An Analysis of English Slang in Foreign Tour Guides' Language: A Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective

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Abstract: The growing popularity of "China Travel" has greatly released the potential of cultural tourism development across the country, enhanced China's global image, while also posed new challenges for foreign tour guides' service capabilities. English slang, as an important medium in cross-cultural communication, enables foreign tour guides to better understand the cultural backgrounds of their target tourists and improve their communicative skills. This study, based on the characteristics of English slang, and connotations of adaptation theory and interpretative translation theory, adopts the literature review and case analysis to investigate the challenges associated with the use of English slang in foreign tour guides' language, with the purpose of identifying effective solutions to current dilemmas and enhancing foreign tour guides' communicative competence. Results indicate that cultural misinterpretation, improper usage, neglect of the register and outdating the language resources are the primary issues affecting the quality of communication. The study also proposes effective solutions, such as enhancing cultural awareness, adopting a modest and open-minded approach, promoting sensitivity to register, and regularly updating language resources. This study highlights the crucial role of foreign tour guides' linguistic competence in promoting cross-cultural communication, contributing to future studies on tour guide language, and fostering the sustainable growth of China's inbound tourism industry.

Keywords: English Slang, Foreign Tour Guides' Language, Cross-Cultural Communication, Effective Solutions, China Travel

1. Introduction

Inbound tourism is an important part of the tourism industry, contributing significantly to economic growth, promoting China's global image and fostering mutual learning among civilizations. According to Yang Feiyue [1], the implementation of visa-free policies and optimized measures has led to an influx of international travelers to China. Furthermore, the global popularity of video games and television series, such as *Black Myth: Wukong* and *To the Wonder*, along with the digitalization and intelligence services in Chinese tourism, has fueled the "China Travel" craze, attracting even more overseas tourists to China. Tour groups often consist of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, professions, and social statuses, all of which are reflected in their language usage and expressions. Foreign tour guides, as cultural mediators, are responsible for understanding their clients' linguistic habits and ensuring smooth, enjoyable communication.

English slang, as an informal spoken language used to express user's emotions, represents a unique linguistic culture of English-speaking countries. After centuries of evolution, it has been widely recognized and accepted by the general public. Its vivid, witty, and emotional qualities can enliven group dynamics and help foster a closer bond between tour guides and tourists. Therefore, ensuring foreign tour guides are able to understand the slang appeared in tourists and apply it appropriately and properly is of paramount importance. To this end, it is urgent to master basic knowledge and rules of slang usage, recognize and reflect on challenges guides have encountered in their tour guiding, and explore effective solutions to better achieve cross-cultural communication by creating an active atmosphere, regulating emotions and adding an element of fun to this experience.

2. Theoretical Foundations

In cross-cultural communication, tour guides must not only be familiar with basic tourist information

but also focus on enhancing communication effectiveness. Additionally, the process of guiding tourists involves performing speech acts--receiving, understanding, and conveying the intentions of both speakers and listeners. Therefore, understanding and applying the characteristics of slang, adaptation theory and interpretative theory in tour guiding is significant for successful communication.

2.1 The Connotations of Slang

2.1.1 The Definition of Slang

English slang has evolved over centuries, spanning diverse registers from casual face-to-face conversations and social media to literature and films, covering a wide range of speech communities including both professionals and everyday individuals. Therefore, it is significant for English learners to study the social and cultural development of English-speaking countries. Burdová ^[2] describes slang as an independent non-literary language formation closely connected with its terminology, while Agha ^[3] identifies it as a social and linguistic formation (a speech register) that foregrounds relationships between social groups rather than relying on a fixed linguistic repertoire. As slang evolves, it also serves to express new concepts or assign new names to familiar things. Today, slang is recognized as a dynamic linguistic phenomenon that encompasses both the specific and the general senses, typically consisting of new words and novel or extended meanings ^[4]. Given that English functions as a lingua franca and that slang reflects local characteristics shaped by daily interactions, foreign tour guides must acknowledge its significance and be mindful of its usage to ensure effective communication.

2.1.2 The Linguistic Characteristics of English Slang

English slang is recognized as a kind of speech variety ^[5]. Different from other speech forms, English slang embodies five basic characteristics that make it a more interesting but difficult linguistic phenomena in the context of tourist groups.

