

# A Study on the Standardization of Tourism Translation under Adaptation Theory

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**Abstract:** *In the current era of global communication, exchanges from people who are born with different national languages have become more frequent, resulting in the convergence of diverse cultures and meanwhile more intense conflicts. In such background, the need for the standardization of tourism translation is more urgent. As an essential component of cross-cultural communication, the standardization of tourism translation plays a crucial role in the prosperous development of tourism. This paper aims to explore how to achieve the standardization of tourism translation from the perspective of contextual correlates of adaptability under Adaptation Theory.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism Translation; Translation Standardization; Adaptation Theory*

## 1. Introduction

With the economic globalization and the vigorous development of China's tourism industry, the role of tourism translation as a bridge in the advancement of tourism has become increasingly prominent. The significant role of tourism translation in promoting the development of the tourism industry necessitates the research on the standardization of tourism translation. Since translation involves different languages, cultures and traditions, and no single language is powerful enough to encompass all cultures, translation conflicts are bound to arise. The research on the standardization of tourism translation helps resolve such conflicts in tourism translation and provides reasonable solutions for such conflicts.

The standardization of tourism translation cannot be achieved without the guidance of translation theories. Among these theories, Adaptation Theory, as a core concept in pragmatics, provides a highly systematic and practical analytical framework for pragmatic phenomena. Adaptation Theory was proposed by Jef Verschueren, Secretary General of the International Pragmatics Association, in his book *Understanding Pragmatics* in 1999. In this book, Verschueren, explaining pragmatics from an entirely new perspective, argues that pragmatics, which deals with language use, essentially concerns the process of language selection. This process involves dynamic adaptations based on communicative context, linguistic context and linguistic structure, guided by varying degrees of cognitive awareness <sup>[1]</sup>. Three key characteristics of language—variability, negotiability, and adaptability—are interconnected and inseparable, enabling language users to make appropriate linguistic choices during communication. Among them, adaptability is the most crucial element. Verschueren proposes that adaptation should encompass four aspects: structural object adaptability, contextual correlates of adaptability, dynamics of adaptability, and the salience of adaptation process <sup>[2]</sup>. About contextual correlates of adaptability, Verschueren divides it into communicative context and linguistic context. Considering Verschueren's explanation for Adaptation Theory, the author insists that contextual correlates of adaptability serves not only as an important method for achieving mutual transformation between the target language and the source language but also as a key criterion for evaluating whether such transformation has been successfully realized. Starting from the goal of achieving contextual adaptation, this paper explores how to standardize tourism translation through the adaptation of linguistic context and communicative context.

## 2. Adaptation to the Linguistic Context

According to Adaptation Theory, linguistic context primarily encompasses three aspects: contextual cohesion, intertextuality, and sequencing. Contextual cohesion refers to the use of conjunctions, anaphora, cataphora, repetition, substitution, and other methods to achieve semantic relevance within a

discourse. Intertextuality indicates that a discourse is influenced and constrained by factors such as its theme and genre. Sequencing emphasizes the need to consider the logical-semantic relationships within the context when selecting language and then arrange utterances in a specific order <sup>[3]</sup>. The role of linguistic context in determining semantic meaning is self-evident, as the meaning of words can shift with changes in the linguistic context. At the same time, while a discourse may not undergo fundamental changes in vocabulary and grammar, it is constrained by factors such as its subject matter and genre, leading to noticeable differences in syntactic structures, phraseology, and linguistic style. Tourism translation, specially serving tourism activities, possesses unique characteristics in linguistic style. Therefore, one viable approach to standardizing tourism translation is to treat the adaptation of linguistic context as a benchmark. By assessing whether the target text has achieved adaptation to the linguistic context of the source text during the translation process, it can be determined whether the translation activity is successful.

As two distinct languages, English and Chinese exhibit different expressive conventions, which are also reflected in tourism texts. Chinese tourism texts are characterized by well-structured sentences, ornate diction, and vividness. Through the extensive enumeration of scenic features and the accumulation of vivid descriptions, they immerse readers in beautifully crafted phrases, evoking their expectations and imagination for scenes. In contrast, English tourism texts tend to be concise, straightforward and practical, emphasizing accuracy of information and linguistic functionality. They avoid redundant expressions and unnecessary repetition, allowing tourists to gain a rational understanding of the attractions through plain and unadorned language. Thus, English tourism texts achieve their communicative purpose by presenting concrete information in a clear, fluid, and logically structured manner.

