation of being unfaithful [9]. Therefore, when translating the publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum, it is necessary for the translator to take on the role of a cultural communicator, bridge the gap between the two cultures, and present a sound translation for the Western visitors.

4.2. Transforming the Expression Mode of Appraisal Resources

According to the above statistics, there are only 236 appraisal resources in the publicity texts of the British Museum, whereas there are as many as 303 in the publicity texts of the Shaanxi History Museum. If all the appraisal resources are transferred equivalently during translation, it will not conform to the expression habits of the target language.

Appraisal resources can be expressed implicitly and explicitly. Explicit appraisal is mainly reflected in the lexical-grammatical level, while implicit appraisal resources are concentrated in the rhetorical, phonetic and textual levels. When translating, the translator should bear in mind that some explicit appraisal resources should be transformed into implicit ones according to the expression habits of the target language, but also pay attention to the recognition and transformation of implicit appraisal resources. By this way, the translator's subjectivity can be manifested to a full extent.

4.3. Seeking Objectivity with the Aim of Highlighting Important information

Based on the statistical results above, the monogloss resources in publicity texts of the Shaanxi History Museum vastly outnumber those of the British Museum. In publicity texts of the Shaanxi History Museum, some subjective evaluations are usually added when introducing the historical background in order to reinforce its historical significance and value, while the British Museum pays more

attention to the depiction of substantive information, which is mainly due to the different thinking habits between the West and China.

Case 2:

Source text: 为了满足帝王的享乐需求，长安城郊外还兴建了众多离宫别苑。其间广布山川林泽，蓄养大量珍禽异兽，栽种各种名花异木。位于长安城南的上林苑，周回 200 多公里，不仅是中国最早、最大的动植物园，而且是中国古代皇家园囿的典范。

Target text: Many gardens and side palaces were constructed in the suburbs of Chang'an for the enjoyment of the emperors. A large number of trees, plants and flowers were grown and rare species of birds and animals were raised to form the earliest Chinese zoos and botanical gardens. The best example of them is the Shanglinyuan Garden located in the south suburbs of Chang'an. It has a circumference of 200 kilometers and is the representative of the royal gardens in ancient China.

In Case 2, there are some appreciation and graduation resources in the source text, such as “享乐需求”, “其间广布山川林泽，蓄养大量珍禽异兽，栽种各种名花异木” and “中国最早、最大的动植物园”. None of them are substantive information. Given the reading preference of Western tourists, the target text can be modified to “Many gardens and side palaces were constructed in the suburbs of Chang'an with the scattering of plants and rare animals. Among them, Shanglinyuan Garden, as the representative of the royal gardens in ancient China, is located in the south suburbs of Chang'an with a circumference of 200 kilometers.” In the modified target text, the most important appraisal information is retained whereas some less important information is deleted, which can better attract Western tourists.

When translating, translators should give emphasis to the above difference and try to present the information as objective as possible. In this way, the important information can be highlighted, so as to be better accepted by Western tourists and improve the effectiveness of information dissemination.

5. Conclusions

Museum serves as a bridge of communication between different cultures. The Shaanxi History Museum, with its profound cultural heritage, is a typical representative of China's time-honored history and splendid culture, thus attracting a large number of foreign visitors every year. Given that, the English translation of publicity texts of the Shaanxi History Museum should better meet the needs of foreign visitors.

Drawing upon the Appraisal Theory, this paper makes a comparative analysis on the publicity texts of Shaanxi History Museum and its English translation with the British Museum as a reference. It is found that attitude and graduation resources used in the publicity texts of the Shaanxi History Museum are similar to those of the British Museum, whereas there are huge differences in the number of engagement resources. Based on the comparison results, three suggestions

are made for the English translation of Shaanxi History Museum. Firstly, in rendering appraisal resources, only by deeply understanding the difference between Chinese and Western culture can the translator better meet the psychological expectations of Western visitors. Secondly, it is not necessary to seek exact equivalence of appraisal resources when translating, and the transformation of the expression mode of appraisal resources should be given emphasis. And finally, it is also necessary to pay attention to the transmission of substantive information in pursuit of objectivity, so that the English translation can attract foreign tourists and thus better spread the history and culture of Shaanxi.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Martin, J.R. (2000) Beyond Exchange: Appraisal Systems in English. In: Hunston, S. and Thompson, G., Eds., *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 142-175.
- [2] Liu, S.Z. (2012) A Model of Translation Process within Appraisal Theory. *Shandong Foreign Languages Teaching Journal*, No. 4, 24-28.
- [3] Si, X.Z. (2018) Appraisal, Engagement and Graduation: A Holistic Application of Appraisal Theory in Translation Studies. *Asia Pacific Interdisciplinary Translation Studies*, No. 1, 18-31.
- [4] Li, J.Y. (2021) Research on the C-E Translation of Political Discourse from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory Illustrated by a Case Study of the Chinese and English Versions of the 19th National Congress of the CPC. Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing.
- [5] Chen, X.R. (2019) English Translation Strategies for Discourse in the Attitudinal Perspective of Evaluation Theory: A Case Study on Annual Report Addresses of Listed Companies. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, No. 6, 41-45+68.
- [6] Su, H. (2015) Judgement and Adjective Complementation Patterns in Biographical Discourse: A Corpus Study. Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Birmingham, Birmingham.
- [7] Martin, J.R. and White, P.R.R. (2005) *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230511910>
- [8] Martin, J.R. and Rose, D. (2003) *Working with Discourse: Meaning beyond the Clause*. Continuum, London and New York.
- [9] Xia, X.F. (2016) Appraisal Theory in Functionalism and Translation Evaluation. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6, 1682-1686. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0608.24>