Firstly, English slang is witty and lively, reflecting the optimistic and imaginative nature of Western cultures. This extroverted attitude is mirrored in language usage. For instance, terms like "green-eyed monsters" (jealousy), "lady-killer" (handsome), and "blah-blah" (talking non-stop) vividly convey their implied meanings. Even if unfamiliar with these expressions, listeners can intuitively understand their implications, accompanied with the imagery coming to mind. For example, "three sheets in the wind" (drunk) immediately conjures the image of an unsteady, inebriated person struggling to maintain control.

Secondly, it keeps up with The Times and changes rapidly, awarded as the "living language" [6]. Phrases like "stay-at-home type" describe those who stay at home and rarely go out, while "hands-chopping people" mostly refers to the online consumers who frequently exclaim "buy too much, hate to chop hands" yet continue to make purchases. Other examples include "GOAT" (greatest of all time) and "snatched" (stylish or fashionable). Such slang terms embody the popular elements of their respective eras. Even "OK" once considered slang, has now become an integral part of mainstream language.

Thirdly, it is concise and convenient. One of the defining features of slang is its ability to express complex ideas through simple and succinct language. As a form of folk expression, slang reflects modern society's demand for efficiency and a fast-paced lifestyle. For foreign tour guides, understanding how slang is used is crucial for grasping the personality traits and preferences of the tourists they serve. For instance, terms like ID (identification), fan (fanatic), DINK (double income no kids), social butterfly (a sociable person), and backfire (run counter to one's desire) are commonly used. In addition to its conciseness, slang is also catchy and convenient, making it widely accepted and spread.

Fourthly, English slang mirrors Western culture. Language is the material shell of culture, and culture is better presented through language. To fully grasp the origins and development of English slang, it is necessary to truly immerse oneself in the cultural context of Western countries. For example, common slang phrase such as Big Wig (a person of great importance in a certain field) dates back to the 18th century, when prominent political figures wore large wigs. Another example, Butter Someone Up (to flatter), comes from ancient India, where butter was thrown at statues as a gesture of supplication. Additionally, The Walls Have Ears (to be cautious with one's words) originates from rumors that The Louvre had secret listening pipes, which allowed Queen Catherine De'Medici to overhear political conversations. For tour guides and translators, familiarity with the cultural and historical background of such expressions is vital for using slang effectively and authentically.

Lastly, it is vulgar and non-standard. Historically, slang originated from marginalized groups, including criminals, the poor, and other subcultures [7]. From the 15th and 16th centuries, it was mainly

British criminal jargon, and by 1770, slang was labeled "street language", a restricted code of the criminal underworld. It was not only vulgar but also regarded as "taboo" by Americans at the time. While today's slang is prevalent in literary works by authors like Charles Dickens and in popular media, it was long seen as an unsophisticated, colloquial form of language. After centuries of evolution and development, slang embodies rich connotations, including both euphemisms and many vulgar expressions. Therefore, foreign tour guides should carefully differentiate different types of slang to avoid misuse in interaction. For example, expressions like "Look at that girl", "I'm dying to the loo", and "Give me some skin" may be considered rude and or impolite and should be avoided by tour guides.

2.2 The Adaptation Theory

The Adaptation Theory is first proposed by Jef Verschueren, emphasizing the comprehensive and dynamic nature of pragmatics. Verschueren [8] posits that "language use is essentially a process of continuous selection", where adaptability, as a core feature, enables users to make flexible linguistic choices from available items to meet communicative needs. As a result, language use is inherently a process of selection and adaptation [9]. According to this theory, language can be interpreted and used through four dimensions: contextual correlates of adaptation, structural objects of adaptation, dynamics of adaptation and salience of adaptation processes.

First, the contextual correlates of adaptation require both parties in intercultural communication to consider the communicative context when choosing a language. For instance, when guiding tourists through ancient Chinese buildings, foreign tour guides should consider the tourists' sociological backgrounds, such as nationality, race, gender, status and knowledge level, while choosing appropriate vocabulary, expressions and topics. Incorporating interesting historical anecdotes and simple slang expressions can enhance tourists' engagement and enjoyment.