Furthermore, due to the differences in thinking habits between Chinese and Western cultures, there are also distinctions in the writing styles of English and Chinese tourism texts. Chinese writing tends to be implicit and circuitous, often building up context before delving into the main topic, while English writing prefers a direct and straightforward approach, getting to the point immediately. Additionally, in describing events, Chinese typically presents facts first and then draws conclusions, whereas English tends to provide a general overview first, followed by detailed explanations <sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, in the process of translating, adjustments must be made to the structure of tourism texts to align with the reading preferences of target language readers.

As examples mentioned before show, the differences in linguistic style and textual structure between English and Chinese tourism texts require us to consider whether the adaptation to linguistic contexts has been achieved during translation. Conversely, we can also evaluate the success of translations by assessing the adaptation to linguistic contexts. In this way, we can establish norms for tourism translation, which serve as measures to evaluate the quality of translations.

### **3. Adaptation to the Communicative Context**

The communicative context falls under the category of non-linguistic context. Verschueren proposed that linguistic choices must adapt to the communicative context which includes the mental world, social world, and physical world of both communication parties. Both the addresser and the recipient, as participants in language use, serve as focal points in the process. Without the involvement of both parties, linguistic activities can hardly proceed, and there would be no adaptation to speak of. Therefore, to facilitate the smooth progression of linguistic activities, it is essential to fully consider the mental world, social world, and physical world of both communication parties. Such consideration can stimulate the cognitive engagement of language users, thereby fulfilling the communicative function of language.

#### ***3.1 Adaptation to the Physical World***

The physical world primarily refers to deictic relationships concerning time and space. Time includes event time, reference time, and communication time. Space encompasses absolute spatial relationships and relative spatial relationships based on reference objects <sup>[5]</sup>. Translation is an interlingual information exchange that transcends regions, time, and space. Differences in geographical locations and spatiotemporal contexts often become obstacles in cross-linguistic communication. In translation, translators should recognize that the same word may carry different cultural connotations in different physical worlds. Thus, they must actively adapt to these varying physical contexts by selecting appropriate words and employing suitable translation methods.

There are noticeable differences in the cultural backgrounds and historical traditions between Eastern and Western countries, causing difficulties in translating descriptions of historical sites or ancient architecture. Due to cultural differences, foreign tourists may not have a deep understanding of Chinese history and traditional culture. For instance, in the specific cultural context of Chinese dynasties, foreign visitors might lack a clear concept of the dynasties mentioned in the text. Therefore, it is necessary to consider temporal adaptation during the translation process. By adding annotations with specific dates corresponding to the dynasties, the translation can better align with Western conventions of time expression, allowing tourists to gain a more intuitive and accurate understanding of the content.

Furthermore, the differences in spatial thinking patterns between Chinese and Western cultures lead to distinct linguistic variations when describing things. Chinese tends to describe objects "from the outside in," while English, with its characteristic of "prioritizing key points", prefers expressions that move "from near to far" or "from small to large". For example, in the Chinese and English texts introducing Guilin, a tourist city, the Chinese version begins with a description of Guilin's geographical location and concludes with a summarizing statement: "It is one of the popular tourist destinations both domestically and internationally.". In contrast, the English text places the summarizing information—"It is one of the popular tourist destinations both domestically and internationally."—as the main clause, while presenting other details in subordinate clauses. This difference exactly shows that spatial adaptation should be taken into account in the process of translating so as to ensure the successful transformation of the two texts.

Meanwhile, there is also a discernible difference between English and Chinese in the expression of spatial relations. In English, spatial relationships are often realized through overt means, namely the extensive use of preposition, whereas in Chinese, they are implicitly embedded within the internal logic of the language. For example, consider the following English tourism text describing the layout of an ancient town: "The old town is nestled in a valley between two lush mountains. The river flows through its heart, under several stone bridges. Traditional houses cluster along the cobblestone streets that wind around the central square.". This description is entirely constructed through a chain of prepositions and relative pronouns, resembling a map annotated with precise coordinates. Readers can clearly visualize a static layout with well-defined geometric relationships in their minds, as the position of each object is precisely "pinned" by prepositions. In contrast, Chinese tourism texts imply spatial relationships through the inherent logic of verb phrases and locative nouns, showing one of its feature-dynamic. Spatial relations emerge naturally from the state, motion, and relative positioning of things, lending the language a greater sense of imagery. Consequently, readers perceive a vivid, dynamic picture. This fundamental difference means that when translating or composing tourism texts, directly matching prepositions word-for-word often results in awkward and unnatural phrasing. An authentic approach involves switching between the two modes of thinking: transforming English "prepositional coordinates" into Chinese "verbal phrases", and deconstructing the Chinese "implicit imagery" into English "prepositional-relation chains".

Indeed, there are systematic differences in how English and Chinese approach time and space in tourism texts. Spatially, English relies on explicit prepositions to construct a static coordinate network, while Chinese creates a dynamic beauty through verbs and internal logic. Temporally, English utilizes time as a precise coordinate framework, whereas Chinese poeticizes it into a perceptible atmosphere. English tourism texts strive to build an objective, stable, and logically explicit spatiotemporal information structure for the reader, with its appeal lying in clarity, reliability, and ease of use. In contrast, Chinese tourism texts resemble a poetic tour guide or a landscape painter, dedicated to sketching a subjective, fluid, and logically implicit spatiotemporal scroll for the reader. Understanding and mastering these differences is paramount for achieving effective cross-cultural communication and crafting tourism texts that genuinely resonate with the target readers.

### ***3.2 Adaptation to the Social World***

The adaptation to the social world means that linguistic choices should be adapted to different social factors, such as varying social environments and social institutions. And therefore, for language users, it is necessary to adhere to the specific contexts, institutions, and communicative norms of the social world during the process of linguistic selection. English and Chinese have evolved from distinct social environments, and as a result, they respectively exhibit unique ways of expressing specific cultural phenomena. Hence, such differences lead to the difficulties in the translation between English tourism texts and Chinese tourism texts, which requires translators to ponder over how to faithfully convey the cultural images in the source text and make them acceptable to the target readers. The

adaptation to the social world, by which translators can fulfill communicative purposes, is proposed to exactly handle the difficulties caused by these cultural images. Therefore, one way to evaluate whether a translated tourism text successfully disseminates culture and achieves its communicative goals is to assess whether adaptation to the social world has been accomplished. If the adaptation to the social world in the process of translating has been realized, it means translation activities are successful. And successful translation activities play an important role in the prosperity of tourism. The following examples illustrate how to adapt to the social worlds of both the target language and the source language in the process of translating.

As two distinct languages, Chinese and English possess their own cultural backgrounds and thus feature unique cultural images. For instance, when introducing Pingyao, a city in China, mention is often made of its nickname "Turtle City" and the layout of the city, which resembles a "Bagua diagram". Cultural images such as "turtles" and "Bagua" are unique to Chinese culture. In traditional Chinese culture, "turtles" symbolizes longevity. "Bagua", on the other hand, is one of the core concepts of traditional Chinese culture. Originating in ancient China, it is a set of theological or philosophical symbols composed of Yin and Yang, representing fundamental philosophical concepts of the Chinese nation. However, in Western culture, there are no cultural equivalents to notions such as "turtles representing longevity" or "Bagua". Therefore, literal translation would inevitably lead to confusion among foreign tourists regarding such cultural images. In such cases, one way to resolve this conflict is to employ translation techniques such as amplification to provide explanations for foreign tourists, thereby conveying the connotations embedded in these unique cultural images. This approach exactly shows the realization of communicative purpose of tourism texts through adaptation to the social world.