Second, structural objects of adaptation involve the choice of appropriate language, styles, segment, composition and principles of discourse construction based on the purpose and context of communication. For example, when introducing Chinese culinary traditions to French tourists, the tour guide should consider the French passion for food, using vivid descriptions to highlight the color, aroma, presentation, and taste of Chinese dishes, while also incorporating cultural customs to enrich the tourists' understanding of the cuisine.

Third, the dynamics of adaptation refers to the ongoing adjustments and changes in language use. For example, when visiting multiple tourist sites, the guide can modify explanations to align with the interests of foreign tourists in various architectural arts, ensuring the content remains relevant and engaging.

Last, the salience of adaptation processes reflects the degree of awareness and self-consciousness displayed by language users during the selection process. The success of adaptation depends on the varying levels of consciousness driven by psychological and social factors. In casual interactions with foreign tourists, tour guides may use authentic slang to create a more relaxed and personal atmosphere. However, when discussing professional topics or historical and cultural knowledge, they must maintain the accuracy and reliability in their language.

2.3 Interpretative Translation Theory

Interpretative theory posits that translation should focus on conveying the meaning of the source message rather than merely replicating its linguistic form. This process involves the translator interpreting the original meaning through linguistic signs and their cognitive understanding. In general translation, there are three levels of analysis: the lexical level, the sentence (or discourse, as defined by Saussure), and the chapter level [10]. According to this theory, translation is about meaning, not grammar or individual words and sentences. To achieve the same effect on the target audience as the original text, the basic unit of translation must be the communicative meaning.

Interpretative translation offers valuable insights for interpretation, practical translation and related teaching. It guides interpreters to focus on both the content they are conveying and the communicative intention of the speaker. Thus, for tour guides, understanding the connotation of this theory is essential for accurately comprehending tourists' intentions and needs. To communicate effectively with tourists and provide accurate information about attractions, tour guides must grasp the meaning of tourists' discourse, consider the context, and convey messages clearly.

Every slang expression has its own historical background and reasons for gaining popularity in specific societies and eras. It may change meaning, evolve into standard language, or persist in specific

regions over time. Some slang introduces new concepts, while others provide new expressions that may be novel, provocative, or even sensational. However, most slang is innovated based on the existing concepts, with some adaptations in forms. English slang is informal and should be applied with attention to context and audience. Similarly, it cannot be translated literally into Chinese, as doing so may produce unintentionally hilarious results. For instance, in American slang, "red-letter day" refers to an important day, and "come again" means to repeat something. In British slang, "that costs a bomb" means something is very expensive, and "go to a do" refers to attending a party.

3. The Current Status and Challenges of Slang Usage in Foreign Tour Guides

The internal characteristics of English slang has facilitated its global expansion, making it commonplace in international travel. As inbound tourism and foreign trade grow rapidly, the demand for foreign tour guides has become increasingly stringent. However, influenced by local cultural environments and their native languages, foreign tour guides may face various challenges in their interactions with tourists, which can further affect the overall experience of foreign visitors.

3.1 The Current Use of Slang

The development of slang is deeply intertwined with society, culture, and race. As its early creators and users were marginalized subcultures, including criminals, African Americans, gamblers, and drug addicts, slang was initially dismissed by mainstream society and excluded from formal discourse. Yet, its lively and intimate has fueled its rapid growth as society evolved. By the 1980s, slang had gained broad acceptance, especially among youth, who integrated it into daily life. Due to English's global prominence and slang's superiority in making conversations more dynamic, English slang has become a globally common feature of spoken language.

In China, many English slang terms have entered into everyday conversations, with expressions like "Barbie" (also written as BBQ), "hang out", "poker face" and "kick the bucket" becoming commonplace. However, cultural differences between East and West often led to the misunderstanding or misuse of English slang. Many tour guides stick to pre-prepared explanations when interacting with foreign tourists, missing the opportunity to engage them more deeply or vividly promote Chinese culture. This gap can lead to miscommunication especially when tourists use more colloquial slang. For example, when a foreign tourist asked a guide, "I wonder if I can go somewhere?"—A polite way of asking for a bathroom—The guide replied, "Yes, you can go anywhere in China." The tourist was shocked, interpreting it as permission to urinate freely, which could lead to a negative impression of China. Similarly, when a tourist, after finishing a meal, asks "What's the damage?"—Slang for asking the cost—the guide, taking it literally, might ask what was broken. These instances highlight how a lack of familiarity with English slang can lead to misunderstandings and impede effective communication. Therefore, it is essential for tour guides to improve their knowledge and application of English slang to enhance cross-cultural communication.