Furthermore, tourism texts are inherently a form of persuasive communication, and their linguistic choices must align with the social norms surrounding "advice" and "authority" within a given culture. Chinese texts tend to adapt to a social world characterized by high power distance and group orientation. The text often assumes the role of a "cultural authority" or a "considerate guide", employing high-involvement, high-certainty language. This aligns with the expectations and reliance on authoritative guidance common in collectivist cultures. Clear, confident recommendations are viewed as signs of reliability and conscientiousness, adhering to the norm of "experts guiding novices" within the Chinese social world. English texts, in contrast, tend to adapt to a social world with lower power distance and individualistic values. The text often serves as an "information consultant" or "service provider", using low-involvement language in a suggestive tone. For example, in the sentence "The temple is widely considered a must-see, famed for its exceptionally well-preserved murals. Many visitors find that taking a moment for quiet reflection enhances the experience.", the author employs the passive voice and indirect referencing ("is widely considered") along with the third person featuring generalization ("Many visitors find") to soften subjective assertions. This choice establishes an equal, consultative communicative relationship. By packaging suggestions as common opinions or personal experiences, it respects the reader's autonomy in judgment. This adaptation meets the emphasis placed in individualistic cultures on independent choice and the avoidance of imposition. Direct commands are perceived as intrusive, whereas providing evidence and others' experiences is seen as respectful and objective, fitting the social norm of "individual autonomous decision-making".

Another adaptation to the social worlds of both English tourism texts and Chinese tourism texts is shown in the aspect that linguistic choices must align with the target readers' perception of their self-identity. In Chinese tourism texts, language choices are closely related to the collective culture, and hence a cultural community through discourse is constructed in texts. Consequently, the first-person plural "we", inclusive terms like "you and I", and words such as "ancestors" are frequently employed when it comes to linguistic selections. These choices directly invoke and reinforce the reader's sense of cultural membership, elevating the travel experience from individual observation to cultural identity. This aligns with the social tendency in the communicative world where individuals seek belonging through shared cultural symbols. In contrast, in English tourism texts, individuals as touristic explorers occupy an important position. And therefore language choices should focus on "your" unique discoveries and experiences. For example, in the text "The classical Chinese garden is designed to create a landscape that 'though made by man, appears as if born of nature'. As you wander through it, you can appreciate the philosophical pursuit of harmony between humankind and the natural world.", the frequent use of the second-person "you" is evident. This choice consistently positions the reader as an external individual observer and experiencer. Even profound cultural concepts are presented as objects for "you" to personally "appreciate". This reflects the predisposition in the social world of English tourism texts to view the individual as an independent cognitive agent. The differences in the social worlds involved in these two languages necessitate that the translation should take the social

norms of both the target language and the source language into consideration to achieve successful communication.

To sum up, from the perspective of Adaptation Theory, the differences between Chinese and English tourism texts not only lie in rhetorical preferences, but also linguistic choice preferences deeply rooted in the distinct rules of their respective social worlds. Successful translation or creation requires adaptation to the social worlds of both the target language and the source language. This involves transforming the "low-involvement suggestions" suited to the individualistic culture of English into the "high-involvement guidance" that aligns with the expectations of authority and group belonging in Chinese culture. Similarly, the "cultural calling" embedded in Chinese texts, which evokes collective identity and positive empathy, must be adapted in the process of translation into the value priority that respects individual autonomy in English culture. This demands that translators possess acute "sociopragmatic awareness", making deliberate language choices to dynamically adapt to the entire sociocultural context in which the target readers are situated.

### ***3.3 Adaptation to the Mental World***

Mental state has always been emphatically considered when it comes to discuss linguistic phenomenon, and hence adaptation to the readers' mental world during the translation process is essential. The components of the mental world activated in language use can be categorized into cognitive and emotional elements. In cultural translation, the translator operates with an assumed reader in mind, and therefore must consider both cognitive and emotional factors while making linguistic choices to align with the readers' mental state. Only when cognitive and emotional factors are taken into consideration can the translation process be regarded successful. Consequently, adaptation to the mental world can serve as a criterion for judgment about the quality of translations.

For instance, in terms of public signs in tourist attractions, Chinese public signs are characterized by imperative tones, euphemism and a focus on parallelism. Hence, certain public signs with a commanding tone are considered completely normal expressions for Chinese tourists. However, for foreign tourists, the forceful tone in some Chinese public signs may come across as overly authoritarian, leading to negative travel experiences and a sense of offense. Therefore, when translating such texts, translators need to take into account the psychological tendencies of foreign tourists and transform expressions that might be perceived as offensive into ones that align better with their expectations. By adapting to the psychological world of the target readers, translators can not only achieve accurate meaning conveyance but also effectively fulfill the communicative intent.