3.2 Challenges in the Use of English Slang by Foreign Tour Guides

3.2.1 Cultural Misinterpretation

Pamela Tobey [11] reports that the robust performance of tourism has significantly contributed to China's economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid expansion of tourism has become a major driver of consumption growth and a key pillar of the economy. This growth also underscores the increasing frequency of cultural exchanges and trade cooperation between China and the West, further emphasizing the notion of a "global village". However, the last decade of development has also revealed many cultural differences between China and Western countries. Both English and Chinese have distinct linguistic features shaped by differences in customs, religion, history, values, and geography.

Tourism, as a unique industry, requires tour guides not only to possess professional translation and interpretation skills but also to deeply understand the cultures of the countries they serve. Successful communication hinges on recognizing and respecting cultural differences, which accounts for the reasons for frequent misunderstandings and misinterpretations in foreign tour guides' language. For instance, the idiom "can't hold a candle" refers to someone who is not as good as the person or thing being compared, a phrase dating back to the 17th century. It originated from the idea that an apprentice was so unskilled that they couldn't even hold a candle for their master. Without knowledge of this cultural background, a guide might misinterpret the phrase. Similarly, the phrase "bite the bullet" means to endure something

painful or difficult. It is believed to have originated in the 18th or 19th century when soldiers, lacking anesthesia, were given bullets to bite down on during surgery to distract them from the pain. Slang expressions such as "break the ice" and "when in Rome, do as the Romans do" also have cultural origins that should be explored. In short, the language used by tour guides reflects not only their professional expertise but also their understanding of foreign cultures and their ability to communicate effectively.

3.2.2 Improper Use

Improper or excessive use of English slang is another issue in foreign tour guides' language. Slang represents an informal and colloquial aspect of language, having the potential to create a more relaxed atmosphere and help build rapport with tourists if tour guides use it appropriately. However, irregular or excessive use can have the opposite effect. Given its rich meanings and evolving nature, slang requires careful attention to context and proper usage; otherwise, it can lead to misunderstandings or negative impressions.

Many tour guides fail to recognize this and assume that frequent use of slang and colloquialisms in conversations with foreign tourists will showcase their cultural awareness or add humor. For instance, to integrate into the tour group, guides may use the word "sucks", as in "the game sucks" or "I suck at this". However, these phrases are typically reserved for close acquaintances and are used in a self-deprecating manner. Casual use of such expressions with tourists can come across as unprofessional or rude, undermining the guide's credibility. Similarly, when a British tourist says "Cheers!", they are likely expressing gratitude, although the same word is also used for toasting. In British English, young people often say "Cheers!", instead of "Thank you", as the latter may be seen as too formal. Without understanding the nuance, a guide may mistakenly reply with "Cheers!" inappropriately, causing confusion.

Furthermore, English slang encompasses various linguistic forms, including jargon, euphemisms, and taboo words. Among them, euphemisms are often used by Westerners as a means of avoiding unnecessary misunderstandings in social interactions. In contrast, taboo words are those that people refrain from using due to their offensive or unpleasant associations. Tour guides, when learning English slang, will inevitably encounter these different linguistic forms. Therefore, they must be mindful of their usage and carefully select appropriate expressions in their communication.

3.2.3 Neglect of Register

Neglect of register can also lead to the improper use of English slang. Linguists studying the relationship between language and society have consistently emphasized the strong influence of social variables on language variation, upholding the term "register" to capture this dynamic. Dai and He [12] conclude that register is a language variety linked to a person's profession, closely tied to the speaker, context, and level of formality. For any occupation that requires communication and collaboration with others, mastering the appropriate use of language is essential—tour guides are no exception. When interacting with tourists, guides should not merely repeat pre-prepared content but adapt their expressions to the specific environment. Thus, understanding the principles of register, using precise language, and possessing strong communication skills are crucial for tour guides.