Moreover, for some place names translated through Chinese Pinyin transliteration, foreign tourists may struggle to grasp their meanings. Due to the differences between the Chinese and English writing systems, foreign tourists lack the cognitive context to associate Pinyin with Chinese characters. To ensure the smooth progression of communicative activities, the translation of place names should fully consider the existing encyclopedic knowledge of foreign tourists, meaning that adaptation to their psychological world is necessary. Based on this, appropriate supplementary explanations can be considered when translating place names, emphasizing cultural confidence while also facilitating cultural exchange.

Besides, differences in aesthetic psychology must also be taken into account when translating between Chinese and English tourism texts. Chinese tourism texts emphasizes the pursuit of a philosophical realm characterized by the "communion between the observer and the observed", with personification and philosophical abstraction being its defining features. This aligns with the psychological needs in traditional Chinese aesthetics for "drawing moral parallels from nature" and "attaining spiritual enlightenment". That is contemplating human virtues and perceiving universal truths through natural scenery. Additionally, the introspective experience embedded in such texts highlights the inner spiritual purification and emotional sublimation prompted by the scenery, catering to an aesthetic psychology that seeks inner experience and the elevation of one's spiritual state. In contrast, English tourism texts emphasize the magnificence and accessibility of "visual spectacle". For example, in the text "The snow-capped mountain peak presents a breathtaking and majestic spectacle. Its permanent glaciers are a dazzling sight under the sun. Conquering its summit (or viewing it from the base) offers an unforgettable and awe-inspiring achievement.", the use of sensory adjectives like "breathtaking", "majestic", and "dazzling" directly targets readers' psychological expectations for visual wonders. Simultaneously, the phrase "Conquering... offers an achievement" transforms the landscape experience into a challenge that an individual can "complete" or "overcome", adapting to a proactive mindset in English culture that encourages exploration and the pursuit of personal accomplishment.

From the perspective of Adaptation Theory, adaptation to the psychological world refers to the active and dynamic process by which linguistic choices both accommodate and shape the emotions, motivations, expectations, cognitive schemata, and self-concepts of the target readers. It demands that translators not only grasp surface-level social norms but also gain deep insight into how target readers feel, think, and define the meaning of travel. Successful cross-cultural text translation necessitates the "recreation of the psychological context". In Chinese and English tourism texts, this adaptation is manifested through the distinct strategies employed by each language, aimed to align with the deep-seated psychological frameworks of readers within their respective cultural contexts.

#### 4. Conclusion

Translation, as a fundamental cross-cultural communicative activity, can only achieve its purpose when all participating parties reach a mutual understanding regarding the shared meaning of the content. Without establishing such common ground—if instead the involved individuals or groups interpret the language through divergent cultural or contextual lenses—effective communication would be unattainable, leading to potential misunderstandings, reduced engagement, or even cultural friction. Therefore, the prescriptive requirements for translation are not merely technical guidelines but serve as an essential pathway to enabling meaningful and productive cross-cultural exchange. These standards help ensure that translated materials maintain fidelity to the source while remaining accessible for the target readers.

As a branch of translation that most distinctly embodies the nature of translation as a cross-cultural communicative activity, tourism translation should necessitate its standardized research. That's because the standardization of tourism translation holds significant implications for promoting the development of tourism and the successful conduct of cross-cultural communicative activities. The standardized research of tourism translation supports the clarity and consistency of informational, promotional tourism texts, which in turn enhances visitor experience, fosters cultural appreciation, and contributes to the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Consequently, research into its standardization carries significant practical implications, not only for advancing translation studies but also for supporting global tourism growth and ensuring the success of cross-cultural communicative initiatives.

This paper aims to explore how to standardize tourism translation by adopting the perspective of Adaptation Theory, discussing the feasibility of achieving standardization through adaptation to both the linguistic context and the communicative context. Through illustrative examples, it demonstrates how the standardization of tourism translation can be realized by adapting to the linguistic and communicative contexts of the text, thereby facilitating the achievement of the communicative goals of tourism translation.

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