While slang is known for its vividness and humor, many foreign tour guides use it indiscriminately to create a relaxed atmosphere, without considering the context, audience, or content, leading to awkward situations. For instance, a guide might say "put one's foot in one's mouth" (meaning to say something foolish and embarrassing) during casual conversation or ask "Anybody wants to take a leak?" (A crude way of asking if someone needs to urinate). Some guides even introduce historical figures by saying, "I am tickled pink to give you a low-down of this emperor" [7]. Such inappropriate use of slang, without regard for the register, not only fails to engage tourists but also exposes the guide's lack of professionalism, causing tourists to question their competence. It is unquestionable that register is the most important element in any situation requiring communication and cooperation.

3.2.4 Outdating the Language Resources

The last critical issue is to update the language resources. One of the most notable characteristics of English slang is its rapid evolution. As society advances, new words and expressions emerge, often either to describe novel concepts or to provide new ways of expressing familiar ideas [13]. The development of language mirrors the evolution of human society, with slang being one of the most representative forms of this relationship. For those engaged in international communication, failing to keep their language resources updated can not only lead to missed opportunities to connect with younger generations but also result in falling behind societal trends. Many learners of English slang may notice that it often deviates

from standard grammar, with misspelled words or seemingly incorrect constructions. However, it is the unique informal spoken language unconstrained by strict grammatical rules, American slang in particular. In everyday conversation, native speakers prioritize convenience, often using abbreviations or casual forms without regard for conventional spelling or grammar. For instance, many Chinese students assume British English to sound like "Hello, how are you?" "I am fine, thank you. And you?" However, upon arriving in the UK, they encounter more colloquial phrases such as, "Hiya, mate, fancy a cuppa and a chin-wag?" or "Sorry, pal, I'm skint—so gutted!" Similarly, the slang term "chop chop", which means "hurry up", could easily be mistaken as a reference to chopping vegetables faster. Therefore, foreign tour guides risk misunderstandings or awkward situations if they do not regularly update their knowledge of contemporary slang and colloquialisms.

4. Suggestions for Foreign Tour Guides to Use English Slang

Learning the linguistic characteristics of slang, as well as applying adaptation theory and interpretative theory, can greatly benefit tour guides in understanding, interpreting, and effectively using English slang. This paper identifies the main challenges faced by foreign tour guides, including cultural misinterpretations, improper usage, neglect of register, and failure to update their language corpus. Based on these challenges, the paper offers four recommendations to enhance the accurate and fluent use of English slang, thereby improving cross-cultural communication competence among foreign tour guides.

4.1 Enhancing Cultural Awareness

International tourism is inherently a form of cross-cultural exchange. Enhancing cross-cultural tourism and improving the quality of tourist experiences are vital for the future growth of the industry. The tourism sector serves a diverse and mobile customer base, whose values, language, and behaviors reflect distinct cultural customs and religious beliefs. Thus, beyond designing targeted tourism products, the long-term development of cross-border travel services depends on promoting foreign tour guides' idea of cross-cultural communication and equipping them with high-quality, professional communication skills. Moreover, regular cultural training is essential to maintain a high standard of service.

English slang, as an integral part of everyday speech in English-speaking countries, vividly reflects the cultural characteristics of regional speech communities. To use English slang effectively and appropriately, foreign tour guides must consider the cultural nuances involved in cross-cultural communication, and understand the cultural customs embedded in language. Only by building a strong foundation of cultural knowledge can foreign tour guides significantly enhance their ability to engage with tourists and provide high-quality services.

4.2 Being Modest and Open-Minded

Apart from the cultural differences, remaining modest and open-minded are significant in the appropriate use of English slang. With the advancement of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the increasing integration of tourism and the digital industry, the number of international tourists visiting China has grown significantly, along with the diversity of their countries and regions of origin. When interacting with these diverse groups, tour guides often encounter knowledge gaps. For example, they may use non-standard expressions or engage in behaviors that unintentionally offend the customs of certain countries. In such situations, tour guides should remain calm and seek advice from colleagues or tourists with an open mind. If misunderstandings arise, timely apologies should be made to avoid pragmatic errors caused by a lack of knowledge or fear of judgment. Once figuring out the error and its cause, guides should take the time to learn the correct expressions and build a repertoire of similar phrases for future reference [14].

English slang possesses rich meanings and diverse linguistic forms. When a guide encounters an unfamiliar expression, what they should do is search their knowledge base for similar expressions and understand the speaker's communicative goals, rather than interpreting it literally. Additionally, slang evolves rapidly, reflecting changes in technology, politics, economics, and culture. Tour guides, who interact with tourists from around the world, should actively stay informed about the latest slang and regional variations. In short, by remaining modest and open-minded, tour guides can steadily improve their language skills.

4.3 Promoting Sensitivity to Register

When using English slang, tour guides must be mindful of the context in which it is applied. To meet tourists' expectations and enhance their travel experience, the appropriate use of slang can add enjoyment to the trip. However, slang differs from formal language styles. In addition to the proper linguistic form, tour guides should also consider three social variables that determine the register: the context, the participants, and the level of formality. A relatively peaceful international environment, advanced transportation and increased global cooperation inspire people's desire to travel. Tourists may travel for various reasons, such as relaxation, education, fitness, or work-related purposes. Therefore, tour guides must adjust their language style and content according to the specific needs of different tourists and fully consider the appropriate context for slang use.

When addressing different types of tourists, such as elders, superiors, or VIPs, slang should be used sparingly and with caution. For professionals, scholars, or leaders, its use should be minimal. Similarly, on formal, solemn occasions, slang should be avoided, whereas in informal settings, it can be properly used to lighten the atmosphere. Additionally, foreign tour guides should exercise moderation in their use of slang, ensuring its purpose is clear. The goal should be quality over quantity, aiming to improve communication without overusing it.

4.4 Updating the Linguistic Resources in Time

In addition to the factors of cultural differences, register and attitude of tour guides, actively updating their linguistic resources is also effective. Slang is a dynamic linguistic phenomenon that reflects contemporary trends, characterized by rapid evolution and a strong connection to the times [15]. New slang terms constantly emerge with the development of society. At the same time, the forms and meanings of existing slang often shift to accommodate new lifestyles and professional demands. In Western countries, where immigration promotes the integration of diversity, the essence of slang is to break conventions and embrace novelty, with many older terms acquiring new meanings. The profession of foreign tour guiding requires a comprehensive range of knowledge and skills, including language, public relations, and management. Due to these unique demands, tour guides must not only possess foundational expertise but also continuously update their knowledge base.

Language use remains the most critical and fundamental skill for foreign tour guides in this new era. Without strong language proficiency, it is impossible to deliver high-quality service. Tour guides must broaden their vision to better communicate with foreign tourists, whose perspectives are shaped by different cultural contexts. However, native cultural influences and ingrained knowledge systems can occasionally hinder effective foreign language communication. Therefore, the most efficient solution is to adopt a flexible mindset and commit to continuous learning.

In conclusion, being an excellent foreign tour guide requires not just understanding a language but mastering it. By following these suggestions, foreign tour guides can provide rich, engaging services, fostering deeper communication with tourists and enhancing their understanding of our country.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of English slang by foreign tour guides, analyzing its characteristics and common challenges faced in the journey. Finally, four practical solutions were proposed: enhancing cultural awareness, adopting a modest and open-minded approach, promoting sensitivity to register, and regularly updating language resources, aiming to improve the communicative competence of foreign tour guides in cross-cultural contexts and strengthen China's international image.

Foreign tour guides play a crucial role in enhancing domestic economic benefits, promoting a positive international image, and spreading Chinese culture. English slang, with its vividness, wit, and emotional resonance, can help energize tour group interactions and foster closer connections between guides and tourists. Therefore, studying the use of English slang by foreign tour guides holds practical value for facilitating intercultural exchange and advancing China's inbound tourism development.

However, this study still has several limitations. First, the scope of the literature review is restricted, relying primarily on domestic sources with limited reference to foreign scholars' perspectives on slang usage. Second, the analysis of English slang development and its application in guiding foreign tourists is not exhaustive. Third, the study's focus is primarily on promoting cultural exchange with English-speaking countries, overlooking the use of slang in non-English-speaking regions and other roles within

the tourism industry. Lastly, while the study employs literature review and case analysis, it lacks in-depth practical research, making some conclusions more subjective. Future research can make a further exploration of the strategies for the proper use of slang.

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